Understanding Feminist Infrastructures

An Exploratory Study of Online Feminist Content Creation Spaces in India

Centre
for Internet
& Society

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1 Introduction

The internet and digital technologies have played an important role in contemporary feminist practice – in addition to social media activism, their growing prevalence in academia, advocacy, and creative expression illustrate how digital media contributes to efforts to question asymmetries of power and knowledge. In the last few years, the concept of a feminist internet[1] and forms of feminist infrastructures[2] have emerged as crucial entry points to understand the affordances of the digital and its many challenges, especially for women and other structurally disadvantaged communities. Indeed, many systemic forms of injustice persist within modern, progressive, and neoliberal contexts. Building a feminist internet, therefore, could be one of the ways to facilitate change. This could include improving access to technologies, public spaces, learning, and work opportunities; building networks of solidarity, support, and safety; and fostering an ethics of care that enables shifts in prevailing norms around gender and sexuality.

Feminist content creation has been integral to contemporary feminist work in India. As spaces for creative expression, activism, advocacy, awareness, research, and pedagogy, feminist publications are part of the larger discourse on gender and sexuality in India, and address broader questions of access, equity, and inclusion. The feminist publishing sector in India has grown and evolved in the last decade, with the advent of digital technologies. In addition to prominent feminist publishing houses, there are now content creation and curation platforms including blogs, magazines, websites, and social media pages. These platforms host a plethora of resources, including information and original content, as long-form writing, videos, and illustrations.

Feminist publishing began during the women's rights movements in India and many other parts of the world. The field has long engaged with activism, increasing awareness, and development.[3] The role of women in anti-colonial struggles and social movements on caste, language, ethnicity, and sexuality have shaped feminist writing in India, especially perspectives on access, identities, and marginalisation.[4] The emergence and proliferation of women's studies courses, institutionalisation of the women's movement, and subsequent mainstreaming of gender-related publishing in the last few decades have contributed to greater commercial viability of women's writing.[5] However, with the co-option of these issues into the mainstream publishing market, there have also been challenges related to the sustainability of independent feminist presses and small publishing initiatives, and indeed debates on changes to the ideological imperatives of feminist writing,

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[1] One of the earliest instances of use of the term was at the first 'Imagine a Feminist Internet' meeting called by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) in 2014. See "Home", *Feminist Principles of the Internet*, accessed 2 June 2023, https://feministinternet.org/en.

[2] While still to be defined, the term ostensibly denotes several infrastructural aspects that have been imperative to the growth and sustenance of feminist networks and practice. See Sophie Toupin and Alexandra Hache, "Feminist Autonomous Infrastructures", Association for Progressive Communications and Hivos, 2015, https://www.giswatch.org/en/internet-rights/feminist-autonomous-infrastructures.

[3] Urvashi Butalia and Ritu Menon, *Making a Difference: Feminist Publishing in the South* (Bellagio Publishing Network, 1996).

[4] Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon, *We Also Made History: Women in the Ambedkarite Movement* (Zubaan, 2014); Srila Roy, *Changing the Subject: Feminist and Queer Politics in Neoliberal India* (Duke University Press, 2022); Maya Ingo Schöningh and Sonja Eismann, eds., *Movements and Moments: Indigenous Feminisms in the Global South* (Zubaan, 2022).

[5] Ritu Menon, "Dismantling the Master's House: The Predicament of Feminist Publishing and Writing Today", *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 7, no. 2 (2000): 289–301, https://doi.org/10.1177/097152150000700209.

publishing, and teaching.[6] Transformations in the larger publishing sector, especially with the rise of translations and Indian language publishing[7] and the advent of digital forms and formats, are important to understand how feminist content creation has evolved. The nature of content has diversified tremendously, with social media emerging as crucial for activism, creative expression, and research, and for building networks of solidarity and care.

The rise of online feminist publications, and related digital media content creation and curation spaces, has engendered new forums for debate, networking, and community-building. However, concerns around the safety of women and marginalised groups are still prominent because of the challenges to free speech and creative expression, especially with the growing presence of mis/disinformation, hate speech, and harassment.[8] Even as regulatory frameworks for online safety and free speech evolve, questions of ownership and control over platforms, and concerns about privacy and data protection, become more significant.[9] Digital infrastructure, therefore, emerges as vital to the growth of online feminist content creation and curation spaces in India and to the creation of a feminist internet.

This study analyses the development of feminist infrastructures (including various interpretations of the term) through an exploration of online feminist content creation and curation spaces, and their impact on the contemporary discourse on feminism, gender, and sexuality in India. It focuses on the challenges of establishing and running an online feminist platform or forum, particularly concerning free speech and expression. It also examines how emerging media types and formats for feminist content creation in India (social media, digital news, blogs, and other multimedia publications) address and respond to the challenges and affordances of creating content online. Through conversations with select online feminist publishing, content creation, and curation spaces, this study outlines motivations for choosing certain media, nature of content, languages and design and how such choices inform practice and politics. An overarching aim is to unpack the term 'feminist infrastructure' and its interpretations in the context of transitioning to digital content creation and publication.

We recognise that the discourses on many of the themes we discussed with our research participants, such as access, inclusion, and sustainability, have become more prominent since the pandemic. Like many other sectors, publications and content creation spaces were adversely impacted during this time. Moreover, cases of domestic violence and oppression faced by women and marginalised communities increased at an alarming rate with the restrictions imposed during

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[6] Menon, "Dismantling the Master's House", 289–301.

[7] Padmini Ray Murray, Rashmi Dhanwani, and Kavya Iyer Ramalingam, "India Literature and Publishing Sector Study, December 2020–May 2021", British Council and Art X Company, 2021, https://www.festivalsfromindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/arts_literature_report_english_long_report_1.pdf.

[8] "Frequently Asked Questions: Tech-facilitated Gender-based Violence", *UN Women*, accessed 23 January 2024, https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/faqs/tech-facilitated-gender-based-violence.

[9] Aarathi Ganesan, "Can Taking Away Safe Harbour Fix Free Speech Issues in an Internet Dominated by a Few Tech Cos? *Medianama*, 23 May 2023, https://www.medianama.com/2023/05/223-safe-harbour-free-speech-internet-competition-nama/.

the pandemic.[10] Conversations about a feminist ethics of care have thus become even more important, as has creating feminist infrastructures that centre the voices of the most vulnerable.

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[10] Akshaya Krishnakumar and Shankey Verma, "Understanding Domestic Violence in India During COVID-19: A Routine Activity Approach", *Asian Journal of Criminology* 16, no. 1 (2021): 19–35, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7945968/.

2 Context

The term 'feminist infrastructure' has emerged in the last couple of years in policy and academic discourse on gender and technology, often in various iterations, such as 'feminist technological infrastructure', 'feminist autonomous infrastructure', and as an important component of broader feminist principles of the internet.[11] The term may generally comprise various forms of physical and online infrastructures, including but not limited to community networks, safe spaces, platforms, tools, training, and inclusive design. But much policy and academic literature emphasises that the development of the internet and multimedia technologies has been gendered for decades.[12] 'Infrastructure' may therefore be an entry point to understanding and interrogating pre-existing notions of technological infrastructures as unbiased and deterministic. While not always apparent or visible, infrastructure forms an indispensable aspect of our everyday lives, both online and offline. Susan Leigh Star refers to infrastructure as "becoming visible upon breakdown."[13] Similarly, feminist infrastructure or the lack thereof becomes apparent in the systemic perpetuation of asymmetries of power in both physical and online spaces. This affects how marginalised and underrepresented groups – women, those with diverse gender and sexual identities, people from non-dominant castes and religions, and persons with disabilities – engage with these spaces.

In the last few years, there have been several initiatives to bridge this gap – to build and sustain inclusive and accessible infrastructures. The Association for Progressive Communications (APC), in a report on sexual rights on the internet, notes:

> *"One of the main constitutive elements of feminist autonomous infrastructures lies in the concept of self-organisation already practised by many social movements that understand the question of autonomy as a desire for freedom, self-valorisation and mutual aid…. In addition, we understand the term technological infrastructure in an expansive way, encompassing hardware, software and applications, but also participatory design, safe spaces and social solidarities. Concrete examples of feminist autonomous infrastructures include the Geek Feminism Wiki, developing specific technologies that tackle gender-based online violence, such as bots against trolls, and building feminist online libraries and feminist servers, but also enabling offline safe spaces such as feminist hackerspaces which allow feminist, queer and trans* hackers, makers and geeks to gather and learn with others."[14]*

The APC report highlights the significance of these measures in light of increasing violence against vulnerable and marginalised populations, and the need to develop offline and online

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[11] "Home", *Feminist Principles of the Internet*.

[12] Anita Gurumurthy, "A History of Feminist Engagement with Development and Digital Technologies", *Association for Progressive Communications Issue Paper 1* (2017), https://ssrn.com/abstract=3873762.

[13] Susan Leigh Star, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure", in *Boundary Objects and Beyond*, eds. Geoffrey C. Bowker, Stefan Timmermans, Adele E. Clarke, and Ellen Balka (The MIT Press, 2016), 473–488, https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/10113.003.0030.

[14] Toupin and Hache, "Feminist Autonomous Infrastructures".

strategies to address these challenges. Based on an analysis of three community-led projects, it emphasises the need for local technological solutions (online and offline), with diverse voices to foreground the autonomy of users of these technologies. Ownership and control of communication technologies are important for creating feminist infrastructures. This is especially true with big tech and large media houses increasingly exercising control over communication networks and determining the conditions and nature of content, and scope of privacy and free speech. In the majority world context, while the term itself is yet to be established, research and practice related to building a feminist, inclusive, and accessible internet have time and again acknowledged these infrastructural gaps. Feminist interventions in ICT policy have consistently advocated mainstreaming gender-sensitive infrastructure development, for instance, improving the access of women and marginalised groups to media and communication networks.[15]

The global literature on gendered technological infrastructures foregrounds the traditional understanding of technology as a masculine space, which offers limited access and opportunities to women in fields such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Highlighting such long-standing disparities in maker and hacker representation, Savić and Wuschitz describe how feminist hackerspaces become "infrastructures that enable an autonomous gender performance". Describing their experiences with a feminist hackerspace run by a group of feminist artists, designers, and developers for female-identifying and transgender hackers and activists, the authors unpack how these spaces offer opportunities to break existing gender norms, particularly in performing technology in hacker and maker cultures (tinkering, soldering, etc.) through the convention of masculinity. They further note, "People performing technology and femininity at a traditional hackerspace are visible, meaning they are discriminated (against), stereotyped, marked. The infrastructure of a feminist hackerspace renders gender unmarked. Feminist hacking activity generates alternate, autonomous, fluent forms of gender performance."[16]

A large obstacle in the discourse on feminist infrastructure is the linear imagination about technology flows and unevenness of communication networks across the world. This is a remnant of colonial legacies in the development of infrastructure and communication technologies, which privileged certain forms of knowledge and skills over others.[17] Further, the lack of recognition of feminist methodologies and practices in the development of information technologies, particularly in computer programming, has long impeded access by women and other marginalised and vulnerable communities, rendering technologies exclusive. In discussing their experience of organising a panel on feminist infrastructures at the Association of Digital

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[15] Anita Gurumurthy, Parminder Jeet Singh, Anu Mundkur, and Mridula Swamy, "Gender in the Information Society: Emerging Issues", UNDP-APDIP and Elsevier, 2006, https://www.unapcict.org/sites/default/files/2019-01/GenderIS.pdf

[16] Selena Savić and Stefanie Wuschitz, "Feminist Hackerspace as a Place of Infrastructure Production", *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, no. 13 (2018), https://doi.org/10.5399/uo/ada.2018.13.10.

[17] Rudolf Mrázek, *Engineers of Happy Land: Technology and Nationalism in a Colony* (Princeton University Press, 2002). Mrázek observes the encounters with colonial modernity in the last phase of Dutch rule in Indonesia, and modernisation brought about through privileged access to certain forms of knowledge, such as engineering, and its flattening of a diversity in culture. This has also informed the growth of and relationship with technologies in ways that embody hierarchies of power.

Humanities Organisations (ADHO) Digital Humanities conference held in Kraków in 2016 (DH2016), Losh and Wernimont describe the relative value accorded to feminist work and methodologies in thinking through emerging digital practices in fields like the digital humanities, and how this work is not integrated into mainstream discourses in the field.[18] The session conducted by Losh, Wernimont, and others at DH2016 also highlighted interesting approaches to understanding the "social and relational aspects of infrastructure", including efforts in community-based training and research networks.[19]

While the term feminist infrastructure is recent, there is a small but significant body of work that theorises and unpacks infrastructure through a gendered lens, illustrating precursors to the term. Siemiatycki et al. summarise this in their recent work, noting that a predominant 'masculinist bias' in infrastructure production has contributed to the marginalisation of vulnerable groups. They further observe,

> *"systematic failures among both scholars and policy professionals to consider gender have prevented scholars from seeing a key fundamental dimension of the infrastructure sector: not only are all the official systems involved in the production of infrastructure overwhelmingly male dominated, but they also rely on inherently masculine sensibilities about space, place, technology, subjectivity, and embodiment."*[20]

They trace these gender inequities within Eurocentric and/or colonial practices of knowledge production. This includes narratives of early mega infrastructure projects, often led by 'master builders' (predominantly white men), which sustain long-held gendered and racialised hierarchies of labour. These histories of omission have shaped modern thinking about infrastructure, developing in particular homogenised, neoliberal notions of progress and development across the world. Siemiatycki et al. therefore emphasise the importance of critically analysing the 'infrastructure turn' and suggest several ways to do so. For example, conducting detailed studies on representational diversity in the infrastructure industry workforce, its norms and culture, financial investments, and decision-making.[21]

Over the last few decades, infrastructure has come to mean more than built environments and technological innovation. It now includes crucial components such as labour and design in its development and sustenance. While the gendered division of labour has long been part of feminist discourse, debates around it were foregrounded even more in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.[22] Similarly, recognising design as crucial but often invisible in infrastructure-building, a space to conceptualise inherently feminist forms of infrastructure, has

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[18] Elizabeth M. Losh and Jacqueline Wernimont, "Introduction", in *Bodies of Information: Intersectional Feminism and Digital Humanities*, eds. Elizabeth M. Losh and Jacqueline Wernimont (University of Minnesota Press, 2018), ix–xxvi.

[19] Susan Brown, Tanya Clement, Laura Mandell, Deb Verhoeven, and Jacque Wernimont, "Creating Feminist Infrastructure in the Digital Humanities", *Digital Humanities 2016: Conference Abstracts*: 47–50.

[20] Matti Siemiatycki, Theresa Enright, and Mariana Valverde. "The Gendered Production of Infrastructure", *Progress in Human Geography* 44, no. 2 (2020): 297–314, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132519828458.

[21] Siemiatycki, Enright, and Valverde, "Gendered Production of Infrastructure", 297–314.

[22] Banu Özkazanç-Pan and Alison Pullen, "Gendered Labour and Work, Even in Pandemic Times", *Gender, Work, and Organization* 27, no. 5 (2020): 675–676, https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12516.

emerged recently as an important consideration.[23] Funding feminist infrastructures – as spaces to collectivise, tools for safety, or platforms for expression – has also been widely debated.[24] Community networks facilitate the creation of feminist infrastructures. But as noted in APC's GIS Watch report, it is important to approach the notion of 'community' with an intersectional lens so as not to homogenise and flatten prevalent dynamics of power and knowledge or invisiblise voices within community-based infrastructural models.[25]

Research, activism, and resource-building in areas related to gender and sexuality have revealed some of the knowledge gaps in the development of inclusive and accessible feminist infrastructures, or indeed their evolution over time. Radhika Gajjala's early work on cyberfeminism, which focuses on online feminist community-building in South Asian and majority world contexts, underscores crucial questions around access and inclusion and how they may inform online and offline feminist work.[26] Developments in the field since then highlight changes in cyberfeminist practice and methods, especially with the rise of social media and related discourse such as networked feminisms.[27]

Documentation and archiving is another crucial aspect of feminist work and research that has not received a lot of attention in conversations around publishing, especially in the digital space. But despite efforts to sustain offline and digital collections, feminist publications and collectives have faced persistent challenges. Importantly, apart from the infrastructural issues that already pervade archival work in India, questions of representation, inclusion, and access become paramount in envisioning what constitutes Indian feminist archives. As Padmini Ray Murray observes,

> *"Despite efforts by feminist publishers and academics in India and elsewhere to amplify less-represented voices, there are invariably archival silences created by the lack of access and means of non-dominant-caste and tribal communities to publish in traditional modes of dissemination such as academic journals and monographs as well as the mainstream press."*[28]

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[23] Anuradha Ganapathy and Tanay Mahindru, "Gender by Design: Principles for Gender-responsive Public Digital Infrastructure", *IT For Change*, May 2023, https://itforchange.net/index.php/gender-by-design-principles-for-gender-responsive-public-digital-infrastructure.

[24] Tenzin Dolker, "Where Is the Money for Feminist Organising", Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), 24 May 2021, https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/AWID_Research_WITM_Brief_ENG.pdf.

[25] Toupin and Hache, "Feminist Autonomous Infrastructures".

[26] Radhika Gajjala and Yeon Ju Oh, eds., *Cyberfeminism 2.0* (Peter Lang Publishing, 2012).

[27] Shana MacDonald, Brianna I. Wiens, Michelle Macarthur, and Milena Radzikowska, eds., *Networked Feminisms: Activist Assemblies and Digital Practices* (Lexington Books, 2022).

[28] Padmini Ray Murray, "Writing New Sastras: Notes Towards Building An Indian Feminist Archive", in *New Feminisms in South Asia: Disrupting the Discourse through Social Media, Film, and Literature*, eds. Sonora Jha and Alka Kurian (Routledge and Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 105–117.

These 'silences' persist in other spaces, such as healthcare[29] and labour,[30] and even with the deployment of emerging technologies[31] to aid infrastructural development. Moreover, algorithmic selection in sorting, classifying, and hierarchising information, news, music, and audio-visual content in digital spaces impacts digital publishing. It curates results on search engines, content aggregators, and social media feeds and timelines.[32] The discoverability and consequent consumption of digital content is thus influenced by the selection criteria of algorithms. But the opacity of these selection criteria and protocols around the use of data are causes for concern among researchers and publishers. Data collection and management, including access to sources, and development of selection criteria for algorithms, are defined by the organisation. This often leads to gatekeeping of content that may not align with the organisation's profitability goals.[33] Despite the proliferation of digital media platforms and better access to the internet in the last decade, digital divides persist in India. As a result, online publications and content creation platforms, many largely in English, have a relatively limited audience compared to print publications.

Digitalisation has resulted in changes across different parts of the publishing sector. Many mainstream publishers are keen to bid on books by social media influencers, as they have an existing audience. Moreover, the content on social media is increasingly dependent on the personal brands and work of online content creators.[34] Influencers often market books on their social media, while publishers do complementary work through their marketing departments. The readership of online content creators is thus primarily determined by their presence on social media. The number of individual feminist content creators on social media has risen, just as independent online feminist publications, such as blogs and magazines, have decreased globally.[35] This is also indicative of the new formats of content that are becoming increasingly prevalent, with the increased use of social media.

This overview of literature offers insights into the existing discourse on digital infrastructures and efforts to reimagine it through a gendered, feminist lens. Foremost is the need to unpack and contextualise the term 'infrastructure' beyond the mainstream understanding of infrastructure-building and development. This includes tracing its antecedents in colonial legacies of knowledge production, which continue to inform how it is imagined today. A key lacuna is literature on intersectional approaches to the study and design of infrastructure. This

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[29] Radhika Radhakrishnan, "Experiments with Social Good: Feminist Critiques of Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare in India", *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* 7, no. 2 (2021): 1–28, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.28968/cftt.v7i2.34916.

[30] Payal Arora, Usha Raman, and Rene Konig, *Feminist Futures of Work: Reimagining Labour in the Digital Economy* (Amsterdam University Press, 2023).

[31] Sophie Toupin, "Shaping Feminist Artificial Intelligence", *New Media & Society* 26, no. 1 (2023), https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221150776.

[32] Murray, Simone, "Secret Agents: Algorithmic Culture, Goodreads and Datafication of the Contemporary Book World", *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 24, no. 4 (2019): 970–989. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549419886026.

[33] Julian Wallace, "Modelling Contemporary Gatekeeping", *Digital Journalism* 6, no. 3 (2018): 274–293, https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1343648.

[34] Ellen Pierson-Hagger, "Inside the Rise of Influencer Publishing", *The New Statesman*, 22 September 2021, https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2021/09/inside-the-rise-of-influencer-publishing.

[35] Emma Goldberg, "Goodbye, Feminist Blogs. Hello, Gen Z Content Creators?", *The New York Times*, 17 November 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/17/business/feminism-gen-z.html.

signals the need for better mapping of the mainstream discourse and research in these areas. As observed by a number of authors, the preponderance of 'masculinized technologies' across fields has shaped how these technologies are accessed. Therefore, forms of 'feminist infrastructuring'[36] may offer ways to address some of these challenges of access, diversity, and inclusion. Feminist publishing, content creation and curation, among the earliest available spaces for feminist creative expression, activism, research, and resource-building, offer insight into the available processes of such infrastructuring, its challenges, and opportunities. While digital technologies have added further complexity to some of these processes, they have also opened up ways to reimagine spaces, objects, tools, and methods of content creation on gender, feminism, and sexuality in India. In doing so, they have contributed to the general understanding of infrastructures, and highlighted where they may be made more inclusive, accessible, and democratic. The study therefore explores feminist content creation and curation as an entry-point into the larger question of feminist infrastructures and how their development in the Indian context has informed the larger discourse on gender, sexuality and feminist work.

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[36] Laura Forlano, "Infrastructuring as Critical Feminist Technoscientific Practice", *Spheres: Journal for Digital Cultures* 3 (2017): 1–4,
https://spheres-journal.org/contribution/infrastructuring-as-critical-feminist-technoscientific-practice/.

3 Methodology

This study explores the work of feminist publications, digital content platforms, and individual content creators in India to understand how they have informed the growth of feminist infrastructures. We conducted semi-structured interviews with key feminist publications, content creators and curators. We also organised workshops to gather observations from participants on feminist infrastructures.

3.1 Interviews with publications, platforms, and individuals

We adopted a qualitative approach, using a snowball sampling method to identify key organisations and individuals working in publication and content creation. These include online publications and content creation platforms, with many being born-digital spaces, including those on social media. We conducted 12 semi-structured in-depth interviews with the founders, editors, or contributors of publications and content creation spaces.

A key focus of the study is the transition to, or adoption of born-digital publishing and content creation; we examine the motivations for choosing the media type and the resulting impacts on feminist objectives. The interviews were held between 2018 and 2020, during which time the work of several organisations and individuals we interviewed evolved. This study includes certain publications and content creators who may not explicitly identify as feminist. However, their work has contributed immensely to conversations on gender and sexuality both offline and online in India. These contributions include creating inclusive spaces for conversations on intimacy and pleasure, promoting discussions on sexual and reproductive health, and forming communities in which people can talk, write and create content about gender, sexuality and relationships.

For the purpose of this research, a feminist digital content creator includes any individual or organisation that creates and/or publishes feminist content or content on gender and sexuality in India. Content creation spaces studied for this research vary in the extent of their digital presence; news, informational, or educational intent; utilisation of visual, audio, and textual media; and the platforms on which they are hosted. The organisations and individuals interviewed for the study are as follows:

- **Zubaan,**[37] an independent feminist publication house, which publishes academic books, fiction, memoirs, popular nonfiction, and books for children and young adults. It is primarily a print publication house but has some online content as well.

- **Feminism in India,**[38] a digital, intersectional, and bilingual feminist media platform which works on informing and developing a feminist sensibility among the youth.

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[37] "Home", *Zubaan*, accessed 22 March 2024, https://zubaanbooks.com/
[38] "Home", *Feminism in India,* accessed 22 March 2024, https://feminisminindia.com/

- **Sexuality and Disability,**[39] a digital platform for women with disabilities, which provides information on the body, sexuality, and intimate relationships.

- **Agents of Ishq,**[40] a multimedia project about sex, love, and desire, which shares informational material and various experiences of intimacy and desire.

- **Khabar Lahariya,**[41] a women-run rural digital media network, practises rural feminist journalism, and has transitioned from being a print-only publication to also a digital one.

- **Latha Pratibha Madhukar,**[42] a Bahujan feminist writer, social activist, and researcher, who has been active in various social movements, and published several books, short stories, poems, and articles in Marathi, Hindi, and English periodicals.

- **In Plainspeak,**[43] a digital magazine which creates content and generates discussions on issues of sexuality and sexual and reproductive health and rights in the global south.

- **Genderlog,**[44] a social media handle with a weekly guest curator who facilitates discussions on gender, sexuality, and feminism. It has been inactive since 2020.

- **The Ladies Finger,**[45] an online women's magazine which publishes reportage, cultural commentary, personal essays, photo essays, comics, videos, explainers, and resources on politics, pop culture, health, sex, law, books, and work. The publication has been inactive since 2019.

- **Indu Harikumar,**[46] an artist and illustrator; we looked at her work on Instagram, where she shares illustrations and crowdsourced narratives on sexuality, mental health, and relationships.

- **Interviewee 12**, a Dalit feminist writer and poet, who writes about the politics of identity/self-determination, allyship, and intersectional discourse on caste, gender, religion, race, and sexuality.

The interviews followed these broad lines of enquiry:
- Motivation behind starting the project.
- Nature and value of content produced for their project.
- Challenges faced in establishing the project.
- Reasons for choosing the media type and for continuing with it.
- Reach or readership of the content.
- Incidents of harassment, censorship, or pushback.
- Aesthetic decisions and design strategy.
- Writers' and contributors' perspectives on feminism.
- Perspectives on feminist information infrastructures.

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[39] "Home", *Sexuality and Disability,* accessed 22 March 2024, https://sexualityanddisability.org/#content

[40] "Home", *Agents of Ishq,* accessed 22 March 2024, https://agentsofishq.com/

[41] "Home", *Khabar Lahariya*, accessed 22 March 2024, https://khabarlahariya.org/

[42] "Dr. Lata Pratibha Madhukar", *Twitter*, accessed 22 March 2024, https://twitter.com/LataPratibha

[43] "Home", *In Plainspeak,* accessed 22 March 2024, https://www.tarshi.net/inplainspeak/

[44] "Genderlog", *Twitter*, accessed 22 March 2023, https://twitter.com/genderlogindia

[45] "The Ladies Finger", *Twitter*, accessed 22 March 2023, https://twitter.com/TheLadiesFinger

[46] "Indu Harikumar", *Instagram*, accessed 22 March 2023, https://www.instagram.com/induviduality/

We limit this report to discussions on the structure, content, media, and aesthetics of these digital publications and content creation and curation spaces, without undertaking an in-depth analysis of the technical infrastructures[47]of these spaces. This study focuses on understanding the role of online feminist content creation, as informed by changes in the discourse around feminism, gender, and sexuality, and subsequently, the development of feminist infrastructures.

It is important to distinguish between forms of infrastructure, such as digitally networked infrastructures and community infrastructures, both of which research participants referred to. Digitally networked infrastructure includes hardware (routers, cables, switches, etc.), software (security applications, firewalls, etc.), and service components of a network (wireless protocols, cloud connectivity, etc.) that enable connectivity and communication between people and processes.[48] There is no universal definition for community infrastructures, which are part of social infrastructures and include public facilities, services, and built environments that support communities. Community infrastructures are low-cost, small-scale, micro-infrastructures, often developed by informal or non-governmental actors through community-led initiatives.[49] While this study does not exclusively focus on either type, research participants mention them as components of feminist infrastructures. Similarly, while we focus on online feminist content creation, many participants mentioned the need to effect change in offline and physical spaces as well.

We conduct research on digital cultures, access to knowledge, and design; this report is one of our first forays into feminist research. In addition to the interviews conducted for the study, we also consulted researchers working in these areas for inputs.[50] While we have access to networks and communities in the field of internet research, it took us time to identify and reach out to representatives at the different publications and content creation spaces. Further, our research was significantly delayed by the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. We have therefore tried to present the inputs shared by all research participants clearly and with care, and acknowledge that any errors in interpretation are solely ours.

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[47] While technical infrastructure is a crucial aspect of feminist infrastructures, it requires focused research and specific expertise. We hope to delve into this in the future under the broader theme of feminist infrastructures.

[48] G.C Bowker, K. Baker, F. Millerand, and D. Ribes, "Toward Information Infrastructure Studies: Ways of Knowing in a Networked Environment." In *Handbook of Internet Research,* eds.Jeremy Hunsinger, Lisbeth Klastrup, Matthew Allen (Springer, 2010), 97–117

[49] "Community Infrastructure: PDNA Guidelines Volume 8", *World Bank*, accessed 24 January 2024, https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/ar/291161493270918315/pdf/114639-WP-PUBLIC-ADD-SERIE S-pdna-guidelines-vol-b-community-infrastructure.pdf.

[50] An early, informal meeting on the broad thematics of this work was held in December 2022 with Prof. Radhika Gajjala (Bowling Green State University, Ohio), Dr. Padmini Ray Murray (Design Beku) and Aparajita Ray (King's College, London) in Bengaluru.

Workshop on feminist infrastructure wishlists

During this research, <u>a workshop titled "Feminist Infrastructure Wishlists" was organised as part of the Unbox Festival in Bangalore</u>[51] in 2019. The Unbox Festival is a platform for exploring new narratives and working at the intersection of disciplines to reimagine India's plural futures.[52] The workshop included 20 participants from varying professional backgrounds. It was structured as a mind-mapping exercise, aiming to gather participants' thoughts and imaginations of what feminist infrastructures could be. The session began with a brief discussion on what it means to have infrastructure that is feminist. Participants unpacked the concept in detail, without any preconceived definitions to fall back on.

Participants were then asked what necessitated feminist infrastructure or a feminist internet. Responses were given in the form of keywords, which were clustered into four broad categories: **inclusivity**, **safety in public spaces**, **access**, and **legal/policy interventions**. There were also keywords that did not fall into any of these categories, such as cognitive justice: recognising all knowledge systems, intersectional value systems, and no stereotypes attached. These alluded to the larger structural issue of gender inequality and lack of representation.

In the inclusivity cluster, there was an emphasis on inclusive public and private spaces for women. Phrases such as "be cognizant of gender dynamics among decision-makers – are women included?" and "equality in perception" suggested a need for inclusion. Meanwhile, the safety in public spaces cluster had keywords calling for safety, starting with public, offline spaces and moving to online spaces. Several participants mentioned public transport, where safety is critical.

Keywords within the access cluster emphasised equal access to infrastructure, with equitable practices and protocols. Some participants indicated the need for ownership of resources and access in the mainstream media. Under legal/policy interventions, technological solutions included AI to ensure consent for private content, and coding. Suggestions for policy changes included legal rights, childcare (policy), equal parenting, shared responsibility, and compulsory gender ratio for public spaces. Ideas such as "transport design and integrated sustainable travel designed around women's journeys and work-lives" hinted at implementation of such equitable policies.

There were several suggestions for physical infrastructural changes. Most gaps that were pointed out pertained to the lack of safety in and access to public spaces. Issues of visibility in public spaces, both offline and online, representation on the ground, and a missing narrative around equal access to infrastructure across genders were also raised. This led to a critical question: *who is feminist infrastructure for*?

The clusters of keywords were then used to structure a discussion around feminist infrastructure, with a focus on how we understand the term in the Indian context, both online and offline. In the discussion participants explored how 'infrastructure' and 'infrastructure-building' can be critically analysed in the context of mainstream discourses on gender, sexuality, and development. The understanding of infrastructure as purely technological or conceptual, as opposed to political, was scrutinised. Existing concepts and definitions such

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[51] Appendix : <u>Image 01</u>
[52] "Unbox Festival 2019", *Unbox Festival*, accessed 20 November 2019,
  http://unboxfestival.com/background/index.html.

as principles of a feminist internet, and autonomous feminist infrastructures, were also discussed. Participants conversed with each other and shared their experiences. One such experience related to doxing, which came up in the context of safety in online spaces. Another participant brought up concerns about inequality in parenting and childcare. Experiences in rural communities and the need for intersectional structures, with regard to online infrastructure, were also shared.

The discussion led to a visualisation exercise for which participants were divided into four groups and asked to imagine an ideal form of feminist infrastructure, to create a wishlist. As the wishlist was to be represented visually, the exercise was open-ended and prompted participants to think freely.

One group visualised a structure inspired by rainwater harvesting[53], where a large umbrella protects a building from raindrops signifying non-democratic democracy, power structures, sexism, trolls, and patriarchy. The floors of the building represent allied community, values, behaviours, and norms, which are maintained by the binding structures. The collected rainwater is filtered by the structure, resulting in true democracy, equity, equality, and matriarchy. This exercise prompted participants to consider how we may learn from existing design and innovation to imagine a feminist infrastructure.

Another group identified several spheres where feminist infrastructure [54]interventions are needed. These include public spaces, public transportation, cab services, advertising and media spaces, technology, industry, private spaces, and communities. Safety is shown as central to feminist infrastructure, and as a process. The visualisation has a mix of feminist infrastructures working together, such as street lights, public toilets, transportation, supportive communities, and citizens' collectives. It addresses threats specific to online spaces; for instance, hate speech, revenge porn, and restricted access.

The third group presented a manifesto[55] to address access, safety, and representation in large institutions and smaller self-initiated communities. This proposal is in the form of a code of conduct that can be moderated by a diverse panel of people. It advocates access to the internet for women in rural areas and methods for capacity-building to encourage meaningful use. The manifesto also suggests working towards feminist open-source software and hardware. Finally, it recommends coding courses for young girls to change the status quo in the technology community, which would directly affect information infrastructure.

The final group's visualisation is a roadmap[56] for feminist infrastructure, with several pit stops. This roadmap indicates goals such as equal participation, gender-neutral public facilities, ramps for accessibility, and shared labour. The visualisation has a mix of physical infrastructure changes and conceptual forms of infrastructure such as labour, representation, and access.

After creating the visuals, each group presented their feminist infrastructure wishlist. The session concluded with a discussion on the wishlists and thoughts on the session.

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[53] Appendix : Image 02
[54] Appendix : Image 03
[55] Appendix : Image 04
[56] Appendix: Image 05

Workshop on feminist principles of design and infrastructure

An interactive session on feminist design principles for creative practitioners was conducted as part of Design Dialogues[57] in Bangalore in 2019. Design Dialogues was a series of monthly talks conceptualised by designer, historian and curator Ishita Shah, and co-curated by Rahul Bisht on cultural and creative practices. This session was about public policies and how they intersect with creative practices. Some concerns it aimed to address were as follows: how do different interest groups influence policy and policymaking? Is there a way to bridge the gap between the public and policymaking through creative practices? What would it take for a creative practitioner to work with public policies and address issues like inclusivity or creating for all?

The interactive workshop[58] was directed at imagining feminist design principles that could lead to feminist infrastructures for creative practitioners, and how these infrastructures intersect with policies such as free speech. Participants included photographers, architects, and designers, and those with technology and research backgrounds.

The workshop began with a discussion on our study on feminist infrastructures, with a focus on free speech policies in India. It then shifted to us sharing examples of creative practitioners who work towards creating feminist infrastructure facing censorship. This was followed by a discussion on how participants understood free speech in their respective professions. They were asked to mention phrases they associated with free speech and censorship. Their responses were varied and included keywords such as power, opinions, restrictions, whose voice, and asking questions. Many responses upheld free speech as a necessary right, and sought to address asymmetries of power and gender justice.

Later, the challenges to free speech for creative practitioners engaged with feminist or sensitive gender- and sexuality-related work were discussed using examples of films, music, and visual art. These examples included the film Lipstick Under My Burkha,[59] artist Pulkit Mogha's[60] work on Instagram, and musician Falz,[61] whose song 'This is Nigeria' was censored. Other examples of feminist infrastructure, such as Smashboard,[62] an alternative social media network for people of all genders fighting the patriarchy, and the censorship such platforms are subjected to also came up. This led to a conversation on hate speech online and issues surrounding free speech on the internet.

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[57] "DD#10: Creative Interactions with Policies", *Design Dialogues Online*, 14 March 2020, https://designdialoguesonline.wordpress.com/2020/03/14/dd10-creative-interactions-with-policies/.

[58] Appendix : Image 06

[59] Michael Safi, "Lipstick under My Burkha's Release Hailed as Victory for Indian Women", *The Guardian*, 23 June 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/23/lipstick-uner-my-burkha-release-hailed-as-victory-for-indian-women.

[60] Sara H., "5 Provocative Indian Artists on Navigating Censorship on Social Media", *Homegrown*, 8 June 2021, https://homegrown.co.in/article/803016/5-provocative-indian-artists-on-navigating-censorship-on-social-media.

[61] Orji Sunday, "Falz: The Nigerian Rapper Rebelling through Music", *Al Jazeera*, 17 January 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2019/1/17/falz-the-nigerian-rapper-rebelling-through-music.

[62] "Home", *Smashboard*, accessed 23 March 2020, https://smashboard.org/.

Based on this conversation, facilitators introduced feminist design principles as a way to address concerns around free speech and to initiate informed policymaking for creative practitioners. Participants were asked to think of feminist design principles to tackle these issues in their practice. Their ideas were listed under broad themes: **online infrastructure**, **representation**, **access and public space**, and **policy interventions**.

Although there were several overlapping and independent ideas, most fell under the online infrastructure cluster. Some examples were training moderators for online platforms based on feminist principles, safe and quick access to trans- and queer-affirmative gynaecologists and therapists on a dedicated online platform, Creative Commons licences for work, decentralised approaches to cultural centres like museums, and network infrastructure such as servers. Within the representation theme, ideas included avoiding stereotyping women in visuals and films based on their profession and a gender-neutral approach to designing toys. Ideas in the access and public space category included access to inclusive child care and safe travel modes for women. Finally, examples of policy interventions were the need for frameworks to assess and penalise sexual abuse based on the level of severity and instilling accountability in people engaging with online platforms and forums.

These themes and ideas were discussed to understand the potential of feminist design principles in developing feminist infrastructure. This led to a conversation on infrastructure in the context of power imbalances among diverse communities, between urban and rural spaces, and across sectors and languages, and the potential role of creative practitioners in building spaces to help restore equity.

4 Observations

The interviews led to diverse responses on motivations, challenges, and the choice of the medium for online feminist content creation and curation. However, the key learnings can be grouped under these 3 sections – how digital media plays a role in shaping feminist content, how publications and content creators navigate censorship and online safety, and how these platforms and individuals perceive feminist infrastructures.

4.1. Feminist publishing and content creation

The mediation of feminist content on digital platforms, especially social media, has been a notable development in the last few years, not just in terms of the content itself, but also its format, design, and visual aesthetics. While the digital medium has opened up new spaces for the creation of long-form, image, or audio-visual content, it is important to unpack such multimodality offered by the internet and digital technologies, and how it impacts the content. Language emerges as a significant issue, because of the lack (or limited availability online and in digital forms) of content on gender, sexuality, and feminism in Indian languages – many interviewees noted this aspect of working with digital platforms. Key gaps include the absence of tools and resources to produce content in Indian languages, digital literacy and upskilling needed to work with the digital medium, long-term sustainability of work, and a deep engagement with feminist principles of design.

4.1.1 How the digital medium facilitates feminist content creation

The motivation for most feminist publications and content creation and curation spaces to work, as revealed in interviews, is to fill the gaps in the knowledge available on gender, sexuality, access, inclusion, and gender justice across a range of sectors, such as health, education, and governance. These gaps are often coupled with a lack of accessible information or space to share lived experiences, especially for structurally disadvantaged groups. Some publications and individual content creators, therefore, began writing or creating content to make space for discussion, often with a focus on providing accessible information to specific communities. For instance, In Plainspeak generates content for the global south, specifically for and from activists. Meanwhile, Latha Madhukar and Interviewee 12 spoke of the lack of inclusivity and representation of Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi (DBAV) communities in India and globally, and the limited visibility of feminist work in Indian languages. Similarly, Sexuality and Disability is one of few online, accessible resources on gender and sexuality available in India specifically for women with disabilities.

As with much feminist publishing across the world, several of these spaces were started in the wake of activism and mobilisations around gender justice, safety, and sexual rights in India. For instance, Zubaan is an imprint of Kali for Women, which was founded during the women's movement in 1984. Genderlog was started by author and columnist Nilanjana Roy, around the

time of the protests following the Delhi gang rape and murder case in 2012. Agents of Ishq was established to engage with questions of desire, contend with the lack of diversity in existing feminist campaigns, and address the content focusing on sex negativity, driven by mockery and criticism.

Most publications, and content creators and curators interviewed for this study began on digital platforms. In many cases, the digital realm enabled their inception and the content is shaped by the particular platforms and technologies. Genderlog, for instance, was a handle on X (formerly Twitter), and In Plainspeak uses Instagram. For Indu Harikumar, Instagram, as an image-centric platform, aligns with her work. Similarly, Feminism in India, The Ladies Finger and Sexuality and Disability use the digital medium because of its affordability, access, and reach. Interestingly, as noted by Interviewees 3 and 4 at Sexuaity and Disability and Point of View[63](the organisation and digital platform that anchors the former), the digital space is most conducive to creating focused content on topics like sexuality and disability; when these organisations were founded, not many offline, mainstream publications were open to these subjects – indeed, some still may not be. Importantly, Interviewee 3 noted that despite the many challenges of self-publishing, and persistent digital divides such as access and linguistic barriers, the internet is a place where the question of rights is increasingly debated and articulated in diverse ways by marginalised groups. Sexuality and Disability is part of that space – it lets people share personal narratives. Similarly, Skin Stories,[64] their award-winning publication which can also be accessed on the Sexuality and Disability website began as a blog on WordPress. Later, it was moved to Medium, which allows for tagging people on X, to reach a wider audience.

Many of these publications, content creation and curation spaces have been active for more than a decade, and despite several challenges, have broken new ground with their work. Their work has involved undertaking several efforts, both offline and online, and engaging with local communities to establish and sustain themselves. Khabar Lahariya, for example, was started to produce local and independent feminist content, and establish women journalists in small towns and villages. But the organisation faced difficulties hiring and retaining reporters due to structural and logistical issues for women in these areas. Challenges in distribution led Khabar Lahariya to completely transition to the digital medium after a year of maintaining both print and digital news. Some older publishing outfits, such as In Plainspeak and Zubaan, have also transitioned from primarily print publications to either completely digital or print with an online presence.

Pooja Pande – senior manager of partnerships at Khabar Lahariya at the time of our interview and currently co-CEO at Chambal Media, the digital media social enterprise that houses Khabar Lahariya – reported that there was no existing local language newspaper to learn from when they started their online transition. They therefore reimagined their structure and processes for the digital medium. This included introducing a video training model for reporters, and using cheap phones and devices to make the process more accessible. Pooja highlighted that phones afford women in rural settings access and agency – these women have the power to record and

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[63] "Home", *Point of View,* accessed March 22 2024, https://pointofview.org/
[64] "Home", *Skin Stories*, accessed March 22 2024, https://medium.com/skin-stories

share content online. She also claimed that there is more creative use of technology in rural areas in comparison to urban publishing spaces. It is important to note, however, that for women in rural areas, owning a personal device can be challenging due to affordability concerns and their lack of agency in the family.

Still, a key learning from our conversations was regarding increased social media engagement over the last decade, and the role social media plays in creating readership. Publications, content creators and curators were largely positive about their use of social media to share content and connect with audiences. In Plainspeak gets more audience engagement on social media than their website. Feminism in India also shares updates on various social media platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, and YouTube. Japleen Pasricha, founder of Feminism in India, however, mentioned that to effectively use the digital space, organisations must maintain accounts on several social media platforms.

For many, the digital space has offered refuge, opportunities, and encouragement to create content. Indu specified that she finds Instagram more intimate than Facebook because it allows her to form connections with other users. She also spoke of the internet as having opened up several avenues for her. Paromita Vohra, founder and creative director of Agents of Ishq, also found the internet a liberating place for her as an artist. Interviewee 12 was keen on the flexibility of form online – content can be visual, auditory, or textual. This opens up interesting ways of creating content because one does not have to rely on writing alone. They felt that while the offline/physical space can still be violent and oppressive for a Dalit woman, the advantage of the digital space is that there are more people who listen. Interviewee 12 mentioned that digital platforms have encouraged confidence in Dalit women to speak up and share their experiences.

Noopur Tiwari, co-curator of Genderlog at the time of the interview and founder of Smashboard, noted the initial lack of representation from DBAV backgrounds in digital communities like Genderlog. Despite collaborations with notable figures such as Dalit Diva and Raya Sarkar, the majority of Genderlog's guest curators and followers were from Savarna backgrounds, which limited their networks and responsiveness to DBAV voices. However, Noopur acknowledges the evolving nature of the feminist digital landscape since then, manifested in the increasing presence of DBAV feminists advocating for intersectionality to be central to digital feminism despite the backlash they encounter.

But Interviewee 12 pointed out that while the digital realm, especially social media, can be motivating, it is not always accepting. There are barriers that must be overcome to gain access. The networks and recognition that mainstream publications benefit from are not available to a Dalit feminist publication. Indeed, people are still hesitant to consume content posted by online Dalit feminist publications. Latha also talked about how much intersectional work or work with vulnerable groups (sex workers, non-dominant religious communities, and DBAV groups in sensitive areas) is not available online. She emphasised that while the first-generation Indian feminists got global recognition, there are other kinds of feminist literature in multiple Indian languages that are yet to travel widely. Digital discourse on several forms of feminism continues to exclude DBAV women. It is also important to note that algorithmic curation on social media platforms tends to privilege some forms of information and content over others, hence limiting the agency and reach of marginalised content creators.

4.1.2 Feminist approaches to aesthetics, visual design, and representation

While diversity in visual representation and divergence from stereotypical imagery came up most when speaking about design strategies in feminist content creation, there was also the fact that the digital medium shapes the aesthetics of a publication. Feminism in India and In Plainspeak pointed out the limitations in creating a website due to their lack of resources. They hence relied on pre-existing templates (such as WordPress themes) for their websites, the aesthetics of which they chose on the basis of functionality. However, over the years, Feminism in India worked on revenue generation and redesigned their website in 2022 with the help of a web developer and designer. In their initial years, small and independent media platforms therefore often struggle to function without adequate funding. The visual design and aesthetics of print publications are also influenced by the medium and intended audience. For Khabar Lahariya, initially a print newspaper, aesthetics were dictated by the need to be regarded as a local newspaper. The design thus evolved in tandem with the local media landscape. The newspaper was consciously designed for the semi-literate reader, who is typically alienated by the mainstream media. This was achieved by using large fonts and hand-drawn illustrations.[65] The motivation of the publication or work is another factor that shapes its aesthetics. For instance, Latha pointed out how visual elements of her work are also informed by feminist activism. She explained how slogans, banners, and posters created for feminist activism have distinctive aesthetics, which have evolved over time, and which may not be entirely reproducible in a digital format.

Social media platforms also influence the visual design strategies of publishing and content creation spaces. While Instagram is recognised as primarily visual, X is seen as largely textual. The character limit on X is also a determining factor of how content is presented. Indu and interviewee 12 use Instagram for its visual focus and hence increased accessibility. Genderlog, on the other hand, rarely used visuals, mainly posting on X. Agents of Ishq also has a primarily visual presence on all its web platforms. Its website has a unique style, which is also reflective of the language it uses. Most articles on the website use mixed language, combining English and Hindi. But founder Paromita warned of the modularity in form that the internet enforces. Giving the example of WordPress' template-based websites, she spoke about the loss of nuance and complexity in design. Agents of Ishq's intention is to revive such complexities and create a look that defies the norm on the internet. Its aesthetics deliberately disrupt the established visual styling of the digital – flattened, digitally drawn, vector graphics. Agents of Ishq's visuals, as Paromita highlighted, are hand drawn or handmade digitally. Illustrators follow a style sheet to ensure that the depiction of bodies is gender-fluid and diverse.

Similarly, Nisha Susan, writer and co-founder of The Ladies Finger, described the visuals that the publication used as simple, fun, and pacey. The Ladies Finger adopted a hybrid language – a mix of a regional language and English, with colloquial phrases. This was in tune with their content.

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[65] Jheel Parekh, "Khabar Lahariya – A Weekly Newspaper in Bundeli", *The Better India*, 20 August 2009, https://www.thebetterindia.com/882/khabar-lahariya-a-weekly-newspaper-in-bundeli/.

A feminist approach for many interviewees meant hiring feminist artists and designers to create branding elements and visual imagery. Since these publications and content creation spaces deal with sensitive content around sexuality, disability, and gender-based violence, they use affirmative visuals that are not triggering or dehumanising and cannot be interpreted as pornographic. Interviewee 3 talked about how they work on making their WordPress blog accessible to people with disabilities. They hope for the visual aesthetics to challenge the stereotypical, ableist, and grim representations of disability in the mainstream media. Equally, they do not want the visuals to be construed as either inspirational or pity porn.

Visual representation in most content creation spaces includes everything from gender-fluid, non-normative bodies to anti-ableist and anti-patriarchal ones. Interviewee 12 raised a concern over conflicts in representing Dalit bodies. They believe that while Dalit bodies should be represented in images online, they should not be stereotyped, as this would only perpetuate existing socio-cultural barriers. Indu[66] noted that it was once difficult for her to draw people in unconventional ways, but that this has changed over time. She asks readers to share photographs of themselves, along with their stories, which she uses to draw them. This allows her to include details such as body hair in her representations of diverse bodies. She finds it fascinating how readers photograph themselves. Indu has consciously toned down the use of nudity in her illustrations since our interview. She believes that this not only safeguards her work from censorship on Instagram, but also increases the chances of people engaging with her posts. Her aim is to have her work reach more people. Indu holds that less nudity allows her work more coverage in the Indian and international media. She also feels safer creating more representative than realistic imagery, especially while working with difficult and taboo subjects. However, she continues to request people to share details of their appearance and conversations to help her visualise their stories. This makes her feel close to the people. She appreciates their trust in her.

4.1.3 Publishing in Indian languages

Even though digital publishing offers the possibility of producing content in various Indian languages, there are several challenges publishers and content creators face in making their work available in different languages. The politics around language, accessibility, and reach is prominent, especially because most publications and content creation spaces favour English. Pooja at Khabar Lahariya mentioned that since there are no good models of digital publications in regional languages, they have had to find their own way of sustaining the publication, whose articles and website are primarily in Hindi and dialects including Bundeli and Awadhi. They have to deal with technological obstacles, particularly on social media platforms, as typing in regional languages is not well supported. But publishing in regional languages is central to Khabar Lahariya, as it connects them to their audience. Indeed, the publication strives to change the landscape of local language publishing. An English section on their website was added only

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[66] Indu's work includes illustrating and sharing crowdsourced stories on sexuality, mental health, and relationships.

recently, mainly to enable the sharing of stories across digital platforms. Technological difficulties are also now being mitigated using Google Input Tools to type in local languages.

Japleen also expressed concern about the lack of Devanagari fonts for Hindi content, even though WordPress is compatible with Hindi text. While many platforms now support a limited number of Indian languages, there is scope for improvement in this area. She mentioned that a big challenge for her team is translating specific terminology from English into Hindi. It is difficult to find Hindi equivalents for contextual, sensitive, and appropriate terms related to gender and sexuality. At In Plainspeak, founder Radhika Chandiramani explained that they strive to publish at least one Hindi article each month. These articles are largely translations of English articles since they receive few original articles in Hindi. There is also a lack of staff who write in other Indian languages. But In Plainspeak has published a set of Hindi digests for people working in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who read short articles in Hindi when they travel for fieldwork. Agents of Ishq uses a blend of English and Hindi in most of their articles. They make their content separately available in English and Hindi, and have some articles in Tamil and Bangla. They also expressed similar limitations of producing articles and graphics in Hindi.

Paromita discussed the politics of language and how an activist is usually expected to be fluent in English. Thus, the intellectual work of people who reject or are unable to work in the dominant language is therefore excluded from mainstream discourse. To counter this, The Ladies Finger used a multilingual tone and visual aesthetic for its content. Nisha mentioned that the language The Ladies Finger used was reflective of urban Karnataka, clearly locating the publication in South India. She recounted the experience of working with publications based in North India, and the patronising tone used for articles about South India; The Ladies Finger attempted to reinvent this reality.

Meanwhile, Latha, who writes primarily in Hindi and Marathi, talked about the challenges of getting published in Indian languages. She thus shifted to English a few years ago, which gave her greater access to social media and digital tools to create and share their work. She observed that issues of access and digital literacy are exacerbated for languages other than English because of infrastructural gaps – this area is in great need of intervention. Noting the rich body of feminist work in this space, she emphasised the need for more translation and archiving to grow the discourse on feminism, gender, and sexuality in India.

4.2. Free speech and safety online

Free speech and expression have always been important in the discourse on gender, sexuality, and feminism, much of which has been structured around safety and regulation.[67] While the advent of the internet, increased access to digital technologies and devices, and rise of social media have increased opportunities for self-expression, the spectre of online harms has also simultaneously grown. Online gender-based violence (OGBV), or forms of violence perpetuated through technology and disproportionately targeting people with diverse gender and sexual identities, has surged in recent years, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.[68] While the primary research for this report concluded before the lockdowns in India, our conversations illustrate that online safety and related issues such as censorship, harassment and violence, and strategies to ensure digital security have always been relevant to feminist content creation in India. Quite a few publications and content creators we interviewed mentioned having faced pushback for their work. This was mainly in the form of online trolling but also in coercion to self-censor, sometimes from people within their own networks or families, primarily out of concern for their safety. They noted that concerns around censorship and fear of being harmed have always been prevalent given their line of work. As feminist publishers, who have few staff, many of them women, they need to be cautious. Given the sensitive nature of their content, physical safety and privacy concerns are relevant, whether they are writers, editors, illustrators, or reporters out in the field. Apart from their own work, they also observed that online interactions can be hostile, particularly towards women and people from marginalised and vulnerable communities. Tackling this requires strict regulations and infrastructural support.

Urvashi Butalia, founder and director of Zubaan, noted that the understanding of freedom of speech as an absolute, non-negotiable principle has changed over time, and more radically so in the last four-five years, with increasing instances of gender-based violence, both online and offline. She pointed out that while the digital realm has afforded people more avenues for expression, it may not be entirely without constraints. Publishers are continuously vulnerable to online attacks. Earlier, when free speech was under threat in the print media, there were tangible ways to protest, such as street rallies, and these were directed against mostly forms of state censorship. Now, there are many more actors (not all known) and increased potential for real physical and psychological harm, such as the mental health impact of hate speech, which is only being understood now.

Publishers have developed various strategies to contend with these challenges to online safety. For instance, organisations publish sensitive content anonymously, and take additional steps to keep personal data, addresses, and contacts private and offline, or at least not easily discoverable. Radhika mentioned how In Plainspeak has maintained anonymity of their

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[67] "Gender Equality in Freedom of Expression Remains a Distant Goal – UN Expert", *United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner*, 18 October 2021, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/10/gender-equality-freedom-expression-remains-distant-goal-un-expert.

[68] "COVID-19 and Online Violence in India: Digital Intelligence Report", Quilt.AI and International Center for Research on Women, April 2021, https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Ex-Summary-Online-Violence-during-Covid-in-India.pdf.

contributors when sensitive topics have been involved. These precautions are part of content and social media strategies as well. Nisha noted that at The Ladies Finger, writers avoided polarising phrasing, responding to constructive criticism only where needed. They did not engage at all if the intention was clearly harassment, even if it meant resorting to methods such as shadow banning to ensure safety. While these are fairly low-tech solutions, the need to engage with the larger problem of online harassment itself, and its impact on the writer and work still remains unaddressed. In instances of genuine criticism, it is important to do the due diligence and move on. Radhika also observed how it is important for publications to stay abreast of regulations for social media; for example, provisions under the Information Technology (IT) Act. They are also careful with their use of social media, engaging only where required. Concern about censorship necessitates taking measured risks.

There are similar difficulties in dealing with pushback on visual content, as images are open to interpretation. Indu faces some of these challenges with her work, especially given that her artwork and illustrations are on sensitive topics such as the body and sexuality, and engage with deeply personal narratives. For her crowdsourced projects she sometimes turns off comments on posts and does not tag contributors. She has observed, however, that people are increasingly willing to be identified and own their stories. Still, Indu reported that one of her illustrations was taken down from social media because it depicted an extramarital affair, despite the drawing (which included some parts of the body) not being realistic. She urged that such forms of censorship by platforms, often citing community safety standards, can be problematic in the contexts of creativity and free speech.

X has a hateful conduct policy to address prejudiced behaviour. For instance using slurs or gendered hate speech is a violation of the policy, but this can be interpreted subjectively.[69] Similarly, definitions for gendered abuse, violent behaviour, and harassment in social media community guidelines need to be clarified to avoid arbitrary punishment and consequences, and to establish appropriate redressal mechanisms. The lack of transparency and inconsistency in decision-making by social media platforms has led to several instances of inaction and excessive action.[70] Despite the increase in online threats and violence towards feminist content creators working with vulnerable sections of society, such speech is often not taken down from platforms, even when it obviously violates hate speech or incitement to violence policies. This extends further, with platforms not taking action against hate speech towards minority communities and vulnerable groups, or when they censor content that is critical of the state.

Indeed, trolling and other forms of online harm disproportionately target marginalised communities, a fact observed by Interviewee 12. For instance, they noted that Dalit women always have to be more careful than others on public platforms; they cannot say something too radical given the repercussions. They face several other barriers too. For instance, getting verified on X for a community-led digital project focused on Dalit women's struggles for justice

[69]Ayako Hatano, "Regulating Online Hate Speech through the Prism of Human Rights Law: The Potential of Localised Content Moderation", *The Australian Year Book of International Law Online* 41, 1 (2023): 127-156, doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/26660229-04101017

[70] Torsha Sarkar and Gurshabad Grover, "Platforms as Gatekeepers: Threats to Digital Space", The Centre for Internet & Society, October 2020, https://www.icnl.org/wp-content/uploads/4.-Platform-Governance-India-report.pdf.

was a significant challenge in the beginning, and could only be done with the help of another magazine. Unlike other women, they cannot afford to leave social media, as their visibility and representation is already so constrained. These ways of limiting access to social media platforms restrict free speech for vulnerable communities. These patterns also call for an examination of data gathering practices by platforms, and efforts to set up community guidelines to address ingrained bias and discrimination in users, functioning on social media, and the platforms themselves.[71]

These examples outline a certain engagement with the internet and digital technologies, particularly social media, that is engendered by increased access and insidious forms of discrimination, given the possibility for anonymity. How do women and people with diverse gender and sexual identities, especially those from marginalised communities, navigate online spaces, when their safety remains an overarching concern? In this vein, Urvashi highlighted that the expansion of online workplaces has necessitated guidelines to address sexual harassment, especially by anonymous attackers. Some complaint and redressal mechanisms exist but how robust they are is up for debate.

Pooja observes that while online harassment is more prevalent in urban areas, rural creators face other problems. For instance, at Khabar Lahariya, reporters primarily work offline, in regions where networks and communities are small, therefore rendering anonymity impossible. She also recounted incidents of reporters facing in-person pushback and coercion – sometimes matters escalated so far that they required the intervention of government officials. Still, rural publications are not immune to online harassment. A popular video segment on the digital platform by Khabar Lahariya's co-founder was subjected to much criticism and trolling in the publication's early days. Pooja therefore stressed the need to institute offline and online infrastructures that work together to ensure that women and marginalised communities can safely engage with the internet and social media.

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[71] Florian Saurwein and Charlotte Spencer-Smith, "Automated Trouble: The Role of Algorithmic Selection in Harms on Social Media Platforms", *Media and Communication* 9, no. 4S1 (2021): 222–233, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A687235806/AONE?u=anon~a7f78192&sid=googleScholar&xid=a650a3b2.

4.3. Feminist infrastructures

The conversations for this report revolved around multiple infrastructures of feminist publishing and content creation, forms of feminist work, and indeed multiple feminisms. While all the people we spoke to may not identify as feminists, they brought to the conversations their experiences of engaging with diverse social movements and observations of how feminist, anti-caste, sexuality, and disability-related discourses in India have evolved. Unsurprisingly many discussions revolved around addressing gaps in existing infrastructures, through widening access to public spaces and technologies, increasing the safety of women and marginalised communities, both offline and online, and developing funding, capacity, and resources for feminist work. Sustainability of feminist work and interventions, such as feminist publishing, is therefore a crucial aspect of these conversations. Feminist infrastructures as they already exist, or could be, are varied and span diverse conceptual and linguistic registers. An important question raised by one of our interviewees was whether building feminist infrastructures involves transforming existing infrastructures or creating alternatives. Our conversations illustrate that it is a mix of both. Fixing infrastructural gaps has led to many interesting and new creative solutions, such as the multifarious digital publishing enabled by social media, which has contributed towards feminist work.

As we observed in the workshops, when infrastructure development focuses on women and marginalised and vulnerable groups, the discussion invariably returns to key points such as safety, access, and digital literacy. Indeed, Nisha noted that most writing on women and technology is always in some form of panic mode or related to safety concerns. She hoped that once these gaps were addressed, conversations would move beyond these issues. She broached the idea of a feminist resource centre through which conceptual questions could be unpacked, and observed that funding would be an important aspect of this infrastructure. She also mentioned the need for more women in leadership and decision-making roles, especially in fundraising for feminist work and publishing, as this would go a long way in translating the value of the work across diverse groups, and building credibility and sustainability.

Interviewees wished for critical discussions on access and inclusivity to facilitate the development of more accessible infrastructures. Access and inclusion were high priorities for most interviewees and workshop participants when visualising forms of feminist infrastructure. Ensuring access and inclusion involved the expansion of public spaces to increase the visibility and participation of women and marginalised communities, and improving offline and online access to information. Interviewee 3 noted that the rise of digital culture has been an impetus for strategising how feminist writing and principles can be shared and collectively built. Some of this work is already ongoing in encouraging the free flow of information, collaborations in publishing, and cross-posting on platforms. For instance, Smashboard's attempt to create an alternative feminist social media platform garnered mainstream media attention[72] and won the international UNESCO-Netexplo Grand Prix as "a breakthrough digital innovation with the

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[72]"Press", Smashboard, accessed March 22 2024, https://smashboard.org/press/

potential of profound and lasting impact on digital society".[73] Founder Noopur Tiwari observed enthusiastic responses from Indian feminists across caste and gender spectrums as well. Nevertheless, Noopur reported that investors saw the project as too ambitious, emphasising how pitching intersectional feminism as a marketable digital asset undermines its core objective and limits investment. The vectoralist class[74] still controls digital infrastructure and is the biggest challenge to feminist assertions in the digital space, Noopur adds.

Urvashi and her editor at Zubaan acknowledged the intersections of infrastructure and human resources, and why it is important to involve small and independent businesses in related conversations, particularly in publishing. They also observed that any social movement – such as trade union protests, group mobilisation or organisation, or even setting up a community library – is part of a feminist infrastructure. So too is the creation and development of new pedagogic tools, content, and resources, not just for feminist research but also for diversity, access, and inclusion.

No change can happen overnight, as shifts need to occur in public discourse and mindsets related to feminism, gender, and sexuality. Japleen noted that the work has to be done from the bottom up, and that it will not be easy or quick, given the prevailing discourse on gender, sexuality, and feminism. For instance, it took long for the reforms of Indian laws on sexual violence and rape to be effected, even after the events of December 2012. Still, changes in formative education could address these gaps, as children could learn to be equitable and sensitive, and thus contribute to building a feminist public.

The current lack of women in public spaces indicates that everyday spaces need to become more inclusive. There are clear gaps in how cities are designed and built, with little regard for the limitations of women, children, the elderly, or people with disabilities. For example, interviewees discussed how many women report feeling cold in air-conditioned offices, which is the result of most workplaces being designed primarily for men.[75] Further, women often find it difficult to use everyday articles (setting up a gas cylinder, for example) or vehicles, which are normally designed based on male bodies and related parameters of strength, size, and comfort.

As we learnt from our many conversations, improvements in public infrastructure, including information infrastructures, are informed by an evolving discourse with multiple stakeholders. Feminist infrastructure could connote different aspects of infrastructure development. Indeed, Urvashi suggested that feminist infrastructures need to be institutionalised, not necessarily as physical establishments or organisations, but as a set of practices that facilitate the development of infrastructures to create a level and accessible playing field for diverse actors. As she and others pointed out, the feminist movement has enabled the creation of safe spaces for women to speak out. But since the digital transition, it has been difficult to determine how these spaces have changed, who has access, and how much. One cannot, therefore, presume

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[73] "Smashboard Has Won the UNESCO-Netexplo Grand Prix". What Is It All About?, *Smashboard*, 15 April, 2021.
https://smashboard.org/smashboard-has-won-the-unesco-netexplo-grand-prix-what-is-it-all-about/
[74] McKenzie Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto*, Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 2004
[75] Umair Irfan and Climatewire, "Your Thermostat May Be Sexist", *Scientific American*, 4 August 2015,
  https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/your-thermostat-may-be-sexist1/.

that these spaces are always safe – they can easily and quickly get vitiated, which brings up the question of regulation. And, in light of the conversation around freedom of speech, regulation is complicated. The ownership, control, and regulation of online platforms, especially social media, thus becomes crucial, as noted by several interviewees and workshop participants. Many acknowledged the role of social media, blogging and messaging platforms, applications, and proprietary software and tools, within the ecosystem of digital publishing and online content creation, not only to facilitate the creation of original content, but also to reach a large audience. This is alongside the global growth of big tech players and the corporatisation of media, and their influence on the development of technology and related discourse on free speech, safety, and human rights. Along with a discussion on alternatives, such as open source software, there is also a mindful and critical engagement with how this digital ecosystem informs the practice and politics of the interviewees' work. The development of feminist internet, or feminist infrastructures therefore needs to account for the existing landscape of information technologies in India, its challenges and affordances.

Paromita described the rise of a 'commercial interest' in feminism, where content gets attention because it is written by a woman or grapples with feminism, gender, or sexuality.[76] This has resulted in a certain palatable language for the work, which does not overturn existing notions of rights, identities, or sexual choice etc. and is therefore not disruptive of existing structures. It is imperative to consider how feminist infrastructures may develop in this context, and what they might look like. There is a need for the development of infrastructure to be accompanied by an awareness of the prevailing discourse. Most importantly, Interviewee 12 observed that feminist infrastructure and discourse need to be uncomplicated and accessible to/driven by those who need it the most, and their voices need to be at the forefront of its imagination. A number of the interviewees thus highlighted the need for deeper feminist discourse and the growth of digital cultures to build feminist infrastructures in the different ways and forms that it is understood.

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[76] For more on this, see Nancy Fraser's work on feminism and its engagement with neoliberalism through a shift to identity politics and recognition of cultural difference, and an ambivalence in contemporary discourse as a result of market mechanisms harnessing feminist ideas for capitalist accumulation. Nancy Fraser, "Feminism's Two Legacies: A Tale of Ambivalence", *South Atlantic Quarterly* 114, no. 4 (2015): 699–712, https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-3157089.

5 Conclusion

The interviews and workshops offer several important insights on the many factors that have informed online feminist content creation and curation, and the growth of inclusive and accessible digital infrastructures over the last few years. The question of sustainability came up in most conversations on feminist platforms, given that many of these initiatives have been built by and continue to be anchored by individuals or small teams, many of them women. Writing on gender, sexuality, and feminism forms a key part of the collections of most mainstream publishing houses, even though a substantial portion of the academic and theoretical work still comes from feminist publishing houses and university presses.[77] While interviewees noted how interest in commercial viability of feminist content has grown, this still comes with certain challenges, such as stories on women, gender, and sexuality still being usually classified as 'soft content', thereby receiving less space and visibility, and the use of certain kind of language and tenor that make the stories more acceptable and unobtrusive to readers, often diminishing its impact.

The digital realm has opened up new spaces for content production, paving the way for diverse multimedia content, including user-generated work. But the cost effectiveness of digital platforms is a key consideration. These platforms have infrastructural requirements, such as storage and server costs, maintenance, and constant upskilling of staff. Importantly, access and digital literacy are key impediments to fully leveraging the benefits of these platforms. These issues are further compounded by the dearth of content on gender, sexuality, and feminism in Indian languages, and the technological and conceptual challenges associated with digitisation, translation, and archiving of material. Sustaining small, independent, and predominantly women-led publishing or content creation and curation platforms, especially those working in Indian languages, on gender, sexuality, and feminism, and in the intersections of caste and disability, has been a challenge. The COVID-19 pandemic coupled with the growing challenges to free speech and expression, the rise of mis/disinformation and hate speech, developments in internet regulation, and ownership of media platforms have shaped the evolution of the publishing, media, and creative industries. These impacts can be seen in feminist content creation spaces as well, both in positive and negative ways.

A key point that emerges from the discussion on sustainability is regarding legacy. Some content creation spaces have been active for years, while others only survived for a short while. Still, their contributions to the discourse on feminism, gender justice, human rights, and inclusion are significant. Documentation and archiving of these contributions, particularly those in the digital medium, is therefore pressing. Archival practice is slowly making a digital turn, especially in India. Creating a feminist digital archive brings to the fore important questions of ethics, access, and inclusion, particularly in the bid to centre the voices of the most vulnerable. Feminist metadata practices and critical curation have brought attention to invisibilities within digital archives, and where technologies can potentially help.[78] Importantly, it also reiterates the status of archives as

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[77] Ritu Menon, "Feminist Publishing Today: Victim of Its Own Success?", *Logos* 12, no. 1 (2001): 33–38, https://doi.org/10.2959/logo.2001.12.1.33.

[78] Nicola Wilson, Claire Battershill, Helena Clarkson, Matthew N. Hannah, Illya Nokhrin, and Elizabeth Wilson Gordon, "Digital Critical Archives, Copyright, and Feminist Praxis", *Archival Science* 22, no. 1 (2002): 295–317, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-021-09384-x.

epistemological sites, its role in feminist historiography and subversive potential to address social inequities.[79]

Sustainability, fundraising, and labour are inextricably linked to the conversations on feminist infrastructures. Many content creation and publication platforms are self-financed and managed by the founders, often with staff playing multiple roles. Interviewees spoke about the challenges with fundraising for their work, given their limited resources and the general lack of understanding and consensus among most private and public organisations on priority areas of funding feminist work. Fundraising for feminist and gender justice work is part of a larger feminist fundraising ecosystem, which involves navigating global economic workflows, dynamics of power, and the representation of marginalised or beneficiary communities in decision-making processes.[80] Our interviews delved into how to build this funding ecosystem, from setting up feminist resource centres to improving fundraising strategies to support small and independent businesses.

Setting up and running independent content production and publication platforms is labour-intensive. But this labour is most often rendered invisible, especially in the digital sphere. The rapid growth of digital platforms and social media has put organisations, particularly those working with limited resources, on steep learning curves of upskilling and multi-tasking. In addition to these forms, immaterial, affective[81] networks of labour and care engendered through these spaces have been revealed in the past decade, especially during the pandemic. Feminist labour in digital spaces has, therefore, consistently navigated the challenge of being invisible in the quest for creative expression, advocacy, activism, and freedom of speech.

This research highlights the urgent need for comprehensive free speech laws that support publishers and content creators. There is a lack of explicit laws against hate speech in India, and vague and subjective indicators of what constitutes hate speech in existing regulations.[82] Defining hate speech would enable platforms and publications to pursue substantive action in cases of online harassment. Similarly, the absence of well-defined laws against gendered mis/disinformation and OGBV also needs to be addressed, so that the existing regulations are not misused to take down content. The current lack of transparency and accountability regarding content moderation and removal on social media platforms enables the spread of hate speech and the suppression of free speech.[83] At present, social media regulations also allow for excessive removal of content, further threatening free speech on these platforms.[84] Policy interventions are hence necessary to mitigate censorship on digital platforms. Interviewees and workshop

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[79] Murray, "Writing New Sastras", 105–117.

[80] Kellea Miller and Rochelle Jones, "Toward a Feminist Funding Ecosystem", Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), October 2019, https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/AWID_Funding_Ecosystem_2019_FINAL_Eng.pdf.

[81] Kaitlynn Mendes, "Digital Feminist Labour: The Immaterial, Aspirational and Affective Labour of Feminist Activists and Fempreneurs", *Women's History Review* 31, no. 4 (2021): 693–712, https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2021.1944353.

[82] Archit Lohani, "Countering Disinformation and Hate Speech Online: Regulation and User Behavioural Change", *ORF Occasional Papers*, 25 January 2021, https://www.orfonline.org/research/countering-disinformation-and-hate-speech-online/.

[83] Akriti Gaur, "Moderate Globally Impact Locally: Tackling Social Media's Hate Speech Problem in India", *Yale Law School*, 28 September 2020, https://law.yale.edu/moderate-globally-impact-locally-tackling-social-medias-hate-speech-problem-india.

[84] Torsha Sarkar, Gurshabad Grover, Raghav Ahooja, Pallavi Bedi, and Divyank Katira, "On the Legality and Constitutionality of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021", The Centre for Internet & Society, 21 June 2021, https://cis-india.org/internet-governance/legality-constitutionality-il-rules-digital-media-2021.

participants also stressed the need for more robust redressal mechanisms to counter online harassment. Legal infrastructure could play a key role in the building and operation of these mechanisms. Moreover, exclusion and harm of marginalised communities within existing digital infrastructures can be countered by prioritising the rights of these groups through regulation.

The research illustrates the role of design in communicating principles of feminist ethics and care. It presents the need for developing a set of feminist principles for designers and visual artists. Open source and democratic design practices can support the development of feminist design principles. These could be applied to support body positivity, sex positivity, diversity in caste and gender, multilingual content, and accessibility. In designing and developing online content creation and publication spaces, web hosting platforms, software, and visual assets can be made more accessible. As the criticism of the interfaces of social media platforms grows due to manipulative practices such as deceptive design[85], the application of feminist principles would enable safe and inclusive online spaces.

Feminist publications, content creation and curation spaces have enabled the mainstream discourse on feminism, gender, and sexuality to evolve and become more visible. These spaces have brought to light the intersectional aspects of feminist discourse by facilitating conversations on caste, class, religion, accessibility, language justice, gender, and sexual rights. As multiple interviewees pointed out, feminist publications are often stereotyped as solely advocates of women's issues. However, in practice, they offer space to discuss various concerns, such as public infrastructure, labour, governance, creative expression and access.[86] Feminist publishing, content creation and curation spaces provide a platform to people across communities, and thereby contribute immensely to the development of feminist infrastructures.

A crucial learning from this study is the need to build infrastructures that are inclusive of and accessible by people from marginalised and structurally disadvantaged communities. While we present the perspectives of a few writers and artists who work on issues of caste, sexuality, and disability, there is a need for a more focused discussion on the intersectional aspects of the larger discourse on digital content creation. We aim to further the research in this space, looking at the question of caste in digital content creation, and contextualising questions of gender and sexuality within the work being led by researchers and practitioners engaged in anti-caste, sexual rights, and gender justice work in India.

This report is an initial foray into the vast field of feminist infrastructures, with feminist content creation and curation being an entry point into the evolving politics and practice of the space, especially on digital platforms. Online feminist publishing, content creation and curation spaces are key actors in this discourse, and will continue to play a role in the imagination of feminist infrastructures. By gathering multiple interpretations of the term, this report offers insights into the existing challenges and possibilities for how to envision, co-create, and sustain feminist infrastructures in India.

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[85] "Deceptive design patterns in social media platform interfaces: how to recognise and avoid them", *European Data Protection Board*, 14 February 2023.
https://edpb.europa.eu/system/files/2023-02/edpb_03-2022_guidelines_on_deceptive_design_patterns_in_social_media_platform_interfaces_v2_en_0.pdf

[86] Namita Aavriti Malhotra, Tigist Shewarega Hussen, and Mariana Fossatti, "How to Build a Feminist Internet and Why It Matters", *APRIA Journal* 4, no. 4 (2022): 3–22,
https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/feminist-design-how-build-feminist-internet-and-why-it-matters.
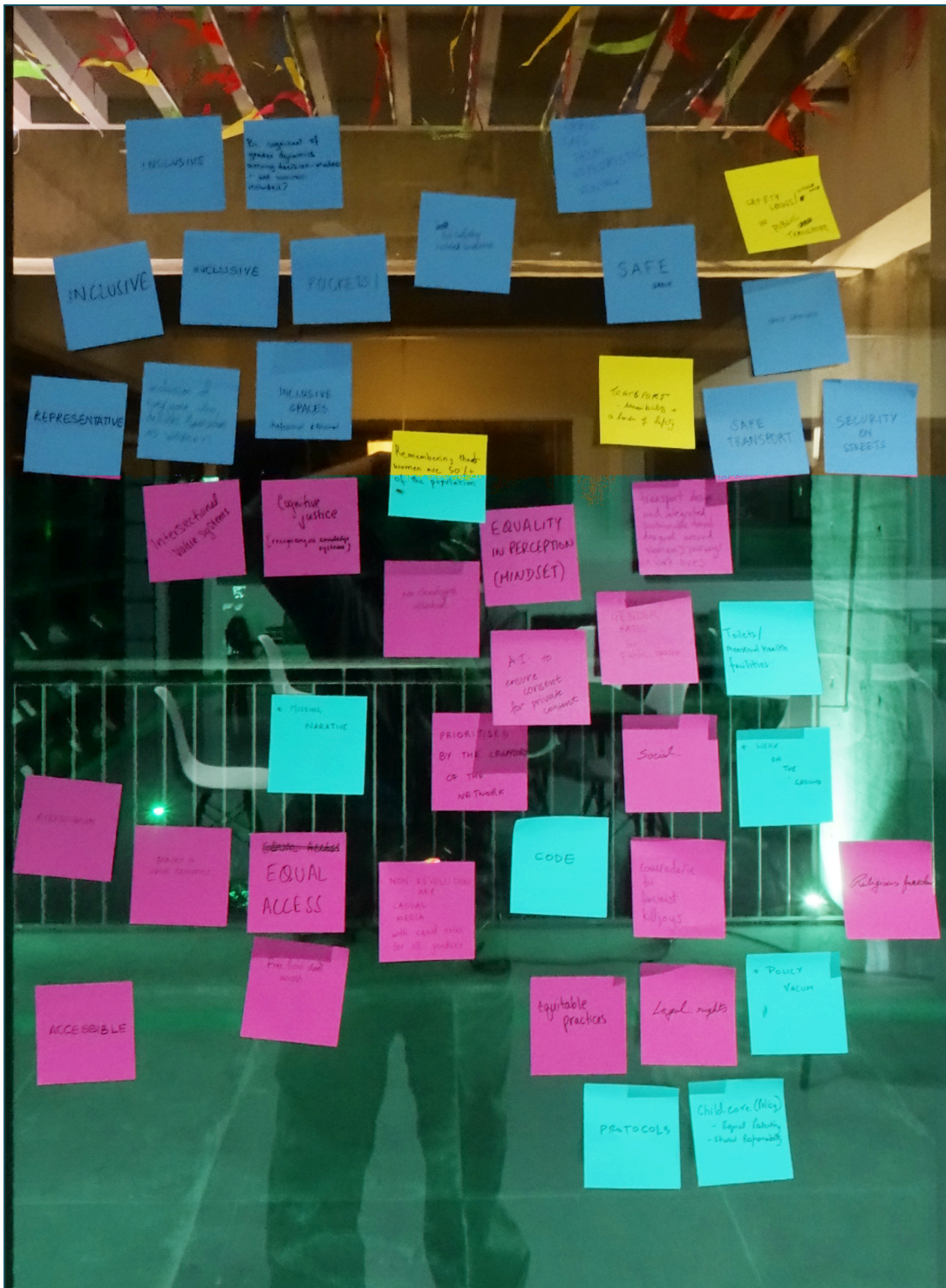
Appendix

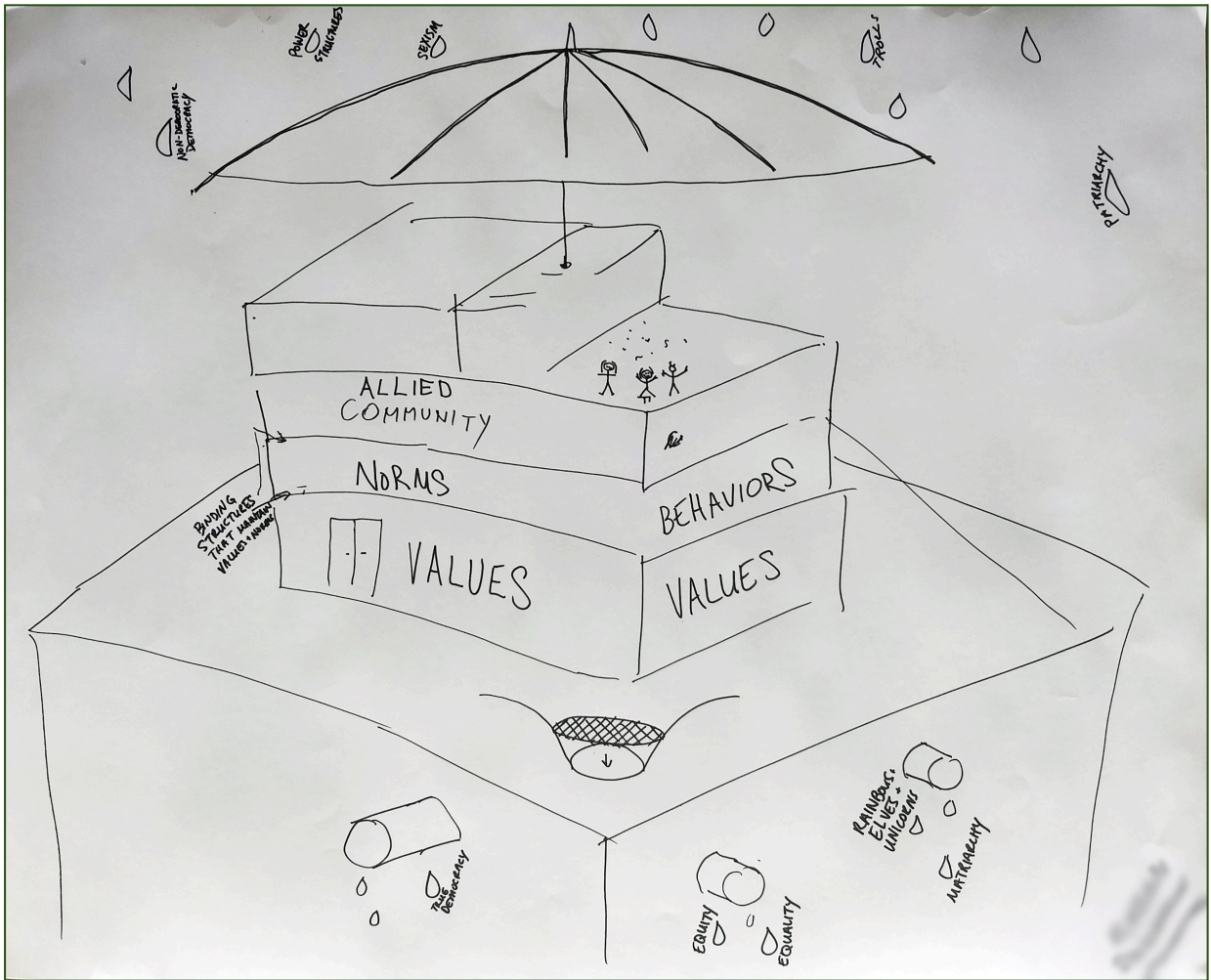*Image 01: Keywords from the workshop at the Unbox Festival*

Image 02: Feminist infrastructure visualised inspired by rainwater harvesting by one of the groups in the workshop
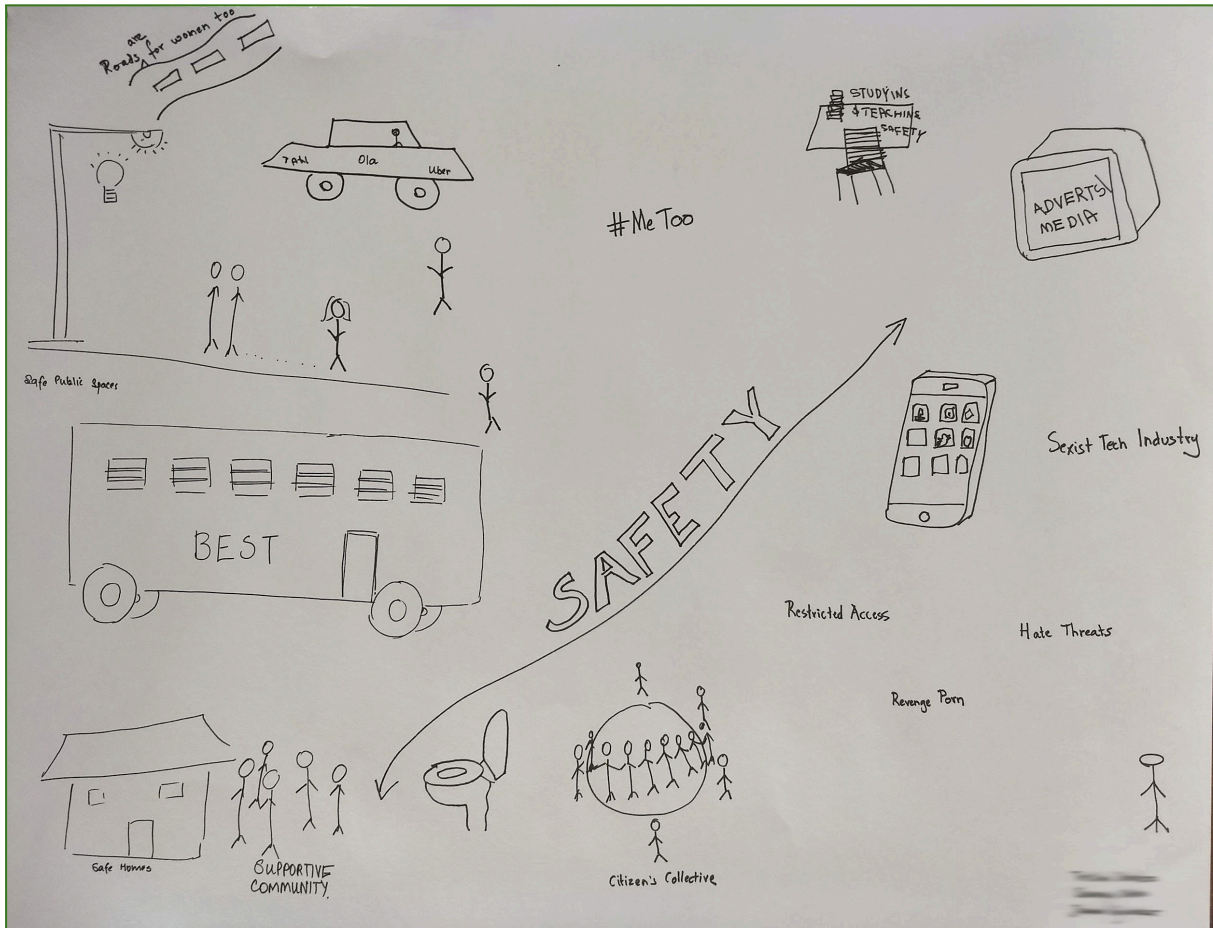
Image 03: Feminist infrastructure visualised with "safety" as the central theme by one of the groups in the workshop

MANIFESTO

Code of Conduct — for large institutions and smaller cultivated communities

Code of Conduct — how can this be implemented or moderated

need to know if this is being moderated by humans or by bots/algorithms → women → properly diverse panel of people

Safe Spaces

access to internet for women in villages
— what does a better way access to internet and education or how to use the internet

feminist open source software and hardware

if reading code is like reading a novel by a white man... blond blue eyed
feminist code is ......
happening in 10 to 15 years
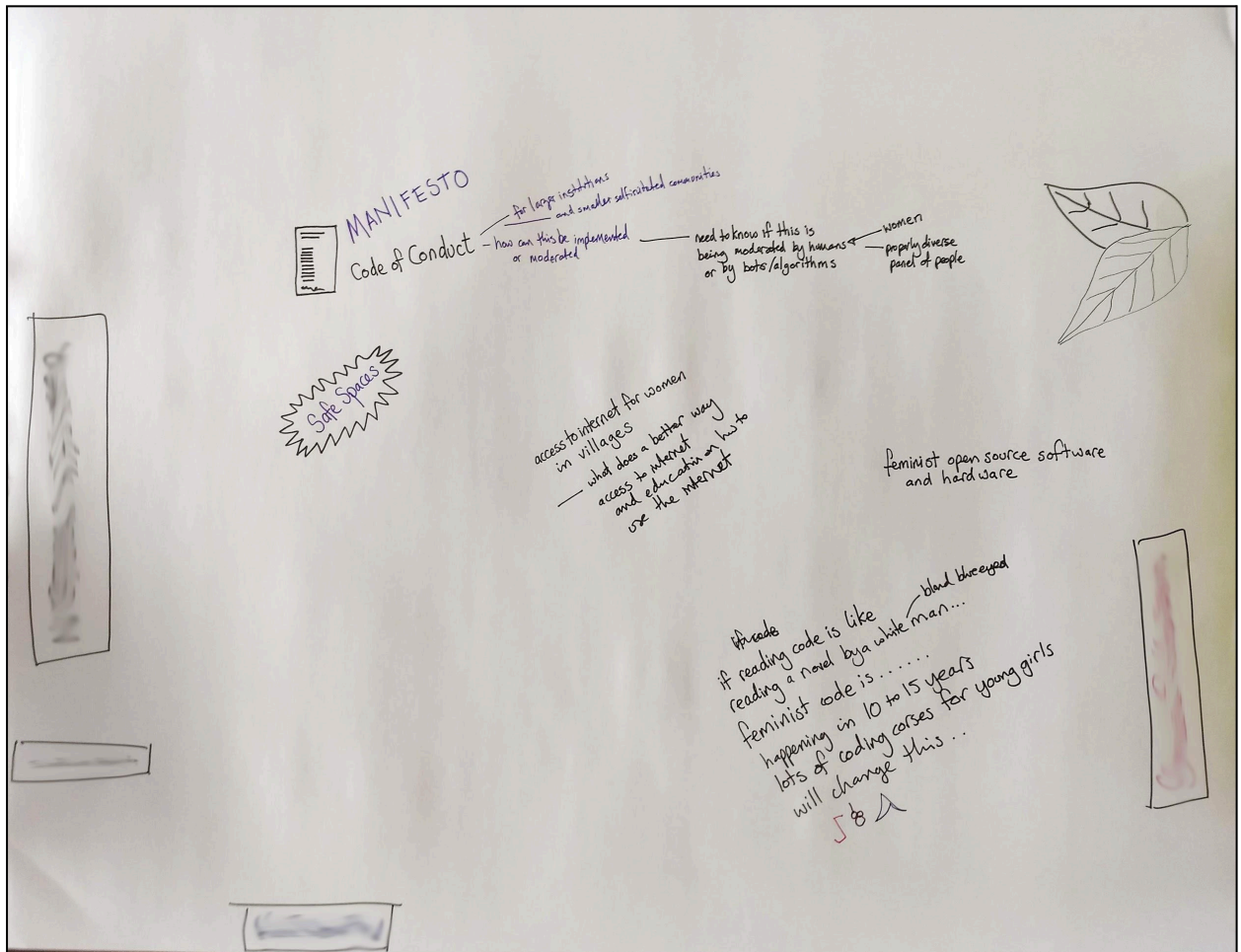lots of coding corses for young girls
will change this ..

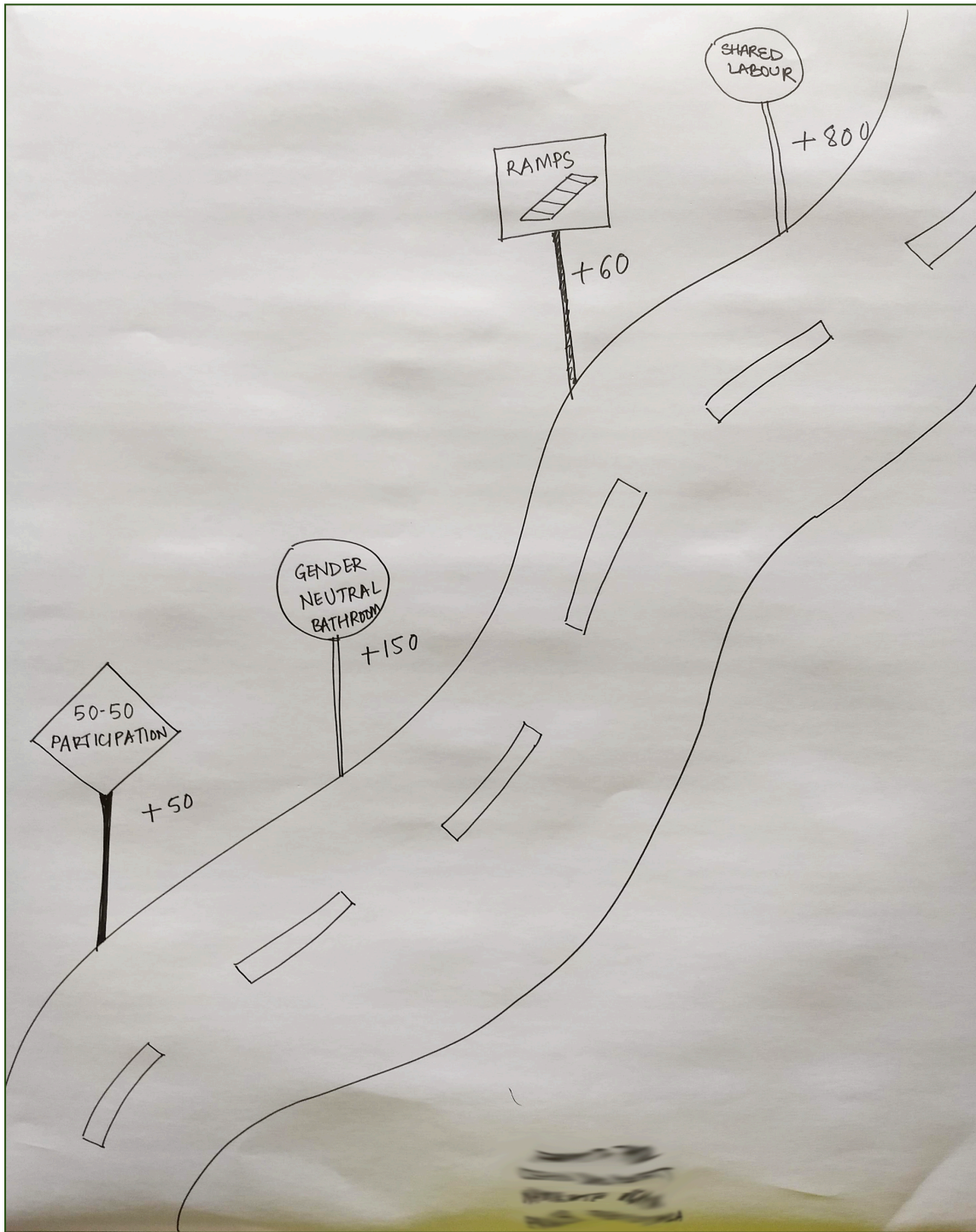*Image 04: Feminist infrastructure visualised as a manifesto by one of the groups in the workshop*

Image 05: Feminist infrastructure visualised as a roadmap with several goals by one of the groups in the workshop

DD#10: Creative Interactions with Policies
Photos by Navin Kumar

Image 06: Keywords from the workshop conducted at Design Dialogues

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