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Sexual Violence 2012-2018 and #MeToo

A Touchstone for the Present

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Sexual violence and harassment seem to have secured a central focus for women's issues. What structural aspects of women's oppression are obscured by this centrality of violence? What fresh insights does it nevertheless offer?

1 Introduction

In a pioneering essay from the 1990s, "Problems for a Contemporary Theory of Gender," Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana began provocatively with the statement "Suddenly, women are everywhere."

The arguments of that essay chose to raise questions about some of the ways in which the subject of "the new woman"-sometimes even portrayed as a feminist one-was being deployed in the most significant events of the 1990s. This new subject could be found in the anti-Mandal agitations against the implementation of reservations for the Other Backward Castes (OBCs) in government services; the promotion of new long-acting contraceptives in family planning programmes for women's empowerment by international agencies; the emergence of a militant female figure in the women's wing of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) during the late 1980s; and in accounts of the village women leading the anti-arrack struggles in coastal Andhra Pradesh in the early 1990s (Tharu and Niranjana 1996).

A whole generation has since elapsed and we are now well into the 21st century. In these intervening decades, feminism, taken as short hand for the movement for women's rights, has truly come of age. The clearest sign of this is the widespread use of the term feminism itself, which, not so long ago, was treated rather gingerly or else avoided altogether, with "women" or "gender" being more frequently used.

Today, in spite of being up against a state formation that is the most hostile to gender equality and social justice in the history of modern India, or perhaps precisely because of it, there is a renewed urgency to speak up from identifiably feminist perspectives. Thus, feminist voices have been speaking out, whether it be against growing militarisation, the ravages of neo-liberal development, the hierarchies of caste, the disenfranchisement of minorities, the exclusions of disability, or queer subjectivities.

In the midst of this kind of a renewal of a feminist politics, it might seem rather odd to raise questions about it. I take this perverse course in the hope of clarifying for myself what our collective insights and blindness have been in the recent past. The main target of my questioning-which has had to double back on itself to make changes and corrections-is the visible centrality of sexual violence in contemporary feminist politics.

> To put it more sharply, today, it seems as if violence has become a kind of touchstone for the recognition of an issue as a "women's issue."

Just as Tharu and Niranjana once proclaimed, in a critical rather than celebratory tone, that women are suddenly everywhere, more than two decades later, I am tempted to say that suddenly sexual violence is everywhere. It is being recognised and called out in buses and on the street, in corporate boardrooms and university departments, in hostels and homes, in the "badlands" of a state like Haryana as much as in well-to-do metropolitan India. The list of places where it is gaining visibility today seems truly unending: from the violation of small children, mature adults, transpeople, and sexual minorities.

To put it more sharply, today, it seems as if violence has become a kind of touchstone for the recognition of an issue as a "women's issue." The presence of coercive force-in a whole range of acts from rape to sexual harassment-appears to crystallise feminist issues, renders them recognisable as such, and even enables them to acquire resonance within a larger, otherwise unsympathetic public. Just as an actual touchstone certified the purity of gold once upon a time, violence seems to authenticate an issue as genuinely feminist.

My argument here is *not* that violence should not be allowed to function as a touchstone, nor do I wish to suggest that it is a bad or deficient one. Rather, this essay is about my changing and still evolving relationship with violence-as-touchstone, from the aftermath of the gang rape of Jyoti Singh in Delhi in 2012 to the presently evolving #MeToo movement. It is both about what the focus on violence may have obscured, and what we might yet gain in thinking afresh about violence today.

2 What is New about Sexual Violence Today?

The campaign against gendered violence was one of the crucial founding moments in the history of the contemporary women's movement, and it was followed by decades of campaigns and legal reforms. Given its status as an inaugural issue, therefore, the first question to ask is what is new about the current preoccupation with sexual violence both within the women's movement and in public discourses more broadly? Why am I claiming a special significance for the struggles against sexual violence today when they are, after all, only a culmination of all that has come before?

It is broadly agreed that for reasons that we may not yet fully grasp, the gang rape of 16 December 2012 produced mass protests (and not just in the city of Delhi, but in several places both large and small) that were unprecedented in scope and caught the attention of the state, the media, and a global public as never before. The horrific and fatal nature of the gang rape undoubtedly played a large part in the national and international outcry that followed. Responses included the setting up of the Justice Verma Committee and the rapid enactments of the Criminal Amendment Act (2013) and the Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act (2013). Issues of sexual violence were brought into the very mainstream of public life in a way that decades of agitation had not been able to achieve. It also turned India and its "rape capital" Delhi into a kind of state of exception on the world stage, provoking varied first-world responses towards the plight of Indian women. These included the setting up of a special Gender Task Force at Harvard to provide us with legal aid, and Leslie Udwin's controversial film *India's Daughter* that evoked comparisons to Katherine Mayo and the colonial civilising mission.

The Nirbhaya case came dangerously close to cementing the hold of two popular myths: first, that the greatest danger to women lay in the stranger lurking in the streets after nightfall; and second, that the only way to curb such crimes was through the death penalty. Therefore, what made its aftermath so remarkable was that fresh directions and insights were gained by going *against* the common sense perceptions promoted by the Delhi rape case.

To begin with, there was a qualitative difference in the forms of the protest and its feminist leadership. This difference was largely inspired, I suspect, by the repositioning of questions of sexuality since the 1990s. It was remarkable that the December 2012 protests did not only demand justice and an end to victimisation: they also asserted women's right to desire, to freedom and autonomy, and spoke out in the language of sexual rights. For every banner calling for death to the rapists, there were others proclaiming, "Don't ask me where I was last night," or "My dress is not a yes." The frequent cry of "Azadi" in the many gatherings that followed was not a slogan one had heard in prior mobilisations against rape.

> [T]he powerful responses to harassment and violence engendered by this moment also appeared, at the same time, to have the disabling effect of obscuring the contexts shaping young people's, and especially young women's destinies.

Another difference was in some of the path-breaking research undertaken at this time in contrast to prior decades, when reflections on campaigns against violence and legal reform (rather than research on forms and experiences of violence) were critical. Activists and scholars examined sources of data like the National Crime Records Bureau more closely. I have to confess that before this time, I did not know that in 98% of all the rape First Information Reports (FIRs) lodged in India's police stations, the perpetrator was known to the victim. If this was the official record, what of the situation on the ground (about which one could only speculate), given all the barriers against reporting rapes by someone known or in a position of power? The studies and reports of this period upset assumptions about rape and violence. Two examples stand out. The investigations of Rukmini Sreenivasan for *The Hindu* newspaper in Delhi revealed that for many years, the largest category of rape cases registered in Delhi comes under the category of kidnapping and abduction. In fact, these are almost invariably cases against boys in eloping young couples registered by the parents of the girl; hence not really cases of rape at all. (Another major category is that of "promise to marry.") A study conducted by the organisation Majlis in Mumbai highlighted the prevalence of cases of incest by fathers in broken families in that city: it was not known that such cases were more numerous than those of stranger rape.

Thus, the Delhi gang rape stimulated research and insights precisely because it was a perfect case of stranger rape that fitted only too well with the stereotype that needed to be dislodged. But one of its less noticed effects was that it crowded out media attention to the shocking avalanche of rapes of Dalit girls and women in the neighbouring state of Haryana that were happening around the same time.

On the surface, these were cases of young school or college going girls aspiring for a better future for themselves, thereby inviting comparison with Jyoti Singh, the Delhi victim of December 2012. But the vital difference was that the respective social status of the victim and the perpetrator was reversed in the Haryana cases. Though from a modest middle-class background, Jyoti Singh was upper caste, training to begin a professional career as a physiotherapist; her attackers were members of the urban precariat, social dregs. By contrast, in neighbouring semi-urban or "rurban" Haryana, girls and women from the lowest and most vulnerable castes were being raped by young men from their own neighbourhoods who were (mostly) from the locally dominant Jat caste, capable of wielding influence where it mattered. Moreover, the aspiration for upward mobility implicit in the Dalit girls' quest for education ran against the grain of caste society. Thus, despite their surface similarity and their contiguity in time and space, the Delhi and Haryana rapes were worlds apart, which conspired to make the whole question of justice so elusive in Haryana compared to the swiftness with which it seemed to be achieved in Delhi.

> [W]hat makes India exceptional is the paradoxical juxtaposition of near gender parity in access to higher education and the very low proportion of women in gainful employment.

So, there is no doubt that much was being learnt. The year 2013 spawned new movements among the youth and especially among students. Examples include Hyderabad For Feminism, an online forum for combatting violence and harassment in that city; the "Why Loiter" groups that demanded negotiating with public urban spaces and a redefinition of what counts as safety; the Pinjra Tod (break the cage) movement in Delhi's colleges and universities, calling for an end to discrimination in women's hostels; and transgender groups in cities like Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Chennai that raised the curtain on the extent of everyday sexual violence and humiliation they were subjected to by the police. Needless to add, this is only an incomplete illustrative list.

This was clearly a moment of creative upsurge, public outcry and accountability, and of long awaited legal reform. Despite this, however, I also developed a sense of disquiet. As I will be explaining below this is because the powerful responses to harassment and violence engendered by this moment also appeared, at the same time, to have the disabling effect of obscuring the contexts shaping young people's, and especially young women's destinies. Our initial response as feminists had been to deny the exceptional status accorded to sexual violence in India by a sensation-seeking media both local and global. However, I also believed that India was indeed exceptional, though for reasons that were deeper and stranger.

While it is yet to be elaborated and justified, my basic argument is that what makes India exceptional is the paradoxical juxtaposition of near gender parity in access to higher education and the very low proportion of women in gainful employment. Nowhere else in the world is such a contrast found. And yet, this unique predicament has somehow failed to attract public attention. Indeed, even the women's movement (especially its autonomous face) has not cared enough to make this a political issue. Where is the ire if not rage over the very contexts within which violence is endemic?

3 Sexual Harassment in Higher Education

Let me lay out my misgivings in relation to higher education, where-or so I thought till #MeToo came to India in 2017-issues of sexual harassment had been sufficiently scrutinised and politicised. I was brought into a direct relationship with this situation when the University Grants Commission set up a Task Force in January 2013 (as an immediate response to the Delhi gang rape) "to review the existing arrangements that have been put in place on the campuses…to ensure the freedom, safety and security of girls and women in particular and of the entire youth population in general" (*Saksham* 2013: 95). The Task Force (of which I was a member) was given the opportunity to investigate into how universities were tackling sexual harassment and providing gender sensitisation, the results of which came out in the form of a UGC Report (*Saksham* 2013). Open Forums were conducted in a number of universities and a broader glimpse of the state of affairs in many more institutions was obtained by sending out questionnaires to all the constituent colleges and universities under the UGC's jurisdiction. To those from a generation who recalled the campaigns against "eve-teasing" of the 1970s and 1980s these testimonies came as a major surprise; we had assumed that much would have improved in the interim.

If one had to sum up the findings as briefly as possible they would be thus: The subject of sexual harassment was at best a matter of considerable confusion and more frequently one of outright denial, especially among administrators and teachers, while one of the weakest aspect of India's institutions of higher education turned out to be their lack of gender sensitivity. The Task Force heard over and over again about the pervasive vulnerability to forms of sexual harassment that constituted the everyday life of women students on campuses. It was exacerbated by the lack of basic facilities-public transport, lighting, hostel accommodation, health care and counselling, on the one hand, and compounded when gender was reinforced by other structures of discrimination and disadvantage-by rural location, caste, class, minority status, disability and sexuality, on the other.

In peri-urban and rural areas, there were students who could only get to college by tractor; but even in the heart of India's metros, the lack of public transport in a sprawling campus made many women dependent on male students with motorbikes for their "little daily needs," who then expected "favours" in return, in classic quid pro quo mode. Women students wearing a hijab received frequent comments and taunts, while those from the states of the North East were subjected to propositioning should they venture out for a walk in the evenings.

Very few members of higher educational institutions took the need for gender sensitisation seriously, in spite of how critical it is for creating a conducive atmosphere on campus in relation to gender equality and freedom from harassment. Moreover, given the heterogeneous nature of student populations, who not only study but often lived together for many years, it was not just experiences of discrimination but different ideas about "appropriate" behaviour that created confusion and alienation among students.

The university or college-precisely because their purpose is education-should have been places that are especially well placed to think further about equality, to enable students to take risks and experiment, to learn how to not just tolerate but live well with others who are different (socially, economically, in terms of religion, caste, gender, sexuality, or ability). The Saksham Report attempted to capture the views of students who strongly and repeatedly articulated that a university "should help women transition from the protected atmosphere of the home into a real life situation where she had to be independent" (Saksham: 37).

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The greatest obstacle to gender sensitisation was the administrative approach for dealing with the presence of significant numbers of women students, namely protectionism and policing. In the wake of the Delhi gang rape, while students took out marches and held vigils for greater freedom and justice, authorities in many parts of the country responded by making their rules for women students even more stringent than they were before the incident. Hostel timings were curtailed and "night outs" cancelled. Most troubling of all was the exposure of the most effective method for silencing students: especially in undergraduate colleges and privately managed institutions there appeared to be a kind of unspoken pact between the administration and parents, whereby discriminatory rules had to be tolerated if not respected, even though they are oriented towards blaming the victim. If students spoke up or acted against such rules, the result could well be one of being asked to leave. Here again, it was only too obvious as to which students would be most vulnerable to this kind of threat: those already battling "convention" bound family backgrounds, with limited economic resources, coming from marginal communities and locations. In such a situation, several students said that it would be better to quietly endure the daily humiliations and constraints, than to risk having to give up these precious few years.

The Saksham Report was produced a year after the Delhi gang rape and then accepted as guidelines by the UGC. It had been hoped that these would therefore be the basis for a new set of regulations to deal with sexual harassment on campuses. Regulations were indeed created in 2016 by a new team and with the involvement of several government ministries, but unfortunately their narrow focus on Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs) did not appear to carry enough of the spirit of the Saksham Report forward.

Such disappointment apart, my concern in those years was to draw attention to what I perceived to be critical for students and their futures. In all the turmoil, one of the most remarkable facets of higher education was either being taken for granted or bypassed altogether; namely the gendered aspects of the democratisation of the student body at a time of unprecedented expansion and privatisation.

4 Gender Parity in Higher Education

To put this unique moment in the history of higher education in some perspective: On the eve of Independence, there were approximately a hundred thousand students enrolled in the nation's colleges and universities, at a time when all Indian universities were state-run and charged practically no fees. According to the All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE) Report this number stood at a staggering 36.6 million in 2017-18, with over one hundred thousand enrolled at the PhD level alone. With over 900 universities, 40,000 colleges and 10,000 standalone institutions, India has the largest system of higher education in the world, and the second largest in terms of the sheer number of students enrolled. Much of this growth has been very recent, with enrolment rates doubling in the last decade.

> There was no getting away from the overall fact that what a few decades ago was still an elite male bastion had decisively given way to a situation close to gender parity, when it came to students.

But hear this: just 10% of students at the time of Independence were women. Yet, by the year 2000 this figure had jumped to 40%, and has been inching forward to reach 47.6% in 2017-18. Being an average number covering every kind of institution that offers a degree after class 12, this figure hides the unevenness of female enrolment, especially the continued male bias in institutions of national importance (which include the prestigious IITs and IIMs), BTech and Engineering courses, and state private universities. But one would be quite wrong to think that young women are simply crowding into the countless but relatively small BEd colleges and other teacher training shops that have been mushrooming all across the country. There was no getting away from the overall fact that what a few decades ago was still an elite male bastion had decisively given way to a situation close to gender parity, when it came to students**.** In no other public institutional space (where gender inequalities are otherwise so rife) was there anything remotely like this.

This unprecedented entry of women into India's colleges and universities has been happening alongside democratisation of access on other fronts as well. Thanks in large part to the implementation of reservations: out of 100 students in 2017-18 (again these are all India averages), 14.4% were Scheduled Caste, 35% Other Backward Classes (OBC), and 5.2% Scheduled Tribes. There were also 5% Muslims, and 2.2% other minorities, which left about 38% Hindu upper castes (AISHE Report 2017-18). So while upper castes (who constitute an estimated 15%-20% of the population) are still quite over represented, and Muslims and Persons with Disability in particular are severely underrepresented, the student body has become much more heterogeneous than before, and the situation has been broadly improving over the years.

Of course, much more needed to be said about what kind of space this is, as the movement to fight the institutional suicide of the Ph.D student Rohith Vemula (at the University of Hyderabad in January 2016), among many such struggles, was forcing people to ask questions. Scheduled Tribes were only increasing marginally, while Muslims seemed to be losing the small foothold they had a decade ago. On the other hand, even those who do not show up in government statistics-like sexual minorities-have become more visible on our campuses.

Cutting through all these developments has been the growing presence of women across every group. Even among the most under represented, such as Muslims, close to half are women. Therefore, there now is a very significant heterogeneity among women too, as more women from hitherto excluded social and economic locations are gaining entry. This kind of democratisation is hugely important. How should we view this? Was this simply a "normal" process, as families aspired for upward mobility for daughters as well as sons? Or could there be something more potentially "revolutionary" in the making? These were the kinds of questions that I felt needed to be posed alongside the high visibility being accorded to the pervasiveness of sexual harassment on campuses. Such was the potency of sexual harassment as a touchstone that it provided both the language and frame for students and even the UGC to stake out a hope for making young women's lives a more genuinely fulfilling and less humiliating experience. Women were claiming the space of higher education where they wished to transition from the protected sphere of the home to that of greater independence. But was this in fact the case? What happened afterwards?

5 The Crisis in Employment

This brings me to the other part of my narrative. While many administrators think of it as a sort of creche for young adults, and some despairing students refer to their years in it as "time pass," Indian higher education has nevertheless managed to become an exceptional bubble of relative gender parity. But India's work places present a starkly different picture.

Since the 1970s, the burden of many scholars and activists in India had been to show that our data sets on women's work are fundamentally misleading: women are engaged in productive economic work of all kinds, but our national accounting systems are unable to capture and measure this. With a strong focus on rural India, where the majority of the population still resides, decades of analysis, especially among development economists, had gone to show how much work, including productive labour beyond conventional notions of housework, is being undertaken by women, but without acknowledgement. Already by the early 1990s, major international bodies such as the World Bank were revising their understandings, with announcements to the effect that if all the labour were counted, women worked longer and harder than men, but with fewer returns to their labour.

> After all is said and done, not to put too fine a point on it, India has one of the lowest female work participation rates in the world

At the same time, some scholars and feminists were arguing that this did not resolve the huge gap that is recorded between men and women in India's overall paid work force, especially in urban areas. After all is said and done, not to put too fine a point on it, India has one of the lowest female work participation rates in the world (the only countries worse than India are in West Asia!), and this fact is only now gaining a little traction. When it comes to recent trends, some speak of an overall stagnation in women's work, others notice levels of volatility, oscillating nonetheless around a very low average, especially in the realm of paid work, where National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) figures for 2011-12 are 15%.

These low rates coincide with a time when India has witnessed the highest growth rates in its economy, and where a certain common sense would have one believe that India has been living in a time of unprecedented job opportunities. But what the data in fact was saying is that the contemporary economic regime is one where the vast majority of all women, however long and hard many of them may be working-at home, on family farms, in various artisanal or other productive contexts-are effectively living in relations of dependency, fundamentally attached to households, since they are engaging in some form or other of unpaid family labour. These relations of dependency, while initially those of a daughter, are subsequently invariably structured by marriage. And from what we know about the lack of any effective implementation of property rights for those with land, assets or other forms of capital, this means registering the enormity of such dependency and its wider ramifications for any discussion of women's chances for autonomy in India, including, most definitely, freedom from sexual harassment and violence.

> [L]abour markets that are supposedly neutral are actually places where both stigma and discrimination are rife.

Furthermore, there is also a distinct, persistent class and caste dimension to women's paid and unpaid work, which is playing a significant role in structuring India's labour markets. While a proper account would not be possible here, a few issues do stand out, all of them disturbing. Once the differences between men and women's labour situations are further disaggregated, Neetha N has demonstrated that there has been an overall intensification of inequalities between women, one that aligns with their Scheduled Tribe, Scheduled Caste, Other Backward Classes, Muslim and upper-caste status. Thus, for instance, the last round of NSSO data for 2011-12 reveals that in a situation of overall decline in female employment, STs, SCs and OBCs (in that order) have lost out the most job-wise, and that too, in a context where they are already marginalised and confined to the most onerous sectors (Neetha N 2014) A small proportion of upper-caste women, especially in urban India, have, on the other hand, found a few enclaves, such that their relative privilege in social and educational terms translates into cornering not just the more traditional fields of education, but the hyper-visible ones relating to finance, real estate and the media. This means that labour markets that are supposedly neutral are actually places where both stigma and discrimination are rife.

To recap the shocking facts: Barely 15% of women in India have any kind of paid work - and this is a figure that has been stagnating if not declining in recent years, the very years of the highest levels of economic growth that the country has ever seen. The vast bulk of "employed" women are working in stagnant agriculture in rural India, and a small proportion in urban India, with primary school teaching and paid domestic work being the largest concentrations of urban female workers. This meant that while more and more women were indeed gaining entry into higher education as never before, and from increasingly diverse social and economic backgrounds, declining proportions of these women would find employment once they left, however accomplished and well educated they might be, and however much may have been invested in their education. (In the face of the much awaited new round of NSSO data, namely that of the Periodic Labour Force Survey 2017-18, suppressed by the current government, which reveals an unprecedented absolute shrinking of jobs overall, the situation for women can only worsen).

> On several occasions I even urged that there had been enough talk about violence, though informal conversations with students and in women's groups claimed otherwise; they said that too much was still being left unsaid. They turned out to be right.

This then is the drift of my arguments so far. In the midst of all the clamour for freedom from violence that characterised the years following the Delhi gang rape, I wished for an equal focus on the context shaping young people's futures, and especially those of women. On several occasions I even urged that there had been enough talk about violence, though informal conversations with students and in women's groups claimed otherwise; they said that too much was still being left unsaid. They turned out to be right.

6 The Lens of #MeToo in India

Then came the #MeToo movement of 2017, which took everyone by surprise. Unlike the shocked international finger pointing of December 2012, in 2017 India was not quarantined in a state of exception. The voices of the #MeToo survivors were bearing testimony to the ubiquity of sexual harassment and violence in a country like the USA. Suddenly available were not just a common language for "breaking the silence" and gaining global credibility, but also ways of telling. Varied forms of bearing witness-from personal testimonies to anonymous lists of male harassers-cascaded from Hollywood, the American media, and to a lesser degree, US academia in an escalating, expanding spiral that "went viral" across the globe. If the language of silence seemed to hark back to the feminism of the 1970s, this was no simple return to old vocabularies. A new kind of media-based activism seemed to animate it, led by a new generation.

India too is in the midst of acknowledging its #MeToo movement. In October 2017 Raya Sarkar brought out a list of men in academia anonymously accused of sexual harassment on Facebook. Less than a year later, voices emerged from the film industry, journalism, the field of comedy, the art world, and the NGO sector, among others. Their accounts of experiences of sexual harassment (sometimes recalled many years after the event) garnered much greater publicity through the medium of Twitter. Painful and traumatic sexual and intimate relations became subjects that could be shared on social media platforms. In all of these situations men were being called to account in unprecedented ways. I believe that these events have introduced us to new registers and dimensions in the problems that had otherwise become so familiar in the wake of the Delhi gang rape. I cannot hope to do justice to much of what is still in the process of unfolding, including the critical role being played by the new social media (which was no doubt already quite central after December 2012, but not in the way it is now).

Since it is formed through such direct global influence, the #MeToo moment might seem a suspect way in which to have to think afresh about the transformative potential of movements against sexual harassment in India. Certainly, this was not how I had anticipated that women's embattled presence in higher education and in employment would ultimately gain some public traction. The unexpected lesson here is not only that questions surrounding sexual harassment and violence have not been exhausted, but that they may also further our understanding about what makes the situation of women in our context so difficult to address today. In other words, thinking with (not against) the touchstone of violence might actually serve us better. Let me try and explain.

> In particular, what was claimed to be a progressive attitude from men, especially in heterosexual relations, has all too often turned into an experience of violation that is very hard to acknowledge, let alone name

The first set of issues is that of a different voice since the onset of #MeToo, from within a critically active new generation. Ritty Lukose has suggested in the US context that it is the changing sexual politics of the times that has made the younger feminists leading #MeToo-who have grown up in a sexually permissive if not sex-saturated world-draw on notions of exploitation and victimhood that an older generation had become quite wary of (Lukose 2018). I do not wish to suggest that this is true of our world too, but there are significant connections all the same. We lack a good description of how much things have changed since the 1990s when sexuality entered public life and movement politics in India. Many millennials are raising doubts of their own about how the desire for greater sexual freedom in repressive contexts like ours has had the effect of making sex-positivism into an imperative but with less than liberatory outcomes.

In particular, what was claimed to be a progressive attitude from men, especially in heterosexual relations, has all too often turned into an experience of violation that is very hard to acknowledge, let alone name, and so much more so for anyone whose vulnerability is compounded along other axes of discrimination. For many from my generation that allied with sexuality movements, sex positivity

appeared as an advance or even as a counter to violence. Desire and consent have been the watchwords. This way of thinking stands challenged now, and the challenge has come from those who have voiced their experiences of sexual harassment, not from an established feminist leadership representing their cause.

A second set of questions has been forced on us in the context of the university. The list "naming and shaming" academics (many of whom were renowned and admired for their progressive scholarship) has been among the more controversial aspects of #MeToo politics in India. In my view its misleading polarisation in opposition to due process became an obstacle to recognising what about it was so disturbing, not just a matter of dismay. It gestured towards a problem regarding universities that needed to be grasped prior to and alongside mechanisms of redressal.

Looking back at the Saksham Report with the benefit of hindsight, I would say that in its aim to push for the gender sensitisation of a heterogeneous student body within a broadly liberal culture, it underestimated how university structures and faculty networks were shaping students' worlds and their futures. What kind of workplace is the university and how should one characterise the relationship between faculty and students, who are not to each other as employer is to employee? While everyone may acknowledge the power differential between teacher and student, there is much more at stake. By virtue of being a relationship of learning and influence, sometimes profoundly so, the pedagogic dimensions of the relationship extend further. This can make the institutional culture of universities quite different from that of modern workplaces.

Paradoxically, in an effort to capture the ties that bind students to their teachers, commentators have described universities across the world as more feudal than capitalist, and I believe this would be even truer in India. In such situations, the sexual politics of teacher student relations become all the more difficult to address, especially when hierarchies are masked by liberal claims. The near parity in gendered terms among the student population that I referred to earlier contrasts sharply with the social composition of faculty who are overwhelmingly male and upper caste.

An anonymous list is an ambivalent phenomenon: On the one hand, there was no knowing what the accusations were, how they fit within existing definitions of sexual harassment, perhaps indicative of other experiences of discrimination and violation. On the other hand, the characteristic of a list is to go beyond individuals to gesture towards a larger problem, in this case an academic culture of widespread immunity. One can better discern the specific vulnerabilities of students in the #MeToo era in India. In spite of universities having been the sites of so much mobilising against sexual harassment and for so long, it has been that much harder to call out harassers among faculty than in other workplaces, where some very famous men have been brought low.

This brings me to the third set of questions - the very new visibility of some workplaces as sites of sexual harassment. Interestingly, these have not been the more familiar "traditional" ones, but those such as the media and entertainment industries, where a small but critical mass of women is barely a generation old. We already have accounts from, and lively debates among, journalists of different generations that attest to this new situation. What has made it possible for this generation of women holding jobs in male dominated work cultures to speak up as some of them have? Questions have been raised about the relative privilege of these #MeToo voices in terms of caste and class. Doubtless there are those whose testimonies have shown that they are unable or unwilling to acknowledge the extent to which this privilege has worked in their favour. Yet others have evinced a remarkable capacity for reflexivity, acknowledging, for example, how class advantage or familial support was critical to enduring the mental anguish they were subjected to when they spoke out. But one should be careful not to generalise. In the case of the Telugu film industry it was women and transpeople at the bottom of the pyramid who raised their voices, combining economic exploitation and sexual harassment with discrimination based on caste and skin colour. Moreover, high profile support in some quarters has gone hand in hand with backlash, denial, and forced retractions.

So this is the paradox thrown up by #MeToo in contemporary India: the very time when the vast majority of women are condemned to relations of financial and economic dependency on men, has also become the time when sexual violation is being named in unprecedented ways and men are being called to account.

In her recent book *Fortunes of Feminism: From State Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*, Nancy Fraser has raised some provocative questions about the "coincidence" of the prospering of second-wave feminism in the era of neo-liberalism in western societies. "Was there some perverse, subterranean, elective affinity between them" she asks? (Fraser 2012: 218) Rather than her worry about the heightened emphasis on identity politics at the cost of critiques of capitalism, I am more concerned about the considerable focus on sexual violence and harassment that is presently unfolding. Curiously, this appears to be a genuinely global moment, one that

is bringing together countries as far apart as India and the USA.

Neo-liberalism in India has taken the road of "jobless growth" (and if the latest suppressed data is to be believed is now shifting to "shrinking jobs growth") in a context of very low if not declining decent work opportunities for women, along with rising rates of access to higher education. As we have seen, successive waves of politicising the spaces of higher education have sought to name the vulnerability of the woman student through the language of sexual harassment. In a situation where future prospects are ringed with so much uncertainty, where the chances and costs of lodging formal complaints have every probability of backfiring, what more needs to be done by way of supporting students in this critical phase of their lives? Late in the day, new workplaces have become sites where sexual violations have been called to account. These voices are as yet few and far between, occupying as they do hugely divergent but relatively small enclaves of work. Nor are there signs yet of how these voices connect to other platforms of women workers; consider the lakhs of garment workers in Bengaluru (whose testimonies have born witness to the ubiquity of harassment, wage theft and harsh levels of exploitation) who in 2016 successfully struck work in order to be able to access their provident fund.

We know far too little about how women are negotiating, entering, or leaving places of employment, and we have not cared enough that the majority are simply excluded from it and have to depend entirely on men to bring their earnings home. It is even more troubling that this applies with greater force to a younger, better educated generation. So it is not enough to take the easy route of questioning the relative ease with which liberal notions of individual perpetrators of harassment and violence can be called out while more structural problems do not seem to find a ready language. Instead, we need to care more by responding to the modes in which protests are being articulated, in order to make other futures possible.

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