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Memorializing Acts Against Gender Violence in South Asia Through Visual Portraits

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Abstract

In this essay, as a visual art practitioner and scholar of gender violence in India, I discuss three visual portraits of South Asian women as records of activism against institutionalized gender violence in South Asian cultures. These artists use their diverse artistic styles to memorialize intersectional violence in three categories of violence namely, caste violence, tribal violence, and dowry violence. They not only use the digital platform to mobilize solidarity against these forms of oppression but also transform conventional exhibition spaces and art-viewing into movement-building exercises against gender violence. Through their art, these artists (Priyanka Paul, Portia Roy, and Kruttika Susarala) aim to build a dialogue on gender violence, caste oppression, and oppression against Indigenous people, and build solidarity among all women across borders and nationalities.

Keywords: Dalit women, caste violence, tribal violence, anti-dowry movement, Instagram feminist activism, India women portraits, visual art, contemporary art forms, digital art

Introduction to Three Visual Portraits of South Asian Women as Records of and Activism Against Institutionalized Gender Violence in South Asian Cultures

Portraits, shared on the social media application *Instagram*, by three South Asian[1] feminist artists transform women's bodies as sites of assault and violence to sites of activism against gender violence is the essay's focus. Image sharing social media platforms can elude patriarchal exhibition gatekeeping inherent in most museums and galleries. I am a feminist activist artist born into gender and caste oppression in India. I live and work in Delhi creating art in public places such as murals throughout India's capital city, which has been promoted widely through social media.[2] My lived experiences and work have led me to engage with three *Instagram* art accounts from distinct art communities and categories.

First is the Instagram community @artwhoring begun by Priyanka Paul, a 20-year-old Dalit[3] artist based out of Mumbai (@artwhoring), who has painted portraits of the caste-based oppression faced by the Ezhava (lower caste) community of Kerala, India. I focus my analysis on the building of a community

[1] In this essay, the terms "Indian" and "South Asian" are used interchangeably when discussing social structures due to the historical and cultural interconnectedness of the region.

[2] For example, I contributed to several of the mural projects in India's first art district, Lodhi Art District (see St+art India Foundation, n.d.; ST+ART India Instagram, n.d.). I introduced Delhi art in the slam culture around the world, through *Delhi Art Slam*, a community I initiated for artists and to advocate for art in public places (Delhi Art Slam, n.d.)

[3] Caste oppression refers to the systematic discrimination, marginalization, and mistreatment of individuals or groups based on their caste or social hierarchy in societies. In caste-based societies, people are categorized into different social groups or castes, often assigned at birth, and are expected to conform to rigid roles and expectations associated with their caste. The caste system historically has been hierarchical, with some castes considered superior and others deemed inferior. The lower castes, also known as "Dalits" or "Scheduled Castes," have historically faced severe discrimination, exclusion, and exploitation (Patnaik, 2017). However, Dalit is also a self-proclaimed term of those who have been oppressed as the lowest members of India's caste system. Dalit art critiques caste lived realities of being Dalit.

against caste-based gender violence catalyzed by Priyanka Paul's fictionalized magazine cover she posted to @artwhoring, which memorializes the individual act of Nangeli, a woman from the Ezhava community who cut her breast off and died to protest the unjust taxation by the ruler and as a call to end the oppression of India's caste hierarchal social system.

Second is the Instagram community @royportia created by Portia Roy, a 29-year-old Bangladeshi artist, who focuses on the Adivasi (tribal) and Maoist women's struggle. In this essay, I discuss the local and transnational community-building begun by Portia Roy's visual art portrait of a sexual assault by a local Chhattisgarhi policeman in which he squeezes the breast of women to see whether they are lactating or not. If not lactating, the law enforcement, still in power in 2023, concluded the women were Maoists since they were not controlled by marriage and constant birth-giving and, thereby would be imprisoned in other ways such as locked in jail cells.

Third is a portrait by Kruttika Susarala of Satyarani Chadha posted on Instagram (@kruttika) through which she aims to evoke solidarity in the Anti-Dowry Movement. The Anti-Dowry Movement in India has been a significant social movement aimed at challenging the deeply entrenched and problematic practice of dowry, which has persisted in South Asian society for centuries. Susarala draws the portrait of Chadha as a means of visualizing her resistance against this practice, and to immortalize her activism.

Together, the three social media communities are activated by visual portraits of lived experiences of individuals formed in solidarity against gendered caste violence and toward gendered caste justice. In what follows, I contextualize each of the three artworks from a South Asian feminist theoretical lens of the oppressive impact of caste systems on women, which guides my analysis of the three distinct communities as an interrelated phenomenon of gender-based violence and injustice.

Methodology and South Asian Feminist Theories Informing My Visual Analysis

For years, I have been following on Instagram the three artists for this study. I selected the artists for this study due to the large number of followers they have, which reflects the impact of their art, politics, art education, and ability to communicate using visual art methods. I choose one compelling visual artwork from each artist posted on Instagram to provide focus and depth to my inquiry on how their work speaks to historical institutionalized violence in India. I also interviewed the artists in-person for this study and read their published interviews about their art.

My analysis draws on my awareness and research into oppression, violence, and discrimination many women in India experience, especially marginalized groups, for an intersectional feminist perspective specific to the socio-political contexts of India. Particularly, the work selected concerns caste-based violence, tribal violence, and dowry violence.

Brahmanical feminist theories in South Asia examine the intersection of gender and caste within the dominant Brahmanical social structure and critique patriarchy and caste-based hierarchies that uphold gender inequality and oppression. Women from lower caste backgrounds have been marginalized and oppressed by Brahmanical ideologies and practices, according to Uma Chakravarti (1993, 2018). They contend that the Brahmanical framework's deeply ingrained notion of purity has been used to limit and control the autonomy of women and strengthen caste and gender-based power dynamics in society (Chakravarti, 1993).

On the other hand, feminist theorists studying tribal women focus on the experiences of Indigenous women and their struggles against multiple forms of oppression, including patriarchy, colonialism, and the marginalization of Indigenous communities. Scholars such as Papori Bora (2010) have highlighted the importance of recognizing the unique cultural, social, and political contexts of tribal communities in South Asia. These theories emphasize the agency and resistance of tribal women in challenging oppressive structures and reclaiming their identities and rights. Bora argues for postcolonial feminist analytics of the oppression of Indigenous women, a resignification of the tribal lands beyond colonial and nationalist legacies (Bora, 2010). My analysis draws upon Brahmanical feminist theories and South Asian Indigenous women's praxis of agency and resistance from their contextualized theorizing of such acts.

Priyanka Paul @ artwhoring: Uncovering Caste-based Violence

I begin my analysis focused on the building of a community against caste-based gender violence catalyzed by Priyanka Paul's[4] fictionalized magazine cover (Figure 1). She posted the cover to @artwhoring, which memorializes the individual act of Nangeli, a woman from the Ezhava community who cut her breast off and died to protest the unjust taxation by the ruler, and as a call to end the oppression of Dalits (lower castes) in India's hierarchical social system.[5]

Figure 1. *Nangeli* by Priyanka Paul, Instagram account: @artwhoring posted on March 28, 2017. In Nangeli, Priyanka Paul portrays the caste-based oppression faced by her ancestral Ezhava Community. Image courtesy of Priyanka Paul, which can be accessed at https://www.instagram.com/p/BS

Figure 1 illustrates a digital sketch created by Priyanka on March 28th, 2017. Paul describes this artwork in the caption of her Instagram post as follows:

> …TAKE THAT PEOPLE WHO SAY SHOWING SKIN IS AGAINST MY CULTURE. Nudity isn't against Indian culture. Being proud of your sexuality isn't against Indian culture. Telling women what to do, sadly is. Not to forget however that we've always had powerful women who've stood up to the test of time. Kerala has today evolved to be very conservative. I'd think twice before wearing jeans in Thrissur. But we have roots that go way back to when women's bodies were still policed, yet not fetishized. Stop spreading patriarchal propaganda under the garb of culture. The statues of Khajuraho and the old long-gone women of Kerala are staring at you and saying "Culture whaaat?"

The visual mimics a magazine cover as a satire of the skin-showing cover page

[4] Priyanka Paul is based in Mumbai, India. She is also a poet and activist and runs her popular *Instagram* account (@artwhoring), with 72,000 followers as of 2023. The number of followers is mentioned to give the reader an idea of how many lives the art may be impacting. Paul's work juxtaposes conventions and traditions with contemporary art.

[5] Caste-based violence is still prevalent in India. Often triggered by trivial matters such as sporting a mustache or drawing water from a well, such caste-based incidents of violence reflect the failure of Indian social and legal protection of vulnerable groups (National Crime Record Bureau, 2022). Violence against Dalit women is also on the rise (National Crime Record Bureau, 2022). Dalit women face a triple burden of economic deprivation, patriarchy, and caste- and untouchability-based discrimination (Nathan, 2020). The increase in the number of crimes and atrocities against Dalit women has raised a serious issue regarding the empowerment of Dalits as a whole and especially of Dalit women, whose bodies become the sites of sexual violence committed publicly whenever they or the men of their community are seen as transgressing the caste hierarchy (Sabharwal & Sonalkar, 2015).

culture adopted by several high-ranking international magazines. It further inserts this skin-showing culture of fashion magazines with caste-based oppression that forced women to be without blouses. Against the dull pink background, Paul creates a magazine cover with three women in the center, against the bright yellow aura and captions and magazine article titles placed as text all around it. The two women on each side are looking in opposite directions and the one in the center is looking directly at the viewer, as if they seem to cover all directions with their gazes, as a team.

On the cover, she writes the main cover line in a clockwise direction to highlight the urgent need to talk about this long-forgotten story of Nangeli and the culture of Kerala. She writes the buzzwords, "*Goddesses' Own Country*," as an anecdote to the phrase used to describe the state of Kerala, *"God's own country."* She uses this phrase over the visual of three bold topless women to paint an imagination of Kerala, had it been the Goddesses' own country, instead of God's. By doing so, she implicitly points toward the plight of women in the real Kerala.

Further, she writes "Communist Fashion" to highlight the longstanding political affiliation of the state of Kerala and, also, represent the fashion worn by communists. In Kerala, communism[6] has had a significant influence, with the state witnessing the rise of communist movements and the formation of a democratically elected communist-led government since 1957.

Next, she uses the hashtag "*#FreeTheNipple*" to point out her picture's relatedness to the global feminist movement with a larger and wider body politics involved. The #FreeTheNipple movement seeks to normalize the display of female nipples in public spaces and media, arguing that laws and norms prohibiting female toplessness are discriminatory and perpetuate the objectification and sexualization of women's bodies. They argue that if male nipples are allowed to be exposed in public, there should be no distinction between female nipples (Shapiro, 2021).

Lastly, the headline of the art "*10 Ways to Rock the Topless Mundu"* shows Paul's satire of converting caste oppression into a fashion trend. Then, she moves to *"Tell Me Showing Skin Is Not Part of Indian Culture"* and ends with *"Dubai Shopping Festival"* to bring awareness to how gender and class struggles and historical debates seem to evaporate with the distraction of India's popular Dubai Shopping Festival.

Although the work addresses the oppression faced by Dalit women, the art cuts across the themes of nudity, femininity, race, as well as caste. Paul's nude portrait delineates its cultural power that is not pornographic in nature. Nangeli's story is about self-mutilation to protest oppression. About 200 years ago, Cherthala, the Kingdom of Travancore, present-day Kerala, imposed a tax, called *Mulakkaram*, on lower castes if they wanted to cover their breasts or keep mustaches. Nangeli could not afford to pay the tax and was in debt to the ruler of Travancore. When the tax collector came, she presented her self-mutilated breasts on a plantain leaf to him. Nangeli bled to death, yet her act resulted in the removal of the tax for all in the Kingdom of Travancore (Surendranath, 2013).

Priyanka further argues that history has conveniently left out Nangeli's story, showing historical bias. People in the Instagram comments have congratulated Nangeli's brilliant and brave self-expression and have expressed their concerns about *Keralites* forgetting their past. There are comments on how the artist has made Malayalis (a Malayalam-speaking community in South India) proud. Further, the comments have taught an eye-opening historical fact, which many people did not know about their own culture, that the Channar revolt (1813-1859) refers to the fight of Nadar climber women in Travancore kingdom of India for the right to wear upper-body clothes covering their breasts (Lal, 2018).

In an interview with *The Hindu*, Deeptha Achar tells the interviewer-journalist Rahi Gaikwad (2015) that Dalit art is venturing where traditional Indian art has not and is responding to the divide created by caste. Although the Dalit caste has been an artisanal caste since the beginning of the caste itself, Dalit art has not yet been included in India's art history. Most discussions about Dalit art that points out Achar have been concentrated on visual imagery in the context of Dalits in the public sphere or invoking traditional Dalit practices, without a focus on a particular artist (Gaikwad, 2015). Priyanka's art challenges conventional upper-caste-dominated notions of beauty and aesthetics.

[6] Communism refers to a political and economic ideology that advocates for a classless society where the means of production, distribution, and exchange are owned and controlled collectively by the community rather than by private individuals.

In the interview, Achar also poses an interesting question about the difficulties of visually representing caste. She asks, "How does one visually address the problem of the caste system? How does one engage caste and community through drawing a figure, a landscape or an object?" (Gaikwad, 2015). Paul perhaps gives one of the many possible answers to this question. Paul's work is in a realistic figurative mode and has an added context through the clothes (or lack of clothes, in this case), and the skin color of their bodies. Their clothes acts as a signifer of their culture. The text included in the visual, along with the artist's background being the Ezhava community, adds additional historical context to the artwork.[7]

Paul's artwork is almost satirical in nature. The three women presented in Figure 1, do not look back at us as an individual but at all of us, collectively, as if asking us the questions. Their unwavering and confident gaze, while being topless, on a magazine cover questions the Indian society's obsession with women's clothing and expression, and at the same time breaks from the Victorian and upper-caste idea of a woman's modesty.

Portia Roy (@royportia): A Visual Art Portrait of Assault of Adivasi Women

Portia Roy's[8] (2018) visual art portrait (see Figure 2) conveys the commonplace assault of Adivasi[9] women by the local police, wherein policemen squeeze their breasts to check for lactation. This horrifying practice, continued even in 2023, stems from the belief that Adivasi and Maoist women are not family-oriented, and thus can't be lactating, which in turn gives the police an indication of women not lactating being part of Adivasi and Maoist communities, and thus required to be jailed. Roy expresses through visual art horror and anxiety about the body-violating practice of police. Roy's art "The Rebel Detector" refers to *The Naxalite Test,* where police officials do not trust when told that they're not *Naxalites* and hence, think fit to test it by themselves (Benedict, 2017; Sandilaya & Divya, 2016). When I asked Roy about her art in our personal correspondence, she responded:

> Around 2 years back I came to know about an E-Paper called the 'Lal Sangbad'. This newspaper covered the communist movements around the world. Here I came across news about the molestation of tribal women in the red corridors of India. [The area containing major portions in Odisha, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand famous in the news for the Maoist revolution.] It [the newspaper] claimed that the women residing in the Maoist-inflected areas had to go through a unique test. Security personnel squeezed their breasts to see if they were lactating or not. The lactating women were considered as family people and the rest [of the women] were considered Maoists. [It is by the implicit rule of the government that if an Adivasi woman is unmarried then she is a Naxalite, because Naxalites don't marry, and thus can't be lactating.] I have always been extremely sensitive about my breasts. This information evoked terrible sensations in my body, which seemed unbearable. I felt the urge to puke it out somewhere, somehow. Hence this work happened. The indifference in her eyes is what troubles me the most. She knew there was no way she could resist, hence she decided to ignore it.

7. In the course of my research, I found 7 more *Instagram* artists who have created art on Nangeli's story, all with a single female figure with mutilated breasts and a pool of blood, and several more Dalit feminist art-based pages. The art or the feminist recovery of female heroes does not happen in isolation. The audience is always watching, learning, and interpreting, and many create art as well. This is how art dismantles age-old oppression. By appearing more and more and being re-read into several traditions and creating awareness about atrocities in the past impacting the present.

8. Portia Roy is a 29-year-old art educator and an artist. She is a Bangladeshi refugee with Western Bengali heritage, currently living in Delhi. She posts her artwork on her Instagram account, which has over 1300 followers as of 2023.

9. The aboriginal people of India, also known as the *Adivasis* are designated as Scheduled Tribes [ST] and offered specific protective provisions under the Indian constitution. However, these provisions have not prevented the violence and discrimination that they face (Pankaj, 2022). According to the National Crime Record Bureau Report of 2021, violence against Adivasis has increased recently. In the NCRB report, cases of Rape against Schedule Tribe women stood at 15% of the total cases reported (NCRB, 2022). According to a report published by *Survival International*, a human rights organization, Adivasis have been resisting for their land and rights in the face of growing extractive industries in their regions, with women being at the forefront of this resistance (Woodman, 2022). The report also highlights that there are high rates of sexual abuse of Adivasi women in the districts with high levels of mining and mining resistance movements. Adivasi women defending their lands are punished viciously and face additional threats of sexual violence, public stripping, acid attacks, and defamation (Woodman, 2022).

When Roy first read the online article (Sandilaya & Divya, 2016), she immediately wanted to forget about it and erase the memory of even reading it. However, the narrative in the article haunted her, and she decided to paint it. "There was no image in the news article, so I painted one" (P. Roy, personal correspondence, March 8, 2021).

Figure 2. *The Rebel-Detector* by Portia Roy, a wood-board carving and acrylic (12" x 8") posted *by @royportia on Instagram, on April 25, 2018*, portrays a tribal woman in the middle of an assault by a Chhattisgarhi policeman. Image courtesy of Portia Roy, which can be accessed at https://www.instagram

Roy depicts the portrait of an unnamed, unknown, and naked tribal woman who is in the middle of an assault. We see a woman with her breast being groped from behind, by huge, red monstrous hands, while she had her own hands resting behind her head. She has an exhausted, indifferent expression on her face, looking sideways. Four bright colors are used in this art, with some shades, making the artwork easier to view and understand. The texture of the artwork, in terms of strokes, is similar throughout with slight variations here and there, that is: rigid, rigorous brush strokes, hardened but very conscious layers, as though the rigid texture of the painting itself was certifying the solemnity of the experiences of these women, the subject of Roy's portrait painting. The strokes on the red hands are larger giving them a perpetrator's effect, while the strokes on the brown skin are soft and fading, displaying passivity. The strokes in the blue background are a mix of multiple shades. Black bold lines have outlined the hands and body of the tribal woman that suggests her subjectivity. Against the blue background, the skin tone of the woman is brown, her hair is green in color and falls on her back and the red hands are holding her breasts. The red color displays the carnal, monstrous, and evil instincts of the policemen of Chhattisgarh, whereas the brown skin tone is like the color of the earth and soil. The green color is associated with the forest and with tribal life. The woman has an empty expression on her face. She wears the traditional septum nose ring. Her nose is enormous in size and her lips are brown in color. This artwork is made with acrylic paints on a pastel sheet of paper. This is a portrait of assault, sadly experienced by Chhattisgarhi tribal women. Roy's art negates the exotic imagery of Adivasi women, laden with colorful jewelry or traditional clothing. Roy's art instead paints an image of an *Adivasi* woman being abused.

Depictions of assaulted Adivasi and Maoist women from the red corridors of India, at the hands of Chhattisgarhi policemen, on a digital platform have allowed their plight to be known by viewers across the world, all through the discourse of art (Chowdhury, 2019). This is how Portia has transformed violence into protest art, on a digital platform.

Kruttika Susarala (@kruttika): A Portrait of Satyarani Chadha, a Leader of the Anti-Dowry Movement

Kruttika Susarala, a digital freelance artist based in India, created a digital portrait of Satyarani Chadha,[10] who led the Anti-Dowry Movement after the death of her 20-year-old pregnant daughter who was burnt alive following demands of

[10] The inspiration for this project comes to her from a feminist Instagram page called *Dead Feminists* (@deadfeminists), which is dedicated to feminists from previous generations and their contributions. The page is a conscious effort to create a digital archive, so the newer generation can know and learn about feminists from the past.

dowry.[11] In an interview with Kruttika, she explains the theme of her work as

> gender, sexuality, and observations on the status quo. Through my work, I'm interested in how visual imagery can make or break stereotypes to form perceptions of what is culturally normal. My work process largely involves following the news or reflecting on personal experiences and figuring out if I have a take on it. Most often, I try to work on these pieces in the manner that I'd talk to a friend about it. If I feel like, by making a piece of art or a comic might lead to a productive discussion, I'll try to make it in a way that facilitates such a discussion. (K. Susarala, personal communication, May 19, 2019).

In the portrait, Satyarani Chadha is portrayed with white hair, tired and old, her forehead wrinkled with grief and anguish (see Figure 3). Chadha carries in her hand a framed photo of her daughter's graduation. She wears a cotton shirt, full-sleeved and fully covered, as a blouse to the *saree*, pertaining to the image of a social worker or a women's rights activist who wears *khadi* plain clothes. Her eyes speak of remorse, loss, and exhaustion from the war. Kruttika uses bold details in her digital sketch, from white hair strands to the graduation photo of Satyarani's daughter.

Figure 3. In *Anti Dowry Movement*, posted to @kruttika on March 24, 2017, Kruttika paints a digital portrait of Satyarani Chaddha, a woman who protested against Dowry deaths in India. Image courtesy of Kruttika Susarala, which can be accessed at https://www.instagram.com/p/BSB3m5iFaxW/.

Before feminist movements began in the mid-19th century in India, death-by-fire was considered suicide and a family matter. It was only when a barrage of protest marches in the 20th century, fueled by independent women's organizations, that the anti-dowry movement caught fire. Even though the Anti-Dowry Act was passed in 1961, demands for dowry as part of India's culture remain prevalent even today (Nagpal, 2017).

In the visual portrayal of Satyarani Chadha, her eyes are not fixed on the audience, she's looking slightly toward the right, which means she is not gazing back at the viewer. Kruttika's rendition of Satyarani Chadha and her gaze is actively not meant for the *Instagram* audience, it is meant for people from the past who have resisted her protest and those who have supported and demanded dowry, those who have burned and tortured young brides and daughters-in-law for demands of dowry, those who have persisted and endlessly pressurized girls' families. Satyarani's gaze is relaxed, she raises her hand and her fist appears stiff

[11] The dowry system is understood as things of value given by the parents of a girl to their son-in-law and/or his family. In India, this pervasive system is to blame for disturbing incidents of violence and harassment (Gondal, 2015; Srinivasan & Lee, 2004). There are reports of 35,493 dowry deaths in India between 2017 and 2021, according to data from the National Crime Records Bureau (Pioneer News Service, 2022). According to an alarming trend of dowry deaths in India, 20 women are killed or forced to commit suicide every day, burnt alive, or raped or beaten, as a result of dowry-related harassment (Chaudhary, 2022).

and rigid, almost like proclaiming her readiness to continue her fight. The use of the upper half of the body re-evokes the painting tradition and immortalizes her.

The Anti-Dowry Movement is widespread and well-known and has various elements involved to evoke a visual image of anti-dowry such as the face of a crying bride, torture, raised voices, coercion, domestic fire, death, and pained parents (Agnihotri & Mazumdar, 1995). And yet, the artist deemed it fit to collect all the visuals and encapsulate them into one image of raging and exhausted Satyarani. Why is Satyarani Chadha the face of the Anti-Dowry Movement, and not the burnt carcass of her daughter, for whom she was fighting? This is because the imagination of the movement is what was born out of that unfortunate violence.

There is depth in Satyarani's face, visible through cheek lines, eyebrows, neck, and forehead that show her age. She has a stout body, dark brown skin, and plump features. Metaphysical elements are evoked in this art, the blue color[12] of the sky and shooting stars in the background point to the larger-than-life impact Satyarani has created through her dissent. The smoothness of the digital sketch erases the struggle and the attempts that have gone into creating the work are invisible. The digital medium erases the materiality. The digital-ness of the art polishes smooth the coarse journey of both Satyarani Chadha as well as of the Anti-Dowry Movement. There is no differentiation between the wrinkles on Satyarani's skin, the khadi of her clothes, and the metal of the photo. The digital medium engulfs all tactile senses and inaugurates newer directions for the 88-year-old Satyarani Chadha and the Anti-Dowry Movement.

Concluding Discussion: Pressing Onward

The portraits discussed in this paper speak from the resistant identities of subaltern women to massive power structures and institutional forces against them. For centuries women have been subjected to gendered violence to prevent their transgressions from patriarchal social norms, laws, customs, and traditions that control their bodies, education, work, and every aspect of their lives. The art about Dalit and Adivasi (tribal) women evokes conversations on breasts, sexuality, and the female body. The art is not just about any *body*, it is about a tribal woman's body. The art becomes a visual imagery of overlapping multiple intersectional identities. This is how a single work of art speaks multiple languages.

The Instagram posting of art about the individual lived experiences of a Dalit woman, an Adivasi woman, and a founding mother of the Anti-Dowry Movement not only evoked conversations on caste-based atrocities in the Dalit and Adivasi communities but, also, the visual art on Instagram of portraits of women who have raised their voices against atrocities discussed in this essay are counternarratives to the common images of gendered violence, bloodshed, harassment, death, and rape. The visual portrait art not only gives visibility to the invisible women but also neutralizes the harsh imagery of violence against women. Achar (2012) discusses the representation of women's bodies in pain or distress as a recurring motif in art. This motif has various implications including, victimhood and vulnerability on one end, and subversion and resistance on the other. While the representation of women's bodies in pain is a complex and multifaceted issue, artists and viewers alike must be conscious of the broader social and cultural contexts in which such representations are created and interpreted (Achar, 2012). With the rise of the feminist movement, the depiction of the female body has emerged as symbolic of all women-related issues and movements (Frydrysiak, 2012). The penetrating characteristics of portraiture draw viewers into believing in their own familiarity and similarity with these women figures, their personality traits, and their habits. These portraits can be looked at as the extension of the tradition of female self-portraiture that breaks away from the typical objectification of the female form as depicted by male artists and as a means of asserting the viewpoint of women in the art world.

Today, South Asia is a breeding ground of restlessness and diverse identities. Through this essay, I have presented a localized language of identity and politics of violated and vulnerable women in India. The motif of the 'body' of South Asian women that is evoked in all three of the artworks discussed in this essay plays an important role in identifying the threat they continue to live with every day. I argue that visuals with central female figures restate how women's bodies become the site of assault and violence but can also be a site of activism. The artist plays a pivotal role in commemorating the experiences of women who have been part of movements or fought against various challenges. The art

[12] A number '5' lies in a background to mark the fifth one in the order of the 10 women-led movements Kruttika illustrated. Other movements in her alphanumeric series are Pink Chaddi Campaign, Bhartiya Muslim Mahila Andolan, and Anti-Arrack Movements.

becomes a visual representation of the artist's memories and reflections on these themes, serving as a medium for dialogue and reflection on important societal matters.

Instagram can be a medium that catalyzes the promotion of movements against horrendous assaults on women across various castes, tribes, and social evils and engages the community. The visual acts as an homage to women who have fought against oppression, the struggles of these marginalized women, and a reminder that such battles continue. South Asian artists are working relentlessly to memorialize violence against women and enshrine the lost history of women's protests using new-age media and cyberspace. The digital media then becomes the space of historical storytelling, and visual art becomes the medium to do so.

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About the Author

Isha Yadav is currently a doctoral student at Ambedkar University, Delhi. She has taught English and Communication Theory to undergraduates at University of Delhi and has worked as a Social Media Advisor to Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India and UN Women. She has earned a Master of Philosophy from Ambedkar University and earned a Master's in English Studies from the University of Exeter, U.K. Isha is a published writer, a visual-art practitioner, and a feminist activist. She introduced Delhi art in the slam culture around the world, through *Delhi Art Slam*, a community she initiated for artists and to advocate art in public places. She has co-authored three books. Isha is also a street artist, has painted several walls across the capital, taken creative-writing workshops, and works in collaboration with several gender-sensitizing communities in Delhi. In 2022, she created a *Museum of Rape Threats and Sexism*, a visual-art installation that speaks about digital lives of women, for which she was the inaugural recipient of the Linda Stein Upstander Award for her art project memorializing sexual violence in 2021, which is in-process for becoming a documentary film. She has been a speaker at colleges, community events, radio channels, and the topic of newspaper articles and e-publications. Isha actively works on building support communities for women, for art for social change through her various art projects on mental health, arranged-marriages, gender-based conflicts, among other topics, and builds transnational dialogue.

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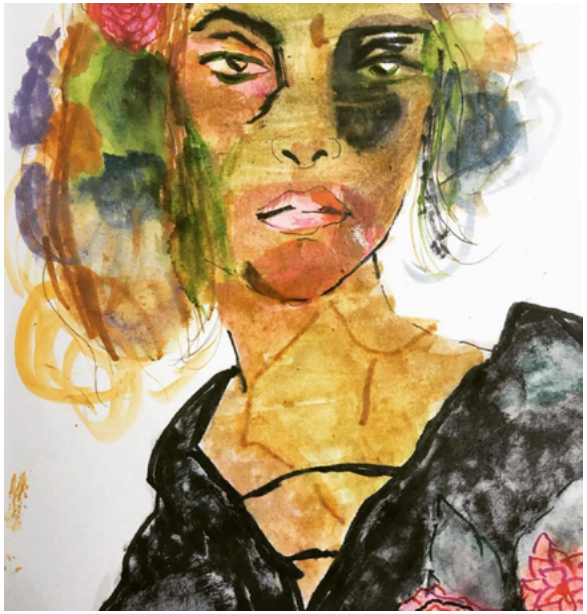

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