Imagining the Campus: Political Possibilities and Fault-lines of Dissent

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the award of the Degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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JULY 2015

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that dissertation entitled "**IMAGINING THE CAMPUS: POLITICAL POSSIBILITIES AND FAULT-LINES OF DISSENT**" submitted by **PROMONA SENGUPTA**, Theatre and Performance Studies, School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi – 110067, India, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** is her original work and has not been previously submitted for any other Degree of this or any other University.

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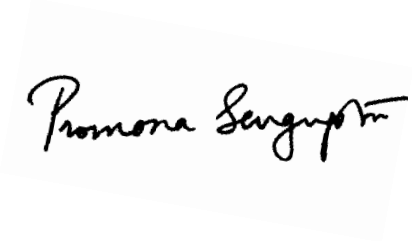
This is to certify that dissertation entitled "**IMAGINING THE CAMPUS: POLITICAL POSSIBILITIES AND FAULT-LINES OF DISSENT**" has been submitted by me, **PROMONA SENGUPTA**, student of the Department of Theatre and Performance Studies, School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi – 110067, India, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** and it is my original work and has not been previously submitted for any other Degree of this or any other University. I take full responsibility for any errors and discrepancies in the document.



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Acknowledgements

This research has been enabled, encouraged and incubated over the last 6 to 7 years, with the help of the people who I write about the most – the students of Delhi University. I am indebted to my exceptional peer group in Lady Shri Ram College for Women and all the other people I have met and continue to meet in my explorations around the DU campus, including professors, staff advisors and theatre professionals who give all of us hope that theatremaking is important and an economically viable way of life, much like engineering and law.

Some of the people who have greatly influenced and encouraged me at every step are Dr. Bishnupriya Dutt, my supervisor, mentor and friend, without whose support it would not have been possible for me to write; my family, the Senguptas – Krittika, Sudhijit, Aishee, Aniruddha, Briti and the Mitras – Kaninika, Late Dr. Amal Kumar and the incredible Sandhya, my granny, the scientist to whom all the women of the family owe their brains; my partner Krishnarjun Bhattacharya; my friends Bedatri Dutta Choudhury, Manjari Kaul; my classmates at the School of Arts and Aesthetics – Krupa Desai, Parvathi Ramanathan, Devika Menon, Samik Dasgupta, Debojeet Bora, Subodh Kanwar and Shankar Rao; the professors at the Department of Theatre and Performance Studies – Prof. Urmimala Sarkar Munsi, Prof. Rustom Bharucha, Prof. Soumyabrata Chaudhury, Ameet Parameswaran, Brahm Prakash and Dean Ira Bhaskar; my colleagues at Khoj International Artists' Association – Sitara Chowfla, Suresh Pandey, Manoj VP, Adil Akhtar, Manohar Bhengra, Arun Chhetri and director and professional mentor Pooja Sood who has shown consistent support towards my academic moonlighting. It would be impossible to choose the Spartan profession of academics without the invaluable feedback, support, love and sacrifices extended to me by all of them.

Promona Sengupta
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22nd July 2015

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INTRODUCTION

The Possibilities of Political Engagement within the Contemporary University

This work should begin with the conscious assertion that this is as much a political manifesto and observations around how the world ought to be as it is a dissertation. As new work that contributes to the building of discourse around studenthood and experiences of higher education, this dissertation, to be submitted to a higher education institution, would aim to not only weigh down university library shelves further, but also to strengthen the autonomy of the student movement and acknowledge the shrinking collegiate space within the contemporary neoliberal turn in higher education and its ramifications. The socio-economic disparity within the Indian population relegates higher education to the realm of privileged experiences. This privileged position of higher education is expressed explicitly in popular culture. Till date, innumerable films from across the country attest to the privilege of the higher education institution – a fantastical world of well-dressed young people falling in love and breezing through their college lives – and media-generated "youth icons", graduates of management schools turned authors, churn out bestselling novels about the trials and tribulations of professional education in high-stress, elite institutes of the country. Higher education is seen as a part of the grand narrative of "young India", whereby the nation is touted to become the next global superpower, riding on the wave of the unending and untapped potential of its "GenY". This entirely blinkered vision of the

future and the potential of the young generation needs to be systematically smashed and exposed, by rejecting on the one hand the Pepsi-Cola identity of the abstracted consumer base called "youth" and on the other refocusing the lens on educational institutions not only as coteries of privilege but also valid spaces for socio-political transformative possibilities.

Higher education in India remains a disparate experience for all its participants – a very small fraction of the population of the country that finishes school, thinks about college, applies for higher education, succeeds in admissions, fails in admissions, goes to university, writes dissertations and so forth. Such is the system of privilege within higher education that part of this percentage in effect comes back into the system as educators and professors. In spite of this self-feeding, circuitous structure, higher education is still a diverse experience amongst students, coming from very different contexts and backgrounds and beliefs and continuously challenging the flattened and essentialised identity of the "youth" carved by the market and sales driven media and culture industry. In order to realistically gauge the socio-political futures that are possible in the hands of young people, beyond the myth of the "GenY", it is important to acknowledge the labour of students to change or transform or mitigate their own agonistic experiences of higher education in the country. The university as a social system outside the family that enables young people with different social and cultural capital to engage in principle with the Enlightenment values of democratic living, becomes an extremely formative period in many people's lives. It is necessary to understand college education in terms of the distinct

experience it remains in the minds of its participants, a sense of a temporary utopic space in terms of the relative social and political sanctions it allows.

In April 2013, a student activist belonging to the West Bengal chapter of Student Federation of India, the student wing of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), lost his life in police custody[1], following a demonstration protesting the State Government's controversial decision to issue a blanket ban on college union elections citing the upcoming state school board examinations[2]. The death of Sudipto Gupta was the unfortunate event that reopened the Pandora's box regarding the debate about students' participation in political processes of the country. The death resulted in a series of incidents of violent altercations between rival student groups, and between student activists and government backed goons, situating students in the middle of street-style violence that the politics of West Bengal had been experiencing for some time, especially with the change of government in 2011[3]. A long drawn out public debate in both print and electronic media following Sudipto Gupta's death, involving the voices of many Bengali public intellectuals[4], which weighed the pros and cons of political participation of young people during their student life, effectively encouraging the problematic assumption at the heart of the debate – that young people studying in colleges and universities were somehow removed

[1] http://www.telegraphindia.com/1130403/jsp/frontpage/story_16741659.jsp#.VbTzVPmqqko
[2] http://indiatogether.org/politics-society
[3] http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2011-05-13/news/29539965_1_mamata-banerjee-west-bengal-left-front
[4] From the many print and television programs on this issue, here is a debate program on a leading Bengali television channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyYaV1yoFJA

from political processes around them and that university spaces were veritable oases of untrammelled youthfulness that needed to be protected from the sullying forces of politics.

This myopic understanding of higher education has come from a series of deeply rooted cultural beliefs about education in general, through the lenses of colonialism as well as caste, class, and privilege, which see education as such a privileged experience that it ought to be completely untouched by the adulterating forces of the "outside" world beyond the school, college or university. Victorian puritanism is pervasive in this assumption that education will have to be a "clean" enterprise, without sex, violence and other forces of reality playing a part in it, engineering an "imagined sanity" within educational institutions. It also perhaps betrays the inward-looking, familial nature of the Brahmanical education model of the *Guru-Shishya Parampara*. At a point of time when globally universities are facing neoliberal overhauls, resulting in a shift in the focus of education towards increased productivity and marketability[5], such assumptions regarding the nature and efficacy of higher education are not only dangerous, but they further attempt to render university spaces into apolitical, clinicised production houses. The beginnings of this research and its ideological rationale have been generated around the death of Sudipto Gupta, in order to be a dipstick into the political life of students attending university at the juncture of the neoliberal turn.

[5] A slowly growing body of mostly online, open source opinion pieces describe in detail the limits of the neoliberal project within British and American academia and the subsequent decrease in the importance of non-professional studies. This is one such article. http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/19654-public-intellectuals-against-the-neoliberal-university

This research has a very specific temporal and spatial scope – it looks at certain developments and their consequences within Delhi University roughly between the years 2007 and 2013, years that are characterized by administrative overhauls and changes within the workings of the University. In this research, an attempt is made to reconstruct and recognize the political activisms and solidarities of students of the University during these years in a manner of *"seize*[ing] *hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger"*(Benjamin, 1937). The political expressions that have been documented and analysed in this research are collegiate theatre and its associated process, along with specific activist movements related to issues that are pertinent to university life. In the grand narrative of political processes, none of these instances perhaps qualify as moments of political potential, and in fact this study consciously steers clear of larger partisan union politics within universities such as general student elections. Electoral politics within Delhi University has often been seen as the rehearsal for national politics, and control over the DU union is important for national parties in order to generate a culture of consent in the form of ready vote-banks. In that sense, as a political process, the DU general student elections have a certain teleological identity that has a straightforward analysis. The concern of this study is to tease out moments of activist politics that break through the telos of the democratic republic in order to assert a separate socio-political space for students – the **campus**. The campus as a space and a phenomenon is at the heart of this study, as not only the site of student political activity, but also as a specific spatial and temporal arrangement whose

ephemeral geographical identity can be evoked and produced through the affective solidarities of its constituency – mainly the students. In this study, the campus is positioned as a space that is separate from the institutional university space, both sharing a dialectical relationship that is crucial to the politics of the campus. The campus is seen as a "produced" space, not a naturalized architectural entity, and it is in this production process of the campus that this study situates the political impulse of its students.

As one of the largest universities within the country, Delhi University admits students from extremely diverse backgrounds, from across India (with a rise of 7 – 9% per year of the number of outstation students taking admissions in the undergraduate courses)[6], and in effect, the common parlance usage of the term "student body" becomes meaningless because it is far too generalized to denote the diverse student constituency of the university. Despite the universalist feel of the term "university", it is as impossible to attribute universal democratic values of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity to Delhi University as it is perhaps to the Indian nation. Like the national constituency, Delhi university campus, in spite of having one common student union, which is elected annually, is a deeply agonistic[7] space. Through this study, the highly moot terms of "student body" would be continuously challenged, broken and redefined. For us, the fractures within the campus space are far more important in order to write a political history of the campus

[6] This article informs us about the increase in the number of outstation students in DU over the years: http://universitynewsnetwork.in/tag/delhi-university/

[7] I borrow the term from Chantal Mouffe's understanding of a "vibrant democracy", where decision-making does not appear out of technical problem solving processes by experts, but by conflicts between political adversaries, which is often an unsolvable situation. (Mouffe 2007)

than a flattened history of campus activism. While the university as a space of national importance actively produces its own history and discourse in the form of academic work in education as well as innumerable annual reports, college brochures and other advertisement literature, the campus as a lived experience does not beget as much academic attention. This is strange, as, it can be argued that the institution only allows expression and discourse, but the campus forms it.

In order for this study to find requisite material that speaks of the campus phenomenon, there occurred a historiographical block, that could only throw up recent rhetorical literature on the internet that bemoaned the loss of the campus to neoliberal educational reforms, or historical material dating back to the "magic moments" of student activism in the 1960s and 70s[8]. There was a huge gap in the form of the 80s and 90s, and even the beginnings of this decade, whereby it would be easy to agree with the commonplace assumption that with the late-capitalist open market economies of the post-Cold War world, Left wing activism across the globe was dying a fast and prompt death, rendering any expression of activism and dissent meaningless.

Contrary to this context, the Delhi University campus, along with other campuses in the city, have found diverse political expressions that have been documented over the 80s and the 90s[9]. In

[8] As a random example, Tariq Ali writes about May '68:
http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2008/mar/22/vietnamwar

[9] One of the paradigmatic movements of the 1990s was the activism around the Mandal Commission that recommended caste based reservations in government jobs. A large number of students were involved on both sides of a series of protests, iconized by the images of attempted self-immolation of DU student Rajiv Goswami, which

spite of this, political activism led by students has in general been written about in the vocabulary of "unrest", a law and order problem, a problem of discipline[10]. This rhetoric around student activism has been pervasive since the writings of Humayun Kabir in the 1950s, the education minister under the Jawaharlal Nehru government, and with the rising disillusionment with the Indian democracy by the late 1960s, this rhetoric reached hysterical levels as students from top universities identified themselves with radicalized working class movements across the country such as in the case of the Naxalbari movement. The sheer robustness of this claim of indiscipline has not only positioned a student's involvement with politics as potentially dangerous and liable to be corrected by the state (as was the case during the Naxalbari movement), but has in general succeeded in fabricating a historiographical lie about the campus as a space of no real political or discursive value, a space to be kept clean and disciplined.

The primary frame of reference in this study for the analysis of the campus is its cultural productions, mainly its theatre. There is a specific rationale behind the choice of collegiate theatre here. In the book *Student Unrest: Causes and Cure* (1958), the pioneering educationist of Modern India Humayun Kabir delineates certain causes of student unrest such as general loss of idealism, loss of appropriate leadership by teachers, economic disadvantages etc. It is not difficult to contextualize this pathologising look at student activism, within the climes of the

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became a typical method of protest for anti-Mandal activists : http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/mandal-report-touches-a-peculiar-chord-among-youth/1/315753.html .

[10] This is evident not only in Humayun Kabir's own writings about higher education, but also in UGC's *"Report on the Problem of Student Indiscipline in Indian Universities"* published in 1960.

post-independence drive to manufacture a democracy based on a culture of consent that would read activism as an aberration. What is unfortunate is the sheer durability of this claim within contemporary discussions about student politics to this day, as seen in the public debate following Sudipto Gupta's death. Education is often viewed as a means of acquiring capital[11]. In rough Marxian terms it can be argued that the problem in Indian society is still perceived to be primarily a problem of the economics of poverty, of the base or the structure, and education and the success of it will presumably mitigate the gaping holes within the economic structure through the increase of job viability and livelihoods. While this view of the efficacy of education is indeed important, it fails to take cognizance of the *experience* of education as a transformative agent in the lives of its recipients. This is the component of education that this research is interested in, the affective excess knowledge produced by university education, that does not necessarily translate into hard economics of productivity and employability. The rationale behind studying the other possible efficacies of educational spaces, specifically, beyond the economic transactions that underwrite the assumed teleological direction of higher education, is that these contain activities and work that students produce that are potentially radical in new political vocabularies, beyond the accepted vocabulary of Leftist class-struggles. The vocabulary of solidarity in such instances are very often not simply class and economic oppression, such as was the case of student solidarities of the 1960s-70s, nor caste and civil and identitarian rights, such

[11] I use the term capital in the manner of Pierre Bourdieu's understanding of the same as social, cultural, economic and symbolic. (Bourdieu, 1984 translation by Richard Nice)

as certain student movements of the 1980s and 90s, but affect – the idea of a shared space or a common shared practice such as theatre leading to deep friendships and a sense of togetherness that in itself is a political act within a rapidly changing and professionalizing campus space that does not have time for such things. This aspect of the student experience is largely absent from the literature around student politics, be it from the perspective of "unrest" or that of "movement". In both these cases, the "student body" is essentialised as a flattened community working on the principle of consensus and solidarity, without actually addressing the diverse personal experiences and agonistic perspectives on education that shapes students and their modes of solidarity on campus. This research is just the beginning steps in trying to tease out an alternative historiography of student solidarity through the largely unarchived realm of the campus.

The theatre work that is produced within the campus space of Delhi University lends itself to this analytical model of alternative experiences and efficacies of higher education because of certain specific attributes. To begin with, in many ways the theatre work coming out of DU negotiates the two different worlds of collegiate amateur processual theatre and the professional theatre outside the ambit of the campus. For example, DU collegiate theatre is almost always the first step of training for many professional theatreworkers within Delhi. Consequently, this theatre work straddles the very different economics of the two worlds in very interesting ways – such as finding a circuitous connection with the Bollywood culture industry through Delhi professional

theatre, which shall be discussed in this research. Collegiate theatre within Delhi University falls directly under the umbrella term of Extra-Curricular Activities (ECA), permitted leisure activities within the academic workday of the student. As this is the case, the institution becomes the patron of the arts via a structural decision that essentially works towards increasing the productivity of students by providing them respite and recreation from their primary work of studying and studenthood. This functional role that theatre plays within the institution's understanding of collegiate life is transcended in many ways by the very different priority and importance given to collegiate theatre by students themselves who are involved in this activity. While this research will delve deeper into this moment of disconnect between the institutional definition of an activity with the campus definition of the same, it is important in the introduction to point out that the relative importance that is given to theatre work and other forms of collegiate cultural production, at least within the campus space of Delhi University has a certain context which perhaps comes from circumstances prevailing upon the city of Delhi itself. The situation of the university within the premise of the national capital, along with the expanse and stretching of the campus across the cityscape with certain recognizable nerve-centers in the North and the South (the North Campus and the South Campus), makes the theatre work of the campus more susceptible to be produced in conversation, reaction and sometime imitation of professional theatre of Delhi fuelled by government institutions such as the National School of Drama and the Sangeet Natak Akademi and the professional performances held at various

popular theatre venues such as the Shri Ram Center or Kamani auditorium in Central Delhi, places of importance to life and social experience in the national capital. This obvious impact is not only evident in the fact that in spite of the gap in between the economic structure of professional theatre and amateur theatre, a gap that shapes the difference in the aesthetic choices made in the two forms, students theatreworkers leaving college and joining professional theatre groups or gaining admission in NSD and such institutions are quick to discard collegiate production values and economics for a professional work ethic. While this might seem an obvious transition, over the course of the research it will be argued that the training of these theatreworkers remain rooted in the collegiate sensibility even after the adoption of professional theatre structure, an adoption merely of economics and not of aesthetic sensibility, because of the depth of collegiate training by the virtue of its status as a deep-seated training strategy that is closely linked with day to day living on campus. The difference between a professional economics and collegiate aesthetic sensibility gives rise to a form of unresolved performance that helps us understand the tenuous relationship that professional Delhi theatre shares with theatre of Delhi University.

The existence of the National School of Drama within the city is another such formative circumstance that to a great extent dictates the existence and relevance of Delhi University theatre. The theatre school, being a national center for professional excellence in theatre and performance, exercises considerable discursive power in terms of training methodology in

theatre. While Delhi University collegiate theatre has over the course of time developed a specific repertoire[12] of its own, this repertoire often consists of training kits taught by faculty at the NSD, imported to Delhi University through workshops at NSD, or many NSD graduates and faculty members taking workshops in Delhi University. While this often gives rise to fascinating reclamations of drama school pedagogies within non-drama school spaces, it can be said that the reverse also happens. The experiences of Delhi University as a space and the specific ways in which this campus prevails upon the student's physical and performative body gets imported into NSD through DU alumna, many of whom go on to become part of NSD or FTII or other professional acting schools. In order to understand the very specific way in which the DU theatre scene manages to train and shape a student body (both the physical body and the political approximation of the student constituency), it is quite important to accept this *quid pro quo* between the collegiate theatre scene in the city and its professional theatre. Finally, the research returns to one of the main strands of historiographical questioning that has been posed – the idea of a "student body" or a "student community" and the potentially dangerous residues that these approximations of mass might leave for radical politics. The research deals with the fractured nature of the student body and the importance of intersectional reading of the campus space in order to avoid unproblematised valorisation of student solidarities and gain a more realistic idea

[12] Used in the manner in which Tracy Davis uses the word in her article "*Nineteenth Century Repertoire"*, 2009, as a collection of theatrical mores such as gestures, acts and songs immediately recognizable as the salient features of a particular kind of theatre by its devoted audience.

of the potential of the campus space. This is also a study in doing feminist politics within campus spaces that, in spite of their radical potential, fail to take cognizance of their own patriarchal underpinnings and become oppressive spaces for women and people of alternative genders and other identity expressions.

As has been pointed out before, the aim of this work is not only to research and document the campus and its work but also to identify and activate its radical potential by accepting that radical politics has changed in identity from its possible apogee in the 1960s. This research is also trying to document a unique form of political engagement that students within neoliberal universities identify and claim as their own. This not a data-heavy, empirical and exhaustive endeavor, but an experienced and documented and often polemical one, and while it might be unacceptable within the halls of empirical research, it is made to move and think and not to feed the behemoth of statistical research. One urges readers to keep this qualification in mind while reading the work and to entertain, even if it is for the duration of their read, the possibility of research that is less objective and more subjective, less dense and more accessible, less practical and more ideal.

The first chapter of the research tries to map the ephemeral geography of the campus space as a space that is autonomous from the edifice of the institution. The active "production" of the campus space through the reproduction and representation of campus-oriented sensibilities

within the cultural sphere, especially in collegiate theatre, is mapped through a moment of contestation over the campus space – the Commonwealth Games of 2010. While a brief overview of the competitive theatre circuit within DU indicates the specific repertoire created by student theatreworkers within the university, the chapter moves towards making a case for the production of the campus space as a space for politics where the dialectical relationship between the campus and the institution plays out. In an in-depth analysis of a small movement against infrastructural overhaul in DU before the Games in conjunction with a particular DU theatre production, I attempt to make a case for the campus space as a potentially political space. I primarily follow the lead of works by Henri Lefebvre (1991) in terms of the production of the campus and Nicholas Ridout (2003) for the political potential of the rehearsal in this chapter. I also briefly dwell on Mauricio Lazzarato's (1996) idea of labour within neoliberalism and attempt to contextualize the theatremaking process within the university as non-productive work that subverts the preconditions of a professionalizing drive within higher education.

In the second chapter, I explore the relationship that the collegiate repertoire might have with the culture industry of Bollywood. While in the first chapter I argue that the collegiate aesthetic is untenable within a high-budget, professionalized setup, here I investigate the way the sensibility changes in confrontation with the market and what components from the collegiate repertoire actually integrate with normative popular culture. I look critically at the rise of the working class North Indian macho masculinity as a trope which enjoys widespread popularity within Hindi

cinema of recent times and how it is possible to trace the precedents in the collegiate world. This brings in Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital, especially in the context of on-stage representations of the working class by DU students from a position of cultural privilege. I interrogate the political potential of this new trope on the campus stage, if any, and follow the lead of Partha Chatterjee's (2004) work on civil and political society to analyse if the shift in the demographic identities of characters on stage can play a role in the dialectical relationship between the campus and the institution and bring to the fore the idea of agonistic democracy within the campus space.

In the third chapter, I take the idea of agonism within the campus one step forward to talk exclusively about the subgroup of women's colleges within the university and how through their theatre production and theatremaking process, the students effect political subversion that has very different priorities from the ones discussed in the previous chapters. For students from women's colleges, the institutional authority also acts as a patriarchal authority, and the campus becomes the space to increase the permissible limits of propriety. The safe haven type setups of these colleges become sites of patriarchal oppression buttressed by peculiarly paternalistic ideas of safety and liberation. In such circumstances, solidarities based on affect – emotional ties and ties forged through the shared practice of theatre – become modes of being together politically. I follow the lead of the works by Sara Ahmed on the socio-political reading of emotions (2004) and route it through to the radical lesbian feminist writing of Monique Wittig (1981) and

Adrienne Rich (1996) to theorise the affective solidarities that particularly pervades the campus space within women's colleges in Delhi University.

It has to be borne in mind that this research cannot claim to be an exhaustive chronicling of the Delhi University campus space between the years 2007- 2013. As a researcher who has been deeply involved within the campus theatre circuit, I am very much implicated in the hierarchies and inequalities that characterise the fractured campus space of DU. My attempt has not been to create a survey of the different kinds of theatre production in DU, but to patch together the possible existence of an ephemeral campus space within DU, with the help of evidence in the form of small-scale political protests and instances of student theatre, especially theatre rehearsals. I have argued in favour of the evident fractures in the abstract idea of the "student's body", positing the presence of a contested campus space which is not only under threat from the highly corporatized market economy of the contemporary world and the neoliberalised government, but has also developed fault-lines within itself, in the form of self-assertion by various intersectionalities of the student body. I have consistently positioned the theatre rehearsal as a moment of non-productive, subversive work. This strain of subversion has been carried across the three chapters of the research, and the subversive potential of the campus has been continuously questioned and put through a test of credibility.

In conclusion, my attempt to theorise the political potential of the contemporary campus is also an attempt at a historiographical shift, from the student movements of 1960s being the closest possible frame of reference for literature on the campus to acknowledging the political solidarities of the present day campus as different in priorities in their manifestations and writing about the same. That is the reason why I have felt the need to have a mix of collegiate theatre and collegiate protest movements in my examples, as within the neoliberal rearrangement of the education sector, cultural production and political subversion are completely implicated in each other. Only when we take cognizance of the political potential of existence within a campus space will it be possible for us to understand the transformative possibilities within fast changing, corporatizing professionalizing higher education institutes that push for privatization of education and continuing the monopoly of educational rights by the elite.

Promona Sengupta
New Delhi, 2015

Chapter 1

THE EPHEMERAL GEOGRAPHIES OF THE CAMPUS

This research originates from a long-standing interest in the role of students as stakeholders in political processes of the country. It looks at the idea of the "campus" as a space that is distinct from the architectural edifice of the institution. Etymologically *"Kampos"* refers to an alcove or a wooded area within the institutional grounds (Chapman, 2007), a "retreat" where students can temporarily escape the rules of the institution for relaxation and recreation. In the 2013-14 academic brochure of DU, the campus is defined as the following.

> *"Campus" includes all places of work and residence in the Delhi University or any college or institution affiliated to the Delhi University. It includes all places of instruction, research and administration, as well as hostel, health centres, sports grounds, staff quarters and public places (including shopping centres, eating places, parks, streets and lanes) on the Delhi University campus or the campus of any college or institution affiliated to the Delhi University.*

Drawing from the work of Henri Lefebvre, this chapter argues that the campus is not only an approximation of the physical space occupied by the institution, but is a physical space that is *produced* through the presence and work of its residents, most importantly students. The study

specifically focuses on a particular type of work that the students carry out – collegiate theatre. The everyday practice of DU theatre becomes an important means of producing what might be called a "campus body", a body that remembers and reignites the campus space even outside the physical boundaries of the campus. It is interesting to study how this body is different in its conduct from the normative body of a "good" or "well-behaved" student, and how this difference comes across through a more assertive relationship of the campus body with the institutional architecture – a sense of belonging and comfort within the campus space or a sense of opposition and a dialectical, political relationship with the institution. This changed relationship of the campus body with the institution is facilitated through the *rehearsal*, a special shared time when students exercise a right to changing or altering the general use of an institutional space.

The rehearsal becomes an important everyday event, where students assemble at various spaces within the institution for long hours for indulgent role play, improvisations, gossip, fights and loitering. The lack of infrastructure compels student theatreworkers to take over classrooms, lawns, foyers and other spaces and turn them into makeshift performance spaces. During rehearsals, held in the afterhours, student theatreworkers reclaim institutional spaces and rearrange them, giving rise to an ephemeral campus space. This temporary rearrangement of the space subverts the relations of power within the institutional use of such spaces during the day.

This research is tethered to a moment in the recent history of Delhi University when there is a sense of higher education becoming more professionalized. The Commonwealth Games of 2010 has changed urban existence within Delhi with architectural and infrastructural overhauls that have reached the college campuses and hostels as well. In 2013-14, the Four Year Undergraduate Program (FYUP) came into place, a system of undergraduate studies that allowed multiple exit points for students with varying levels of degree across four years[13]. According to the General Agreement on Trade in Services at the WTO in 1995, member countries such as India have been slowly gearing towards neoliberal policies within higher education that would take cognizance of the education sector as a trade zone and students as human capital (Deodhar, 2001). In this context, the institution becomes a space in which the international market is interested, to employ professionals optimized for being a part of the labour force. Knowledge production within higher educational institution can be recognized as a form of *immaterial labour* (Lazzarato, 1996) that can be commodified. Campus theatre, officially being recognised as a permissible Extra Curricular Activity (ECA) that is a criteria for admission of 5% (along with Sports quota) of the total student intake in an academic year, also becomes a part of the skill development model of professional education that DU has geared itself towards. Collegiate theatre becomes the leisure activity necessary for the optimal productivity of the student as a future professional. Yet, it is

[13] The FYUP was a complete departure from the tradition three-year undergraduate course. It included Foundation courses that were meant to train students across disciplines of science, art, spirituality and innovation etc., and students could leave the course after two years, earning a Diploma, or three years, earning a Bachelors degree, complete four years, earning a Bachelors with Honours degree.

possible to see a resistance to the commodification of the contemporary campus in activities that do not necessarily add to the increased productivity of the student, activities that have a potential of a political relationship between the institution and the campus, such as instances of collegiate theatre and involvement in political protests within campus.

The DU Theatre Circuit: A Brief Overview

The theatre world of Delhi University has come to display a certain distinct identity of its own. It is an identity so pronounced that it can be called an independent sensibility. This sensibility arises out of a specific collegiate atmosphere. A combination of lack of funds and institutional support, competitive prize money and a fairly well-defined after-hours system of rehearsal and training has acquired Delhi University collegiate theatre its unmistakable *jugaadu*[14] feel. While theatreworkers within this setup feel the economic pinch most acutely, and it serves them as a grim reminder of the institution's lack of interest in the cultural work of students, it is also true that large-scale funding or corporatization of collegiate theatre significantly changes the original sensibility of the form. At the very outset the direct relationship between student theatre and the institution has to be examined. To begin with, Delhi University has the provision of admitting new students in each course under the banner of 5% ECA (Extra-Curricular Activities) and Sports quota. Every year, this 5% intake has many students who come through the dramatics

[14] Comes from the Hindi word *jugaad* which means improvisational innovation within very modest means – makeshift, low-cost solutions for big problems.

ECA quota after one or two rounds of auditioning. In some colleges under the University, through their academic year, these ECA quota students find themselves pressurized or obligated to take part in the dramatics societies or debating societies or the dance societies and so forth and be active members of their annual activity. The institution might not directly be pressurizing them, but it is not uncommon for ECA quota students to have more of an obligation towards cultural clubs than other students. While the institution does not really have great interest in the cultural production of students within its premises, by providing student theatre workers a space, however tentative, to rehearse in, and at least as a lip service having an attendance exemption and minimal travel expenses for the ones who tour with their productions, the institution gives benevolent and progressive support to theatre groups within colleges. But it must be understood clearly that none of these progressive steps are easy to implement – reimbursements are almost always barred, low-attendance of ECA students is left unaddressed, causing a problem in promotion to the next year – and often results in further harassment and alienation of collegiate theatre groups by the institution.

The collegiate theatre scene really becomes a "circuit" during the inter-college festivals in which there are intense theatre competitions. These competitions are held in the institution's premises and with the money of either the institution itself (which is very rare) or the commercial sponsors (which are mostly the case) who have agreed to sponsor the event only based on the name and

credibility of the institution itself[15]. The prizes, when won by college teams, are feathers in the cap not so much of the student theatreworkers themselves but of the college they represent. In a setup like Delhi University, where there is an annual high-competition scramble to get admissions and attain the impossible "cut-off" marks in Board Examinations, the name of the college becomes a marker for many things – status, economic wherewithal, political ideology – and students increasingly identify themselves with the unique image of each college. The institution has a rather loose and relatively unconnected relationship with the cultural production of its student community, but there exists a broad *quid pro quo* into the relationship – dedicated quality cultural production by the students and accolades for the institution in return of the power and currency that the name of the college wields among their student peers – to ensure its institutional hegemony over the subjects. This means that the leash that the institution has on the theatre sensibility of students is a rather long and loose one, but it would not fail to tighten when questions of censorship arise. This relationship of insidious give and take is the premise for cultural production within the collegiate space of Delhi University.

The space directly beyond the direct panoptical reach of the institution is the campus. Cultural production within Delhi University, with its calculated and strategic distance from the center of institutional power, sits squarely within the geography of the campus, that relatively free,

[15] A case in point is the relatively high budgets of the Shri Ram College of Commerce annual festival. SRCC is one of the premier commerce colleges of the university and because of the corporate content of its course and the academic records of the students, they manage to attract high profile corporate sponsors, aspiring employers of the students. The fest is also attended by popular Bollywood actors who come to publicize their newest releases: http://dubeat.com/2015/02/star-cast-movie-badlapur-visits-srcc-four-colleges-delhi-university/

recreational space produced often structurally by the institution itself as its extension – a sort of friendly annexure to give students their "space", much like the ubiquitous table tennis room in hostels. The ideas pervading through the fabric of the collegiate sensibility is also specifically campus[16], the audience is the campus and the theatrepersons are also from within the campus. To extend this argument, it also true that through the exploration of the campus sensibility, collegiate theatre also produces the campus as much as it derives itself from it. There is no specific geographical location of the campus apart from being defined by its exclusion from the institution space. But, as the everyday social space of students, teachers and other staff, it presents itself in canteens, rehearsal spaces, cigarette shops outside colleges, common rooms, college lawns, staff rooms, union rooms, corridors, sports complexes, hostel rooms etc, spaces which might be deeply embedded within the physical geography of the institution, but are autonomous spaces in their own right because of the conversations and cultural productions they host, the "after-hours" activities which are very often critical of the institution. These spaces have now expanded to also include the cyberspaces and other online spaces that are chosen to document these actual moments of the campus space. A certain consciousness pervades these spaces, which prompts students to appropriate them as their spaces which are relatively more accessible and malleable than the classroom or administrative spaces around the institution. Having said that, a great deal of repurposing also happens with spaces such as classrooms and

[16] Used to denote a sensibility and not a physical space.

lecture halls, as students use them for rehearsals, meetings and other such activities, thereby undoing the pre-existent power structures that pervade these spaces. One of the common practices within DU students is taking over spaces immediately outside the periphery of the college walls as smoking areas, within a campus that has a blanket ban on smoking and substance abuse. In Miranda House, a women's college in the North Campus of the university, the students have consciously taken over a patch of the peripheral garden outside the hostel entrance, right next to the official No Smoking notice board, as their preferred *chai-sutta*[17] point. The "*Sutta* Point" is a ubiquitous phenomenon across many colleges within the University, a social space that stretches the permissible limits of good conduct and allows the breaking of rule and law in a manner of outright rejection of, rather than contestation and negotiation with, the institution. Very often the institution attempts to bring these lost peripheral spaces back into the official fold, such as through painting it or giving it a distinct institutional identity, as was seen by the Miranda House students when the board was erected sometime in 2009, long after the bench beside the hostel entrance had become the preferred *Sutta*-Point. But these spaces are next to impossible to "rehabilitate", as they firmly belong to the ephemeral geography of the campus. This consciousness of a claimed space is supplemented by a constitution of the time in which these spaces present themselves—the lawns might be out of bounds during the day, but in the evening they are to be appropriated for rehearsals, meeting, chats and smoking sessions. The

[17] Tea-Cigarette

after-school nature of these activities is important because in many colleges, formal spaces of instruction such as auditoriums or lecture halls are inaccessible after the official working hours, which is why students are obligated to take over and repurpose spaces such as abandoned classrooms, hostel common rooms, stairway landings, fields and lawns. It can be argued that this consciousness of the spatial and temporal elements of "campus" is in itself a political consciousness that facilitates the students' understanding of their relationship with institutions and the ideas that come out of such spatial and temporal zones continuously question and negotiate with the geography of the institution.

What does it mean to actively produce and be produced by the campus? Delhi University theatre productions, over the course of their fairly long and patchy history, have agreed upon a repertoire, a common vocabulary, a pool of messages, texts, visuals, thematics, dramaturgy, work ethic and symbolism that is, to use a contemporary coinage, "open source" – easily accessible by anyone entering the world of collegiate theatre. It is really an "entering", an initiation, as, like DU itself, the college theatre circuit is also extremely exclusive. But that does not stop them from being a popular and well-accepted tool of cultural expression amongst students of the campus. This theatre is a thriving and extremely popular alternative to the professional theatre scene of the city, controlled and practiced by "culturecrats" of Delhi, often equipped with degrees from the National School of Drama and strong sponsorships (in the words of a fellow-collegiate theatre practitioner, "Socialite theatre"), showing in professional

performance venues such as Kamani auditorium or Shri Ram Center. The plays of the campus often provide critical commentary on public debates particularly popular with the canteen-going crowd and their choice of "socially relevant" themes or scripts traces the world of student activism and their engagement and understanding of their socio-political situation. Women's colleges are generally known for their use of feminist themes in productions, often talking about violence against women and custodial rape (*Qaid,* Gargi College, 2009; *Iron,* Miranda House, 2007), honour killings (*In the Name of Honour,* Maitreyee College, 2009), sexual abuse (*Eight*, LSR, 2006) etc. The theatre society of Hansraj college has performed scripts with critical commentary on the issue of sexuality such as V*agina Monologues* (2007) *Seven Steps Around the Fire* (2008). St. Stephens college, on the other hand produces plays through its Shakespeare Society, an exclusively English theatre society which holds an annual production of a Shakespeare script and works on light comedies such as *The Problem* (2009) or *Nothing Will Happen Between Us* (2007). Sri Venkateswara College, from South Campus is very well known for their slapstick comedies such as *God* (2007) and *McWho* (2008).

It is true that in terms of form and content Delhi University theatre leaves a lot to be desired, and often their representations of "social issues" merely reiterate formulaic representations of similar material within mass media without significant critical insight. In terms of the internal workings of the theatre organizations themselves there are huge lacunae – these are exclusive and often structurally violent and unfair organizations. The internal divides and fissures of the collegiate

theatre world, especially along the lines of proscenium theatre and street theatre and English theatre and Hindi theatre throw up larger issues of differences in cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) among students and the privileging of English education within a postcolonial scenario. In spite of the fairly obvious problems within the campus sensibility, the keen consciousness that student theatre activists acquire of their own space and time within the preexisting schedule of college life through campus theatre is indeed a *political* reconfiguration of their relationship to the system and while it broadly escapes being recognized as legitimate political involvement[18], it shapes to a great extent the political consciousness that pervades the student community of Delhi University. In his 2004 book *Politics of the Governed*, Partha Chatterjee discusses the divergence in postcolonial democracy between the civil society and political society, the former being a mode of engagement with democratic governmental authority through civic and legal structures according to the principles of Enlightenment democratic values and universal citizenship, and the latter being a means of political engagement, mainly by the subalterns within democracy through ways which are paralegal and do not fit into permissible modes of engagement with authority. The change in the relationship of the students with the institution's physical space through their practice of theatre can be analysed through the frame of this political society, which is also invoked during small-scale university-centric protests that speak of the concern regarding the shrinkage of the space and time of the campus.

[18] As in, participation in an representational democratic scenario

Productions of The Campus: Producing Transformative Space And Time

The "campus" as an idea has come to India through an exposure to American Ivy-League vocabulary[19]. The conception of a "campus space" is actively produced through the work of the residents of the campus. The kind of "work" that is explored in this research is primarily campus theatre and college-centric student struggles around issues that pertain only to studenthood, such as canteen prices or photocopy machine replacements. Through this kind of work, which is largely not geared towards production and falls within the purview of leisure and recreation, the students produce the space of the campus, a space which is also not production-oriented, unlike the institution which participates actively in the production of knowledge and the professionalization of its students. The campus space superscribes the strict panoptical architecture of the institution (Foucault, 1995) during such work. When students take over classroom spaces or lawns for rehearsals after college hours, the relationship that the institutional space has with the students is greatly altered, giving rise to another kind of space, the campus space. The campus space, while being a conceptual space, also has physical, planned, and most importantly, lived manifestations. At the same time it is true that these manifestations defy easy demarcations. These manifestations make this space more of an ethos, a tactile atmosphere. This space travels from place to place across the architecture of the institution and is produced

[19] The use of the term "campus" has been attributed to Princeton University during the 18th Century, and campus as an ethos seems to have come from Medieval European Universities, with students and teachers staying together and studying together within the same precinct.

specifically through social relations and political alliances that are produced through interactions between the individual and collective bodies of students. The kind of space that is culled out of the institution by the world of collegiate dramatics is such as space.

While almost every institution under the edifice of Delhi University has some sort of involvement in theatre, be it inter-collegiate competitive theatre or exposure to iconic texts through literature courses, none of the many dramatics societies inhabiting the college ethos have a regimented space or time in which they do their work. Instead, their theatrework happens with the ephemeral spatio-temporal arrangements of the campus. The institutional understanding of "work" carried out by students is primarily their academic duties, the resource that the institution provides them with, which then is assumed as their primary connection to the institution. Yet, for the students involved in collegiate theatre, the rigorous rehearsals that take up their time after hours is as much of hard work as attending lectures, sometimes even more. These rehearsals and discussions take place in spaces that are mostly not geared towards such usage – foyers, corridors, lawns, classrooms, hostels and gazebos. Thus the student theatre practitioners of Delhi University engage with the edifice of the institution through alternative times and spaces, that which are outside the ambit of the spatial and temporal schedule of college education. In conversations with many theatrepersons involved with the theatre circuit of Delhi University, I found that there is a distinct sense that their involvement with collegiate theatre to a large extent has shaped their identities as students in the relatively difficult social setup of college, a huge

jump academically after school education in the country. In this sense, for many theatreworkers working within DU, theatre practice *takes precedence* over their academic duties as university students, radically changing their experience of higher education.

Henri Lefebvre in his book *Production of Space* (1991) argues for the understanding of space as an entity that is directly linked to the modes of production that underlie a specific society, because it is not just the site for the existence of the same, but is produced through the labour that comes out of the specific mode of production. He effectively brings the idea of spatiality and geography out of the much disreputed realm of superstructure and posits that while space might be a naturalized, given entity, one can only read it politically in terms of the social relations that it engineers, which is based on the prevalent mode of production.

> *"Space is never produced in the sense that a kilogram of sugar or a yard of cloth is produced. Nor is it an aggregate of the places and locations of such products as sugar, wheat or cloth. Does it then come into being after the fashion of a superstructure? Again, no. It would be more accurate to say that it is at once a precondition and a result of social superstructures….Though a product to be used, to be consumed, it is also a means of production; network of exchange and flows of raw materials and energy fashion space and is determined by it."* (Lefebvre, 1991)

Through a thorough survey of the representations and understandings of the schema of space in philosophy and mathematics, Lefebvre broadens the conceptual understanding of space into a three wide manifestations which find a certain unity through labour. The argument is for perceived spaces, conceived spaces and lived spaces—the first being the most visible, tactile spaces around us that are made and used, the second, the conceptual spaces of cartographers, mathematicians and rulers of nations and the last and the most interesting, spaces that are both real and imagined, spaces that are hafted through lived experiences and memories that are associated with them. The campus within Delhi University student life is one such lived space that predicates itself on and also becomes an alternative mode of production of knowledge. In its alternative understanding of how a student's day is constituted spatially and temporally, to a great extent revising her ideas of work and leisure, the campus is a lived politics of space that gets expressed through social relations, situations and interactions such as the ubiquitous rehearsal. Operating within the institutional architectural edifice, but expertly superimposing it with its own ideas on how to use this space for studenthood-centered activities that are not always necessarily permitted by rules or fit into the larger idea of academic production, the campus produces a certain alternative meaning, an alternative epistemology of the institution that enables students to claim it as their own on their own spatial and temporal terms.

The special temporality of the campus space, being an ephemeral space that is produced by the work of the students, comes from the understanding of the student's work, in this case, theatre

and its rehearsal, within the temporal arrangement of a student's workday. On an average, student theatreworkers of DU spend 3-4 hours every day, sometimes including weekends (when the rehearsals are longer), in rehearsal. The rehearsal is a process that starts as early as September – October[20] for many college societies (the festival season is kicked off by the annual cultural festival of IIT Delhi in October) – and goes on till April, following which the annual exams are held in the university. An activity that takes place in various places within the institution, after the academic working day is over, the rehearsal becomes the most important social-cultural activity for a majority of theatreworkers within the university, who would have to forgo other recreational activities in favour of this. The rehearsal in Delhi University has a general structure, with variations within specific collegiate contexts and nature of the production[21]. It begins with a shared warm-up session in the duration of which the entire cast and crew of a particular production gathers in the rehearsal space. The warm up sessions start out with the ubiquitous random walk, used by every theatre society in the university, where actors are instructed by the leader of the warm up session, mostly the director of a particular play, to walk across the rehearsal space, occupying space, at varying speeds, sometimes running, sometimes crawling, with different intentionalities such as catching a train or running from a dog or carrying a heavy load, hopping on one leg, acting like an animal etc. The random walk

[20] Academic term for DU starts in July every year.
[21] Street theatre and proscenium theatre rehearsals are quite different. In this research I look at rehearsals for proscenium productions.

exercise starts formally as a study in walking postures, chin up, making eye-contact with passers-by and a lesson in blocking and balancing the number of people on stage at the same time through an equal spread of bodies across the space. This balance is an important aspect because in the random walk, like in the rest of the rehearsal, the ensemble and group work become the main priority, superseding either the presence or the body of the individual actor on stage. While the random walk starts in a formal fashion, very soon it becomes a joke, with increasingly ridiculous orders coming from the leader – "*chase each other like dogs*", "*walk with your noses to the ground*", "*act like you have ants up your pants*" [22] -- and the exercise ends in chaos and laughter. It is important to understand that this is the case with most exercises during rehearsals in DU – many of them have become part of the collegiate rehearsal through formal channels of instructions such as workshops by NSD graduates and sessions by well-known professional theatre directors[23], but over the course of the rehearsal, have become a part of the collegiate sensibility of irreverence for structured learning and lampooning of professional education. Some exercises used in rehearsal sessions are common across colleges, such as the walk, the machine, the hot-seat, the vocal orchestra. The machine is an exercise that ostensibly builds team coordination, where one person starts a repetitive action compounded by a specific repetitive

[22] Direct quotes from an LSR rehearsal session

[23] Many college societies organise masterclasses with recent graduates of NSD for training in mostly Realist modes of acting. Some colleges such as Miranda House, St. Stephens, LSR, Kamala Nehru College have an annual, month-long production oriented workshop by an invited director, which is called a PP or a public performance. Invited directors have included stalwarts like Mahesh Dattani, Feisal Alkazi, M K Raina and Habib Tanvir. This is mostly an institution funded program, often ticketed for the larger public.

sound, and one by one others join in with their own actions and sounds, maintaining one point of contact with the previous person. This results in a working "machine" made of coordinated actions and sounds, a giant locomotive of human bodies. Machine is used an exercise to create tableaus and moments to showcase ensembles on stage. Hot-seat is an exercise in psychological realism, where an actor playing a character is made to sit in the middle of a circle with the rest of the group asking the character all sorts of questions regarding her past, her future plans, the foods that she likes to eat etc. This is an exercise that theatre societies use to work on character building and identification to the character by the actors. While each of the exercises might have a specific function, during the rehearsal, all of them work in a fairly unstructured manner, mainly for the purposes of being an engaging way of spending time together as a theatre group. The time that is spent together becomes a time that is outside the purview of the academic workday, not only because it happens in the evening after classes are over, but also because unlike the academic work that is oriented towards training students towards employability or higher studies, the theatre work within theatre societies does not directly prevail upon the productivity of the student. It is in a sense unproductive work, because of the disproportionate time dedicated to rehearsals in relation with actual showings. The showings are all non-ticketed and no money is made from doing collegiate theatre. Cash prizes in competitions, in spite of being increased over the years[24], mostly get divided among the entire cast and crew. Economically as well as

[24] Some of the professional colleges outside DU, such as National Law School Bangalore or IIT Bombay give as

temporally, collegiate theatre remains amateur theatre, following Nicholas Ridout's (2003) understanding of amateurism.

> *"Even if romantic anti-capitalism might long to locate its "good community" beyond capitalism itself, and to seek relief from alienation in an exit from its logics, it is almost always obliged to make do with what it can make within them. Something of this predicament is captured in the word amateur. On the one hand, the amateur acts out of love, in what Marx calls "the realm of freedom," making an unconditional commitment that affirms its own autonomy. On the other hand, the amateur also acts in relation to "the realm of necessity," her activity constantly defined in opposition either to the work of the "professional" who makes her living from theatre, or to the work she herself does to make her own living.*

Drawing from Mauricio Lazzarato's understanding of the transformation of labour from manual work to services rendered in the contemporary late capitalist society which has changed with the proliferation of information technology, it can be argued that academic work within the university is "immaterial labour", that labour which "*produces informational and cultural content of the commodity*". In this case the commodity is the trained professional, the student

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much as 1 lakh rupees as cash prizes, making these coveted festivals to attend for DU students, who are offered anything between Rs 3000 in a college like Miranda House to Rs 10,000 in SRCC.

herself, who, according to the WTO pact mentioned in the introductory paragraph of this chapter, becomes a tradable good. The theatre that the student does, does not fit into this rubric of labour either, as it is not growing the marketability of the student in any way. In their 2004 book *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have developed a concept of "affective labour", which encompasses labour that produces or generates affect and emotion. While Hardt and Negri speak of *"the work of legal assistants, flight attendants, and fast food workers (service with a smile)"*, is it possible to say that theatre works by students are in any way affective labour? While this kind of work indeed does produce affect, in terms of deep friendships, understanding of social issues and satisfaction with creative work, the affect produced is outside and in excess of the circuit of production of the neoliberal university. In the Human Resource Development Department of the Government of India 2010 newsletter, in the editorial essay, then education minister Kapil Sibal wrote about the need for vocationalizing education, stating "*Corporate sector is showing increasing interest in education sector because they required skilled manpower. A Bill to consider permitting Foreign Educational Institutions is already introduced in the Parliament*." The priority to open up the higher educational sector to foreign funding and the establishment of foreign universities has already led to an unmistakable move towards privatized universities such as Ashoka and O.P. Jindal Law School within Delhi, with vastly increased tuition fees and repackaging of education within the vocabulary of "skill development". In this context, amateurism becomes a political

tool that holds on to the unprofessional character of certain spaces within the campus, such as collegiate theatre. While many collegiate theatreworkers later on go to NSD and pursue professional acting training, within DU, amateurism breaks the temporal dominance of the workday of neoliberal education through critical leisure.

The temporality of these bursts of transformative space on campus is strong in the challenge to institutionally divided time. Campus is a time-space and just like the space element within it, the temporality of the campus is impossible to demarcate. It emerges through a sensibility that rears its head around the institution space not only during institutionally demarcated times of leisure such as lunch breaks, after hours or off periods, but also in an impromptu fashion between classes in canteen-like spaces and even within lecture times shooting through classroom spaces. The institution provides a structure for the work and leisure paradigm naturalized within a late capitalist world, with structured class timings and even off periods and practice periods within DU, which are specifically demarcated for pursuing "extra-curricular activities" such as theatre. This works itself into the annual calendar of the institution, which becomes the official paternalistic patron of the arts. But there are temporalities within this structure which are outside the direct or active jurisdiction of the institution. The most important temporality is the afterhours. It is a time that is outside institutional surveillance and because it is a considerable chunk of the evening and night, during which rehearsals often take place, it has a structure of its own which does not involve the idea of "time-thrift" (Thompson, 1967) that E P Thompson

speaks of in context of schools in newly industrialized towns in his essay *Time, Work-discipline and Industrial Capitalism* (1967). Time is not consumed or spent as such as a commodity as the activity that the temporality centers around is not geared towards consumption. Nightlong sojourns of many theatre clubs in DU become important social spaces and times because of the relatively temporally free schedule that nighttime offer, along with promises of material of socialization such as alcohol or marijuana. Nighttime also transforms the space of the institution, not just in appearance, but in affect, as bodies in leisure are bound to react differently to the same physical surroundings that they face while working. A great deal of rule breaking also happens during the night, with endless graffiti and defacement sessions that bring forth the spatial and temporal importance of nighttime within the category of the campus. Within classes and lecture times as well students steal moments of temporal flexibility when they text each other or gather around the toilets or make a din. Even in the smallest of bending of the schedule of the class, it is possible to eke out a political time in which students have the autonomy to while away their own time or have a sense of ownership over it. With temporal arrangements such as semesterisation and the Four Year Undergraduate Program (subsequently revoked) hitting Delhi University's undergraduate program, the temporal spaces within the campus has been directly under threat with a substantial rise in coursework and a consequent dip in the time demarcated for leisure.

The spatiality and temporality that the campus generates, that of relative freedom and amateur unstructuredness, is directly threatened, then, by broad overhauls in the architecture of the

college, such as the project that happened during the Commonwealth Games in Delhi in 2010 when many of the collegiate hostels were used for the accommodation of foreign delegates. In their effort to redo the city of Delhi according to what were purportedly international standards, the government of the city intervened in the social geographies of the city, its universities and in effect the campus spaces, including the free-to-modify hostel rooms, bathrooms and common rooms of institutions[25]. The rooms were demarcated specific geographies, with beds and bedside lamps rigidly placed (actually nailed to the floor!) according to a hotel-like aesthetic, vehemently cutting into the vibrant social life and campus sensibility of the DU hostel. The bathrooms of Miranda House hostel, one student commented, had overnight been overhauled, into five-star facilities, with lockers and towel shelves, and even the Indian style toilets were being changed to accommodate Western style commodes and expensive fittings. There was a sense within some students of having been undervalued as residents of the same space for so long and never having been important enough to warrant a world-class home makeover. On the other hand, this new international hotel aesthetic was quite disorienting and changed intimate social spaces like bathrooms and bedrooms in to spaces of luxury and privilege, a change that students used to abysmal standards of living were visibly uncomfortable with. The much needed replenishment of resources was appreciated at first, but the ensuing eviction of students from the hostels proved to

[25] While this article speaks of students happy with the facelift the hostels got, the eventual eviction during the Games proved to be a trying situation for students living on a tight budget.
http://www.hindustantimes.com/newdelhi/games-silver-lining-new-hostels-at-du/article1-615638.aspx

be completely unacceptable[26]. While this to a large extent could be read on the one hand as a misdirected attempt at "organizing" a potentially chaotic living space such as a hostel, and on the other as a conscious decision to 'fix' the dynamic and transformable architecture of the insides of a hostel room, this measure was seen as an extremely suspicious move by a small group of students who started holding regular meetings in and around the North Campus of Delhi University, mostly in the Delhi School of Economics Canteen, in order to discuss the upcoming Commonwealth Games and the rapid changes that were being implemented in the city. The meetings were being held through July, the admission month for DU, and matters had come to a head when the university authorities had unfairly issued a decision requiring students to vacate their hostel rooms in order to accommodate the Games delegates. This has apparently happened without appropriately prior notice given to the students who were faced with a tremendous predicament once they arrived in the city. In spite of stating that each and every student had been written to, institutional heads in the North Campus were being approached by this group, calling themselves the University Community for Democracy, demanding specific dates of the letter of intimation, formal consent from the students and other details about the incident. After the commencement of the annual academic session, the meetings eventually gave way to a protest and a relay hunger strike in August 2010[27].The lead up to the Commonwealth Games was being viewed with great suspicion in various quarters of the city, and the efforts of the University

[26] http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/students-pay-high-rents-as-pgs-cashin-on-du-hostel-eviction/1/106112.html
[27] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ksDfIXr8o7k: A series of videos documenting the protest.

Community for Democracy became a part of the larger tide of critique against the games and uneven urban development that it had caused[28]. As movements go, this could hardly live up to the historical precedent that movements within the literature on student movements had set. In fact, the small-scale intervention that this research finds the most interesting aspect of this movement mostly remained in the forms of irregular meetings that started as democratic discussions about the shrinking of campus spaces and inevitably became populated and dominated by members of campus political parties and their electoral politics rhetoric. In an email conversation with Malay Firoz, an ex-student of Kirori Mal College and a theatreworker, who had been a part of the meetings along with the present researcher, there was a detailed discussion about the potential of such movements to be hijacked by hollow political rhetoric from Left parties which post Nandigram[29] had started sounding hollow. Here is an extract from Malay's stand on the issue.

> *"I too have had a problem with the overuse of a particular kind of political vocabulary, as if to assume that it is universally shared across the spectrum of people one is attempting to mobilise. However, the issue is not one of whether the political language is 'tainted' with the blood of Nandigram violence. All political movements have a darker history of conciliations and*

[28] One of the many articles about protests against the Games in Delhi: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/othersports/commonwealthgames/8034158/Commonwealth-Games-2010-Indians-burn-effigy-of-Games-chief-executive-Mike-Hooper.html

[29] http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/2007-Nandigram+violence:+A+state+of+failure/1/76403.html

compromises to precisely the forms of injustice they are manifestly committed against. This is no more true of Communism (vis-a-vis Stalinism) as it is also true of Welfare Capitalism (vis-a-vis Corporatocracy). It would therefore be counter-productive to say that one has to abandon the theoretical and methodological apparatus provided by Marxism only because certain Communist movements have gone awry. Indeed, logically speaking, there is no necessary reason to say that Marxist concepts are intrinsically and causally related to Nandigram violence, or that they lose their intellectual value and rigour only because those who perpetrated Nandigram also used them. To say that would fall into the familiar postmodernist trap: that modernist notions of 'reason' are tainted with the blood of the 20th century, so let's abandon 'reason' altogether and revel in relativistic alterity.

My problem, instead, has to do more with the imperatives of political strategy. Politics is like drama in a number of senses: it is theatrical, it is performative, and it always needs an audience. Like drama, therefore, any political movement has to have a keen awareness of the audience it performs to. The use of a Marxist vocabulary for mobilisation can often be alienating if it operates unaware that the its target audience does not necessarily share

that vocabulary, or even worse, that it has been conditioned by the mainstream ideological environment we occupy to dismiss such a vocabulary outright. Reaching out to such an apolitical segment then requires diluting the intellectually located nature of that vocabulary into one that is more familiar and democratically available to a wider audience. That may be regarded by many as 'selling out'. Indeed, in this perspective I have been attacked for attempting to be "neutral on a moving train" (cf. Zinn), for compromising on my political inheritance for the sake of the "indoctrinated masses". And to this I reply that if those "indoctrinated masses" are the people we need in order to build a movement, then we have to speak to them in their own language. To insist on speaking our language, on casually throwing around references of a specifically Communist flavour, would then amount to political self-absorption, as it would satisfy only our own self-congratulations and be counter-productive to the actual task of mobilisation…..

This conversation is not only important as a part of the sporadic documentation of the movement against the hostel evictions during the Commonwealth Games, but is also a witness to the discussions around *what* brand of politics the campus endorses and the problem of assuming

solidarities through an accepted political language, which here Malay poses as a kind of "theatre", with a certain kind of repertoire, audiences and expectations. The idea of the campus as a space that is constantly under threat from not only market forces and the institution, representing the development of hostels and other campus spaces, but also from a sort of oversaturated Leftist rhetoric and ideologically bankrupt mother-parties is rife in the conversation. However, the language of political meetings and relay hunger strikes in this case opens up the campus space only as referential to larger electoral and democratic politics of the country, failing to actually keep alive the immediacy of the lived experience of changed hostel rooms and a general alienation from the institutional surroundings.

This was achieved with great potency in Kirori Mal College's 2010 theatre production *Class Enemy*. In 2010, with the ongoing protests against the Commonwealth Games, and the employment of many students as volunteers for the Games, Delhi University had been deeply involved in various ways with the functioning of the event. In this context, honestly not too many campus productions were critiquing the Games. There was a popular spoof performed by the students of LSR for their College Day production on the subject of the Commonwealth Games, but it was *Class Enemy* that managed to register the protest against the surfacial facelift that the city and the university had undertone during that year. The original play text, written by Nigel Williams, was published in 1978 as a testimony to the rise of violence and aggression among the youth of Britain. The play, set in a classroom in poor, small-town Britain, was populated by

unforgettable characters—young students who had had to choose a life of delinquency due to their social disenfranchisement. Williams wrote the play in the context of a sense of anarchy flowing through the British youth at the time, with the rise of the punk movement being a significant influence on a lot of young people. The broader political context was that of Thatcherism, with trade unions and the working class being systematically attacked and disempowered by the state. As Nigel Williams has said in many interviews[30], the nation was becoming ungovernable and there was an overwhelming sense of class conflict. In this kind of a context, the play explored the meaninglessness of an educational system which had given up on its wards. The text performed by The Players, the dramatics society of Kirori Mal College was a Hindi translation of Williams's work, done by members of the society. The premise was transported to a municipal school in a working-class neighborhood of a changing Delhi. The cast was a group of six boys. It was interesting to see how the student theatreworkers had interpreted Williams's play and incorporated the problems that the city of Delhi was facing at the moment into the script. The tone was that of irreverence and *gaalis*, and insults were the normal mode of speech, often peppered with casual misogyny and dehumanization. Here is an excerpt from the directorial note at the beginning of the Hindi script.

"….Our adaptation re-locates the setting to a municipal school in a working-class area of Delhi. We have aimed to create a 'real space' by being truthful

[30] As seen in one of these interviews, to CNN, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYAz2s1OPEc

to the speech and behavior patterns of our character types, in the hope that audiences, bred on expectations of decorum on the stage, will not unduly focus on these at the risk of missing the larger picture. After all, violation of artistic decorum is a small price to pay given the larger violence committed when we marginalize and silence the underprivileged…"

Class Enemy was a significant performance within the life of the campus space within Delhi University, specifically the North Campus, because in many senses it represented and critiqued the administrative changes that the institution implemented during the Commonwealth Games in a textual and performative language that was potentially politically subversive, beyond the "*particular kind of political vocabulary*" that Malay had spoken of in the previous section. The performance and direction of the performance was consistently playing with the idea of space and time as factors which shaped the experience of education among students. The entire play was set within a typical school day, with the narrative centering around a group of male students simply waiting for teachers to arrive. In the constant inflow and outflow of parts of the group, some leaving to find the teacher, some coming back from their breaks, the classroom had been recreated as a liminal space, not only because of the physical entry and exit of the players but also the constant reference to the lives of the characters outside the classroom space, specifically referring in this case to working class backgrounds and the structural violence that engulfed a

working class existence within the urban space of Delhi. This was an extremely important aspect of the performance for many reasons. To begin with, the changing demography of the student body in DU, which to a large extent challenged the otherwise rigidly meritocratic, elite system of the university, especially with a vast population of outstation students coming in, and a review and revision of reservations within higher education institutions[31], brought in the representation of alternative narratives about the educational experience, critically negotiating with the elite space of the central university as well as the high cultural capital pervasive within collegiate proscenium theatre. While this was true, it would also be unjustified to unwittingly glorify the attempt of representation of working class bodies by relatively privileged performer bodies of students. In *Class Enemy*, as was the case with many campus productions, there was an attempt at empathizing with "causes", the pressure of declassing and the burden of representing a class other, which hit the same roadblock that the movement against the Commonwealth Games hit as a political moment. In a conversation with Gandharv Dewan, one of the directors of the play, I developed some insight into the production process. Gandharv, who was an English speaking, upper class "brat" (direct quote) graduated from Modern School, one of the premier private schools in Delhi, had experienced a paradigm shift in terms of his perceptions about theatre when he had joined Kirori Mal College. The "*attention to detail*" that was valued within the dramatics society of KMC had pushed Gandharv towards realism and an interest in a very carefully

[31] http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/supreme-court-upholds-law-for-27-obc-quota/article1237256.ece

planned and directed form of performance. He had chanced upon the Nigel Williams script while he was reading Marx in his English literature course, and before the rehearsal process started, he instructed the cast to visit suburban Delhi such as Trilokpuri and other such neighbourhoods and observe people for appropriate body language and posturing. There was a clear sense that the actors needed to embody and portray those who were Others. On the other hand, what was a highly potent aspect of the performance was that in spite of the element of posturing and the actors unselfconsciously being lower-class impostors, in its performance the play had strong element of subversion. The performative category of waiting on stage was one such element. The bodies of the students that waited for ever for their teachers to arrive to start the class eventually got bored and started a performance within a performance, playing the teacher to the rest of the classroom. The workshopping and improvisational process that helped the actors prepare for this temporal challenge was a exercise devised by Gandharv, where the cast would be locked up in a room for six to seven hours at a stretch and would need to find ways of communication other than speech. Aside from the lock on the door, metaphorically this was a typical campus theatre situation, where students would find new solidarities that denoted a break from the general language of student politics within the university. This part of the play was successful in creating the typically campus sensibility of the rehearsal as a space within the campus – a space of recreation, pleasurable cultural production and unruly loitering that engaged the students in a certain kind of work which did not fit the category of academic production or productivity and

would be considered strictly "extra-curricular"[32]. This new category of performative space and time that was produced at this moment in a play that was a radical manifestation of the campus as a spatially and temporally ephemeral entity that was produced through a moment of recreational and pleasurable "hanging out" and rebelliousness among students, i.e. the social relations that inhabited this produced space (Lefebvre, 1991). It was within this ephemeral and short lived campus moment that the larger socio-political problems of class, economic disenfranchisement, urban angst and the overall makeover of the education system received an outlet which moved from the referential politics[33] of traditionally Left protest movements into the realm of a bodily experience of disgust, discomfort and exclusion–a lived experience of political disenfranchisement that was true to the context of the university student, that necessitated the beginning of radical thought.

In terms of the acting style of the play, Gandharv was particularly interested in psychological realism, following the method of acting established by Constantin Stanislavski. While the initial exercise of visiting working class neighbourhoods and studying people had helped the actors get a perspective on the disenfranchisement of the urban poor, especially in the context of the Commonwealth Games, the changing metropolis, and the human cost of urban development, it was excercises such as the Hot-seat (spoken of earlier in the research) and the social relations

[32] Extra-curricular: not only in terms of the work happening in the afterhours, but also the dialectic relationship of this work with the work that students are expected to do within the contemporary university setup

[33] Referring to a class which would not necessarily be the class identity of the spokeperson or ideologue, as opposed to the self-evidence of the student as a resident of the campus – the break experienced in the anti-Commonwealth Games protests.

within their theatre society that helped them develop their characters the best. For example, Gandharv, the director, had found his own high cultural capital to be a personal attribute that he had needed to question thoroughly during his first months as a part of the KMC theatre society. A feeling of being a part of the group yet being different in many ways was one of his chief prompts in his portrayal of the character Deepu, a schoolboy from a working class background with aspirations of respectability. In another example, Shwetaabh Singh, the second director, had played Veeru, the bully and leader of the group, drawing from his experience of leading the society as its acting president. Their experiences of their specific social roles within the campus space was what had provided them with their sense of identification with the characters. KMC had performed two very similar plays in the previous two years, *Holi* and *Line Mein Lago*, with a similar all-boys cast and a minimalist stage.[34]The repertoire of these two plays had stayed on with the campus audience, to the point that there was a generic expectation from *Class Enemy*, along with a generic tag of "*launda* natak" (dude play) that it got from students of the campus. Gandharv mentioned that this expectation from the audiences would shape each performance of the play, often superimposing over the original directorial intent. For example, on the topic of the humour in the play, there would be unprecedented laughter at a particular joke –

All: Namaste sir!

[34]*Holi* was based on a Mahesh Elkunchwar script about an incident of escalated violence among a group of boys within a college, while *Line Mein Lago* was an adaptation of Nigel Williams' *Line 'em*, about a group of truckers sitting on a protest on the eve of an army siege.

Pyaare: Aaj hum padhenge bilogy ke baare mein. (Giggles in the group) Ab dekho, aise koi nahasega nahin varna main bhi hans padoonga! Bilogy bahot hi khubsurat chij hai.Dhyaan dena iss baat par. Hum sab iss duniya mein aate hain bilogy ki vajah se! Ek baarkya hota hai… ek kaala aadmi — matlab katai hi kaala aadmi — ek gori aurat — matlabkatai gori aurat — ke saath bilogy kare hai. Voh bhi naarangi condom ke saath. Tohbatao balaakon, is experiment ka rejult, yani balak, kaunse rang ka hoga?

Jhantu: Naarangi!

Naatu: Black and white!

Pyaare: Abey soch kart toh bolo!

Deepu: Sahi mein bhai. Kala aadmi, gori aurat. Saavlan hoga ji.

Pyaare: Abey — jab condom laga rakha hoga toh baalak kahan se paida hoga!

This was not supposed to be a joke at all. In fact through the deployment of many such "jokes", the directors and the actors was trying to critically expose the limitations of sexual humour and sex jokes which were common within the repertoire of the all-male plays that KMC was associated with. The following lines were a proof:

Veeru: O Master! Tum sirf bakchodi kar rahe ho.

Pyaare: Bhai achcha joke toh tha!

Veeru: Kya achcha joke tha be? Saalon, joke sunne baithe hain hum yahan? Bhai jara masteron

ki tarah bhi padha de.

The cast was trying to achieve an honesty in their representation of the working class, not by posturing as working class bodies (which could have easily happened following the field trip exercise), but by exposing their own existences within the campus space as their own subjective psychological realities which superscribed the socio-political and class identities of the characters themselves. The stage design was minimal, populated by six broken desks and six old chairs gathered from the old furniture inventory at KMC. "*We wanted to portray our psychological reality through the set. There could not have been another chair or another desk from another context that could take the place of one of those props*", asserted Gandharv. The immediate point of reference for the audience, then, was not that of school, but of their college, and it was immediately clear that the play was about them. The limits of propriety within a classroom setup was frequently destroyed through the play, invoking the possibilities of the campus space to be the realm of rule breaking and even vandalism. The language used within the play would be unacceptable within the institution, but was the language used by many in the campus. In one memorable scene, the crowd is bored with their "*bakchodi*"[35] or pointless conversation and someone whips out a homemade firecracker and places it on a sleeping Raju's crotch. By the time Raju would awake, the bomb would be on the verge of bursting, and then turning out to be a defective piece. The scene was a silent one, with everyone involved in ganging up on poor Raju, tiptoeing around him to pull this potentially fatal prank. The

[35] Literally translated as "verbal fucking"

production of a space that was taut with explosive anticipation, which then fizzled out into a petty argument, became a representation of the campus space and its potential and its shortcomings for Gandharv. In exploring the potential of bringing a completely unpermitted, destructive, uncontrollable behaviour on to the campus stage, the cast of *Class Enemy* was trying to break through the veneer of *tameeez*[36] and respectability that was overshadowing the city, illegally pushing out encroachers and beggars out of the public eye into the peripheries of the metropolis.

While many excerpts from *Class Enemy* embodied this specific political context of the changing university and the threat the students and the campus space was feeling, the following excerpt from the script made the connection very clear.

> *Pyaare: Main coridoor mein gaya tha. Poore school me sannata. Atti chup-chaap. Koi avaaz na. Pehle kamre mein jhaak kar dekha toh key dekhta hoon ki (runs and sits on a desk and folds up his legs) sab chikne launde hath jodh, choukdhi maare baithe the. Aur unke saamne — (to Deepu) Bhai, jaraa khade hoiyo. Unke saamne ek sundar sa aadmi chalk liye khada. Rajkiya Vidyalaya ka akhri chalk. Dekh ke, aisa lag raha tha — jaise un bachon ke chehron se ummeed panap rahi ho. Aur main, Pyaare, dilli ke*

[36] propriety

sabse gande illaake ke kudedan mein pada kachra yeh soch rahan hoon ki… Vah! Yahan toh atthara pandavon ka gurukul chal ra hai….

Deepu: Phir?

Pyaare: Phir kya. Saalon, tab mujhe samajh mein aaya ki yeh toh sala school inspector ko chootiya banane ke liye pharji dhong ho raha hai. Na toh saala launda hille, na saale master hille. Sab-ke-sab saale putle the.

In the way the actors embodied the scenes, and the extremely detailed stage directions that they closely followed, there was a distinct reference to the informal blocking seen within the collegiate rehearsal space. The setting of the production was in a classroom and throughout the course of the play, the benches and other artifacts that demarcated and annotated the classroom as a classroom got moved and shoved around, vandalized and repurposed, essentially putting the performative mode of the rehearsal on to the stage. In this regard, *Class Enemy*, despite being produced partly for the competitive theatre circuit of Delhi University, achieved a vocabulary of embodied politics that not only spoke of college-centric issues about professionalization and limits of neoliberal education, but subsequently created the ephemeral space of the campus during the performance, which gave the issues voiced in the play a political meaning that went beyond the referential.

The production of the specific kind of spatio-temporal arrangement that the campus is, revises the relationship between the student and the institution. The campus space, the ephemeral burst of a special moment, is seen within a shared practice such as theatre. I have argued so far for the recognition of the political potential of this campus space. With respect to the "imagined sanity" of the campus space, theatre practice and political movements in many ways have stretched the limits of acceptable behavior and discipline within the institutional setup. The campus space becomes an embodied, affective space which is invoked not only within the scope of campus-centric political activity, but within spaces outside as well. The particular solidarity that the campus space offers to the students is solidarity of affect, of having been in the same lived experience that was beyond the purview of institutionally demarcated student life. This solidarity is rekindled when old friends, having shared the campus space during their time in college, meet after long. Out of the number of theatreworkers within DU(on an average about 50 members in every college society), very few actually find their way into professional theatre through the route of NSD or into the culture industry of Bollywood. A small number continues to do amateur or semi-professional work outside the campus. In speaking with some ex-students from DU who have gone on to join NSD, I found out that the greatest change that they experienced from their collegiate days within the professional training setup of NSD was that this was a space of individual achievement and cultivation of the actor as a distinct part of a larger practice involving other individuals. Within the collegiate scene, the shared responsibility in terms of

training, scriptwriting, research and production design would not let theatreworkers disengage with the collective nature of the collegiate form of theatre production. This sense of the shared spatio-temporality of the campus comes back even outside the immediate physical edifice of the institution, in which the campus is temporarily based. As an example, I shall take the instance of a recent endeavor called *Prayogshala*[37]that was initiated by a group of young theatreworkers in Delhi, all of them ex-students of Delhi University, actively working or starting to work professionally within the city. The group of initiators sent around an open invitation to like-minded theatreworkers within the city to join them to work on a series of three plays under Theatre Uncut[38], a UK based political theatre movement which protests against fund cuts in culture by the UK government. The final crowd of people was not more than 30, ex-students of LSR, Kirori Mal College, St. Stephen's, Ramjas College, Miranda House, Hansraj College and Kamala Nehru College. While each of us had worked within the separate working paradigms of each of our collegiate groups, often carrying within our practice the repertoire of each college, there was an immediate acknowledgement of a common practice with a more or less common repository of training devices, exercises, gestures and themes. Some of us had left collegiate theatre 4-5 years back, some were fresh graduates, and the possibility of improvising together as a mixed group of relative strangers and finding a familiar ground of belonging was extremely potent. This ground was created by the immediate recognition of a co-actor's gesture and having

[37] Translated as workshop.
[38] http://www.theatreuncut.com/

a counter-gesture to respond to that. It has to be remembered that out of that group many of us had been working day jobs, in schools and libraries, corporate houses, universities and art organisations, and as "professionals" within our fields, none of us were getting paid for attending this "production-oriented workshop" every day for three to four hours post work, for about a month and a half. We had all graduated from the obligations of the dramatics society and the giddy love for the popularity that came with being a part of a society in the social fabric of DU. Sobriety had set in and the institution was not a viable enemy any longer, to huff and puff against. There was really no reason why we were even there, every evening, together, moving. The reason that most of us were there was not to train in new forms of theatremaking, or towards professional gains, but to partake in the re-ignition of the potential of the campus space outside the actual, physical campus. The initial skepticism of one another, especially on the knowledge of each other's alma maters (the social hierarchies of DU run deep within the campus space), had given way to the recognition that we had moved on from college, but the pleasant discoveries of similar exercises, theatre games and ways of voice modulation pointed towards the reason why there was a relative comfort that we found when in contact with each other's bodies – our bodies, in their situation within the time and space of the campus had become "campus bodies", bodies which could invoke and deploy the spatial and temporal politics of the campus when they would come together in a separate space. It was this that the NSD students from DU were missing – the lack of bodies trained within the same campus moment, which would immediately understand

the collective nature of the practice and provide a connection for the individual to a larger politics. This affective solidarity is difficult to quantify in terms of its exact political impact. But it can certainly be seen as a language of student solidarity that creates a break from the language used to describe student politics of the 1960s and 70s. This solidarity is one of a shared bodily practice and not always of the shared involvement in the revolution. However, just like the latter, it has a profound impact on the lives of its members, far beyond the three years of collegiate life.

Class Enemy is by no means an exaggerated account of appropriation of institutional spaces by students. Collegiate theatre groups through their unique amateur sensibility, their choice of themes, their campus-centric vocabulary and their work method of simply taking over and staying visible in certain iconic spots around the institutional architecture actually do produce a uniquely student-centric and autonomous space. Their productions mostly do with themes that engage the interest of the campus, whether it is self-reflexive critical accounts of ragging on campus or caste-based violence in the country, and other areas of public interest such as the issue of gender and gender-based violence. While the productions that deal with these themes annually do not necessarily question or critique these subjects with professional rigor, one cannot deny that the productions pose as a popular tool for the campus crowd to talk about such issues. This kind of theatremaking and theatergoing activity gives rise to a uniquely campus-centered discourse about them and adds to the larger political consciousness of the campus. Admittedly, this campus-centered political discourse often lacks political critique and can be simplistic and

perhaps harmful, obliterating many different voices that ring through the horizontal community that the campus claims itself to be. Despite the transformative quality of the space of the campus, it has to be kept in mind that it is not in any way divorced from the violence and hierarchies that are prevalent outside the purportedly impenetrable walls of the college.

While the argument is not aimed at political glorification of an admittedly fragmented and stratified campus, it needs to be reiterated that the consciousness of the campus in terms of the temporal and spatial limitations that the institution has within its structure radically questions the predetermined roles that students have to live up to within an education system suffering from a morality hangover[39]. Participation in political movements transgresses this role most visibly. But even within the everyday confrontation with the institutional edifice, especially within student-centric cultural production, there is a break away from the predetermined role of students as disciple and receiver of knowledge. Because of the centrality that education and academic involvement takes within the cultural production of the campus, it is possible to draw from Jacques Ranciere's work *The Nights of Labour: The Worker's Dream in Nineteenth Century France* (1989). While Ranciere speaks of the cultural production and appropriation of aesthetics by workers and labourers in order to escape the oppressive, almost Heugenotic predeterminism of their class identity, he also specifically comes away from giving them a vanguard status that is seen within Marxist cultural perceptions about workers' cultural production, another form of the

[39] To explain, the campus is rulebound to be a space where propriety is maintained and moral fibres are strengthened.

same predeterminism. DU collegiate theatreworkers do not have a specific class identity, nor do they have any sort of homogenous identity apart from that of studenthood. In their cultural work they often upend that, and in their engagement with the space and time of the institution they challenge the appropriate place of students within the spatial and temporal architecture of the institution. Their sense of aesthetics, the collegiate sensibility, is also often a challenge towards the sensibility that the institution disseminates to its student body, resulting in censorship and clampdowns. In this context, Pierre Bourdieu's work *La Distinction* (1984) becomes important insofar as it posits that taste is a contentious territory that is often disseminated by institutions, through knowledge production by educational institutions. Social clusters with differentiated levels of cultural capital vie for superiority in terms of taste, which becomes more of a power dynamic rather than a purely personal choice. The kind of knowledge that is produced and sanctioned within educational institution is reflexive of this struggle for distinction. Speaking of the involvement of the educational institutions in the cultural stratification of society, Bourdieu comments,

> *"Culture also has its titles of nobility—awarded by the educational system—and its pedigrees, measured by seniority in admission to the nobility"* (Bourdieu, 1984).

While the campus space maintains its own status symbols and cultural nobility, it is also true that the demography of DU has changed over the years with a huge number of outstation students from various parts of the country with various levels of exposure to different kinds of politics getting admissions every year. Alongside their systematic challenge to the cultural norms pushed by the institution, many theatre societies within DU are also changing in their own structures due to the diversity in their ranks, in terms of region, class and political ideologies.

The case of Delhi University becomes significant because of the turning tides that have been ushered in by semesterization and the FYUP system, which has been subsequently withdrawn, which drastically for the few years of its existence, ate into both the time within the academic schedule of the average student and was purportedly geared towards enhancing the marketability or employability of the students. Meanwhile, the Commonwealth Games and the resultant hostel makeovers ate into the space of the campus. In this context, collegiate cultural movements and cultural productions that specifically addressed this very shrinkage of space became a significant moment of the campus realizing its own political potential and affective value within the life its residents and set about to fight for the preservation of the same. At the same time, this focus on the campus brought about the exposure of various fault-lines within the ranks, as we would see in the next chapters.

Chapter 2

AMATEURISM AND THE CULTURE INDUSTRY: THE NORTH INDIAN MALE SUBJECT WITHIN DU THEATRE AND HIS JOURNEY TO BOLLYWOOD

In this chapter, we shall be exploring the socio-political hierarchies within Delhi University, and how collegiate theatre and the projection of these hierarchies on stage can feed the fault-lines further, to either posit a significant criticism of the symbolic violence of the "cultural arbitrary" (Bourdieu, Passeron,1990) within the campus or to be lapped up by the culture industry as fashionable icons of alterity and dissent within popular culture. While the amateurism (as posited by Ridout) of collegiate theatre works as a significant voice of dissent in the campus, against the neoliberalizing university, when this same amateurism is routed through the professional theatre training of NSD onto the cinema industry of Bombay, it gets appropriated as a form of dissent which is consumable through popular culture, especially in the form of high-grossing, profit-driven commercial cinema that positions itself against the familial systems of privilege in Bombay through the deployment of non-urban, non-decorous characters as hero material. This new kind of male protagonist and his brand of dissent might have their origin within the political spatio-temporal entity of the campus. This chapter explores this tenuous relationship.

While it is of great importance to understand the political potential of the campus space autonomous from the geographical location of the institution, one of the departures that this

research consciously tries to make is that of clarifying the historiographical generalisation of the "student body" as a flattened and essentialised mass[40] without any important political agonism and strife within itself. In order to understand the campus as a political space of importance that houses various contestations within itself and has a potential to alter the traditional relationship that students share with the world and to institutional edifices, it is very important to examine the dynamics of power that play out within the student body, as this could certainly dispel misconceptions about "youth", "students" and "student movements" as simplistic catchphrases without internal complexities, catchphrases used akin to market-driven vocabulary of "target-audience" and "target-group". The DU campus space, in spite of being an important alternative social space which allows a critical and dialectical relationship to the institution, is a highly stratified space with very different narratives and experiences of higher education within it. Most of the hierarchies within the campus are engineered through systemic channels of segregation that percolate through institutional means such as admission processes reflective of general social hierarchies such as those of caste, gender, region, class and economic status. However, these stratifications are modified in accordance with markers of privilege and superiority within the campus to become markers of identity within the student populace, in conjunction with the parallel hierarchies engineered within the campus space on the basis of social stratifications such

[40] Both within the literature on student unrest referred to in the first chapter a well as literature on student movements

as rankings of the college the student belongs to, cultural activities s/he is part of, and which social group s/he is friendly with within college.

The Social Order of Delhi University

To begin with, Delhi University is one of the most sought after universities in the country, not only excelling academically but also having the important strategic position of being in the national capital. While Delhi University is situated within Delhi and some of its colleges receive state government support, it is a central university and it attracts a very large number of students from across the country and the world (as has been mentioned in the previous chapter). It is well known for being one of the premier universities of the country, with high quality of scholarship and teaching. The large number of applications for admissions every year are made to go through a standardized evaluation according to the "cut-offs" system of admission that evaluates a candidate based on the marks secured in the school board exams rather than on admission tests. 2007 was the last year any of the DU colleges held admission tests[41], and ever since, there has been steady hype and anticipation generated my media regarding DU admissions and publication of cut-off lists. In 2011, Shri Ram College of Commerce, a premier economics and commerce college in DUhit new records with the publication of a 100% cutoff for enrolment in the

[41] Undergraduate courses such as Bachelors in Elementary Education, Management Studies, Bachelor of Fine Arts, Physiotherapy, Multimedia and Nursing still hold admission tests within the specific colleges that offer these professional courses, but the humanities, science and commerce streams have stopped the tests.

Bachelor of Commerce program[42]. With the ever increasing cutoffs in DU, there is a general impediment faced by aspiring undergraduates who comes from State Board backgrounds, where it is next to impossible to score such high marks in the school-leaving examinations[43].The feeling of exclusivity that DU is suspected of cultivating with its unreasonable admission demands had come to a stress point when in 2014, Delhi Human Resource Development Minister Manish Sisodia from the newly elected Aam Admi Party government expressed his controversial idea of securing 90% seats in DU for students hailing from Delhi[44]. While this had been promptly rejected by all and labeled as a populist gimmick on the part of the AAP, it had reinforced the general suspicion among students and teachers about the neoliberal educational reforms being undertaken within Delhi University such as semesterisation[45] and the introduction of the FYUP[46]. While the unreachable standards of DU admissions continues to keep the university space exclusive, caste reservations and quotas for exceptional performances in sports and in extra-curricular activities are strategies to diversify the student body. The reservation issue has had an extremely contentious history within Indian education and within a space like DU that values the contested idea of "merit", there is a great amount of violence that students from reservation categories face, especially students from the North eastern states who often come

[42] http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/delhi-university-cut-offs-reach-record-high-100-needed-for-b-com-at-srcc-458503
[43] http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/delhi-university-first-cut-off-list/1/141490.html
[44] http://www.hindustantimes.com/newdelhi/proposal-for-90-local-quota-in-delhi-university-a-cause-for-worry/article1-1171109.aspx
[45] http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/delhi-university-in-a-hurry-to-semesterise/article873407.ece
[46] http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/as-dus-fyup-takes-baby-steps-a-debate-surrounds-its-legitimacy/article4790778.ece

through the Scheduled Tribe quota, in terms of physical violence[47], sexual assault[48]and other forms of systemic violence such as racist attitudes, struggle with English as the medium of instruction and the dominance of Hindi as the language of choice within the social life of the university. The ECA quota, the other alternative to cut-offs, while being a viable option for many students who pursue theatre, music, dance and other cultural activities to gain admission in DU, fits into the larger merit-based ethos of the university, with each activity having a dedicated society in every college which competes every year in inter-college festivals. In order to secure a place in such societies, there is an assessment of merit in the form of the ECA admissions, annual auditions held in every college for students seeking admissions through the ECA quota. The competition model of the ECAs in Delhi is greatly responsible for the institutional importance given to the cultural productions of the students as achievements in annual reports, websites and the likes. While the institution often claims credit for excellence in extra-curricular activities, there is in truth painfully little support to the year-long process that goes behind the making of the annual productions of the societies that tour the college theatre festival circuits. While the rehearsal and making processes of the production are largely held as the most significant time of production by members of the ECA societies, the institution's focus on competition prizes and rankings and general lack of interest in the production processes makes

[47] http://www.hindustantimes.com/newdelhi/assaulted-dalit-student-dies/article1-609338.aspx
[48] http://indianexpress.com/article/india/crime/delhi-northeast-girl-brother-assaulted-near-du-north-campus-two-arrested/

them highly production-oriented and competition-bound. The search for achievement and "excellence" would obviously make for highly exclusive spaces even within the relatively more informal spaces of the campus. Delhi University and its cut-off based systems has an informal ranking amongst the colleges, a fairly arbitrary categorization that is fomented by publication of college listings in newspapers and magazines every year[49] and that to a very large extent shapes the interactions of students within the campus hierarchies. These categorizations are mostly to do with class, where some colleges are considered to be B-grade simply due to lower cutoffs and added factors of the perceived backgrounds of the students, closely linked with the situation of the college within the geography of Delhi. Colleges located within East and West Delhi, are considered to be largely B-grade, while colleges situated within the North Campus are almost always the A-listers. Colleges with high reputation due to their successful lists of alumni, such as St. Stephen's College or Lady Shri Ram College or Shri Ram College of Commerce are highest in the pecking order, capturing the imagination of aspiring undergraduates. While writing about Delhi University it is extremely important to understand that each college has developed a specific profile within the campus imagination, being known by some stereotype or the other, stereotypes which are mostly buttressed by a belief in this informal college ranking system, class backgrounds of students, and often caste, religion and gender[50]. This can give rise to very

[49] The most popular listing comes out in India Today: http://indiatoday.intoday.in/bestcolleges/2015/
[50] One of my favourites, a social media article comparing college stereotypes with Game of Thrones characters. http://www.scoopwhoop.com/inothernews/delhi-colleges-as-got-characters/

difficult and unequal interactions within students, and to claim the campus as a utopic space where these internal hierarchies are null and void is dishonest. Elitism pervades interactions between so-called A-grade and B-grade colleges, in which fluency in English becomes a marker for good education and sophistication and alternatively non-fluency in Hindi is seen as a marker for maladjustment within the city of Delhi and the larger ethos of Hindi-speaking North India. The politics of language and entitlement plays out very curiously in the case of the campus, especially the ECA societies, especially the dramatics societies. In analyzing these conflict zones within the life of the campus, it becomes clear that the campus is changing rapidly and there is a necessity to historicize it and revise our understanding of essentialised terms such as "student body" and "student politics", disjointed from the literature around the student movements of the 1960s and 70s. New writings on higher educational institutions and the political radicalism they engender within the students need to take cognizance of the internal fault lines and intersectionalities within the student constituencies, which become very important in forging new solidarities and alliances within the larger student body.

It is interesting to refocus on the politics of language and socio-cultural stratifications within the student body and how they produce and in turn are reproduced through the cultural productions of the campus. Theatre within the Delhi University campus is largely viewed as an important social practice and bonding exercise and theatre societies provide a certain unique identity to their member that helps them navigate the social and economic hierarchies of DU. There is to

begin with a deep fissure between street theatre and proscenium theatre, the former being perceived as a more popular and accessible medium due to its socio-political issue-based content, the use of Hindi as its language and its adoption of the outdoors as it site, and the latter being perceived as more "sophisticated", narrative-heavy, classical, elite and non-formulaic. This fissure extends to more generalized hierarchies of the Hindi-speaking actors and English-speaking ones, and the perceived class distinctions between the two, which is often quite arbitrary. There are certain colleges such as St. Stephen's, Hansraj College, Miranda House and LSR, which are seen as elite and therefore the natural flag bearers of English theatre. Especially the theatre society of St. Stephen's, named Shakespeare Society and established in 1926, is an exclusively English theatre society that produces one Shakespeare production every year and frequently works on realist scripts by Henrik Ibsen to more recent writers such as Eugene Ionesco, Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard. The profile of the actors are therefore almost exclusively urban, English speaking, and with enough interest and exposure to the works of Shakespeare. The Shakespeare Society's annual Shakespeare productions see a experimentation and adaptation of texts such as *Othello* (2010), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2011), *Tempest* (2013), but the precedence of importance given to the textual reading of Shakespeare rather than the attention to the performance of it, often makes the plays school-level exercises in staging Shakespeare, as extensions of literature classes. The implication of Shakespeare texts within the colonial project in order to instill superiority of the English language under British rule, and the

subsequent introduction of the same texts within postcolonial school and college curriculum for purposes of proper English education (Trivedi, 1993), is perhaps naively reiterated by the exclusivity of the society and the specific cultural capital that it expects from its members. The emphasis is on pronunciation and expert delivery of solo acts[51], and while the economics of the productions are very much like other campus performances, i.e. typically low-budget with minimal sets and improvised costumes and make-up, the point of this kind of theatre practice is entirely different – an in-depth understanding of Shakespearean texts. The closeness of the Shakespeare Society to the Literature department gives it a specific pedagogical identity as well. Aside from their Shakespeare productions, the Shakespeare Society also produces other plays, mostly in English, often working with a very small cast and minimal budgets due to a large part of their annual budget going towards their Shakespeare play and the unavailability of actors because of the same. Plays like *Effie's Burning* (2007), *Teechers* (2008) and *The Problem* (2009) were recognisable as St. Stephen's productions for their verbose English scripts, extremely minimal stage design and prop use, very small casts and frequent use of the device of talking to the audience by characters, as a narrative strategy for the plays. There is a possibility that this strategy of taking dramatic monologues has been developed over their engaged work with Shakespearean texts and soliloquys. But in these plays, the campus space of the collective does not get invoked in the way it does in productions by many other colleges. *Teechers*, originally

[51] In 2015, Shakespeare Society held a program exclusively on Shakespeare's soliloquys and their performance.

written by John Godber in 1985,is a play about three high school children who imitate their teachers before they leave school to go to college, and enact a play as a tribute to their favourite drama teacher. The Stephen's adaptation, directed by Karam Vir Lamba, had followed the plot and script of the original, changing the names and geographical references to Indian counterparts. The location was a private school in Delhi, close to the actual context of the entire cast of four[52]. The dialogue delivery was distinctive – as a play it was difficult to follow only because the repartees were meant to be at the speed of lightning, with each of the characters playing a multitude of other characters in the play within a play. The actors and their excellent grasp over the English language managed to deliver the play with elan, but a great deal of information was lost in the verbosity. So much so that the highlights of the production were the familiar English pop songs used as the musical score, and a kiss that the leading pair shared. The props were three school tables which would be repurposed to make one long table or any other situational property. The costume was the unmistakably respectable and clean white shirts and dark pants of premier education. It was a comedy, and the actors, playing many different teachers, made their portrayals exaggerated and buffoonish, drawing laughter and appreciation from the audience. The play was a striking counterpoint to *Class Enemy*, to be performed two years later in KMC, with the context changed to a working class municipality school, where the students would be imitating the teacher and the profession of teaching not as a nostalgic look of

[52] Lamba himself had studied in Doon School, another cast member Krittika Bhattacharjee was a graduate of La Martiniere School, Kolkata, while Ria Singh Sawhney was schooled in Sardar Patel Vidyalaya.

appreciation towards the enjoyable experience of school, but as a critical look at the limitations of education within systems of urban privilege. *Teechers* was a lost moment for the campus sensibility, where the very premise of the narrative as well as the performative strategies contained within themselves glorification of systems of urban upper class privilege without a lens of requisite criticality.This loss of criticality is evident in many of the English comedies preferred by some theatre societies such as those of Stephen's or Sri Venkateswara College. The latter, lovingly called "Venky" in short within the campus, have developed a name for slapstick English comedies such as *God* (2007) and *McWho* (2008), which governs the audience's expectation from their productions to this day – their 2015 production of Edward Albee' *The Goat or Who is Sylvia* was largely treated as a slapstick comedy about bestiality. The Productions of Sri Venkateswara College are insanely popular among students and always go houseful because they promise "entertainment". In a conversation with Akash Bhatia, the director of *McWho* and the then president of the dramatics society at Venky, I came to know that the members of the society prioritised comedies over more "serious" scripts because they felt that the competition circuit demanded playing to the house, and the collegiate scene was saturated with issue-based plays. The English dramatics societies of St. Stephen's College and Sri Venkateswara College have gained a paradigmatic role within the English proscenium theatre circuit as the makers of comedies and lighthearted plays to offset the emotionally heavy feminist plays coming out of Miranda House and LSR or the serious texts selected by Hindu College or

Hansraj College. In this, they position themselves unabashedly at a position of high cultural capital within the social order of DU collegiate theatre.

Holi **by The Players and the Construction of the North Indian Male Subject**

The Hindi proscenium productions occupy an ambivalent position in the context of politics of language, and sometimes the language deployed is "clean", or classical, either Urdu-leaning or Sanskritised. The Hindi collegiate stage is also filled with translations of well-known scripts by Brecht and Dario Fo and showcase adaptations of works by progressive Urdu and Hindi writers such as Sadat Hasan Manto and Gulzar. Scripts by postcolonial Indian playwrights such asMohan Rakesh, Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani and Mahesh Elkunchwar have also become very popular. The Hindi proscenium generally leans towards texts that are already fairly canonical, read in literature classes and have had successful stage runs in the professional theatre circuit.A marked departure from this is the proscenium productions of Kirori Mal College. Kirori Mal College is famous for its theatre society called The Players, known within the campus theatre circuit as producer of very high quality theatre productions which are in process for almost a year under the watchful eyes of their staff advisor Keval Arora[53]. Over the course of the

[53] Professor of English Literature at Kirori Mal College, Keval Arora commands a position of high respect as staff advisor to The Players. Keval is not only an authority among the actors and theatreworkers of KMC, but also the campus in general, becoming advisor and judge of many plays in many colleges. Every collegiate theatre society in DU values his feedback and tried to arrange special post production meetings with him to specifically discuss the plays. As the staff advisor of The Players, Keval commands a position of authority, overseeing ECA auditions,

years, The Players have positioned themselves behind Hindi adaptations of politically charged plays by internationally acclaimed playwrights, as opposed to the more effete English proscenium productions coming out of colleges higher on the pecking order within the stratified world of DU. In the years between 2007 – 2010, the society had successfully developed a specific repertoire of plays that were very similar in nature and centered around a specific kind of dramaturgy. The 2007 production *Holi* has ever since been seen as a very important production within the campus circuit, not only for its massive popularity but also because of the great impact it left within the theatreworkers of the campus in terms of its content and its production style. *Holi* was production based on Mahesh Elkunchwar's iconic play written in 1969, about a college hostel that was populated by a bunch of unruly young men who decided to humiliate the principal in public on the holiday of Holi because of his failure to meet their demand of a day off. What ensued was a massive crackdown and interrogation of the students till one of the members of the group, slightly effeminate and forever picked on, spilled the beans, resulting in rustications and punitive measures. In a quick and intense backlash, he was humiliated very cruelly and publicly, which drove him to suicide. The play text burned with the oppressive space of a college hostel, with young men living extremely close to each other, developing homoerotic

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certain rehearsals and production processes and attending many collegiate theatre festivals. He is also one of the organisers of the collegiate theatre module of the prestigious Old World Theatre Festival at India Habitat Center, a premier theatre festival in the city, for which he helps handpick college productions to be showcased at the high-profile venue for the general public.

bonds in a largely conservative society and the ensuing array of intense emotions, denial and downright cruelty. The only distancing factor from the incredibly heartless actions within the play was the almost calm voice of the *sutradhar*, almost as if he was a bystander to the escalating violence within the campus. The Players developed their performance text over two whole years, between 2006 and 2008, and after a series of changes in cast and reworking of the script, it still remained a work in progress despite garnering a widespread fan following within the collegiate festival circuit. When I watched the play for the first time, as a first-year student of the university, assisting the lights manager in the lights room above the LSR auditorium, it left a profound impact on me as being a very powerful realist representation of the flipside of communitarian campus spaces. The production left a deep impact on the cultural landscape of the campus for a number of reasons. The most obvious reason was the much-hyped final humiliation scene where the effeminate character was stripped down to his underwear and forcibly made to wear a sari and makeup by his erstwhile friends as he cried and broke down, in order to shame him for telling on the rest of the group. There was voyeuristic curiosity being strategically fomented within audiences, such as when the lights manager cheerfully informed me during the LSR performance that while generally they only partially stripped the actor, for the [largely female] LSR audience they had consciously decided to *"strip him down to his Frenchie".* While this was an incredibly sexist jibe, misconstrued to be friendly banter (which happens very often in interactions between students of LSR or other women's colleges in DU

and students from the rest of the colleges), such was the strength of this fully correct rumor that each show of *Holi* would enjoy a full house till the very end of the performances, a rare sight for the impatient DU audiences. This curiosity was further fomented by the fact that *Holi*would continuously face threats of disqualification from judges on the grounds of obscenity and violence, which made it a scandalous performance filled with forbidden attractions. There were other draws, of course. The acting was of very high standard in comparison with the general amateur theatre productions of the university. The acting was in a completely realist mode, and during the rehearsal process of the play, "identification with character" had been emphasized. The script was funny, adapted into the profanity-ridden casual campus lingo that everyone understood and accepted and the setting of the play was totally identifiable, as if this was the story of each college and each hostel in DU. What was perhaps most important was that *Holi* perhaps unwittingly established the legitimacy of the subjectivity of the Hindi-speaking, unpolished North Indian male as an important voice within the stratified social systems of elitism in Delhi University and higher education in India. As opposed to the predominance of canonical scripts, English theatre and overall effete feel of proscenium productions within DU, *Holi* and its high production standards proposed an alternative look at the proscenium space, as a space that could resonate with the voice of the non-English speaking, non-urban, non-Delhiite hosteller. This was an important intervention, creating an aesthetic standard and repertoire that was very different in its class underpinnings from celebrated stage productions from A-grade colleges such

as St. Stephen's or LSR or celebrated Hindi plays from other A-graders such as SRCC or Miranda House. At the same time, this alternative aesthetic standard, in spite of its potential to represent a section of the constituency with relatively low cultural capital as the protagonists of cultural production, soon met its limitations, by creating a stereotypical image of North Indian aggressive masculinity on the campus stage, along with its underpinnings of rampant misogyny, which had gained acceptance in recent Bollywood productions as hero material. In a long conversation with Kislay Gonzalvez, an ex-member of The Players and one of the cast members from the 2007 production, specific details of this conscious presentation of a different aesthetic ground came out. He mentioned the closeness that the premise of the performance-text had with actual life within KMC boys hostels. The hostel was divided between two coteries – the Haryanvi crowd and the Bihari crowd – and all other students from all other regions of the country were simply swallowed up by either of these. The aggressive, hinterland-type North Indian male was ubiquitous within the KMC campus life and came to be identified with the image of the college in general, to the extent that students from English Honours or Economics Honours streams specifically would be seen as automatically more effete and in the same league as students of St. Stephen's type English speaking colleges. While these barriers would be broken down to a large extent through prolonged shared practice within cultural societies like The Players, Kislay mentioned that there was a great deal of posturing as that particular male stereotype within the male students of the college, especially as a strategy to fit in within the

dominant social setup of the college. The production process of *Holi* specifically worked with this expression of North Indian masculinity, and adapted the script to mirror the KMC context in such detail that the cast and the directors started losing their critical distance from their work. The Players was known for making productions that had a larger socio-political value for the audiences, and in this case, while the attempt was to create a critique of the macho hypermasculinity and ensuing dysfunctionality of hostel life in a North Indian college, the actors, who had been chosen very carefully, often mirroring the psychological profiles of the characters in the play, started over-identifying with the premise of the play. Many members of The Players had been acquainted with works by Stanislavski and Brecht, and understood the different methods of performance delineated by both. *Holi* had been devised through a production process that was predicated on realist acting. To begin with, like many other KMC production, *Holi* went through an adaptation phase, where the directors and the cast would rework each character and each scene of the play through improvisations. *"The idea was to make it relatable and closer to the context of the actors, something that they would be comfortable performing",* said Kislay. Even the casting, which was done in two phases – one at the initial stage and one when the play was reworked in January 2007 – was mindful of the physical and behavioral similarities between the actors and the characters. At every step during the rehearsals, the campus space was directly projected onto the performance, through improvisations around recreation of college scenes, hostel life and canteen crowds, and the performances were meant to fully reflect the boys' hostel

scenarios in KMC in a realist manner. The realist mode of acting, very common within the DU theatre space, allowed the actors to show off their acting skills which would be measured by verisimilitude of representation, and also partake in the exciting process of method acting and psychological realism. While to the student theatreworkers, this process had different meanings – ranging from "posing" as Hindi-speaking macho male figures to fit in to hostel life or positioning themselves as an alternative to the effete theatre coming from St. Stephens or Hindu College, to their influential staff advisor Keval Arora, it was a necessary exercise to question their own class positions. In an interview given to students of Jamia Millia Islamia in 2012[54], he mentions,

> *"When it comes to politics and textuality, when it comes to, let's say, politics in terms of a play we do on labour, and we have struggled with the students at that stage…this is very soon after the incident at Honda, the incident with the workers being fired*[55] *upon* (sic) *at the Honda factory in Manesar etc. etc… This year there is a play on custodial violence … again and again we are telling the students that you know your play stinks of the middle class…you imagine the space completely from the insularity of your class position….I'm not getting the feeling of …you know it's difficult, how do I ask you to think like a rickshawallah. It's difficult. It will be a pretend, let's*

[54] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-sndvanJsOM
[55] http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Things-under-control-at-Manesar-plant-Honda-Motorcycle-Scooter-India-president/articleshow/15390127.cms

> *pretend, and you will do it in a way* [in]*which a boy consciously takes off his Reeboks and says "Oh look, mein nange paer hun*[56]*" kind of thing, but now with a different quality of that nange paer….but in the thought process there is a frightening tendency within The Players to slip into the comfort zones of their own class positions… and there I feel the faculty plays a fairly significant role through instruction, mockery, forcing them to start thinking out of that box."*

In the same interview, he mentioned an anecdote, where after a performance by The Players at the India Habitat Center, a high profile venue for professional theatre in the city and frequented by appreciative audiences with high cultural capital, an audience member asked for the details of an actor's social background, and on hearing that he was the son of a doctor and a college professor, was shocked, as he had concluded that the actor came from the working class. According to Arora, *"what could be more flattering"* than the audience confusing this upper middle class actor as someone from the working class in the context of a play about the working class. The divergence in the efficacy of this devoted realist mode of acting training could be seen within The Players – to the students, this gave them the means to navigate collegiate sociality better, especially in the context of the campus space of KMC, and DU in general which was very stratified with numerous fault-lines of regional and linguistic conflict, and to the staff advisor

[56] "I am barefoot"

figure on this specific context, it was a means to critically think about class positions. In the middle of this dual-purpose, the realist mode of acting deployed by The Players threw up serious problems in terms of the politics of representation, an issue which shall be dealt with a little later.

In the context of *Holi*, however, the limitations of the realist mode of acting soon became evident to the cast and crew. The initial interest in the Realist mode of acting had been primarily aimed towards delivering excellent acting performances, one of the most important criteria to win college competitions, to the extent that in the latter half of the play when the character of Anand, guilty of telling on the rest of the group for disrupting the college function on Holi, was being humiliated and accosted by the rest, neither the audience nor the actors could process the moment for the sheer horror that it was meant to evoke. The scene was typically long and painstaking, where Anand would be dragged to the center-stage by the group, who proceeded to angrily confront him about his actions, pour a deluge of profanities and start physically assaulting him and tearing his clothes, till a point when Anand's roommate Vinod, with whom he had shared an emotionally abusive homosocial bond, would bring forth the idea of dressing him up in a sari and make-up to humiliate him. The ensuing shaming incident involved the group of boys crowding around Anand, constantly hitting him, as he hunched, face downwards, doubled up in pain and shame, crying silently. Anand would be completely stripped down to his underwear, and with his pants down to his ankles, would be forcibly draped in a sari and his face smeared in lipstick, without any visible protest from him. The violence of the scene was direct,

with each resounding slap on the character heard clearly by the entirely shocked audience. The gesture of defeated submission on the part of the actor playing Anand was honest, and the audience had just borne witness to a live act of ragging. But the other characters, such as funny-bones Taimur and Ranjit, had been very popular with the viewers and had commanded a level of emotional connection that was simply impossible to shake off, rendering even the incident of visible violence on stage fuzzy and morally ambivalent. In spite of the minimal use of props, with just a couple of sitting blocks strewn around the stage (or in the major change of scene during the principal's speech a long table would appear downstage), the "real" campus was apparently so well invoked that the audience willingly partook in a common campus practice of aiding, abetting and protecting the secrecy of violence such as gender crimes, homophobia and ragging. The careful study of aggressive machismo was displayed in the form of the script, generously peppered with misogynist slurs and constant picking on the effeminate Anand, and the exclusively male space of the play was sealed with on-stage male-bonding that involved almost constant physical contact between the men and frequent derogatory jokes about women and feminine behaviour. There was a great deal of sitting around on stage, where the students would be hanging out, typically spreading their legs, highlighting their comfort within an all-men setup and taking up a great deal of space in a show of entitlement. One particular character, an ardent nationalist and supposed convert to the Hindutva cause, epitomized the male Hindu nationalist cultivation of physical vigor through yoga and *suryanamaskar*. *"They are people that*

I could see roaming around in my college", related Shilpi, a theatreworker in the LSR dramatics society who had seen the play. This was the overwhelming feedback from audience members from very different kinds of colleges of DU, and while it was perhaps impossible to find such characters in the LSR hostel, this feedback went on to show how the reality effect had turned the scene of violence into a consumable spectacle, leaving no room for reflection or introspection, which apparently had been the original intention of The Players. There was no room for stepping back, the audience was enthralled. What could be more flattering? The jokes and gags in the first half of the play, painstakingly constructed over many improvisation sessions, became insanely popular in the first viewings within the hostel, and the audience started watching out for points of identification (of which there were many) rather than paying attention to the violent storyline of the text. In the first reworking of the play, the theatreworkers introduced some devices that would enable introspection. For example, the *sutradhar* character, which was passive till now, was changed to the character of Lalu, an active partaker in the ragging. This new responsibility would enable the character to step out of the play temporarily and ask the audience what they were thinking of the violent treatment of Anand. While this sudden breaking of the fourth wall would possibly have broken the spectacle of the real, it turned out to be viewed as merely a distraction. In the collegiate theatre world, where realist acting was very much the preferred parameter of excellence in theatre, and a linear narrative structure was desired, any device that strongly interfered with this would not be accepted very easily. This new narrator also possibly

provided the audience with an easier channel of identification than a more distanced *sutradhar* figure. This necessitated a moment of reflection on the part of the society, resulting in a strategy that worked on paper, but to many members of the audience such as myself, grossly misfired. The solution of the problem of realist spectacles was to lean towards shock value and escalate the levels of physical violence within the play, lengthening the humiliation scene and increasing the physical assault, in order to create a moment of break for the audiences to identify their own roles within the everyday violences of campus life. But so much power had the new identity of the male actor on stage started wielding that the escalated violence simply fed into the overall discourse of non-urban non-elite North Indian hypermasculinity being paraded on stage. For the next two years, more or less the same set of male actors worked in two different plays of the same temper – *Line Mein Lago*, based on Nigel William's *Line 'em* in 2008 - 9and *Class Enemy*, another Williams play, in 2010 – 11. Kislay observed that there was a real *Holi* hangover among the actors while being in the production process for the later plays, and for the audience it looked like simply a recapitulation of the *Holi* premise, with the same stock characters and possibly similar kind of humour, only with a different name. *Line Mein Lago* based on a union strike by a group of male truckers in the face of an army siege, and *Class Enemy*, about a group of rowdy schoolgoers in a government school wasting away their time awaiting the arrival of a teacher, both carried over the North Indian masculinity trope in the face of crisis. The KMC repertoire, which had already been around for a while, was created and cemented as the homeground of the

Hindi-speaking, aggressive male persona, situated within equally aggressive, all-male ensemble situations. This, in spite of the society producing very different productions alongside, which did not enjoy the same kind of appreciation or popularity among the audiences.

In the face of the slowly changing institution of Delhi University and a steady drive towards a corporate overhaul, the KMC repertoire had an amazing amount of subversive potential –by claiming cultural space on behalf of a male identity that was traditionally associated with the blue collar working class of the neoliberal urban center. But the outcome was, perhaps unwittingly, quite the opposite. The cultivation of North Indian, Hindi-speaking masculinity at one go alienated women and queer people, placing them squarely within the tertiary space outside public cultural life within the college, a reality within the semi-feudal social setup of North India till date, and alienated all other regional identities within the Indian subcontinent. The reasons for making exclusively male casts for productions came from various other concerns, such as nightlong practice sessions, which would perhaps be uncomfortable for women. While this was a reason cited, it was completely untenable, as during the famed ECA quota auditions for The Players, women aspirants as well as men, who did not yet have a definite place to stay in Delhi (many were outstation candidates), were expected to stay till late into the night in an unknown campus, and an unknown city, waiting for their audition turn. In that moment, why was there no concern for their safety and comfort during the night? Besides, with the rapid growth in popularity of Bollywood films by Anurag Kashyap and Vishal Bhardwaj,

both infamous for basing their extremely stylized realist films on their own experiences of growing up in the North Indian hinterlands of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, North Indian masculinity had become a highly popular and marketable identity to flaunt by this time. The subversive quality of the image of the Hindi-speaking, anti-establishment, non-urban, blue collar male at odds with his experience of urban neoliberalism was superseded within the image of mainstream, popularly accepted, powerful, feudal Bollywood stock characters such as Nawazuddin Siddiqui's masterful depiction of Faizal Khan, a Dhanbad-based coal mafia boss in his popular Gangs of Wasseypur film series.

While this exposed the limits of representation within the campus theatre setup and how radical innovations on stage would soon become mainstream, populist tropes, the connection of this new trope to the mainstream, market-variety of acting was far-reaching and quite deep. In 2014,the students of the National School of Drama, New Delhi, presented a play called *Vividh*, directed by faculty member Abhilash Pillai, which amalgamated two plays – *Holi* by Elkunchwar and *Mitrachi Goshta* by another iconic Marathi playwright, Vijay Tendulkar. The presentation was positioned as a larger comment on the limits of higher educational spaces, with the audience entering the viewing area and being seated in a classroom setup, with close, cramped dark walls and with benches and desks which would instantly invoke each audience member's specific relationship with the geography of a classroom. The "windows" of the classroom were projection screens, with edited videos speaking of a large number of things, wars, killings, strife and

protest, as an experiential tool to set up the basis for the ensuing production. The first part was *Holi*, which had an elaborate set, one of the most remarkable parts of the production. While on one side of the stage there was a minimalist hostel setup, mostly with different seating surfaces, on the other, there was a folding door which opened up to reveal a huge array of guns hung from the wall. The entire set was movable and kept changing to reveals different parts of the set, one more high-quality and detailed as the next. The visual import for the Delhi audience should immediately have been a suburban North Indian college, where gun control was limited and gangs and local warlords proxied for government power. This was very much buttressed by the very specific macho male body language deployed by the all-male cast, and unlike in KMC where the bodies on stage were at least physically disparate, here, almost all of them, being professional theatre actors, training in a professional theatre setup, possessed perfect, buffed up physiques, which completely robbed the production of any possibility of even visual or physical inclusivity. The issues addressed were entirely different from that of the KMC production – there was no awareness of the campus space that could be invoked within the play. This awareness of the campus and the daily issues that students in the campus struggled with, came out in subtle but revealing ways such as the Spartan, inexpensive production values of plays actually coming out of DU, immediately representative of the institution's lack of support and the students' lack of means, including in KMC's version of *Holi*.To a large extent, the elaborate sets of the NSD version placed the production squarely within the realm of professional theatre, with no interest

whatsoever in representing the ethos of the campus in any manner. The acting was in the mode of highly polished psychological realism, but in the situation of a non-campus audience, identification with the characters was very limited. There was a break in the cathartic circle of emotions flowing from the actor to the audience, which was intensified by the excessive sets, such as the panel of guns on stage right, which were an antithesis to a typically low-budget, inexpensive campus space, even in North Indian suburbs where gun control would be limited. The performance text itself did not reveal in any way why the guns were there in the first place. It was simply an addition to the larger theme of violence within education, and in being the dominating visual motif of the set, rendered the stage absurd within a realist setup. The costumes and getup of the students were very carefully tailored, with some of them wearing sleeveless jeans jackets and wife-beater vests, knucklebusters and biking accessories like armbands etc., with prominent tattoos on their arms. While this was not a recognizable getup of a university hosteller, even within the private universities of Delhi, it was clearly a very Bollywoodised version of how a college-goer would look, akin to the character of Laxman Prasad played by Zayed Khan in the film *Main Hoon Na* directed by Farah Khan or the character of Dukhhi Bana in Anurag Kashyap's *Gulal*.

In spite of their great differences, the overwhelming carry-over between the two very diverse performances in KMC and NSD was the aggressive North Indian male identity, buttressed here by the typically strong and perfect male body and the particularly suggestive stage design. The

situation complicated itself with the metatheatrical narrative of professional theatre training. Many students from KMC, with their deep investment in theatre, eventually joined NSD[57]. Members of the original cast of *Holi* at KMC, Prashant Kumar and Himanshu Kohli, eventually joined NSD, and while neither of them were possibly a part of the NSD version of the play, the steady influx of especially male actors from KMC to NSD to a large extent might have imported bits of the collegiate repertoire within the regimented training process of the latter. In fact, related Kislay, in his conversations with them during their early days in NSD, both Himanshu and Prashant would admit to feeling very rushed and uncomfortable within the highly professionalized training process of NSD. While the campus theatre process would involve a major chunk of rehearsal time given to free improvisation and loitering, smoking and relaxing with friends, and one production would be worked on for at least a year, if not two, NSD involved working on a particular play for no more than a month or two and an emphasis on training in traditional and folk forms such as Chhau, Kathakali etc. for each of the productions at a breakneck speed. This took a toll on the satisfaction they derived from a play experience, their confidence in devising organic acting strategies as opposed to taught canonical techniques of realism, and their ownership and attachment to performances. These were the shortcomings even of Abhilash Pillai's *Holi*, the fact that it was about the campus space, that too a fractured campus space, but none of the actors looked like the denizens of a campus or had any improvisatory

[57] KMC remains the DU college that accounts for a large number of MA admission in NSD from DU.

moment where the audience could indulge in identification. The final humiliation scene, blocking-wise quite similar to the KMC production, turned melodramatic simply because of the hyperbolic projection of the male body in a sari as the abject victim figure, all alone on center stage, under a powerful spotlight, breaking down and crumpling on the floor for a prolonged period of stage time. While in the KMC production this scene was fairly long, the violence of the act was kept very real through the mostly unnecessary use of physical violence and the constant presence of the mob throughout the scene, keeping it away from the visual lexicon of the Fallen Hero/Woman trope. In fact, in the KMC play, the figure of Anand cowering as he took the blows and the insults rendered unnecessary the need to dedicate a separate time allocation for the emotional trauma of the character.

However, in spite of the significant differences between the two productions, it is interesting to push the point about a travelling repertoire of the campus, that has a certain form and meaning within the confines of campus spaces, and on its import to formalized actor training setups like NSD, get modified, retaining the "marketable" points and attributes, such as hinterland masculinity, which in turn perhaps feeds the culture industry of Bollywood and its new obsession with fetishized North Indian male lumpenism. This is a tenuous relationship to be drawn, but the number of KMC students who start their careers in campus theatre and land up in Mumbai through NSD is revealing of the possibility of a direct connection between the amateur theatre setup of the DU college and the culture industry of Hindi cinema. Here, it is important to focus

on the non-market, non-commercial value that collegiate theatre in DU possesses, as an activity that is sanctioned by the college but is not necessarily feeding directly into the culture industry of the city. And when the shift happens towards professionalizing the campus-based practice, it retains only the most alienating and problematic of attributes – machismo – simply because it sells.

In the context of the Indian campus, *Holi* as a script has become significant and very popular because it gives different students till date the opportunity to express their own issues with and experiences of the higher education system, despite the original text being written in 1969. Endlessly adaptable, considering the basic premise of rebellion and punishment is still a lived reality in campuses, there have been performances of *Holi* in a number of colleges, and within DU, the notable precedent performance before The Players happened in 1991, performed by the then newly formed IBTIDA, the dramatics society of Hindu College formed by the now famous Bollywood film director Imtiyaz Ali. *Holi* also has a special place within the life of the campus because of the Hindi filmmaker Ketan Mehta's well-known diploma film[58]from 1984 based on the same script, which was the debut of the famous Bollywood star Amir Khan.The crisscrossing of stories of Bombay stardom with *Holi*, while appearing as a coincidence, can be seen as symbolic of the professional career path that some young actors from DU chart out through KMC, NSD and on to Bollywood. *Holi* also becomes a small part of the very long and slow

[58]https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HdMHpAe_Z6Y

process of the insertion of the rebellious, Hindi-speaking aggressive North Indian male as a leading man figure in contemporary Bollywood films, challenging the dominance of upper class, South-Bombay type rich young men as hero material in the current flock of films. This shift is seen in the films of Anurag Kashyap most notably, a filmmaker who has made a shift from making critically acclaimed cinema which was more indie in feel such as *Paanch*, *Black Friday* and *No Smoking* etc. in his early career, often incurring the wrath of the censor board due to the use of excessive violence and abuse and other controversies, to commercial successes such as *Dev D*, *Gangs of Wasseypur*, *Gulal* etc. which had similar levels of abuse and violence, but were big box office hits. This is also seen in Vishal Bhardwaj's directorial work in films such as *Ishqiya,* and *Omkara*. Both the directors, incidentally alumna of DU, have made films which explore the limits and fringes of Bollywood cinema dealing with the privileged upper class, often drawing heavily from the Bombay ganglands aesthetic of the 1990s found in films by Vidhu Vinod Chopra and Ram Gopal Verma, exposing the undesirable underbelly of the "maximum city". Only with the works of these two directors (Kashyap and Bhardwaj), very different from each other, the site of gangland violence shifts from Mumbai, with underworld violence becoming more surreptitious and less visible on the streets post the 1990s, to the Hindi heartlands of the country. While in many of the aforementioned films, the leading men would still be stars from a South Bombay background (consider the cast of *Omkara*), the presence of NSD trained actors such as Irfan Khan (*Maqbool*, *Haasil* by Tigmanshu Dhulia) and

Nawazuddin Siddiqui (*Gangs of Wasseypur*) in such films would go on to define the comeback of the non-urban, angry North Indian male as the center of the plot. This hero would not be aimed as a critique of postcolonial modernity and the migrant experience of urban life such as in the Angry Young Man trope of the 1960s-70s[59]. Instead, this new North Indian male hero, with a background of rural or suburban upper class (either landed elite UP Brahmins, such as in *Omkara* or even elite Muslims such as the Bihari Qureshis in *Gangs of Wasseypur*) fights for the maintenance of the status quo of "honour" and power in the rural countryside or suburban towns through swift and graphic violence. Women in these films oscillate between keepers of house and secrets of the crimes committed by the men, often graduating to become gangsters themselves, and sexually charged dancers, very often extramarital liaisons entertaining the men at social gatherings – both kind actively complicit in the criminality of the society depicted.

It is important to interrogate the increasing acceptance that the aggressive North Indian rural elite male is enjoying (sample a series of films along similar lines by other directors, *Ishaqzaade, Desi Katte*, etc. merging the aesthetic of countryside clan violence with young romance) as an important subjective position within commercial cultural production of Bollywood, and subsequently in the channels of theatre practice such as DU and NSD which often feed Bollywood. This is not a subaltern subject position if the caste politics and gender violence connected to "honour" in the Hindi heartland is taken into account. It is very much a dominant,

[59] Prasad, Madhava, *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction*, OUP, New Delhi, 2000

male, elite understanding of the world and one wonders how this came to be the alternative subject position offered by commercial culture industry to the South Bombay, aspirational mode. Here it is valuable to borrow from Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) model of social analysis of the *"field as a network… in the structure of the distribution of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field…"* The network of the field in Bourdieu's analysis is a system of social classification, which is predicated on the relations of power between the actors, either individuals or organisations within it. The relations of power are defined by the levels of access to the resources of the field which are the principle currency towards the claiming of power. In Bourdieu's understanding of the field, power relations within the social sphere is derived from four kinds of capital – economic capital or access to money, social capital or relationships with important people, cultural capital or initiation into dominant modes of high culture through pedagogic tools such as education, and symbolic capital or prestige within society. In the increasing acceptance of North Indian aggressive masculinity within the repertoire of the popular cultural hero, and the making and mimicking of the same masculinity in collegiate theatre in DU, one sees a curious mobility of cultural capital and symbolic capital, especially within a campus space such as DU, not only towards a large-scale cultural and symbolic legitimacy of the suburban landed-elite social class within the field of culture which is the field of power, but also within the parallel arena of the market (the exclusively economic iteration of the field) in the form of the acceptance by the culture industry

of Bollywood. An interesting departure from Bourdieu's ideas is in the form of the "posturing" mentioned by Kislay, and witnessed by Keval Arora, where actors from backgrounds of relatively higher cultural capital, i.e. urban education, exposure to the arts and cultural distinction as the educated urban middle class become actors both on stage and off it and play out at least the visual and linguistic lexicon of those who for them is the lower class male. While this could very well be seen as a failed project that prevents the real identification because of the class habitus ingrained into the person's social behavior, what becomes the accepted mode of behavior on campus to gain a foothold within the social sphere of the KMC campus is not the high cultural capital identity of the student, but his posturing as a character with low cultural capital. The relatively high social and symbolic capital that this male figure has within the rural or suburban space that is depicted in the films that glorify this male subject position, possibly elides the low cultural capital aspect in favour of the a revenue-generating high economic capital of the character within the culture industry, in turn glorifying and celebrating the popular culture currency of this subject position. This does not quite displace habitus perhaps, but acknowledges the role of conscious agency in the form of acting and representation in appropriating class identities with differential claims on the resources of the field. Here, the urban middle class, consisting of many of the members of the DU dramatics society circuit, with high cultural capital, deliberately postures in a subject position of a relatively lower class person for increased social and symbolic capital within the dramatics society itself. On the question of representation

through a realist mode, mostly to make a point about class divisions and access to resources, such as in the case of *Class Enemy*, there seems to be an absence of a performative vocabulary of the working class beyond this standardized North Indian male machismo. Here again comes the question of the political transformation and critique of class positions that theatre productions within DU try to effect, but get trapped in this unidirectional persona of "working class", which is in actuality perhaps an amalgamated, essentialised image of the urban lower class and the rural upper class, seen through the lens of the angry peri-urban Bollywood hero. It would be interesting to illustrate the differential cultural capital and economic and symbolic capital that is a play in this situation through an example of a professional theatre production called *Karkhana* that took place in March 2015 in New Delhi. Planned to be a ticketed performance that would run a preview followed by a number of shows, the play was a translation and adaptation of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's film *Katzelmacher* released also incidentally in 1969. The director Nikhil Mehta had studied theatre direction at Columbia University in USA and on his arrival in Delhi had been working on a translation of the English film script. In my capacity as the dramaturg for the production, I was a part of the production process and long sessions of production notes with Nikhil. The script was originally set in a working class town in Germany where a group of young men and women, working in a factory would pass their days in sheer boredom till an immigrant joined them as a "guest labourer", pushing them to gang up and grievously injure him in a show of racist mob violence. *Karkhana* was meant to be a site-specific

performance, being rehearsed and performed in a factory basement in the industrial suburb of Delhi, Okhla. The actors recruited through the auditions had all been part of the amateur collegiate circuit of DU, while Nikhil was coming from entirely different, professional studio training in theatre. The setting had been changed to a bunch of small-scale white collar workers working at the backend of a large corporation, after a prolonged discussion regarding the class identities of the characters, which was very self-evident in the original. While *Karkhana* was essentially meant to be about a group of people ganging up on an outsider, it was also indicative of this violence being engineered by the loss of meaning in the lives of the workers in a high-capitalist workforce, where, akin to the conjecture of Mauricio Lazzarato (1996), services had taken precedence over manual work, rendering the presence of the bodies of the workers redundant. The actors, each of them coming from either upper middle class backgrounds of DU education or professional theatre training either in NSD or acting studios in the USA, with very high cultural capital, if not economic, symbolic and social capital as well, were made to go through an intense process of service based "labour" every day to warm up for the scenes. This process was that each of them would be allocated a chair and a table within the rigidly designed the set, where they would sit and continuously do a series of actions that indicated boring office work, set to a rhythm counted out through the music, a remixed record of clockwork sounds. The actions were stapling of papers, taking out papers from files and putting them inside other files, searching through the desks, reading papers, fanning themselves with papers etc., a closely

choreographed scene of perfect synchronization of the ensemble. On the day of the performance, this was what the audience entered the space to watch, till everyone settled down and the real action of the play would start. In spite of this conscious choreography of a physical score that would speak of the embodiment of the contemporary working class, the rest of the play saw a continuous deployment of the aggressive North Indian male figure by the men of the cast to denote their own working class status, especially in the context of this working class which was potentially violent. There was not much of a questioning as to how the characters of Deepak and Ekraaj, the two alpha males of the group who took initiative to violently accost J, the new worker hailing from Assam, came to gestures and acting techniques similar to what was seen in the two production of *Holi* – spread legs while sitting, exaggerated swagger of walking, projected chest, and a stereotypical scratching of the testicles while speaking which was an exaggerated comic action perceived to be a trademark move of the Indian lower class male, seen in so many films, alternatively as funny for men and threatening for women. This physical score of the lower class or working class man had become the go-to representation of the vast and varied intersection of workers in the country, evident in the performances of both the cosmopolitan Delhiite upper middle class professional actor playing Ekraaj, the DU-trained outstation student actor playing Deepak and the NSD trained outstation student playing J.

This brings out a larger question about the change in the upper middle class' perceptions of the lower classes within India, no longer perhaps within the representational logic that Keval Arora

deems as necessary, which has also been the logic behind the student movements of the 1960s and the necessity for upper middle class students with high culture capital to declass themselves and join arms in larger political struggles of the working classes for their rights and livelihoods. Instead, an image of aggression replaces the image of the working class as victims or even as agential presences that fight for change, the earlier representations of the working classes in theatre productions such as those of *Jana Natya Manch*. The aggression begins as an assertion of power reclaimed from the upper classes and becomes the dominant perception and mode of representing the working class.

Political Society Within the Campus

It is very interesting to interrogate this new articulation of working class masculinity in terms of its politics of representation, bringing in the framework suggested by Partha Chatterjee (2004) to analyze the postcolonial democratic state and the limits of libertarian universalist citizenship, by demarcating two domains within the workings of the state – the civil society and the political society. While the former would be the domain in which the socio-cultural elite would partake, through the egalitarian principles of libertarian democracy with universal franchise, the latter would be the domain of subaltern classes for whom the access to the rights of democratic citizenship comes through channels which do not strictly fall within the limits of legality and are negotiated through political understandings with civic and legal authorities. In the articulation of their relationship with authority, be it the state or the government college or the boss of the

factory, the new working class heroes in the aforementioned examples of *Holi*, contemporary Bollywood cinema or *Karkhana* or similar representations show their location squarely within the para-legal domain of political society. The actors playing the characters in the productions are very much a part of civil society in terms of their cultural capital, but in the case of the campus this is not an easy generalization to make. The contemporary institution is successfully transforming into an entity that does not predicate its authority on the physical or direct participation of students and teachers in the manner of the democratic representation. This is covertly clear in the complete negation of the importance of student unions in new privatized institutions and overtly evident in the introduction of cloud campuses and MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) as new classroom teaching tools that renders the power dynamics of the classroom space unnecessary to maintain the legitimacy of power of the institution. In this context, it can become increasingly tough for students to claim their spot as stakeholders of consequence in the functioning of the institution and to optimally experience higher education. Their negotiations with the authority, in this context the institution, then has to come into the realm of political society, in spite of the discrepancy in cultural capital of the students in the context that Partha Chatterjee uses the term. It can be argued then that in the case of *Holi* and many ensuing collegiate productions that made use of the ubiquitous stock characteristics of the North Indian aggressive male, this could have been their understanding of political society, where the only point of negotiation between a fast changing neoliberal college, university, city

and world is through explicit violence, and through that, a deeper understanding of the students' role within the social sphere of the campus. Except that when this aggressive masculinity was imported into the professional setup of NSD or the culture industry of Bollywood, it completely lost its political potential and became just another trope that encompassed the diverse experiences of the neoliberal working class.

To conclude, I would like to point out that the projection of this alternative masculinity as the dominant subjectivity within the campus space, in spite of its marketability and new found glamour, still exposes the agonistic character of the campus space. Neither does this adhere to acceptable vocabularies of political decorum within student political struggles, nor does it fit well into the larger project of the central government educational organisation of Delhi University into making students a part of the democratic process of the country. In the context of this (self?) imposition of decorum on the language of protest, we shall now focus on the disciplining of women students and constructions of decorum of behavior within collegiate theatre coming out of women's colleges in New Delhi.

Chapter 3

THE OTHER STAGE: FISSURES WITHIN THE CAMPUS AND REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDER

In mapping the intersectionalities within the larger "student body" of DU, which would critically challenge the perception of the campus space as a space of democratic consent, we have already spoken of the role that certain performances within DU theatre play in constructing and representing characters outside the ambit of the urban upper-middle class "cultural arbitrary" (Bourdieu, Passeron, 1990) of the campus, with interesting results. In this chapter, we shall focus on the construction of gender identity within women's colleges in DU, and the collusion of this identity with consumerist economy and the making of the woman consumer and woman corporate professional. As the institution moves towards neoliberal policies in education, aiming for increased productivity and skill building within students, the spatio-temporal entity of the campus is threatened by the onslaught of free market values, discouraging nonproductive work and the political relationship it produces between students and institutions. Women's colleges have been a favoured recruiting ground for corporate economy in India not only because of the wage gap[60]that enables cheap labour, but also the collusion of patriarchal power with corporate economy to establish rigid disciplining among the labour force through the naturalized

[60]http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Unequal-pay-for-equal-work-dogs-working-women-in-India-Study/articleshow/7659619.cms

subordinate position of women within society. In this context, the institution of the women's college in India has reasonably changed their pedagogic agenda to accommodate demands of a corporate economy within the larger rubric of female empowerment through education. This insidious marriage of libertarian progressivism with corporate economy is implemented through careful disciplining of the campus space within these colleges. This disciplining extends itself to the strategic promotion of all-women spaces and values of liberal feminism that construct a template of female success that directly feed into high capitalist market economy and elides more radical understanding of feminist thought. In this chapter, I would analyse some of the means of protest deployed by students for considerably expanding permissible limits of good behaviour within these women's colleges. These means would not only be direct action such as political protestsstthat uphold the dialectical relationship of the campus with the institution, but also women's collegiate theatre, which allows for the stretching of the limits of propriety and decorum, cornerstones of the pliant female workforce in a corporate patriarchy nexus.

The imagined sanity that pervades the campus space within public imagination to a large extent glosses over the entrenched violence and inequality that is a part of collegiate life in India. The denial to acknowledge that the campus space will throw up the exact same social-political issues and instances of conflict as the "outside world" comes with the possibility that every time there is an instance of violence or conflict within the campus, it is considered to be an aberration in the general routine of the campus. Consequently, the daily instances of violence prevalent within the

space such as ragging, sexual harassment, systemic casteism and class hierarchies are completely normalized and develop an unhealthy culture of silence around them. In this chapter, the critical lens over the campus is narrowed down to examine one such instance of conflict within the perceived safe space of the campus – one very specific instance of systemic oppression and institutional crackdown that occurred following an unprecedented small political strike in Lady Shri Ram College for Women in February 2009. The analysis of this incident is a part of a larger narrative of construction of gender identity within the DU campus, a construction that is represented and reproduced via the discourse generated by cultural productions coming out of the colleges. A critical survey of certain theatre productions undertaken by students of women's colleges within DU points towards the failures of the campus space at being an inclusive or safe space for all students and the nagging existence of patriarchal values even within the relatively transformative space of the campus. This in some cases extends itself into the world of professional theatre as well, and gives interesting insights into the construction of womanhood within the urban space of Delhi, a city that is touted widely as the "rape capital" of India[61]. I attempt to understand the two examples of the strike and the performances of the women's colleges as two instances that populate the socio-political landscape of an exclusively women's campus space, and if, within the context of the larger gender identity building exercise of the institution, they manage to create a radically intersectional feminist identity for themselves.

[61] http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Shame-Delhi-still-Indias-rape-capital/articleshow/13793594.cms

Before entering into the details of the political strike in Lady Shri Ram College for Women, there is a necessity to give a certain context to the example. Lady Shri Ram College for Women, or LSR in common parlance, is a premier women's college situated in the upper middle class residential neighborhood of Lajpat Nagar in South Delhi. LSR was founded in 1956 by the industrialist Lala Shri Ram who established the Delhi Cotton Mills, and till date the governing board of the college is presided over by the principle member of the Ram family. Because of its unique location as an "off-campus" college, which is that it is not located in either of the two campuses of Delhi University, many students of LSR confess to feeling a sense of geographical isolation that gives rise to an ideological isolation. This dislocated experience of the campus shapes the comparative insularity of the LSR student population and to a large extent constructs an image of the typical LSR graduate within the larger DU campus and related popular literature and media, replete with misogyny and class antagonism[62]. The situation works in a typically nebulous manner of patriarchy – on the one hand LSR at an institutional level situates itself within the tradition of post-independence progressive women's education, feminist discourse is taught and actively encouraged within classes and other social spheres of the college; on the other, the geographical distance between the two campuses of DU limits interactions between students of LSR and the rest of the university, giving rise to a myth of inaccessibility, which is

[62] Consistently produced sexist articles such as this: http://buzzepedia.com/8-reasons-why-you-should-date-a-girl-from-lady-shri-ram-college/ produce frustrated, problematic outbursts such as this: http://buzzepedia.com/8-reasons-why-you-should-date-a-girl-from-lady-shri-ram-college/. Both the websites are very popular among students of DU.

doubled by the perceived "feminist" label of the college (feminism being either an exotic identity or a socially unacceptable behavior which is the mainstay of upper class)and the positioning of LSR within the upper middle class, posh ethos of South Delhi in spite of the diverse class backgrounds of its students. The larger social setups of Delhi or of the many hometowns that students hail from appear bleak and oppressive after graduating with the values that "the magic of LSR" inculcates, making life back home tough to adjust to[63]. For many students within LSR, there is very little difference between the levels of oppression on two sides of the argument – while the institution's idea of feminist discourse can become top-down and elide all traces of intersectional identity politics, the pejorative branding as "feminist" within the rest of the campus severely impedes interactions with university peers and positions LSR students within an "out-of-my-league", aspirational desire for so-called upper class women (in simple parlance, a "catch"). This Scylla and Charybdis[64] situation is best illustrated with a small example. During annual functions of the college, many a time high-profile male chief guests are invited to address the student body and on majority of these occasions, immediately after pontificating over the achievements of women in India, the guests publicly confess to having stood in front of the LSR gates waiting to catch a glimpse of the girls inside. In this kind of scenario, the institution often

[63] The "snob-value" attached to LSR students can hinder their social credibility in various ways, be it matrimonial advertisements stating "LSR girls need not apply" or being perceived as disrespectful of traditions and decorum.
[64] A situation of danger on both sides: http://www.thefreedictionary.com/between+Scylla+and+Charybdis

takes its protectionism beyond acceptable levels, impinging on and actively manipulating the formation of the students' identities as young women.

From the very first time the college principal addresses the new batch of undergraduates in Lady Shri Ram College for Women, Lajpat Nagar, the normative discourse that is deployed to define a "community" within the institution is that of the heteronormative family. While young women are mentored and guided within these familial setups, especially those who live in the hostels, unmarried women are non-negotiably disallowed to be local guardians for hostel residents. It is important here to remember that hostel residents are a large part of the student constituency and include a very diverse population from different regions, class, caste and political ideas, all of which is encouraged to amalgamate within the shared celibate Spartan life of the mess. It is then only "natural" for such a familial community to invisibilise entirely the political potential that is present within the students of the college who come from different backgrounds and geographical locations, with different ideas about politics. Instead, all legitimate demands of the students body has to be vocalised through polite discussion and dialogue. While LSR has a students' union, the body is sufficiently depoliticized and is forever implicated into logistical and clerical work befitting of an event management body. This often renders such bodies to become part of the neoliberal project of professionalization of education and the building of the labour force. In order to understand this, there is a need to delve a little deeper into the space of the Women's College in contemporary India.

Women's Colleges and their existence within India have a very specific history of interaction between social reforms of the colonial elite, with regard to issues such as women's education and their protectionist need to respect gender segregation in accordance with Hindu household practices, Muslim purdah practices, and overseen by the puritanism of a Victorian state. The post-independence woman's college was built to realize new aspirations of women. Like so many other public institutions of the era, the colleges were also bestowed with the responsibility of training the new citizens of a new nation who will be markers of the new modernity, occupying pride of place within the new found public institutions of the state (Tharu, 2000). Needless to say, this project had stumbled upon its limitations by the 1960s, with members of the progressive women's movement actively dissociating with Nehruvian socialism, and the state became the greatest site of contestation for the feminist movement for at least the next two decades (John, 1996). New solidarities were formed within the women's movement—environmental activism, indigenous struggles, movements for peace and social entrepreneurship taking precedence. Women's colleges played active roles in educating generations of women who had been a part of these movements. In fact, this generation of activist social entrepreneurs consists of women who are inducted into the Honour Rolls of these colleges till date.

While women's colleges within India have undoubtedly played a role in the lives of their students, as separatist[65], empowering spaces enabling new and radical idioms of womanhood, there is a necessity to view these institutions critically at this juncture, when these radical new idioms of womanhood are getting absorbed and appropriated by the insidious joint identities of the woman-citizen, woman-professional and the woman-consumer. The idea of the "woman achiever", that runs deep within the ideology of liberal, progressive women's institutions, while on the one hand promotes substantive equality, is increasingly becoming the handmaiden to the ideal female neoliberal consumer-citizen of the contemporary nation.

> *"Being one of the council members gives you the opportunity to hone your skills in leadership, team management, conception and execution of ideas, and negotiation. These are the students who go on to shape the future of our nation."*

On this note, quoted from the web-site of Gargi College, another premier women's college in DU, we take the instance of the college elections in order to interrogate the citizenship-building project of women's colleges. Most of the unions are rendered into "student councils", opting for a term that is less aligned to ideas of protest and political bargaining (worker's unions) and leaning more towards governance and decision-making (local council). This process effectively

[65] Frye, Marilyn, "*Some Reflections on Separatism and Power"*, in *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*, Crossing Press, 1983

takes away the political teeth and bargaining power that student unions can potentially have, narrowing down the jurisdiction of the body to the confines of the college, and its duties the caretaking of the college's status quo. In a conversation with the principal of IP College for Women, she mentioned that women's colleges often become spaces of retreat, safe and protected. The fragility of many women who attend college, who are still prohibited from studying and come from very orthodox families, is kept protected through ungainly but necessary structural constraints such as early curfews. There is a general sense of the outside world as a dangerous place and the pejorative that the concept of "politics" carries, bearing traces of potential violence, which might threaten the retreat-like space of a women's college. In spite of being affiliated to the Delhi University Students' Union, the Miranda House Student's Union has put up a puzzling notice on the college website.

> *"The programmes of the Students' Union are framed with the prior approval of the Principal. The meetings of the General Body of the union are also arranged with the prior permission of the Principal. Neither the Students' Union nor any society arranges any programme/ meeting connected with any political party. These rules will remain in force notwithstanding any provision made elsewhere."*[66]

[66] http://www.mirandahouse.ac.in/mirandahouse/programfile/infogallery/homepage/Click.asp?LinkName=6&strLinkName=Societies&From=

The imagined sanity within women's colleges makes the event of student's union elections that much more of a performance of the ideal female citizen, the educated, articulate, high-achieving independent professional woman, with a complete devotion to the infallible systems of liberal democracy. This intra-collegiate world of liberal democracy has its basis in the institution's favoured view of the residents of the college as a natural, familial community, based solely on the commonality of gender, devoid of violence and politics of the outside world. The importance of "dialogue" and decision-making through consensus and quorum are important values that are inculcated through the election processes of these elections, and a general sense of discipline and relative lack of physical violence during elections within women's colleges result in the electoral processes becoming working models of non-violent, rational democracy being operated through forms of dialogue between the students and the authorities, in the manner of the workings of the civil society from Partha Chatterjee's work (2004). This is no doubt an illusion, as we shall discuss later into the research, as, following Monique Wittig's influential work on the lesbian society (1981), the baseless assumptions of women being a "natural group" can be extended to women's colleges and familial communities within them. It would be important to see the potential for a "lesbian society" within the woman's college, to tease out moments of political solidarity beyond the trope of sisterhood.

Across all the women's colleges that have student body elections, there are specific attributes that successful electoral candidates generally have. A Third Year student at IP College, also the President of their Women's Development Cell observes the traits spot on.

> *"It helps if the candidate is able to articulate her agenda and is willing to work for the college community. Students also generally prefer candidates who are into extra-curricular activities or sports."*

Young women, who tend to achieve many goals together, excelling in studies as well as multiple fields within the college, are seen as the most worthy representatives of their constituency. Multitasking, among other attributes such as effective articulation, organization and leadership skills and ability to work in a team are all valued, and most of the questions coming to the candidates during the electoral debates deal with their ability to invite sponsorships and deliver smooth events such as college festivals, or be a problem-solver for pertinent collegiate issues such as Xerox machines in the library or water leakage in the bathrooms. It is important to note that none of these "issues" are strictly apolitical *per* se, but is the preferred approach towards these in terms of problems which need solutions, there is a functionality-based omission of political content. While this may or may not help in quick redressal of on-campus issues, what it does effectively, I argue, is to keep such problems within the realm of civil society interactions with the authority and turning them into skill-building exercises that trains the students in

tackling situations of possible conflict through "solutions" rather than protest. This is a visible shift from unionist tendencies of dealing with authority to corporate cultures of neutralising conflict through actively engineered consensus.

While the agendas of most candidates circle around the same points it ultimately falls upon the most articulate, or the most friendly or the most popular student to secure a post in the student body. The electoral debates become competitions in strategic thinking and English extempore skills. This is essentially the point where the measure of success as a citizen within a democratic electoral process is articulated, forming a template for the contemporary woman achiever. Corporatization has changed the very nature of labour, with "services" taking precedence over manual work (Lazzarato, 1996). In this climate over the labour force, managerial skills such as "leadership", "communication", "strategic thinking" etc. are much sought after. Student Union elections that do not have a larger political ramification then become rehearsals in corporatespeak, and a rehearsal of the neoliberal democratic electoral process. In this context, the student union within LSR has been no exception, and as a body that has often seen alumnae in powerful positions in the government and policy-making, the body has been accused frequently of primarily being an event management body[67]. But there have been instances when the relationship between students and the authorities have been brought into the realm of political

[67] An interview with the LSR union: http://www.universityexpress.co.in/delhiuniversity/2015/05/lsr-students-union-interview/

negotiation, invoking the socio-political relations engendered within the ephemeral campus space.

The Limits of Dissent

Around the end of February, 2009, an anonymous group calling themselves TBR, an acronym for Think Beyond Rules, started sending out mass e-mails to LSR student contact lists they had acquired from the archives of the Academic Forum and the Voluntary Agency Placement Program, two fairly small non-Performing Arts Societies with limited outreach among the students. Written in remarkably cutting and analytical language, the TBR mails expressed discontent regarding the state of affairs in college and pinpointed a couple of issues that were angering the students – namely the exorbitant amount of money charged to get a photocopy of an examination answer sheet after the grades were out, and more crucially, the unreasonably high price of food in the LSR Cafe. *"...They were certainly very sharp in their choice of the problem..."* observed an ex-student of the college, and the Cafe prices issue eventually became the rallying point around which a call was given for *"a friendly protest on Tuesday, 3rd March* [2009]*, during LUNCH in the RUINS outside the café"*. What the TBR *parcha*[68] had intended to be *"fun, loud and happy"* and merely a *"little hungama about the cafe prices"* became a staggeringly energetic, politically motivated mass of about 45 – 50 protesting women trooping through the corridors of the college shouting angry slogans. This unprecedented development

[68] pamphlet

posed a highly effective threat to the hitherto unquestioned paradigms of "dialogue" and "conflict resolution", charging the architectural edifice of the college with the dynamism of what Foucault calls "plebness" (Foucault, 1980), what the students considered as their rightful language of political activism and that which the institution only saw as misdirected lumpenism and "inappropriate conduct" unbecoming of young educated middle-class women. In an interview titled *Truth and Power*, given to Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino, Foucault mentions a "plebian quality", "*something in the social body, in classes, groups and individuals themselves which in some sense escapes relations of power"*, that is a spate kind of political consciousness beyond that of authority or of proletarian subjectivity. The strength of the pleb subjectivity comes from their relationship with authority which does not have a set language of engagement, as would be the case in representational, democratic processes.

> *"This measure of plebs is not so much what stands outside relations of power as their limit, their underside, their counter-stroke, that which responds to every advance of power by a movement of disengagement."*

This very "inappropriateness" of the Cafe dharna became such a site of plebness within the students' body of the college, as the protestors understood the transgressive nature of their protest simply through the nature of institutional crackdown in the form of examination card detainment, phone calls to anxious parents and threats about career futures. The nature of authority within a setup such as LSR imposed familial values and infantilised students and this had got to have had a direct linkage with the fact that it is an all-women's college. The

institutional reaction and the disciplinary actions taken were also invoking the paradigm of a disciplining parent such as scoldings, telephone calls to homes and a clear message that "*anonymous mails belonged in the dustbin*"[69]. The absolute outrage that the protest registered in the minds of the college administration was because the performance of the protest was consummately making use of performative modes that were considered to be far away from the sophistication and comfort of the LSR family, beyond the permissible limits of protest. When on the day of the dharna, women gathered around the fringes of the Cafe, a place that had been important enough to have a name, which was "The Ruins", we found out that most of the placards that were brought were in Hindi. This was an interesting phenomenon, as in LSR practically everyone spoke to each other in English (apart from some students of the Hindi and Sanskrit language departments, resulting in their firm position in the low cultural capital category within the social hierarchy of the college).An agitational dharna which was the first spontaneous and politically motivated act within college by most of the students who took part in it, became a platform for them to identify with performative modes that they were acquainted with, from the larger agit-prop political protests[70] of the country, modes they had not so far had the opportunity to be a part of. To add to this, the *daphli*, an instrument that the entire population of the college identified with the street-theatre group, came to inhabit the nerve centre of all the song and dance

[69] The principal's opinion about the TBR *parcha*, as spoken about in the college assembly.
[70] Such as sit-ins and dharnas and *chakka-jam* modes of protest that we see during *hartaals* and in Jantar Mantar area

that the dharna started with, when students adlibbed strategic songs from Hindi films (the most notable one being '*Emotional Atyaachaar'* from *Dev-D*), often dancing along. The sloganeering started after the crowd moved from the liminal space of The Ruins to inside the cafe, in a spontaneous act of reclamation of space, sitting on the tables, the walls and on the floor (and not only on the seats). This part of the protest, along with Hindi slogans such as *"Tanashahi Nahi Chalegi"* [71] and *"LSR Jawaab Do"* etc were viewed as offensive to the core by the administration, for whom this political language was nothing but a misplaced adoption of trade-unionist, party-activist, rabble-rouser sensibilities into the uncluttered, familial space of the college. One of the faculty members even complained, *"Yeh kya JNU samajh ke rakha hai?"*[Do you take this place to be JNU?][72]Matters escalated further with the charged-up crowd deciding to parade through the corridors of the college and occupying the Lower Foyer, the decorative space right at the entrance of the college. An ex-student of the college observed,

> *"...the ruins and the foyer are also the most visible/decorative points in LSR... the foyer for the ubiquitous rangoli and the ruins is often photographed for magazines."*

[71] Tanashahi is an Urdu word for dictatorship or autocracy. This was a slogan that enraged the principal, a professor of political science, so much, that she grabbed some students on the spot and asked them to tell her the meaning of the word, trying to expose at the same time the lack of understanding on the part of the students and their actual class identity of English speaking, elite women who were suffering from a delusion of subversive potential of union-type working class politics.

[72] JNU or Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi being famous for having an atmosphere of progressive, autonomous student movements.

It was interesting that the agitators found these very places, the much-advertised architectural entities of the institution, useful for the purposes of reclamation of space, and for allowing the spatio-temporal arrangement of the campus to flow through, and it was possible to interpret these spaces as well as the transitional space of the corridors as liminal spaces that were perfectly suited for an agitation of this nature, spearheaded by a yet to be identified anonymous group in the face of a paranoid counter-strike by the administration.

During the eventual meeting with the principal regarding the cafe issue (eventually being referred to as a *jan sunwai*[73]), the large group of mobilised students that turned up for the interaction again displayed this affinity for extra-institutional, "pleb" behaviour, such as insisting on sitting on the floor of the auditorium instead of on the chairs. An ex-student pointed out,

> *"It was voicing a sense of ownership in the sense that "this is our college, we'll march where we want and sit wherever."*

This was a radical reinterpretation of the aestheticised architecture of the college that for the duration of the protest ceased to stand for a hegemonic structure disciplining the bodies and minds of young women of the campus.

[73] Hindi for public hearing, a term used by agitational people's movements such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan and the Majdoor Kissan Shakti Sangathan, to denote the event of the people of the movement sitting for a public meeting with the authorities.

In interrogating the nature of TBR's erstwhile popularity within the students of the college, one faces some important questions regarding the constitution of power within the college precinct. As has been said with respect to Arendt's understanding of 20th century totalitarianism (1973), power within LSR is definitely not merely a downward-percolating or top-heavy phenomenon but takes the structure of the onion. While it is definitely a stretch to label LSR as a totalitarian organization, Arendt's analysis of an organizational structure that rarefy the centrality of power into layers of insularity which develop a sense of legitimacy through their front organisations is very helpful in parts to analyse the status of power relations within the precinct of the college. In the best tradition of a woman's institution, power is played out within various fields – self-disciplining, particularly significant for young women, which is forged by very elegant, professionalized cultural production of the college, and various micro-level class-based hegemonies that are prevalent within the diverse demography of a residential government college. These nodes of power are often given institutional labels such as unions and societies or even cliques. TBR, being an anonymous body that gave a call for a *dharna* which ultimately took on a life of its own, wrote itself into a political tradition of non-representative people's power, an anarchist position that enables political protest without a specific leadership. While the institution was absolutely incapable of coping with such politics and dismissed TBR because of its anonymity, it was this anonymity that enabled every student who was a part of the protest to claim the protest as her own, culminating in the electrifying slogan --

"TBR kaun hai? Hum sab! Hum sab!" [Who is TBR? All of us! All of us!]

The naturalised feeling of a community engendered by the rhetoric of the family which had been officially deployed for years by the principal was suddenly broken because of this radical idea of having inherently different class backgrounds and political orientations, but being together within an affective solidarity of an organised mass of students, possibly for the first time, for many of the women.

It is interesting to see this political event through the prism of "plebness" that Michel Foucault postulates – a political mode that signals the very limits of politics. To explore the idea further, the plebness of an event, especially an event of political subversion, lies in a bleeding centrifugal force that emanates from the protesting body, a political force that goes beyond the performances of formal politics between policy-makers and governments and a mobilised populace, a political force that is difficult to describe beyond the topological subject-position of each and every protester. In terms of the TBR protest in LSR, it is possible to detect this extra-dialogic (external of the "dialogue" paradigm prevalent in the student politics of LSR) "plebness" in the disturbance that the language of the *parchas* caused within many members of the faculty. The extremely refined political language of the pamphlets, and the well-versedness it betrayed with political performances such as dharnas and pamphleteering, as well as successfully protecting

anonymity, were taken as a sign that the pamphlets were being written by members of the faculty to "instigate" the students. In answer to this TBR declared,

> *"Apart from this being a clear insult to our collective intelligence, it reveals an utter dismissal and condescension towards the student body."*

The mere shock that many members of the faculty suffered from when they read the language of the pamphlet can be seen in terms of a disturbing upturning of the knowledge/power paradigms prevalent in a liberal women's college mainly attended by students from a middle-class background. This instance of the momentous upturning of a largely unquestioned power-structure is the site for the extra-dialogic (outside the purview of a polite dialogue) and extra-performative (outside the purview of representative, performative politics) "plebness", the overwhelming narrative of "inappropriateness" of the event. It is in such instances of protest that the language of negotiation with the authority breaks out of the mould of problem-solving and democratic dialogue, interrupting the citizenship-building project of women's colleges such as LSR.

Women's Theatre in DU: Representing Plebness through the Lesbian Continuum

The limits of acceptability of protest set within the context of such eventsas the TBR protest profoundly resonate with students of women's colleges in DU. To a large extent such events expose the hypocrisy and entrenched patriarchal values within purportedly feminist discourses

propagated by the colleges themselves. Institutional feminist discourses limit the potential of plurality of gender expressions and cultural productions that try to move away from the feminist activist ethos of the 70s and 80s, restricting the entry of the contemporary campus ethos within the spatio-temporal imagination of the students. Having said that, the limits of acceptability of gender transgressions are stretched to a large extent within cultural societies of these colleges, specifically theatre societies, where the shared physical space enabled by the daily rehearsalallows departures from institutionally approved feminist thought into more inclusive and agonistic feminisms. I draw a connection between a moment of protest by TBR and the theatre productions coming out of women's colleges as being a part of the same narrative of radical feminist thought that denounces the "natural" affinities among women, a denouncement that further exposes the political inersectionalities within historical constructions of the "student body". This denouncement puts the disciplined bodies of young women students in a dialectical relationship with the traditional space-time arrangements of the institution through the act of reclamation (as seen in TBR, specifically in terms of institutional space), and is also adopted by women theatreworkers in DU as a radical embodiment of agonistic feminisms that reinterpret the woman-only space of the college not as the sisterhood paradigm of liberal feminism but as the intersectional feminist paradigm of the lesbian continuum (Rich, 1996).

Theatre productions created by women's colleges within Delhi University have unique ways of approaching questions of power and authority, but are unfortunately almost always viewed

through the repertoire of female empowerment understood within activist feminism of the 1960s-90s. The largely held opinion regarding the plays coming out of the women's colleges across DU is that they are replete with rhetoric that is expectedly "feminist". This stands as evidence of a simplistic essentialisation that takes place in terms of the "women's work" within DU theatre. Before responding to this very arbitrary instance of essentialisation, there is a need to investigate what this "feminist" label means. In one of the post-production feedback sessions with the judges at a competition in the academic year 2009-10, a member of the dramatics society of Kamala Nehru College had become highly agitated when the eminent judge, well-versed in collegiate theatre practices, had cuttingly criticised what he called the *"naari-bechaari"* paradigm of their street play *Udaan Abhi Baaki Hai.*The play had been a satire on the condition of women living within the Indian context, and like many other plays coming out of the collegiate circuit (especially from agit-prop sensibilities of street theatre), it was viewed with the expectations of hard hitting narratives about women who have been victims of violence and oppression, performed with minimal props, strong and confident dialogue delivery and realistic depiction of disturbing scenes such as rape to raise awareness regarding such issues. Because of the formulaic style of street theatre in DU, what the judge failed to recognise was that the theatreworkers had made a script about the shortcomings of the feminist movement and its problematic emancipatory nature through explorations of class privilege within the women's movement. In the same year, Lady Shri Ram College's annual proscenium production *Hairy Tales from here*

and There was critiqued by another very eminent critic of collegiate theatre for not having a more social-issue driven women-centric approach. The play was a surreal take on the many cultural significances of hair and explored different narratives on hair and hair-growth through a non-linear series of monologues, songs and choreographed sequences. The critic had found feminist narratives running through the play, but these simply were not feminist enough, as none of them were directly addressing feminist activist agendas. There was a pattern in the expectations that the campus at large had from women's collegiate theatre. To put it clearly, the "feminism" that was expected from these women's groups was specifically driven towards pro-women activism, borrowing ideas from news and current affairs. Women's colleges inevitably faced a paradoxical situation where their productions, if they were playing to the house, were needed to be attuned with the current trends of feminist legislative, political or social activism.

As an example, in the year 2010-11, when many co-ed colleges were putting up plays about corruption, following the anti-corruption protests in New Delhi under the leadership of Anna Hazare[74], girls' colleges would be expected to take up honour killings[75]or something else that aligns itself to feminist activism as their choice of theme. Many women performers in DU felt that their exploration of themes beyond this brand of feminism often resulted in requests by judges to incorporate the 'woman's question' in a more involved manner. On the other hand, if

[74]*Sawsth Man Se*, (2009) by the street play group from Sri Venkateswara College, *Swarg Mein Bhrashtachar* (2010) by students of Lakshmibai College etc. A glimpse of the scenario here: http://www.hindustantimes.com/entertainment/street-plays-against-corruption/article1-735087.aspx

[75]*In the Name of Honor* (2009-10), Maitreyi College

the productions were following this formula, judges would often make the *"naari-bechaari"* observation. Given the rigid standardisation of street theatre within Delhi University, with exact winning formulas involving physical feats such as human mountains and other tableaus and catchy, Bollywood type songs doing the rounds, many women street theatre actors had felt caught in a bind, where their almost naturalised adherence (i.e. to win competitions) to narratives of female victimhood would be rejected by judges during competitions. At the same time, standardisation of quality would ultimately discourage innovation in the productions. With proscenium theatre, whereas there seemed to have been lesser number of standardised stage-stunts to win competitions, the preferred acting style would still be realistic and the production values low-budget, giving the plays a more or less similar visual feel. A lot of times, women directors working in this setup would pick up women-centric scripts for practical reasons such as the unavailability of male actors and lack of verisimilitude in women portraying men. Sometimes they would select scripts dealing with issues of gender violence such as the 2007 - 08 Hindi language performance of Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out* by the dramatics society of Gargi College, or their 2008 - 09 production of *Qaid*, only because of their own belief in a feminist politics around these issues, but also to stand out amidst the large number of annual productions in DU every year. For the proscenium theatre competitions, teams often work on special aspects of the production to stand out in the crowd. For example, *Lights Out* was a highly memorable performance because Padmanabhan's script and the director's production design implicated the

audience in the everyday viewing of a gang-rape in the protagonist's neighbour's house. In the script, a young middle class couple living in a high building suspected the unfinished construction next to their window to be harbouring a group of people who were gang-raping a screaming woman. Leela wanted to help, but Bhaskar refused, and over the course of the play the screaming would increase, till Leela, surrounded by guests and friends, would emotionally disintegrate. The play had managed to acquire a convincing set, with chairs, sofas and a center table making the space into a posh living room. The text in original had been quite verbose, in the vein of one-room mystery plots akin to *Sleuth*, and the performances of the main cast were playing on the deliberately boring and meandering delaying tactics that the characters employed in the text, taking apart the possibilities of the criminal activity in the adjacent building before calling the police. What was remarkable about the play was the piercing screams that the director of the play would utter throughout the performance, sitting in the audience. The screams never stopped, even during blackouts, and many a times actually drowned the dialogue significantly! Everyone in the audience felt terrible and utterly disturbed, partially because the screams were distracting and hindered the viewing experience of the play. Many of us also felt genuinely worried for the director, as we could guess the psychological trauma that she would have to achieve in order to perform those screams. *Lights Out* could very well have been an exercise in a *naari-bechaari* theatre experience, but was very positively received by judges and students alike, simply because of the screams, as it helped them have a distinct identity as a performance in a

crowd of so many. This was possibly the case because while the rest of the play had looked just like any other DU production, the screams, which had started coming from amidst the audience, had made the experience of witnessing rape almost hyperreal. The sets, significant in their recognizable middle class aesthetic had most definitely played a part in this, engineering a visual identification of context with the character on stage, which received a violent shock in the break that came with the screams. As a contrast, their other production *Qaid*, which was a translation of Rona Munro's 2002 psychological drama *Iron*, was met with general disdain and mockery[76]. The play, set in a women's prison, was not only over saturated with profanity, but also contained many scenes of physical violence among the prisoners and one scene of custodial rape. In a conversation with Lavanya Jain, cast member of both the productions and president of the dramatics society for the year 2010-11, she brought up a pertinent observation. She asked that why would Kirori Mal College's production of *Holi* be praised for the realistic depiction of violence and for the profanity-filled script, and *Qaid* be so criticized for the same reasons. The answer to this question lay not in the qualitative difference between the two productions, but in the gendered difference in the limits of acceptable behavior – so much so that representations of violence by men on stage could be seen as "authentic"[77] and therefore important and appreciable, whereas the same by women would be rejected as nonsensical.

[76] In its debut performance in the annual LSR cultural festival, *Qaid* inspired peals of laughter from an audience that commented on the actors and their inability to deliver lines that were full of expletives.
[77] On a stage where "authentic" is the yardstick for quality and realism is the primary narrative device.

Unproductive Pleasure and the Failure of Liberal Feminism

In another instance, when the dramatics society of LSR staged *Hairy Tales from Here and There* in 2009-10, the overwhelming feedback that we received, among other things, was that there was no discernible feminist strain in the script. The script had been written partly by the cast and partly by myself, a long text which was fully in verse. There was no forward-moving narrative plot – the play had a repetitive, elliptical structure. The script had been conceived after a monologue workshop by an American dramatist in the American embassy in Delhi[78]. While the monologue within the feminist context was obviously a mode of vocalizing subjectivities, and indeed, most of the monologues were those pertaining to personal tragedies and pain, the monologues were pieced together by the presence of a chorus in the centrestage, a surreal entity called the "Fount of Hair", a group of women dressed in different kinds of costumes and wigs, standing on various levels in a tableau, who would be the confidantes and problem-solvers for the various monologue-takers. Picture this – the Goddess Kali[79] appeared on stage left, weeping, with her head bald and her garlands dry, telling the Fount that she was washed away in the river after the immersion[80]and the river took away her hair. Without her hair, she did not feel like herself at all, and nobody was worshipping her, and could they please help her out. In a flashback

[78] Such is the normal mode of training within DU – sporadic participation in workshops by professional theatreworkers from many different traditions and trainings. It is neither consciously structured, nor consistent in its intent, making the repertoire of theatre exercises within DU an eclectic mix of hand-me-downs.
[79] A Hindu Goddess associated often with cremation grounds and the violent, destructive feminine. Avataar to the Mother Goddess, Kali is naked and burnt black, her hair absolutely unchained, wearing a garland of skulls around her neck and waist.
[80] A ritualized immersion of the goddess at the end of her *paksh* or designated period of workship.

sequence on stage left, a huge mask of the goddess appeared, sitting on bamboo scaffolding held up by devotees taking her either for immersion or for consecration, while she told the story of her life as the Goddess of darkness and how she lost all her hair. The Fount, feeling bad for her, decided to donate the hair of Samson[81] to Kali. The tale of Samson's hair was then told through a choreography, where Delilah made love to Samson and put him to bed, only to cut off his hair in his sleep. This was accompanied by a voiceover retelling the story. The rest of the play was the same in structure, where many characters, from fiction and reality, would come crying to the Fount and tell their own stories about their relationship with hair, wanting the Fount to help them. To this, the Fount would tell them more stories and assist them in various ways. The characters were many – Kali, Porphyria from Robert Browning's Porphyria's Lover[82], a male *jatra* actor who played women, and *Head Opisher Boro Babu*[83], a character from Sukumar Ray's iconic take on colonial bureaucracy, a poem called *Goph Churi*[84].The stage had a backdrop made of a colourful web of scarves, like a cobweb almost, while the Fount would be standing, moving and gesticulating centrestage and the different characters and their stories played out on stage left and stage right. At the end of the play, the verse rhythm would break briefly into prose, when a government official Mr. P K Pandey would come on stage on the grounds of evicting and

[81] Of the Samson and Delilah story from the Old Testament
[82] A work of modern poetry about a man having sex with his lover Porphyria and strangling her with her own hair while she orgasmed. Naturally, we changed the roles and made Porphyria kill her lover with her own braid.
[83] Translated as top boss of the head office
[84] Translated as Moustache-theft, the poem chronicles the peaceful top boss of the head office and his sudden outburst one day and random accusations of his moustache being stolen by one of his subordinates. The rest of the poem chronicles how the entire office tries desperately to calm him down while he puts down official notices roundly insulting his employees.

bulldozing the Fount for aiding and abetting the rights of women and homosexuals. But the fount would seduce the bald Mr. Pandey with the promise of hair, thereby prevailing upon the high-handedness of the state. *Hairy Tales* had very curious reactions from the audience, as the structure of the play was completely unfamiliar within the predominant realist mode employed by most collegiate groups in the competition circuit. There was also very little direct reference to feminist activism in the realist strain that other plays from women's colleges would have. There was very little representational element within the play, most of it being shot through with surreal stage design effects. For example, in a monologue by a widow about her unconsummated marriage, she sat on a bed under a canopy of splayed scissors, and her story reflected the narrative of *Behula*, the young widow protagonist of Bengali folklore *Manasamangal*[85]. While the method deployed by the actors to prepare for their roles might have been that of psychological realism, each of them were playing multiple roles, very different from each other, and the verisimilitude in representation never quite worked well. Besides, the narrative was so fractured, with dances, voiceovers, and even a puppet-show for the *Boro Babu* piece, that overall, the play failed to create any form of identification and thus lost legitimacy within the

[85] Dedicated to the subaltern snake goddess Manasa, this folk epic was orally transmitted through the 15th century Bengali countryside till it was written down by a group of authors over the course of many years, the most well-known being Bipradas Pipilai. The main protagonist Chaand Showdagar or merchant Chaand, a Shiva devotee, refuses to engage with or worship the snake goddess, who claims the life of his newlywed son on his wedding night, leaving behind the grieving young widow Behula. Behula goes to the netherworld, the realm of the snakes to retrieve her husband and becomes a lifelong devotee of Manasa.

collegiate circuit[86]. On a feedback session with Keval Arora, he mentioned that there needed to be a focus to the play, a focus which could be more clearly feminist. It is also important to note here that in a conversation with the then principle of LSR, I was told with a laugh that apparently the play was about "pubic hair", after which she wanted to see the script. The interest of the institution came because of the production of the play in a post-TBR period, where many students such as myself and many more, were still feeling rebellious and could not embrace the benevolent face of feminist solidarity or empowerment promoted by the college. The play had been produced immediately after the TBR protest, and while writing the script, in my mind the idea of a stretching of the limits of propriety within college had been planted, and the cast and the crew had come to many decisions together that in subtle ways was going against the grain of the institution in many ways. We had decided not to continuously change our plays according to the needs of the competition circuit. We had instead, in commonsensical parlance, aimed to enjoy and learn from the process of reading, researching and writing our own pieces, and working on our own interpretations of the roles. There had been a distinct importance given to rehearsals, as a platform of reading[87] and discussing, and experimenting with choreography, puppetry and different modes of performance. The emphasis had been on pleasure in the place of competition and training in the place of a large number of shows. This had mixed reactions from

[86] We had a very small number of shows – about 4 in total, because we were not selected for competitions within DU.
[87] Many of the pieces and monologues were references to literary material

the cast in the long run – many actors were keen on making a name within the collegiate circuit as realist actors of caliber, and the sporadic shows and obsessive rehearsals was not amounting to much practically. The play was not "successful" within the collegiate setup or within the women's college setup either. But for many of us involved within the production and direction process, we were inflicting alternative modes of thought within the setup. In her 2004 book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed referenced Martha Nussbaum's criticism of Judith Butler's feminism as a "failure", as, *"hungry women are not fed by it, battered women are not sheltered by it, raped women do not find justice in it, gays and lesbians do not achieve legal protections through it"*[88]. Ahmed went on to criticise the obvious myopia of this stand by positing that,

> *"It assumes access to women's suffering to authenticate and ontological distinction between legitimate and illegitimate feminism; women's pain becomes and 'immediate' measure of truth, against which all others must fail. The transformation of women's pain into a fetish object can work to delegitimate feminist attempts to understand the complexity of social and psychic life".*(Ahmed, 2004)

[88] Read the full text here:
http://perso.uclouvain.be/mylene.botbol/Recherche/GenreBioethique/Nussbaum_NRO.htm

This was precisely the myopic fascination with liberal activist-feminist narratives that some of us were trying to talk back to, introducing terms of solidarity that were predicated on the shared pleasure of intimacy and shared space and time such as in the form of the rehearsal, rather than on shared pain of the female subjectivity. The pleasure that one derived from non-productive work such as a rehearsal without a show was outside the purview of success be it within the rubric of the neoliberal women's college or within the values of institutional feminism.

Notions of Success Within Women's Colleges in DU

Many of the women's colleges within DU were established post-independence, with a Nehruvian vision of great belief and faith in national systems, vying to be proficient centers to nurture the new female citizens of the nation. While for many years, the educated, well-married caste Hindu housewife remained the template of the successful woman, the induction of women within the workforce had inserted monetary independence and buying/spending power as a measure of success. This new vocabulary of success, finding ground in the movement for workplace equality, spoke of "breaking the glass ceiling", women's leadership programmes, felicitations for professional women, scholarships for women entrepreneurs and so forth, creating "buzzwords", new ideals for young women to aim towards. Women's colleges and universities within India have adopted this vocabulary of success and the attached values of confidence, professional

excellence, ability to articulate, ability to carry and present oneself, aggressive debate skills, awareness of the world etc. as prescribed character traits of the ideal woman they aim to produce.

Says the yearbook of Miranda House, a prominent women's college in Delhi University,

> *"A generation of young women with the image of new vistas opening up before them entered the portals of the college setting high goals and ideals for themselves. The college has felt the tide of changing times. There has been an ideological shift in the role that the young women of today are called upon to play. Miranda House has always provided the right atmosphere for this growth. …The "Miranda Touch" always remains and is passed on from the past generation to the present and to the coming generation."*[89]

This is an example of the vocabulary that contemporary ideas of success for women employ – broadening horizons, opening vistas, breaking of the glass ceiling, transforming conflict and building peace. These traits are legitimized by citing successful "old girls" – CEOs, civil servants, women in power – who become regular fixtures as chief guests at college functions and star attendees of alumnae meets, sports days etc., events that are central to the dissemination of the vocabulary of success within the institution. Such compulsory days of festivity are not only common, but also central to constructing the ethos of the college and the production of a certain

[89] http://www.mirandahouse.ac.in/MirandaHouse/ProgramFile/InfoGallery/HomePage/Click.asp?LinkName=1&strLinkName=About%20Miranda%20House&From=

image of feminine success and aspirations, with its unique set of values and attributes. With the shift of education from being a force of enlightened rationalism and libertarianism to a training ground for the corporate labour force, it is crucial to study the woman's college and its core value of empowerment critically, teasing out the relationship between contemporary ideas of success for women and the making of the female worker-consumer-citizen of a contemporary neoliberal state.

This narrative of female success is expected to reflect in the cultural production of the woman's college, and success remains the basis of identification with the community feeling that it engenders. This comes out in the form of strategies such as alumni meets and alumni speeches by star students and honour rolls filled with ex-students with records of success – successful CEOs, politicians, professors, educationists, even actors and filmmakers. This narrative of success prevails upon the theatre productions of the college, especially within the context of the inter-collegiate competitions, and choosing productions that are in the feminist-activist strain becomes a strategy in carving a niche within the collegiate theatre circuit. However, within the theatremaking process of women's colleges, it is possible to find students exploring non-productive work and labour and subverting this idea of success. The stretching of the limits of propriety and appropriate public behavior of women, which happened during the TBR protest, carries over specifically within the space of rehearsal within women's colleges, and into theatre productions that mark a departure from the institutionally supported feminist narratives. Lesbian

feminism pervades the intellectual landscape of many of these women performers, and often the female body and its desires are foregrounded. This move, however innocuous, towards an exploration of the female body is often seen as a threat to the official cultural image of a college, whereby an intervention by the institution is achieved that aims to censor certain productions[90]. The dramatics society of Gargi College especially felt the institutional censorship in this regard. Gargi College's production of *Qaid*, as said before, had many scenes of violence and profanities. In Gargi College's production of *Lights Out* had an intimate scene between a woman and another woman dressed as a man. In 2011 the same dramatics society worked on a self-scripted production on the theme of incest, *Anahata*, and it was with the beginnings of rehearsals for this play that the authorities decided to reprimand them for picking up 'controversial issues'. According to Lavanya, the faculty advisors were keen to make the theatreworkers perform Shakespeare or some such "safe" script, which they thought would make for better theatre. The problem of "controversy" was precisely with the scenes of female intimacy and possibilities of female homosociality within the play. The members of the Maitreyi College dramatics society members were seen by the faculty as unwomanly, unnecessarily arrogant and raucous. Amusingly, the accusation often thrown at the members of the Miranda House dramatics society members by the staff of the college was that the women were too intimate with each other for

[90] Very much like the reaction of Betty Friedan, the president of NOW, to the "lavender menace" of radical lesbian feminists within the ranks of the women's conference of 1969: http://www.afterellen.com/people/227567-moving-past-the-lavender-menace-why-lgbt-women-should-care-about-abortion-rights

anyone's comfort. One idea emerged clearly – women collegiate theatreworkers often actively resisted the progressive feminist theatre impulse, and they clearly welcome the autonomous space that dramatics societies provided, outside this progressive tradition, a space where they were allowed to interpret their own feminist responsibilities in any way they wanted, spaces where they could be uncouth, unwomanly, loud, bodily and ungainly without having the institution or the spectator pass judgment.

While the importance of collegiate theatre societies for women's colleges remain undeniable due the role that such spaces play to push the limits of acceptable female behavior, it is also necessary to view the tenability of such safe spaces in the context of the larger urban arena of Delhi and the difficult relationship that young women share with public spaces and acceptable female behavior in the capital city[91]. For this research, it would be valuable to look at perhaps how the aforementioned imagined construction of women theatreworkers and in expansion, women students within DU through its cultural production, especially theatre, can shape the spectatorship experience of a professional theatre productions that are produced by ex-students of DU who come from training in the all-women setups of Women's College drama societies. There is often a general miscommunication between the assertion of alternative expressions of gender and gender relations on the part of the actors and directors of such theatre and the consumption of the same by an audience used to the repertoire of DU, which includes a

[91] http://www.hindustantimes.com/newdelhi/delhi-is-still-not-safe-for-women/article1-1022347.aspx

misogynistic image of women and a tokenistic understanding of "women-related issues". This in many ways duplicates the relative freedom to loiter and claim spaces within the institutions as students and the fear psychosis and lack of freedom to claim public spaces within Delhi. While this is a reality, it has to be kept in mind that even though the "inner" spaces of women's colleges appear safe and protected, this is the exact same discourse employed by authorities to push unreasonable measures such as early hostel curfews and caps on night-outs for women students and hostel residents in Women's Colleges. The "imagined sanity" in terms of women's colleges is a double edged sword which on the one hand allows a certain level of freedom within the walls of an institution, and on the other takes away basic freedoms of mobility and choice of individuals residing within the premises. Similarly, working as a young woman theatreworker within a semi-professional setup of Delhi and deploying the repertoire of campus theatre critically is also a double edged sword, where the visual and contextual lexicon of the campus keeps getting generated to collude with the "larger" image of the woman in the city and become an oppressive limitation to what certain kinds of feminist theatre is trying to do.

In March 2014, a group of six women, all ex-students of various women's college under Delhi University came together to create a performance called *Parting Gestures*. The production was to be a part of a year-long project of curatorial collaboration between Instituto Cervantes, New Delhi, which is the Spanish Cultural Center and Yellow Cat Theatre, a professional theatre outfit based out of Delhi. The collaboration was called "Women by Women", and the primary idea was

to introduce play texts by contemporary women playwrights from Spain to young women theatre directors based in Delhi. The idea of the project was novel, and the idea of a loose feminist collective that colluded over shared play texts was very appealing. The first production to be staged was Parting Gestures, which conducted rehearsals over one month at the Instituto Cervantes auditorium with the group of six women, was directed by Manjari Kaul, who trained as a performer and director within the dramatics society setup of Miranda House, DU. The process of Parting Gestures was very significant. In its access to embassy level rehearsal infrastructure and publicity support from Instituto Cervantes, it was semi-professional and was completely open to public. On the other hand, the shows were unticketed, the actors were not remunerated and the theatre knowledge and training of everyone in the group had been the amateur theatre setup of Delhi University dramatics societies – an interesting overlap of the two kinds of economic configurations of theatre within the city. Much of the performance was devised through improvisation sessions over the course of one month, where Manjari would amalgamate the various different kinds of training techniques she had picked up from different theatre workshops and from the collegiate theatre ethos. While initially there was an audition and male actors had come by for the same, many were absolutely not suitable for the roles, and some, who had received formal training in theatre or acting, were unwilling to work for free. Under these circumstances, Manjari drew up a list of six women, women who would be working together for a month, for free, and many would come for rehearsals after full days of work. The

overall experience, at least for this researcher, was fantastic and liberating in many ways. Having been used to low production values of collegiate theatre, the privilege of rehearsing in the site of the final performance for one whole month in itself was immense. The amount of control and autonomy given to each performer in terms of their presences on stage, their gestures and ultimately their complete involvement with blocking was a great change from the collegiate theatre setting. In spite of these breaks from the collegiate ethos, the potentially transgressive space of the campus was forever present, in our interactions, jokes, shared rehearsal time and long tea and cigarette breaks which would act as long criticism and "bitching" sessions about the limits of campus theatre, male mentoring heads of campus societies, other productions coming from male-dominated setups such as Kirori Mal College and discussions about other professional theatre setups across Delhi. Every day, the rehearsal would begin by the group of women coming together and lying down on stage, getting their thoughts together and getting acclimatized to the rehearsal space. This would be followed by a series of warm up exercises, many of which Manjari and many of the others learnt from workshopping with UK based ensemble theatre director John Britton. These exercises would specifically work with ideas of many bodies together in spaces, forming relationships with others as well as groups, getting comfortable with each other through initiating controlled touch-based games of leading and being led and dancing. Some exercises would be taken from the vast array of exercises used by the many dramatics societies of DU, such as random walking (most ubiquitous) and communications through

gibberish to shed inhibitions, train in tonal quality and loosen the muscles of the mouth. While the exercises might have been familiar, there was a perceptible relaxation from the hectic pressures of the competitive circuits of DU and an acceptance of varying levels of expertise and knowledge that was crucial in making the rehearsal space an extremely positive and enjoyable work space. What was also important was the mechanism of giving feedback, which without any prior regulation became positive and supportive, choosing to leave the theatreworkers to work on their mistakes and shortcomings on their own time. These were massive departures from the collegiate theatre system that all of us had been trained in and had been at different stages disillusioned with. The feedback sessions became an extremely important part of the rehearsal bonding as everyone in the cast agreed that there was an undeniable aggression and vindictiveness in feedback sessions at DU, especially post competitions, with judges and other notable staff advisors from the university, and in that context this was a new and positive experience for them. In long conversations with Manjari, the importance of feedback as an integral part of the rehearsal setup became clear. Manjari mentioned a significant detail that to a great extent impacted the morale and quality of work of DU student theatreworkers – the judges and feedback-givers would often nitpick on what could have been done in the performance, rather than choosing to speak about the performance that actually happened and what they thought about the same. This is a very important observation, as theatreworkers within DU often drastically change their productions according to the post-production feedback from judges, and

a lack of positive feedback further foments the long-standing DU theatre culture of attempted standardization of performances, where each piece would aspire to check all the appropriate boxes, of content, form, style etc and emphasize much more on the competition module of the theatre experience than on the learning and training.

After a month-long experience in physical exercises and active improvisational work with individual characters, their back stories and relationships to others, the performance text of Parting Gestures was created – an amalgamation of three plays by the Spanish playwright Paloma Pedrero. The three short plays dealt with scenes of urban life – one was of the complicated and intensely homoerotic relationship that a married woman shared with her childhood friend and artistic mentor, the second was of an estranged couple fighting over the custody of their dog, the third was the unexpectedly intimate meeting of two strangers from different class backgrounds stranded in a subway on the night. The performance of these pieces was pulled together by improvisational physical theatre that dealt with women negotiating with the public spaces within Delhi. While the juxtaposition between the two divergent contexts – that of Delhi and of Spain – could have been disorienting, the improvisational components of the performance contextualized the performers and their subjectivities within the larger issues of urban living and alienation raised in the play texts. While it was the kind of space created through memories of the shared practice of campus theatre that was really the valuable experience from the rehearsals, it is valuable to see how the first public performance of the

production changed the meaning of the experience for the performers. The deeply subjective feminist interactions with Delhi got dislocated and modified through the ethos of campus spectatorship of the shows. The third part of the play, "Night in the Subway" was a story about an unemployed working class man loitering in the subway station and subsequently meeting an upper class government professional woman with whom he shared an unexpected night of intimacy. While the outcome of the piece was appropriately romantic in a conventional manner, the previous conversations between the two protagonists Juan and Carmen were highly ambiguous, at times blatantly misogynistic and akin to sexual harassment and humiliation and at others deeply classist and discriminatory. The dominance of power moved rapidly between the two throughout the play, with Juan being the hypermasculinised working class hero with acute class and gender anger against Carmen and Carmen being the snobbish and affected upper class woman looking at her companion in disgust. While the performers Dilpreet Taggar (playing Juan) and Aishwarya Chaudhary (playing Carmen) successfully brought out the ambivalence of the dialogues by highlighting the rampant misogyny and class hatred within Juan's parts, such as his hatred and desire laced comments on Carmen's silky smooth skin and how soft skin was an attribute of rich people. The performers, with their own class and gender identities, that of belonging to higher middle class families of Punjab and Haryana respectively, could respond to and understand Carmen and what it would feel like to be stranded in the lonely subway with an unknown man commenting on one's appearance and personal choices. On the other hand,

Dilpreet brought high levels of understanding to Juan's character, escaping the stereotypical depiction of a predatory male as hypermasculine and overtly aggressive and coming up with a portrayal that brought forth Juan's social disadvantage as a poor person and advantage as a man at the same time. She completely steered clear of the gestural vocabulary of the aggressive Indian man, typically North-Indian and Hindi-speaking, which was deployed in the instance of *Holi*, actively breaking from the easily identifiable aggressive male persona in currency within campus theatre. Even her stance on stage was withdrawn, devoid of the male swagger that could easily be deployed here, except for the scene where Juan disrobes to show Carmen his scars. Even this moment of machismo turns ironic when at the very end Carmen realizes that Juan has a tattoo on his scar which is a butterfly. More often than not, Juan would be sitting, passive, smoking and loitering, completely in resignation or even in comfort of his surroundings, while Carmen would be actively seeking a solution to the problem at hand, and eventually push Juan into action. Both the performers were very aware of the power dynamics on stage in the scene and had taken a conscious decision to steer clear of hypermasculine depictions of working class men so typical within the collegiate context. What was interesting though was that the day of the show saw a huge number of Dilpreet and Aishwarya's university mates populating the audience, and the presence of their collegiate peers and the audience prompts they provided significantly reshaped their onstage performances. Playing to the audience, Dilpreet's Juan became more cynical, a little passive aggressive and certainly the funny man of the script with his ambivalent banter. His

probing questions about Carmen's relationship status and personal life, which would certainly be unacceptable and frightening behavior in the reality of a desolate subway at night, had been rendered funny by Dilpreet's unconscious overplaying of the male swagger, to the extent that it turned comical. Aishwarya's Carmen, who would normally be a lone woman in a public space at night, slightly afraid but mostly very reserved and businesslike to avoid human contact and conversation, became a hysterical, fussy lampoon to counter the overplayed Juan. What it resulted in was the reduction of two very complex characters sharing a complicated relationship entwined in class and gender locations into a sappy romantic comedy replete with hooting and cheering at the kissing at the end of the play. Both Dilpreet and Aishwarya were very aware of the way the performance had changed due to the specific kind of spectatorship and the constant invocation of the campus repertoire and the stereotypes that pervade the campus theatre space. In this case of expression of non-normative gender identities, when the campus is brought alive in geographical spaces outside the edifice of the institution, the campus impulse fails to remain the transgressional or transformative impulse and get caught in the more conservative social stereotypes of collegiate theatre. Having said that, this is perhaps largely restricted to the limited viewing of the work in a professional setup, as the rehearsals for the same work involved a significant amount of feminist self-reflection and open discussions about feminist claims over public spaces etc. This goes on to add to the argument that the form of collegiate theatre lends itself more radically to processual engagement and the rehearsal than it does to professionalized

theatre and an orientation towards production. Such is the nature of this theatre that a dissociation with the rehearsal process behind the production would only go on to give an extremely limited picture of the radical potential of the form.

Within the rehearsal process of women's collegiate theatre, one can see an interest in loitering and hanging out as well as homosocial intimacy that might be found within the rehearsals of co-education spaces, but change in its efficacy and impact within an all-women setup. This happens, as has been outlined before, because of the specific familial relationship that these institutions have with their student bodies, which engenders subversion of a particular kind. The shared practice of theatre produces a form of affective solidarity that has far more significance to the campus space created within these colleges than the institutionally supported naturalized progressive liberal feminism. In her paradigmatic essay on *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* (Rich, 1996), Adrienne Rich delineates an affective model of female subjectivity and solidarity completely distant from the ways of being prescribed by the structures of patriarchy. She writes,

> *"As the term lesbian has been held to limiting, clinical associations in its patriarchaldefinition, female friendship and comradeship have been set apart from the erotic,thus limiting the erotic itself. But as we deepen and broaden the range of what wedefine as lesbian existence, as we delineate a lesbian*

continuum, we begin to discover the erotic in female terms: as that which is unconfined to any single part of the bodyor solely to the body itself; as an energy not only diffuse but, as Audre Lorde has described it, omnipresent in 'the sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic,' and in the sharing of work; as the empowering joy which 'makes us less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native tome, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial.'25"

Rich's redefinition of radical female experience within the rubric of the lesbian continuum is an effective frame of reference in the context of the affective solidarities within the campus space generated within women's colleges within DU. The experience of the campus within women's colleges and the specific rearrangement of relationships to authority that it offers is predicated upon the women-only status of such colleges and the nature of institutional authority that draws its disciplining power from the same aspect. Harnessing strategies of patriarchy such as the disciplining of female homosociality and circumscribing the limits of behavioural propriety, these institutions find a common ground between liberal feminism of the 1960s and 70s and neoliberal measures of female success, which together become an oppressive system of mass-manufacturing ideal, confident, professional women for the labour force of tomorrow. Within

this system, the principle of pleasure is marked by what Sara Ahmed calls *"the fantasy of being reproductive"* (Ahmed, 2004) in a slightly different context[92]. I extend her argument of pleasure gained from sexual sociality to pleasure gained from the affective sociality of the campus space, and how the predominant mode of pleasure within a merit-based system is the zenith of productivity and success. In this scenario, the radical expression of a campus space is achieved by the invoking of possibilities of queer pleasure and queer sociality.

> *"When bodies touch and give pleasure to those bodies that have been barred from contact, then those bodies are reshaped. The hope of queer is that the reshaping of bodies through the enjoyment of what or who has been 'barred' can impress differently upon the surfaces of social space, creating the possibility of social forms that are not constrained by the form of the heterosexual couple."* (Ahmed, 2004)

To conclude, in spite of the relative failure of the professional performance of *Parting Gesture* in placing on stage this radical, non-productive queer politics, this is still very much a part of the rehearsal space of the spatio-temporal arrangement of the campus within women's colleges of Delhi University. It is a specific kind of redefinition of the campus space within a certain

[92] In the context of sociality

significant intersectionality within the university that has found a radical, affective solidarity that denotes the autonomous status of the campus space vis-à-vis that of the institution.

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CONCLUSION

The Potential of the Campus as a Lived Archive

This research has been an attempt to piece together the affective solidarities that I saw forming within students of Delhi University in the years 2007-2013 (and beyond), through collegiate theatre and small-scale protest movements that invoked a spatio-temporal relationship between the students and the institution that was alternative to the traditional student-institution power structures within higher education. In recognising the campus as a distinct experience that shapes our encounter with education, giving students alternative ways of relating to institutional authority, we not only reconsider the radical potential of contemporary student bodies, but also entertain the possibility of a political solidarity that bases itself on the commonality of inhabited space and time. In spite of the expanse of constituency that this kind of political solidarity allows, I have been careful in my research to tease out instances of dissent from within the ranks of the students. I hope this conscious exercise in foregrounding small, marginal, "unimportant" voices of dissent has dispelled the false notion about the existence of a "students' body" of a "students movement" that follows any universal template of radicalism. It is in fact through the voices of dissent emerging out of the intersectional pockets of agonism that radical negotiations with the institutions are implemented, giving rise to subversive behavior.

One of the concepts that I have briefly discussed in my research is the idea of the rehearsal and I would like to revisit the rehearsal at this juncture as the kernel of my understanding of the campus space as a re-arrangement of the productivity orientation of institutionally governed space and time. The rehearsal becomes one of the key moments within the day of the student, a moment which is replete with radical potential not only of rearranging the spatio-temporal relationship between the student and the institution, but also of the radical potential of solidarities that are forged through physical intimacy and a shared practice involving the touching and connection between human bodies. While in the case of already male-dominated spaces, this homosocial radicality might engender hypermasculine representations in performance, within women-dominated spaces, this homosociality facilitates the exploration of radical queer feminist solidarities that move beyond the heterosexual imperative of progressive feminist movements.

For this research my material has mostly been discussions and conversations with my friends and colleagues from the collegiate theatre circuit of Delhi University. There is practically no archive that takes seriously the task of preserving the informal world of collegiate theatre, and while can be a hindrance, it goes on to show the impossibility of building a performance archive around collegiate theatre without oral narratives, anecdotes and rumours that get corroborated through the occasional newspaper article, but mostly through other oral narratives, anecdotes and rumour. While I have been acutely aware of the subjective nature of the some of the material that has

been presented in this research, I have tried to corroborate the same with the help of cross-checking and corroboration through my discussions with my colleagues. Many of the plays that have been described and analysed over the course of the research have been viewed by myself and while the ephemeral existence of the performance is the sole reason why writing about performances can be a challenging task in terms of empiricism, in the context of collegiate theatre within DU, I have borne in mind the completely uncontextualised existence of a play without its paraphernalia – the rumours, the process and the fond memories of shared rehearsals.

It has been an extremely challenging task to piece together memories of performances that have left a deep impact on the audience in terms of immortalising the campus spaces and the campus sensibility, but not in terms of empirical evidence. This is the reason why it might be useful to analyse and understand the campus space through the affect that it creates in us, staying with us through our years. If this consistent affect-generation by the campus can be looked at historically, in terms of some of the spatio-temporal points when it was possible to see active generation of this kind of radical, subversive affect, it will be possible to not only write a history of the campus space of a particular university, but also attempt to bring together available material for archiving. For me, the rehearsal is one such spatio-temporal point of the campus, a site of non-productive labour that actively produces affect through role play, physical intimacy and a solidarity forged through the common vocabulary of theatrework.

My interest in the rehearsal also brings me to the question of archiving processual work and whether it is possible to incorporate the practice of rehearsals itself within an archive, whereby the act of rehearsing can simultaneously be an act of archiving. The archive that I propose is one that will treat the act of rehearsing as a historical act of the campus space, and would encapsulate within its repertoire, not only the mores of performance that constitute the collegiate theatre form, but also manages to archive the campus feel, the impulse of sharing a special space and time which can lead to a political relationship with authority. As I have briefly discussed in my research, there is a possibility to detect the invocation of the campus space outside the physical location of the institutional geography, and this points towards the possibility of their being a practice-based archive that can be studied through an immersion or an engagement with the rehearsal process. I would like to take this up in my future research, and argue for the act of archiving through rehearsal as alternative to traditional practice of archiving such as photographs, videographs and recordings, which many a times fail to capture the unfinished nature of processual work. This archive that I would propose would be a living archive where the repertoire of the campus is generated and preserved through the time and space of the rehearsal, through the work of student theatreworkers, incorporating the mores of collegiate theatre practice and its associated activities such as loitering and chilling out.

It is important to mention in the context of the possibilities of the archive that my research is not exhaustive and is often very limited to the colleges and dramatics societies that are considered

more elite. I understand this as a limitation of my project with the provision of branching out to many other colleges for my subsequent studies. It has to also be borne in mind that the in-depth analysis of performances, process and related developments within the political life of the university might get diluted if my research turns solely towards the quantitative. However, in case of the proposed archival methodology of the rehearsal, there would have to be an immersion into the campus space of each and every college to tease out the changing relationship between the students and authority within the particular kinds of power structures that each college engenders. This could potentially lead to very exhaustive in-depth studies of the political thought prevalent within students of the contemporary university.

To conclude, it is imperative to explore and study the new kinds of resistances and solidarities that emerge out of university spaces that are going through the motions of neoliberalisation. With recent attacks by the state on the autonomy of student-centric spaces, such as in Jadavpur University in 2014[93], where the police *lathi*-charged a group of peaceful protestors protesting against the inadequacy of redressal measures by the institution regarding a case of sexual harassment, or the current predicament faced by the campus of the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune, where the NDA government is insisting on inserting its yes-man Gajendra Chauhan as the chairperson of the institute[94], there is a growing need for students as well as the

[93] http://qz.com/269774/hokkolorob-the-hashtag-thats-defining-an-indian-student-protest-against-violence/
[94] http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/gajendra-chauhan-selected-ftii-president-for-his-portrayal-of-yudhishthir-in-mahabharat/

institutions to understand the political potential of the campus space and how it gives rise to resistance to forces of the state or the market who try to gain control over the space. Instead of infantilising students as merely the ones that are governed within the system of the institution, it is very important to understand that students use the political tools that are provided by the spatio-temporal arrangement of the campus to register their critique of the institution and find new political solidarities. In this sense, the campus becomes a kind of political consciousness of the students of the contemporary university, a consciousness that acknowledges the various strands of intersectional politics within itself and gives rise to many smaller affective solidarities, moving beyond the myth of a unitary "student movement".

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Annexure: Images

Institutional Spaces: College Architecture and Facades

Clockwise from Top Left: Lady Shri Ram College, IP College for Women, Hindu College andShri Ram College of Commerce

Campus Spaces: Canteens, Cafes, Sutta Points and Others

Top Row: (L) The "Ruins" at LSR, site of the TBR protest, (R) The very popular canteen at Delhi School of Economics

Middle Row: (L) The ubiquitous after-hours snack haunt in North Campus - Tom Uncle Maggi, (R) FYI Maggi, a student friendly joint in the neighbouring market of Kamala Nagar, next to North Campus

Bottom Row: (L) *Sutta* Point at LSR, in use, (R)The same place dug up and rearranged during MCD repairs

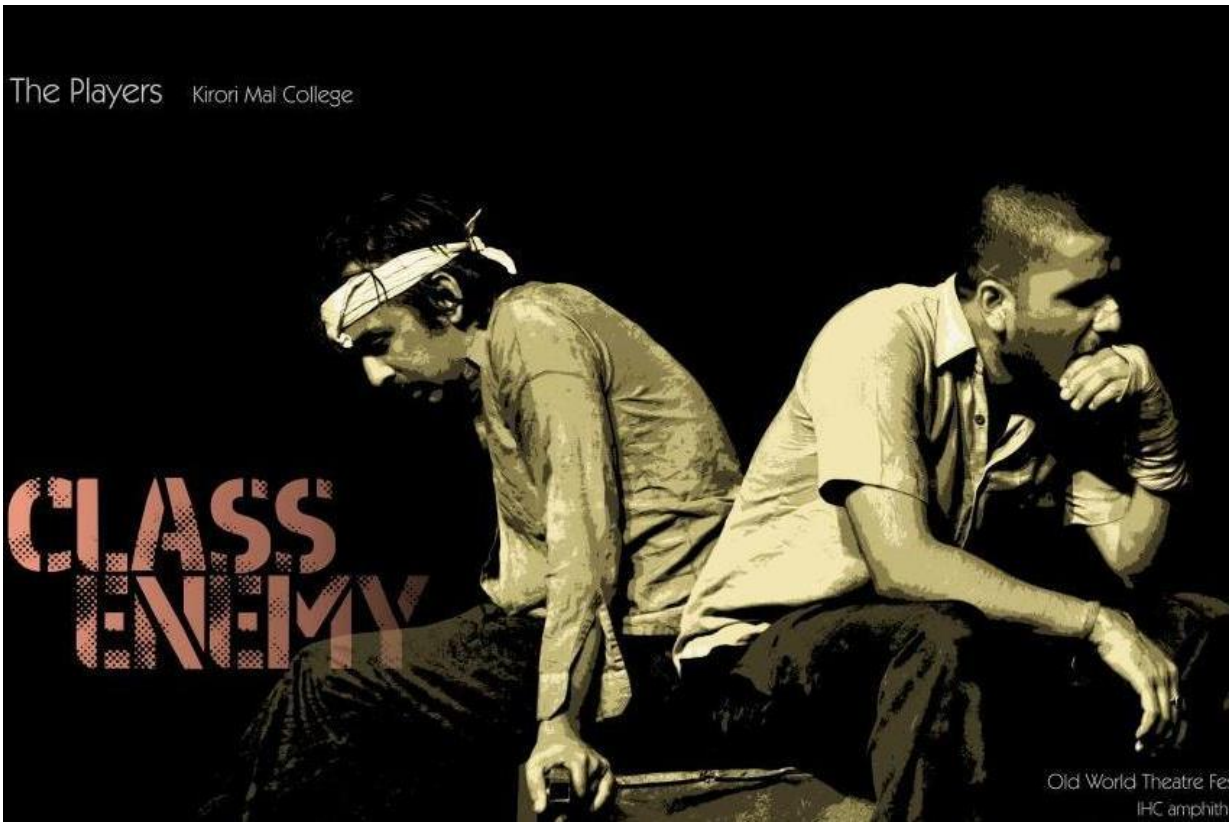
Spaces of Rehearsal and Theatre Performance

Top Row: (L) *Chaupal* at Kamala Nehru College, designated space for performances, (R) *Chaupal* in use

Bottom Row: Lower Foyer at LSR being used for rehearsals for *Hairy Tales from Here and There*

(L) A dramatics ECA audition in progress at Kirori Mal College, (R) The KMC performance space

Collegiate Performance: *Class Enemy* by Kirori Mal College



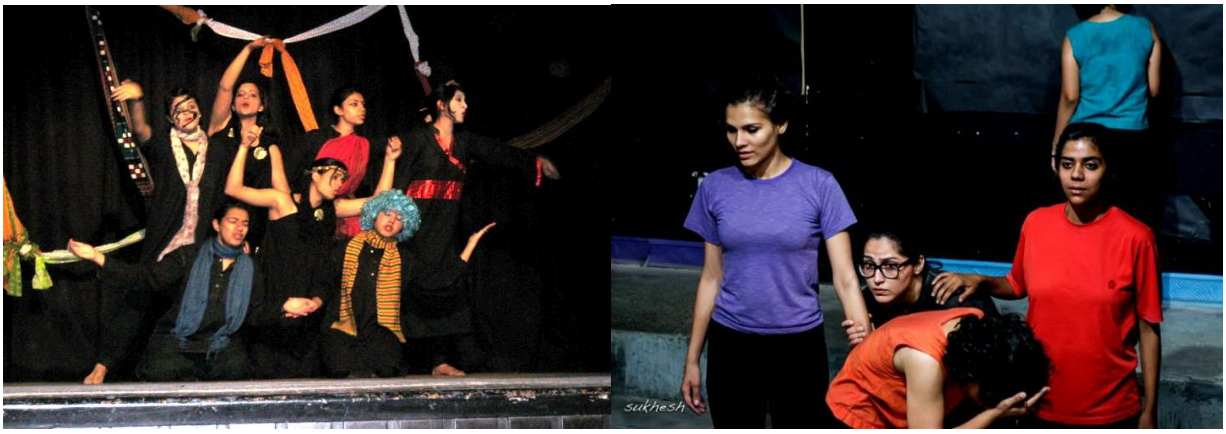
Poster for the performance at India Habitat Center, featuring the director duo Gandharv Dewan (L) and Shwetaabh Singh (R)

Scenes form the play*Class Enemy*

The Women's College Campus

Top Row: (L) Women theatreworkers loitering during rehearsal, (R) Rehearsal of a scene featuring sexual intercourse in *Hairy Tales from Here and There*

Bottom Row: The TBR protest begins with a *dharna*



Ensemble Moments: (L) The "Fount of Hair" in *Hairy Tales from Here and There*, (R) The affective feminist solidarity in *Parting Gestures*

A student protest in Delhi against police action on protesting students of Jadavpur University, 2014

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