



Performing as Critical Resistance in Contemporary Times

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Abstract: The contemporary protest movements in India have scoured broad artistic expressions like graffiti, forum theatre, walking, floor paintings, slam poetry, installations, and songs to stage radical gestures and articulations on streets and social media. Performance as resistance accentuate the rising of people together to create safe spaces and explore new ways to raise critical questions. The paper sees how these performances are an enhancive articulation of the aestheticism of resistance. The documentation and proffering of protest through aestheticism have the power to impact the dominant and orthodox structures, hegemonic beliefs, passive muteness, and curbed ideas. Therefore, the critical concern is to perceive and analyse the content of aestheticism in the protesting actions that communicate people's unflinching courage and determination through performances. In the paper, the aesthetics of resistance are thus contemplated as performative, interactive, and demonstrative.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Resistance, Art, Performance, Gender and Protest

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Introduction

India has increasingly witnessed acts of resistance and episodes of solidarity where some were transformed into movements, and others became symbolic visuals of actions ensuing solidarity. The collective action episodes create an aesthetic sphere incorporating performance art that captures the essence of resistance, its verbal and visual dimensions, and collective emotions. Aesthetics of resistance is the culture of performance that unites people through creative enactment. It can be understood through different mediums that people and groups use to form a networked aesthetics of performance that diminishes the line between the 'self' and the 'other' in collective action. Through the creation of art, a collective self is

established, expressing solidarity through performances that render voice and space to the silenced bodies. The performances embodying resistance and solidarity become a symbol of democratic voices, a visual, verbal, and expressive medium to promulgate a vociferous voice. Aesthetics of resistance comprises material and performative cultures, such as symbolic art, slogans, music, dance, postures, painting, theatre, gestures, expressive behaviours, body art, colours, clothes, and objects that quench the needs of protestors and performers. Thus, aesthetics are the ‘mediums’ and ‘processes’ through which social change is fomented. The performers and protestors use aestheticism to put forth critical questions that seek attentiveness. Through expressive behaviours, resistance performances are made more inclusive and participatory, engaging more people. The creative actions choreograph the narratives of anger and contumacy aesthetically.

Contemporary protest movements have used ‘creative activism’ and ‘artivism’ in myriad ways. Performance as resistance converges voices, actions, representations, identification, and narrativity through creative resistance. Performance increases the visibility and reachability of the protest movements. Performativity through protest is “more decentralised, dispersed, temporary, and individualised forms of political action which then subverts the notion of the collective as singular, unified, homogenous, coherent, and mass” (McGarry 23). The aesthetics of resistance is an expressive form that contrives new mediums of communication and articulation crafted to raise consciousness and cultivate solidarity to propound change. The performance space creates an aesthetically drawn visual culture that accommodates multiple identities voicing resistance, often subsumed in the protesting sites. The following sections deal with performances located in different spaces, contexts, themes, and actions embodying a collective voice through collective action.

Performance as Aesthetic Resistance

Aesthetics of the Stage

9.30 ki Aakbiri Bus (Last bus at 9.30) by JANAM, 2012

The aesthetics of resistance is derived from the exigency of the situation. Resistance performances are known for their unusual style performed in unconventional and dynamic spaces. As a medium of symbolic and constructive protest, these performances exhibit a reality beyond the binaries of body and space. For example, in the aftermath of the tragic Nirbhaya rape case in India, the theatre group, Jana Natya

Manch, along with organisations such as Jan Sanskriti, Act One, JanwadiLekhak Sangh, and Bangla Manch, organised a bus ride titled 9.30 ki Aakhiri Bus (Last bus at 9.30) as an invisible theatre. To reclaim the night and the space, activists, students, and other men and women gathered in large numbers to take the last bus from the Shivaji Stadium bus terminus. Converting the bus into a theatrical space, people assembled near the terminus with placards around their necks saying, “*sheharhamarabai*,” (The city is ours) “, *aakhiri bus se gharjanabai*” (we want to go home in the last moving bus), “reclaim the night,” “*raatkehamsafar*” (companions of the night) “reclaim public spaces” to board the last bus. The accumulation of collective grief and anger and then transferring to a place where the incident of rape took place is an act of resistance to question and critique the violence. Through songs and collective voices, the group boarded the bus as passengers and read poetry to show solidarity with the victim. As Sudhanva Deshpande of JANAM said, “We decided to convert buses into performance spaces with music and poetry reading to make our point about the need for better public transport, especially at night” (Nath). The act, according to Deshpande, raises multiple questions, such as, “Why was the girl faced with a situation where she had to board a private bus? Why was there no DTC bus available as she waited at the bus stop?” (Nath).

The performance as a part of the initiative to “Reclaim the public transport. Reclaim the night. Reclaim the city” sends an open invitation to everybody to join the group with any musical, poetic, or narrative piece, transforming the spectators into ‘spect-activists.’ The performance converts the bus journey into a space staging resistance and dissent through collective action. The act urged the regular passengers to join in and share the narratives, sing with the group, and read poetry as an act of solidarity. Resistance performances tend to conjoin the individual acts into a collective one, and even simple acts of solidarity deal with multiple forms of oppression. As one of the performers asserts, “the act fostered a sense of collectivity, not only among their middle-class constituency but also others who face dangers on public transport daily” (Dutt). Even bus drivers, conductors, and passengers became part of the act. Thus, the act serves as an egalitarian tool providing space and voice to articulate opinions to people on the bus, thereby establishing a relationship through self-expression. JANAM used invisible theatre, not as a problem-solving technique but to develop and enhance critical understanding of people regarding issues tormenting their lives and galloping their consciousness. The interactive performance intends to substantiate commonalities between the narratives and bodies of the performer and the spectator. It further provides a space to articulate, behave, and communicate one’s personal, social, and public stand.

Walk like a Woman by Neha Singh, 2019

The med around women in public spaces and victim-blaming, Neha Singh's *Walk like a Woman* is an interactive performance directed by herself. The play is based on sensitising boys and girls about the different challenges girls experience in public spaces. The performance was received well in India at the University of Delhi colleges, such as Rajdhani College and Shaheed Bhagat Singh College. Known for initiating a dialogue between men and women in public spaces amidst the performance is what makes it a unique piece of installation and resistance. Moreover, the performance is immersive because it creates a bond between the audience and the performer. The audience persists, perceives, and directs what is happening on the stage. Different situations are presented in front of the audience in the act that women often face in public spaces. The audience was asked to decide for the performer so that she would feel safe and comfortable. The gender roles were reversed in the play, and men were asked to don women's clothes and accessories. By donning different clothes, they had to act like a woman atleast for a while and then share their experiences (Singh).¹ What a woman goes through is narrated not from an individualistic perspective but in a collective voice that formulates lived reality in a theatrical space. The doing and undoing of gender through clothes and different voices play a pertinent role in analysing the socio-cultural impositions and how the 'being' of the gender is determined by the 'doing.' Only when one performs the other gender by situating oneself in the realities of another gender the being is realised. The situational and learned reactions of the audience decide how the act will move forward. Giving the authority and agency to the audience to decide for the woman is a deliberate attempt to make people understand that the standards society has imposed upon women are futile and Sisyphean in nature.



Picture 1: *Walk like a Woman* performed at Rajdhani College

Source: Performer



Picture 2: Walk like a Woman Performed at Rajdhani College, University of Delhi

As a Promenade Theatre², the director enters between the performance and changes the show. A different clause is put forth, thereby providing an alternate ending to the play through the active involvement and participation of the audience. In one of the scenes, the performer was stopped inbetween, and the audience was asked, “What would you have done had you been in this position?”. Society has always tried to use strategic and manipulative conditions to gain autonomy over women. The performance is a critical representation of public space that constantly judges a woman who occupies spaces in the so-called masculine realms. The decision-making power thus lies in the hands of people who judge in real spaces and are asked to choose safe and comfortable options for women. As a response-oriented performance, the audience’s suggestions move the play’s action. The act enables one to understand the problems of limited perceptibility and irrational mindsets by challenging the constructed notions of ‘victim-blaming’. By tactfully giving agency to the viewers in the performance, the act raises a rhetorical question regarding a woman’s safety. To what extend woman are safe even if they act according to the whims and fancies of others? The act is about the continuous negotiation of spaces that place women in different contexts and situations. For instance, she is in

the metro and an amiable uncle talks to her. Gradually he starts acting weird and asks personal questions. The friendliness then leads to inappropriate touching, followed by resistance from the girl. At every point, the girl acts according to the decisions made for her by the audience. The audience tries to save the girl by saying, “Don’t talk to the man,” or “Don’t give him this personal information.” At a certain point, the performer counter-questions the audience about their perception of the decisions that move the action. “Who is right?”, “What perception did you make from the act?” are a few common questions that make the performance a live interaction (Singh). Eventually, it was realised that there is no escape from harassment and violence no matter what one chooses. The performance blurs the boundaries between safe and unsafe zone by placing everything on the periphery of unreliable space. It further exposes the inefficiency of people in providing safe spaces for women. Systematic oppression takes place in the form of victim-blaming or limited accessibility, further camouflaging the incompetency of the dominant authority. There is no escape, and whatever choices a woman makes, she will be in danger. So, it is the perception of the people that needs to be changed rather than telling or imposing women with some do’s and don’ts. Even in the performance, the act of protection places women in a vulnerable situation with no way out. Like a catch-22 situation, there is no escape; the audience is perplexed by the decision they made for the woman. The different acts are structured on the internal resistance within the play. By giving agency to the audience to decide, the audience sees that the result is the same no matter their choices. The play follows a cyclic process that intends to bring change in the audience’s mindset.

As the director of the play, Neha Singh, says in a personal interview:

Next time when they are about to judge a woman in a public space for being too modest or rash, they will probably think about the time when they were making choices, and even after making the best choice, they were still in an unsafe state (Singh).

The performance also affects the self and identity of the performer who is donned as a woman. While performing, one embodies someone else’s life and story and with embodiment comes living the perceived reality. The performer brings it into the body, in the voice, and while interacting with the audience, one lives that reality, atleast for some time. Through performative embodiment, one can trace visible and direct effects on the performer to a large extent.

As Neha Singh explains:

Any performance, more than the person watching, affects the person who is performing because the performer becomes part of the story, the resistance, and opinions that he/she is projecting (Singh).

The performance space becomes a space where social and cultural inscriptions are performed and how to move one's body in what ways are imposed through various measures resulting in nothing. Resistance performance offers scope to 'play' with different notions that are 'normalised' in different contexts. The idea is to resist an outlook that has been regularised by society and to help change mindsets. Using Forum theatre to initiate interaction and explore different perspectives to deal with the problems, *Walk like a Woman* uncovers and analyse alternatives in the given situation. The performers and the audience explore the repercussions of the choices creating a theatrical debate generating ideas, perspectives, understanding, solidarity, and empowerment.

Aesthetics of the Street

A prodigious amount of protest art inundated Shaheen Bagh, making it an aesthetic space for political dissent. New forms of resistance represented different realities and emotions of the people. From decorating the routes and bridge with posters, banners, and graffitis to installing the map of India and the mini India gate, art became emblematic of protest. Art transcends the boundaries of language, culture, and community as a communicative language, concatenating people at a deeper level—the aestheticism created initiated a discourse between the self and society. On the other hand, an individual representation speaks of the collective emotion; it gives visual and verbal vocabulary to the particular emotions felt. The poet Aamir Aziz, enunciating art's utility, talks about the dual role of resistance art. One, art contributes to the progression of the protest, and second, it is a historical document. The news records events, but art records the people and the community's feelings through different forms and expressions. These artistic expressions are not limited to one protest movement but rather foster a sense of solidarity; these are words and expressions of community articulated by the artists or individuals. Graffiti on the walls are artful representation with a grammar of its own. Graffiti as a medium of protest is significant for two reasons; one, occupation of space and challenging the narratives of power through colourful representations; second, claiming a collective identity.

The photographic presentation and representation of exasperation and annoyance, solidarity and collectiveness, and identity and self convert walls into 'museification'.³From student protests to state and national protests to women's movements, graffiti has established a radical counterculture voicing people's feelings. The revolutionary poetry, symbols, slogans, and actions are forms of self-expression that find a space and collective identity through painting and writing on the walls. In recent times, the unswerving nature of artists to bring revolution through art is most palpable in the anti-CAA protest. The use of public art at Shaheen Bagh through posters, photographs,

graffiti, and paintings on the walls and bridge displays the protestors' melange of aestheticism and resistance. With different tools such as humour, wit, irony, and forms such as posters, poetry, and painting, people celebrated the resilience and strength of the women and the movement. For example, the graffiti finds fearless burqa-clad Muslim women carrying the *nazm* by Faiz Ahmad Faiz, "*Hum Dekhenge*" (we shall see); the entire street interspersed with colourful visuals of dissent reads, "*Bol ke lab azad baitere*", "We will not hide our identity", "*main Shaheenhoon*", "take back CAA", and many more weaves narrates of people in the public spaces. Nabiya Khan's famous lines "*Ayega Inquilab, Pehenke Bindi, Chudiyen, Burqa, Hijab*" (the revolution will arrive, donned in bindi, bangles, veil, and hijab) find space on various walls. The line dismantles the stereotypes associated with women and reclaims the space through attire and adornment. Breaking the 'normative' idea of bangles and veil as suppressive, these writings by women and for women tends to claim womanhood through choice and assertion. The newfound vocabulary of self-expression through artistic dissent emerges from oppression and celebration both. It addresses layers of oppression and multiple identities in salubrious yet stimulating ways.

The graffiti depicts the fearless women of Shaheenbagh holding the constitution of India in their hands, falcon on the shoulder, spreading the message of "Mohabbat Zindabad," "*Ishq Inquilab*", "*Bebaakbulandaazadaaurtein*", and the Republic self accord them the status of 'activist-awakened citizens.



Picture 3: Graffiti at Shaheen Bagh

Source: Fearless Collective

National symbols are identity markers in the fight for quality, freedom, and democracy. The use of national flags and anthems in the movements has fostered pride and uniformity in people. The way constitutionalism, national flag, songs, and anthem have been reclaimed and reasserted by the citizens of India resonates with the idea of a 'Nation For All.' The reading of the Indian constitution, the national flag imprinted on the face, and the verbal hymn of the anthem is a highly symbolic and visually enticing action. The nationalist symbols serve a dual purpose in the protest; one, they ignited the nationalist zeal amongst the protestors and the spectators; second, the symbols procured a protective frame for the people. The act has an impeccable impact defining the sanctity of the protest space and conjoining more and more people to the idea of the nation. The avidity for democracy surfaced nationally, and culturally influential symbols vouchsafed a new standpoint to the protest action. The nationalist zeal that the movements create is visually enchanting; one finds the national flag hung at almost every nook and corner (Shaheen Bagh and Farmer's protest). These symbolic acts give credence that resistance has become part of everyday existence. With resistance through national symbols comes the realisation



Picture 4: Installation of India Gate at Shaheen Bagh

Source: Wikimedia

that access to the fundamental right is not something received as a favour from the regime, but instead, it is the right to make the rightful claims. The chants of ‘Azadi’ are a ‘joyous realisation’ that freedom is “limitless and indivisible” and once won “can never be given up because nothing can take its place, nothing can compensate for its loss”(Ali 205). The installation of a metallic map of India at Shaheen Bagh with “We the people of India reject CAA NPR NRC” written on it and the replica of India Gate with the names of comrades who died while fighting against the CAA inscribed on each brick marks a new wave of symbolic protest in India.

In Assam, people constructed *belaghor*⁴ in the shape of the map of the motherland, Assam, to inscribe the message of resistance in the Assamese language. The country geographically and ideologically belongs to people, and the use of symbols is a constructive action to claim the right citizenship. Thus, maps are used to narrate the agonies of the self.



Picture 5: ‘Belaghar’ in Assam

Source: Insidene

Colours of Protest and Pride: The Act of Colour Mixing

Colours are also being used as markers of identification, such as the use of black hijabs by Muslim women, yellow turbans and dupattas by Sikhs, and pink sarees by women, but the question is, what if your gender and community do not fit into the hegemonic binaries? What colour can one use to define and identify the self? For

example, the LGBTQ community does not fit into the normative order of colours; therefore, as an act of resistance, the community uses rainbow colours on the body and as flags to represent the multiplicity in the identity.



Picture 6: The Pride Flag

Source: The Economic Times

The representation through vibrant rainbow colours indicates their urge for naturalness, identification, and acceptance in a community. The different colours reveal their different shades of love and sexuality, which do not fit into the white and black binaries constructed by society. The colours also question the so-called 'normative people' who are creators of 'normative discourse', asking them to break this dominant discourse. Dismantling the binaries created by society to outcast them, they painted their colours on their body as a symbol of liberation and celebration.

Decorating the body helps one to transcend the boundaries that trivialise and desexualise them. Through the symbolic expression, the community also urges one to think that if society is not ready to accept them as one amongst them, how can one shape their history? How can they try and fix them into the powerful discourse? With acceptance comes denial, but how can one deny them the right to live when there is no acceptance? Thus, they urge people to leave them to themselves to avoid getting lost in this gender divide game.



Picture 7: The Rainbow Revolution

Source: Loop News

Aesthetics of the Digital Spaces

***Sanitary Panels* by Rachita Taneja**

Sanitary Panels is an Indian webcomic by Rachita Taneja reflecting views upon different socio-political topics ranging from discrimination to democracy. According to Rachita, “Sanitary Panels is a feminist webcomic that comments on culture, society and politics” through stick figure art style (Quint). The bold statements that the cartoons demonstrate using simple stick figures created manually through pen and paper are the most provocative way of communicating complex ideas to the public. The black and white figures and the text make her style unique, as she acclaims, “It is very easy to get straight to the point when you have a simplistic, non-daunting style, making it accessible” (NL Interview). Self-expression has been the most prolific form of resistance, and women have been articulating the self through different modes and mediums. The expression has led to various controversies on obscenity and boldness. Similar consequences have been faced by Taneja two times; first, when she reported the rape threats received on social media and second, when she critiqued the ruling party and the supreme court through her comic. In

the first case, when she reported the threats and vulgar words, Facebook did not take any action, but when she posted a comment saying, “men are trash”, her post was removed, and the account was blocked. The incident brings forth the curbed freedom of expression artists face. In response to the incident, Rachita made a comic criticising Facebook that was again considered offensive and taken down, stating that it goes “against our community standards.” The act questions the double standards that prevail in the physical and virtual worlds.



Picture 8: Comic on Supreme Court

Source: Sanitary Panels, Twitter

In the second case, a contempt proceeding was sanctioned against Rachita for the series of illustrations commenting upon the decision of the Supreme Court in Arnab Goswami’s case. Her tweets with images were considered “audacious assault and insult to the institution” and alleged as abhorrent, insulting, and cast aspersions, further stating that it made “clear implications” that Supreme Court is “biased towards the ruling Bhartiya Janta Party” (Scroll. in). This case is a clear example of the forceful imposition of ‘un-voicing’ anger. A humorous illustration petrified the court to the extent that Taneja’s act of dissent compelled the court to believe cartoons denigrate the power and authority of the court in the eyes of the general public. The suppression of dissent gives rise to the culture of resistance and solidarity.

Subduing one artist's voice is stifling the collective voice; the freedom to speak, act and express is a collection of action and democratic rights of each individual, and when the right to articulate is questioned, a collective voice becomes the voice of dissent and defiance. A group of artists and illustrators stood in solidarity with Rachita critiquing the "authoritarian action" and considering it a violation of the right to freedom and speech. They argued that rather than protecting the rights of citizens, the Supreme Court is fostering a sense of terror and fear; the act reveals the propensity to censor the vociferous and outspoken voices rising against the dominant powers.

The statement added:

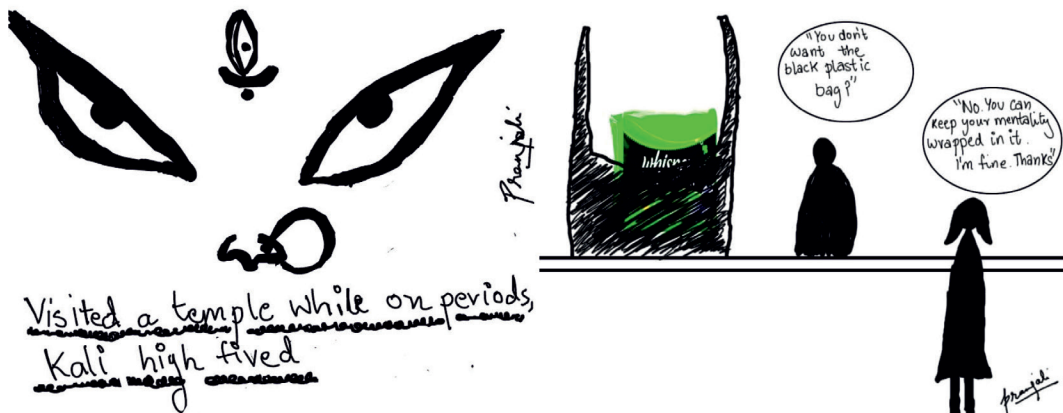
"We are compelled as artists to raise questions about the social and political context we live in, which includes the functioning of the Supreme Court – as Rachita has done in her work. Art, especially cartooning, has had a relationship with society, which is rooted in the possibilities of creative and critical debate. Rachita Taneja's art practice is situated in a long tradition of cartooning, which has kept alive this culture of debate and dialogue on contemporary governance, court cases and anti-people policies through peaceful and creative means" (Press Statement, Scroll. in).

— Drawing Resistance

The act of restraining people from critiquing the functioning of society shows the incompetence of the authoritarian. Rather than pondering over the criticism and improving, stifling seems the most appropriate medium to exhibit power. Art can never be choked back, and it plays an essential role in abstaining the country and the people to become subservient citizens. The furtherance of the discourse and dialogue around dissent is the most potent form of democracy and must be encouraged rather than stifling it in different forms. Apart from the political content, Rachita has been outspoken about issues around eve-teasing, sexual harassment, menstruation, sexism, rape, and molestation; to put it simply, her work questions the rigid frameworks of masculinity, politics, and society. Moreover, questioning the unquestioned through humour and satire from a feminist standpoint has democratised spaces for women and widened and transformed the restricted domains of knowledge and representation. Rachita's stick figures are metaphorical 'sticks' used to thrash multiple layers of patriarchies and politics. A counterculture challenging the power in society is formulated through humour. What is eccentric is the appearance of women humourists stripping the culture they were supposed to protect. Crudity is considered unfeminine, but women are breaking the rigid codes, laughing and adorning the unfeminine.

Kalmuhi by Pranjali Dubey

Embracing the taboo words to initiate new narratives of gender, *Kalmuhūs* a webpage by Pranjali Dubey. Through her page, she initiated a campaign to voice against the hidden taboos in Indian society, criticise the patriarchal narrative, and seek answers to the interdict discourses and stigmas. The artwork triggers the sense to the extent that one questions one's predicaments of doing and being. The undisguised and fiery illustrations become a collective canvas and voice of each woman, thereby formulating a gendered art movement against social taboofication. Pranjali Dubey herself explains the name of her webpage; she says, "*Kalmuhi* (*literally the one who has her face blackened in public of shame*) is a term that stands for any woman who breaks the rules and goes against the norms, who does not fit into the socially assigned mould and rebels real hard. *Kalmuhi* is a platform that I have created for the norm-breaking women *to discuss the issues we face every day, such as menstruation, body shaming, sex, mental and physical abuse, consent, and disorders* (Dangwal). The monochromatic doodles with a tint of sarcasm and humour, vehemence and furiousness address the 'unrecognised' issues. Stemming from the rooted narratives around injustice and silence, the systematically nurtured taboos is what the artist aspires to dismantle. Through the collaboration of words and drawing, a canvas of resistance critiquing the structured socio-political discourse is solidified. Her art has been considered too bold by the audience, but she calls her doodles "creative ventilations of her frustrations." Recounting an incident, Pranjali once interposed how her art breaks the age-old narratives around menstruation and how young girls



Picture 9&10: Pranjali Dubey's Artwork

Source: Facebook

play a pertinent role in accounting change. For example, seeing one of her doodles on menstruation, a young girl went to the temple while she was menstruating, and “the sky did not fall on her.”

Pranjali, through her doodles, contests existing norms and perspectives to initiate a new discourse from different perspectives. As an inclusive space for defiance and dialogues, she says, “my aim is to create a dialogue between my doodles and the audience through inclusion of women’s perspective. My art is a commentary and means less for aesthetic admiration and more for understanding and questioning the socio-political landscape of the prevalent gender issues. I am using it as a tool to try and mend the society in places where it seems broken” (Dangwal). The doodles thus demonstrate the ‘angry self’ of an artist questioning the distorted mindsets draped in the politics of exclusion and alienation of women. The reconfiguring of the imagined and assigned spaces to women has been a new site of resistance for patriarchal authorities. These sites of artistic resistance have become articulation and re-articulation of women as active subjects rather than passive beings. With an increasing number of women breaking the stereotypical spaces and embracing artistic forms, the culture of resistance is aestheticised. The aestheticised space has often been turned into campaigns for change on social media and on the streets. The fierce ‘modern’ woman adulates herself. The glorification through oppression has been a tool of patriarchy to retain women in the private space of the home. However, women now accolade suppressed desires and expressions through artworks. The hushed tones and politics of concealment around menstruation, nudity, sexuality, fantasy, and desire have been mapped with narratives of female desire, strength and identity construction.

For many other female artists, personal has become political whose representation in the political spaces are prerequisite for change and development. Art is not an escape from reality; it creates an alternate reality, the one that belongs to the artist but represents the collective identity and self of a particular group or community. Resistance art, per se, tends to canvas the collective experience and further extend the sense of solidarity and selfhood to others. As a woman born in a patriarchal society, being labelled as radical and vociferous for asking too many questions on things such as periods and sexuality is a common tendency. For women, art is a dialogue with the self and others; the perceived differences and the conceived anger instigated them to channel personal resentment into doodles to shame the deformed mindsets.

Conclusion

Contemporary art practices in India have occupied different spaces, adding aestheticism to political moments and social dogmas. The substantial and constructive

use of protest aesthetics incorporates visuals, performance, and textual materials such as images, symbols, dance, music, theatre, masking, clowning, graffiti, clothes, flags, and the rhetoric elements such as slang, humour, slogans, and speeches. In addition, the aesthetic performances of resistance are collaborative and participatory, fusing experiences from personal, political and social engagements and articulating them through a shared space and voice. Resistance and art share a two-way relationship; both contribute to each other's progression providing a voice and vision for growth and multiplication. Movements stuff the art with food (content); on the contrary, the aesthetic expressions become the movement's soul through representation. Protest art in different symbolic forms provides a visual story that either represents a culture in its valour or discards it for its unacceptable dogmas. Performativity, therefore, is an "empowering concept, politically and artistically, because it not only explains how norms are constituted but also shows that change and invention are always possible" (McGarry 23). Empowerment becomes a collective practice of the protesting group derived from visual and verbal communication. In these expressive communications, articulation of the self is an auxiliary to aestheticism; self-expression becomes a personalised collective performance. Aesthetic resistance thus becomes the 'genesis of coherence' of the ideas and solidarity. In performance, the line between the performer and the audience is blurred; the audience and performers can equally participate in the performative acts of resistance through interaction and intersection.

Notes

1. Singh, Neha. *Telephonic Interview*. March 22, 2021
2. *Promenade theatre takes the audience from scene to scene, where they observe, or participate in the creative performance and theatrics. This theatre can be site-specific, in an enclosed area or an open site*
3. Museification is the non-institutional transformation of an object into museum, and flows the same logic as museum in exposing elements intended for contemplation, admiration and knowledge.
4. The *bhela ghar* is a bamboo-and-straw construction made by the Assamese during Bihu time. It is usually where all the fun — feasting and merrymaking, and grooving to Bihu songs — takes place. Early in the morning on Bihu, the *bhela ghar* is set afire, while the people pray for a peaceful and tranquil society.

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