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Queering Feminist Solidarities. #Metoo, LoSHA and the Digital Dalit

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Abstract: At the height of international visibility for #metoo, a crowd-sourced list was published on Facebook that contained the names of prestigious Indian academics, accusing them of sexual harassment. The list was controversial not only in that it became a viral phenomenon (and resulted in immediate questioning of the legitimacy of internet culture for politics) but also in that these accusations did not contain information on the circumstances of the alleged crimes, so as to protect the victims' anonymity. The list was quickly dubbed "the list of naming and shaming" and was met with its strongest criticism from within the feminist movement itself, as established feminists argued publicly against such methods and against the queer Dalit leaker of the document, Raya Sarkar. This paper examines these conflicts of solidarity as conflicts between transnational and local positionalities and argues for the possibility of digital spaces as environments that invite a queering of identity politics, constructive disagreement, and transformative justice, rather than mere conflict and its resolution through a homogenous feminist identity.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Feminism, Social Media, Intersectionality, Sexual Harassment

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Introduction

The hashtag #metoo – popularized after revelations surfaced about mainstream-media mogul Harvey Weinstein's sexually predatory behaviour – seems to be a defining signifier for contemporary feminisms. Since the Weinstein affair, #metoo has "gone viral" and become a cipher upon which feminist movements are hinging their work on sexual and gendered violence. The hashtag has been criticized, reduced, reused, misunderstood, and celebrated again and again in different locations across the globe, connecting discourses that seem geographically distant and locally distinct. Media outlets across a wide spectrum have acknowledged, commented on, or dismissed that women*[1] are disproportionally exposed to violence and harassment on the basis of their gender. Most surprising, however, seems to be the way victimhood is articulated in a shamelessly accusatory way when it exists beyond the frame of white, heterosexual, and bourgeois femininity. In fact, the "Me Too" movement, sans the hashtag, was created for black and lower-class women* by activist Tarana Burke, who was looking to support and heal those who continue to be the least acknowledged victims of sexual violence (A Verso Report 2018). Picking up on this lineage, I argue for the strength of the internet to inform intersectional and marginalized communities of feminists through the example of an Indian list of alleged sexual harassers in academia. The list, which came to be known as LoSHA ("List of Sexual Harassers in Academia"), was crowd-sourced, managed and leaked by Raya Sarkar, a young queer Dalit anti-caste activist, who first posted it on Facebook to circulate amongst their peers. The list was quickly dubbed a campaign to "name and shame" (Menon 2017) and was met with its strong criticism from within the

1 I understand that "woman", as any category, can never exhaust itself and does not describe a specific or essential body or being. For this reason, I frame the category of woman* (with the asterisk) as inclusive and understand it to extend to anyone that self-defines or is read as "woman". I understand the difficulties of juxtaposing womanhood – however constructed – with victimhood, but given that a large majority of women* across locations have, in some way or another, experienced violence, harassment, or misconduct due to their gender and (assumed) sexuality, I understand the category of woman* to be, to a certain extent, framed by violence, although I also want to stress that it is not *only* women* who experience such gendered forms of violence. I stand also by the category of victimhood, despite attempts to frame the encounter with sexual violence in more empowering terms. Marking a person as a victim allows the person to understand the origin of the crime within a perpetrator. It marks solidarity amongst victims, which has shown itself precisely through these shared vulnerabilities, making individuals feel less alone by providing space for sharing pain. I use the term thus in defiance of "victim-blaming" and anti-feminist stances that have made it an insult.

feminist movement itself, as established feminists expressed worry over such emerging digital methodologies. The list came to be understood as an expression of Dalit-Adivasi-Bahujan (DAB) feminism, thus situating itself at the position of India's most marginalized women*. In addition to such a reading of LoSHA as Dalit expression, the list needs to be read as the inhabitation of the "digital queer" (Gajjala 2019, 151pp.), which effectively circumvents claims to authentic singular identities, addressing instead a globalized digital public sphere.

The following article will explore the "list-statement controversy" (as this series of events came to be known) from the angle of digital media studies. I will first describe how the list-statement controversy developed to then turn to the positionalities at play in more detail. I argue that there is a public intimacy that emerged among list-supporters due to the intersectional angle and multiplicity of positionalities it could offer articulation to. What imagined positionalities and methodologies inform the LoSHA conflict and how does the digital complicate or assuage these problems?

I will argue that the non-upper-caste, non-heterosexual status of the leaker of the list, Raya Sarkar, necessitated the digital's multiplicity to become a point of rupture for Indian feminism. I read LoSHA as having its lineages in offline spaces of feminist representation as well as in a transnational digital connectivity that enables kinship networks across difference (Paik 2014). The anxieties about such a 'viral' object verbalized by upper-caste (*savarna*) Indian feminists inadvertently reveal and repeat historical anxieties about caste and a non-*savarna* subaltern national authenticity that queered the politics of identity in the post-colony. Further, given that both the accusers and the accused travel within the transnational spaces of academia and the internet, LoSHA's political relevance must be contextualized beyond the borders of Indian territory, in resonance with a global public. I will in closing argue that the list harnesses a multiplicity common in digital spaces that questions the capacity for identity politics as authentic and homogenous group expressions.

At the moment of leaking, I was a visiting scholar at the English and Foreign Language University in Hyderabad (EFLU), using the library of the Anveshi Research Centre for Women's Studies for my research. As a white-passing non-Indian scholar who had spent most of her academic life in Western institutions, my assumptions and knowledges about caste-based discrimination, India-specific stereotypes and violence are predominantly mediated either through academic texts or conversations such as the ones I had at Anveshi. My understanding of LoSHA was deepened through an array of interviews undertaken in Bangalore in the aftermath of the list. Here, I was supporting and organizing budding conversations about consent and feminist infrastructures at the Centre for Internet

and Society (CIS), as a response to the centre's former board member Lawrence Liang's being implicated by the list. I was soon discussing LoSHA at cultural institutions such as the Alternative Law Forum; the Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology; and elsewhere, and learning from the practitioners dealing with its immediate implications. I am greatly indebted to the people offering insights, including Jasmine George from Hidden Pockets, Darshana Mitra from ALF, Jasmeen Patheja from Blank Noise, and Padmini Ray Murray from Srishti, as well as, finally, numerous students, feminists and digital practitioners at Anveshi, EFLU, and CIS.

Although their perspectives were central to informing my position as a Western academic, I do not want to pit these informants against suggestions of "authentic" Indianness carried forward by the statement. Instead, the analysis presented here takes a less-travelled route[2], as it focuses on the digital aspects of the list and its enabling capacities for queer politics that undermine an understanding of identities as essentially authentic or static. As an early-career feminist researcher of digital infrastructures and computational imaginaries, I acknowledge and relate to the convergence of offline and online lives that the #LoSHA[3]-feminists arguably experience on a daily basis. This suggests that communities inhabiting digital technologies in a similar manner can indeed produce ideological overlaps between them that complicate the traditions of identity politics and allow for solidarity across difference – but this by no means makes identities and expressions ahistorical or decontextualized. While the list and its subsequent defenders make clear demands about identity politics and the disavowal of caste in discussions on gender-based violence, the list also problematizes the question of being inside and outside, of activity and passivity, and of an indigenous Indian feminism that perpetuates a framework that privileges heterosexual *savarna* cis-women.

LoSHA in the Spotlight

LoSHA is the first object of discussion in India to visibly signal towards the supposedly already global #metoo movement. The list's publication occurred as a response to an article by Christine Fair on HuffPost, which was taken down

2 "Less-travelled" does not mean that I am treading in entirely unexplored territory. Radhika Gajjala's research in particular has been incredibly helpful, and at the time of #LoSHA, I was following a group of Indian digital feminists around Gajjala on Facebook and Twitter. Some of what I learned came from these conversations, and Gajjala's recent book "Digital Diasporas" (2019) has documented many of the discussions that took place at the time. I am thus especially grateful for this book, as these conversations have become citable references.

3 I use the hashtag here to separate the list as an object from the list as a discourse and the list- and discourse-supporters, whether they themselves contributed or not. "#LoSHA-feminists" then refers to all pro-list feminists, while "LoSHA" refers to the list itself. "#LoSHA", in turn, refers to the discussions emerging around the object of LoSHA online, where often the hashtag was used to mark an article or statement as referring to the list.

from the website on 23 October 2017 (Dasgupta 2018). In the article, the writer names her harassers under the hashtag #himtoo and gives explicit detail as to how the continuity and systematic repetition of sexual misconduct led her to leave academia. The article marks a shift in focus; Fair argues that conversations on sexual violence should not pretend that these instances were crimes without origin but instead focus on the perpetrators (Fair 2017). Responding to this impetus, Raya Sarkar published a list of names on Facebook, warning friends and followers of academics with problematic and predatory behaviour, but also asking for further contributions. As a result, the list named around 70 prominent and left-intellectual academics as predators, beginning with one of Fair's main perpetrators, Indian academic Dipesh Chakrabarty. The list, crowd-sourced from students in higher-education institutions across India, was said to first have been conceived of as a "whisper network" (Gajjala 2018) with which to warn students about professors that were potential predators. As such, it would not lay claim to any judicial mechanisms, but merely record instances of violence and harassment for future students. Such networks have existed for as long as sexual predators have, but this instance was quickly understood to be replacing judicial mechanisms with vigilantism.

Shortly after LoSHA had appeared and "gone viral" in the format of a Google Doc, Sarkar took responsibility for crowd-sourcing, managing and leaking the list, giving it a face and a target towards which to direct its criticism. Immediately, the feminist publishing collective Kafila issued a statement that criticized and dismissed the list as "naming and shaming" and demanded it be taken down in the name of the "larger feminist community" (Menon 2017a). The statement questioned the political valence of internet culture and read LoSHA as testimony to an insurmountable gap between India and the West.

Predominantly, there seemed to have been a worry that LoSHA would dismantle the mechanisms of due process and natural justice that feminists had built over the course of decades, as explained in the statement written by Nivedita Menon (2017a), which was signed by 11 other prominent feminists. The statement and its subsequent annex (Menon 2017b) suggested there could be flaws in evaluating certain cases as harassment; unfair accusations could be made against innocent people because a lack of both detail and evidence made it impossible for outsiders to evaluate the circumstances. The way LoSHA was set up, it was argued, led to a lumping together of different degrees of harassment without nuance, as descriptions and resolutions were left blank – even for people already found guilty through institutional mechanisms.

Feminists and left-intellectuals saw the danger of enabling right-wing conservatives in going "on the rampage naming every 'anti-national' as a sexual

harasser" (Menon 2017a). Pro-statement feminists further questioned the viability of contributors' anonymity, the lack of context, as well as the format – the list had been put up on Facebook through Sarkar, who was now acting as a proxy and seemed to have sole editing power, while the Google Doc could virally circulate. Arguments against the list framed the digitality of the object as opening the gates for an internet culture that knew only trolling and shaming, was flippant in its judgment, and produced no real way of moving forward politically. The statement's signees argued to instead return to strengthening due-process mechanisms, which would validate harassment claims and support a fair and just outcome for all involved.

The Internet Universal and Indian feminism

This conflict makes it necessary to look at Sarkar more closely as the proxy of the list, beyond the supposed divide of feminisms along notions of "generations" or "waves". As suggested initially, younger feminists growing up with the internet as a firm part of their lives may have developed a more intuitive and diverse engagement with online spaces and thus may have acquired a different form of media literacy. However, age cannot be the only avenue of explanation for the chasm between supporters of the list and supporters of the statement. As many voices have since suggested, the divide between list supporters and statement supporters is ideological rather than generational (e.g., Ayyar 2017; Roy 2017). And yet, the arguments provided by the statement and its follow-ups questioned the list's legitimacy and the methodology behind it, reading it as uninformed and dismissing its activist potential because of its digital format. Expressing this technological scepticism, Menon called out "finger-tip activists with no historical memory" (Menon 2018), claiming that LoSHA was ineffective "slacktivism". At the same time, the list was being read as "mob justice" (Chachra 2017) and even compared to a Gulag (Visvanathan 2018). Further, Menon's statement insinuated that the list ahistorically broke with Indian feminist tradition for the sake of a neoliberal global subjectivity.

However, not only does "calling out" and "taking back" have historical lineages within feminist methodologies[4], Menon's suggestion of rupture misunderstands the temporalities of the digital, and falls short of the labor behind the interface. Any form of expression on digital social-networking sites such as Twitter or Facebook is often mistakenly read through myths of discontinuity

4 I am thinking of movements such as *Take Back the Night*, *Hollaback*, and others that originated in the feminist "Second Wave" of the 1970s and 1980s, and, especially in India, were very suspicious of the institutionalization suggested to be of relevance here (Chaudhuri 2017).

(Balsamo 2011). Because cyberspace is imagined as a space of radical newness and innovation, the initial assumption that it is breaking with all histories and modalities of the physical world (Barlow 1996) continues to have currency. Media technologies are fetishized as constant innovators through monikers such as "new media" (Chun 2016), instead of being seen in their historical lineages in terms of design, purpose, content, and usage. As Wendy Chun (2016) has claimed, digital archives have been said to turn memory into storage, meaning that knowledge becomes stowed away and detached from its political relevance and historical lineages. The internet is now often read merely in terms of interface, where whatever is not immediately present is assumed to be lost in the depth of cyberspace, to no longer be accessible on new media turned old.

The same shortsightedness registers with political content in digital spaces. The "Global Village", meant to bring online users closer together, has instead glossed over difference, meaning that the interfaced encounter is usually assumed to happen with an unmarked universal user (Srinivasan 2019). When specific identity markers are not immediately accessible, online objects are always first assumed to iterate a hegemonic position, meaning that a user in India would usually assume content to come from a user that is savarna and middle class before other options. As contexts constantly collapse online (boyd/Marwick 2011), it becomes increasingly difficult to follow the lineages that digital politics call upon, because the assumption is that what you see is all you get. However, this view regards the interface as the only space on which politics happens, which creates a rigid boundary between offline and online activities and negates the processes of labor and care that enable the digital object to appear in the first place.

Instead, I read LoSHA as an object that evoked connection only amongst those who populate the digital intimately and could thus decipher it beyond what the interface seemed to suggest. This intimacy is revealed only in a deeper engagement with LoSHA beyond the interface. As Lauren Berlant has put it:

> "To intimate is to communicate with the sparest of signs and gestures, and at its root intimacy has the quality of eloquence and brevity. But intimacy also involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about both oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way." (Berlant 1998)

As Berlant phrases it, the forms of attachment that such communication proposes is relational; normative ideologies may very well reconfigure, but also contest such forms of attachment. I read the attachment of the digital, perhaps unusual for the usual habitus of the pro-statement feminists, to have negotiated LoSHA's methods of circulation and contribution more 'naturally' for those

who agreed with the methodologies or contributed directly. Sarkar later stated that they had vetted every contribution personally, often verifying the individual stories through a comprehensive consultation of the Indian Penal Code (Gajjala et al. 2019). The pro-statement feminists did not consider the complexities behind the interface, and thus expressed ignorance over the offline labor and historical continuities that made an object such as LoSHA possible in the first place.

In part, I see this occlusion facilitated by the notion of the digital object as "viral", and thus contagious, polluted, alienating, but also passing to, at one point, disappear. Following Chun, I suggest an understanding of bodies that "inhabit" the digital through their interfaced objects, rather than proclaiming digital objects to travel as infectiously "viral" (Chun 2016). This shifts a reading of the digital as contagious and frivolous toward the acknowledgement of offline labor, but also provides an understanding of the embodied situation from which such objects are produced. Seeing LoSHA as an object that is "inhabited" through more and more bodies joining a collective rather than something in "virality" allows an understanding that LoSHA did not simply travel – implying that it left nothing behind or that it comes from polluted origins and "infects" people. Instead, I argue that it grew to include more and more people in different ways, either as contributors or via the traditions of consciousness raising, when read as a "whisper network".

Those arguing against the list seemed unable to see the internet as a serious site for activism, despite earlier acknowledgements of the importance of the digital in the protests after the now-infamous Delhi gang rape of 2012. At the time, the mass protests in solidarity with the victim were all organized online, via the same social-media channels that Sarkar then used and by the same people who then shamed online engagement as nothing but hysterical tipping (Dey 2018; Jha/Kurian 2018). In fact, the event has been said to mark a turning point for Indian feminism toward the internet and "to a global vocabulary of rights" (Kurian 2018, 16) that resonates with mainstream media outlets on a transnational scale.

Menon's problematic evaluation of social media, seemingly dependent on who uses them, accumulated in her understanding that it should not matter whether or not the leaker was Dalit (Menon 2017b). I read this statement as grossly negligent of what it means when a queer young Dalit lawyer becomes the face of a critical feminist object and subsequent target of an ideological battle initiated by supposed allies. Mirroring these claims, Radhika Gajjala, Padmini Ray Murray, and others have shown how Dalit communities in particular connect and are enabled to speak online and inhabit the digital (Gajjala 2004, 2019; Nayar 2014; Ray Murray 2018) to escape home-grown hierarchies and critique

localized universalisms. When we remind ourselves of the Gandhian call that Ambedkar and the Dalits should not argue for separate electorates so as not to divide Hindu society (Ambedkar 1946), Menon's statement offers a reading suggested by Shailaja Paik (2014) that marginalized communities across the world (in her example, Dalit and African-American women) struggle similarly with homegrown hierarchies and a feminism that occludes them in comparable manner. Contrary to Menon's appeal to what was read as feminist universalism, the LoSHA-advocates devised rules according to a global community of marginalized people otherwise excluded in the umbrella-terms of movements supposedly intended to liberate them (Garza 2014).

The digital can hence be a place for those who are otherwise omitted. LoSHA departs from its national context to build "margin-to-margin" solidarity networks, and even received a statement of support from Tarana Burke herself (The New Indian Express 2017). Such differentiation seems necessary, especially for feminism, which has often had to withstand claims that it is an elitist project that has omitted women* of color, queer and trans women*, sex workers, working-class women*, disabled women*, and Dalit women*.

Despite possible flaws, LoSHA must thus be read through an understanding of digital social movements that have lineages in and continuities with offline histories. In such a reading, conflict can be made productive through its potential to disrupt norms, and social-media content can be seen to frame new spaces for the marginalized subject to remain, rather than to appear and disappear, when read as "viral". The list must be read as an anti-caste and queer feminist object – one that does historicize but has rejected a flaccid struggle under the umbrella of "the larger feminist community" for the sake of a critique of Indian elites that are seen to perpetuate, rather than disrupt, caste hierarchies (Bargi 2017). Instead of reading it as dangerous, frivolous or troubled, the list, in its digitality, offers a new point of departure for addressing and critiquing Brahmanical (and other) heteronormative patriarchies on a systemic level and allows subaltern positionalities to become authors of their own narratives and connect in solidarity and care. LoSHA is, therefore, an incident that has enabled a local, subaltern voice to travel across the globe and place itself in the path of #metoo.

Nothing Natural about Justice

Entangled into the question of digitality was the fear that LoSHA was aiming to replace judicial mechanisms of natural justice. Natural justice is meant to guarantee that judicial mechanisms function without bias, including an impartial ruling after a fair hearing. With Sarkar coming forward as an anti-caste ac-

tivist, the Indian caste-class nexus that gives "some men a sense of entitlement and access to young women's minds and bodies" (Gopal 2018) became one of the central axes of discussion of the list. As Pallavi Rao has argued, sexual harassment cannot be seen "in isolation from other forms of systemic violence" (Rao 2018) and omitting the context when a Dalit comes forward to land in the eye of a storm is highly problematic. Sarkar's Facebook profile positioned them as an Anti-Caste activist long before LoSHA, and the list cannot but be read in lineage with Sarkar's preceding posts. While this conjecture has been discussed in great detail[5], I do not want to omit its implications here, given that caste is so important in this context. As many presented due process as the central reason for their opposing LoSHA, I want to shortly address its shortcomings, especially in relation to the aforementioned caste-class nexus that inflects any ability to address gender issues.

For many, the Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) and Gender Sensitisation Committee Against Sexual Harassment (GSCASH), the central committees in charge of ensuring that due process is carried out at Indian universities, have more potential for redressal than filing a police report.[6] Certainly, efforts to instill mechanisms of due process independently from the state have been central achievements that can only be attributed to the now well-established feminists that supported the Kafila statement. These mechanisms are more sensitive to victimhood than a patriarchal state would be; they incorporate and rely on feminist knowledge on sexual assault and misconduct, rather than merely on judicial factors or cultural myths. However, to pretend that these mechanisms serve all victims of gender-based violence equally would be naive at best. Students experiencing discomfort with the actions of professors rarely file reports, especially when they do not evaluate the behaviour as hard harassment (Das 2017). Due-process mechanisms are difficult enough to navigate as a student or young academic, as accusations of false allegations, backlash from perpetrators or

5 "Economic and Political Weekly" has put together a whole number of articles in a special feature on "Power and Relationships in Academia" accessible online (EPW engage 2017). Further, in fall 2018, the journal "Communication, Culture & Critique" included three articles on LoSHA by Ayesha Vemuri, Pallavi Rao, and Radhika Gajjala that I quote throughout this article. This only names a few of the articles that deal with caste explicitly; others are cited throughout this subsection.

6 Like elsewhere, sexual assault victims often struggle to be believed and cases often get dismissed on the basis of lacking evidence. Against this background, women*'s complaints have regularly been disregarded, especially when directed towards upper-caste men. Corrupt police officers may refuse to file reports on assault; pretend to file them, only for the reports to then get lost; or file them and have victims see them get thrown out in court (Krishnan 2017). Adding to these all-too-familiar scenes, the Indian political climate is increasingly toxic and turned against marginalized communities, which are searching for Indian authenticity through neo-conservative to fundamentalist Hindu-nationalist homogeneity and, therefore, paradoxically, joining a global shift towards what is largely considered to be the "political right".

their peer groups, and refusal to work with accusers in the future are only some of the repercussions that any person naming their assaulters may face. In addition, these committees mostly do not include representatives from all marginalized communities and therefore create a heterosexual and upper-caste matrix that may unwillingly perpetuate biases towards lower-caste, indigenous and non-Hindu minorities (Ayyar 2017).

Taking into consideration a dominant discriminatory stereotype that frames Dalits as hypersexual and constantly available, especially to upper castes (Paik 2014), the question is how sensitive such committees are to their own biases. The perseverance of caste-discrimination, coupled with the preponderance of upper-caste Hindu women* on gender-sensitivity committees, makes the mechanisms of due process and natural justice almost inaccessible to everyone at the lower end of the social hierarchy (Gupta/Dangwal 2017). These flaws in processes of natural justice within Indian academia were not new revelations, and yet, they made for little lenience on the part of statement supporters. The insistence on due process and only due process thus intensified a wound already felt amongst the younger and socially marginalized students supporting the list. Statement supporters seemed oblivious or indifferent to the caste-based inequalities that continue to exist, even perpetuating discrimination, as caste was further invisibilized through the statement.

As India's caste hegemony hardens once more under Hindu-nationalist rule, Dalit and Adivasi communities have found little distinction between the domination of the British Raj, the violence of institutions with Hindu-Nationalist inflections, and the Brahmin-centric heteropatriarchy that normalizes both (Mondal 2018; Thomas Danaraj 2018). Dalit lynchings and gendered violence based on caste or religious discrimination have made it unsafe for these communities to protest in public spaces or university institutions. Names such as Chuni Kotal, Rohith Vemula, J Muthukrishnan – an Adivasi woman and two Dalit men who, after long episodes of institutionalized harassment, committed suicide – have become central to university-based Dalit struggles. Their bodies are evidences of the violence with which non-Brahmins are faced even in supposedly progressive university institutions. Protesters mourning their deaths have also been shut down, often violently.

The last decade has hence seen the arrival of a multitude of online presences in which Dalits attempt to re-write histories of India from the point of view of their oppression – often under the violent scrutiny of the state and its drift to the right, but also of public universities as governmental institutions and even India's political left (Bargi 2017; Thomas Danaraj 2018). Internet formats, often met with suspicion within the upper-caste heteropatriarchy, thus serve as a vi-

tal point of knowledge production and critique from a Dalit perspective. Digital platforms have become one of the central spaces for Dalits to connect, organize and historicize (Nayar 2014).

The question of the harassed queer further complicated the call to due process at the time. Non-heterosexual sexual relations were decriminalized only in 2018, after the LoSHA leak (Paletta/Anh Vu 2018). Theoretically, queer victims of gender-based violence – where the perpetrator was of the same sex as the victim – if they had been acknowledged at all, would, at the time, have run the risk of being criminalized. On the other hand, Sarkar's self-identification as "queer" also posits them in relation to the globalized queer movement originating within Western Europe and North America, rather than with the various indigenous queer and non-binary communities in India such as *hijras* or *kothis*[7]. As there is an obvious lived difference to these communities, predominantly in terms of class hierarchies, the term queer invariably opens itself up to the accusations of neoliberal appropriation and a reification of Western superiority (Puar 2007). However, as Gajjala states, queer bodies that are read as female learn to pass and invisibilize their specificities more often than those that are assigned the male sex at birth (Gajjala 2019). For this reason, flocking to the digital happens more intuitively for these groups, as the anonymity of interfaces is arguably already familiar (Dean 2016). But the invisibility of Sarkar's queer-femme sexuality made other identifiers hypervisible in the Indian discourse: read-as-male Dalit rage, read-as-femme Asian migrant in the US, read-as-Western technology to criticize savarna Indianness. Instead of reading these critiques of Sarkar and LoSHA in isolation, Sarkar's queerness transcends their sexuality and comes to signify their outsideness in the statement-discourse.

I propose that LoSHA should be read outside of a paradigm that perpetuates feminism as monolithic and authentically situated. In this affirmative reading, the fluidity of the internet can portray identities as in flux, relational and porous. Through LoSHA, I propose a queer reading of the digital as a space that, in opposition to the notions of disembodiment that fuels the cyberspaced imaginary, is material and inhabited (Chun 2016; Ray Murray 2018). As a result, LoSHA should be read as an infrastructure that allowed for the digital queer to

7 These communities are perhaps differently queer, as they consist of intersex and transgender people, often living in abject poverty or making a living through sex work. They are also predominantly bodies moving from their male-assigned birthgender to a feminine/female appearance and thus have different experiences with discrimination, stereotypes, and being invisibilised, even by the gay movement (Gajjala 2019, 156). The term queer, although sometimes also used to address these communities, comes with class-connotations, but also seems more befitting to describe a femme-appearing law graduate of Asian origin living in the United States than the arguably less cosmopolitan indigenous queer communities.

inhabit public space, to become visible and intelligible – and thus to have the capacity to reveal existing conflicts within the Indian feminist movement.

Transnational Digital Feminisms and the Politics of the Local

Given these complications, the question of naming vs. due process is arguably misplaced. Rather, one might ask how valuable due process may have been to Dalits at the point of the LoSHA revelations, how willing the committees might be to have a close look at one of their own, and how adequate the repercussions would be, should all of these steps even be taken. Paired with a tonality that was understood as patronizing and dismissive, the statement and the discourse around it seemed to sever the ties between disappointed contributors to the list on one side and their former mentors and idols on the other. LoSHA disrupted the notion of a united Indian left-intellectual front and revealed to some what others were unable to admit – that even *they* – intelligent, anti-nationalist and "feminist" men* – felt an entitlement to younger women*'s bodies in a way that caused conflict and muddied consent.

The very public occurrences mentioned above ease a reading of LoSHA as a critique of Brahminical heteropatriarchy, connecting struggles of sexuality, gender, and class/caste in one object. Sarkar, instead of aligning with the histories of (upper-caste) feminism in India, chose to put the guerrilla tactics associated with Adivasi and lower-caste communities to the forefront. Given that the Naxalbari uprising had its 50th anniversary in 2017, just months before LoSHA appeared, it is not too far-fetched to speculate on Sarkar's sympathy with the communist armed guerrillas, whose political aim was to uplift DAB communities by putting guns in their hands. Indeed, there have also been references to the revolutionary Dalit in other writings that defend LoSHA. Drishadwati Bargi, in responding to the Kafila statement, says:

> "For instance, the Dalit–Bahujan man can play with the figure of the 'angry/militant/revolutionary male' and gain legitimacy and acceptance in a culture that valorises men with 'strong personality.' The same can make the Dalit–Bahujan woman a greater outcaste, desexualised and perhaps, a little too queer for these spaces. This, in turn has its resonance in building friendships or feminist solidarities across caste." (Bargi 2017)

While, at the time, there was much speculation on the true status of Sarkar's roots, the patronizing sentiments expressed in the statement underline rather than discredit that line of argument, as Sarkar and LoSHA are dismissed due to the supposed ahistoricity of the internet and a misrecognition of Dalit tactics.

Waging Sarkar's vulnerability against their supposed privilege when situating them in the US again forsakes questions of accountability and care for a fetishization of authenticity. Thus, insisting on more proof and insight into the occurrences rearticulates the colonial legacies of positivistic knowledges that fetishize truth as an objective fact.

However, as complex cases such as that of Aziz Ansari and Avital Ronell have shown, it is impossible to objectively assert a situation where sexuality is negotiated in line with power hierarchies. Here, consent becomes a grey area that is spread out between aspiration, desire, and integrity, where the accuser is often read as the problem. LoSHA underlines the allegorical nature of truth and the judicial mechanisms that perpetuate an understanding of truth as objectively accessible. As Sarkar came forward to defend the list, other contributors were enabled to remain in the sheltered anonymity Sarkar had provided for them, but they could still take a public stand in solidarity with #LoSHA, without the danger of being retraumatized through victim blaming and intricate questioning.

Despite its critics, LoSHA added intersectional inflections to Indian feminism – in composing what I read as a structural critique rather than in expecting punitive measures against individuals. It is only in this reading – transformative rather than carceral – that LoSHA may release its potential to speak to the hybrid intersections of discriminatory practice.

Precisely because of its collectivity, its connection to Me Too, and the centrality of Raya Sarkar as the queer Dalit leaker – their position in the US protecting and enabling them – LoSHA systemically identified faults in Indian feminism's caste discourse. Because the Dalit is either desexualized or hypersexual, Bargi (2017), as cited above, suggests reading the Dalit position in itself as queer – a position that, according to María do Mar Castro Varela et al. (2011), always includes a struggle to move from spaces of invisibility to legitimacy and representation. As Mimi Mondal (2018) has stated, a Dalit with a voice is no longer seen as an authentic Dalit. Sarkar is thus read as "too Dalit" for feminism, and "too queer" for Indian sexual politics. While Ashley Tellis (who was also added to the list) has lamented that the Indian queer movement did not stand with Dalits, laborers, farmers or sex-workers (Tellis 2012), I argue that speculations about Sarkar's identity posited them as constantly in-between, and effectively, their queerness was read as foreignness, thus echoing precisely the type of affirmative national discourse Tellis so deeply criticizes.

LoSHA as digital testimony does not pretend, therefore, to replace the law, but critiques its gaps and interpretations within feminist movements. Instead of lacking nuance, I read LoSHA as a comment on the structural quality of sexual and gendered inequalities, which can also manifest in friendships, mentorships

and quotidian forms of personal exchange. Sarkar acknowledges the systemic quality of harassment on their Facebook page, which exemplifies their reading of sexual and gendered violence not as a singular act but as a cultural fact:

> "[...] people are within their right to discredit the list and call it false despite mounting public testimonies from survivors but they may not harass any of us to reveal details for their own lascivious entertainment. Some folks claimed that it is unfair to clump all alleged harassers together because some of them may have harassed "less" than the rest. Rape culture is when people grade your trauma. There is no such thing as sexual harassment lite™. If an act falls within the scope of sexual harassment, then it's sexual harassment. Period." (Sarkar 2018, on Facebook)

Sarkar defies the constant inquiries for further details of occurrences that led to names being put on the list, invoking a critique of judicial procedures that often undermine feminist support by fetishizing proof. Instead, Sarkar stressed the necessity of acknowledging the right of victims to have their own scale for the trauma they have had to live through, therefore attesting to cultures of violence rather than to individual perpetrators, to notions of healing rather than punitive measures. In a conversation in Gajjala's most recent book, Sarkar attests to the intricate details that went into compiling the list (Gajjala et al. 2019).

As Ayesha Vemuri mentions in this conversation, discussions around LoSHA have often omitted the fact that Sarkar was trained as a lawyer and, therefore, has expertise on what falls within the scope of sexual harassment and vetted the contributors to LoSHA accordingly, even offering support should any of the contributors want to take legal action (Gajjala et al. 2019, 192). This again allows for a reading of LoSHA as accompanying and at best transforming the legal system, not dismantling it.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued for an understanding of digital space beyond notions of virality and crisis, as a transnational arena that both influences and challenges local positionalities as bounded, authentic, and separable. LoSHA exemplifies how quotidian digital acts can give voice to and form solidarities for those marginalized within local umbrella-term movements for social justice. In terms of the iterative space it creates for those whose trauma is least recognized within public discourse on violence, objects such as LoSHA allow marginalized expression to critique naturalized hegemonies within political groups. As a digital object, the list was open to many different forms of engagement and can be read as a hypertextual manual that invites its contributors and readers to

connect to it on a range of identity levels (as discussed above) – arguably, at the same time. LoSHA must be read as a queer object, as it attests to the multiplicity of identities that inform and iterate each body, yet also permeates the boundaries of neoliberal individuation in its collective form.

The list has since affected more nuanced conversation about sexual violence and patriarchy, which have spilled beyond the left-intellectual academic landscape of LoSHA and paved the way for constant questioning of positionalities within workplace institutions and across caste-boundaries. Since LoSHA, the question of Brahmanical patriarchy has become central in India's social-media landscape. In light of new hashtags such as #smashbrahmanicalpatriarchy[8] and movements that offer online sex-education, self-help and community consultation, centring increasingly on Dalit perspectives, I argue that the list has produced affective solidarities that allow for dissent and discussion beyond the law. These new discussions work without framing feminist solidarities and kinship formations as fragile, juvenile or volatile for finding representation in a digital form. Looking beyond sensation, LoSHA can give way to a new language of care and intimacy, of connection and allyship, across age, caste, class, and any other category that may seem to divide feminisms into unlikely enemies but actually only addresses lacks within feminisms that should always strive to better their scope – whether or not standards and methodologies are met or revised. No one owns feminism.

It is not uncommon for articles written at and after hour zero of leaking to include side notes, edits and mentions of accusations of sexual harassment but also of more intersectional readings of violence. After the sense of crisis had died down, the list effectively opened a space to continue these old and yet-to-be-resolved struggles. However, it has also allowed for #metoo to resurface within Indian cyberspace in ambivalent ways. The same methodology of naming and shaming has been implemented within a recent resurgence of the movement. And yet, savarna feminists have not only hailed this round of #metoo, it has commonly been marked as its very first arrival in the country – LoSHA and Sarkar's efforts simply erased (BuzzFeed India/Kandukuri 2019; Rasul 2018). Only after fervent critiques have Twitter feeds and articles included acknowledgement of Sarkar's labor, without which #metoo would not have happened for India in this way. The internet thus reveals what was already there – the fact that lived realities and solidarities transgress and circumvent monodirectional identity categories on multiple levels, but that violence can also and very often does express itself "merely" in forms of unquestioned privilege or quick omissions.

8 This hashtag was initated by Dalit activist Thenmouzhi Soundarrajan, @DalitDiva on Twitter, in the aftermath of the list.

LoSHA and other lists that have appeared to target a culture in which silence is the trade-off for supposed safety and where sexual violence seems like a crime without origin. Especially for victims of intersectional violence, these objects mark a moment not only of community building but of breaking precisely that codex of silence and of demanding not only protection but a response and acknowledgement of hurt, beyond a formal or institutional frame that often fails or ignores the most marginalized bodies in their community.

Finally, LoSHA, Me Too, and #metoo must, therefore, be read through histories that depart from women*-of-color feminist networks of care that were laboring away, unacknowledged, long before these hashtags travelled across the globe. It is thus a systemic critique not only of patriarchy but also of a feminism that continues to consider only the most hegemonic concept of "womanhood" as viable for victimhood. Certainly, the digital does not alleviate these pains but instead serves to rein in those otherwise omitted by problematizing, if not queering, the notion of authentic and unitary identities.

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