



DURGA INDIA'S MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

November - December 2023 | Vol. 6

DURGA DARES



www.durgaindia.org



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

WINNIE PANDE

DESIGNER

WINNIE PANDE

CONTRIBUTORS

LIZ BAJJALIEH

SUMAYYA RAZAKH

RAVITHA

PRABHAKARAN

LALITHASHREE

GANESH

WINNIE PANDE

ANANYA

KARTHIKEYAN

ILLUSTRATORS

LALITHASHREE

GANESH

LIZ BAJJALIEH

For 16 Days of Activism, we wanted to involve everyone in the conversation - our participants across the BBMP and BMTC, our thriving youth community in colleges, and people and organisations online who were working on myriad issues related to gender justice and elimination of gender based violence. The idea was to get everyone talking, so that people were tuned in and listening.

To achieve this, we organised a series of events throughout the 16 days. One of the highlights was the 'Through Her Eyes' photo exhibit, which allowed a unique experience to gain insight into how different genders experience public spaces. This was a great tool since it involved listening to each story behind a picture and empathising with people's lived experiences.

We are so happy with how the event went and are so happy to share the highlights with you as you head into the new year!

Winnie Pande & Sumayya Razakh

DURGA INDIA



@DURGAINDIA1



@DURGAINDIAOFFICIAL





THROUGH HER EYES - 25 NOVEMBER

It is rare for us to build and occupy public spaces as women.

Men saunter through spaces that women can only dream of putting their foot on. However, it is even more disappointing that a woman's imagination and experience of a public space also finds little to no representation. Women fear assault and harassment at all times during the day, but especially during the night, where creatures from the dark crawl around, leer and stare women down.

We rarely capture our experiences in public spaces at night because we are burdened with ensuring our safety.

Men and women experience spaces differently. And we wanted to capture this as part of 16 Days because this denial of experience is also a violence against women and girls in itself.

This why for 16 days of activism, we urged the women in our team and in our community to create a little photo album for us of what their experiences were in public spaces. How does a woman see a park? A bus? A lonely road?

'Through her Eyes' was a way for us to look into the intricacies and nuances of gender-based violence that women faced in their everyday lives. The reaction we got from participants was overwhelming while at the same time, it was also gut wrenching. Women were hyper sexualised for everything. A common thread that connected their experiences was the feeling of always being on display for men's eternal consumption.

However, by the end of this exercise with the people we brought this photo exhibit to, we didn't feel just a sense of lingering sadness but also that of power. When we saw the nods in the room, the empathy with which women in the room looked at each other, and the warmth with which people expressed their solidarity, it felt powerful. *It felt like I could take on the world, hell, I could take on any space I wanted to, if I just had the women in the world alongside me. In the next couple of pages, we recount our experiences, and take you through 16 Days of Activism, 2023.*



Some participants shared their thoughts during the photo exhibit, on what emotion the photos evoked in them.

“This is a road that is right outside my house, and my mother and I take a walk through it with our dogs every evening when I’m home. There are more roads connecting this road, but our range is limited only to this because it’s the only place where we won’t be leered at, no matter how much we “cover up.”

“This is a sunset that unfolded in front of my eyes as I waited at a bus stop; I usually keep my eyes directed downwards in public spaces, I feel safer that way. This was one of the rare occasions that I looked up to see if my bus had come yet, and saw a sunset I had to capture.”

“These pictures make me see women for their labour which is rendered invisible far too often. Seeing women in a dense market, advertising their wares, selling fresh fish, calling out to potential buyers - all I see is their energy expended, their effort and their work. It is then, violence of the highest degree to not recognise the ways in which women contribute to the economy, and to make conditions for their work better and safer.”

“I feel like when I enter certain spaces- say a chai sutta shop, I’m automatically judged and I feel on the spot. Everyone looks at me like I’m an alien and I feel so wrong just being there. I finish my chai hurriedly and leave the space because it is where I feel the most uneasy; and ironically, I go there with the idea that I can unwind and process my emotions.”

“I stopped going to the beach when I was in 5th grade. Suddenly, people made me conscious of how my wet clothes clung to my body, how my swimming costume was too short, and how it would make the uncles at the beach uncomfortable. And suddenly, after seeing the picture of these women on the beach, I am reminded of the fun and laughter I missed out on.”

“My dream is to walk alone at night and isn’t it sad how so many women have that dream?”



“Even during the day, in full daylight, I’m cognizant of the fact that I’m surrounded by people. If I’m in a crowd, and taking care of my belongings, I know that people can get away with things and touch me inappropriately. Public spaces have some sort of security and safety, in a sense, but there needs to be a lot more work done. Public spaces is not a safe space at the moment.”

“I never feel safe in buses. A touch here and there always feels intentional, no matter how how much people profess it wasn’t. It is in times like this that I wish I didn’t have my body, my arms, my legs, my chest, my eyes, my throat. No matter what I do, I will always be viewed sexually and it scares me, knowing that I have no control over it. It is a sensation known only to women - to be able to see eyes on you, even when your head is turned.”

WORD SEARCH!



Y	O	U	T	H	E	R	E	U
E	G	E	N	D	E	R	D	N
Y	R	U	C	H	M	D	A	S
I	I	N	R	A	P	B	A	A
S	G	A	R	D	O	O	R	F
V	H	M	C	U	W	I	N	E
O	T	U	B	O	E	E	S	O
C	S	H	M	U	R	I	T	Y
A	C	T	I	V	I	S	M	S

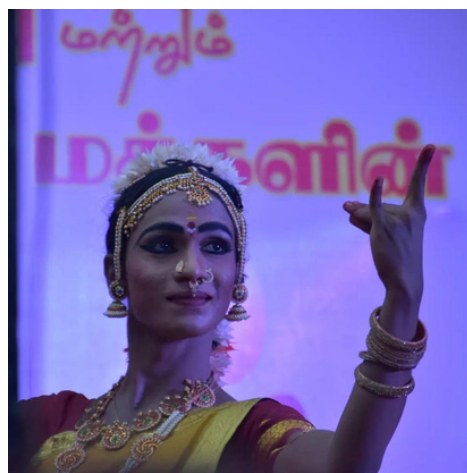
- 1.HUMAN
- 2.RIGHTS
- 3.EMPOWER
- 4.GENDER
- 5.ACTIVISM

SEARCH UP, DOWN, BACKWARDS AND ACROSS*



THROUGH HER EYES: HOW DO WOMEN EXPERIENCE PUBLIC SPACES?

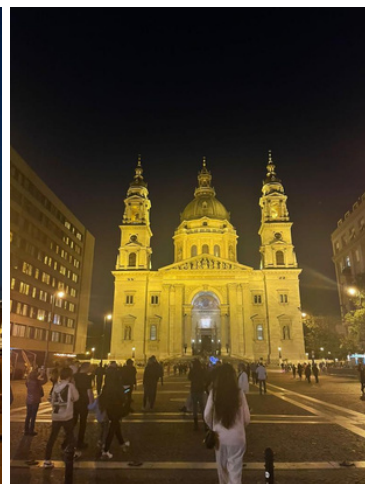
PHOTOS WERE SUBMITTED TO US BY STUDENTS, PEERS AND COLLEAGUES AND THOSE IN OUR VOICE (STUDENT) COMMUNITY. THEY CAPTURED WOMEN IN PUBLIC SPACES, AND OFTEN PICTURES IN PUBLIC SPACES WHICH MADE THEM FEEL DIFFERENT EMOTIONS. THE COMMENTS IN THE PREVIOUS PAGE ARE ABOUT MANY OF THESE IMAGES AND THE EMOTIONS THEY EVOKED.

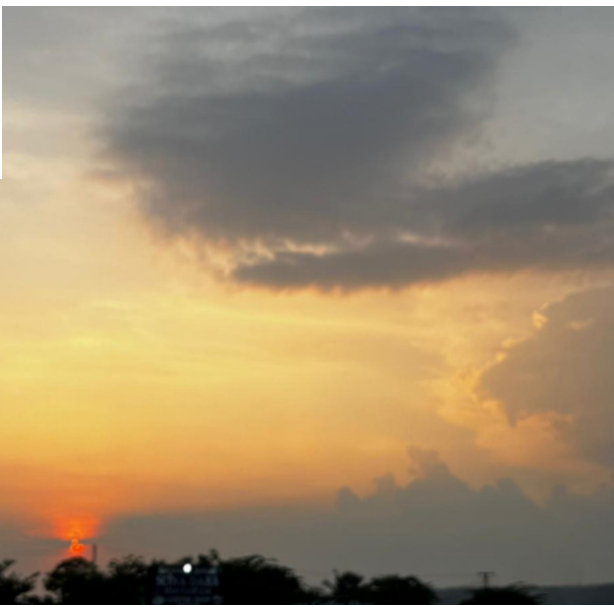




THROUGH HER EYES: HOW DO WOMEN EXPERIENCE PUBLIC SPACES?

PHOTOS WERE SUBMITTED TO US BY STUDENTS, PEERS AND COLLEAGUES AND THOSE IN OUR VOICE (STUDENT) COMMUNITY. THEY CAPTURED WOMEN IN PUBLIC SPACES, AND OFTEN PICTURES IN PUBLIC SPACES WHICH MADE THEM FEEL DIFFERENT EMOTIONS. THE COMMENTS IN THE PREVIOUS PAGE ARE ABOUT MANY OF THESE IMAGES AND THE EMOTIONS THEY EVOKED.





THROUGH HER EYES: HOW DO WOMEN EXPERIENCE PUBLIC SPACES?

PHOTOS WERE SUBMITTED TO US BY STUDENTS, PEERS AND COLLEAGUES AND THOSE IN OUR VOICE (STUDENT) COMMUNITY. THEY CAPTURED WOMEN IN PUBLIC SPACES, AND OFTEN PICTURES IN PUBLIC SPACES WHICH MADE THEM FEEL DIFFERENT EMOTIONS. THE COMMENTS IN THE PREVIOUS PAGE ARE ABOUT MANY OF THESE IMAGES AND THE EMOTIONS THEY EVOKED.



INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINIAN PEOPLE - 29 NOVEMBER

29th November, 2023 is a day for folks across the world to show their support for Palestinians' dreams of a peaceful future based on justice and freedom. Now, more than ever, people need to speak up for Palestinian rights as they are being cruelly and systemically exploited; leaving behind generations of people without families, homes, places and cultures.

Durga collaborated with **Liz Bajjalieh**, a queer Palestinian artist to draw attention to the ways in which women and girls are being impacted during the ongoing genocide in Gaza. Israel's assault on the reproductive rights of Palestinian women and their children has been alarming. Sexual violence against women has also reached a new high, with war further exemplifying their vulnerability. Liz, who goes by she/they/he pronouns, titled their art piece "No one should be forced to cry this many tears." On being prompted about the inspiration for the piece, Liz said, "I think of the joined sorrow of all women in





Gaza trying to survive Israel's massacre. I am trying to recreate the message I see from Gazans - one of deep sorrow but also one of refusing to give up the Palestinian identity. In front, there are two women joining hands shedding tears together, and in the back, there's the netting pattern seen on the kuffiyeh, which is not only a symbol of Palestinian liberation but one of Palestine's connection to the sea. Behind that is a tatreez pattern, a type of embroidery deeply imbedded in Palestine's identity.

There's an Arabic word, صامد, which translates to "steadfast," a type of fight against the power that is one of simply staying where you are, refusing to be taken down. Palestinians have lived this for decades - refusing to leave despite Israel's brutal oppression. My hope is this piece conveys that as well, while still recognising the deep pain Palestinians feel that they must be liberated from as well. The women are holding hands to touch on that sense of shared grief and experiences that women in Palestine are holding together." - Liz Bajjalieh

At this point in time, I feel a sense of helplessness and unfathomable grief. I watch the world go by as I see mothers hold limbs of their lifeless children, fathers covering their children's ears as the shells drop, and the scramble for a meagre loaf of bread. According to estimates, and reports by Al Jazeera, over seventy percent of the dead are women and children. Seventy percent!! The number is enough to make anyone's feet curl. Yet, the world watches as we now enter a hundred days post Israel's attack on Gaza, which has reduced a place of hope to the biggest morgue in recent human history.

Women have had surgeries and pregnancies on the streets with no anaesthesia, in a bid to save their unborn children, with both lives lost in the process. As a result of Israel's forced mass displacement and lack of access to water and sanitation, women and girls who are menstruating have been forced to take norethisterone tablets to delay their periods. I got the chills when Ruba Seif, a woman interviewed by reporters from Al Jazeera said, "Other women around me in the school have asked me for these pills, and one of them told me that she had gone through the worst period in her life. I know of their negative side effects, but these pills cannot be more harmful than the missiles, death and destruction all around us."*

*<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/31/no-privacy-no-water-gaza-women-use-period-delaying-pills-amid-war>



Let's talk. It is a matter of grave concern that children are being pulled out of rubble instead of running around on the streets.

It is a matter of grave concern that children in hospitals have a new label now: WCNSF; Wounded Child, No Surviving Family.

It is a matter of grave concern that amongst the death and starvation, people have no one left to hold.

It is a matter of grave concern that children are dying of cardiac arrests because their hearts can't take the terror that is their everyday life.

It is a matter of grave concern that there are now zero functioning hospitals in Gaza.

It is a matter of grave concern that women are in *isdals*, day and night, because they fear being bombed and dying wearing nothing.

It is a matter of grave concern that mothers have to see multiple children of theirs maimed, burnt or worse.

It is a matter of grave concern when people ask "Is it us? Will it be us?" as the earth shakes and the smoke blocks your view of the sky.

It is a matter of grave concern that feminists across the world find it "complicated" to comment on a genocide; which is a deeply feminist, and humanitarian issue.

It is a matter of grave concern that as a humanity, we have failed Gaza, unable to call for ceasefire as a united front.

It is a matter of grave concern that Gaza now looks a different colour and texture from space.

CEASEFIRE. NOW.



RED INK

Written by Lalithashree Ganesh

Faded, torn, lost and buried
History's pages rise up
And fly back
Into the present
A gift that shouldn't be opened -

The pages rewrite and overwrite themselves
This year; in 2023
The horrors of the Holocaust
Repeating itself
In deep red ink

Splashing into loud puddles of tears
Bursting and spilling into the streets
Into their homes
Into their hearts
Into the silent heavy wind,
Into the Red Sea...

Wave after wave
Engulfing child, woman, man, and animal

The red ink blots
and spreads
On parts of the map;
Wiping away the truth -
Manipulating geographies, histories, spaces, voices, and lives;

in multitudes

Stop the rewriting
Stop the red ink from spilling, flowing, blotting, distorting, destroying...



Stop the evil thoughts
and orders
Stop erasing
the faces of the innocent
Stop the cries
and the screams

Stop.
Stop.
Stop.
Stop stop stop stop stop.

S.T.O.P.

We do not want our days to be red
We do not want our stories to be written
in red
We do not want our present or our future to be soaked
in red
We do not want to be killed by the world
We do not want to be ghosts that have never lived

We want to live in peace
We want to live in love

~ Free Palestine ~

Ceasefire. NOW.



DURGA'S LENS: 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM IN COLLEGES

THE PICTURES REFLECT OUR ENGAGEMENT WITH COLLEGE STUDENTS, ESPECIALLY DURING 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM. OUR SESSIONS WITH THEM THIS TIME FOCUSED ON PUBLIC SPACES AND HOW WOMEN PERCEIVE THEM - ARE THEY SPACES FOR US TO BE FREE OR FETTERED?





INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY - 10 DECEMBER

What a fitting end to the 16 days of Activism - Human Rights Day! A day for us to examine our privilege, the stances we are taking in this day and age and to truly advocate for everyone to experience life fully and freely through their rights.

For this section of the newsletter, we included 4 creative pieces which are bound to make you look at the world differently.

We delved into a bit of history, where we looked at women's work being credited to more powerful men, and society's treatment of these women, to show the blatant violation of human rights centuries ago, and which has unfortunately continued till date.

Buried Tales, our monthly PoSH comic (which is almost at its end) also addressed workplace rights- and how to put perpetrators in check just when they think they're above the law.

In Laundry Vs Laptop, the daily struggles of a working mother are documented with such sincerity that every woman reading will resonate with Ravitha when she says *"The lack of acknowledgement and appreciation for the numerous responsibilities I hold, is tiring."*

As a conclusion to this lengthy, yet a very laborious labour of love, Aleena writes about the power of human liberty and freedom, and what happens when you take a stand to 'live your life'!

We hope the next section inspires, and helps you voice out for what matters the most to you; most importantly, for people in the world whose freedoms are currently compromised.

Here's to a 2024 that is peaceful and full of hope.



INVISIBLE WOMEN IN HISTORY

Written by Ananya Karthikeyan (Intern at Durga India)

In the era of Andrew Tate and an overall trend towards right wingism, conversations around women's contribution to history have largely been an argument towards pushing a "female subservience" agenda. In response, it only seems appropriate, as an active opinionated member of society, to bring up the systemic erasure of women from history. That is to say, artfully call any notions of women being lesser contributors of history, utter and complete bullshit.

For this, we must first agree that despite historic material and non material oppression of women, it simply doesn't stand to reason that half the human population contributed to a minute amount of achievements. And therefore the question goes, where are the women in history and what are their contributions? Have their contributions been discredited or falsely credited to men? As it turns out, the answer is both.

It's incredible to see just how many women in history have been largely uncredited or systematically overwritten for what are certainly keynotes in history. For example, Harriet Hosmer has been largely forgotten as the pioneer of limestone to marble production process. Olympe de Gouges who fought for civil rights in the French Revolution was rewarded for her courage and achievement by widespread defamation and beheading at the hands of Robespierre. Physicist Chien Shiung-Wu devised a groundbreaking experiment to test the law of parity conservation only for two of her male colleagues to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. Even Albert Einstein's first wife- Mileva Marić, a fellow physicist is thought to have been systematically sidelined and under-recognised for her work. All of the above examples are integral inventions and/or discoveries that shape modern science and society and yet we have rarely heard of pioneering women that are not Marie Sklodowska Curie (who fought for her achievements to be recognised) or Joan of Arc (whose fate is decidedly unhappy).

Society celebrates the violent legacies of men like James Cook but will not recognise or credit Jeanne Baret, the first woman to circumnavigate the globe, finding several medicinal plants en route. Picassos's numerous works depicting rape and sexual violence are accepted but Sofonisba Anguissola, the Italian

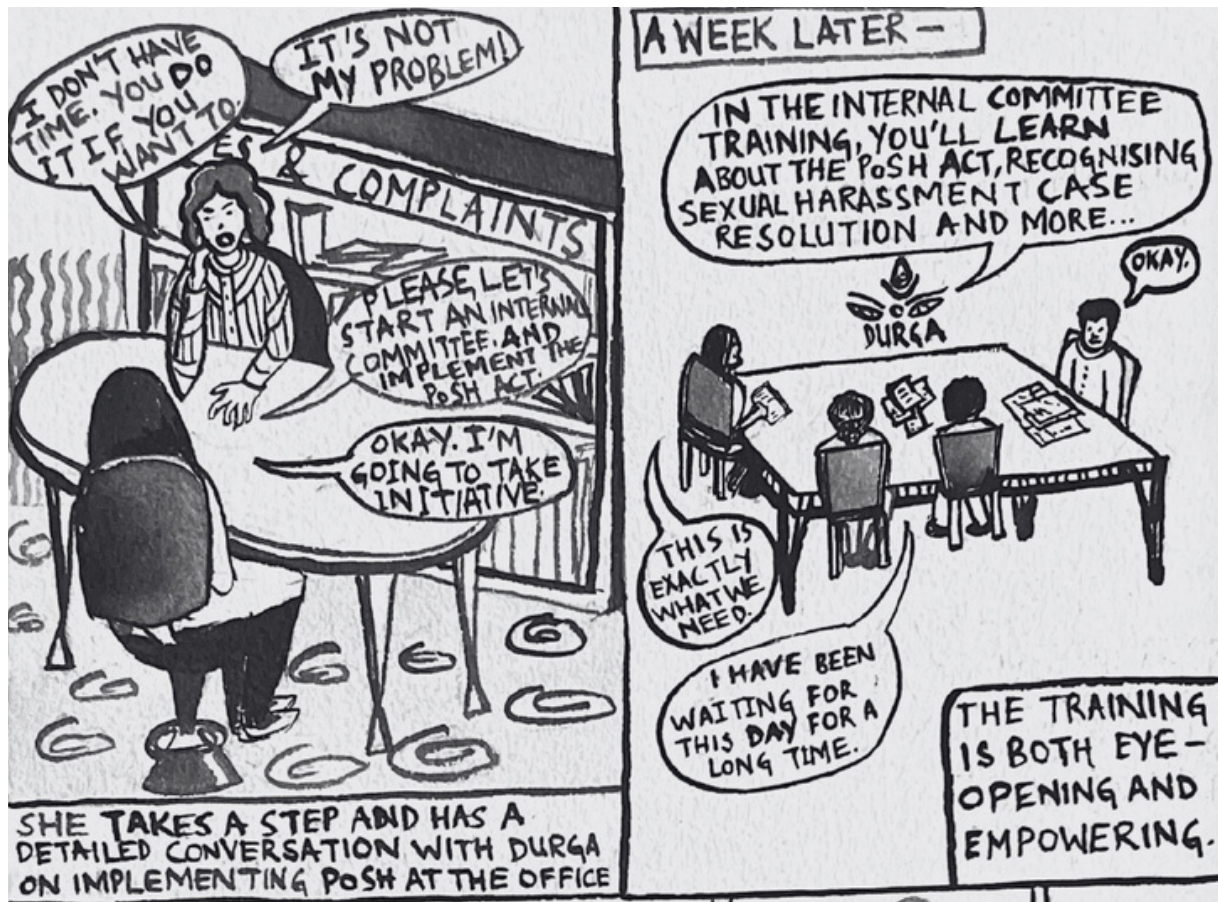


Renaissance portrait painter's talent and career has been brushed over, and, even worse, falsely attributed to other male painters of the age. Truly the lengths society and historians have gone to obscure and obfuscate women in history is astounding. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu brought variolation techniques in vaccination to England when she approached the royal family in the belief that this was the only way to prevent the spread of disease. The royal family offered pardons to any 12 criminals willing to undertake the experiment and survive and upon their survival, the Royal Family and Lady Mary introduced variolation techniques to all of England. However, internet histories of vaccinations falsely attribute the introduction as an obscure coming-to-England phenomena or to the little town of Piddinglyton. Even the invention of the umbrella is attributed on wikipedia to 'Lu Ban's wife' whose name is not mentioned (she doesn't have one of those rabbit hole Wikipedia blue links to a page on her life and works either).

Viewing history through this lens reflects a larger subconscious social trend where women are discouraged or punished for stepping outside the limited roles offered to us but also discredited and erased when we achieve great things despite the odds. But there is another urgent issue this raises- if women are absent in history, how can we believe that we can be or we will be any more than we have been? How can we search for parity with men if they seem to be the only shadowy figures influencing how we think, speak and theorise?

BURIED TALES

Illustrations: Lalithashree Ganesh. Concept: Winnie Pande





LAUNDRY OR LAPTOP?

-Ravitha Prabhakaran (Associate Director at Durga India)

Before I get into this, I'd like to say that I deeply love and cherish my family. Their love and support keeps me going forward. However, the lack of acknowledgement and appreciation for the numerous responsibilities I hold, is tiring. Playing multiple roles and putting on a pretence of being the best version of myself for my kids and partner is exhausting. What do I do when there is a constant tug of war between me, the laundry (home) and the laptop (work)? I am striving to strike a balance in my life. People often suggest, "Quit your work! Just manage the house and you'll be alright." Ah. The perpetual one-stop solution for my problem. For the problems of all working women.

My struggles go unnoticed. I wake up groggy eyed, often in confusion about how to manage chores when my child falls ill, while also juggling work requests and other tasks. Personal time? What's that? Despite all these struggles, I am determined and resilient to not let go of my work. I don't want to undergo mental health issues, low self-esteem and low confidence, evidenced amongst home makers, who consistently feel unworthy of themselves as they indulge in monotonous, unpaid household work day after day.

A man is still considered to be the sole bread winner or head of the family and a women's financial contribution is seen as "additional" contribution. Pocket money. Peanuts. Never as valued as the man's. These are historical societal biases; where women's work is undervalued or not valued at all.

Currently, the tug of war is tipped in favour of the laundry. However, I have a bigger war to wage. It seems like I'm the lone soldier against patriarchy, constantly fighting for my rights- at work, at home, shielding



myself from discrimination, double standards and sexism. I hope the reward will be that I can just be. Just exist. Like my partner, who never came back with bruises and scars from the war in the first place.

We also wanted to take this opportunity to thank our partners: Kantar India Foundation, the CSR arm of Kantar India; Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies; CGI, and Utopia India Pvt Limited for their support to Durga's cause.

KANTAR



CGI



LEARNING TO BE ME

Written by Aleena Treesa Lukose (Intern at Durga India)

In the light and in the dark,
I can sense those eyes
behind my back.
I can feel those creepy
hands on me, tearing me;
Ripping my body and soul to bits.

Fight back! Oh!
I hear that sound
like a bell, ringing
in my inner mind

Still my eyes search for you,
your helping hand
to stop my pain

Your spark ignites the fire in me
The fire to fight, to burn
those devilish eyes of lust

It's time to take a stand
Leaving my fears far behind
It's time to say NO
It's time to live my life.