

THE PHOSPHENE

An Art & Expression Magazine

Feminism

F E B R U A R Y 2 0 2 1

ನಿಸ್ಸಾಯಿ ಪಸಂದಿ ನಾರಿವಾದ Feminism ಫಿಮಿನಿಜಂ ಫಿಮಿನಿಜಂ
ಪೆಂಠಣಿಯಂ ಸ್ತ್ರೀವಾದಂ ಹೂಮಿನಿಸಂ ಸ್ತ್ರೀವಾದ ಸ್ತ್ರೀವಾದ ನಾರಿವಾದ
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ಫಿಮಿನಿಜಂ

Cover Photograph By Disha

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Editor's Note



Hello,

Firstly, to the people reading this issue, I would like to extend my thanks for being patient with us. Thank you for believing in us. Honestly, we wouldn't have gone this far without your love and support. Also, a very heartfelt thanks to Team Phosphene, you all have such creative minds that every time I sit to collect and shortlist final pieces for the issue, I am amazed beyond words.

This issue is really close to my heart and comes when being a feminist has become a "label". People refrain from using the words due to the many stereotypes and hatred that comes attached to it. So, through this issue, we attempt to break this stigma surrounding feminism. We wanted to honour the pioneers of the feminist movement, without whom we wouldn't be able to curate this issue today. Beyond that, we wanted to acknowledge the evolution of feminism to this day. We aimed to address the intersectionality of the feminist movement through the expression and art of the really great minds on our team.

While reading this, we want you to reflect on your idea of intersectional feminism (note that we are not talking about trans or minority exclusionary feminism here, such a belief is simply not feminism), what it means to you? We want you to remember and acknowledge its history, delicacy, and importance in today's world dynamics. A hundred per cent of entries in this issue are from women and non-binary folkx. I really hope you enjoy it. If you have send any feedback or comments on this issue, we would love to know.

Shivani
They/Them
Editor-in-Chief

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Feminism ನಾರಿವಾದ نسائی پسندی பெண்ணியம் స్త్రీవాదం
 ഫെമിനിസം ಸ್ತ್ರೀವಾದ ಸ್ತ್ರೀತ್ವ ನಾರೀವಾದ ಕಾಠಿವಾದ ನಾರಿವಾಃ ನಾರಿವಾದ
 نسائی پسندی ناریवाद Feminism ناریवाद نسائی پسندی
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Emmeline Pankhurst under arrest in 1910 during the WSPU's militant campaign for women's suffrage

O b s c u r a

Pralaya

// Photos and concept by Shreya



The dawn of modernised ideas disarranges the notions of what ought to be. Challenging the conventionality of what is to be a binary notion, **Pralaya** reimagines feminism and ideas of femininity through fashion and cultural aspects.



Photo By Shreya



Chipko

//Photos (Self-portrait) and concept by Disha





Photo by Disha

The Chipko Movement was a non-violent agitation in **1973** that was aimed at protection and conservation of trees, but, perhaps, it is best remembered for the collective mobilisation of women for the cause of preserving forests, which also brought about a change in attitude regarding their own status in society.



Depicting the unity and power women share between themselves, this editorial is inspired by the women who sacrificed and put their lives at risk to protect the source of their livelihood, the forests. The movement is one of the major feminist movements that raised the dignity of a woman in society. Working with the Indo - Western look for depicting the power those women had to amplify their unheard voices.



Photo by Disha

Wounds Of Oppression

// Photos and concept by Rushali



The shoot aims to depict that grooming does not hide the **Wounds of Oppression** that transwomen have faced and have been facing since the beginning of time. They have been trying to reclaim the power and position they are denied through asserting their identity. We should never forget the contribution of Trans woman during the feminist movement and in the fight for the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community.

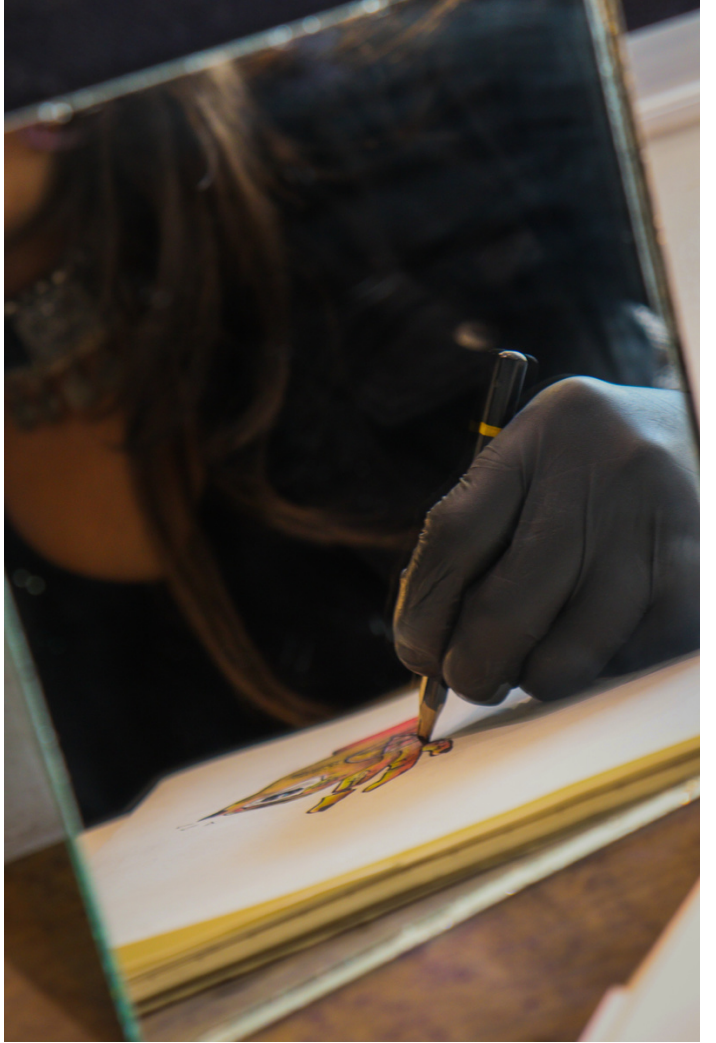


Photo by Rushali











Princess Duleep Singh, Indian Suffragette, second left, and others collect funds to help soldiers in the first world war.

Handpicked Hairat



A Brown Gilead

// Aishwarya

**//Nolite Te Bastardes Carborundorum.
— "Don't let the bastards grind you down."**

She's standing at a distance.
You cannot see her eyes,
But you'd like to believe that they are dark brown,
And in sunlight, they would turn into honey
So that each time she cries,
You can call that sweet blasphemy.

**//And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel
envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die.
— Genesis 30:1-3**

She doesn't live in the white, 'fertile' land of Gilead.
She lives in an all-brown-land of Sanskar and Parampara.
A land where it's okay to leer at Draupadi and tear at her saree.
A land where it's okay to ask Sita to prove her purity through an
Agni-pariksha.
She lives in a country, which has included residues of oppression in her
surname.

She has walked through pages of history, tainted with drops of blood.

She found herself inside a pyre, with her fellow women;
Burning with trees who wanted to become novels instead.
She was with Maham Anaga, who formed the Petticoat Government, and
made Akbar 'Great'.

//Khoob Ladi Mardani Woh To Jhansi Wali Rani Thi.

Dressed as a man, she fought a fierce battle with Laxmi Bai,
And was killed in combat.

She was with Velu Nachiyar.

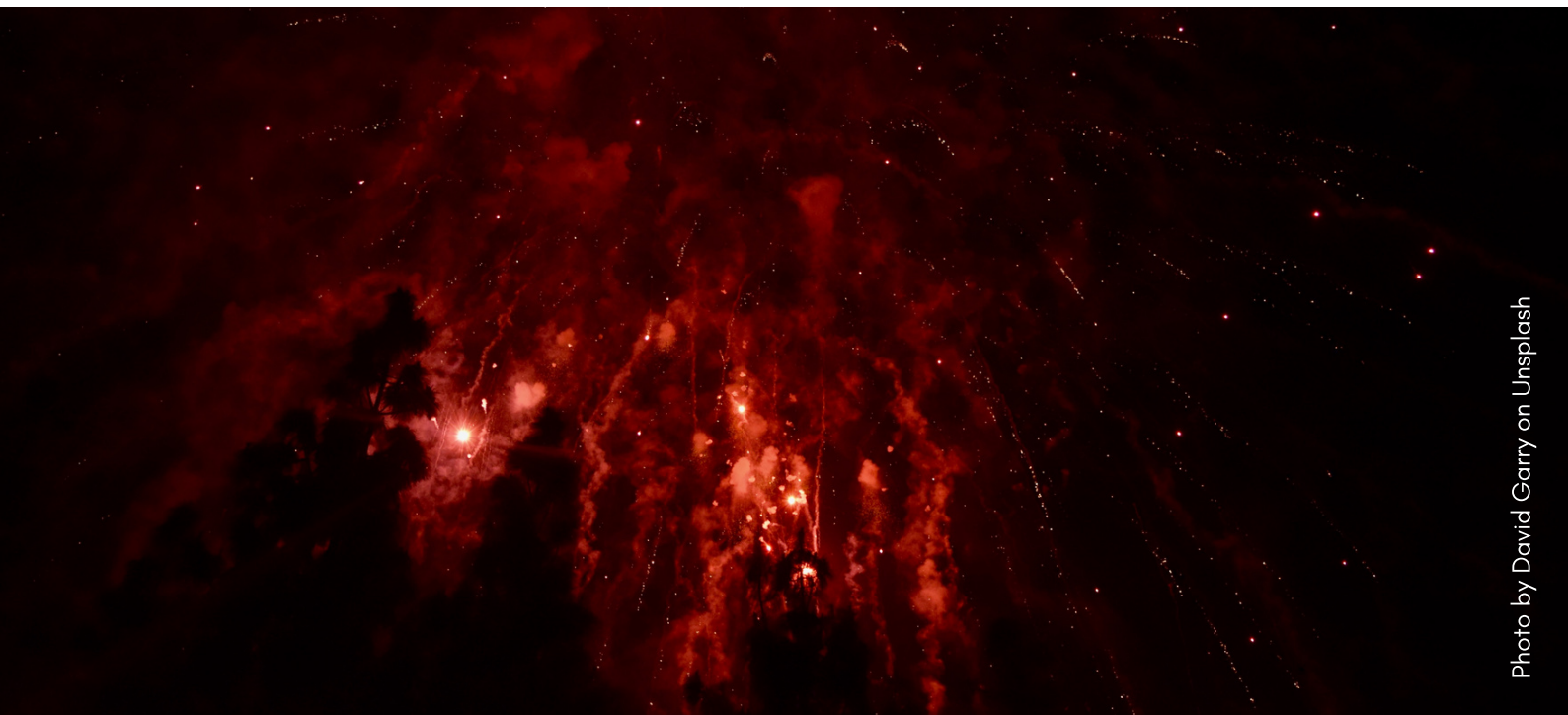
When she found the place where the British stored their ammunition,
She walked into that room, after dousing herself in oil and lighting herself,
To destroy the arms.

She had walked through Bengal famine. The Amritsar massacre. Sepoy
mutiny.

All of this with singing anklets,
And painted toenails.

She is no white submissive Handmaid
From the holier-than-thou place of Gilead.
She is a Kali; fighting for her abortion rights,
A Hidimba; A single-mother breastfeeding in public,
A Draupadi; preaching about consent,
And a Sita; never submitting herself to anyone.

The world's a terrible place,
But she ain't letting no bastard grind her down this time.



How to be a Freaky Grandma?:

What it Means to be Old, Attractive, Female in India?

// Himali

This morning, as I opened the newspaper, an article on page 3 made me stop and think of an incident with my mother from a few days ago: I wanted to give my mum a curly-hair makeover for the first time in my life (and hers). It was a big deal for my 63-year-old mum, a traditional Maharashtrian, simple woman, rarely indulging in any beauty rituals. She was excited about it. Undoubtedly so, after about an hour of conditioning, scrunching, and styling, her hair looked stunning, and she loved her new look. We sent pictures of her to other close family members, and everyone, including my father, seemed to think that my mum looked 30-35 years younger, with her sultry, attractive curls.

A few days after my mum received, and continued to receive, many compliments about her beautiful new hairdo, something changed. Suddenly, she began tying up her hair. And before I knew the reason, she stopped sporting those sexy curls.

After much probing and mostly one-sided conversations, my mother reluctantly admitted – it isn't my age to look sexy, you know? What will people think? They will pass comments saying – look at this grandma trying to be all attractive.

I disagreed but made peace with the fact that my stubborn mum would never sport those sultry curls again.

As I opened the newspaper this morning, an article on page 3 reminded me of the above incident with my mother. This article was about Rajini Chandy, the 6-years-older-than-my-mum (69-year-old) actor, who was trolled for being “too sexy” after some pictures from her photoshoot were released on Instagram.

In these pictures, a stunning Rajini, clad in western attire (denim, a tee, a jumpsuit) looked about 30–35 years younger than her age. Intrigued, I looked up her profile on Instagram and spent the next 20 minutes, putting some of those millennial stalking skills to use. I went through the comments on her pictures, a few of which are mentioned below.

Comment 1: Freaky, Grandma!

Comment 2: <series of poop emojis>

Comment 3: <series of laugh emojis>

A few pictures had recent encouragement comments, perhaps posted by others like me, once they read the article on news portals and decided to stalk Rajini's social handle. After a little while of tireless stalking, I sank back in my newspaper-reading chair to ponder upon the question –



What makes society uncomfortable with aged women being attractive or sexy when the same society sees millions of young women wear sexier clothes on a platform like Instagram, every day?

It is important to note the way society is a lot more okay with older women looking beautiful vs looking sexy. Even advertisements like Dove's Real Beauty have taken steps towards normalizing beauty for aged women in India. However, when it comes to being sexy, it's a whole different ballgame. To understand this a little better, let's first look at why the same society permits (and even encourages) young women to look sexy and attractive. Of course, the question of how sexy is again because if a woman is too bold and too sexy, she is called names. Nonetheless, society has been okay with young women looking attractive in the Instagram world for the most part.

It is advantageous for capitalism and patriarchy if young women looked attractive (or aspired to look gorgeous). The cosmetic/beauty/fashion industry thrives on a particular 'scarcity' as Tressie McMillan Cottom refers to in her book 'Thick: And Other Essays'.

In the book, she elaborates on how capitalism creates and breeds unattainable standards of beauty, thus propagating the belief that the way a woman looks or what she owns at any point in time, isn't enough. This 'scarcity' that most advertisements piggy-back on and harbour, when it comes to beauty/fashion products, makes us women aspire to have what we think we don't so that we purchase their products. It is, therefore, advantageous for capitalism to encourage young women to look sexy and attractive. Why else would young women purchase their products?

Additionally, the definition of sexy itself comes from what appeals to a male gaze, thus making patriarchy benefit from it. For instance, it is sexy for a woman to wear lingerie, even though it is hardly comfortable for the woman herself. Being sexy and attractive for a young woman is thus, a performance for a society that looks at us the way a man would.

Nonetheless, when it comes to aged women, this whole dynamic changes completely. Capitalism doesn't have too much to gain from this group, as there are hardly any fashion/beauty products made for aged women (over the age of 60 years), to make them look attractive or sexy in India. Hence, there isn't a reason for advertisements to make aged attractiveness aspirational. As no product can replenish the 'scarcity', there is no need to create this 'scarcity' in the first place. Hence, the representation of old, attractive women in India is also marginal.

And as for patriarchy, it assigns a completely different role to women, this age. As opposed to the young women who perform for the male gaze, the older women are expected to propagate patriarchal stereotypes to the younger ones in this stage of life. They are expected to teach traditions, most (if not all) of which have patriarchal undertones. In this way, the older women are made to feel like they are a central part of the hegemony, and that it is their duty to carry forward the stereotypes they faced throughout their lives.

Due to this role that society assigns them, that older women like my mother internalize patriarchal notions so gravely. After all, unless you believe it fully, internalize it wholly, there isn't the question of passing it on to others.

For this reason, my mother does not need another person to comment about how attractive she looks for her to stop sporting those sultry curls. She is already convinced that a woman can either look old or attractive, but not both together. And if a woman does try to be both, she is deemed a 'freaky grandma', as the patriarchy-fueled, Instagram jury of India has sadly demonstrated.



Photo by Sincerely Media on Unsplash

Fetishization of Asian Women

// Drishti



Photo by Larm Rmah on Unsplash

The Westerns conquering Asia brought more than exploitation; it brought the thought process of “How To See The World Through The Eyes Of A White Man” ingrained in the people who live in the decolonial world. An example?

The fetishization of Asian Women.

Its history goes back to the novel “Madame Chrysantheme” by Pierre Loti. It tells the story of a French sailor stationed in Japan who “rents” both a house and wife. The description of the object named “women” is equivalent to that of an object. Madame Chrysantheme also acts as an inspiration for another novel called “Madame Butterfly”. This book features the same story, but a plot change featuring the bride named Cho-Cho (Japanese for Butterfly) is left by the officer. She tries to attempt suicide and fails, leaving Cho-Cho and the son in Japan.

It has been more than a century, and the thought of glorification and romanticizing the use of objects named "Asian Women" is still prevalent. An interesting fact to mention alongside would be that the films "Madame Chrysanthemum" inspired didn't feel the need to use an Asian woman for the role. It was usually just White women with a yellow face and matching stereotypical Asian characters.

As the wars between the US and South-East Asian grew, the number of Western soldiers stationed in Asian countries also grew proportionately. So did the ideas of the fetishization of Asian women.

The soldiers took War Brides since the Asian brides seemed more nonchalant and docile than American women's bold image. Shimizu's work in her book, "The Hypersexuality Of Race" lays out the history of women of colour serving as pleasurable objects. The real experiences of these women in America are translated onto the Western cinema screen and rendered into sexual things recognized as the "dragon lady and lotus blossom dichotomy". One represents the obedience and domestication to society – the lotus blossom, while the other signifies a seductive and non-normative deviant – the dragon lady. The docile is then intertwined with the rebellious to create a category of the sexual model minority, "ideal in their union of sex appeal with family-centred values and a strong work ethic," which is desired by men with an Asian fetish.

The duality of the Asian/American women as sexual model minorities portrays them as "alluring, provocative, and mysterious and passive, yielding, and vulnerable," to uphold white masculine hegemony. This fetishization of Asian women can only be unlearned through better mainstream portrayals and media that exclusively focus on their stories with their lenses. The colonial thinking propagated in our minds needs to be unlearned and washed away from mainstream channels that are only possible by education and understanding.

Breeding ground for ill nurtured men

//Soleil



The day i found a suicide letter in mother's room.
 Mine thought about committing suicide;
 A friend from high school. His mother tried;
 And my french teacher's mother died.
 Our mothers lost bodily autonomy the day they stepped
 out of their houses –
 For school, to go to market and another
 while going to watch a movie with friends.

His hands	her cheek.
His hands	her knees.
His hands	her thighs.
His hands	her breasts.

Our mothers' femininity is a closely knit rag.
 A living nightmare.
 Our fathers speak 'fluent english' while our mothers
 don't speak at all.
 She inherited docility, traded for lands and repute.
 And the only time she slaps back is to create a graveyard of mosquitoes.
 His mother, the friend from high school,
 her opinions were like heat rods.
 They took time to erupt for condensing
 her husband's manly etiquettes.

My teacher, she found her mother dead.
 She didn't need a letter to understand what and why.
 She saw thunderbolts every night.
 And so did her mother,
 my mother,
 his mother.

I sometimes see her eyes. Nothing is the same.
 Nothing good comes from being gone.

For their lover's teething,
 Three of them read pablo neruda and
 almost every guide to be a better wife.
 Only if their femininity wasn't taken for meekness,
 they would have thrived.

When i found my mother's suicide note,
 it was only then when i stopped,
 skipped,
 tore,
 burnt
 the evidence of her hands swaddling me,
 her eyes heeding me,
 her lips assuring me that love is there.
 Because it is not. It is not.

In bed, they had their interlude of clarity.
 Her blood near the door smells like rage.
 Her writing reeks of patience.
 Held back maternal extincts.
 Who does love choose to show up as?
 A trojan horse perhaps?
 Leading through my father's wit.
 The stains of guilt are harder to obliterate than of sangria.
 I know why our mothers hated silk sheets.

Our mothers' bodies were breeding ground for ill nurtured men;
It's like she landed here with all the bitter ends of cucumbers in her plate,
Agonising gracefully till she decided to abate.
They only taught us that fathers invest
in daughters like they are to not see them be brides
but get away from liability,
waiting to sold to the highest bidder.

Post haste, i sleep with stack of needles around my bed;
Ask in temples, if still my body is a
breeding ground for ill nurtured men.
If i can replenish the lives of our dead mothers
in exchange of my weak constitution;
That suicide note can not overcompensate
for the lies i see in my father's eyes.

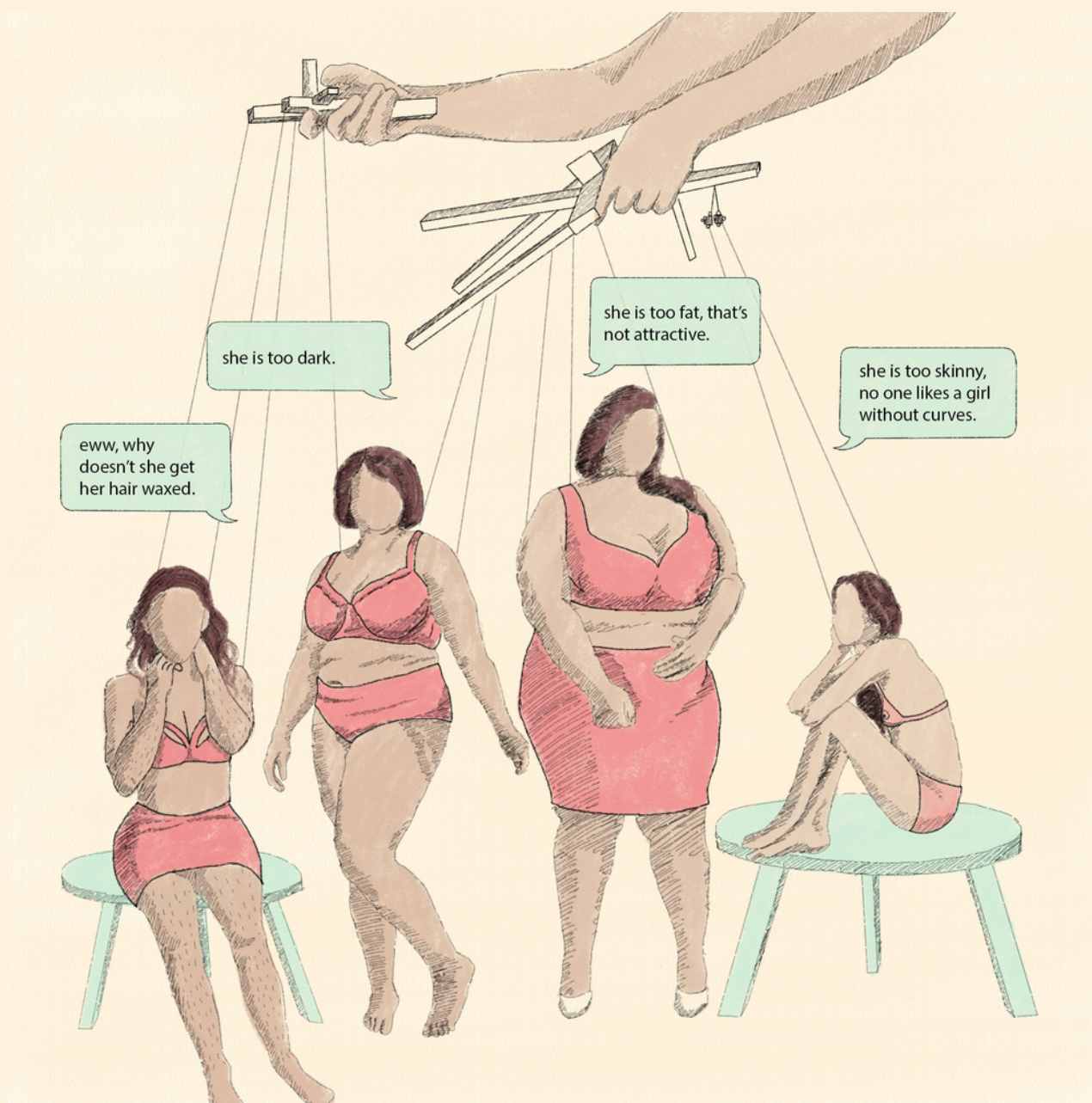
Our mothers learned to walk around blindfolded
in a boundation called marriage,
In a boundation called love and when
they couldn't run back and forth anymore,
They fell on their knees and left their progenies
to survive their failed attempts at life.



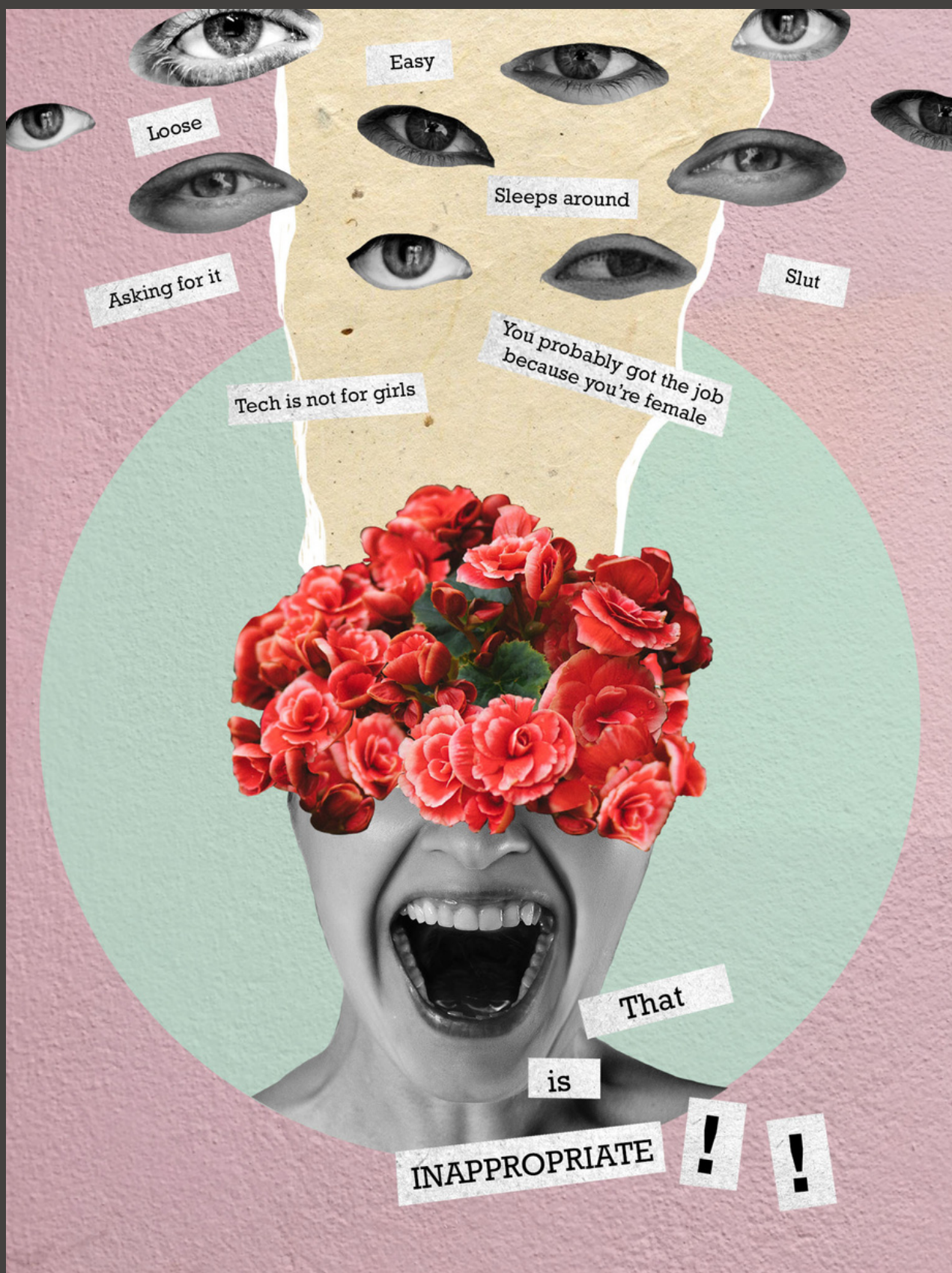


A woman reads the Suffragette paper, 1913

Queerkala



"Beauty Standards" by Kirti



"Casual Sexism" by Kirti



#TOGETHER

"United we stand" by Kiri



"Break the mould" by Kiri



"Am I enough?" by Anushri



"Revolution" By Anushri



"Fake News" by Ekta



"Shit Show" by Ekta



"Transphobia" by Parth



"Expression" by Palak

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