

# Communique

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## HAVE YOU CHECKED YOUR PRIVILEGE TODAY?

*Shreya Bansal*

In November 2018, Aruna Sanghapali, the woman behind the Twitter handle 'Dalit women fight' met Twitter Co-Founder and CEO Jack Dorsey and presented him with a poster with the words 'Smash Brahminical patriarchy' written over it. In a roundtable discussion, that included various women journalists, organisations and activists. Aruna attempted to share her reality of being a dalit woman on the internet. As the creator of 'Dalit women fight' she aims to educate and inform people about oppressive caste and patriarchal structures. A photo of Dorsey did rounds on the internet as he posed with the three words that soon started a stir in the online space.

The meeting was held to shed light on the relevance of twitter in India. The poster was an effort to draw attention towards the need for making Twitter sensitive to the issues of Indian cultural society, especially those relating to caste and gender discrimination. However, the poster became viral in a scenario where any attempt to resist patriarchy equals man hating and resisting the caste system is equated with being anti-Brahmin and anti Hindu. Many on the internet took offence to the poster and Aruna and Dorsey alike faced backlash. Aruna was bombarded with sexist remarks and casteist slurs, effectively proving her point. She clarified in a statement to 'The Wire', that "it wasn't meant to be the statement it has become" further explaining that "the photo they'd taken was meant to be a private one. And the poster, made by Thenmozhi (Dalit Diva on Instagram and Twitter), a US-based artist, was given to Dorsey in an effort to drive home the importance of address-

ing caste-based discrimination on the platform." Amidst all the trolling it is important to note Aruna's effort to give dalit women an online platform to raise their voice and convey that they're capable of sharing their own stories. Gender dynamics affect our interpretation of everyday life and also shape the playing ground for our survival. A woman's existence is a constant struggle to ne-



Source : [scroll.in](http://scroll.in)

gotiate with patriarchal institutions and relationships. This reality has become much more evident on spaces like twitter. Caste is another phenomenon intrinsic in determining one's identity in the Indian society. In a country where atrocities towards dalits and bahujans have only increased, it would be imprudent to think that caste is external to our existence. It would be further ignorant to suggest that caste based discrimination is restricted to rural India. As urban Indians are busy skipping through acts

of violence against dalits, we are failing to notice the acts of discrimination, deeply embedded in our day to day lives. According to Indian Statistical Institute, Delhi, metropolitan areas have the lowest rate of inter-caste marriages among urban areas, while developed villages have a higher percentage.

The marginalisation of women by men, dalit women by dalit men, dalit women by upper class women and non binary individuals by cis gendered individuals are based on evident realities that play out in our everyday life. As Brahmins continue to be at the top of the pyramid in terms of affluence and stature, the dalit women are the worst hit by both patriarchy and casteism. As Aruna held, "Patriarchy is not general in nature, in India, it's Brahminical". Even feminist movements have been controlled by Brahmin and upper caste individuals and consciously excluded dalit and bahujan women. As dalit women try reclaiming public spaces that have been denied to them for generations, it is only fair that they will resist similar efforts that aim to de-platform them from online spaces. The discussion with Dorsey can be considered to be a step forward in making a platform like Twitter more sensitive to their needs. "Dialoguing would help Twitter's team understand the context of Indian users. However, while Twitter has been an "essential platform" for their voices, it doesn't mean they will stick on if the platform chooses to be complicit in a system of oppression." Aruna told The Wire.

## ARE YOU DALIT OR ARE YOU QUEER?

*Shreya Bansal*

The LGBTQI movement and Dalit, anti caste movement in India are movements that have grown out of considerable struggle and effort. Both these groups have time and again tried to challenge Brahminical and heteronormative traditions on their own respective platforms.



The discrimination of an individual identifying with the LGBTQI community, has for a long time come from the state, through its criminalization of article 377.

Even after the supreme court of India decriminalized section 377 this discrimination comes in the form of social ridicule and segregation, unavailability of jobs and safe and inclusive educational spaces. The discrimination on the basis of caste, on the other hand has always come from the societal notions of caste and the state has only been implicitly, and lately explicitly, discriminatory in its lack of action in protecting individuals on the ground level.

India has had a long history of dealing with issues of class discrimination and bias. The LGBTQ community on the other hand, was for a very long time underrepresented because it was felt that not enough people identify with the community and that it was a notion of the western world.

With more and more people coming out to share their stories and experiences, the movement has gained considerable momentum. Safe spac-



es have emerged that have seen the participation of many LGBTQ individuals as well as allies. However, the caste inclusiveness of these spaces has been in question constantly.

As pride is being celebrated in more and more cities, its solidarity with the anti-caste movement is still very fragile. While dealing with one form of discrimination, have we sidelined another important form of discrimination? How safe would a safe

space be for Dalit queer individual whose caste impacts their day to life as much as their sexuality? Would a non-English speaking youth be as accepted as any other English-Speaking millennial? As we ask heterosexual folks to understand their privilege have we in fact forgotten to let go off our privilege that allows us to paint our faces in rainbows?

The experiences of a person, belonging to a caste that is discriminated against, as an LGBTQIA individual will be very different from someone who has to pay a negligible price for their opinions and activism. It does little justice for us to appropriate how each and every experience is shared and felt.



Our hashtags, social media marketing, slam poetry events in expensive cafes and of course, parades are enough to cause a revolution but it's essential to ask if each and every Dalit-Bahujan queer finds a space in this revolution.

# WILL RAJ EVER MEET HIS RAHUL?

Vasundhara Singh

Bollywood has become a staple part of our everyday lives, almost like a cup of tea in the morning. You're not sure if you actually want to consume it but you have no option as it is present everywhere and hence, becomes unavoidable. For most people of our country, LGBTQ+ people don't exist and that is not only a result of wilful ignorance but also of the cage that has hidden the community from mainstream culture since times immemorial. We have grown up watching and admiring toxic characters such as Raj from DDLJ and Bunny from 'Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani'.

I wonder why the writers of DDLJ were so complacent in thinking that Simran would be interested in Raj not because he waved her bra in front of her face in one of the scenes but for the reason that Simran may have had other sexual preferences. For Bollywood, everyone is straight and the ones who aren't are fashion designers. Bollywood's representation of the LGBTQ+ community is outright insensitive.



Source: Pinterest

The character of the dean played by Rishi Kapoor in Student of the year or John Abraham and Abhishek Bachchan's characters in Dostana have all proven that for the filmmakers of our country, gay people are nothing less than cheap punch lines within an already skewed film. They are present in the narrative to get out a few laughs from a majorly homophobic audience. This scenario gets even more sickening when we realize that the above mentioned films have been hits at the box office. The stereotype of a gay man has been so strongly entrenched in the

minds of the audience that an alternative point of view seems impossible. When we talk of the representation of lesbian characters or the lack thereof, the situation only gets more disappointing. There is less than 2% representation of healthy lesbian relationships in Bollywood movies. They are not misrepresented or laughed at because for the Indian filmmakers, they simply don't exist. There are a few examples we have of lesbian characters such as the characters of Shabana Azmi and Nandita Das in Mira Nair's Fire, Kalki Koechlin's character in Margarita with a Straw and Sarah Jane Dias's character in Angry Indian Goddesses. There is a unfair similarity

to these movies and it is not the fact that their characters are all interested in women but the fact that none of the above films were viewed by a large number of people and have no place in the psyche of a common man. In the recent years, the representation of LGBTQ+ characters in Indian cinema has become more just such as Fawad Khan's character in Kapoor and Sons or Manoj Bajpayee's character in Aligarh.

The representation of the third gender is sparse and often, derogatory. They are either there to make the audience laugh or to be villains. In Sacred games, Cuckoo's character has been applauded and praised for its 'genuine' portrayal of a transgender person. There is still a loophole there as not many pointed out that a woman was cast in that role while a transgender person was not present. Representation doesn't just limit itself to portrayal but to making space for the community to participate where they are required. Change will only occur when the censor board is not armed with their scissors every time an intimate scene between two lesbian or gay characters is portrayed or when the new generation will grow up watching homosexual characters ride away into the sunset while a cheesy track plays in the background.

# QUEER OVER THE YEARS

Drishti Nagdeo

In the early years of Hollywood, from the 1890s to 1930s, Hollywood's portrayal of the LGBTQ community had been one of ridicule and the filmmakers were largely homophobic. Gays and lesbians were portrayed as perverted, sick, evil, and downright disgusting. The first representation of same-sex interactions was in 1895 with Edison Short's silent film 'The Dickson Experimental Sound Film', popularly known as 'The Gay Brothers'. Through the early twentieth century being openly homosexual was uncommon, hence, when represented, it was used as a comic device, for example 'Sissy Man' in Stan Laurel's silent film 'The Soilers' in 1923.

In the period between 1930 and 1950 was when people started being critical of the industry's treatment of the minority community. There was a sense of outrage towards the film industry for being immoral in their actions and unjust in their ways of thinking. As a result, the industry introduced the 'Hayes Code', a system of self-censorship that among other things, affected the portrayal of homosexuality. During these years, films could not feature homosexual characters. Throughout the 1930s till the 1960s, portrayals (positive or negative) were highly censored or removed. This strict code was loosened in the 1960s and 1970s, which saw the dawn of the gay rights movement.

In 1969, a series of violent riots in New York called the 'Stonewall Riots' took place, as a resistance to the discrimination the LGBTQ community had faced hitherto. This marked the beginning of the modern LGBTQ movement. LGBTQ political activists began to pressure Hollywood to end its consistent negative portrayals of homosexuality. Responding to the movement, the community was given increased visibility in the films. Even though they were more visible in the films, their representation still continued to be increasingly homophobic. The reality of the lives that LGBTQ folks led was obscured and never given the screen space it deserved. At this time, gay characters were often represented as being dangerous, violent, predatory, or suicidal such as in the films 'The Children's Hour' (1961), 'The Boys in the Band' (1970), 'Midnight Express' (1978), and 'Vanishing Point' (1971).

From the 1990's until now, Hollywood has improved its portrayal of gay and lesbian characters. The popularity of films such as 'The Birdcage', 'Philadelphia', 'To Wong Foo Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar's 'Flawless' and 'In & Out' demonstrates that the audience has positively taken to cinema which features the realistic portrayal of LGBTQ individuals. Some of the best LGBTQ films of all time are 'Paris is burning' (1990), 'Happy Together' (1997), 'Weekend' (2011), and 'Carol' (2015).

The portrayal took a turn since 1990s but the President and C.E.O. of the American non-governmental media monitoring organization, GLAAD, Sarah Kate Ellis, says, "With many of the most popular TV shows proudly including LGBTQ characters and stories, the time has come for the film industry to step up and show the full diversity of the world that movie audiences are living in today instead, and end the outdated humor seen in many films."

Even though the representation of the LGBTQ community has increased, the Hollywood industry still has a long way to go, in portraying them in a more accepted, open, real, and equitable manner.



Source: Pinterest



# Struggle 2.0

Dimpal Gulwani

September 6 2018 was an important day in the constitutional history of India; it witnessed the decriminalisation of the Section 377 which had been raining down obstacles in the path to achieve basic human rights. Decriminalisation of section 377 in layman terms implies that consensual adult gay sex is not a crime anymore. The verdict was celebrated with immense joy by the community and even by others with open arms. People went out on the streets waving the rainbow flags. Social networking sites flashed rainbow flag stickers to mark the historic judgement. But under the wave of celebration are some important questions, are we there yet? Does one legal verdict change the society in a day? The decision has been unwelcomed by many religious groups saying the act (consensual adult gay sex) is against nature's law. The RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) in a statement said, "Like Supreme Court, we also do not consider it to be a crime. The same sex marriages are not compatible with norms of the nature, so we do not support such relations. Human beings generally learn from experiences that is why this issue needs to be taken care of at the social and psychological level." The Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (an Islamic organization) also had a similar take on the verdict. The JIH general Muhammad Salim Engineer said, "Jamaat-e-Islami is dismayed and disappointed over the Supreme Court verdict to legalize homosexual behaviour between two consenting adults. Thus by decriminalising homosexuality and permitting male-male and female-female marriage will destroy the family system and prevent the natural evolution and progress of the human race..." Similar opposition was shown by Christian groups like the 'trust god ministries' where they argued that section 377 acts as means to prevent HIV/AIDS and if the section is struck down, it will result in rapid spread of AIDS. These organizations act as 'opinion leaders' for many and thus contribute to shaping public opinion to

some extent. Research suggests (British social attitudes survey, 1983) that the decriminalisation of homosexuality would improve social attitudes, with more citizens believing their communities are an inclusive and supportive environment for same sex couples however, results in the Indian context may vary. Activists agree that the court's verdict has changed situations in offices, educational institutions, on the streets somewhat, but to cultivate a social change from the law, the activism still has to continue. People from within the community, still think there is more time needed for change. Jack Harrison Quintana, a member of the community said during an interview by a gay dating app, 'Many LGBTQ people all over the world grow up receiving messages about themselves that we are sick or that our sexual orientation is wrong. LGBTQ activists in India still have a long road ahead to achieve full liberation of our people.' Divya Roop, another member of the community during an interview by 'Rainbow Voices', said, "The only thing that is going to change is that we can be assured that we won't be counted as criminals for loving someone we wanted to... It's not going to change much at a personal, professional or social front because on those levels, individual mindset has to change." Although tracking social changes numerically is not very desirable but Talking about the acceptance of the LGBTQ community in other countries, statistics and surveys show a positive trend the percentage of British people considering the act as "not wrong at all" has increased significantly, from 17% in 1983 to 64 in 2016. Uncomfortable glares, staring and gossiping will still take time to subside. Change is not what comes in a day, it develops through rational thoughts. The legal change is an event that marked the culmination of a process, it will trigger one too. The battle has just begun.

## Hello From The 'Other' Side

Aditi Doneria

"In a landmark judgement for the LGBT community..." read the newspaper (Economic Times) headlines on September 7, a day after the Supreme Court decriminalized what were formerly designated 'unnatural sexual offences'. The front page of almost all major English dailies was painted rainbow with a headline of the similar syntax that day. Television newsrooms quickly assembled a panel consisting of at least one LGBT rights activists to discuss the 'landmark' verdict. Celebrity tweets and visuals of celebrations outside the Supreme Court were relayed all afternoon. A surface examination of the media coverage of the event however shows in fact how distant legal changes and reality is. Most newspapers, TV news channels and online news portals reported the verdict as a 'moment of celebration' for the LGBTQ community. This itself went against the very essence of not only what the court explained in detail, but also what these very organizations quoted and reported as being the 'next step' in the 'battle': Inclusion.

Reporting a 'landmark' change in a provision of the penal code of the country which had existed for more than 150 years, as 'an "emotional moment" for those who identify as gay, lesbian, transgender and bisexual in India' (scroll.in) or 'Supreme Court brings joy to gays' (The Deccan Chronicle) as an approach is reductionist and even factually misleading.

The verdict was of course monumental for the community, but that was not it. Section 377 infringed upon the fundamental rights of not only people who identified as homosexuals, bisexuals, transgender or others but also on the rights of those who identified as heterosexuals, as it criminalized oral and anal penetrative sex. Some news reports went on to cover how the verdict had implications for the heterosexuals, even then, a clear divide was established between what the verdict meant for the members of LGBTQ community and 'others'. The vox populi too was shaped by this approach of 'othering' quoting reactions of the petitioners, lawyers and celebrities or of categorically identified activists and members of LGBTQ collectives, instead of the ordinarily used tags of 'student', 'resident', 'supporter'

etc. In the haystack of such subtly and slightly exclusionary coverage, a report by The Business Standard appeared to be a sharp and shiny needle: 'There was a collective sigh of relief as the court lifted the weight of criminality from those who lived in the shadow of India's law criminalising homosexuality, specifically section 377 of the Indian Penal Code 1860. It is true, that the LGBTQ community has been the 'other' (rather even non-existent) in mainstream news reportage for as long as there has been news media, so what about those uncountable reports and shows, why aren't we pointing fingers at them? We aren't because resorting to whataboutery is an endless, meaningless spiral. In times when the third pillar of our democracy, the judiciary is trying to make the legal framework more inclusionary, the fourth pillar, Media must oblige and walk the same path. Just because something has been practiced for a longtime, doesn't mean it is rightful to act that way.



The Indian Express while reporting the celebration outside the SC on September 7 quoted '44-year-old Tantei, who flew down to Delhi from Mizoram to be with her daughter Ruth (22), who runs an LGBTQI support group at Kamla Nehru College called Nazariya. Saying "my daughter is straight but she feels deeply about this..." This act of distancing is exactly what the media coverage reflected. Such distancing is problematic as it labels to an extent, the

verdict being impact bearing only for a certain section of the society and not everyone irrespective of their sex, gender and sexual orientation.

This isolationism of sorts might be a result of the hetero-normative perspective that majority of us Indians (journalists included) share, which disallows us to look beyond the binaries. If so, then the media is in need of gender sensitive and aware reporters now more than ever.

Source : scroll.in

# IN CONVERSATION WITH AYYAPPA

**Tanya Gupta**

Media nowadays has evolved, re-aligned and re-invented itself enormously. With the advent of new technology such as internet, Wi-Fi etc., it has become more prompt for media to deliver information and news to the public. The benefit people can reap from this change is the quick access to information which, in turn, gives us a broader option and enhances our critical thinking and decision making. Its necessity and exposure is pretty evident. Be it any sexist norm or recent hot issues, the mainstream media clubbed with social media shapes the public discourse. From the days of the morning newspaper to the days of the prime time debate, the role of the media has transcended from the town crier to that of a judge, jury and the executioner. The fiercely debated issues are gender bias and the role played by the media in establishing them. How are women's issues presented in the media? Are they discussed too much or too little? An example of this could be the Sabarimala issue. Kerala's Sabarimala Temple issue is about the conflict between constitutional right to practice religion and traditions. According to age-old traditions and customs, menstruating women aren't allowed from taking pilgrimage to Sabarimala Temple considering temple's main deity Swami Ayyappa was a celibate and that menstruating women's entry in the temple may "pollute" the deity's presence. In September 2018, the Supreme Court declared this practice unconstitutional and allowed the



Source : [newslaundry.com](http://newslaundry.com)

the women of all age groups to enter the temple. This verdict had an unprecedented impact as Ayyappa devotees very vehemently opposed women's entry into the temple as they considered the verdict to be an interference in their religious matters by the highest Court. Now, media reported minute to minute happenings in Sabarimala with a feverish passion that could only be found during the December 16 gang rape case of 2012. Be it an attack on media personalities like Republic TV's South India Bureau Chief Pooja

Prasanna beaten with sticks, Saritha S Balan from The News Minute kicked on the spine, midway through live reportage of events NDTV journalist Sneha Mary Koshy and cameraperson SP Babu were heckled and told to leave, their camera was snatched, personnel from CNN-News 18 and Aaj Tak were also targeted and this was also given a political twist as the debate catapulted very swiftly from being a matter of constitutional right to pray to a political mudslinging match between the Left and the Right. Media highlighted how the Supreme Court delivered a flawed verdict and religious sentiments got hurt while completely ignoring the gender inequality in this issue through articles by famous opinion makers like Faizaan Mustafa's "Not a Holy Book" in Indian Express, Kaleeswaram Raj's "Do All Women Have Right To Enter Sabarimala?" in The Hindu, R Jagannathan's "A Flawed Sabarimala Verdict: Don't Kill Religious Diversity In The Name Of Countering Discrimination" in The Times Of India. The perspective side lined by the media was the verdict not being dictated by religious sentiments and the only guiding belief behind the verdict were the right to equality and the right to pray as enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Another aspect that can be taken into perspective is that despite Lord Hanuman being a celibate (a comparison is being drawn as both Hanuman and Ayyappa lived their life in celibacy) women aren't barred from entering his temples and that it is out of their own volition that women don't enter his temple when they are menstruating. Since this era is dominated by media, it should try to be more balanced in its reporting and should consider the emancipation of the society as its obligation. The representation of women's issues in the media needs to change. It should focus on the reality of the situation in relation to societal norms and vice versa.



Source : [homegrown.co.in](http://homegrown.co.in)

## WHOSE GOD IS IT ANYWAY?

**Udisha Srivastava**

Without a doubt, 2018 proved to be empowering, especially for Indian women. From a series of individual accolades by women such as Hima Das and Deepika Padukone, who became the 1st Indian women to make it to the Forbes Top-5 richest to the landmark judgments such as Triple Talaq and Sabarimala have, undoubtedly, empowered women. In the month of September, when the progressive verdicts by the then Chief Justice of India, Dipak Mishra paved their way - one of them was the Sabarimala historic judgment. The apex court lifted the embargo on women's entry into the temple making the verdict shine with women empowerment and leadership, being a matter of history. The latest to note, a PIL was filed in 2016 by the Indian Young Lawyers Associ-



Source : [SheThePeople.Tv](http://SheThePeople.Tv)

ation and it came into effect two years later. Filed against the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship Rules, the

PIL attempted to smash the age-old tradition that provoked quandaries on the question of women empowerment.

However, from the beginning till date, the issue has remained the subject of heated controversies. The moment the decision became public, widespread protests broke out in parts of the southern state of Kerala reflecting aggression of people. On the contrary, there were



Source : [SheThePeople.Tv](http://SheThePeople.Tv)

a majority of people who embraced the verdict and welcomed it with open arms marking a symbolic change in the status of women. This majority of people expressed their gratitude for the new decision through social media and social gatherings, of course.

Now when we have pondered over the question of empowerment, we can make another attempt to change our perspective and look into the other side of the perspective spectrum. When the decision by 4:1 majority hit

the headlines of media, all that was majorly shown was the perspective of urban women who wanted to break the shackles and enter the Ayyappan temple. There were other campaigns like #RighttoWait on the other side, but the sufficient amount of coverage was dedicated to the bold-urban feminism which defines feminism as a threat to patriarchy. Before heading further, it's rather true that we have invisible classifications of feminism, as one type of feminism can't define all women. Women are different in the way they talk, walk, dress etc., thus they all do not "fit-in" under the banner of mainstream feminism. A few women like the activist Rehana Fathima, a Muslim by birth and journalist Kavita Jakkal came under the limelight of extreme controversies as they tried their luck to realize the essence of the verdict. As expected, they were opposed by the religious groups and Hindu extremists. In another incident, when the temple geared to reopen for the devotees in the month of November, the Hindu radical groups told the media outlets not to send women journalists for coverage as it would aggravate the situation. The question is once again the same - Have women got empowerment or still the answer is in disguise? The

judgment indeed was a significant step but not sufficient at all. While the views are significantly abroad from the direct Yes or No statements, some people even held the opinion that the issue isn't even the test of empowerment. So, the next question that exists is what now. Women are still being blocked from entering the temple and kept away from the sanctum sanctorum disallowing them to preach, worship, or lead the congregations. In the end, it is inevitable that we have climbed a mandatory



Source : [SheThePeople.Tv](http://SheThePeople.Tv)

step after years. Thus, the essence lies in the realization of the verdict and not just on stamp papers.

# HASHTAG REVOLUTION

Vasundhara Singh

For many of us, the afternoon hours of October 15th, 2017 were the reminiscence of any other day but for some, it was the beginning of a revolution. On that day, actress Alyssa Milano encouraged women to use the #metoo on twitter to share their stories of sexual harassment. The result of that one tweet caused havoc which was large enough to unsettle those in power. Tarana Burke in 2006 had created the hash tag for women of colour to share their experiences of sexual abuse, particularly within unprivileged communities.

tom productions was dissolved after one of its partners, Vikas Bahl was accused of sexual harassment. India's me too movement had been a long time coming, delayed by unfair means. Today, it has its supporters but like any other revolution, it has received a substantial amount of criticism. The criticism has mostly been two-fold. The first one is concerned with the fact that many women such as Vini-

outspoken and for remaining silent. Women face life altering consequences for speaking out against their abusers such as being labelled a 'troublemaker' or 'difficult', they are often blacklisted and left in the margins and are also, fired from their jobs. A woman with the millennial intelligibility of using a hashtag is the one who can take advantage of this revolution but that doesn't invalidate the movement, it only limits it to a particular class of women.



ties. In India, it all started when actress Tanushree Dutta renewed allegations against Nana Patekar for sexually harassing her on a movie set in 2008. This created a domino effect which resulted in women belonging to professional backgrounds to share their experiences of sexual harassment against men in power. The Indian 'me too' movement gained momentum when the accused started facing the consequences for their actions. Former minister of state for external affairs, M.J Akbar resigned from his post after more than a dozen women accused him of sexual assault. Phan-

ta Nanda and Priya Ramani have spoken out years after the incident took place. The second criticism is of the movement being an elitist one which means it is only concerned with women belonging to high paying jobs and upper middle class backgrounds. It has completely shunned the women belonging to lower class and castes. To them I would like to say, society is just as un-forgiving to women who speak out and to women who remain silent. A victim pays a price for being

To many fearful men and cynics, this revolution seems to have a time constraint. As the clock strikes at midnight on 31st of December and a new year begins, this movement would have vanished into thin air. But women of today are here to inform them that this is only the beginning. A revolution has begun and women no longer need patriarchy to remind them of the injustices done to them by the society. To all the Harvey Weinstein's and Nana Patekar's of the world, your time is up.

## Missing Rural Voices

Danita Yadav

The Me Too Movement in India emerged from the international campaign against sexual harassment and sexual abuse of women in work-



place. The movement embarked commenced in India with actress Tanushree Dutta accusing fellow actor Nana Patekar of sexual harassment on sets of "Horn Ok Pleasss" (2009). Ever since Dutta's allegations, numerous women have stepped out, shared their experiences and accused the men of sexual harassment and abuse. From the Bollywood film industry to the union cabinet, accusations have been pouring out. However, the impact of the movement has been seen dominantly confined to urban professions such as journalism, film industry, academia etc. This is perhaps due to the availability of education and, access to technology and internet among

other things. In urban professions, as mentioned above, some of the perpetrators were asked to resign from their jobs, some were asked to leave temporarily until further notice; and other such similar actions were taken to work towards a safer and harassment free environment for all. The movement has been considerably efficient in generating awareness and creating an initiative to bring about a safer environment for women or any other person who has been a victim of sexual harassment. However it is yet to make its mark in rural India. Many women have raised their concerns regarding sexual harassment in ways such as sending and forwarding pornographic films and edited pictures of women on WhatsApp, cat-calling, forceful or inappropriate touching etc. There have been instances where the women have complained and raised their voices against such behaviour but have not been taken seriously by the authorities. In fact, they are often told to brush it off because "yeh sab toh hota hi hai" (Instances like these keep happening). Institutionalised sexual exploitation is still an extensively concealed issue in both rural and urban areas. Especially for domestic workers, migrants etc. as they are often blackmailed and harassed into sexual trade or favours. They fear for their life and even if they do speak up, more often than not, the higher risk of losing their job results in their silence instead of initiating an action against the perpetrator. Another problem that is faced in the rural areas is the lack of education, awareness and identity consciousness. To properly understand

the law and its regulations, one must be literate enough to understand its provisions. Education and schooling for children is not given much importance as compared to working minimum wage and all other odd jobs in order to survive. Many of the families in rural areas tend to follow the orthodox way of life and customs, that are now considered 'outdated'. Even when they are exposed to 'modern ways', they are often hesitant to change. This to an extent, contributes to the way sexual harassment as an offense is treated in rural, rather 'periphery' areas. Women in the Indian society have traditionally been suppressed and have been considered equivalent to property. It has been considerably hard for the Me too movement to bring about drastic change due to the fact that women are made to believe that this sort of behaviour is normal. There have been instances where female rural reporters have spoken against sexual harassment but have been disappointed with the treatment by the authorities, as many of the perpetrators are simply let off with a warning which leads them to believe that it is not a serious issue. The movement should move towards an all inclusive approach, which means it should become gender neutral, as sexual harassment is not common only to women. With the movement garnering momentum this year, we can hope that suitable actions and provisions against sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse are extended to the rural areas so that a harassment free and equal environment can be created for all.

# FASHIONED BY MEDIA

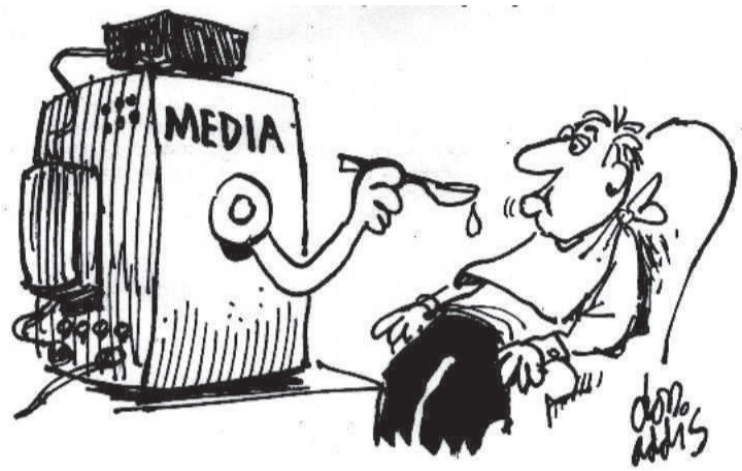
## Malavika.PM

Today we are surrounded by various forms of media. From our mobile phones that act as alarm to wake us up to the ritual ten-o'clock news bulletin before sleeping, our day is 'mediated'. The role of media has expanded from informing and educating to shaping public opinion. By creating a certain type of messages, media can manipulate people's attitude and opinions. Media messages are engraved into our consciousness at every turn. All forms of media communicate images of among other things, the genders, many of which perpetuate unrealistic, stereotypical and limiting perceptions. Media in general and especially soap operas, in the Indian context, continue to present both men and women in stereotypical ways that limit our perception of human possibilities. As media pervade our lives it distorts how we see ourselves and what we consider 'normal' and 'desirable' for men and for women.

The media especially the soap operas show two types of women: good and bad ones. Good ones are pretty, deferential, and focused on home, family and taking care of others, they are usually cast as victims, angels, martyrs, and loyal wives and helpmate. The other image of women the media offers us is the evil sister of the good woman who is presented as a 'witch/vamp' and is represented as villain. Examples of these can also be seen in movies and shows made for kids like The Snow White. The Snow White is seen doing all the domestic work around the house, nurturing to the dwarfs and animals, and naive enough to take a bite of the poisonous apple. Snow White gives the message to young girls that your duties are cleaning and enjoying it, taking care of others. On the contrary her step mother is portrayed as an evil woman who wants to kill her at any cost. Media perpetuates stereotypes around masculinity too. Men are presented as rigid, tough, independent, athletic, sexually aggressive, fearless, brave, totally in control of all emotions and above all- in no way 'feminine'. They are seldom shown doing household chores. In the mov-

ie The Tarzan, for example, the main stereotype portrayed is that a male should be able to protect everyone that he is close to, like Jane and his gorilla family, and if he fails he isn't considered 'manly' enough. Media not only moulds gender roles but also shapes gender relationships.

The most common ground for nearly all cultural products is the relationship of dependence of a woman on a man. The media presently is exploiting the huge power vested in its hand by perpetuating irrationalities and watering stereotypes in the society. The media is supposed to be the mirror to the society that depicts the changes that the society undergoes instead of setting standards for beauty or individuality. Media's ideal role in civil society is to educate, expose and empower more; instead it is reaffirming those norms, leading people to internalize these norms.



Source : [itsallaboutpolitics.weebly.com](http://itsallaboutpolitics.weebly.com)

## LIGHTS, CAMERA, ME TOO!

### Anisha Reddy

Around September of 2018, the Bollywood industry witnessed a buzz regarding the #MeToo movement which spread in October 2018 as a viral hashtag on social media in an attempt to demonstrate the widespread prevalence of sexual assault and harassment.

Actress Tanushree Dutta was the first in the media industry who accused Nana Patekar of misbehaving with her on the sets of a shoot. Within few days of the story making news, a wave of allegations and accusations against popular figures in the entertainment industry spread. Radhika Apte, Richa Chadha and Swara Bhaskar were among the few artists who spoke up regarding what they had experienced.

Tanushree Dutta, who helped trigger the movement in India, received a heavy load of backlash. Nana Patekar sent a legal notice to the actress demanding her to apologize or face further legal action. The Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) filed a complaint with the police against Dutta for the comments she made about their chief. The police acted by filing a defamation case against Dutta.

The actress also expressed her disappointment regarding the film industry's response. Despite the accusations against the alleged perpetrator, he was allowed to work in films. She seemed to receive minimal support from the industry. One of the most revered actors in the Bollywood industry, Amitabh Bachchan, who recently starred in the movie 'Pink', which revolved around society's perception about women and the concept of consent, refused to comment on the allegations against Nana Patekar, stands for the industry's ignorance towards this issue. 'Neither my name is Tanushree Dutta nor it is Nana Patekar', was his statement when questioned. Is this the Bollywood industry that has been known and loved for decades? Is this the example the industry is setting for the future generation? The industry of course believes that issues like wardrobe malfunctions or airport looks are more worthy of commenting on than the trauma faced by victims of sexual harassment.

Despite the stoic silence on the movement, it did emerge victorious to some extent. A US based journalist in Bengaluru, Priya Ramani accused Mobashar Jawed Akbar, who left practice of journalism (Editor, Asian Age), joined the Bharatiya Janta Part, and had been inducted in the country's cabinet as the minister of state for external affairs in 2016, of sexual harassment. With this allegation, several complaints found their way on to the social media under #MeToo accusing MJ Akbar of molestation. The government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, failed to take any action against one of their own ministers. MJ Akbar, being a powerful man, filed a defamation case against Ramani. But, this case witnessed the sheer strength of women who decided to finally stand up against the government for lack of response. As a result, MJ Akbar stepped down from his post.

Over the past few months, our country has witnessed a revolution of sorts. Social media became a special space for women to share their experiences and sufferings. It was one of the biggest boons of the movement. While many Bollywood actors sign up for several advertisements and social campaigns, they have chosen not to stand by their own fraternity.

The deficiency of support from our Government and the Bollywood industry has made it difficult for women to believe that stringent measures would be taken against the perpetrators. In a democracy, the government is supposed to be accountable and responsible to its people; its role has remained incompetent in India in this case.

Source: [www.newindianexpress.com](http://www.newindianexpress.com)



# TROLLS OF HINDUSTAN

**Divya Tripathi**

“Am I not even allowed to practice my constitutional rights in my own country? Do I need permission to access public places just because of my gender?” - this was my harmless comment on recent Sabarimala issue on facebook to which I received comments like- “this is just another publicity stunt by these women to show how victimized they are, bloody attention seekers”, or “no wonder why Aiyappa didn’t allow you to come near him surely your dumbness will make him impure” & some extensively sexist & abusive comments. This made me wonder that who are these people & why they are being so mean to me? Am I the only one who’s been a target? But to my surprise, all my friends, especially female-friends have been the victim of online trolling in one way or the other. So let’s take a close look in the world of trolling & try to understand the hidden agenda behind this nasty culture.

## Who are these cyberbullies?

These flag bearers of chauvinism can be a daily patriarch, who is so scared to even address the fact that even women can have their own, independent opinion & are capable of fearlessly expressing that. Irrespective of your logic & reasons, they will simply deny your position, that’s why they will constantly remind you that you are a miss fit in this society or this is not your place. Then comes the “mansplainers”, those people who will often tag you as the “feminazis” or “pseudo-feminists” even for the smallest thing because it’s easy to just call out names & demean the intelligence & dignity, rather than coming up with some hard-hitting logical comebacks. Last but not least, the paid trolls. It’s a growing concern in the digital age, people from a particular organization having certain beliefs or influential political parties hire these online trolls to perpetuate their own ideology or principles. These people are deliberately hired to shut down contrary opinions or to simply distract people from the real issues. The book- “I Am a Troll: Inside the Secret World of the BJP’s Digital Army” By “Swati Chaturvedi” highlights the corrupt practice of online trolling & how the nexus of cyberbullies works.

## Dealing with the “troll trauma”

Before indulging with these trolls remember, they are just bullies or fake accounts which cannot harm you anyway, so don’t sacrifice your mental peace for them. Now talking about what you can do on an individual level to han-

dle these people is- first of all, The legal path- Although there’s no proper law to ensure the security & control these trolls completely. But knowing the correct IPC or legal sections can help you punish your harasser, like- SECTION 507 OF IPC- Deals with criminal intimidation by anonymous communication and can be used by women facing harassment and threats online, particularly rape threats. Other than this, SECTIONS 354A, 354D OF IPC- These sections deal with sexual harassment, stalking & harassment via electronic communication, it was stringent after ‘Nirbhaya case’. Next way is to- Report -You can report any offensive post or fake account on these social media platform whenever you feel insecure & violated. Lastly, Ignore- the best way to deal with these trolls is to simply ignore them as most of them are either fake or can’t do much harm rather than babbling behind the keyboards.



Source : [www.quint.com](http://www.quint.com)

## Future of free speech

So after receiving all these hate comments, my brother asked me is it worth taking all the trouble & hatred? Shouldn’t you just delete the comment? To which my simple answer was, “the internet is a free world if I’m free to express my opinion, then they are also free to express their displeasure, but their harsh words cannot stop me from expressing my thoughts because it’s my opinion that matters & not their fatuous comments”.

# “Woke” Feminism 101: Comedy Series

**Harshika Kapoor**

The #MeToo movement started in Hollywood when two NY Times journalists Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey wrote a story about the decades of Weinstein’s atrocities against women in the film industry in form of rapes, sexual harassment, misbehavior, etc. It took 80+ allegations for the media to finally stop calling women “attention-seekers” and to turn the story around and to vaguely call men out for their abhorrent acts of reducing women to mere bodies and sex dolls. The movement gained momentum and many women, all over the world, came out with their stories, to finally expose the scars dug by the overlooked sleazy touches, dismissed drunken abusive calls, and worst come to worst, being dragged in a room, raped and dumped. It took a year for this movement to travel 13,595 kilometers even in the age of nanosecond internet services. The witch-hunting of women has continued and is still very prevalent, except now, it’s stealthy. Now, the women who dare to voice their opinions, their problems, and experiences get labeled as “troublemakers”. In India, the fire of #MeToo movement was first ignited in 2017 in academia circles when Raya Sarkar and DBA feminists shared LoSha publically. It went on to oust more than 72 influential, powerful, incumbent men. The personal accounts of the victims involved rape, molestations, harassment, etc. It’s hard to be shocked by this since, 106 women are raped in India every day. 106 women. Raped. In India. Every. Day. Slowly, the news becomes “regular Monday”. Gradually, as a woman, I have

accepted that I’d be raped, too or be somewhere at the wrong time and there’d be creepy men around me; they’ll ogle at me the way some men ogle at me on metro, on roads, even in the darkness of a movie theatre, in buses, in temples, in the market, at home; they’ll leer at my body; and then they’ll



Tanmay Bhatt , comedian AIB Source : [www.youngisthan.com](http://www.youngisthan.com)

strike me just like lightning strikes trees and turns it into ash. I’ll become Regular Monday. Utsav Chakraborty being revealed as a sexual predator when he openly proclaims to be the so-called “wokeboy” is shocking. Shocking was that AIB knew (after all, they heard “whispers” of it for many years) that he is a sexual predator and continued working with him. Appalling was their apology labeled as a “statement”. They admitted that whatever they say are just excuses, and of course it was, because it has been made clear through these rolling “allegations” that AIB was too busy using feminism as a bait to create, promote and propagate their videos and to portray themselves as “woke feminists”, to actually work and solve a sexual harassment case in their own circle. The co-founder of AIB and self-proclaimed co-king of

“woke male feminists” circle Gursimran Khamba has been alleged to have harassed women for years in the past. His apology? Let’s not even talk about it. The sacred “brotherhood” of men in such a crisis when the truth about them is finally revealed and their reputations are on immutable, eternal fire is obnoxious. In AIB’s second “apology”, they disguise their self-victimization as apology. Self-victimization as instead of showing public disdain for Tanmay Bhatt’s role in the sexual harassment case and his colleague being an abuser, they talked about how they’ll be on a “temporary leave”. While the victims suffer for their whole lives, Bhatt and Khamba take the privileged road to take an “extended, temporary leave until further notice.” It enables them to disappear while the “ruckus” is at its peak and then make merry with ‘bros’. As a fan, I tried scrounging for excuses and there are none as they have used feminism as a token since 2012, and have been trying to educate the masses by making pointed videos like “Harassment Through the Ages”, being hunky dory with feminists like Harnidh Kaur, Srishti Dixit, Mallika Dua, etc. and discuss toxic masculinity all the time, we know they have the awareness that this #MeToo movement is not recent as Tanushree Dutta came out with her story about Nana Patekar in 2008 and women have faced “harassment through the ages”. Even now, she’s out there telling her story and not one A-lister has supported her in this fight. Constantly, relentlessly.



## Lost In The Echo

Kajal Semwal

*“The voices that worked as the loudspeaker for the people unheard now lay down quiet, as their words resound in the empty air; Lost in the Echo; died trying.”* The Media in India have faced acts of violence in the past. But the surge in their number, in the recent past, has reached new heights making it one of the darkest periods in Media history. Journalists have been groped and assaulted by the police in Delhi, in the case of female reporters; 3 Journalists were mowed down by trucks. Many of them have been threatened via text and social media; there have been numerous court cases filed against them in the form of defamation and sedition to name a few. Many Journalists are living in the constant fear of being branded as ‘Maoists’ and jailed in India’s epicentre of Naxal conflict. The Media houses have been raided and plundered. All in the name of doing their duty; they have seen it all. In 2016, the International Federation of Journalists listed India as the eighth most dangerous country for journalists.

This is not a coincidence but a fact to be noted that this surge in the number of attacks against Journalists, perpetrated by Hindu right-wing groups across the country, has been witnessed since the Prime Minister Narendra Modi led conservative BJP government came to power in 2014. In a single decade, Press freedom in India has seen a progressive erosion across the country with widespread distress on the members of the Press. Suppression of freedom of speech and expression amongst Journalists in India has hit a new low with the rise in the number of violent crimes committed against Journalists. Murder is the highest form of censorship, where when the government couldn’t silence the message, they resorted to shooting the messenger quite literally, in some cases. In the Global Impunity Index, the Committee to Protect Journalists defines murder as “a deliberate attack against a specific journalist in relation to the victim’s work.” Journalists are also facing violence online, in the form of abusive tweets and remarks on various Social Media platforms.

“Journalists are increasingly the targets of online smear campaigns by the most radical nationalists who vilify them and even threaten physical reprisals...journalists working for local media outlets are often the targets of violence by soldiers acting with the central government’s tacit consent,” RWB said in the report. India has seen a surge in attacks on journalists with 142 attacks being reported between the years 2015-2017, according to the latest National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data. These attacks don’t come as a surprise in the

world’s largest democracy as India was ranked 136th of 180 countries in the 2017 World Press Freedom Index released by Reporters without Borders (RWB), which fell by two positions in 2018, where India was ranked 138th of 180 countries, making it one of the most dangerous countries for Journalists to work in. The media is working under constant attacks from various blocks that of the Police and Politics, who wish to repress any criticism and would resort to even violence to accomplish it. But media in itself is lacking the will to stand for the Journalists that work for them, as not all incidents of violence against Journalists, like the Gauri Lankesh Incident, make it to the headlines and create a nation-wide outcry. The Journalist are being let down by the very News organizations that they work for, as was portrayed by the Committee to Protect Journalists. According to the recent CPJ reports, more than 70 Journalists have been killed in India between 1992 till 2016.

“With Hindu nationalists trying to purge all manifestations of ‘anti-national’ thought from the national debate, self-censorship is growing in the mainstream media,” RWB said in its last report. Often times, the Media owners tend to exploit Journalists by offering them a measly pay, which given the today’s competitive environment, they have no choice but to acquiesce.

They resort to writing stories with the advertisements in mind. The Press Council of India and the News Broadcasting Standards Authority lack the power to take stringent measures against the professional misconducts within the Media houses. The current situation makes me wonder, whether the Journalists going in today, have to sign an Indemnity agreement because of how easily the perpetrators are getting away with murder. There is no country-wide legislation to protect Journalists or to stop the exploitation faced by Journalists on the hands of the Media owners. Journalism in India continues to be an unorganized sector.



source: scoopwhoop.com

## His Master’s Voice

Mehak Agarwal

*“Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.”*

-Thomas Jefferson

The quote above mentioned was just a shallow statement for me until the twin incidents of Jim Acosta being stopped from asking tough questions to President Trump at a presser organised by the White House and a columnist like Abhijit Iyer Mitra being imprisoned by the Odisha government for 42 days for making some comments on the Konark temple took place. Both these incidents go on to prove that the media discourse in both these countries is heavily controlled by the governments whether they state their contempt of the media publicly or not. This also shows an appalling picture of the heads of these states being put on a pedestal in order to avoid facing lawsuits or even the possibility of calling it quits. American media houses regardless of their ideological differences with the CNN stood in solidarity with Acosta unlike India where this is considered a sort of a quid pro quo and a way to gain publicity for some abysmal “senior” journalists rather than plain simple moral obligation towards their profession and colleagues. A very famous “senior” journalist took a very hypocritical stand for what she thought was support and wrote in an article for The Print, “Isn’t this what he always demanded should happen to everyone else...” So a right wing columnist being incarcerated is a badge of honour for a democracy like India, Miss Senior Journalist? When it came to truly forgetting any ideological differences and standing up to the Trump administration to support Jim Acosta unconditionally an American film critic and media columnist wrote in an article, “You don’t have to like the media. (Good thing) You don’t have to like Acosta But what they are doing is essential. So is letting them do it.”

It was at least a statement that can be considered as a genuine shoulder for

solidarity unlike our self-proclaimed champions of free speech and human rights,

be it on the left or on the right of the political spectrum. There are a lot of instances that go on to show how journalists and editors were either forced to bend over backwards or to just stop reporting on certain issues if they wanted their channels to function or maybe a meagre discount in purchase of newsprint.

The prime incidents are the raids at NDTV and Republic TV’s chief editor being asked not to report on the Sunanda Pushkar murder case. Both these episodes went on to show how despicable our great Indian politicians were when it came to the right to report and also to encounter uncomfortable truths because how come the Right’s shirt is brighter than the Left. The guiding reason behind these instances is that all politicians in India and the USA believe in shooting the messenger and being accountable is not at all becoming especially of an Indian politician. None of our political parties can hold a higher ground on the issue of free speech as if you have a BJP cabinet abusing all journalists as prostitutes you also have a Congress National President address the editor of ANI as a pliable journalist forgetting the cosy questions he was asked in all interviews except the one he gave to TIMES NOW in 2014.

The difference between the Indian and the American media is that the Indian media comes across as heavily divided and biased be it left, right and centre when it comes to deliberating on what are the impositions on a free press and the freedom of speech whereas the American media seems to be mature enough to bury their ideological conflicts in deep sand when it comes to supporting their colleagues while at loggerheads with the establishment. In a nutshell, Indians need to learn from their Western counterparts if our media wants to rise like a Phoenix and not sink into the never ending abyss of quid pro quo and ideological divisions being decisive in standing up to the establishment and also general restrictions on free speech.



# MEMEINGFUL

Kamya Pandey

Memes are a thing of the future. They are easy to understand and great to have a quick laugh at. However, an activism that revolves around meme culture seems unconventional and unsustainable to many. It has also been looked down upon for its immediate nature that lacks accountability and analysis; but instances of the difference meme activism has created prove otherwise. The world's most subscribed YouTube channel Pewdiepie has been the best example of this. With 80 million subscribers, he and his community have been engaged in an ongoing battle with an Indian channel, Tseries. Tseries is on its way to steal the number one spot on YouTube, with currently 79 million subscribers the channel is owned by the Indian music label of the same name.



Source: The Independent

Pewdiepie an individual channel can never compete with the production quality and the quantity of uploads of a giant like T Series but what he has to his advantage is an army of loyal subscribers, a

very close knit community. Upon seeing the threat of someone taking over Pewdiepie as the most subscribed channel some of his fans have been spamming the Internet as well as the real world to maintain his position at the top. The Pewdiepie fan base took the popular culture to defend their glorious youtube star. From posters, newspaper ads to other YouTube channels like Mr Beast, Markiplier and Jacksepticeye. Some even went as far as to buy billboards to advertise Pewdiepie's channel. This might not be how people traditionally understand the role of memes, as they're most often believed to be meaningless jokes. In a situation like this, however, we saw a return to what Richard Dawkins, first used the term for, 'a cultural unit that works almost like a gene, reproducing and replicating, taking a life of its own'. The situation took a rather drastic turn when an ethical hacker going by the name "Hacker giraffe" started promoting Pewdiepie by spamming Wi-Fi connected printers, in UK, USA, Argentina, Spain, and Chile and hacking about 50,000. The 'Subscribe to Pewdiepie' meme created a ripple effect that wasn't necessarily positive. In a community with a size of the Pewdiepie channel, hate is common. As the memes gained popularity it led to the rise of a cross internet movement because of which the hate for India and Indians became rampant. The comments sections of Pewdiepie's videos were flooded with racist remarks on his Indian viewers. Taking all the attention that he got from these memes Pewdiepie decided to turn

the hate into a positive movement by directing the strength of his 80 million subscribers and starting a gofundme page, where he collected donations for the Indian charity CRY (Child Rights and You). This is not the only case where memes that have a massive popularity have been used to protest and resist. A noteworthy example of which could be a song called "This is America" that addresses the issue of gun violence and mass shootings in the United States along with longstanding racism and discrimination against African Americans in the country became popular as it was made into gifs and memes. Many argue that reducing the song down to just memes has brought down the significance of the song's message, that aims to shed light on important issues in present day America. But the critique ignores the fact that by sharing these memes the value of the issue degrades, instead, people get the opportunity of having wider audience range, in a much faster and effective way. Meme culture is the way of the future and its upon us to use it to our advantage to mobilise audiences and initiate discourse.



Source: MemeRoid

## WHAT'S IN A LABEL?

Astha Gupta

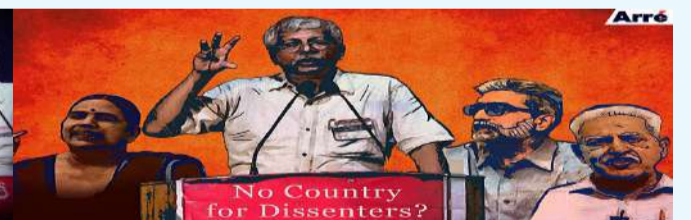
Our perception of the political systems is assimilated through the discourses framed around us. The narratives set by the media and influential personalities form the system through which we decipher the conflicts, however, this process could lead to the discourse becoming impermeable at times. The political institutions and influencers have often attempted to deviate the discourse in order to benefit a particular paradigm. Thus, the structural meaning of this discourse has often been reduced to a minimal entity, a single idea, a label, which has political and societal consequences. Something similar was done by using the label 'urban naxals' for activists arrested by Pune police officers on alleged 'links with 'Maoists'. After the arrest, Varavara Rao in Hyderabad, Gautam Navlakha in Delhi, Sudha Bharadwaj in Haryana and Arun Ferreira and Vernon Gonzalves in Maharashtra, were put on house arrest by the Supreme Court.



Source: Sify.com



Source: HWNews



Source: Arre

The antecedent narrative around 'Naxals' and 'Maoists' has usually been uni-directional, carrying an ominous undertone. Therefore, the use of the umbrella term 'urban naxals' reduced the rhetoric to a unitary idea, averting any other possible perspective. It became a convenient characterization used by the Indian right to curb dissent, affirming the idea that any entity sympathizing with the issues of Naxalites becomes an enemy of the state. As artful this might seem, it's not the first time labels have been used to counter an alleged 'threat' to the state. In the US in the 1900s, any man or woman who were "natives, citizens, denizens, or subjects" of the German Empire automatically became the enemy of the state and declared 'alien enemies'. The vagueness of the label made it an effective weapon in the hands of the US government to crush anti-war sentiment just like how the vagueness of the term urban naxal can put anyone under the radar of the government. Similarly, in the 1960s, the term 'Cultural Marxists' was being used for any Left thinker who was believed to be disrupting the ethos of Christianity and questioning the foundation of society.

It was being considered a conspiracy to disrupt the framework of the society and 'misleading' individuals. What these labels do is categorize an idea or individuals, accompanied by stigmas which mould public perception in a convenient way. It becomes a tool for manipulating and regulating public behaviour which is profitable to the polity. The use of tag 'anti-national' was another canon at the disposal of the Indian state, which tried to create popular support for the actions of the government. It stripped individuals from their ability to question the functioning of the state at multiple levels while equating anyone who criticized the status quo to 'un-patriotic' and 'enemy of state'. In a book by Vivek Agnihotri defined urban naxals as "invisible enemies" which soon became famous after its launch. Soon the term, with its connotations attached, entered the TV studios and was being used by many to justify the arrests.

Historian Romilla Thapar called it a political move for certain stakeholders. With 'Naxalites' already being considered one of the biggest threat by Indian politicians, the popular agenda is being framed against the naxals and their issues. Thus the use of the term 'urban naxals' just worsens the situation, silencing any contrary voice. The discourse becomes less inclusive, moulding the thoughts of individuals in a way that it makes them submissive and obedient to the popular agenda being set by the polity. It is not assumed that every individual will give into the prominent narrative and not criticize the wrongdoings of the state. However, the art of labelling triggers pre-existing stereotype and beliefs of the majority thus shaping the opinion of masses in a particular way. Therefore, in order to avoid supremacy of a paradigm, it is essential that a genuine discourse is promoted which is inclusive of diverse viewpoints. The media should advocate intellectual thought and constant questioning of every action taken by the state. A platform should be created for all the opinions to be voiced, contemplated, scrutinized, and eventually reformed so that labels like urban naxals don't overshadow the discourse.

# HIRAETH

*Drishti Nagdeo*

In a sea of thoughts,  
trying to connect the dots,  
my mind's busy,  
my eyes see everything hazy,  
I feel uneasy,  
call me crazy,  
but I can't take it easy.

I am not content here,  
I was not content there,  
I do not belong here,  
I did not belong there,  
my mind's always racing,  
my eyes are always moving,

I want to go to a place I don't know about,  
I want to meet a person I've never known about,  
I crave for a feeling I cannot resist,  
I crave for a feeling I do not know exists.

No, this is not nostalgia,  
because I've never been there before,  
No, this is not homesickness,  
because I've never felt home before.

Perhaps that is the reason I travel alone,  
in search of a feeling that will make me feel home,  
Perhaps that is why I'll always be a passenger

Searching for warmth in a cold stranger  
Tell me if it's possible,  
to satisfy a craving so insatiable.

## RAGING FIRE

*Danita Yadav*

She burned with a raging fire,  
As she wrote a letter to her sire,  
"No longer am I afraid of her skies above,  
No longer will I hide the scars of love..."  
She continued to stare at the sapphires  
that matched her attire,  
"I was chasing the cars and counting stars,  
Now I shall fly like a bird set free and  
no longer will I pay the fee,  
I will take my gloom  
and puff it up in plumes,  
I'll make sure that my heart will bloom  
As I extinguish these fumes..."

## FROM YOUR SON, WITH LOVE

*Vasundhara Singh*

"Mom, do they treat you well?"  
She looked at me numb, scared to speak the unspoken.  
Her mouth blows out the smoke of her pain,  
Her eyes speak in vain, loud enough to hit the ache.  
She smiles with all her teeth shaking,  
Shivering as if they have been tamed.  
I see her leave the house with her eyes glowing fresh,  
She comes back with her heart lying in dire flesh.  
Her hands wash the dishes,  
Her mind looks out for another mesh,  
Hidden away to catch her in her weakness.  
I read the newspapers and tuck away my worries,  
My mother wears them on her sleeve, everyday.  
Her body bears the imprints of all the hands  
That touch her, unasked.  
When she finally goes to sleep,  
She can hear the whispers following her into her  
dreams.  
I knock on the door,  
With my lips quivering and ask  
"Mom, do they treat you well?"

## REHASHED

*Mehak Agarwal*

My face smashed  
My watch broken  
All my wounds rehashed  
Only to have myself broken.

My vagina never held my honour  
And this caused severe injury to his valour  
In order to walk unfazed  
I need to pierce the eyes that gazed.

That day I was listening  
Only to know a rapist's mind  
"A woman is like a diamond on an open  
street" he opined,  
I was shocked by my find.

I was living in a bubble  
Only to be broken down to rubble.



*Disha Sharma*



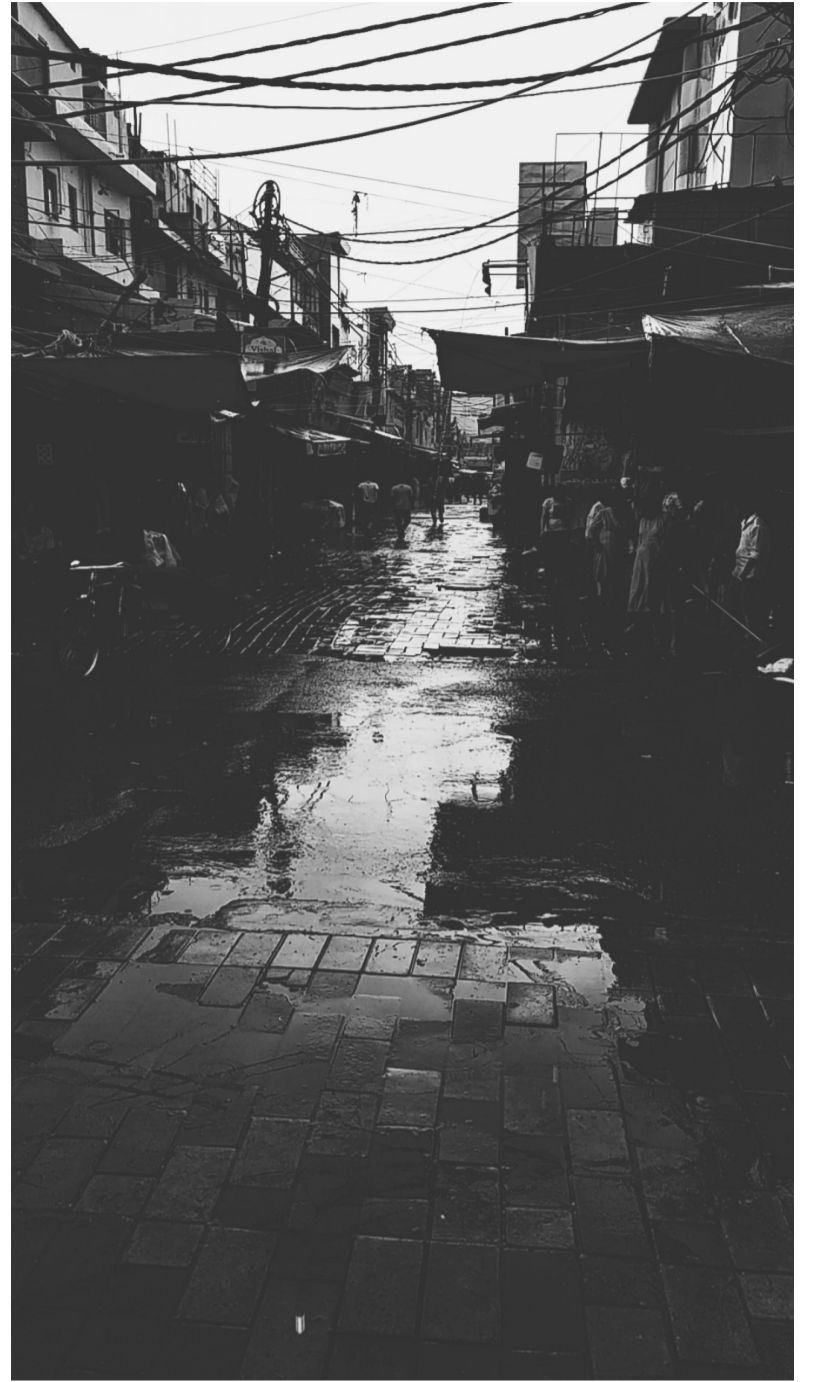
*Swati Chaurasia*



*Vasundhara Singh*



*Laavanya Raturi*



*Nakshatra Shah*



*Swati Chaurasia*

# EDITOR'S NOTE

The communique is a platform for young minds to voice their opinions. For many it is the first step into the world of writing and reporting. As a student publication, it gives you the opportunity to make mistakes and evolve through them. Our team of writers, photographers and designers are a bunch of determined and ambitious students, who wish to create an impact with their craft. With the 16th edition of communique, everybody has put their best foot forward in bringing you stories that we believe need to be heard. The newsletter is a product of weeks of discussion, analysis and brainstorming. There were days when the ideas would flow fluently and others when a blank page would become our worst enemy. While some writers believed less is more, and then there were those whose words met no limits. Some struggled with headlines while others barely met deadlines. In the end, all stories have come from the desk of hardworking individuals, who have tried to highlight important issues in their own unique ways. The communique is the aftermath of all this and much more.

**Editor-In-Chief -**  
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**Editor -**  
Vasundhara Singh

**Sub Editor -**  
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## **Editorial Team**

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Harshika Kapoor  
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Danita Yadav  
Dimple Gulwani  
Malvika Murali

## **Confessions Of A Cub Reporter**

The clock ticks away, tireless hands tip toe on the keyboard as the multitude of heavy breaths remind us of the approaching deadline. Some of us laugh while others sit still but all hold a similar feeling in their hearts, one of anxiety. I look around the room to find tense faces quietly murmuring away in the cold. I hold no judgement and feel no pressure for I know what we have created has been a labour of hard work and sincerity. The coffee mugs have been with us at every step, witnessed our trying moments and gorged on our triumphs. My mind simmers with the dearth of words as I attempt to collect my thoughts for one last time. As we all look down at the table, the glossy pages of Communique become a time capsule. As we go through each article, poem and photograph, we remind ourselves of what a bunch of nerdy minds are capable of.