

1 Decolonizing the Body

Theoretical Imaginings on the Fourth Wave Feminism in India

Alka Kurian

Introduction

This chapter argues that the 2012 anti-rape movement in India launched a new feminist politics that embodied a rights-based discourse of gender - in particular, against everyday, generalized misogyny, and sexual harassment and violence—in a way that had not been seriously taken up by the mainstream Indian Women’s Movement. Asserting their right to be treated as equal fellow citizens, the movement saw young women challenging the subordination of their political identity to moral identity, and demanding that the state criminalize sexual harassment, something that it had ignored to do in the sixty-five years of the country’s independence. Second, I claim that this feminist discourse was connected to a global vocabulary of rights facilitated, to a large extent, by means of the Internet. Third, this movement—often referred to as India’s “Spring”—resonated with other forms of agitations for plurality and inclusivity within the Dalit and Muslim minority communities, educational institutions, and the country’s militarized zones. It is my intention here to argue that this rights-based intersectional feminist movement, led by India’s youth, created a ripple effect for other struggles to break out. Providing them with the “form, idiom, and languages of protest” (Anurima, 2017 fb post), it inspired a large number of public intellectuals and members of the civic society to lay claim to their “political citizenship” (Rahul Roy, 2017) and assert their constitutional right to shape the future of the country’s secularism that they fear is currently under threat by the Hindutva forces of regressive nationalism. The promise of the 2012 feminist movement, therefore, is in this connection, and is a critical breakthrough that has the potential to lay the groundwork for, what I claim, an Indian fourth wave feminism and for wider class-based struggles.

Central to this rights-bearing discourse of gender is a focus on the issues of freedom, choice, and desire i.e. elements, which in the past, were viewed with suspicion by those who were committed to the idea of developmental nationalism. The developmental state was too quick to dismiss these elements that came out of modernity because of its own postcolonial legacies marked by conservative gender binaries. The Indian Women’s Movement, in its turn too, had a narrower set of restrictive and protectionist concerns by placing a limit on what women could ask for or do. Moreover, gender in the public sphere was seen by the IWM only through the lens of the

developmental state, focusing on employment, wages, education, housing, health, food, etc. Its examination of gender in the private sphere, on the other hand, concerned itself with issues of maternal health, reproduction, female feticide or infanticide, the girl child, child marriage, dowry, domestic abuse, etc. Sexuality was strictly a private matter for the developmental state; it saw its public manifestation only in terms of sexual violence against which women needed to be protected through controlling and disciplining their sexual behavior and policing their access to public places.

The access by means of the Internet to a global vocabulary of rights enabled India's youth to bring gender out of the shadows of this developmental framework. It also challenged the regressive nationalistic register by turning the tide from protection to women's autonomy at home and in public spaces. One can scorn at these changes as an upper-class, elitist, and Western phenomenon, or leave it fragmented. But to do that would amount to saying that the developmental logic is not part of the global conversation. The protectionist zeal of the state and the IWM had failed in eliminating women's sexual vulnerability in public places, especially since the watershed decade of 1990s, that had brought more and more women out into the public space, unleashing a massive backlash from the conservative sections of the society. Feeling betrayed by the state and spurned by the society, young women didn't wait to be rescued by the mainstream IWM and used what resources they had at their disposal. Online campaigns such as "Occupy the Night," "Why Loiter," "Blank Noise," etc., were some of the earliest manifestations of this collective spirit against everyday sexism. The 2012 anti-rape movement became the tipping point that initiated a conversation on the need for a shift from developmental to a new rights-based state where women had absolute right to their sexual bodies and to public spaces. By bringing the discourse of freedom and sexuality into the public realm—in the streets and through social media—and by insisting on the autonomy of women's political identity, this discourse helped the Indian feminist movement to emerge into modernity.

These new rights vocabularies of the feminist movement challenged not only the culture of sexism but also classism, casteism, and communalism. Alongside slogans against sexual violence, during the 2012 movement, could be heard voices against oppression of Muslims, Dalits, and of people in Kashmir and Manipur. This rights-based anti-rape movement gave an occasion, therefore, to people from a diversity of interest groups to express their rage against the neo-colonial repressive state. It brought together those who were not on the same page, had different goals for human rights and social justice, and differed on what they wanted from the movement. By trying to advance the interest of civil society and by working on bringing about social justice, these leaders fulfilled, therefore, the role of social "meddlers" (Brittney Cooper 2017: 62) or of public intellectuals, that Romila Thapar fears, have become an "endangered species" (2015).

Fired by the spirit to bring about a democratic culture by dismantling the existing power structure within the repressive neoliberal state, many of the trailblazers of this 2012 intersectional movement provided leadership for other movements that followed, such as “Justice for Vemula,” “Stand with JNU,” “#Pinjra Tod,” “Chalo Una,” “#DalitWomenFight,” and “#NotInMyName,” and a further intensified movement against AFSPA in Kashmir and Manipur. Making this link offers a chance of really pushing forward a different agenda that replaces the developmental state with a progressive alliance. The vocabulary of women who are laying claim to these rights – to the city, to freedom of movement, to their bodies, and to pleasure (and not just civil rights) – needs to be understood as an opportunity for a larger fourth wave feminist movement.

2012 Anti-Rape Movement

The gruesome rape and murder in Delhi of twenty-three-year-old Jyoti Singh on December 16, 2012 unleashed mass protests across India, reigniting public debates on the pervasiveness of sexual violence in the country, foregrounding for the first-time sexual violence as a political issue in liberal democracy (Ratna Kapur 2014). Singh had gone out to watch a film with a male friend, Awindra Pandey. On their way home in a private bus, Pandey was savagely attacked and Singh was brutally gang raped. Singh succumbed to her horrific injuries thirteen days later. Her death lit a spark to the simmering discontent in the country against a profoundly misogynistic culture—that oppresses women across class, caste, and religious divide at home, in public places and institutions—and turned it into a broad-based, nation-wide, intersectional, anti-rape movement. People in their thousands—the first protests being led by students of the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) that houses a powerful gender sensitization committee on campus—joined in mass demonstrations on the streets of urban India, “mobilized by a sense of outrage, social media tools and word of mouth” (Sen cited in Titzmann 2015: 79) demanding an end to the state’s indifference to sexual violence claiming that it denies women their right to life. While the political classes agitated for women’s safety, and many young men and women cried for death penalty for the perpetrators and safety for women, the Hindu right bemoaned Indian women’s sexual corruption through Westernization and blamed the rise of women’s mobility and freedom as the root cause of sexual violence.

The 2013 Criminal Law Amendment Act¹ that followed the 2012 Delhi gang rape and murder of Jyoti Singh was a culmination of feminist discussions that had preceded in the years leading up to this. The unprecedented furor across national and international borders elicited by the 2012 incident was not too dissimilar—albeit magnified manifold in scale and number—to other public expressions of outrage against the culture of sexual violence in India: Mathura 1972; Rameeza Bee 1979; Maya Tyagi 1980; Suman Rani 1989; Bhanvari Devi 1992. It replicated previous cases mobilized by people around the need for ending state

apathy to sexual violence, for amending rape law, for holding the police accountable, and implementing tougher penalties for sex offenders. While Singh's rape made talking about sex and sexuality in public "respectable" (Dutta and Sircar 2013), it also offered a platform for some to reflect on the paucity of response to other cases of sexual violence, some even more gruesome than Singh's, such as the rape of women at the hands of the Indian army in Kashmir (Essar Batool et al. 2016) and the Northeast, or of Dalit, tribal, and Muslim women. Instead of empathizing with the mood of the people, the state imposed reactive measures to deal with the intensity of the protests in Delhi and tried to disperse the agitating crowds by means of water cannons, batons, tear gas, and curfews. Faced with an increasing national and international pressure, the government set up the Verma Committee to revise the anti-rape law in the country. The discussions afforded by the Verma Committee outlined precisely the "continuum of violence against women" (Geetha xv) whether at home or in public spaces, in cities or in border states, that targeted women with sexual violence in the name of honor, identity, or national protection (Geetha xv).

In this section, I investigate feminist activism in India that was triggered by this incident and which railed against the culture of sexual violence, especially against everyday sexual harassment in the country, where walking the streets becomes a sexually hazardous activity for women and which is normalized as an inevitable part of the culture. It looks at the gaps and erasures within mainstream Indian Women's Movement with the attempt to understanding where within the civic society are conversations being led on this question. In the first instance, I attempt to understand this phenomenon against the background of the deepening intersection of women's lives with sexual violence in India, a reality that has historically been cloaked in silence.

Second, I draw on Mitra-Kahn's (2012) analysis to reflect on the transformations within the IWM from its earlier "non-autobiographical" formation to its present-day incarnation of non-mainstream cyberfeminism. I draw on Mitra-Kahn to gain an insight into the ideological feminism of the postcolonial IWM and the profoundly transformative 1990s neoliberal turn of the country to understand the rise of online feminist activism (2012: 110–11). The rapid transformations taking place in feminist politics in India today locate cyberfeminists in radically new feminist spaces and conversations on feminism itself, who use the democratically accessible Internet as a tool for activism on a wide range of issues. I claim that the passionate engagement of cyberfeminists with the politics of sexual violence, for example the one that we saw during the 2012 protests, challenged the perceived sense of political apathy, conservatism, and consumerism among younger women and helped inject a new life into the IWM whose NGO-zation since the

1990s had blunted its edge (Menon 2004) and weakened and fragmented its feminist politics. Moreover, IWM has historically privileged institutional forms of women's oppression related to sati, widows, dowry, custodial rape, female infanticide/feticide, inflation, environmental degradation, etc. The IWM's focus, therefore, has tended to be on specific forms of gender oppressions that impact mostly socially and economically backward and mostly rural layers of Indian society. Without undermining IWM's significant contribution to these major "issue-specific conceptual frameworks" (Chakravarti et al. cited in Mitra-Kahn 111), the class differentiation between "activists/theorist middle class feminists" and their disenfranchised "objects of activism and inquiry," (Mitra-Kahn 110–111) has created an unbridgeable solidarity gap between their self and the other. The privileged members of the IWM understood the pain of the socio-economically oppressed: it happened elsewhere and to other women, i.e. the laborer, the cleaner, the widow, the destitute or the Dalit. But operating from the comfort of its middle-class home or workplace, this "split subject" (John 1998) of the IWM juggled the privilege of the self and the oppression of the other by inadvertently emulating, what I claim, a homegrown "Feminist-as-Tourist" model (Mohanty 2003), causing in the process alienation between the two and fundamentally damaging the IWM. This hands-off approach of the IWM, argues Kshama Sawant (2017a), stemmed also from the IWM's NGO-ization, a process that "did not happen in isolation," but caught many social and political movements in its fold.

However, with more and more girls from across the class system joining the workforce in contemporary India, and consequently getting out of domestic and into public space, the dominant feminist discourse post-1990s has shifted from the other to the self and the concerns of the erstwhile IWM have become youth concerns. In a situation like this, by neglecting to theorize everyday street sexual harassment², considering it to be exclusively a class issue (Phadke 2003)³ that was far too incidental and sporadic in nature to merit its intervention, the ideological feminism of the postcolonial IWM, with its focus on developmental issues, projected itself as exclusionary and too out of touch with the needs of contemporary feminism. By intervening in the resultant activism gap, the younger cyberfeminists proceeded to operate along, what I claim, a "comparative model," illustrating through their actions powerful "relations of mutuality, co-responsibility and common interests, anchoring the idea of feminist solidarity" (Mohanty 2003: 242). By using the Internet for discussion and activism, and relying on its power to "call out" and challenge the culture of sexism and misogyny, cyberfeminists or the "power users of social networking" (cited in Munro 2013) have laid claim to both the site as well as the content of knowledge production hitherto monopolized by the mainstream IWM.

Indian Feminisms: A Historical Background

It is difficult to understand social movements from the prism of waves: there are no clear definitions and meanings tend to seep from one into another, and the appellations only make sense retrospectively. The first wave of the Indian women's movement is understood to have begun during the nineteenth-century social reform movement with women's organizations battling against both patriarchy and colonialism. The second wave of women's political activism in the post-colonial India of 1950s and 1960s took on a radically different form and method of mobilizing and embodied class and anti-caste struggles. These included tribal landless laborers' movement against feudal oppression, rallies against price rise, black marketeering and corruption, formation of trade unions for women working in the informal sector, and agitation for land by landless peasants. The third wave of the Indian women's movement that grew in late 1970s was self-consciously feminist at its core. Deliberately sidestepping party affiliation and hierarchies, this "autonomous" women's movement led agitations against dowry oppression and custodial rape (for example, Rameeza Bee 1978; Mathura 1980; Suman Rani 1988). However, the anti-rape campaign championed by the IWM was far too sporadic and episodic for it to be transformed into a genuine civil rights issue (Geetha 2016). Further, the gaps and fissures exposed within the IWM in the 1990s nation-wide post-Mandal agitations, shed light on the limitations of the movement owing to its blindness to the sexual politics of caste (Geetha 2017). The 1990s NGO-ization and careerism of the autonomous women's organizations owing to sudden influx of donor funding, along with people's inexplicable detachment from political and civic life, undermined the essence of a genuine feminist movement in India after it peaked in 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s. Further, the arrival of governance feminism, i.e. the incorporation of feminist knowledge within state, led to a greater policing and monitoring of citizens, especially of women, viewed by the regressive, neo-liberal state as vulnerable and passive victims (Kapur 2014; Iyer 2015). Critics wonder whether this ideological chaos and transformation that could potentially break up the IWM:

...into separate groups with their own organizational, funder-driven agendas ... [and] our tendency to turn to the law [that invariably reinforces gendered status quo] to deal with every new instance of devaluation and oppression of women in the realm of 'the body' and sexuality is precisely an indication of the lack of a 'strong movement' in this area.
(Menon 2004: 221, 222)

Incapacitated, therefore, by a sexist legal system on the one hand, and by a fragmented and weakened IWM that offered an ambiguous and unsatisfactory direction on everyday street sexual harassment on the other,

leadership on this issue came from young, middle-class, non-mainstream cyberfeminists in India who have been mobilizing in ways that signal a departure both in terms of content and method of resistance.

Shifting Feminist Parameters: Rise of the Fourth Wave Feminism?

The “watershed decade” of 1990s in India was marked by heightened right-wing Hindu radicalism, welfare cut-backs by the state, informalization of labor, steep income decline for the poor, and theft of mineral-rich lands from indigenous people. As a way out of the deepening crisis of global capitalism in 1980s, Western industrial economies began aggressively to target former colonial economies for cheap labor and an expansive consumer base. While these self-serving neo-colonial trade practices led to Indian economy’s neoliberalization with a devastating impact on the country’s fragile social order, they also had contradictory outcomes. On the one hand Western industries’ un-ending demand for cheap labor led to a massive expansion of jobs (mostly exploitative) for women in urban areas, it caused major anxieties for the conservative sections of the society that did not keep pace with a growing number of educated and professionally skilled women whose financial independence opened untold opportunities for them, fundamentally transforming their expectations from the society. It is precisely the intersection between the new and the old order that catapulted a new women’s movement boldly challenging traditional mores, and seeking freedom and not protection from the “Indian capitalist-casteist-feudal-landlordist ruling class (Sawant b)” that wishes to preserve the old ways of being.

The post 1990s India was also marked by regressive constructions of the binary right-wing and neo-liberal imaginings of ideal/subversive Indian femininity. On the one hand, women were venerated as normative, traditional, and family oriented, a reflection of the Hindu right’s sexual and cultural anxiety faced with the increasing Westernization of certain sections of the Indian society. On the other, they were celebrated as the hypersexualized, educated, and career-oriented new and modern Indian women (Sunder Rajan 1993; Munshi 2004). Commenting on the resultant transformation of the everyday life of people in India in the 1990s and early 2000s, Menon and Nigam (2007) enumerate the phenomenon that helped coming into being of, what they refer to as the “new economies of desire:” the cell phone revolution⁴, the radical transformation of the media⁵, consumer revolution⁶, and the “explosion of sexual desire” (92) among urban men and women⁷. A detailed examination of this resultant cultural revolution is beyond the scope of this chapter. What I am interested in, however, is to look at the ways in which the explosion of sexual desire that Menon and Nigam claim was facilitated in India by

the far easier and greater accessibility of the automobile, the cell phone and the Internet, the proliferation of nightclubs, pubs, and multiplexes, the multiplication of dating sites, and the presence of homosexuals in urban public spaces generating an atmosphere that “pulsate(s) with the desire and possibilities of sexual adventure” (2007: 92). Add to this is the phenomenon of unprecedented population mobility that have together liberated urban spaces from traditional mores and conservatism.

As the media began to open up around the turn of the century, the arrival of sexually explicit images into Indian homes from the West and through the cable TV transformed the essence of sexuality in Indian feminist politics so that its concern with heterosexual violence moved to a “desire going beyond the bounds of heteronormativity” (2007: 93). While the 1970s and 1980s feminist politics railed against “obscenity” in “explicit” Indian films and advertisements, in 1990s, it shifted from its earlier stance and campaigned against the politics of censorship as it replicated the Hindu right’s monitoring of sexuality. It clamored, instead, for creating “a space for greater sexual expression on the part of women ... in which women are willing and active agents [to] ... ensure the proliferation of feminist discourses about sexual pleasure and desire” (93–94).

Print and visual media exploded with images of neo-normative Indian femininity that combined modernity, sexiness, and urbanity with middle-class respectability promoting a “virtuous sexual desirability” (Phadke 2005; Menon 2012; Sunder Rajan 1993; Mitra-Kahn, Maitrayee Chaudhuri 2014) where stalking, however, was normalized as a reflection of her sexual desirability. Despite the IWM’s attempts at resistance against misogyny and sexual violence (see below), it offered a dismal response to this “schizophrenic” (Mitra-Kahn 113) discourse on Indian femininity. The presence of this new woman—agentic and sexually confident—both onscreen (in films and advertisements) and offscreen (in colleges, streets, pubs, and offices), faced the backlash of the heteronormative Hindu right, social vigilante groups, and the police, who collectively harass sex workers, hijras, kothis, gays, and lesbians under article 377 of the Indian Constitution⁸, police what girls wear to school or what women drink in pubs, and monitor what people watch in cyber-cafes or whether consenting couples dare to hang out in public spaces on Valentine’s day. Those that defy normative prescribed gender norms become victims of everyday sexual harassment as a result.

Sexual harassment can be understood as either transient, usually non-contact, acts in public spaces—lewd comments, cat call, flashing, etc.—or as physical molestation involving groping or touching.

Sexual harassment is neither a clear-cut example of force, nor a simple display of interest. More than a mere reflection of the highly contradictory nature of gendered power relations, sexual

harassment is productive of these relations ... Sexual harassment is a social exchange in which the very meaning and embodiment of gender identity is at stake.

(Laura Ring, cited in Menon 2014: 144)

Sexual harassment constitutes a politically motivated oppression of women whose mere presence in public spaces is perceived by patriarchy as an act of provocation (Baxi 2001) and is not, what many claim, a benign cultural phenomenon. It is further trivialized by the mainstream media as courtship (Rayaprol 2011: 71) or banalized by the patriarchal state law as “eve-teasing”—a playful, amusing, and harmless teasing of ‘eves’ by men in public spaces (Gangoli 2007: 63). The silence surrounding this public secret (Baxi 2012) of women’s sexual targeting on the streets and professional spaces is compounded, therefore, by its cultural and political tolerance. It is moreover promoted by the state’s apathy to the flagrant violation of women’s physical and sexual integrity whereby they are routinely stripped, paraded naked, burned, or mutilated with acid across regional, caste, ethnic or religious borders. Instead of characterizing acts of aggravated sexual assaults as politically motivated or facilitating victims to seek redressal, the state pathologizes them as acts of sexual deviancy. This dismissal of the enormity of sexual violence by state representatives ends up normalizing a culture where women are commodified and sexual violence is promoted as a strategy of control and discipline. It is further enabled by state-led strategies of women’s surveillance, policing, shaming, naming, and humiliation.

The IWM did successfully lead some campaigns against women’s harassment: In 1992 the “Crimes against Women” chapter was added in the “Crimes in India” report that enlisted offences that specifically targeted women such as dowry-related abuse, domestic violence, molestation, and eve-teasing. Campaigns on custodial rape (for example, Rameeza Bee 1978; Mathura 1980) and sexual assault of women in the workplace (Bhanvari Devi 1992) led to the 1983 Criminal Law Act and the 1997 Vishakha Guidelines. The debates conducted during these campaigns related to how rape and women’s sexualized bodies were understood both by law and the larger Indian society, and how sexual integrity, caste and class hierarchies were central to India’s criminal justice system for which the discourse of normative Indian womanhood was paramount. The second wave of the IWM on sexual violence (Kannabiran 137) saw a remarkable shift in defining rape from a “women’s rights” issue to a “human rights” one, expanding it to include the rape of children, homosexual bodies, and the broadening of the definition of sexual-intercourse to non-penile-vaginal penetration as well. India’s first and only anti-street sexual harassment act was legislated by means of the Delhi Prohibition of Eve Teasing Act, 1988. In addition, Jagori, the Safe Delhi campaign, and the advocacy group on gender safety in public

places were established. However, being based on nineteenth century's outmoded notions of women's propriety and modesty, the specific laws dealing with sexual harassment (Section 509 IPC; Section 354 IPC), were "wholly inadequate in defining the experiences of women" (Agnes 1992 cited in Gangoli 63). In addition, most of the legislation that has successfully been put in place deals only with the workplace, for example, the 1997 Vishakha Guidelines (subsequently reinforced through the 2013 Anti-Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act) laying down instructions to employers of public, private, and unorganized sectors on how to protect their women employees. However, while being welcomed by the IWM, the Vishakha judgement did not involve extensive discussions within the movement (Menon 2004: 220). Barring a few cases, policies related to sexual harassment failed in giving justice to victims due to employer apathy or reluctance, misunderstanding of the definition of the term that can often be ambiguous, slippery, and culturally specific, and owing to loopholes that favor perpetrators (Menon 2014, 2013). Further, the National Commission of Women (NCW) did not feel the need to extensively consult with women's groups before tabling in 2004 the draft bill on Sexual Harassment at the Workplace, an omission that could have had "serious and negative implications for working conditions for women all over the country" (Menon 2004: 146). NCW is known to have alienated itself in other situations too. For example, NCM Chairperson Mamta Sharma claimed in 2015 that women were bringing sexual violence upon themselves by dressing irresponsibly and mindlessly aping the West that was corroding Indian culture (Naidu 2015). Because of its inertia and its politics of victim-blaming, NCW does not project itself as a progressive institution working towards ending violence against women, for which critics have called for its review and audit (Patel 2014). Further, the 2010 Bill on the Protection of Women Against Sexual Harassment at Workplace was formulated in a way that criminalized "false and malicious complaints" of sexual harassment. As a result, rather than guaranteeing their safety, it ended up vulnerablizing women filing complaints against powerful people in their place of work (Menon 2012: 126).

The few examples outlined above are a symptom of a deeper malaise in the Indian society a way out of which, suggests Ratna Kapur, could be in "recuperating and theorizing desire and pleasure ... particularly against the backdrop of the rise of the power of the Hindu Right" (cited in Menon 2004: 146). Failure to do so renders even the most well-meaning and democratic of the legislations anti-feminist in a culture where sexuality and its expressions are regarded as Western intrusions intent upon contaminating Indian culture and tradition, and which therefore feels justified in policing women's sexual behavior. A regressive and conservative ideology such as this that dominates all jurisdiction around sexual harassment, can only offer the same old protectionist solution

to complaints about sexual harassment, rather than seeing it as a symptom of a misogynistic culture that denies women the right to their bodies, including their sexuality. Since a disregard of this protectionist discourse is met with the threat or reality of sexual violence - the latter being the “most visible aspect of a general climate of misogyny” (Menon 2012: 131), women are raised to practice self-censorship, forever exercising caution with their dress, speech, demeanor, and behavior, living up to the patriarchal expectations of femininity, and fully participating in a discourse that only “good girls” deserve to be rescued and safeguarded by the state. The question that hovers under the skin of women’s consciousness is that if men who smoke or drink alcohol are not classed as sexually deviant and if they are not assaulted or penalized for coming home late, why must women be for doing the same as men? Further while men are more vulnerable than women to violent crimes, they are not accused of having brought them on because of their behavior or their sartorial sense and are not expected to “perceive their body, at all times, as a potential crime scene” (Cochrane 428).

The 2012 women’s articulation to the specific right to their bodies and freedom was, I claim, transformative, and signaled a clear departure from earlier movements against sexual violence. My analysis is located within the context of a powerful but gradually burgeoning discourse on freedom within a new, anti-statist and “expansionist and exploratory” (Carole Vance: 1984) shift in the politics of Indian feminism, asserting itself outside the vocabulary of the law, and centered around the question of pleasure that comes with accessing public spaces and reclaiming one’s body and sexuality in both private and public. Menon and Nigam (2007) offer an insightful correlation between economic globalization and the assertion of a series of new aspirations that underline a shifting—albeit triumphant—nature of neo-liberal India’s lived reality. As a product of the material changes resulting from India’s unprecedented 1990s neo-liberal economic growth, many women in urban areas have been choosing their sexual partners, delinking sex with reproduction, and savoring the autonomy of financial independence. Doing away with what they see as outmoded practices of self-discipline and asexuality, and stepping away from the traditional bargain of the mutually exclusive categories of sexual safety and freedom, they seek sexual freedom and the right to be “sexual in more visible and daring ways” (Vance: 1–2).

Amid the deafening calls during the 2012 anti-rape protest grew organically a powerful appeal for freedom—*Bekhauf Azaadi* or Freedom Without Fear—that was, therefore, different. Slogans such as “Don’t Tell Me How to Dress, Tell Him How Not to Rape,” “Freedom, Not Protection,” “Raped woman is a survivor; she is not worse than death,” “My Body, My Right,” “Not as a Mother, Not as a Sister, I want my Rights as a Human Being,” etc. became rallying points for women affirming their right to be adventurous and reckless, assuming no responsibility

for self-protection, shaming the state and the communal moral policing of law-abiding women, defying archaic notions of honor and seeking the basic freedom of choice. The slogans caught the imagination of thousands of people (many of them first time protesters, without any previous initiation into the women's movement,⁹ holding placards for the right to freedom—to college, on public transport, from baap (father), and from khap (village council). Not only did this demand refer to women's freedom from sexual violence in public spaces but also to freedom from the moral policing of women within the private spaces of home and community. Gender sensitization and programs against sexual harassment in college campuses further fueled such demands.

While this national outrage was a powerful representation of this new feminist consciousness, critics were disappointed that, in the absence of guidance from a genuine feminist movement in the country, the masses that congregated willy-nilly were completely rudderless (Roy 2014, 2015; Tellis 2014). I challenge this accusation by making the claim that ordinary women during this mass agitation provided a quantum leap in feminist politics by laying claim to their “political citizenship,” as they pushed their way through the cordons, telling the police to back off as “This is *our* country” (Leslie Udwin, 2015 *India's Daughter*). These women certainly did not see themselves as members of the mainstream IWM. While their spontaneous critique of neo-liberal patriarchal sexism and regressive conservatism is built on the legacy of the critical framework put in place by the IWM, in the absence of the latter's comprehensive critique of the everyday street sexual harassment, they took the bull by the horn. Trapped by the donor exigencies, if the post 1990s NGO-ized IWM had lost its way and weakened as a result, then the 2012 movement showed a way towards regaining its erstwhile autonomy. In their spontaneous mobilization resides the strength of the civil collectivities that showed that, rather than relying on the IWM or political parties, they could really push forward their right to freedom by engaging in what Roy (2017) refers to as the “politics of citizenship.”

One of the voices that stood out among the tumultuous masses was that of Kavita Krishnan, General Secretary of the All India Progressive Women's Association. Buried beneath her bold articulations¹⁰ and promotion of the slogan of *Bekhauf Azaadi*, was a radical feminist assertion for women's autonomy on their own terms. Krishnan's insistence on the need to recognize women's right to freedom without conditions or fear resonates with Carole Vance's central thematic in her seminal 1984 book *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*. Inspired by the articulations framed by socialist feminism on a multiplicity of views on female sexuality, not only does Vance highlight women's realistic anxieties about masculinist sexual violence in all its forms including pornography, she also investigates “the complex intrapsychic, interpersonal fears and anxieties, which produce the many irrationalities surrounding sexual intimacy that wreak havoc on our movement

and at the same time are cleverly used against us by the right” (Segal 1995). Krishnan’s *Bekhauf Azaadi* offers a lens through which to critically reflect on the meaning of women’s affirmation of autonomy, choice, sexual agency, and pleasure set against an asymmetrical gendered hierarchy that regulates female sexuality through the twin arsenals of “control and danger.” Her impassioned articulations underline women coming to grips with the pleasurable and dangerous Janus-faced reality of being a sexualized feminine, which while allowing untold possibilities of joy that come with freedom, embraces the risk of danger that goes hand in hand with women seeking this pleasure. Buried therefore, within the challenge to the culture of sexual violence against women in India is Krishnan’s intention of addressing the “patriarchal structure within which women act,” her commitment to liberating female sexual agency and choice from “sexual terror and despair within which women live,” as well as debunking the “one-sided dangers of sexuality” (Segal 1995) that proponents of sexual caution underline. Borrowing Vance’s theoretical formation of “pleasure and danger,” I make the claim that the specific nature of discourse around women’s assertion for freedom in 2012 was not so much for sexual freedom (in the literal sense of sexual pleasure or experimentation) but for the simple pleasure of accessing public places, and rejecting legal reform, protection, and the stereotype of victimhood. The 1980s and 1990s women’s movements against the blight of domestic battering and sexual abuse sought women’s protection primarily through legal reform (Mitra 2012). No doubt, the 2012 mass agitation did lead to the state-sponsored constitution of the Verma Committee charged with making recommendation to India’s criminal law on rape and sexual violence. But while the state’s solution to the tumultuous situation through legislative change did satisfy some of the agitators, the radical collectivities of the anti-rape movement sought a more fundamental cultural transformation of the society.

Anxious about “the chasm that lies between India Gate (the site for many of these protest marches) and the slum habitat,” critics (Sinha 2013) claimed that, as lay people, the protesters represented self-centered and apolitical middle-class masses who were unconcerned with the brutality of sexual violence suffered by minority women. However, given that the anti-rape movement was seen by many as an example of IWM’s inadequate response to the culture of everyday sexual violence (Chaudhury 2015), attempts to dismiss the protesters away simply based on parameters, such as class, smack of exclusionary elitism. In her examination of the question of class in post-liberalization India, Maitrayee Chaudhury too cautions against scoffing at a phenomenon simply because it is led by the middle class. Such a positionality would be erroneous, claims the author, especially because as a product of a “colonially-mediated modernity,” without emulating either Western bourgeoisie or achieving hegemonic status in independent India, the middle class has historically

played an important role in “managing the ruling bloc, which included the bourgeoisie and landed interests ... [and continues to play] a critical ideological role” (2014: 173) in the country today. In addition, celebrated by the media, a successful and growing Indian middle class helps the country position itself as a global economic power admired for the sheer scale of its consumer base. Inversely, its centrality at a global level helps the middle-class garner for itself “greater political visibility and power within the state and society” (173).

Without undermining the developmental framework of protectionist politics that had earlier called for legislative amendments against the culture of sexual violence, freedom for reproductive rights, or for the right to income equality, the 2012 anti-rape movement therefore was a forceful and an unequivocal assertion of women’s right to pleasure even if it came at the risk of courting danger. I understand this as the feeling of liberation that comes with women recapturing their bodies from patriarchy without squeamishness—in terms both sartorial and sexual, and reclaiming India’s streets and open spaces without having to justify their presence in public spaces regardless of the time of the day or night, irrespective of whether they were alone or with men, and notwithstanding the manner of their dress. If women courted danger in exercising this freedom, then their movement held the state and the larger society accountable for ensuring women’s right to this pleasure.

Global Millennial Continuum

Rising above the general pessimism on the spate of mainstream feminism in India (Roy, Tillerson) was the powerful work undertaken by cyber-feminists. Born in the aftermath of the neo-liberal turn of India, with a large number of young women entering the workforce, they had long been “agitating” online for women’s rights especially on the everyday sexual harassment and violence in the country. Joyti Singh’s brutal gang rape became a flashpoint, triggering an outlet for an offline expression of rage that had long been building online on the culture of sexism, moral policing, and sexual profiling. While mainstream media beaming round-the-clock coverage of the rape¹¹ escalated the protests in the country, it was the discussions on social media that fanned the accumulated rage and frustrations and became an outlet for ordinary people to express their longstanding grievances on the subject. Further, it is my contention that, the powerful digital activism that ensued with blogs, Twitter (e.g. #DelhiGangRape; #Nirbhaya; #StopThisShame), Facebook, and online discussion forums (e.g. *kafila.online*; *Ladies Fingers*, *Youth Ki Awaz*), had the cumulative effect of moving people from online protests to street demonstrations, occupations, and vigils (Titzmann 80–81). As a result, despite the mammoth outpouring of rage in December 2012, it was not the first time that the “public had risen.” Rather than a sudden political

awakening, I see this movement as “part of a continuum” (Sen 2013) of a “cyberlife of feminist politics in urban India” (Mittra-Kahn 109) that has roots in a cultural revolution that was unleashed by the forces of the free market stemming from the neo-liberal turn of the country discussed above. The digital turn in India was also part of a global trend where people came together via the Internet on contentious political issues around which to organize protests, rallies, occupations, sit-ins, and demonstrations. During the 2011 “Arab Spring” or the “twitter revolution”, corporate digital social network systems, such as Facebook and Twitter, played a key role in fomenting anti-establishment revolts. Further, the numbers of women using the Internet as a tool for feminist activism too is on the rise across the world. For example, women in the Middle East use social media to challenge cultural misogyny and religious conservatism in their countries¹². The American feminist writer Jessica Valenti’s blog Feministing.com is the most widely read feminist publication in the world (Solomon 2009). Gopinathan (2017) claims that the use of twitter has helped feminism to grow 300 percent since 2014.

Technology has often played a subversive role in fomenting revolutions: the 1950s Algerian self-determination nationalists seized the radio—a mouth piece of French imperialism—as a tool for anti-colonial activism (Fanon cited in Maeckelberg 284); a variety of “small media” during the 1979 Iranian revolution mounted an oppositional resistance by exploiting the easy accessibility to “pre-existing cultural networks and communicative patterns” (Mohammadi and Mihammadi cited in Maeckelberg 284); a group of lawyers used the medium of YouTube—that promised “voice for the voiceless”—during the 2007 Movement for the Restoration of Democracy in Pakistan. Clearly, the revolution lay not in the technology per se, but in the ways in which social movements manage to suffuse it with newer, oppositional signification or “countercontexts” (284) with the view to bringing about social change. Maeckelberg hails the power of this “technological drama” where lay persons challenge oppressive state by means of usurping the technological infrastructure that was provided by the state for purposes other than revolutionary. It is important, therefore, to underline that the “challenge occurs not through technology [in itself] but through the use of technology in combination with the creation of a social context that expresses different points of view” (282).

Drawing on Bates (cited in Cochrane), I argue that online activism comes naturally to young, urban-based women today who make little divisions between online and offline experiences of their lives and, having grown up with the Internet, relate to it as “just another part of public, social space ... and are campaigning in [this space] where they habitually spend time” (Cochrane 669–79). Providing a steep learning curve for the young, the Internet has radically altered how feminist ideas circulate where members learn them “on the job” rather than in campus classrooms or from women’s organizations. The popularity of these campaigns signals an early politicization of young women who refuse

to normalize everyday sexual violence on the streets or keep it under wraps due to embarrassment or acquiescence to a normal part of growing up in India. While they may gloss over expressions such as feminism or patriarchy, they speak out against being called chut or gaand (misogynistic expressions in Hindi for vagina and anus) on the streets and then violated for being identified as such. In addition, the Internet facilitates user-based evaluation of events so that if they wish to understand how a sexist or a “homophobic advert affects people, [they] don’t have to just read about it in an article, [they] can follow someone who tweets about it, and learn about it from their opinions and their lived experience,” (Cochrane 691) unlike in mainstream media that puts heteronormative voices above all else. Cyberfeminism, then is a form of online feminist organizing where women use the web-based technology to openly articulate their concerns, removing the stigma associated with discussing sex and rape (Valenti 2004, *feministing.com*). If the anti-dowry mobilization in the 1970s involved feminists doing consciousness-raising where women from grassroots levels spoke about and shared their experiences of domestic abuse, then web-based feminism too has initiated a similar consciousness-raising process around the theme of sexual violence with an outreach that is thousand times broader and whose goal it is to underline the pervasiveness of women’s oppression, a collective problem that needs to be politically resolved. In the past, women would have talked about these issues in college canteen or in the privacy of homes; now they are blogging about it, learning feminist vocabulary in the process, challenging appellations of “slacktivism” or “Clicktivism.” In her exploration of Feminist Activism on Social Media in India, Sujatha (2014) claims that apart from helping organize “individualised mass communication,” the Internet also allows users to sidestep state and commercial “gate-keepers and agenda setters” (5). They use the Internet to protest structures of sexual oppression where prior conversation online with different constellations of people helps them strategize before going on the streets.

The news about the Delhi 2012 incident would not have spread as it did nationally and internationally in the absence of the digital technology where an altered temporality with a 24×7 facility of instant uploading of information brought about “paradigmatic changes of creating, delivering, and consuming content ... [providing] instant access to people and institutions across the world” (Chaudhuri 2015: 22). Unlike some of the landmark cases on gender-based violence in the previous decades, during the Delhi incident, a publicity-driven and a technologically savvy interactive media was both the “actor and a central site for representing public outcry” (Chaudhuri 27). It resembled the 2011 anti-corruption movement in the country that had led to the formation of the Lokpal Bill, and where in addition to access to knowledge and the vocabulary for articulating dissent, people’s interactive participation in the “production,

selection, and distribution” (Chaudhury 27) of the media and the latter’s convergence¹³ set this event apart from all previous ones.

As an easily accessible tool therefore, the web clearly helped in the formation of complex and culturally nuanced online communities of “computer-mediated spaces,” where “Internet affordance” enabled them to engage in an “online resisting work” (Massa 2016: 247) against the culture of street sexual harassment. The value of these online spaces maintaining anonymity, minimizing “exposure, participation risk and organizational maintenance cost,” and allowing for activists from a spectrum of social formations possibilities to engage with each other despite class, ethnic, regional, and gender barriers, can hardly be overstated (Massa 2016). Contrary to a generalized perception of the Internet as “an impoverished medium devoid of social cues ... [alienating us from] our sense of geographic place and community” (254), it has become an enabler of heightened connectivity (with anyone at any time) and interactivity (simulating real world conditions), that has shrunk the barriers of time, space, and power, and democratized relationship formation in the process. As a result, regardless of geographical locations, and by-passing the rituals of personal, face-to-face interactions, users of Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter networks follow each other through the cyberspace of instant status updates, sharing experiences and building social relationships between what I refer to as *communities of mind* to launch movements and organize resistance work against oppression, in ways that reinforces ties between people that may or may not share geographic commonalities. Faced with critics who disparage the exclusiveness of media technology, Maekelberg points out that while access to social media or the Internet might smack of capitalist and normative elitism, this certainly does not preclude their use for subversive activities. If technology is used in the service of reproducing and centralizing power relations, it can also be used to subvert these processes. On the ease of transference of ideas from online conversation to mass political mobilization on the streets by online communities, the author argues that the secret lay in Internet-based technology to offer unencumbered possibilities for knowledge production as a “counterweight to mainstream media.” She refers to online communities as part of a media infrastructure made up of “connections between people and groups and specifically the political values that are created and mobilized by the activists themselves in order to create activist media” (2016: 281).

Cyberfeminist protests in India are articulated through a combination of multimodal online, offline, and hybrid modalities (Massa 248) to queer masculinized gender relations and spaces in ways that promote taking collective accountability. Their strategies range from online sharing of narratives of street abuse as testimonials of resistance; intervening in public spaces through street performances to disrupt the gendered gaze; and maintaining postings on blogs, Facebook, YouTube, and

Twitter accounts of an expanding member base of these campaigns¹⁴. Examples include the 2001 “Take Back the Night” project on sexual, domestic, and intimate partner violence; the 2005 “Blank Noise Project” on eve-teasing; the 2009 “Pink Chaddi” campaign to fight conservative right-wing misogyny that targets consenting couples hanging out together in public spaces; the 2009 “A Valentine for India” campaign and the 2011 “Besharmi Morcha (SlutWalk)” against the culture of moral policing; the 2011 “Please Mend the Gap” campaign challenging street sexual harassment in urban spaces; the 2011 “Fight-Back” project against gender-based violence; the 2011 “Why Loiter,” “Did You Ask For it,” and the 2015 “Occupy the Night,” campaigns on women’s right to public spaces, and the 2016 “#Pinjra Tod” campaign against gender-discriminatory policies and curfews in Indian universities. The extensive web-based political activism that emerged in the process can be understood to be stemming from unique and contradictory situation of modernity and conservatism that the Indian middle-class femininity saw itself caught up in at the turn of the century. The safe/private space offered in this context can hardly be overestimated for women to make sense of and think through these incongruous and incompatible sets of positionalities.

Central to the articulation of this feminist discourse is the use of humor, sarcasm and satire as a provocative tool to ridicule women’s cultural and sexual policing makes. This strategy helps women to stay on the task at hand, and underlines anger in a way that is more effective, as it is often the only way to deal with the absurdity of sexism. To understand this dramatically snowballing phenomenon, I draw on Vance’s understating of the “tension between sexual danger and sexual pleasure ... where sexuality is simultaneously a domain of restriction, repression, and danger as well as a domain of exploration, pleasure, and agency” (1984: 1). I argue that buried within the clamor for freedom is a radicalization of a rights bearing female agency that is simultaneously joyous and anxious as it willingly courts danger while seeking this freedom from widespread regressive and sexist politics in the country. In 2013, Backchod India uploaded a satirical video called “Rape: It’s Your Fault,” starring Bollywood actress Kalki Koechlin and Juhi Pandu. The video went viral with over 5 million views, and started conversations about the way that rape victims in India are treated in the media and by law enforcement [12]. Humor, with its capacity for wider outreach, and ability to initiate a conversation on difficult topics, helps attract people who would otherwise be deterred by academic and theoretical discourse. Nisha Susan, founder of the Facebook group “Consortium of Pub-going, Loose [sic] and Forward Women,” urged women to send pink chaddis (knickers) as a Valentine’s Day gift to Sri Ram Sene’s leader Pramod Muthalik, who had been threatening violence if young men and women were seen courting on Valentine’s day. The playful message behind the gender-neutral term Chaddi - a term of derision and mockery, a “slang for right-wing

hardliners,” symbolizing the vulgarity of the Sene actions, and sneering at the image of khaki shorts worn by the self-congratulatory Hindu right wing RSS members—quickly spread like wildfire. The campaign swiftly turned into a movement against widespread right-wing moral policing of well-meaning women asserting their right to relax and have fun. Bollywood stars like Deepika Padukone and Kangana Ranaut have also sparked feminist conversations on the larger, national level, given the cache that these stars enjoy across the spectrum of demographics in India.

Digital technology has changed the very nature of political activism; it is different to how one imagined political engagement such as street demonstrations, rallies and protest marches in the past. Going by its increasing popularity, visibility, and global outreach, online feminist activism has reached a “cultural tipping point” (Munro 2013: 2). This new digital age of feminist activism indicates more than a mere “generational” or a “political” transformation. It represents democratized “citizen journalism” (Gerbaudo 2012) and is filling in the gaps that got left out as feminists were focused on developmental priorities of food, housing, health, education, and economic opportunities. This new engagement is performing a shift in the citing and source of knowledge production. Discarding the trope of “women as a monolithic category, at once objects and users of the ‘master’s tools,” (Blair et al. 2009: 1) using the Internet, cyberfeminists “interrupt the flow of masculine codes by boldly declaring the intention to mongrelize, hybridize, provoke, and disrupt the male order of things in the Net environment” (Wilding cited in Blair et al. 1–2). Social media helped push forward activism for women, especially for those that came from the marginalized layers of the society or those living in repressive regions in the world facing serious political, cultural, and physical challenges. Social media, therefore, embodies both a technological tool as well as a cultural organism whose meaning undergoes profound transformation based on how it is deliberately changed by the users. Increasingly, women use the Internet for a variety of reasons: a tool for inclusion, an alternative public space, an “intersection between disability and queer issues,” or a site for “multiple, coexisting counterpublics,” (Sujatha 2014: 6, 7). This intersectional “cyberdemocracy” enable cyberfeminists “to amplify their own voices ... talking about the things that matter to them, unfiltered, in their own voices” (Interview: “Feminism Online: The New Wave,” 2017). Unencumbered by the burden of donor deadlines or priorities, mobilized by new global vocabularies of freedom, initiating urgent, autobiographical modes of feminist engagements, cyberfeminists have laid the ground for a rights-based, intersectional, and autonomous fourth wave of feminism in India.

Conclusion

Unlike previous anti-rape movements, the 2012 protests were not limited to or led exclusively by women; rather, they gained nation-wide

importance (Chaudhuri and Fitzgerald 2015: 623) with the first mass demonstrations on December 18th being subsequently intensified by other people joining in: ordinary citizens, members of various political parties and minorities—Dalit, Muslim, and queer identified people with individual longstanding political grievances against the state—who led agitations in their own geographical locations as a means to express solidarity to victims of sexual violence. The movement coalesced therefore activists from a range of political persuasions whose goals were different and varied in nature. It explored other forms of marginalization and pondered over questions of nationalism. The quick and reactive character of these campaigns represented the all-encompassing nature of oppression stemming from corruption, Hindu nationalism, demonization of minorities, the Kashmir issue, etc. It advocated for the freedom of all since no one is free until everyone is free.

The vicious attacks since 2015 on the universities across the country, branding radical students' anti-establishment activism as antinational and seditious, was met by a groundswell of rage garnering support from students, scholars, and members of faculty and of trade unions. Their politics was aimed at the state snuffing out critical and independent thought and its narrow hegemonic and dominant anti-minoritarian definition of nationalism where the entity of the other is substitutable by a minority woman, a Muslim, a Dalit, etc. (EPW: February 20, 2016). The 2016 "Stand With JNU" campaign involving protests, formations of human chains, and a long series of lectures delivered on the university's "Freedom Square" on the meaning of nationalism and freedom, stood up for the heterogeneous tradition of educational institutions that fear being decimated by the majoritarian state. Following Rohith Vemula's suicide in February 2016, the "Justice for Rohith" campaign became a nation-wide movement against institutional persecution of Dalit students in Indian universities. A June 2017 public flogging of four Dalit men by cow vigilantes became a turning point in dalit uprising. The "Chalo Una" protests that followed the incident attracted the support of, among others, liberal Hindus who were upset with this state-led politics of terror, and Muslims who were victimized in 2002 Gujarat. The lynching of a young Muslim boy in July 2017 provided the spark to a large number of concerned citizens to speak out against Hindutva-sponsored violence against minority communities. The nation-wide campaign #NotInMyName that emerged in its wake, challenged the idea of citizenship linked to religion or caste, asserting instead a secular democracy that was hard-won by the country's freedom fighters.

The highly neoliberal, modernist, individualist slogan of *Bekhauf Azaadi* during the 2012 anti-rape movement has opened, therefore, a space for addressing what it means to have a holistic feminist movement, and to see the political possibilities of the experience of these women as a way out of the subject-object distinction. I draw on Anu Anurima's

claim with reference to the 2017 “#Pinjra Tod” campaign that women of late have been asserting their rights in a different kind of political space where their struggles have expanded from gender-based oppression to a “wider spectrum of issues from labour and caste-based violence ... [represented through] feminist radicalism in educational spaces that was created, named, and is constantly being redefined by women. It cannot be folded into, or contained within, other meta narratives, in which women are ‘added and stirred’” (2017 fb post).

It would be important to ask the question whether the 2012 anti-rape movement was only for a narrow group of upper class feminists or whether it travelled. I draw on Sawant (2017a) to make the point that while one must not dismiss the significance of this movement simply because it has so far been a middle class, urban phenomenon. However, for it to become a truly meaningful movement, the middle class will need to mature and embrace class-based demands of urban working class, rural and Dalit women, and those that are victims of state-led brutalization in Kashmir, Manipur and Assam. Sawant has faith that this is bound to happen for “history ... demonstrates that movements progress from one stage to the next, not reaching full clarity and maturity on day one, but developing through the real-life experience of struggle ... The revolutions therefore are not in any way completed, but are learning to go to the next step (workers’ struggles, the need for mass strike actions, etc.), and the step after that, and after that, as so on.” The examples of abortion rights movement in the US that was led by the middle class and which matured into a fully developed radical struggle once the working class took it up, is a point in case, just as it is in many of the middle eastern countries that were home to the birth of the 2011 Arab Spring.

It would be useful to ask the question what avenues are there, for example, to connect the urban, middle class “Pink Chaddi” campaign to rural-based Gulabi (pink) Gang or low-income, small-town Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan (Association of Single Strong Women)? Does women’s right to the city happen by displacing others or by seeing the connection between their failed rights and the denial of other people’s rights? This is our task and we should be asking these questions. Do women leading the “Why Loiter” movement asserting their right to the city also recognize the right for people from Northeast India or from Africa to walk the streets without being called Chinkies or Habshis, and for Dalits to build homes in upper-caste neighborhoods and gain college admission through affirmative action? Would they recognize working class women’s right to public places without being harassed? Do members of the “#Pinjra Tod” movement commiserate with diasporic Indian domestic workers trapped in gilded homes in the Middle East? Would those seeking freedom from the Khaps (village council) encourage their domestic helps to share their kitchen utensils? Would it be possible for these young women to mobilize other concerns? Can there be a new vocabulary that

is different to their earlier vocabulary of rights which challenged the protectionist developmental state? Is there a way to see if the rights vocabularies of the feminist movement can be linked to questions of class, caste, and religious minorities? If they have put the question of rights to the public, can it become a new vocabulary of protest not only against sexism but also against classism, casteism, and communalism? Can we use this movement to argue for a connection with other movements in the country such as “Justice for Vemula,” “Stand with JNU,” “#Pinjra Tod,” “Chalo Una,” “#DalitWomenFight,” “#NotInMyName,” or the movement against AFSPA in Kashmir and Manipur? If not, what would it take to make this connection?

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Notes

- 1 Passed by the Lok Sabha on March 19, 2013, this act provides for amendment of Indian Penal Code, India Evidence Act, and Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 on laws related to sexual offence. The Bill received Presidential assent on April 2, 2013 and came into force from April 3, 2013, in light of the protests in the 2012 Delhi gang rape case (Wikipedia).
- 2 Lobbied by prominent members of the IWM, India’s first and only anti-street sexual harassment act was legislated in 1988, called Delhi Prohibition of Eve teasing Act 1988. In addition, there was the establishment of Jagori, the Safe Delhi campaign, and the advocacy group on gender safety in public places.
- 3 Indian popular culture regularly projects working-class/lower-caste masculinity as the source of sexual harassment of modern, westernized upper-class women. Despite data that proves to the contrary, that women in Indian cities are sexually vulnerable to masculinities from across a range of backgrounds—class, education, and profession.
- 4 While in the past one had to wait for years—at times decades—one is now able to buy phone connections literally off the shelf.
- 5 This resulted from the liberation from the hegemonic stranglehold of mainstream music industries such as Bollywood and big gramophone companies facilitated by small-time music producers who flooded the market with cheaply available vernacular, folk, devotional, fusion, and remix music and by the Internet-based music consumers that dispersed music through blogs, YouTube, and websites. Second, it was caused by the undermining of state-licensing monopoly by video-cassette revolution, and cable and satellite TV.
- 6 Enabled through the flooding of the market with consumer goods and their easy access via bank loans.
- 7 This can be gleaned from the exponential popularity of Western-produced pornographic films made easily available in video parlors. While these were mostly watched by men, women too watched these in private collective spaces.
- 8 That criminalizes “sexual acts against the order of nature.”

- 9 See Kavita Krishnan's YouTube statement, December 19, 2012, www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbOhDJFc0Dc, Accessed March 17, 2015, 12:05 p.m.
- 10 In her talk on "Capitalism, Misogyny, and Sexual Violence," Kavita Krishnan focused on the anti-rape movement that she and her peers organized in the wake of the 2012 Delhi rape incident and the organic coming into being of the "Freedom without Fear" slogan.
- 11 News media in India were forbidden from covering rape cases until 2008 (Elizabeth Losh 2014).
- 12 For example the 2011 #Women2Drive campaign in Saudi Arabia; the 2012 #RIPamina campaign in Morocco; and the 2010 #harassmap and the 2012 #endSH campaigns in Egypt and Lebanon. The 2012 British blog #everydaysexism has reached global popularity.
- 13 Merging of TV, radio, print media, and the internet.
- 14 Trishima Mitra-Kahn provides a detailed outline on these online anti-sexist campaigns in her 2015 chapter "Offline issues, online lives? The emerging cyberlife of feminist politics in urban India" in Srila Roy (Ed.) *New South Feminisms: Paradoxes and Possibilities*, (London and New York: Zed Books).

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