

*Public Wall Art on Tulsi Pipe
Road, Mumbai: The Indian
post-millennial contemporary,
sexual violence and 'femaleness'.*

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Introduction and Context

This paper examines a selection of nine public wall art images, photographed during fieldwork on an approximately 2 km stretch of Tulsi Pipe Road (see Fig. 1), Mumbai in April 2016 and December 2017.



Fig. 1

As part of this fieldwork, I made contact with an artist who took part in the creation of this public artwork and I learnt that this section of wall on Tulsi Pipe Road had been painted in late February 2016. The work had been facilitated by a corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative through the Mumbai-based company Arcil, an ‘asset reconstruction company’. To show solidarity with, as well as express personal interpretation of the *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan mission*¹, the CSR initiative called volunteers to join ‘The Art Walk 360’² and in doing so,

1. “Swachh Bharat Mission Urban,” accessed February 15, 2021, <http://swachhbharaturban.gov.in/>
2. Arcil ARC India Ltd, “Invite to The Art Walk 360,” Facebook, February 20, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/arcilarms/photos/a.174669312576152.40182.169693653073718/1051597664883308/?type=3>

invited volunteers to respond to the four themes listed on Facebook, which were: 1) Heritage & Culture, 2) People, 3) Environment and Social Issues and 4) Joy & Harmony, ‘encouraging talent and passing on relevant social message’[sic]. I learnt that many of the volunteers lived in the area and were not necessarily employed by the Arcil company. Importantly, the artwork produced from this activity is varied, demonstrating a rich interpretation of these four themes. Specifically, though, for our discussion here, I focus on artwork that conveys social messages of violence against women and girls and the ‘social issue’ of women’s empowerment. The fact that some of the volunteers/artists interpreted the four themes in a manner which foregrounded the topic of ‘women’s empowerment’ is significant given that this was not a prescribed theme as such. It might be productive to consider this particular prevalence of ‘women’s empowerment’ artworks as one which demonstrates the volunteers/artists repurposing the Tulsi Pipe Road wall as a canvas to make visible ‘women’ in a public space, as Bhattacharyya (2015) writes: ‘... access to violence-free and safe public space is the basic right of a woman. Yet, the greatest challenge relates to the alarming threat to women’s safety and freedom of movement in public spaces.’ (1350)

From a significant body of public artwork spread along the approximate 2 km stretch of Tulsi Pipe Road that specifically communicates issues of sexual violence and

women's empowerment, I have chosen nine images for consideration here. These images relate to ideas of 'femaleness' and how these ideas are made visible and thus documented through the medium of visual arts. Notably, these images encode recent social memory by their invocation of notorious rape cases (and sexual violence), the images call for action ('Save the Girl Child', also the condemnation of violence) and they communicate messages of empowerment and societal freedom for women. As I have written elsewhere (Dawson Varughese, 2017), there is a uniformity to the Tulsi Pipe Road wall due not only to the whitewashing that covers its bricks but also a uniformity due to its inherent physical structure; the brick wall separates the road from the western line train tracks and is constructed of individual panels, linked by brick (and concrete) pillars. This specific construction has allowed the artists to create individual panels (as canvases), and the length of the artwork along Tulsi Pipe appears somewhat 'curated', with each individual piece organised by the framing of the pillars, left and right. This appropriation of the walls for artistic endeavour underscores how Indian streets according to Edensor (1990) 'are never merely "machines for shopping" but the site for numerous activities' (206) and moreover, how here on Tulsi Pipe, the street has been employed as a site for social messaging (of the 'old-fashioned' kind).

In order to refer to the selection of images (Figures 2–10) with some clarity, I have attributed captions. I have,

where possible, formulated captions using text from the artwork panel itself; where this was not possible, I have used descriptors pertaining to the scene portrayed in the artwork. The captions are:

Fig. 2 'Wings and Shackles' April 2016

Fig. 3 'Out from the Cage' April 2016

Fig. 4 'Seize the World' April 2016

Fig. 5 'Drive my Bike' April 2016

Fig. 6 'The Secret Touch' April 2016

Fig. 7 'Let me see the World' April 2016

Fig. 8 'Save Girl Child' April 2016

Fig. 9 'Wings and Shackles', Dec 2017

Fig. 10 '#Missing Girls', Dec 2017

By way of thematic classification, I divide images 2–8 into two groups. Images 2 to 5 are discussed in relation to the paper's interest in how the Tulsi Pipe Road wall art negotiates contested ideas of the post-millennial contemporary Indian woman. Images 6 to 8 are discussed in relation to how the wall art somewhat sidesteps sites of violence that all too often accompany the re-articulation of gender relations. [Figures 9 and 10 pertain to the paper's concluding remarks.] With both sets of images, I am interested in how the medium of public wall art complicates ideas of representation of women and the documentation of gender issues, given that the interlocutors are somewhat not visible (although not invisible) in terms of their presence when compared to physical participation in demonstrations, petition signing or having a

virtual presence on social media. Here, the ‘visual script writers’ of these artistic panels are visible specifically through their visual and textual messaging. Although there is sometimes a signature for the artwork panels on Tulsi Pipe Road, it appears only as a first name and thus it is difficult to concretely identify the artist. Some pieces are dated (as February 2016) and a few carry a Twitter or Facebook identifier. Of the images analysed here, one image (Fig. 5 ‘Drive my Bike’) is signed by the artist using both first and last names. Later in the paper I suggest that because this image ‘celebrates’ the female through both its form and content, it is socially more ‘agreeable’ for the artist to be associated with the image compared to the images of ‘The Secret Touch’ (Fig. 6), ‘Let me see the World’ (Fig. 7) and ‘Save Girl Child’ (Fig. 8) which register the horrors of gender violence. Although ‘Let me see the World’ (Fig. 7) is signed using a first name, the other two images do not carry an artist’s signature or identifier. In order to place these images in the longer context of Tulsi Pipe Road, in my concluding thoughts, I include two images taken in December 2017. These images show both the effects of the passage of time on the artwork as well as how the wall is appropriated for the creation of new wall art in response to ongoing social issues and the need for both documentation and mobilisation on such topics.

Through the semiotic analysis of the images, the paper suggests that the positioning of the wall art and the broader context of public, participatory wall art creates

a social messaging space which combines both older (established) ways of ‘seeing’ with newer ways of ‘seeing’ but both engage with the documentation of social issues.

Analysis

Figures 2–5: ‘Wings and Shackles’ (2); ‘Out from the Cage’ (3); ‘Seize the World’ (4); ‘Drive my Bike’(5).

Meenakshi Thapan (2004) suggests that we need not always think of the ‘new’ (Indian) woman ‘in the context of a charged and transformed modernity’ (413); rather, she writes:

... she should be viewed in the fluid and marked nature of her identity as a woman, which is shaped and redefined in the everyday experiences of women as they both contest and submit to the images and constructs that impinge on their sense, their emotions, and their material and social conditions. (2004, 413)

Fig. 2 (‘Wings and Shackles’) signed by ‘Simar’, depicts a faceless female shackled to a man’s head.



Fig. 2

From her red sari blouse emanate wings which spread back and away; strong, full of white feathers. We notice the red tips of the feathers forming the outline of the wings which appear to join seamlessly onto the woman's body. The red stands in contrast to the bleu clair sari and thus the red seen around the woman's wrists, ear and ankle is foregrounded. The ring of red on the wrists suggest bangles (traditionally a sign of savarna Hindu marriage) and around the ankle, pyal (anklets), except that in the place of one of the pyal is a grey metal clasp, part of a chain shackle that is attached to the male figure located to the right of the frame. Like the female, the male figure

is also faceless save for a large, black moustache. Their common 'facelessness' might speak of an 'every wo/man' whilst we wonder if the man's imagined eyes are being covered by his turban, and we might read this as signalling an anonymity of sorts as he (half-)recognises his wrongdoing. This potential admission of guilt stands in stark opposition to the masculinity portrayed here; his oversized moustache as well as his large red pagri (turban), both of which are set to a flat gunmetal grey complexion. In foregrounding his masculinity, the pagri and the moustache sit in direct opposition to the female's light colourway. As he remains static, she attempts to move into flight, her feet pushing away from the man; the play of movement against stillness highlights the tension and underscores a resoluteness – on the part of both – to stand their ground. In her right hand she holds what seems to be a sign of the 'law', a parchment-like document, rolled up like a scroll. The scroll points the way forward as she looks back, pushing away from the man to whom she is shackled. The grey shackle is curiously placed on the side of the man's head, where an ear would ordinarily be. This positioning suggests that he hears her every move; thus, she is never able to move away from him, no matter how quiet or light-footed she may be.

We might read Figure 2 as being redolent of what Lau (2006) states when she writes: '... the domestic space of home continues to be important not only as the world

South Asian women primarily occupy, but also as a space loaded with implications of their worth and their social positions.' (1114.) Despite the lack of any 'domestic/home scene' portrayed here, Figure 2 seems to explore such a space as it blends not only tropes of the masculine and feminine, placing them in dialogue and tension, but it also blends tropes of the old and new. The shackle is an object reminiscent of medieval times associated with being held captive and with torture, whilst its rendering in metal grey here, attached abstractly to the man's face, is somewhat redolent of a filmic superhero-villain scene of the 20th century (Mumbai as the centre of Bollywood production). Read in this way, the female's wings symbolise more than an angel's; they empower her (as a heroine) and the red/blue colourway takes on the hues of a superheroine's costume, the scroll in her right hand underscores this position of empowerment as it signifies access to education and law-given rights. This 2016 image of a woman's 'moment' of resistance reminds us of what Uberoi (1990) wrote thirty years ago: 'The authentic voices and genres of women, and the modes and moments of their resistance to patriarchal domination have to be located and celebrated in a self-consciously subaltern project.' (WS-41) Thus, Figure 2 takes on broader meanings and implications as it returns society to the on-going debates of patriarchy, gender and choice in post-millennial India.

We find in Fig. 3 that the female is also portrayed with wings.



Fig. 3

Unlike Figure 2, however, which depicts the male as a concrete obstacle to her freedom, in Figure 3 the ‘freedom’ semiotic is underscored by the depiction of a cage which is surrounded by a tree from which menacing and predatory branches appear as arms and hands, reaching out to grab the woman. As her black hair is blown behind her, the strands of hair almost touch the black branches of the tree, and this near-connection might be read as a sort of anchoring or rootedness. This as-

pect of the image seems to suggest that she must cut loose from that which she has always known or been anchored to because, in order to flee from something, one must first have belonged to it in some way. The woman walks defiantly from a dark colourway into a light one, the warm yellows and reds welcoming her as she looks forward, pushing her way into the light. The female here is young and this youthful depiction invokes a sense of hope that emanates from the scene into which she walks. The manner in which the female is dressed in this image is noteworthy as it encapsulates Indian female ways of dressing (langa davani, ghagra choli as examples) yet simultaneously transcends Indian ways of dressing, given that a long, full skirt with such a top might be commonly worn elsewhere in the world (known variously as: flowy skirt, Boho skirt, Kanga, Maxi). As with Fig. 2, the wings on the female in Fig. 3 are effortlessly drawn into the body, suggesting an almost primordial ability to be free. Notwithstanding their fantastical semiotic, the wings painted here in a light cream blend effortlessly with the woman's arms, extending into beautiful elongated arms, swept back as she faces forward into the light. Despite the common theme of 'freedom' across Figures 2 and 3, Figure 2, through its depiction of shackling, the lack of facial features and the slightly robotic, mechanistic trope of the male figure, makes for a more challenging image to see. Figure 3, with its softer, warmer tones to the right of the scene, suggests a hopefulness that is lacking in Figure 2. Both images invoke a more 'empowered wom-

an', but in Figure 2, she is depicted as being bolder in her quest for independence; a show of force towards that which holds her back.

Figure 4 is somewhat more impactful on the gazer as it depicts a female viewed in profile, her hair ablaze, her right hand elevated and open, an image of the 'blue planet' levitating, spinning in her near-grasp.



Fig. 4

The woman is striking – her large almond-shaped eye, long eyelashes, arched eyebrow, full lips and angular nose filling a face whose strong jawline gives way to a solid neck and shoulders. The woman's gaze is intense as she looks at the Earth, spinning in her hand. The colourway, with her yellow-gold skin and fiery red hair,

suggests an otherworldly-ness akin to a fantastical being or a goddess. The image invites us to look even though we are taken aback by her presence. The image is rendered powerful through these facial features, the colour palette and, not least because she is depicted as holding our planet in her hands. This gesture seems to question a sense of authority: who holds the world in their hands? In turn, it dispels ideas that such an authority might be gendered as 'he'. This very public and emboldened 'presence' responds to Nilufer E. Bharucha's (1998) call for female discourse to break out of the antharpurs and zenannas, to 'tear apart the purdahs and demolish[ing] the architectural enclosures of a misogynist patriarchy' (93). And yet, despite the striking nature of this image (Fig. 4), the presence of distinct fantastical tropes risks rendering the message of this image indistinct. If we consider that this image is one that portrays the female identity as strong, courageous and bold (as expressed through the scale and size of the image, its colour palette and foregrounded 'female' facial features), then the couching of such a figure in the fantastical I suggest, questions the reality of such a portrayal in relation to everyday India, and specifically women's lived experiences. Figure 4 is significantly more fantastical than the 'wing' semiotic of Figures 2 and 4 which functions as a metaphor for 'societal freedom'. Figure 4 moves significantly beyond such a portrayal of societal freedom, taking such a 'right' as a given, since here, the woman holds the world in her hand.

It is perhaps Figure 5 that harnesses the bold colourway

preferred in Figure 4 but privileges portrayal of the ‘real’ over the ‘fantastical’.



Fig. 5

Figure 5 uses a common everyday gendered-trope of Indian life, that of riding a motorbike. Importantly, the bike in Figure 5 is not a scooter, it is a motorbike that men drive. The bike depicted in Figure 5 is redolent of those depicted in Bollywood films (such as in the opening credits of *Jab tak hai Jaan*) as well as being the kind of bike showcased in many advertising campaigns for Hero Honda or Royal Enfield (and for related products such as tyres, fuel and oil), thus underscoring the maleness of this mode of transportation. Bollywood actor John Abraham’s video ‘Why Do I Ride?’ epitomises this popular, cultural symbol. Through this short, filmic vid-

eo he explores ideas about why he chooses to ride a motorbike. Freedom, choice and problem-solving (getting lost, navigating difficult terrain, as examples) feature in the video, which advertises the 'Castrol Power Biking' app for smartphones. It is against this veneration of the Royal Enfield-style motorbike and, by extension, contemporary ideas of (Indian) masculinity that we might begin to read the image of Figure 5. The gleaming dark red motorbike, moving at speed (the indexical lines suggest this, as does the movement in the sari palu and in her hair) is accompanied by a bright yellow sun, emitting its strong rays, and the favourable, bright colourway of the female rider in a blue sari, green blouse, gold jhumka-style earrings and open sandals. The artist signs her work: Vanaja Jadhav.

The woman's gaze is fixed on the road ahead of her; arms flexed, she drives her bike with a steely determination. The celebration of her female Indianness is achieved in the depiction of her clothes and accessories. I suggest that Figure 5 is a curious mix of the everyday and the empowered; the stark line drawing, clear lines and bold artwork suggest a very matter-of-fact state of being, a regular occurrence, whilst the content, the actual central image is otherwise, less than commonplace in its occurrence and presence. The form of this image seems to make something of a connection with Hindu calendar art; its bright, favourable colour palettes, stark line drawings and veneration of the figure in the frame

(see Jain, 2000). Moreover, calendar art is both commonplace and empowered whereby it invites gaze and, importantly, the veneration of higher ideals. In short, in Figure 5 there is no movement from dark to light; this female occupies a current, positive moment and, moreover, she focusses on moving forward as a continuation of that momentum.

Figures 6–8: ‘The Secret Touch’ (6); ‘Let me see the World’ (7); ‘Save Girl Child’ (8)

As we turn to Figures 6 to 8, I consider how the gazer is called to engage with images that depict both the idea of ‘the female’ and the experiences she might encounter, specifically experiences that are challenging to behold as they articulate sites of sexual violence and mistreatment. Moreover, they centre on the young female or, in the case of Figure 8, the unborn female. Phadke (2013) writes of the contemporary moment, saying that, ‘... we live in times that are full of risk for young girls and women – health risks that come from anxieties about body shape or unsafe sex, risks of assault and risks of making choices that undermine self-esteem’ (92–93). The three images analysed in this section underscore and, in turn, document Phadke’s concern for young girls in terms of the ‘risk’ of assault. Figure 6 addresses the topic of child sexual abuse through the panel’s title, ‘The Secret Touch’; a topic that remains widely taboo within society.



Fig. 6

'The Secret Touch' has a childlike simplicity (and naivety) encoded in its artwork. The two-dimensional portrayal of the girl child wearing a pink dress is surrounded by 'bubble-style' typeface painted either side of her. The orange-brown square that frames her focusses the gaze, making the image appear like a photograph taken in a studio or at school. As the girl is centre frame, she stands inert, staring forward into a nothingness, her mouth clamped shut whilst muddy handprints wander over her legs and torso. The use of a handprint, laid on top of the painted image, further documents the reality of sexual abuse. The handprint 'identifies' its owner and is unique to the person and his/her identity as an abuser.

It invades the painting and, as the hands climb over the body, the gazer is called to imagine this violation of personal space. This intrusion into intimate, personal space is rendered more acute by the positioning of this wall art in a public space – Tulsi Pipe Road. The passing-by of commuters, residents and even schoolchildren gives visibility to this piece of artwork by the very fact that they walk past the girl and ‘witness’ a violation of this, her personal space and body. The interaction of this intimate sexual violence couched in the socially taboo yet embedded within the very public space of Tulsi Pipe Road gives force to this message, urging the gazers to look on, even if, then, this is to look away.

Figure 7 is also engaged in visually narrating the taboo.



Fig. 7

Here in this image signed by 'Hrutuja' (some of the letters are not clearly visible), the girl is centre stage. She is flanked to her left and right by silhouetted girls 'swinging' from a tree. To the right of the girl, the tree is bathed in a warm orange background; a young girl sits on a wooden swing and the text underneath reads 'what they deserve'. To the left, a cold blue background reveals a silhouetted girl, her hair and skirt in the breeze as she 'swings' from the tree by a rope around her neck. Under this image, the text reads 'what they get'. This dichotomy of lived reality and hoped-for reality is joined by the wall art's plea: 'let me see the world'. A bright-faced girl peeps out of the scene, her hand suggesting that she wishes to climb out and 'see the world'. The disturbing image of the silhouetted body, hanging from the tree, makes a ready connection with the 2014 case in Uttar Pradesh where two girls were found hanging from a tree near their village although it should be stated that there have been many reported and documented cases of women and girls who have been killed or have committed suicide in the wake of sexual violence. However, I make particular mention of the 2014 Uttar Pradesh case here because it garnered significant domestic and international attention. It was covered in detail by the media for several reasons – the girls were reportedly gang-raped before their death; the investigation was poorly managed and there was a report stating that the victims were from the Dalit community – but what has remained in the public memory is the circulation of the disturbing images showing the dead girls

hanging from the tree. Of the seven images from 2016, it is Figure 7 that articulates the act of gendered violence in the most straightforward terms, since the image of the female corpse hanging from the tree is graphic in the sense that it cannot be misinterpreted for some other act. Moreover, the artist's text in the bottom half of the panel is equally bold in its foregrounding of the personal pronoun 'YOU'. This direct call out to the gazer places the responsibility for young girls' safety and well-being with the passer-by.

Unlike Figure 7 that calls its gazers to action and to responsibility, Figure 8, with its bold blue, black and red colourway, seems to 'simply' call its gazers to 'save girl child'.



Fig. 8

The leaves shown growing from the vine-like letters sug-

gest vitality as the buds of leaves form on the branches, growing into full, green leaves. The vine-like branch is created through the blending of the graphemes 'S' and 'C'. They form a line that curls its way (lovingly) around the 'female' embryo. Central to the image, the symbol that traditionally identifies biological gender – Mars for 'male', Venus for 'female' – has also been blended, creating, like the changed-grapheme (of S and C), an artistic use of space and, importantly, a re-articulation of gender relations. Although the biological symbol appears at first glance as the Venus symbol, the placement of the protruding line from the circle is in a different direction to how it is usually placed. Rather than the line facing downwards (towards the pavement in this case), here we see the line mirroring the direction of the line on the 'male' Mars symbol (upper-right quadrant). Importantly, we note that the artist has not painted the Mercury symbol (assigned to represent transgender identities) but rather has mindfully insisted on the 'female' Venus symbol, appropriating it by placing it in the position of the 'male' Mars symbol. This creative play with the biological symbols of gender reinforces a message of equality in terms of the right to life. As the image of the embryo itself cannot make its gender apparent (visually), the use of the biological gender symbols communicates the importance of equality before birth and thus underscores the message that the right to life is (and should be) assumed.

Conclusions

The analysis of the images above has been shaped by an interest in how the medium of public wall art complicates ideas of how women (and relatedly, some lived experiences) might be represented and documented. Given that the articulation of women's rights, the expression of their daily experiences, especially when such expressions depict unfavourable and challenging scenarios, often find their voice in demonstrations, petition signing and activism, thus in visible terms, the public artwork on Tulsi Pipe Road in Mumbai is curious in its messaging, given that only a few pieces give direct access to the creator/artist. Since the fieldwork for this project (2017), the last few years have seen an outpouring of visible contestation through street and public space protests in response to both Kashmir's special status being revoked (Article 370), the introduction of the controversial Citizen (Amendment) Act of October 2019 and the farmers' protests of early 2021 in response to the Modi-government's proposed agriculture reforms. The visibility of people's protest is powerful, not least with 24-hour news coverage domestically, and the various installations of wall art across the country, not only in Mumbai, feeds into this renewed sense of urgency and determination around pressing social topics.

The artists and co-creators of the wall art on Tulsi Pipe Road are visible by way of the artwork itself but, for the most part, invisible in terms of their presence. The

females portrayed in Figures 2–8 have been fashioned by the hands of female (and we might also assume, male) artists who have chosen to depict women and certain lived experiences in India in various ways. As important and valid an expression of identity and representation as these images prove to be, I suggest the wall art, however, sidesteps the sites of violent struggle that often accompany the expression and re-articulation of gender relations. The wall art is present and pervasive, but it remains unidentified when compared to scenes of protest or demonstration. When we recall the protests in the wake of the ‘Nirbhaya’ (or Delhi gang-rape) case and the reaction to the Shakti Mills gang-rape case of 2013 in Mumbai (especially as the victim of the latter was able to report and provide a detailed statement of the events), public outcry, demonstration, activism and protest are visible as people publicly identify (themselves) with the cause. Such reaction and public outcry have served the women’s movement in India well, as Dutta and Sircar (2013) write that, ‘Historically, rape has been the precipitating event that has led the autonomous women’s movement in India to engage with the law and to forge a collective visible presence in public spaces. These engagements have also made talking about women’s sex and sexuality in public respectable, as long as it was focussed on sexual violence.’ (296) Indeed, the topics of gendered violence, rape and abuse circulate in public discourse and become visible via the wall art in addition to their more obvious visual presence as public artwork

on a busy arterial road in the city. Tulsi Pipe Road is particularly significant as a site of wall art in urban centres in India since the artwork covers approximately 2 km of wall, resulting in a sustained and powerful presence. The wall art of Tulsi Pipe Road suggests a process that combines ways of ‘seeing’ as the images are displayed for public consumption, a common practice of ‘seeing’, whether it be film posters, advertising or campaigning in the city of Mumbai. The artwork, although not permanent, has a certain durability given that the paints are waterproof but Figure 9 shows an eventual dilapidation of the artwork over a few years of appearing on the walls (see the same image from 2016 in Fig. 2).



Installed in February 2016, the artwork, although some-

what weather-worn, was still just about visible in December 2017 and thus we might argue that such wall art enjoys more permanence than public demonstrations and protests, which might be described as fleeting by comparison. Still, as Figure 9 shows us, the effects of the sea air of Mumbai and the pollution from the traffic on Tulsi Pipe Road contribute to the wall art's eventual demise. We might consider this passing of time as being consistent with the social issue portrayed on the wall – domestic violence continues, women's freedom continues to be curtailed in various ways – and in this sense, the bleed of the paint into the wall's render, the staining of the colours into the cement and mortar leave a mark that is not completely erased even when the complete image is hard to perceive; the image has recorded and documented a social ill in its own way. The various images of the female (or of femaleness) itself may fade but aspects of the wall art remain both physically by way of paint or emotionally, in the minds of those who have routinely commuted along Tulsi Pipe Road and bore witness to the images' call for social justice. Local people as well as visitors to the city have encountered these images since early 2016 charting their slow decay into early 2018, meaning that the messages of women's rights, empowerment and equality remain alongside continued reports by the media of the most recent horrific gang rape or act of sexual violence.

The challenge of these images does not lie in the combination of content and form uniquely; rather, the challenge is the overarching invitation to 'see' challenging

representations of Indian society. Even what appears to be the simplest of images calls passers-by to see (and engage with) challenging issues of Indian society.



Fig. 10

Figure 10 shows how the canvas of Tulsi Pipe Road has more recently been appropriated for a new creation; a whitewashed wall with a black silhouette of a female painted on it, the hashtag to the right of the image reads ‘#Missing Girls’ (photographed in December 2017).

The image might be thought of as simple in its composition – a monochrome colour palette and a hashtag – but in its supposed simplicity, it is a powerful image and moreover, due to the inclusion of the hashtag, it calls the gazer to action. As I have argued elsewhere, (Dawson Varughese, 2017), 'Tulsi Pipe Road calls its gazers to action in response to very current and pressing issues regarding female social justice in the post-millennial years and Figure 10 is another example of this trend. This image, taken in December 2017, shows how the walls continue to document and speak of social justice for women even when the previous images have faded (note the faded paint, the whitewashing and the silhouette painted on top, creating these layers). Just as the cause remains urgent so then does the wall art respond to and express this urgency with renewed vigour and purpose. At the start of 2020 when the convicted Nirbhaya gang rapists' execution date was set for February, for it to be then moved to March, the country was once again reminded of the enormity of that particularly tragic event. Eight years on from the death of 'Nirbhaya', Tulsi Pipe Road's wall art continues to strive for matters of social justice for women. It makes visible those acts that often take place behind closed doors, in dingy clinics and in remote, isolated places. It foregrounds such acts, rendering them both visible and present.

Of the seven images from the April 2016 fieldwork, five of them analysed here are such depictions of that which

is preferred not to be made visible; Figure 4, 'Seize the World' and Figure 5, 'Drive my Bike' being the exceptions. The artwork depicts Indianness in a challenging light; it foregrounds the need to address sexual violence and inequality within society and specifically calls the public to engage with these issues. Unlike other forms of visual-text narration such as films (see Datta, 2000) or graphic narratives (Dawson Varughese, 2018) through which representation of women's lived experiences, sexual abuse and rape are both documented and communicated, the public wall art of Tulsi Pipe Road is made available to 'see' gratis. There is no entry charge to pay or book to buy in order to (privately) 'see' the struggle, rather the gazer enters into a moment of public seeing and is publicly called to build a better society wherein sexual violence, abuse and inequality have no role or place.

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