

Of lists, naming, and shaming

*"and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid
so it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive"*
— Audre Lorde



#ResearchResearch
NADINE SHAANTA MURSHID

SOMETIMES the paths that the oppressed choose to take are and have to be subversive, says Fanon. Neocolonial structures have to be decolonised by weaponising whatever they have. Recently, certain celebrity academics along with non-celebrity ones were accused of being sexual predators in India in a list of predators compiled by a queer Dalit law student, Raya Sarkar, who wanted to throw light on structural violence in academia after what appears to be many instances of inadequate response from the legal system in cases of sexual harassment and violence. The list entitled "Hall of Shame" went viral, while a group of left feminists including Nivedita Menon and Kavita Krishnan, in a statement published on Kafila, asked that the list be taken down as it "names and shames without context." Questions were raised about whose names made it to the list and whose didn't and why. The Kafila statement by this group of left feminists, all of whom we hold in high esteem, might I add, is problematic on several accounts. 1. Accusing a Dalit woman of naming and shaming does little to support them and their plight. Naming and shaming is a tool of the oppressed—"weapons of the weak" as left feminist Priyamvada Gopal puts it—when they have nothing else available. An analogy would be suicide bombers in Palestine who

resort to suicide bombing because they have no other weapon to fight oppression. Or, sharing video footage on social media of American police officers shooting their African-American citizens since they do not get redress through any "due process" of a racialised legal and policing system.

2. The list is neither exhaustive nor complete but it is necessary to catalyse broader structural change. It is not an impediment to progress but a tool to bring attention to the widespread nature of sexual violence. It is a way to pressurise the world to listen.

3. It is extremely non-feminist of Nivedita Menon and others to accuse another group of feminists of anything, really. Rather, I would have liked them to be in solidarity with Raya Sarkar and others. If they thought that they were going about the list the wrong way, they could have reached out to talk to them, understand where they're coming from, guide them from their positions as senior feminists, and become their mentors and support the new generation of feminists. This new brand of feminists are clearly trying to stand up for oppressed groups of people that have historically been oppressed based on class, caste, and gender. This is something that all feminists are well-positioned to get behind.

4. I say this because I truly believe that all feminists are on the same side because they all want justice for marginalised people, for those who are oppressed by men, by the system—by patriarchy and capitalism.

5. The reason this list exists is because due process is not available to everyone who wants it. We know only too well that in India, like other parts of the world, it is unlikely that a low-income minority student will be able to go to either the university authorities or law enforcement authorities with allegations about sexual harassment without being further harassed, and blamed. We know that too often we do not



SOURCE: FEMINISMININDIA.COM

believe individuals who say they have been sexually harassed. We particularly don't believe individuals when they point fingers at people in positions of power.

6. It is imperative that we understand that in a culture where women are regularly "named and shamed" for being in locations where they are sexually assaulted, for wearing particular articles of clothing that justify sexual assault, they may want to be able to confidentially report their experience of violence, at least as a first step.

7. When the Kafila statement said "due process" has to be sought, it sounded much like "go to the police" and that is baffling, because these are

the feminist women who have taught us how racist, casteist, and sexist law enforcement agencies and their personnel are like.

8. The accusatory tone of the Kafila statement by the feminists is reminiscent of the kind of treatment that individuals are met with by law enforcement personnel when they report their experience of violence: a disregard of their experience of sexual violence and an emphasis on the manner in which it has been reported.

9. Similarly, this rift between the two groups of feminists about the list is reminiscent of the kind of backlash and counter-backlash that follows when women "speak up" about their

experience of violence in their lives, all of which is traumatising and re-traumatising for individuals speaking up about their own experiences as well as individuals with histories of sexual violence.

10. The Kafila statement has led to friction between different groups of feminists, and this benefits patriarchy, no one else, and definitely not the cause: ending sexual violence.

Sexual violence is ubiquitous. A list of sexual predators may or may not represent the entire society. There may be many reasons for that, one being that right-wing politics and their power in India currently make it extremely difficult to criticise the right; I imagine it's even more

difficult for marginalised women to do so. In the era of email and server hacks, confidentiality is even more difficult to maintain.

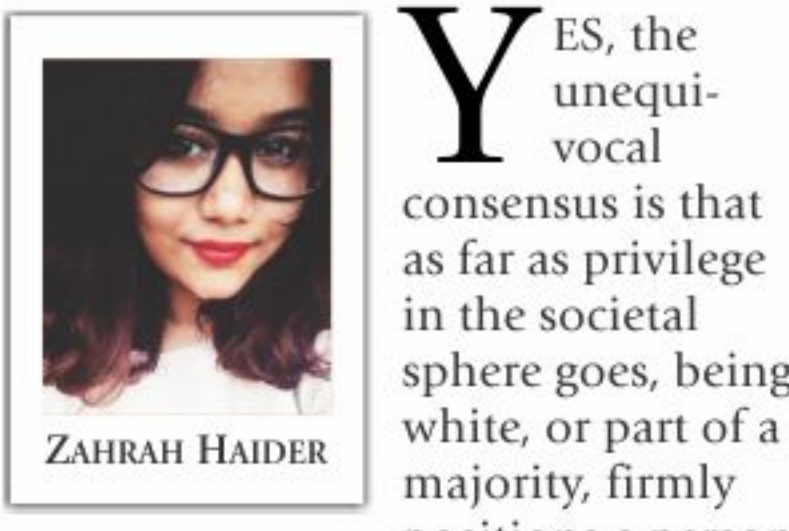
This brings us to the question of anonymity. Hacking notwithstanding, the list is confidential, not anonymous. This means the people who are reporting the sexual predators have names and stories but they are being kept confidential. The list was put together by Raya Sarkar who says she knows all the individuals who have reported sexual violence on that list, which means it's not the "mob" that critics claim it to be. In the past few days, some of the women who had posted the names of their abusers have revealed their identities and provided "context," one of them being Nishitha Jain, director of the documentary "Gulabi Gang."

As more women start sharing their experiences of sexual violence at the hands of the men on the now infamous list, it becomes clear that sexual violence will not end until patriarchal capitalist systems are dismantled, but it also becomes clear that the list has sent a strong message to the world about how prevalent women's experience of sexual violence is, not just in academia, but everywhere.

Indeed, this moment is not a "catfight" as some are referring to this as but, in the words of Priyamvada Gopal, "... an important moment for feminism, pretty much globally, as—rightly—an older generation's concerns and analyses are reconfigured and replaced by those of a new generation." This reconfiguration then allows us to be non-prescriptive about how marginalised groups should find their voice, allows us to truly understand the importance of, as Gopal again points out, "rumours" as "oral history and subversion."

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It's time to talk about privilege



ZAHRAH HAIDER

YES, the unequivocal consensus is that as far as privilege in the societal sphere goes, being white, or part of a majority, firmly positions a person at the top of the ladder. This doesn't mean that non-whites or minorities don't experience privilege, or do not benefit from certain privileges. The social hierarchy in Bangladesh is steeped in varying levels of privilege, and while it may be uncomfortable coming to terms with the idea that one may be benefiting from special advantages that may not be directly earned, it's a necessary exercise, and not just for the sake of keeping ourselves grounded.

The phrase "check your privilege" is thrown around a lot, often derisively, and namely in online social justice circles, but what does it mean in a non-Western context? We all have some sort of privilege over others, while simultaneously facing oppression in other aspects.

American feminist and scholar Peggy McIntosh penned a groundbreaking essay in the 1980s on privilege, which has been used as a baseline for the ongoing discussion on the various types of privilege that exist in society, that intersect and affect people from all walks of life.

Take class privilege for example. My upbringing was fairly middle



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Privilege does not equate to happiness. It would be incorrect to assume that people in villages are less happy than us simply because they aren't as privileged.

class. I never felt financial insecurity but I knew we weren't wealthy either, and throughout my school years I met students that fell on either side of the wealth spectrum. Regardless of academic ability, students from wealthier backgrounds had the chance to attend better institutions of higher education, whether in Bangladesh or abroad, whereas those

from poorer families wouldn't be able to afford those same opportunities. It doesn't make those wealthier students "bad people" for simply taking advantage of the privileges they have, it's merely how society functions.

However, as a woman, I don't have gender privilege. As long as the patriarchy exists, men will be a step

above me in society. Another form of privilege that I do have is that physically, I am able-bodied. I can experience more of the world because I happen to be born a certain way. It's not something I, or anyone else, should feel guilty for. It does mean that we have a responsibility to use the platform we are given to make society a better

place for those that do not share the same privileges as us.

For the last 10 months, Mahfuz Russel has been working tirelessly within the rural communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Prior to that, he spent around 10 years carrying out humanitarian work, helping children living with AIDS in Tanzania, building shelters in remote villages in Nepal after the 2015 earthquake, as well as running a charity for street children in Dhaka and running free clinics and handicrafts training around the country. He gave up his career as a buyer in order to pursue a more sustainable way of life, helping those in need both home and abroad. Mahfuz's name came to mind when I tried to think of someone I knew who lived a privileged life—he was based in Manchester for a short while—yet walked away from the glitz and glam of a metropolitan lifestyle in order to help those less privileged than him. It's a remarkable story and Mahfuz is just one of many examples of people who see their own privilege and try and use it to help others.

It's also important to remember that privilege does not equate to happiness. It would be incorrect to assume that people in villages are less happy than us simply because they aren't as privileged. Ironically enough, you'll find that in a lot of cases they are happier, because they lead simpler lives with fewer worries. Wealth isn't the only form of

privilege either, so it would also be incorrect to assume that all poor people are underprivileged.

I'll admit that I just can't bring myself to give everything up and become a social worker like Mahfuz did, but I do try to help others in my own way. You see, I am privileged enough to have a platform, and as long as I have a platform, I can use it to give a voice to those who are marginalised, and cannot speak up. I use my platform to raise awareness for issues in the hopes that it encourages others to follow suit, because I myself was inspired to do so by other people.

You don't need to be a published writer in order to have a platform. Think about your social media presence, about how many "Facebook friends" you have. Imagine the difference you could make by promoting progressiveness, and highlighting issues that need to be talked about. Not everyone is able-bodied enough to contribute physically; don't let people shame you by labelling you as an "armchair activist". Any step taken towards progressing society is helpful, whether physical or virtual. If you're reading this, I can safely assume you are privileged enough to be educated, and therefore have the capacity to educate others.

Zahrah Haider is a journalism graduate and freelance writer currently living in the UK.

QUOTABLE Quote

GOTTFRIED WILHELM LEIBNIZ
GERMAN POLYMATH AND PHILOSOPHER

Music is the pleasure the human mind experiences from counting without being aware that it is counting.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 1867 purchase

7 Regarding

11 Diminutive

12 Low boat

13 Will subject

14 Welles role

15 Brain-based

17 Rough voice

20 Harbor

23 Do something

24 Soup cracker

26 Lingerie buy

27 Caustic stuff

28 Keats work

29 Sit-up targets

31 Habit inhabitant

32 Spot in the ocean

33 Guessing game

for kids

34 Jeans measure

37 Singer Tori

39 Lets up

43 Single

44 Ruling group

45 Red-ink amount

46 Increase by degrees

DOWN

1 Tad's dad

2 – Vegas

3 Busy worker

4 Philatelic item

5 Designer Spade

6 Hymn close

7 With suspicion

8 Long-necked onions

9 Hauler's unit

10 Need to pay

16 Floor squares

17 Temple leader

18 Land units

19 Mares' mates

21 Finish

22 Wee

24 Narrow cuts

25 Pro vote

30 Camera

accessories

33 Depiction

35 Shucking units

36 Assist in crime

37 Everybody

38 Meadow sound

40 Pointer

41 Earth-bound bird

42 Aug. follower

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT