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Performance, Politics, and Embodiment of New Media in Contemporary Student Resistance Movement in India

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Abstract

The first decade of the twenty-first century is the one which is seen as a global explosion of revolt. Protest movements have accelerated across the globe and have synthesized new methods and techniques of Protesting. From Tahrir Square to the Occupy movement to Hong Kong Resistance movement, we have seen a wealth of performative tools of resistance. The students' protest movements have been a central part of these springs of protests. In contemporary India, we see a continuous eruption of student agitation, be it Occupy UGC, FTII, HCU, or JNU. Each of these movements has evolved new territories and gestures of performing protests. This paper aims to map and study the 'Event' of these performances, the emergence of contemporary aesthetics, and the role of new media in the broader framework of politics and performance. The case studies are historicized and analyzed through the logic of State, globalization, culture, affective embodied impacts, and new media theory in the case studies mentioned above.

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Hindistan'daki Çağdaş Öğrenci Direniş Hareketinde Yeni Medyanın Performansı, Siyaseti ve Somutlaşması

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Özet

Anahtar Kelimeler:

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Yirmi birinci yüzyılın ilk on yılı, küresel bir isyan patlaması olarak görülür. Tepki hareketleri dünya genelinde hızlı bir şekilde artmış ve sentezleme yoluyla yeni Protesto yöntem ve teknikleri ortaya çıkarmıştır. Tahrir Meydanı'ndan, İşgal Et hareketi ile Hong Kong Direniş hareketine kadar çok sayıda fiili direniş aracı gördük. Öğrenci hareketleri, protestoları besleyen memba olagelmıştır. Günümüz Hindistan'ında ister UGC'yi İşgal Et, ister FTII, ister HCU ya da JNU olsun, öğrencilerden sürekli tepkisel patlamalar görülür. Saydığımız bu hareketlerin her biri protesto etme eyleminde yeni duruş ve alanlar ortaya koymuştur. Bu çalışma, bahsedilen bu protesto “Hadiseleri”ni; çağdaş estetiğin ortaya çıkışını ve siyaset ile tiyatro bakımından daha geniş bir çerçevede yeni medyanın rolünü saptamayı ve ele almayı amaçlamaktadır. Örnek olaylar; mantıksal durum, küreselleşme, kültür, duyuşsal somut etkiler ve yukarıda bahsedilen örnek vakalardaki yeni medya aracılığıyla tarihselleştirilmiş ve tahlil edilmiştir.

Introduction

The current Indian State has been facing a “crisis of authority as a growing middle class with access to decentralized technologies, shaped through a global flow of ideology and capital, questions the sovereignty of the territorial state and looks at new forms of governance and organization” (Shah et al. 54). From increasing alarm around student protests in response to the attack on universities to the dissidence of marginalized bodies that cannot actualize their citizenship rights, we are looking at a radical rethinking of the relationship between the State's modes of struggle and the Protestors. It erupted to existence for many reasons ranging from the Privatization of Education to restructuring education to propagate particular political ideologies and to restrict others, to the rupture of the idea of equality and justice by the manifestation of Caste and Gender biases inherent in the Indian State and its Institutions to targeting dissenting voices from across the country. The recent student movements of FTII, Occupy UGC, HCU, and JNU have led to a new way of thinking about politics and performance and new sites of their synthesis. Here, student politics is articulated in ways that use both avant-garde and traditional means of protesting. Here, performance is a means to intensify these protests as the protest itself emerges as a new performative.

Culture of Student Resistance Movements: An Overview of Case Studies

The three case studies for this paper are Student Resistance Movements of FTII, HCU, Occupy UGC, and JNU which took place between 2015 and continued till around 2018 in its latent affective forms. Here is a brief introduction to each of these protest movements.

In 2015, FTII (Film and Television Institute of India, Pune), students saw an indefinite protest of 139 days against the appointment of Gajendra Chauhan as the Chairman of the institute. Students, activists, performers, filmmakers, civil society groups all forged solidarities in support of the student movements. Apart from popular agitprop performances like street theatre, sloganeering, singing revolutionary songs, graffiti design, and rallies, FTII adopted new and innovative modes of conducting alternative classes under the wisdom tree, conducting seminars on Performance Art, Origami Workshops as Protest, face painting workshops, Collective Drama and Poetry reading as Protest. They even contributed their bit to the Azaadi slogans with new iterations of “*Camera Mange Azaadi, lights mange Azaadi*” (Camera asks for Freedom, Lights call for Freedom) and infusing classic slogans with new content like “Ray, *Ghatak, Tarkovsky, we shall fight, and we shall win.*” FTII adopted a monochromatic theme and popularised it as #nocolor. All their digital content was shot in monochrome as a cinematic gesture of protest.

In 2016, HCU (Hyderabad Central University, Hyderabad), the suicide of Ph.D. scholar Rohith Vemula and subsequent crackdown on students became an event of massive uproar on the question of caste and institutional structures and individuals through which it was facilitated. He left behind an extraordinary jolting suicide note, which has become a foundational dramatic text for many performances. His death invited very intense and quick responses from across the students of the country. *Velivada* (Dalit Ghetto), a site on campus, became the ground of mass gathering for political action. Performance and creative expressions of protest emphasized more and more the thematic of caste. Apart from the traditional visual design of a protest that includes flags, pamphlets, placards, ribbons, Slogans, marches, plays like *Eklavya*, solidarity songs by *Gaddar* and other prominent artists were performed. The sculpture of Rohith Vemula installed in HCU became an act of iconoclasm, reclaiming visibility in public space and exposing historical caste injustices by placing it in the place where his ‘institutional murder’¹ was committed. The Greek-style bust sculpture of Rohith, placed high on a pedestal, was designed to inspire a heroic image of him, establishing him as the next Dalit icon. It is also challenging the idea of untouchability by mandating the visibility of this dalit hero and to make the world see the future from his vantage point. The suicide letter of Rohith Vemula itself became a text for the foundation of imagining new politics, new art, and new thought. In another such gesture of protest, The students of Fine Arts Department of HCU covered the paintings of the Gallery with a cloth and lay down on the floor covering their head inside a bag, pressing their ears with hands and closing their eyes at the arrival of Appa Rao, the VC of the university, whom they accuse of being the culprit behind Rohith’s Death.

In JNU (Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi), the arrest of JNUSU President Kanhaiya Kumar on charges of sedition and subsequently two other students after the controversial event of 9th February saw massive protests from February 2016 onwards. Students assembled at Admin Block, later re-christened as Freedom Square, to assert a sense of community, overcome the fear, and reaffirm the ideological battles and cultures of resistance that have been the legacy of JNU. Songs and slogans continued all the while as a tool for healing, but they also specifically broke out the moment there was a threat of clash or physical confrontation with right-wing student groups. For the first few days, the Azaadi slogans were shushed as it automatically meant the reference to Kashmir. Later on, when the video of Kanhaiya’s 10th Feb speech came out, which also became raw material for Rap songs on AZAADI and other creative artworks, the Azaadi slogan was reclaimed and popularised, almost became an Anthem of the Movement. The JNU way of Protesting was thought through, and Teachers initiated the daily Nationalism and

¹ “I would not call it a suicide, but an institutional murder. This is not the first suicide remember. Right from Senthil Kumar, this is the eighth suicide of a Dalit student in the Hyderabad University. That cannot just be accidental,” Mr. Satchidanandan said on the sidelines of the ongoing Jaipur Literature Festival here. (PTI 16) .

Azadi lecture series, while all kinds of solidarities poured in from across the globe. Freedom Square was occupied with daily series of art installations, songs, contemporary and classical dance, street plays, Interactive Performances, Stand-up comedy, Film Screenings, Flower Protests, Activist theatre performances like Maya Rao's Walk.

Performing Protest: Mediating the Physical and Digital Landscapes

In every resistance movement, culture becomes an important tool and manifestation of carrying out the politics of protest. It is a unifying factor for sustenance and continuity of the protest as well as a common ground for community formation and belonging. Performance facilitates in the expression of varied discourses of protest on stage and generates an affective presence/impact among the participant. The performances that are traditionally not used as part of an agitprop method of performances but are 'traditional' performance whose genealogy and origins lay outside of the site of the protest when performed in a site of protest, brings onto itself interruptions, breaks and appropriation of meaning encoded in the impact of the Real Event. In doing so, these performances become a tool for something very essential in constituting a polity as a group of speaking bodies gathered in a central public place.

This polity/assembly was constituted in majorly two ways:

Theatre and performance as a site of constituting an assembly of people and student politics as a mode of people coming together in a physical assembly;

Media and digital space where people came together in the mode of virtual communication.

As a human microphone, chanting in unison created a common sense of purpose, established relationships among neighbors, and intensified awareness of surrounding bodies. At the same time, Social media engaged many thousands of people who had no pre-existing connection to social change organizations and activist networks. These virtual spaces, even more than Freedom Square, became points of encounter where previously unrelated individuals aggregated to form popular assemblies. In addition to people forwarding information and "liking" the YouTube videos of these demonstrations posted on Facebook, these student protests, for example, were replicated online. Sympathizers found each other on Social Media via the # sign and clicking on tags in other social media. This was the digital iteration of what the sound of these movements accomplishes in street protests. These digital means made the protest noticeable and traceable, just like the cacophonic sounds that emerge in public space. Contemporary demonstrators find ways of connecting the live and the distributed, the *in situ* and the mediated by streaming events in real-time, sharing documentation of past rallies, or (while in physical protests) carrying with them signs advertising social media sites where supporters may continue networking after the event is over.

Social media even transcends the link of physical visibility as a show of strength by introducing means online petition and signature campaigns etc. The physical and the digital are intertwined and feed on each other. The work of activists and artists analyzed here sets a rich ground for socio-political experimentation based on the construction of social networks and face-to-face interactions. These actions, carried out by activists and artists, represent not only survival strategies triggered by the crisis, but they also put forth new modalities of labor and production and of democratic participation. The creation of networks and embodied practices are approached here as the main tactic. Although these embodied practices represent a notion of the political that is radically grounded on the body, these practices are better understood in relation to Digital capital. The fact that these practices are positioned here as radical offline manifestations of embodied gestures in response to disembodied virtual capital does not mean that they are dissociated from the online world. In contemporary power formations, the online/offline refers to a dialectical Relationship, not to mutually exclusive ontologies.

Culture and Embodiment of Protest

Culture produces meaning through the reflection of public shared symbols and collective representation. On the other hand, it also changes individual values and beliefs. Cultural performance produces alternative views of identity, meaning, and values and transmits it through embodied bodies in a public space. They also bridge the dichotomy between mind and body, intellect and emotion, political and performative. These are transferred through live interacting embodied bodies, which claim the agency of the body as a lived subject and assert the identity of the bodies. However, it is necessary to highlight the dangers of over-extending the notions of performance. Since everything and anything seems to be brought under the definition of performance, it becomes crucial to understand that though culture is performative, anything that generates new meanings and creates new perceptions necessarily not be deemed as performances. Things like petition writing, organising events, recruiting students for organisations and joint action committees, phone calls, attending a meeting, lobbying, maintaining a book store or counter, announcements are crucial part of social movements and do have a performative dimension to them but certainly do not have the same structure, impact, affect and interaction with the public and space like a street play, protest song or a flash mob performance. Likewise, culture is also not limited to social and political movements. Political activists make use of cultural and performative tools to create oppositional discourses and counter ideas as an important political strategy. Looking at culture as text limits our understanding of its cultural production and provides a homogenous static view of its historical context. We need to look at the material

process of its creation and explore the dynamics of its power.

Cultural performances in social and political movements generate collective emotional impact, make claims of contestation of power and are self-transformative in nature. Here the performer assumes responsibility towards the audience and is composed of elements like ritualized acts, emphasizing the current political crisis, the reiteration of symbols and meanings shared collectively as a basic ideological agreement. The previously shared and agreed ideas enhance the experience of the performances, heighten its emotional impact, and make it a powerful communicative tool for social change efforts. Moving beyond mere discourse, performances generate agency, activate emotions, and bring alive presence and corporeality of witnessing bodies. Protest performances often employ tools and content that communicated dissent and move beyond the immediacy of the movement itself. The form and choice of performances are chosen as part of a political tactic to generate a desirable effect. The choice of these embodied actions is based on simulation, practicality, gesture, and affect. E.g., *Gherao* (blockade) is used as an effective tool when the protestors seek to disrupt the immediate effect of a policy or a decision. Whereas the formation of Human Chain is chosen to showcase the strength and solidarity of a collective opposition by the exhibition of physical numbers of bodies present.

Jeffery S Juris, in her theorization of resistance performance divides these performative protests into four categories, which I am borrowing to illustrate my argument.

Macro-Level Protest Events

These are the largest scale protest performances organized by activists to engage and assert their ideas to the masses. They have an element of strong emotional and affective impact and identities. They are newsworthy events often bordering towards the creation of spectacle. These protest repertoires are Marches, rallies, confrontational riots, militant protest, public meetings, solidarity protests, and sit-ins, etc. These are massive protest repertoires that forge solidarity nationally and globally, mediated through online interventions and adapting itself to differences of time-space and cultures.

They use common identifiers and hashtags while adapting to the regional at the same time. The *##noclor* *#JusticeforRohithVemula* *#Notinmyname* *#StandwithJNU* *OccupyUGC* are some of these examples of these macro-level protest events. Not only does it involve the physical intervention of live bodies confronting authorities and creating alternate practices and modes of protest, but it also involves power dynamics that shift through solidarity protest beyond the physical site and mediated representation it through various mediatic technology. They create multiple 'theatrical events', which are multi-sited and simultaneous at the same time, creating the

domino effect of resistance and formation of a global community. This happens through generating affective solidarity where strong images and emotions are conveyed through intensified embodied action, which arouses heightened emotions of rage and anger, mobilizing a collective body of protestors for action.

While the physical bodies are relied upon to counter the immediate political and violent threat, the other, however, creates and propagates an alternative set of discourses and practices in nonviolent form. These are more spontaneous and potent mass actions as they are free-flowing and not limited to institutionalized spaces and thus do not have an immediate risk or threat of attack. Ritualized activities and performative actions thus become crucial elements of these protests as they limit the potential of confrontation, precarity, and uncertainty of counter-violence and engage emotions in a liminal state where alternative worlds can be imagined, and political utopias are fulfilled through lived experience. The difference between these scripted rehearsed protests and spontaneous live protests is elucidated by Don Handelman's distinction between events that “present the lived-in worlds” and events that “represent the lived-in world.” (Handelman 54)

By staging spectacular performative events, activists make visible unequal relations of power and challenge hegemonic and oppressive symbolic codes and meanings. Thus, Macro-level protest events produce affective solidarity amongst a larger population by embodied actions to turn them into a collective actor.

2. Micro-Level Embodied Performances

Micro-Level embodied performances are subunits of the large-scale macro-level protests. These large-scale events encompass diverse micro-level embodied performances. These myriad micro-level performances constitute a macro level repertoire of dissent. The difference is of analytic abstraction. At the macro level, I was concerned with universal logic and mechanisms, whereas here, I am concerned about the specific embodied performances and dynamics of particular spatial tactics.

In 2014, with the formation of a new right-wing government in India, the general public and specifically universities, academic institutions, and artists faced backlash for the opposition of attempts to saffronisation by oppressive government policies and the rise of Hindutva terror. The micro-level resistance started with incidents like banning the Ambedkar-Periyar study circle in IIT madras and soon enough gained momentum to the whole university, turning to rebellion with Hkkolorob and FTII strike. With the FTII strike, the protest transcended to other spaces and

cities adopting new repertoires of resistance. It saw physical and well as online solidarity protests, marches, talks, film screenings, rallies, and theatre performances that were multi-sited. While the FTII strike was still on, Occupy UGC happened. It borrowed from the previously forged solidarities and methods of creative resistance that the FTII strike had created. Occupy UGC then became a macro level large-scale protest which brought in, for the first time, the identity of a student as a collective group. Resisting the Sale of Education as a commodity and questioning neo-liberal policies' economic policies in education made it a site of global solidarity where students fighting for the right to education poured in their solidarity from across the globe. Students from across the country gathered at the UGC building as well continued protesting in their specific universities.

The students of HCU even started a similar occupation on their campus and merged it with the question of caste and identity-based discrimination in University spaces. This was when Rohith Vemula and his friends were expelled from the university and were called anti-national for defending the right to self-determination of oppressed nationalities. On the very day that the Occupation of UGC ended, Rohith Vemula committed suicide leaving behind the most jolting suicide note that raised the level of solidarity to the question of the dignity of human life. This led to the mass movement of the rise of consciousness of caste oppression and attacked the very core of the saffron brand of hegemonic Brahmanical ideology. This chronology of events and resistances are not mere accidental occurrences. It is an embodied expansion of affect that multiplied the specific local acts of resistance into a mass movement of a large scale. Political agency and the rise of freedom of speech expressed as embodied emotions such as anger was transmitted to convert passive bodies into active political agents. Each event had archival traces of previous ones, and with the creation of each new event, new methods of protest and expression of dissent were born. The similarity of patterns is apparent from the similar performative simulation, gesture, and affect that they generated. A collective reiteration of resistance to oppressive government ideologies and the anger towards curbing spaces of dissent was visible.

Though these micro-level events are units of an umbrella macro movement, they still carry within themselves diverse micro-political discourses. Many conflicting micro-level battles are waged over the distribution of the body in space and control and production of physical territory. Thus micro-level protest performances bring the alternating and conflicting creation of identities, symbols, and meaning. They might have different nuances than the master narrative of macro-level protest. While the Macro level protest event creates a space for collective representation, affect, and identity, micro-level embodied performances create diverse particular embodied meaning, affect and emotions and help to differentiate between the range of diversity of protestors.

3. Protest Theatre

The embodied performances we have looked at so far have performative dimensions to them but are not the same as an independent art form that has a formal structure and apparatus to it. Their validity exists only within the spaces of macro and micro-level protest spaces and does not have an independent journey as an art practice. Protest theatre encompasses a diverse range of formalized art practices that form part of a performative political intervention. It can range from puppet theatre to agitprop art forms like street theatre, open-air stage events to elaborate media stunts, to cultural jamming. Such mass-mediated performances use design, properties, symbols, assembled, and adorned bodies to convey particular cultural meaning and identities. Such performances are very vital to raise the level of awareness and consciousness of a collective body of protestors. They also include art education as every new performance of this kind brings about new thinking of perception and meaning of art. Comedy and satire form a key component of protest theatre as humor is seen as an effective weapon to fight fascism and other hegemonic forces.

Gaddar, a guerrilla theatre group from Telangana, staged the musical performance at HCU. A street play called *Eklavya* was performed by Progressive Theatre Group. Another stage Theatre called *The Last Letter* was performed by the students of HCU. The performance was organized at Velivada, the site where Rohith Vemula and his friends slept after being expelled from the hostel. It later became the center of protests against caste atrocities and the epicenter of the movement for Justice for Rohith Vemula. In the middle of this compound, a bust of Rohith Vemula was also raised on a pedestal. The very location of the space and the presence of witnessing bodies evoked the memory of Rohith Vemula every time *Eklavya* was addressed in the performance. *Eklavya* became a metaphor for Rohith Vemula. The performance staged singing songs in an open-air space where the characters step forward and enact embodied gestures to illustrate the story. The songs are colloquial and are loaded with folkloric melodies and content. The form and content of this Protest Theatre not only created an oppositional force and a political articulation of dissent but also made visible the history and trauma written on the bodies of Dalit lives throughout centuries. It not only staged symbolic rejection of the State's Brahmanical monopoly but also affirmed the right to dignity of human life in the face of violent acts of hate crimes in the name of identity. These performances also take individuals on a diverse journey of memories triggered by gesture, emotion, and affect. Thus, Protest Theatre has a more direct engagement with the audience using structures and content that move beyond the movement and bring into fore the

diverse everyday settings of struggles.

4. Musical Performances

Music has been one of the most key components of resistant movements in contemporary times. Whether it is the consumption of music as playback to a performance, musical concert, or protest songs sung in protests and rallies, music has a visceral effect on the bodies of the protestors. It helps in transcendence, retrospection, the evocation of memory and senses, and helps achieve catharsis in moments of crisis. Moreover, the powerful condensing effect of music makes it an ideal tool to evoke strong emotions and bring people together in affective solidarity. From the folk music of IPTA to reggae compositions of contemporary, musical genres of all forms are utilized for diverse spaces of protest. Musical performances help disseminate ideological praxis of movements in a way that is non-confrontational and cognitive. Music works as a perfect archive of past traditions that can be used to evoke sedimented memories. Music thus becomes a river of embodied ideas and images between the generations of activists.

It can also be a perfect tool for satire where popular images and icons can be used in a melody to convey alternating ideas, images, and identities. Music is a medium that helps builds solidarity across identities, nationalities, and breaks the barrier of language and region. It does the double job of challenging oppression and building strong solidarity within the movement. It has been one of the most powerful embodied tools of resistance from the African Apartheid movement to the Women's suffragette movement to freedom struggles of colonized nations. The evocation of the song at any specific location brings in the archive of its global solidarity and makes the bodies present a single global entity united against oppression sung in the song as 'The international ideal Unites the human race.' The Fluid content of the song makes it readily available for diverse translations and rendition. It became a musical repertoire for the globe and became an international anthem for left-leaning movements and parties. It became a ritualized musical performance, which is not just sung at movements but also as national anthems and party and public events. It prepares the embodied bodies of activists for further action and is generative of affective solidarity. Thus musical performance, like guerrilla theatre, is an important tactical political intervention. It helps build an organized, nonviolent, renewable image of resistance.

During the immediate possibility of a threat, songs become an effective tool to recuperate and heal a community from collapsing into fear. In all of the student movements, we see a ritualized emphasis on protest songs as a tool to forge solidarity and heal the bodies for further fights. A group of students in JNU composed a choir called 'We are JNU.' This helped strengthen the crisis of identity that JNU students were facing. During Hunger Strikes, Reggae

concerts and Nirgun Sufi songs were sung to uplift the spirit of the striking students. They felt sublime and acknowledged a renewed will to fight by soothing harmonic songs that calmed their senses and gave the energy to carry on the resistance through their bodies. FTII invited Shambhaji Bhagat, Kabir Kala Manch, Piyush Mishra, and many other renowned singers to celebrate the culture of dissent and freedom. Their idea of resistance involved the evolution of self as a response to the democratic dictatorship that limits the self into a censored body. The musical drumming of bands and cultural groups at HCU similarly incited passion and excitement similar to the war music that evokes heightened affect of resistance and rage in the face of a violent, cruel enemy.

Thus, Musical performances bring in emotional, cognitive, ideological, and physical dimensions of protests and produce heightened emotions and inspire action and affective solidarity. Its unique sensory and the corporeal effect is regenerative and evokes diverse memories of the past. It is the unifying performance to build solidarities across time, space, and cultural diversities.

Performative Utterance and the Rise of Slogans

J.L. Austin, in his seminal book *How to do things with Words*, theorizes what he terms as 'performative utterance.' (Austin 54) In the philosophy of language and speech acts theory, performative utterances are sentences that are not only describing a given reality but also changing the social reality they are describing. These performative utterances are illocutionary acts that depend upon their efficacy to be ascribed as true or false. The efficacy of these speech acts thus depends upon their performative efficacy, which is determined by the receiving side. This theory opened up the question of linguistic components that constitute our world. Followed by Austin's work, many scholars worked on the efficacy of language. Judith Butler in her recent book *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, asks a pertinent question: When we claim to have been wounded by language, what exactly do we mean? According to Butler:

“We ascribe an agency to language, the power to injure and position ourselves as the objects of its injurious trajectory. We claim that language acts and acts against us, and the claim we make a further instance of language, one which seeks to arrest the force of the prior instance. Thus, we exercise the force of language even as we seek to counter its force, caught up in a bind that no act of censorship can undo. Could language injure us if we were not, in some sense, linguistic beings, beings that require language to be? Is our vulnerability to language a consequence of

our being constituted within its terms?” (Butler 54)

Thus language claims an agency over us as linguistic beings. But it is not the words alone that generate that effect on us; it is the mode of addressing, conditions of these utterances, pronunciation and tonal quality, gestural movement accompanying it as well the variables that constitute the subjectivity of the addressee. The term verbal assault and that words wound effectively mean that they cause symptoms of physical injury and pain. It is felt viscerally, bodily, and mentally and, in response, can lead to physical attacks, verbal abuse, death threats, hate speech, and other forms of physical and verbal violence. A mixture of all these responses was received and felt by the JNU community over the 'alleged' slogans that wounded the 'patriotic spirit of the nation.'

On 9th February 2015, a group of students from a student organization in JNU organized an event titled ‘The Country without a Post Office: Against the Brahminical Collective Conscience, Against the Judicial killing of Afzal Guru and Maqbool Bhatt.’ It was supposed to be a cultural evening of protest with poetry, art, singing, etc., which later turned into a clash between two opposing political organizations and individuals and became a Roshomon like situation which was mediatized, doctored, and became the controversial event that led to an entire global resistance movement.

The aesthetic choice for the expression of politics is of critical importance here. Poetry and singing as a form of protest aesthetics mobilize bodies and sensations in the world of ‘rasa,’ or generation of emotion or aesthetic sentiments. They fuel imagination, invoke myriad human emotions; generate ecstasy and sublime effect on the bodies of the spectators. Even if one disagrees with the lyrics and content of these performances, by the very nature of its other aesthetic affects like tone, rhythm, melody, etc., the spectators nevertheless feel attracted and bonded to it in a passive cogent way. These choices have the potential to transform the spectators into a collective and transform their experiences in a unifying way. It is a constructive and self-healing method of appointing words in an aesthetic medium.

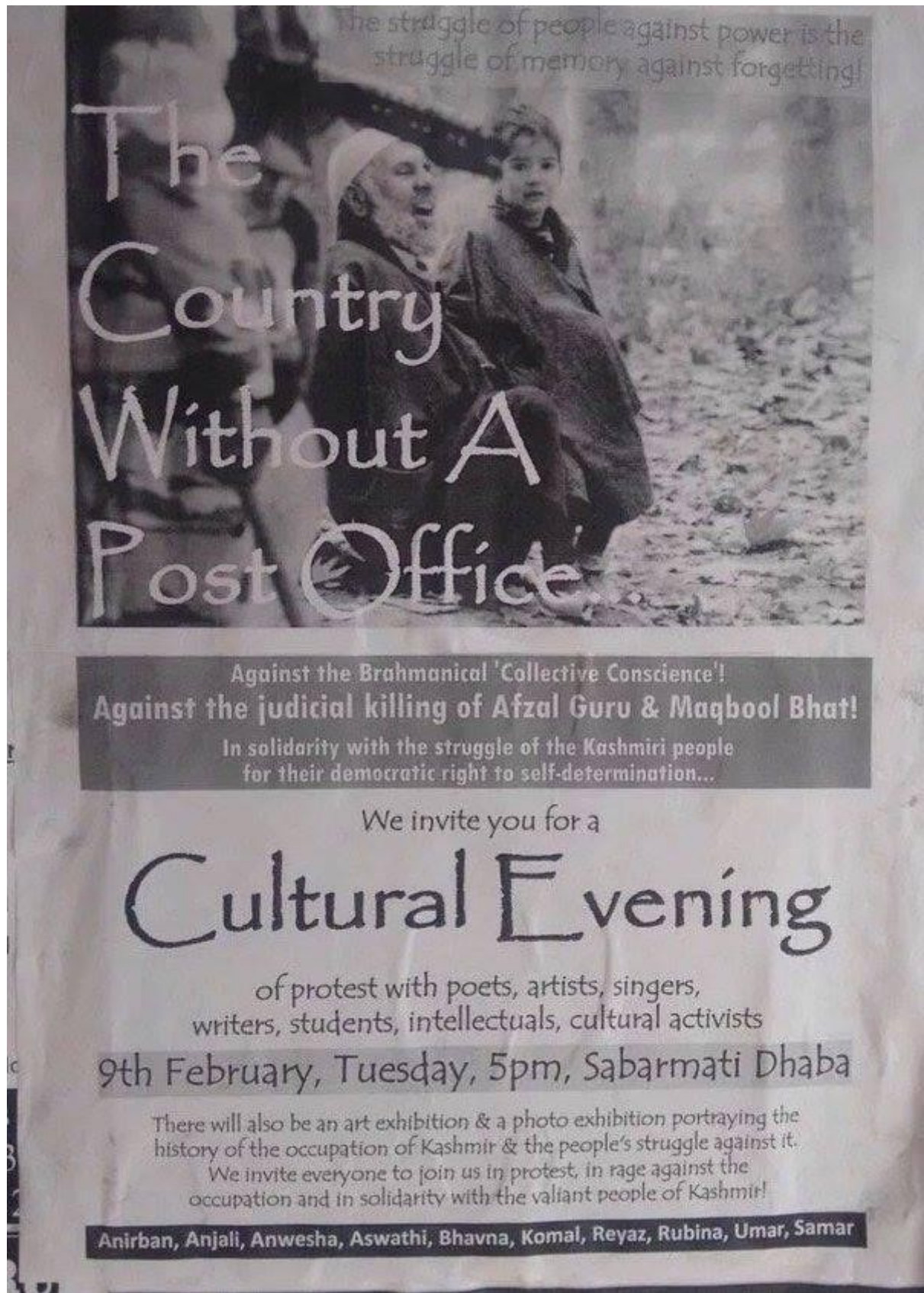


Fig 01 Poster of the controversial 9th February Event in JNU, New Delhi

However, it could not have hidden the political motif behind these aesthetics, and thus the permission for the event was canceled at the last minute. In response to this, as is an older

tradition of dissent in JNU, a march was taken out. This march propelled the passive bodies of spectators into active political subjects. In its essence, sloganeering is a call; it demands that the call to be answered by the bodies present there. It is the formation of a collective political unity on the basis of ideological agreement. Slogan thus, unlike songs and poetry, polarises people into for and against parties. This speech act aims to mock, wound, assert political claims. The students marched from Sabarmati to Ganga Dhaba, had a verbal and physical clash with the opposite nationalist group of students, sloganeering began from both sides as a mode of a verbal clash. Later on, media and police got involved, and the rest is history. Until this point, the identity of a student was of little significance, and their ideological viewpoint was highlighted. After the 'alleged' words of the slogans were out in the world, which included key words like 'Kashmir,' 'Azadi,' 'Afzal Gurni' , 'freedom,' 'India/Bharat,' 'Pakistan, Zindabad, Mordabad. None of these words were new to the political repertoire of sloganeering in JNU. What was new, however, the absurd, the surreal, that was never painted on the oral landscape of JNU were slogans like 'Bharat tere Tukde honge, Inshallah', 'Bharat ki barbadi tak jung rahegi '. These were the utterances that wounded the national sentiment, which provoked acts of hatred and violence against JNU community. This was the new, the event that ruptured the historical continuity of articulation of politics, the routine political repertoire of JNU students. The arrest of JNUSU president two days after it is the result of the efficacy of this injurious speech act. Language is the terrain on which the imagination of nation takes place. The other must be invoked to wound the self. Hence the fiction of Pakistan, the evocation of the other, is to hurt the sentiments of self, the Indian State. It is to deepen the insult that the linguistic injury of praising Pakistan is added. The blow of these slogans was felt to such levels that even law was borderline to law being threatened and the constitution being suspended. Not adhering to principles of natural justice, the arrested student Kanhaiya Kumar was attacked by lawyers in court, all in response to the blows incarcerated by these slogans on the body of Mother India. The rational interpretations of these slogans, however, adhere to questioning the power of a system and using language to create and claim alternate imagination.

The slogans here became an embodied practice that blurs the line between life and art, performance, and the event of the Real. They are a liminal form of language and performance, neither completely representational nor dramatic nor completely rhetorical. The Azadi slogans became an umbrella which acquired new rhythms and new form wherever it traveled and almost explicitly became a call for dissent, for freedom from all oppressive structures. It resonated equally in the gender justice movement, in social movements, and in the student movement, but just like the 'auratic' work of art, the origin is always quoted in the aura of the replica- the Kashmir and right to self-determination resounded with each call of freedom. The name-calling

was accepted as a badge of honor and became a revolutionary idea of dissent.

Conclusion

Today when the truth is turned into literal images, and any evidence-based rational investigation of truth has taken a back seat, the modes of resistance, linguistic, and otherwise by students, artists, activists, and rationalists have brought in a new and emancipatory way of generating insult. At times when discourses are emotive responses more than rational logic, this is a visionary counter-revolutionary force. No doubt, it was the writers of this country who were the first to protest against the growing culture of intolerance and hate-mongering. They understood when the growing atmosphere of hate and violence was still at the level of language and rhetoric. The growing atmosphere of censorship enriched our sense of humor and creativity and made us look for interventions that lead us towards the goals of humanity. Since this is a work in progress and we are living through these times, documenting the changes, the work is open to editing, negotiating and to acquiring new discourses and framework that will emerge in time. The focus remains, however at how the tools of performance studies enable new possibilities of performing protest, embodied virtual existence leading to new ways of seeing and being.

The creative resistance however offers a vision of a better world, which is almost encapsulated in the slogan used quite often in the student protest movement.

“We fight, not only against your tyranny but for the beauty of our Dreams.”

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