



July 2023 | Vol. 2

DURGA DARES

DURGA INDIA'S OFFICIAL MONTHLY NEWSLETTER



ABOUT DURGA

(An Initiative by I'm Every Woman Trust)

At Durga, we strive to identify problematic attitudes, stereotypes, and societal norms and address them from the grassroots level to ensure a collaborative effort within our society to create safe spaces for women.

Most women in India are consistently living in fear of potential or repeated harassment. This is reflected in the way a woman dresses, sits, talks, commutes, or converses. Sadly, all these seemingly normal social interactions are predominantly influenced by negative experiences.

The Durga family aims to inspire change in all arenas of a woman's life; from their home to their place of work, by placing responsibility not on women, but in the hands of the communities that surround them.

GET THE INSIDE SCOOP

From the Editor's Desk

From Durga's Lens: Women At Work

Kofta: A Short Story

Riddle me this?

Glare: A Social Commentary

What's new for Durga this month?



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

WINNIE PANDE

DESIGNERS

WINNIE PANDE

PHOTOGRAPHERS

ASHBIN K BABU
SURAJ ANTHONY

CONTRIBUTORS

ASHBIN K BABU
SAGARIKA WADIYAR
WINNIE PANDE
SUCHITHA B
THEJASWINI
SURESH
SRISHTI GUPTA
GANESH CHAVAN

In this world that's infested with patriarchy and toxic masculinity, where do we find spaces where we can be ourselves? I keep looking for a space where I can just be me, think for myself and be random. I yearn for spaces that don't dictate what I should wear, what I should say, if I need to smile as I speak and of course, if I need to keep my voice low!

Durga, for me became a space that I want to share with anyone who feels like I do. It's for anyone who wants to figure themselves out. For anyone who loves to live. Anyone who wants choice. Who want their tribe. Who Dare!

This is the beginning for us to share and learn about people and stories of how we Dare. How we provide a space for women, girls and all people to Dare to act, Dare to defy and Dare to question patriarchy!

Priya Varadarajan

**CHIEF IMAGINATION OFFICER/
FOUNDER DURGA INDIA**



@DURGAINDIA1



@DURGAINDIAOFFICIAL





DURGA'S LENS: WOMEN AT WORK

PHOTOS BY ASHBIN K BABU, INTERN AT DURGA INDIA. IN FRAME ARE WOMEN POURAKARMIKAS AT SUDDAGUNTEPALYA DURING OUR INITIAL SESSIONS WITH THEM. WE ARE SO HAPPY TO HAVE MET THEM AND LISTENED TO THEIR STORIES.





KOFTA: A SHORT STORY

Written by Winnie Pande (Communications Lead and Asst. Programme Coordinator (WAW) at Durga India)

By the time my grandmother, Devaki, was nearing her 80s, she was a bitter woman; with a permanent scowl on her face, only stopping to say a word when a chair was out of place or a fork misplaced. When I visited her, I kept a distance, occasionally sorting through cabinets and checking for any silverfish nests. I would find odd remnants of her life in the cabinets - photographs with dates scribbled in red ink, a tightly wound leather diary with recipes scribbled in shorthand and earrings that were missing clasps. I found photo albums covered in dust, the pages glued to each other and speckled with yellow stains. However, they never let me in on enough. When I looked at photographs that slipped out from unsuspecting notebooks, I was haunted by the ghost of my grandmother, who smiled at me in black and white.

Naturally, I let my mind conjure up memories of my grandmother. I pictured her as a young bride, on her wedding day, wearing flowers in her braid and her weight in gold, around her neck. How she must have smiled through the pain as her earlobes drooped with the weight of the matching earrings she wore. How her feet, soaked in vermillion would have marked her arrival into her in-laws house; how she must have been led into a world that she knew almost nothing about.

Sometimes I pictured her in a rickshaw, dropping my father and his sister to school. I pictured her eating an ice lolly after, her tongue stained purple from the sugar syrup and juice.

When, on a rainy June morning, she passed away in her sleep, her face was relaxed; with the wrinkles on her cheek slightly less prominent. She had been reading a copy of 'Sarita', which was placed on the pillow next to hers. Her lips were curved downward and bedclothes hung loosely around her frame.

In the next couple of days, I rummaged furiously through the shelves and almirahs in her room, trying to find out about her life. About a woman who for years had been an enigma; someone I called my 'Daadi', but knew nothing about. When the family met relatives, they exchanged condolences and prayers, but I couldn't grieve. Childhood nostalgia kicked in occasionally, and I would miss the jaggery parathas she cooked for me or how she'd slip me an extra 50 rupee note when we'd leave for home. But, that was all that I remembered of my grandmother.



"She was such a caring mother", my father lamented. His sister nodded in agreement, "She was so set in her ways, yet so kind. You remember, Chitra? The food she'd send for you on train journeys?"

The food she made. The wife she was. The self-sacrificing mother. The way she was indispensable to my grandfather. How we were getting a new cook to help out in the house since my grandfather was 'all on his own' now. But never once did I hear about the woman she was; the dreams she had, the lovers and friends she held close, the movies that made her cackle, the books she made her home.

In the nooks and corners of her home, I found that frown turned upside down, saw her photographs in albums where she had her head tilted and her hair in a bun, and *namkeen* boxes which held threads and needles and half knit sweaters. Another time, I discovered, wedged between her mattress and the tin boxes that functioned as her bed stand, a *khujli* stick, which had '2002' engraved in the wood.

My personal discoveries were exciting; but I craved to know her as beyond the fantasies I had in my head, and more as the woman I had grown up with. When I visited her home last, everything was meticulously arranged; almost as if she had been an invisible supervisor, even after all these years. I adjusted my hair in her mirror and accidentally knocked open a box. Out clattered safety pins and beads. As I hurriedly bent to sort out the mess, I noticed a tiny note, "Dear Devaki, the tiffin was delicious. Will send your favourite kofta tomorrow. Love, Mamata"

I turned the note around. A simple ':)' smiled back at me, in red ink. A warm feeling enveloped me. I put the note in the box carefully and swept up the beads and pins which clinked in the dustpan with every sweep.

Today, I thought of Mamata and Devaki, hand in hand, sharing a tiffin box, bursting to the brim with soft, fluffy balls of kofta. I pictured Devaki's hand shaping a ball of rice and dipping it into the creamy cashew curry and relishing it with utter delight. I heard their laughter and the soft hum of songs in my head. Comfort. What a fuzzy feeling that was.

Perhaps the only time my imagination did me any good. Perhaps the only time Devaki felt at peace. Perhaps the only time she ceased to be a mother, wife, daughter. The only time she was a friend. The only time she was Devaki.

RIDDLE ME THIS!



A mother and daughter are caught in a horrific accident. While the mother dies on the spot, the daughter is sent to the hospital and rushed to the critical care unit. The nurse declines operating on the daughter and sobs " How can I go ahead with this? This is my daughter."

How is this possible?

A father is about to bring his son for a job interview applying for a position at a large stockbroker firm in the city. As soon as they arrive in the parking lot, the son's phone rings. He looks at his father who says "Go ahead, answer it!" The caller is the trading company's CEO who says, "Good luck son, you've got this!"

The son ends the call and once again, looks at the father, who is seated next to him in the car.

How is this possible?*

WORD SEARCH

S	O	R	E	G	O	R	E	U
E	O	B	A	E	R	E	D	N
X	D	W	R	R	E	D	A	S
I	B	J	R	A	D	B	A	A
S	A	O	R	D	C	O	R	F
M	A	S	C	U	L	I	N	E
O	O	A	B	O	R	E	S	O
R	B	I	A	S	A	D	B	T
E	D	H	O	S	T	I	L	E

1. SEXISM
2. MASCULINE
3. UNSAFE
4. HOSTILE
5. RACIST
6. BIAS



"STILL, I RISE" - MAYA ANGELOU

PHOTOS BY SURAJ ANTHONY. IN FRAME IS SUCHITHA B; A MARKETING SPECIALIST, A SMALL BUSINESS OWNER AND A PART TIME UNIVERSITY TEACHER. SHE LOVES READING, WRITING, TRAVELLING, DANCING AND BOXING. SUCHITHA IS ALSO MANAGER OF NARRATIVE BUILDING AND COMMUNICATION AT DREAM A DREAM FOUNDATION.



LOCATION: ANTHONY'S BOXING CLUB

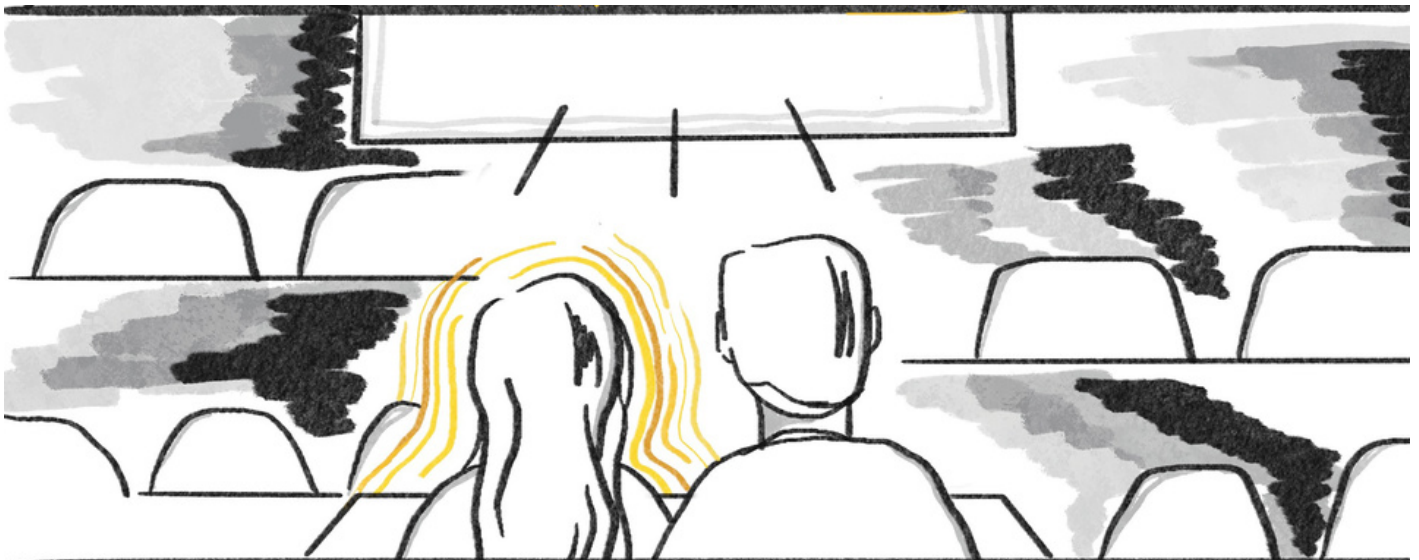


GLARE

Written and Illustrated by Sagarika Wadiyar (Intern at Durga India)



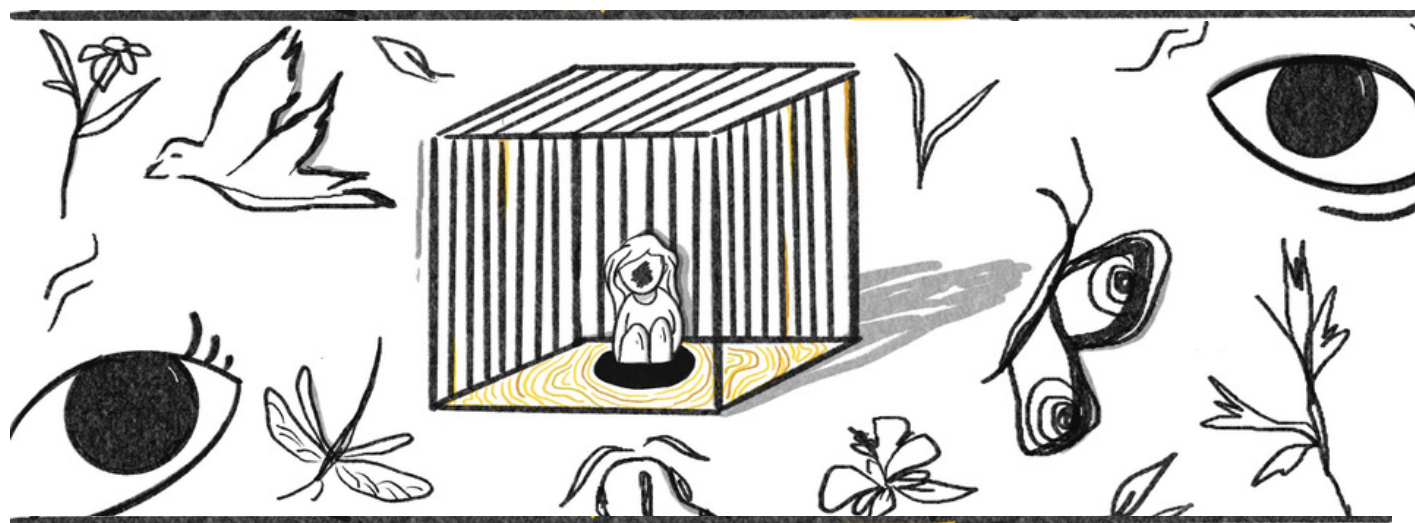
As a girl in my early twenties, I have learnt, through several small, yet greatly disturbing experiences that my *clothes, hair, face, body— my presence*, place me at the epicentre of predatory eyes and snarky remarks, or unwanted attention that one finds no way out of.



11th grade was an unpleasant year for me. It was the first time I encountered a male teacher who made college feel unsafe. *His classes were spent by (female) students anxiously hoping they would not be called names such as “baby” or “darling”, or be made to sit next to him in a dark classroom, while the rest watched the movie being screened.*



Another instance involved a professor who inappropriately and non-consensually touched a female student who was studying in the university as part of an exchange program. *The institutional authorities were informed, however, the professor evaded serious penalty. He was shifted to another branch of the same university.*



While the professor walked a free man, *the student remained confined to a prison of disgust and violation.*

Sexual violence is not just rape. It is implied and subtle. It is a light brush against your arm, the groping, the acts of affection that are unrequited. For spaces to be truly safe, it is crucial for these nuanced acts of immorality to be legally and socially considered - which will help make universities, colleges, schools (and other institutions) safer spaces for individuals.

WE ARE NOW 'GREAT PLACE TO WORK' CERTIFIED!



But, what makes Durga a Great Place To Work? Here's what our team members had to say:

"Because of a work environment where women's concerns are highlighted, Durga is a great place to work for me. I get to work on new creative ideas and have multiple opportunities to explore my work."

-Srishti Gupta (MIS Officer, Durga India)

"Durga makes me feel safe. It is a place where I can meet people from different walks of life and interact with them to inspire change."

-Thejaswini Suresh (Program Coordinator, Durga India)

"A great place to work is one that keeps its employees happy and healthy. It's a workplace where people want to come in every day because it provides an environment where they can do work best while enjoying themselves. That is what Durga is to me."

-Ganesh Chavan (Jr. Accounts and Admin Officer)

A huge thanks to our partners: Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies, Kantar India Foundation, CGI and Utopia India Pvt Limited for their continued support towards Durga's cause!