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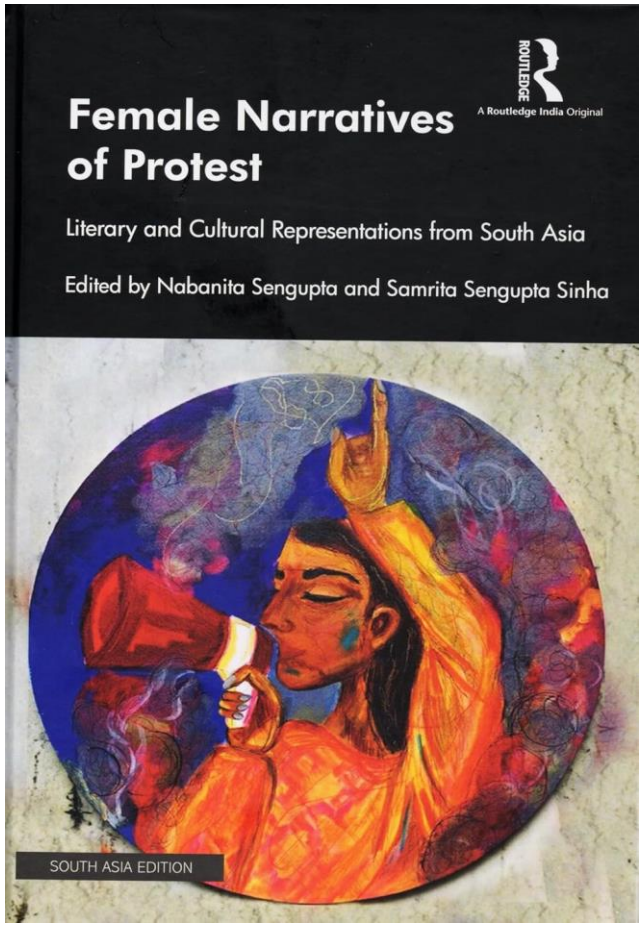

Protests generate and are generated by narratives. These narratives have willed their existence as counter-narratives, of dissonance and dissent. Protests have had a long history across times, cultures and spaces. Embracing the mythical and the real, protests have attracted suppression and opposition, and have often been silenced and marginalised. They have been seen as unnatural, abnormal and deviant as they defy the institutionalised discourse on normalcy.

In addition to the most visible expression of protest in the form of mass street marches, literature has always been a readily available forum of protest,

both covert and overt. Beyond the streets and the other available public platforms, the digital medium has increasingly become a lively and robust site of protest. Protests have ranged across disciplines, cultures, religions, and class-caste-race-gender dynamics. One way of talking about feminism, anti-colonialism, anti-caste movements, anti-racism, anti-rape remonstrations, and anti-feminicide movements across the globe is to tell stories of protest.

Female Narratives of Protest: Literary and Cultural Representations from South Asia edited by Nabanita Sengupta and Samrita Sengupta Sinha is an attempt to bring together diverse voices of protest and highlight the heterogeneous idea of protest as directed by the nature of marginalisation, exploitation or abuse. It looks forward to initiating and taking further the idea of protest as located within the social identity of an individual or a community. This book therefore attempts to establish dialogic outreach by giving visibility to those narratives of protest that have transformed South Asian women's ontological universe in more ways than one.

Part I of the book focuses on how literature, particularly poetry and fiction, serves as a medium of resistance for women across South Asia. This section explores how different literary traditions and genres—ranging from Afghan women's poetry to Dalit women's memoirs—function as sites of protest against oppression, marginalisation, and violence. In the first chapter "Poetry and Dissent: Afghan Women's Poetry" Pulugurtha highlights how Afghan women use poetry to reclaim agency in a society that often silences them. The chapter examines the tradition of Landais—two-line folk poems often recited anonymously by Afghan women—as a form of subversive resistance. It also explores how Afghan women writers in exile use English poetry to communicate their experiences to a global audience. The chapter effectively portrays poetry as a political act. In "Mapping Shrines of Memory: Aspiration, Repression, and Articulation in Contemporary Kashmiri Poetry," Huzaifa Pandit focuses on Kashmiri women's poetry as an archive of collective trauma and protest. It examines the works of poets like Uzma Falak and Rumuz, who use poetry to document human rights violations and personal loss. Pandit argues that Kashmiri poetry resists both the Indian state's control over Kashmir and the hegemonic nationalist narratives within Kashmir itself. Piro Preman, a 19th-century Punjabi poet and former courtesan, used her poetry to critique both patriarchal oppression and religious orthodoxy. Ayesha Latif in the next chapter argues that Piro's Kafian (verses) use Sufi spiritualism to challenge dominant gender norms. The chapter offers a valuable historical perspective, linking past and present feminist struggles. A comparative analysis of Piro Preman's work with other South Asian women poets who used religious or mystical themes to critique

patriarchy would have been greatly enriching. Debashree Chakraborty and Panna Paul in the next chapter explore how Bengali-speaking women poets from Assam's Barak Valley use poetry to resist linguistic and cultural marginalisation. Unish, a poetry collective, gives voice to women resisting both patriarchal and ethno-linguistic discrimination. The chapter highlights how poetry is an essential part of identity politics in a region often overlooked in mainstream South Asian feminist discourse. Nishtha Dev in "Re-Viewing the Viewed: Narrativizing the Other in Amruta Patil's *Kari*" explores how *Kari*, a graphic novel by Amruta Patil, challenges mainstream heteronormative and patriarchal narratives. Dev highlights how the novel destabilises traditional notions of femininity and desire, particularly in an Indian urban context. Snigdha Deka and Rohini Mokashi-Punekar explore how Goswami's novel reimagines historical narratives of female resistance in the next chapter. The analysis effectively ties indigenous struggles to contemporary feminist discourse. The last chapter of this section "Religious Fanaticism and the Advent of Protest Narrative: A Study of Asia Bibi's Blasphemy" by Uma Rani Pal examines how Asia Bibi's memoir challenges Pakistan's blasphemy laws, which are often used to target religious minorities and women. Pal presents the memoir as both a personal testimony and a political statement.

Part II shifts from literary representations of protest to socio-cultural and performative spaces. This section explores the intersection of gender with disability, digital art, cinema, caste, and diaspora, examining how cultural forms serve as tools of resistance to oppression, marginalisation, and social exclusion. The first chapter by Elwin Susan John critiques societal beauty standards that render women with skin conditions (such as vitiligo or leukoderma) "undesirable" and examines how they resist this exclusion by reclaiming their bodies and narratives. "Memorializing Gender Violence in South Asia through Contemporary Digital Art" by Isha Yadav highlights how digital artists memorialise gender violence in South Asia using social media, web-based exhibitions, and online installations. The chapter discusses how digital art amplifies marginalised voices (such as survivors of rape, domestic violence, or honour killings), creates global solidarity through transnational feminist movements and challenges state censorship and mainstream media's erasure of gender violence. This chapter is particularly relevant in the post-#MeToo era, where digital platforms have become sites of feminist resistance. Umar Nizarudeen in the next chapter explores how women-led vigilante narratives in South Asian cinema and OTT platforms (such as Netflix and Amazon Prime) reflect urban female rage against patriarchal oppression. The chapter argues that recent films/series have challenged the "damsel in distress" trope, portraying

women as avengers against sexual violence. Streaming platforms have enabled the rise of nuanced feminist narratives, as they are less constrained by censorship. The trope of the "Goddess Vigilante" (a woman who takes justice into her own hands) is however, both empowering and problematic, as it often legitimises violence. Dhrupadi Chattopadhyay challenges the romanticised nostalgia of Indian migrants by highlighting how Dalit women experience displacement differently from upper-caste Indian women.

Part III shifts the focus from literary and cultural representations of protest (covered in Parts I and II) to lived experiences of resistance. This section explores how women from various marginalised communities—including students, poets, disabled individuals, and transgender persons—navigate oppression through direct action, poetry, and personal testimonies. Unlike the previous sections, which relied heavily on literature and media, Part III brings in real-life activism and first-hand narratives, making it one of the most impactful parts of the book. In the first chapter "Rape, Restriction and Protest: A Critical Analysis of the Bangladeshi Female Student Movement," Shafinur Nahar and Taniah Mahmuda Tinni examine how female students in Bangladesh resist institutionalised gender-based violence. The authors argue that sexual harassment and violence are common in educational spaces, leading to restrictions on women's mobility. Student protests, particularly led by young women, challenge both patriarchal norms and government repression. The state and university administration often side with the perpetrators, blaming victims instead of addressing structural issues.

Wahida Parveez in the next chapter examines how Miya women in Assam use poetry as a form of protest against their marginalisation. The term "Miya poetry" refers to the writings of Bengali-origin Muslims in Assam, who face discrimination, statelessness, and violence due to ethnic politics and the NRC (National Register of Citizens) debate. Miya women poets challenge both state repression and patriarchal control within their own communities. Poetry for them serves as a means of documenting exclusion and expressing resistance. Despite its political power, Miya poetry is often dismissed as "anti-national" literature by the mainstream. This chapter is crucial because it sheds light on an often-overlooked form of resistance—poetry by an ethnic minority facing systemic exclusion. The discussion is particularly relevant in the wake of India's CAA-NRC protests, where citizenship laws were used as a tool of discrimination.

The chapter titled "The Shifting Politics of the Discourse on Disability in India: An Interview with Dr. Anita Sharma" by Samrita Sengupta Sinha is structured as an interview with Dr. Anita Sharma, a disability rights activist and scholar. It highlights how disabled women face double discrimination—both for

their gender and their disability. India's disability rights movement often overlooks gender-specific concerns, leading to a lack of representation for disabled women and the urgent need to integrate feminist and disability activism, as both movements share common struggles against oppression. This chapter astutely brings disability into the discourse on protest, an area that is often marginalised within feminist studies. The interview format makes the discussion personal and engaging, providing valuable insights from an activist's perspective. In the final chapter "Trajectories of Visibility in Indian Queer Experiences: An Interview with Ms. Renju Renjimar," we come across the struggles of transgender women in India and how queer activism challenges heteronormative and casteist structures. Ms. Renju Renjimar is actually a well-known transgender activist and makeup artist. The chapter highlights the importance of representation in media and public spaces in challenging stereotypes and gaining rights.

The larger objective of *Female Narratives of Protest* is to redefine feminism by situating its praxis within the geopolitics of South Asia. Hereby, this book foregrounds that the new markers of feminism are located at the intersections of gender and geopolitics that place narratives of protest movements alongside locations that have given rise to them. By situating female protest within South Asia's unique geopolitical, religious, and socio-cultural context, the book challenges both national and Western feminist narratives that often homogenise third-world women's struggles. It reveals that protest is not limited to marches and slogans but is embedded in everyday acts of defiance, cultural production, and identity assertion.

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