

# Addressing Sexual Violence in Performance

21 January 2019 | 9:30 am – 5:00 pm

Chhaya Center, Thamel, Kathmandu

Submitted to: Zubaan Books and Panos South Asia

Submitted by: photo.circle

## A REPORT

This one-day workshop for performance artists conducted by photo.circle in collaboration with Zubaan Books and Panos South Asia, covered a number of things; we opened with the viewing of Amar Kanwar's eight-part video installation *The Lightning Testimonies*, a multi-channel video installation that draws on the archive of violence in the Indian subcontinent to stage a reflection on the complex experiences of sexual violence. The viewing helped us set the agenda for the first part of the workshop—to think about issues in the representation (particularly visual) of sexual violence and consider how we may break away from familiar tropes of representation. The participants identified common stereotypes through which sexual violence is visually depicted. They shared their observations on how several misconceptions about sexual violence are perpetuated through prevalent representational practices—for instance, about the nature of perpetrators and victims (concerning their age and other profiles), common locations and timing in which rape scenes are portrayed, the physical nature of the violence, the absence of women's agency, the performance of silence or definite ruination, and so on. During this conversation, we tried to get the participants to think not only about how problematic these representations are but also about how these specific modes of representation relate to actual ways in which we understand and adjudicate sexual violence, both culturally and legally. How would alternative representational strategies foster different understandings? One key takeaway from this discussion was what the insufficiencies of representational practices may have to do with the lack of vocabulary on sexual violence in our languages. How can that vocabulary be generated—especially with performance in mind?



In the morning session, we also covered some key concepts. We had a fairly lengthy discussion on consent. We also discussed the broader cultural context of impunity.



In the afternoon, we had invited five guests who talked about their involvement in various movements against sexual violence. Shanta Manavi outlined the founding of All Nepal Women's Association and the protest it led against the Panchayat Regime over the rape and murder of Namita and Sunita Bhandari in 1981. Sushila Shrestha briefed us about the founding of Mahila Surakshya Dabab Samuha in 1991 after a particularly regressive and misogynist response from the Home Minister of the newly democratic government when she and other women activists had brought one rape case to light. Pranika Koyu elaborated on the challenges of organizing Occupy Balwatar in 2012. Sarita Pariyar talked about trying to report on Maya Bishwakarma, a Dalit woman whose rape and murder last year has largely been ignored even though it occurred around the same time and place as the rape and murder of Nirmala Pant, which has produced a national outpouring. Bimal C. Sharma talked about the documentation and archive he keeps at INSEC on sexual violence. This intergenerational dialogue proved simultaneously thorny and fruitful. It showed how outlooks on sexual violence, even among those who organize against it, can be diverse and conflicting. The differences in the way these guests spoke about sexual violence and how to fight against it once again underscored the failings of language. We also took the opportunity to emphasize the need to work towards solidarity.

## Participants

The workshop had 21 participants from various performance backgrounds including theatre and spoken word poetry.



*Please see full participants list + contact info attached.*

## Facilitators

The workshop was facilitated by Diwas Raja KC and NayanTara Gurung Kakshapati.

**Diwas Raja Kc** is a researcher, writer, and curator based in Kathmandu. He pursued graduate studies in visual culture and history in Sarah Lawrence College, New York, and University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. At Nepal Picture Library, he works on building visual archives and presenting documentary images of historically obscured subjects. His curatorial show *Dalit: A Quest for Dignity* (2016) explored ways of witnessing assertions and obfuscations about Dalit past in Nepal. He also works as a documentary film editor and has worked with several renowned artists and visual anthropologists. Kc gives workshops on visual storytelling and has taught courses on social history and historiographical methods.

**NayanTara Gurung Kakshapati** is a photographer and curator based in Kathmandu, Nepal. Her work seeks to embrace themes such as patriarchy, power, memory and change by intersecting visual storytelling, research, pedagogy, and collective action. She is the co-founder and director of photo.circe, Nepal Picture Library and Photo Kathmandu.