



**USE THE SPACE
USE IT, YOU MUST**

लिंग, जगह और उसकी परिकल्पना

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Sex, space and imagination

The female experiences described in this project took place in imaginary gardens, student dormitories, gated communities, urban archaeological goddess burials, and villages consumed by a capital city. They are visualized imaginations of a dramatic land where 18 million human bodies, half of them female, occupy one of the biggest urban settlements in the planet.

How we persevere at inhabiting such spaces and how the spaces inhabit us women, is the question that is thought through and made into diverse artistic responses.

This, what you hold, is about the spaces where sex is determined and contained, where relational encounters that lead to how eroticized our genitals feel, or how we deal with public menstrual affairs, happen. Spaces that tell us which gender should we construct our sexual identities around, when and why to make love, empower or weaken, create political family relationships, when to trust or be suspicious of the dark. The spaces that we occupy as females and often, as citizens with lower status and less visibility.

Our sex is the matter and space the container that gives volume and form. This container, nevertheless, is mostly not given shape by us. There is a tension between what is contained and the container itself, between the series of systems that regulate women and our gender condition.

This publication materializes personal perspectives of different encounters that happened with ladies in New Delhi.

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New Delhi, 2018

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New Dehli, 2018

Space, as a notion 'integral to our geographical imaginations' (Johnston, Longhurst, 2010), tells both about collective history, culture, power, and about personal biographies. Lynda Johnston and Robyn Longhurst write in *Space, Place, and Sex: Geographies of Sexualities* (2010), that space is both sensible and measurable, able to be mapped; and complex in the many discursive levels that are imbued within its generated power relations. They say that 'spaces and bodies are intimately tied together' not only in our desire for spaces to be inhabitable by humans, be places of interaction in our imaginations of order, control and colonization, but in how the spaces also inhabit us.

Streets, parks, buildings, malls, gated communities, dorms, urban villages, are 'space orders that reflect social structures [...] on the one hand they mirror the structure of thoughts and values, on the other, the relations of social and economic powers.' (*Sex & Space* <http://www.k3000.ch/sex&space/info.html>) What concerns me is the daily impact that being an "other" or being a "less", produce in the women that surround me at this very moment. I want to reflect space as a form of representation of social gendered structures. How do females move through spaces depending on their needs and perception? Which spaces concern women and what are their limits? Who, why, when do these limits serve? Where are our bodies, fluids, hairs, *chunnis*, welcomed and where not allowed? Where are trust, love, fear or a sense of power, generated and negotiated in the city?

My main question was articulated already in 1996 by urbanists and artists of the project *Sex & Space* (<http://www.k3000.ch/sex&space/info.html>): 'how is the gender difference already inscribed in the imagination of space and how this could be deconstructed in terms of the gender discourse', and I add, artistic representations? During my stay in the city of New Delhi in the Fall of 2018, I try to find out what possibilities exist for an artistic analysis of these stances. My ways, which mean carrying a foreign, female gendered body around the city through different transport means, interactions and conversations, were not successful but until other women were involved.

The first experiential interactions with spaces in Delhi, have left me thinking of the dichotomies of domestic vs public, personal vs political, invisible vs visible, female vs male. These binaries belonging to hetero-patriarchic social constructions, carried my thoughts to understand spaces as gender-segregated in the beginning. I am speaking of dark streets of complicated navigation and narrow alleys, versus the perceived safety of home. The dominating presence of men on streets, their harassment towards all ladies or foreign "others", including me or anybody queer. The stay at home women that come out at the time of picking up children... a rare moment when their colorful dresses dominate the urbanscape. The single mother that has been denigrated by her own family, process in which she acquired a louder and stronger voice. The woman with a locomotive disability who demands dignity as a basic human right, against the disempowering traditional role of a lady. The primary school girls playing in my studio space because I have "odd" materials to draw with, like spray paint, which requires their whole bodies to move. The woman who has no narrative to support or even explain desire, what she feels for her girlfriend. The university students that are afraid to graduate and go back home because

they will lose autonomy, and return to the spaces of tradition that lead the desires of women towards marriage, body shaming and erotic futility.

Further encounters led me to think of the creation of spaces and economies linked to sustaining this system. Gated communities as the epitome of separating city structures for the sake of public well being, for example. Residential areas, shopping centers, universities, government facilities, many are walled, CCTV'ed and guarded. The app *Safetipin* (<http://safetipin.com>), tells you where the perceived danger spots are in the city and its satellite towns Gurgaon and Noida. The daily news warn against the dangers of the public space with examples of abducted or killed women, and gang rapes. Markets and media dictate what to wear and how to properly wear it for everyone to see, even if time is spent mostly indoors. Moral systems are vigilant of how women, are behaving, to the extent of harassing neighbors who dress too much as westerners or go out on dates, or the daughters that do not fulfill the well-off, married position.

I found Sarover Zaidi and Samprati Pani's blog *Chiragh Dilli* (<https://chiraghdilli.wordpress.com>), refreshing. The blog chronicles their experiences of the city, 'loving the unloved', as New Delhi is described in one of their posts. Their observations move away from looking at urban conditions of life as a spectacle, views that I frequently encountered in articles of the Hindustan Times (<https://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/capital-loss-delhi-has-become-a-dying-city/story-OAb1abwP8W8oQHFm9UqZ1H.html>). Sarover and Samprati use the experience of their bodies to keep us readers, close to the described object: a market, the birds, the men on a public bus. A normality that escapes spectacle and looks at the fun of ordinary life. It has definitely helped me to start loving Khirkee, where I currently stay, and to initiate a routine of walking the neighborhood every other day, looking for places where to eat, sit, or acquire interesting materials. Khirkee, or any other urban village in this city, for the matter, is not easy to love. But I am here and here is in me, even if it defeats me...I'll come back to this last thought later.

At about the same moment, from another place and time frame, my sister Vanesa sends an article about the impressive high suicidal rates of women in India (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/13/nearly-two-out-of-five-women-who-commit-suicide-are-indian>). Then my colleague Vicky sends the website of the *Sex & Space* project, and it all connects. In a text written by Marion von Osten for the exhibition *Sex. Space. Economy*. (Shedhalle Zurich, 1996), she mentions that 'The public space has been treated for years as a space of female fear [...] although women mostly suffer violence in private spaces.' (<http://www.k3000.ch/sex&space/raum.html>) **SIDE NOTE 1** And continues by talking about the historical beginning of city development agendas where domesticating the "urban jungle" is about cleaning, putting order and light. But really, 'the climate of fear was mainly about the dissolution of family structures, and the change of national identity and traditional sex roles, that threatened society, and not the growing city structures or the increasingly delicate hierarchy of exploitation.' **SIDE NOTE 2** Her examples though set in Europe, are applicable to other areas of the world. Later in the neo-liberal city, public safety measures still reflect patterns of segregation and hierarchic exploitation through cleansing campaigns, gates, guards, curfews, cameras and censorship models (like dressing codes or menstrual isolation practices) **SIDE NOTE 3 and 4**. The fear of public spaces propagate not only through government systems, but through the media as well. Women were relegated in a binary that linked them to the domestic life, and men to the public and political. **SIDE NOTE 5 and 6**

So, if statistically, females should be more afraid of home than of the streets, Sarover and Samprati's texts about traveling the city acquired a new sense. I think of *Chiragh Dilli* blog as a space that is structured outside of the binary I have mentioned. One could think of their body routines of moving through the city as a fissure, a hole where the rules and regulations of the

gendered spaces are ignored, unfollowed or bent. And I mean not because of a perceived sense of “bravery” in the act of spending time outside and writing about public conditions, but because they decide to re-articulate these spaces into an order that belongs to the ordinary, not eccentric, not anomalous. I imagine that they try to understand the surrounding as much as they persevere at inhabiting it, at contributing in the not so simple task of occupying it as a woman.

So what makes us see or not see certain aspects of the city? John Berger’s aphorism that seeing is not merely ‘a question of mechanically reacting to stimuli’ provides the most obvious starting point to unravel this question. We only see that which we look at or look for—it involves choice, interest, concern and intentionality. We notice aspects of objects that we focus on and we actively seek out certain objects, whether it is birds, trees, modernist buildings, crowd behaviour, shop designs or anything else that interests us. Cities are such massive, heterogeneous and excessive creatures that anyone with any eccentric interest can pursue that to see and create her own little world. One can choose to see certain aspects of the city and use it to demonstrate practically any argument (and its opposite). Seeing not only ‘establishes our place in the surrounding world’, as Berger argues, but also makes that world in its image. So the same city can be simultaneously made as cruel and compassionate, abundant and poor, an environmental disaster and a delight for nature lovers.

What she thinks when she thinks about walking.

Samprati Pani, 2018

<https://chiraghdilli.wordpress.com/2018/08/24/what-she-thinks-when-she-thinks-about-walking>

SIDE NOTES

1- The UN Women agency reports that one out of three women suffer of violence throughout life worldwide, and that half of the femicides are perpetrated by home companions. (<http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>).

2- Honour killings and domestic sexual abuse: “In 2014, an English daily, The Hindu, tracked 583 rape cases decided by New Delhi’s district courts in 2013. It found that the single largest category of cases (nearly 40 percent) involved consenting couples who had eloped, after which the parents (usually of the women’s) had filed cases of rape.”

<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/honour-killings-india-assault-women-autonomy-180314090856246.html>

3- Clean India Campaign or *Swachh Bharat Mission*, is one of prime minister’s Narendra Modi governmental schemes. The purpose is “changing the face” of urban and rural India by improving the sanitation, water, air and lighting conditions of human settlements. With this, he has also imposed a 0,5% tax on all services and has deployed a persistent public campaign focused mainly on his persona. The campaign is criticized as yet another governmental plan that will serve a few, but take resources from everyone. <https://caravanmagazine.in/reportage/swachh-bharat-mission-heading-failure>



4- Safetipin App

It pins safe areas in different sites of the world, including New Delhi, Gurgaon and Noida, in India, and Cali, in Colombia. It works through the information that users provide, including sound and video data. The app uses variables such as “lighting”, “openness”, “visibility”, “crowd”, “paths condition” and “gender”, to determine and pin the safe and dangerous neighborhoods. All based in perceptions of those users who own smart phones, and cars.

www.safetypin.com

5- Frente Nacional por la Familia (Mexico)

Non-governmental organization that organizes campaigns and demonstrations supporting slogans like “family first”, which advocate for hetero-normative catholic traditional family units. They protest against gay rights and female reproductive rights, mainly.

<https://www.animalpolitico.com/2016/09/marcha-familia-cdmx/>

6- The #MeToo India campaign exploded in October 2018. The hashtag pointed at several dozens of men belonging to the film industry, government, schools, and journalism. The art world was pinned in a second wave in late October. Allegations mainly cover harassment, inappropriate behavior, emotional and sexual abuse perpetrated by men in power positions towards female assistants, students, fellow actors, and family members.

<https://www.firstpost.com/india/metoo-in-india-a-list-of-allegations-as-reported-on-social-media-and-followed-up-by-firstpost-5359961.html>



*Bitch companion

SIDE NOTE Occupation, an act of taking presence, filling a volume, has the connotation of inhabiting a space but does not necessarily tell about the exchange that happens in the relationship between her, who occupies, and the surroundings. If we think of occupation as a job, it describes an activity of economical exchange, survival, and an act of taking time. Occupation means too an act of war, of taking or colonizing. It also relates to protest movements, of course, that bring the notion to the public realm and places importance in using the body and its relationships to other bodies (moving together, raising voices), to modify political spaces.

Occupying is not a simple task: *In the view of the normalcy*

In September-October 2018 I occupied a small space of the art world in New Delhi. Prerana Khandelwal, who was first my guide but became my friend and collaborator, and I, developed a project about recognizing gendered structures by occupying and traveling some roads of the different structural regulatory mechanisms that influence a female dormitory inside one of the biggest universities in India. These structures whether activated or not, just or not, strong or weak, organize the different spatial levels in campus.

We titled the project *In view of the normalcy*, it comprises video works and a fanzine created a midst of the student elections that set off a series of violent disturbances within Prerana's school, the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), that altered attitudes of administratives and students towards our artistic activities.

The project focuses on a small organ of the campus body, a female dormitory called Koyna Hostel. It looks at the space of female private and cooperative life. A place where domestic life negotiates with the regulations of dominant structures – the administration- that overrule the female students' capacities for making decisions or fulfilling desires of themselves. Nevertheless, desires exist and often take place even through small gestures.



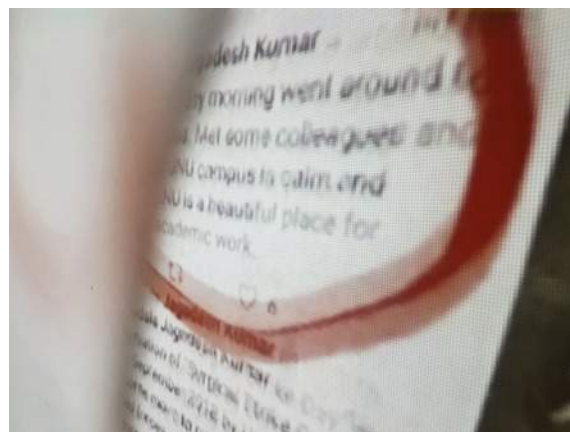
In view of the normalcy begins with a *quasi*-archaeological lucky moment: the finding of a sculpture of the Hindu deity Saraswati, buried under debris, trash and soil within the grounds of the university. The stone figure was dug out by us, and brought to Koyna during an effervescent moment of political discrepancies happening between right and leftist student groups, a day after the yearly elections. Despite the fearful climate that student beatings then produced, the encounter of the statue with the gatekeepers of Koyna, and then with many of the women living there, created a space where domesticity and a sense of shared condition of being female, were explored. We, the women who were lucky to meet the sculpture, started to recognize ourselves in that body, wish for our boobs to be as erotic and in contact with the cool end of summer wind, wish for our smile to be as motherly, as sure of herself, our body to flow as strong and passionate as that of the stone figure.

The girls in Koyna explained the happiness expressed when they first met the statue, as a moment of a physical encounter made possible. In the temple or in museums they can never touch. Now in the dormitory, within private articulations of space, they are able to wash her, to

'feel the beauty and presence of her body'. The distance between them and the object of worship or art, collapses. 'She is like me', said Krati, one of the residents.

The statue also means history and culture. A presence of a certain aesthetic and religious value which the girls have learned as youngsters. During our conversations with them, the statue functioned as a reminder of gendered impositions formulated from cultural definitions that require for them to be sexually 'pure', own an 'elongated symmetrical figure', be clothed, silent, be listeners (as opposed to out-spoken), and be the key of the formation of family units.

What pleasure do we draw as females with the aesthetics of the statue, its significance in history or in personal biographies? Why does it always make the women that see her, smile?



*stills of video work

If I would give a definition to the space that the presence of the sculpture created in Koyna, if we described this space as an imaginary object that appeared suddenly at a moment when imposed structures are progressively redefining the lifestyle of the hostel, we would call it an interstice, a hole that the administrative system of JNU cannot regulate. This is a space not of resistance, but of preservation. A recognition of restrictions imposed on us and only us as females, the freedom to move in the city that is in most cases, not ours, the access to touching sacred untouchable objects that were originally inspired by us, the learning to call out and be heard.

In Koyna it is not about openly challenging patriarchal notions but about finding ways to suppress the hardships of the world, from a standing point of view in the inside of a closed system. To counteract the high rates of suicide of young women, the epidemic of sexual violence, the lack of representation in political processes, which are all part of a feminist agenda but are also things directly lived by the residents of the hostel, these women recognize the importance of constructing spaces of their own. They know how spaces, however real or imaginary, contribute to rethink and reinterpret social realities.

The sculpture was present in Koyna on the 15th of September when the student elections happened. It was there on the 17th when a mob of young students from outside of JNU attacked bachelors and threatened young active female members of political groups by shouting: "You better shut it or I'll cut your neck." It was there when Ummul talked about advocating for

disabled females in India, when Sonali explained about ecosystem services and when Divya lovingly washed the statue and danced after her steps. It was there when the curfew and the military presence at the gates of the university began and ended. It was there when the wardens raided the dormitories at five in the morning, looking for illegal guests, smokes, alcohol, and even electrical appliances that are basic for the well being of their bodies, but are not allowed by the administration for reasons still incomprehensible. (Why deny the use of coolers in the midst of the heat of summer, or the use of water kettles in the harsh winters?) It was there when the residents protested the raid. And it was there when a spontaneous moment of sorority happened when my rights to enter the premises of Koyna Hostel as a guest, were defended by Prerana together with more than 30 residents, who responded a call for support. Thanks to their further protests and fast gathering, the guest permissions were instated again.

The whole process of transporting the statue to the hostel and the relationship that this new guest elicited in the warden, guards and residents, has been documented as video, audio and writings. Interviews and interactions with different women living in the hostel, are part of the research performed on site. A first video was made specifically to screen in the inner courtyard of the Hostel, to try to activate communal unused spaces, and to place the image of the statue outside for every woman's scrutiny, but it did not happen due to endless restrictions of the administration. As a response to the clear bureaucratic sabotage that we suffered, a fanzine was made and distributed to the 336 rooms in the building, followed by 2 screenings in private rooms. The fanzine contains texts, drawings and transcriptions of interviews made in Koyna. It functioned as a form of invitation for the women to come to the private chambers of our supporters, to see the video, and have a conversation. Friends from *Guerrilla Dhaba*, a protest student group that appeared after the curfews and that gives chai to people wandering around campus at night, let us screen the video and allowed for us to have a public debate about how restrictions and regulations can kill student initiatives and the relational spaces in what is supposed to be a community.

A second video was produced and presented in the gallery space in the School of Arts and Aesthetics (SAA Gallery), also within campus. Both video works and zine articulate specific female experiences that collide within Koyna, the campus life, and the imaginary space that the statue activates.

See photographs of process and download the fanzine in www.palomaayala.com/in-view-of-the-normalcy.html .

A game to play indoors in Khirkee Village



*View in Khirkee village

SIDE NOTE 7

A game to play indoors

Khirkee village rains and thunders. The street, as a river, carries and takes away the surplus of economies and humans cross. The man in the vegetable-selling rickshaw moves away towards the temples, under where one can hide from the unpredictability of the storms. The tailor puts the sewing machine inside his tiny shop. The man of the *paratha* stand, closes it down. No one... no man, wanders around without reason.

One cannot say that Khirkee is a planned endeavor. The narrow alleys make the GPS, global positioning system, hard to connect to. Navigation, oh gosh. One requires a good sense of direction and visual memory to get through, even with a smart phone. I invariably return defeated by the neighborhood.

I try to win, though. I check where I want to go before actually going, so not to get easily lost. In these moments I too assess if walking or taking a *tuktuk* is better, since often motorized means succeed over feet, no matter how close in the map the place is. I think of how much to pay the driver, so to be ready to haggle, though I very well know that I will end up paying more. I keep eye contact with every single man around me that stares back or attempts to touch me, and often end up ruining valuable interactions by having an annoyed grimace. I cover my nose and

mouth with a scarf, which far from being self-censoring, is to stop the pollution from causing unwanted headaches. In this process, going from home to somewhere, means losing.

I was explained by my good friend Jyothidas, that Khirkee grew as a response to a non-stopping process of colonization of rural lands, and migrations from farmlands to cities. **SIDE**

NOTES I suspect that there are more people than space, and this makes pockets of the city somewhat resistant to gentrification processes. Places determine less than people. Numbers empower the population against the norms of architecture and urban planning. I assume that the spaces of imagination are, in practice, stronger than a cleansing governmental campaign. In the end, all sort of DIY solutions organically appear to any problem, standing about or transforming any new artificially imposed structures.

The example of the urban village is one. According to Rajendra Ravi, from the Institute for Democracy & Sustainability, where we had the pleasure to meet, the e-rickshaw is another. It is a proliferating economy in a place that depends heavily on motorized means of transport to travel around. This cheaper option is not only responding to the increasing prices of public transportation and gas, it is also friendlier to the air, and for the drivers is a way of survival and sometimes, even a place to sleep and live.

If my suspicion is at least true in Khirkee village, if indeed the numbers of humans overpower certain regulatory systems, then the presence... or in this case the absence of women in the public spaces, affects questions like: for whom are outside spaces important? Who cares for them? Who creates and makes use of them? A simpler and more obvious question would be: where are the women?

The void of female bodies on the streets, creates a landscape of female mistrust upon safety, value, and position. How do women insert themselves in the community economy if all the jobs that one sees are occupied by men? How is invisibility affecting the group of young school-aged girls that visit *Khoj* every Wednesday, their creativity, self-perspective, where and how do they play? And what about the integration of the immigrant women living in a neighborhood with a high number of foreign nationals, like in Khirkee? **SIDE NOTE9**

The problems that I had to deal in Khirkee were, I eventually realized, created by the ways in which I began to construct a relationship to the space. I had to alter my artistic practice and adapt. The interactions that could lead me to answer my questions were not happening by walking and moving around as a tourist. I bought myself a *kurta*, stuck a *bindi* on my forehead, and roamed around some more. Because of my looks, brown woman from Mexico, I thought that I could play as Indian and that I would skip xenophobia or the distance that sensing an 'other' produces. I tried to start conversations with the ladies sitting on walk ways or outside the temple, as if this superfluous game of camouflage would open ways of communication. It did not work. I tried to imitate my friend Prerana in the way she chooses vegetables and bargains with the sellers, or how she haggles with the *tuktuk* drivers. I learned very basic words in Hindi. But I could not create spontaneous conversations, sit at a park to observe and take photographs, walk from the *Khoj* art space to the nearest market area in Sheikh Sarai or Malviya Nagar, alone. The time when I should have been trying to relate and learn, I spent stressed about getting lost or afraid of being harassed. I was making no sense to anybody.

So I changed my movement to more domestic, enclosed spatial contexts, towards creating much closer encounters. The women that I met then were introduced to me by Prerana, meetings that allowed for a whole artistic project to be realized inside an all-female dormitory in Jawaharlal Nehru University, JNU (www.palomaayala.com/in-view-of-the-normalcy.html). I learned more about the issues of psychic health, spatial orders of unequal access, representation of social relationships and mobility that the young students are dealing with, by

confirming that the stress and fear that I felt was extendable, up to certain level, to my new girlfriends, and that our relational strategies were developed mostly for protected and/or securitized perceived environments. **The question of how do we inhabit space (as in modify, occupy, perceive, imagine, activate, create) as women, and how the space inhabits us, became linked to the idea of domestication of the public space.**



*Brides photo shooting at Khirki Masjid

7- Gali Poli, the game to restructure gendered spaces.

Board game created during my stay in Khirkee Village



8- Urban Villages were rural areas that were consumed by the metropolis of New Delhi. 'The urban village as an entity exists only as a concept. Administratively, it merges with the urban ward as soon it gets notified, but has starkly different characteristics from the rest of the ward. The rural-urban conflicts are strongly manifested here.'

<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/coverage/urban-villages--an-oxymoron-13014>

9- Khirkee Voice is a newspaper containing community issues, specially focused in the african diaspora present in Khirkee Village, edited by Malini Kochupillai .

<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-africa-46144571/khirkee-voice-the-delhi-newspaper-bridging-the-indian-african-divide>)

Domestic beings being domestic

Bosnian artist Maja Bajevic wrote that ‘sex, the reproductive activity necessary for the survival of the human species, is considered as something “dirty” and “shameful” for women unless it is connected to “love” and “marriage” [...] Women are represented in highly contradictory manners [...] sometimes their physical bodies are represented as an object of adoration; on other occasions, particularly when they are connected to the concepts of “love” and “marriage”, they are represented in its enslaved version.’ (*Power, Governance, Labor* exhibition in Migros Museum, 2017) **SIDE NOTE10**

With the women that I met in New Delhi, the seldom conversations about erotic bodies and practices, were linked to freedom and autonomy. But in general sex was not openly discussed if not in its political or cultural form. Marriage and sometimes love, were “duties” that are culturally expected as part of the roles of females, they explained. I discussed the binary position of Maja Bajevic, critical of representations that, I assume, have a European origin, but also from my position as a Mexican woman that much alike my new friends, grew amidst conservative values, like representations of catholic virgins, or objectified hyper-sexual bodies in the media. This happened when Prerana and me began working on the project *In view of the normalcy* (www.palomaayala.com/in-view-of-the-normalcy.html), time during which we had the luck to literally unbury a broken ancient sculpture of Saraswati, a Hindu goddess of wisdom.

The statue became an anchor point to our conversations. It is a head and torso (no legs) of a four-armed stone female in a dancing position, an erotic-looking curvy lady with big nipples and a tiny waist. Her face smiles in a quite sexy smirk. She is crowned and jeweled. Her hands, at least the two that were found, form the *mudras* of “teach” and “discussion/argumentation”, which actually ignited the conversation about gender roles and disempowering spaces for females.



The relationships elicited by the sculpture were all created inside the private chambers of Prerana, in an all-female, guarded, and sometimes highly securitized environment. The notion of “safe space” was exploited by us, even inadvertently, in the process of recording conversations, making interviews, or even while presenting our artistic production: a fanzine and a video, distributed or screened in private bedrooms. What we explored within biographical and political topics tell about women feeling empowered and with relative autonomy, creating political communities, for example, or speaking up against the school administrative injustices. The fear of losing this space was highly present when speaking of depression, suicides and getting married once they finished their studies. The big fear was to be violently pushed into a semi-desired domestic partnership and to start having kids.

Fear and resistance appeared in several addressed topics. Ummul Kher, for example, told us as activist and advocate of females with disabilities, that ‘India is very much male dominated, a definite patriarchic society. Because the achievement of life for a women is to get married, to get settled... then usually, if there is any kind of abnormality in her, it becomes a public problem. For example, if the woman is of dark complexion, then she becomes the topic of gossip of the entire family. If she is short of stature, it becomes the point of sympathy for everybody: “She is so short, will she get a good match?” If the woman is fat, she is body shamed. People go to great lengths, spend a lot of money, to ensure the normalcy of a woman’s body and her behavior.’ One of her strongest advocacy notions to counteract segregational behaviors, is to incorporate the idea that being disabled is a community issue and should part of the public agenda. She said ‘Acceptance is something that you have to fight for, inside yourself and in your environment. People won’t include us. First step is to be comfortable with your own identity. Non-apologetic. Being disabled does not mean that you are not able to do things. And we should group up, make communities and be vocal. Be public about it. This is not one person’s problem, it is everybody’s business to enable the conversation of diversity, and not only mine.’ (A longer version of the interview with her is included in the fanzine: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Qz2Qo5kPXHT-mZ7MtLVM-Pi9_TOzpsH6/view)

Other encounters made it clear that a place in which the public female spaces and its segregatory conditions would be addressed is social media, specifically *Whatsapp* and *Facebook*. **SIDE NOTE11** I mention it as an important data because I witnessed it myself: how the input of information in social media transformed into real events, influences, and eventually part of the video work done for the project *In view of the normalcy*. The best example is the moment when my access to the mentioned dormitory was denied. Prerana made a shout out for support in a *Whatsapp* group, her message quickly materialized the presence of dozens of residents of the dormitory. Together, the group of women secured my rights of entrance and defended their own rights of having guests, a less oppressive guard system, and not subduing under the frequent raids to their private habitats.



*Saraswati's hands holding a parchment or a cellphone.

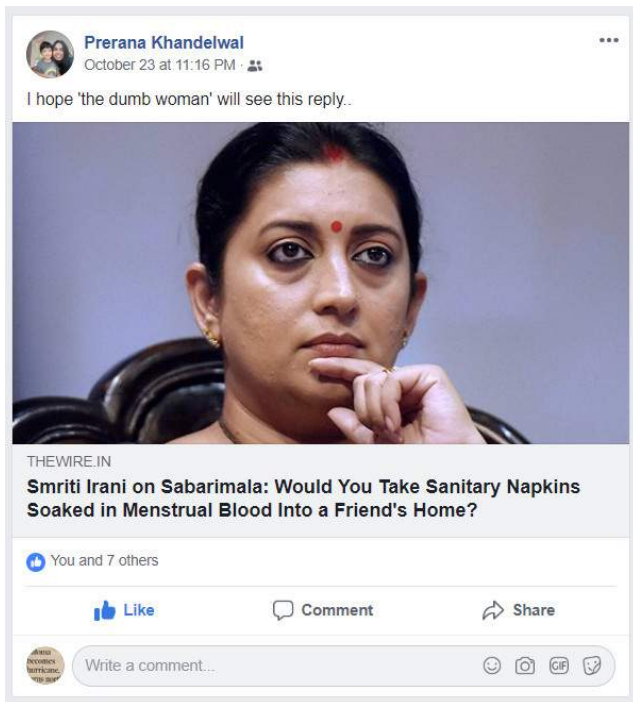
That said, I speak for a small specific experience. Many Indian women, specially activists, continuously challenge gender inequalities and violence, in public. I have mentioned *Chiragh Dilli* (<https://chiraghdilli.wordpress.com>), a blog that explores the experience of living in New Delhi. The kind and supportive friends of *Guerrilla Dhaba* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ylt2KHOGtc>), a student group in JNU, who offers chai tea in the streets of the university, after curfew time. The *Khirkee Voice* newspaper, containing articles about african immigrants living in the neighborhood. Love Matters (<https://lovematters.in/en>), an educational platform about safe and positive sexuality. *Pinjra Tod* (<http://sanhati.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Pinjra-tod-8-Oct-2015.docx.pdf>) a collective of female students that demonstrate against loss of freedoms for women in public spaces, specially the curfew. In Bangalore, there is the *Blank Noise* (<https://www.blanknoise.org/>) group, doing the *Meet to Sleep* get-togethers, as it reads, they meet in parks and sleep as a way of reclaiming a public space that became a site for gang rapes and harassment.

10-Maja Bajevic

How to Explain the World to the Martians (Chapter III: Women) 2017
Collage (Papier, Wasserfarbe auf Papier)



11- History, myth and life, distant from each other.



Structures structuring structures

(Because when speaking of gendered spaces in a patriarchal society, one finds many examples of nonsense.)

*

The Talamana, or a system of “iconometric proportions for creating super human beauty” imposed a canon of ideal parameters for representations of goddesses.

Tala Systems according to Śukranīti¹

	9 tala	8 tala	7 tala
1. Length of face	12	12	12
2. Length of neck	4	4	3
3. Length of Chest (Hikka sutra to stana sutra)	12	10	9
4. Stana sutra to nabhi	12	10	9
5. Nabhi to medhira sutra	12	10	9
6. Length of thighs	24	21	18
7. Length of knees	4	4	3
8. Length of forelegs	24	21	18
9. Height of foot	4	4	3
	108	96	84

Iconometric proportions for creating superhuman beauty were to be followed in case of images meant for worship.

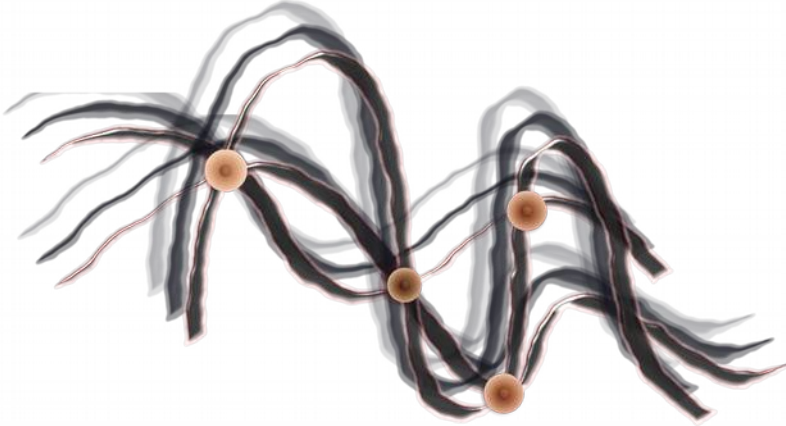
From the paper “Iconometry and measurements of the female figure” by Tsem Rinpoche (<https://www.tsemrinpoche.com/download/Iconography/en/Iconometry%20and%20Anatomy%20of%20the%20Female%20Figure.pdf>)

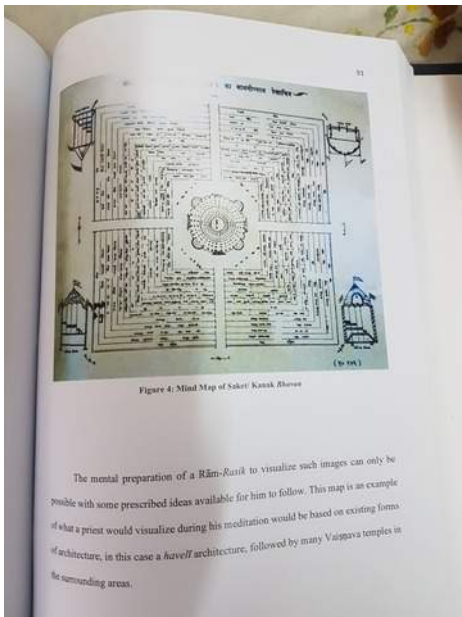
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Facebook post

The *chunni* is a piece of clothing that Indian women of all ages wear to “protect their modesty” or “the family respectability”, as put by friend Manmeet. It’s function is to cover the breasts and specifically, the nipple area. The ladies have found beautiful ways to wear them. Colors and textures vary, but in any case, it bends around the bosom. It is yet another visual structure that superposes on a body that is already clothed, sometimes heavily, already regulated.





Sakti

The master thesis of Prerana Khandelwal studies the architectural imaginary spaces in a specific narrative of the Ramayan, that focuses on the Ram and Sita’s normally omitted domestic and sexual life. Prerana explains that the male priests of Galta, in Jaipur, study such artistic maps of the palace of Sakti in order to enter into an induced trans, a meditation mode during which they travel, live, and are embodied by the spirits of the friends of Sita, so that they can enjoy seeing and having coitus with Ram. As Ram is the ideal male, they would dream of him as a husband.

Ram and Sita are the epitome of heteronormative deities, example of gender roles and family structures, widely venerated in India. The part of their lives that happens after their marriage, is seldom worshiped or discussed, but only by a few groups.

Fake rock walls made of rocks

Anyone who has been in New Delhi, has seen them: rock walls, those urban structures that are quite common. They are not old constructions, but try to imitate one, like fake historical presences. The walls are made of reddish rocks fixed together with cement. If you watch closely, you will see that there is a second, artificial structure shaped as exactly the same thing: a pattern of rocks fixed with cement, superposed on the original underlying structure. Why would anyone spend more resources (money, masons, time) on faking a pattern that is already, naturally, existing underneath, escapes me completely. My point is that one can find spatial structures being reproduced, even if nonsensically.

