



**July|2026**

# **DURGA DARES**

**Durga India's Official Newsletter**

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Collage)**

# From the Editor's Desk

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## On the move...

Everyone has the right to move around equally. But can we really? What does this even mean?

This edition of the newsletter explores what it means and looks like when we're *on the move*. Does everyone experience being on the move the same way? Spoiler: NO!

Our contributors attempt to obscure and confuse how you understand being on the move. They urge our readers to grapple with, and ask: How does safe mobility enable women's access to economic opportunity? How do people maintain agency (social mobility) when confronted by forces larger than themselves? Who gets invisibilised so that some of us have the right to move? What do we need to move around freely?

This newsletter was developed with much intention and care along with an aim to probe. We hope you enjoy!

*Newsletter team*

# What's happening at Durga?



## Learning Huddles

This quarter we had learnings huddles on a range of topics extending from reading ‘*Why Loiter? Women and Risk on Mumbai Streets*’, to examining questions of body politics through *Touching Grass*, a book by Sanitary Panels as well as a reflection session around mental health.

We also had an engaging workshop by friends of Durga, *Letters of Interruption*, who taught us how to use art to instil creativity and challenge manufactured alienation. Sonali Dutta, founder of *YouManize* conducted a session on queerness, inclusion and build safe workplaces.



## Panel Discussion on structured violence

For Anti-street harassment week, some of our team members organised a panel discussion around the structured nature of violence in public spaces. International Anti-Street Harassment Week is a global awareness campaign to end street harassment.

It was important for us as a team to look at prevention responses that steered away from harmful systems and instead relied on people.

Some of the central questions included:

1. What does “reclaiming your space” mean in contexts where public space has never been equally accessible to all?
2. What would survivor-centered accountability look like in public systems?





This is to certify that Durga India (I'm Every Woman Trust) has successfully completed the assessment conducted by Great Place To Work®, India, and is certified as a great workplace. Category: Under 100 Employees

This certificate is valid from May 2026 till May 2027.

## Great Place to Work!

We are delighted to share that we have once again been certified as a Great Place to Work!

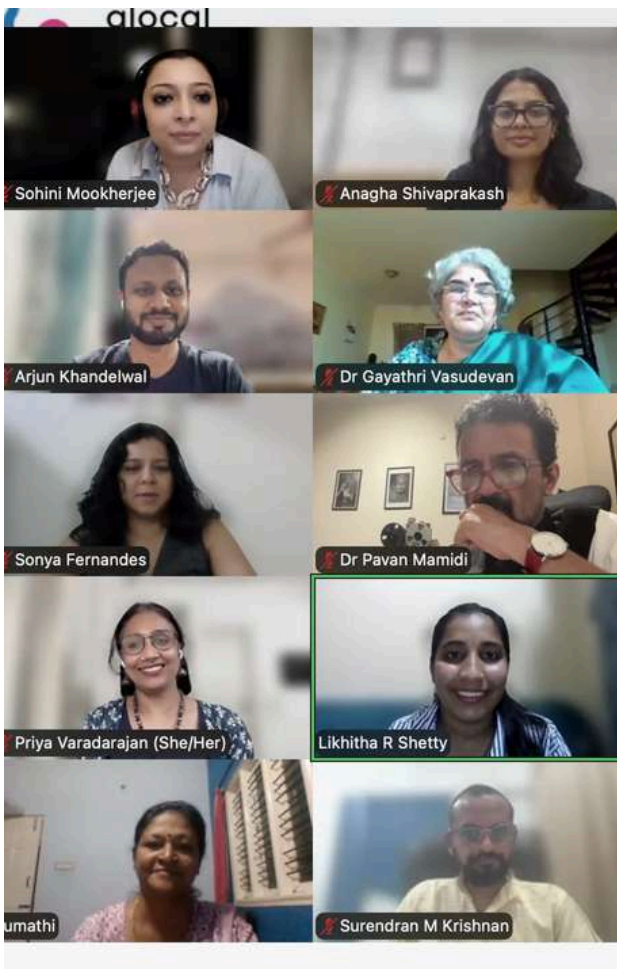
This recognition is a proud moment for all of us and reflects the dedication, collaboration, and commitment of every team member. Together, we continue to build a culture where people feel valued, empowered, and inspired to do their best.

## We were at Glocal Evaluation Week 2026

Our webinar was set in the context of how AI is rapidly changing how we collect, analyse and interpret data and evidence. asked these questions: How do we ensure accountability when algorithms influence decisions? Who benefits from AI, and whose voices are being left out? What role should human judgement play in an increasingly automated world?

Panelists discussed how the future we should be aiming for is not one where machines make all the decisions. We should fight for a future where technology enables people and communities without harming them and taking away their critical thinking abilities and compassion. Because ultimately, safety, justice, dignity, and social change have always depended on human beings choosing to act.

Read more on our social media platforms and watch the discussion on the Glocal YouTube page.



# Safety as a precondition to economic opportunity

Women's economic 'empowerment' is often framed in terms of jobs, income, and skills. But there is a more fundamental question we must ask: who has the freedom to access public space safely enough to pursue these opportunities?

The relationship between safety and economic participation is not incidental. Safety shapes mobility; mobility shapes access to jobs, markets, training, and professional networks; and access, in turn, shapes women's economic opportunities and earnings. In this sense, safety is not simply an outcome of empowerment but a precondition for it.

Across urban and rural contexts, women's mobility is shaped by the constant negotiation of risk. (Phadke et al., 2011). This affects where they go, when they travel, what work they take up, and whether they remain in the workforce at all. The result is not just restricted movement, but systematically constrained economic participation.

Our recent survey with 229 women, many of them skill trainers such as tailors and beauticians, reflects this complexity. While the most commonly cited barrier to employment was the lack of opportunities close to home (143 women shared this), a significant number of women also pointed to limited mobility (72 women), and unsafe travel conditions as reasons they could not take up or sustain work. These are not separate issues, they are deeply interconnected.

This demand for employment close to home reflects mobility constraints rather than just a preference for proximity.



Women frequently seek work nearby because travelling longer distances can involve safety risks, social scrutiny, higher transport costs, and challenges in balancing unpaid care responsibilities. The absence of nearby opportunities therefore reveals not only labour market gaps but also the gendered barriers that restrict women's access to wider economic opportunities.

Safety in public spaces is not just about protection from violence; it determines mobility, time use, and ultimately, economic participation. When women cannot travel freely, take public transport, or work flexible hours, their access to livelihoods becomes structurally limited.

At the same time, women's economic participation is shaped by the unequal distribution of unpaid care work. Responsibilities for childcare, elder care, and household labour often limit the distance women can travel, the hours they can work, and the types of jobs they can pursue. Understanding economic participation therefore requires examining the intersection of safety, mobility, and care rather than treating them as separate challenges.

Now, what happens to those women whose workplaces are public spaces?

For women whose livelihoods are embedded in public spaces: street vendors, waste pickers, domestic workers, gig workers, their income depends on visibility, presence, and mobility. Yet, these are precisely the conditions under which they face heightened vulnerability to harassment, policing, and social sanction. Safety, for them, is not an abstract right but a daily negotiation that directly impacts their income.

Importantly, when we asked women what would help them feel more confident and empowered, their responses did not isolate “economic” needs from “social” ones. Yes, many asked for skill training and financial support. But equally, they emphasised the need for family support, safer community spaces, and the ability to participate more freely in public life. Similarly, when thinking about accessing better work, safe transportation and social encouragement emerged alongside training and financial assistance.

Access, then, is not neutral. It is deeply gendered, and further shaped by caste, class, and religion. Marginalised women often face heightened surveillance, harassment, and exclusion, making their presence in public spaces more precarious and contested (Phadke et al., 2011). Women working in informal occupations face additional vulnerabilities due to insecure working conditions and limited institutional protections. Understanding access requires us to recognise how multiple forms of inequality intersect to shape women’s experiences of ‘work’.

Yet, many economic empowerment programs continue to focus on skills training or financial inclusion (of course, very important) without addressing these structural barriers. This creates a fundamental disconnect: we prepare women for work without ensuring they can safely reach or sustain it. This disconnect stems from the tendency to treat safety as a social issue and livelihoods as an economic one, instead of seeing these as two inseparable issues. When women cannot move safely through public spaces, participate in community life, or access transport systems, economic opportunities remain out of reach regardless of the skills or financial resources available to them.



In our work, we have found that addressing this requires a more integrated approach that moves beyond individual capacity and engages with the systems and relationships that shape women's lives. Here's the the 3E approach we've taken:

**Empower:** This is supporting women to negotiate within their households and communities, to make decisions about work, and to imagine livelihoods beyond what is traditionally deemed acceptable. It is about recognising that agency is relational and that economic independence often begins with the ability to assert choice at home.



**Equip:** To go beyond skills training. It includes building awareness of rights and laws, while also working at a systemic level with institutions such as municipal bodies like BBMP to ensure that the environments in which women work are enabling rather than exclusionary. This shifts the burden away from individual women “managing” safety, towards systems that are accountable for it.

Public spaces are being purposely built to be unsafe. They are shaped through decisions about urban design, transport systems, lighting, maintenance, policing, and governance. Creating safer environments therefore requires institutional accountability and gender-responsive planning rather than expecting individual women to adapt to conditions that exclude them.

**Engage:** This is about building the social ecosystems that make work sustainable. This includes fostering allyship, creating moments of joy and solidarity in workplaces, and enabling collective strategies, whether it is women supporting each other with childcare, showing up together in public spaces, or simply building a sense of belonging and visibility.

A critical part of this work is engaging men, not as peripheral supporters, but as active participants in enabling women's safety and economic opportunity. Men often shape the terms of women's mobility within households, workplaces, and public spaces. Decisions about whether women can travel, work late, or take up certain jobs are frequently negotiated with or controlled by male family members. At the same time, men dominate many public-facing roles—drivers, vendors, security personnel, municipal workers where their everyday actions can enable safety and mobility.

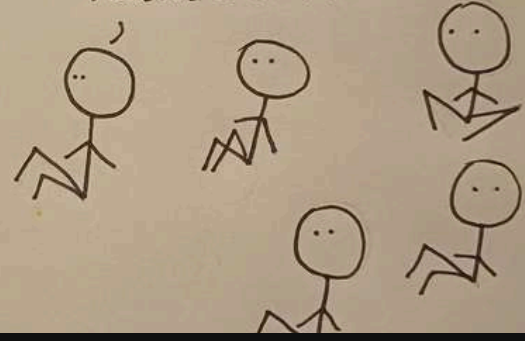
Engaging men is about building their capacity to act differently in concrete situations: to recognise harassment, to intervene safely, to support women's mobility, and to challenge norms within their own circles. When men become active bystanders and allies, safety begins to function as shared responsibility rather than an individual burden. This has direct implications for economic participation because women can then move with greater confidence and less risk (or maybe take risk).

So, what we also really need for economic opportunity and justice is not investment in livelihoods in isolation, but also investment in safer public infrastructure, gender-responsive planning, and community-based accountability systems. This means transforming the conditions under which women access, occupy, and move through public space.

# Whose Space

As women, we never truly belong in a public space, right?

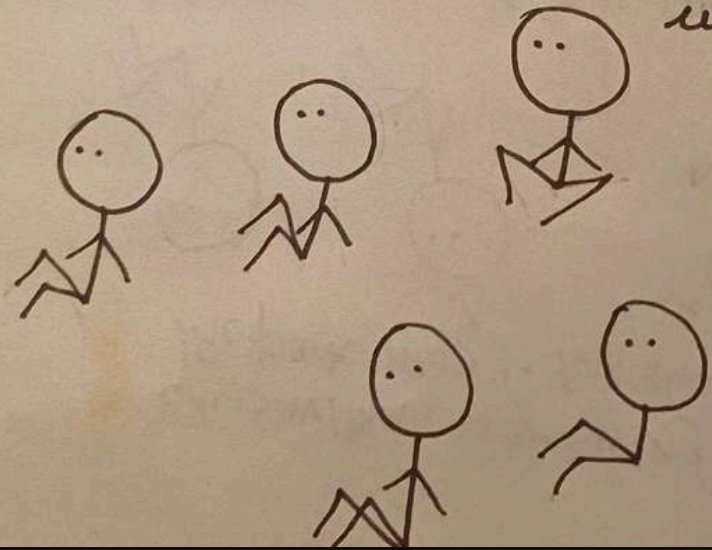
Yeah, my presence in any public space is unquestioned only if I have a respectable reason to be there



is it anyway?

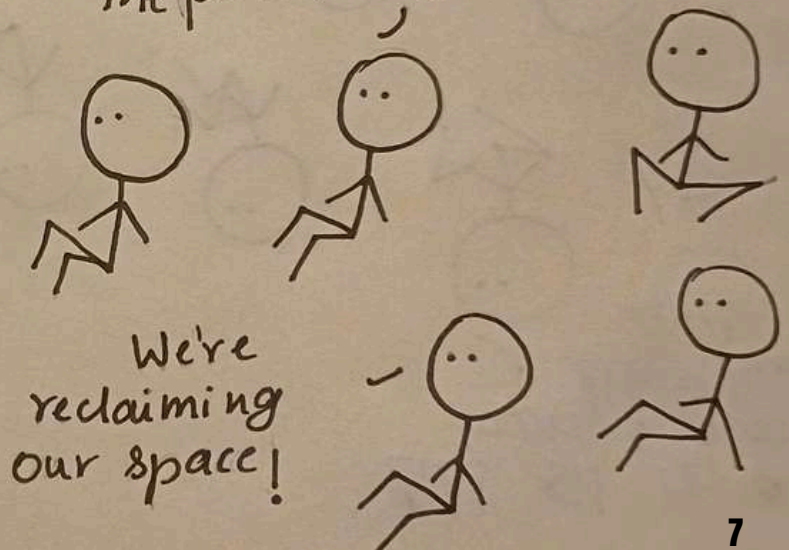
Exactly, we don't have the right to loiter, just exist in spaces.

Like sit in a tapri & gossip like those uncles.



Madam, here's your tea.

Oh, Savitha, we're going to the park nearby. You should join

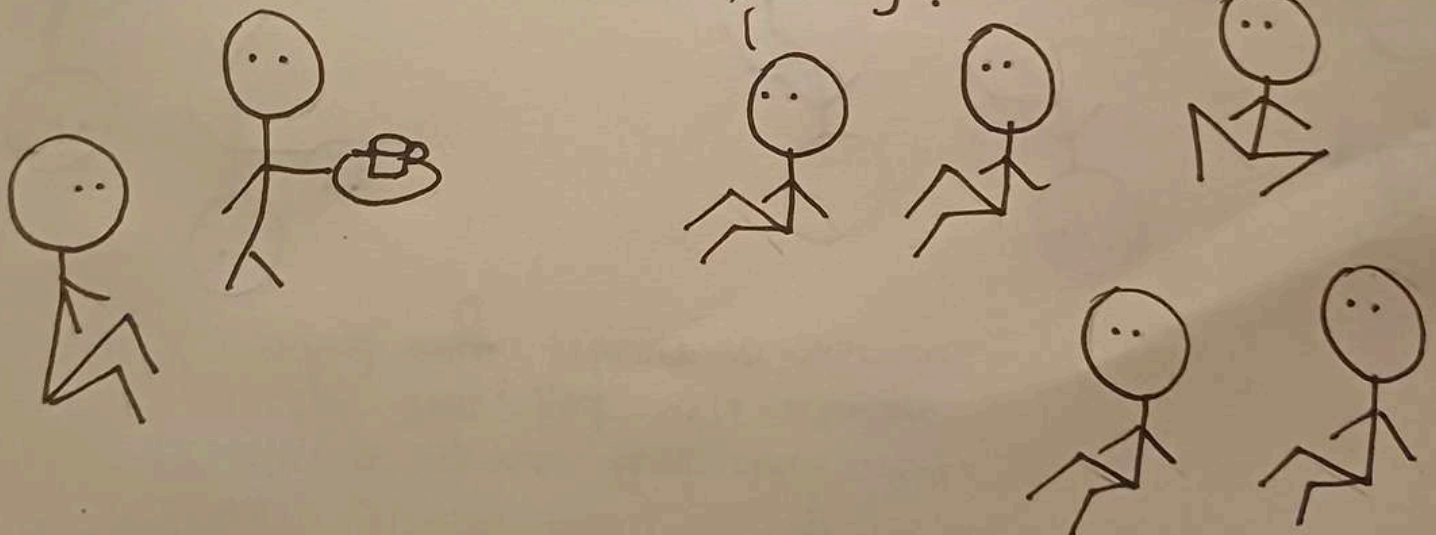


We're reclaiming our space!

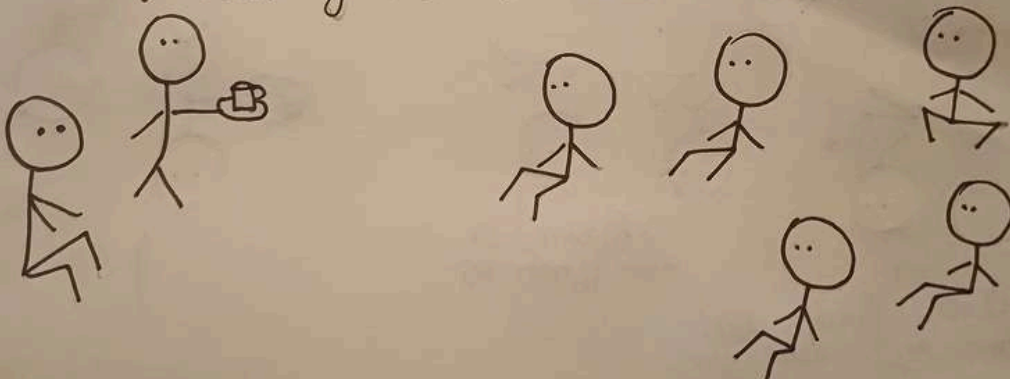
Oh. Actually I go there everyday

What? Really? But it's always filled with men. I've always felt unsafe there.

So, you'll join us, surely?



Uh, no madam. I work there. I will be too busy sweeping to reclaim a space that will never accept me, but will always need my labour to sustain.



## About the author

Sanya is a 4th year undergrad student. She makes comics when she can't express herself in writing. This, she says, is an attempt to put her comics out there!

## Who gets to reclaim public spaces?

Patriarchy ensures that women struggle for the right to loiter or occupy public spaces without 'respectable' justifications. What gets lost in this debate however is that marginalised women from the labouring class have always inhabited these spaces. This comic explores the uneasy intersection between visibility and belonging, asking whether access alone is enough when public spaces depend on marginalised women's work while denying them the comfort of leisure.

## About the piece

# ನನ್ನೊಳಗಿನ ಅಲೆಗಳು (The Waves Within Me)

ತೇಜಸ್ವಿನಿ. ಎಚ್ (Thejaswini H)

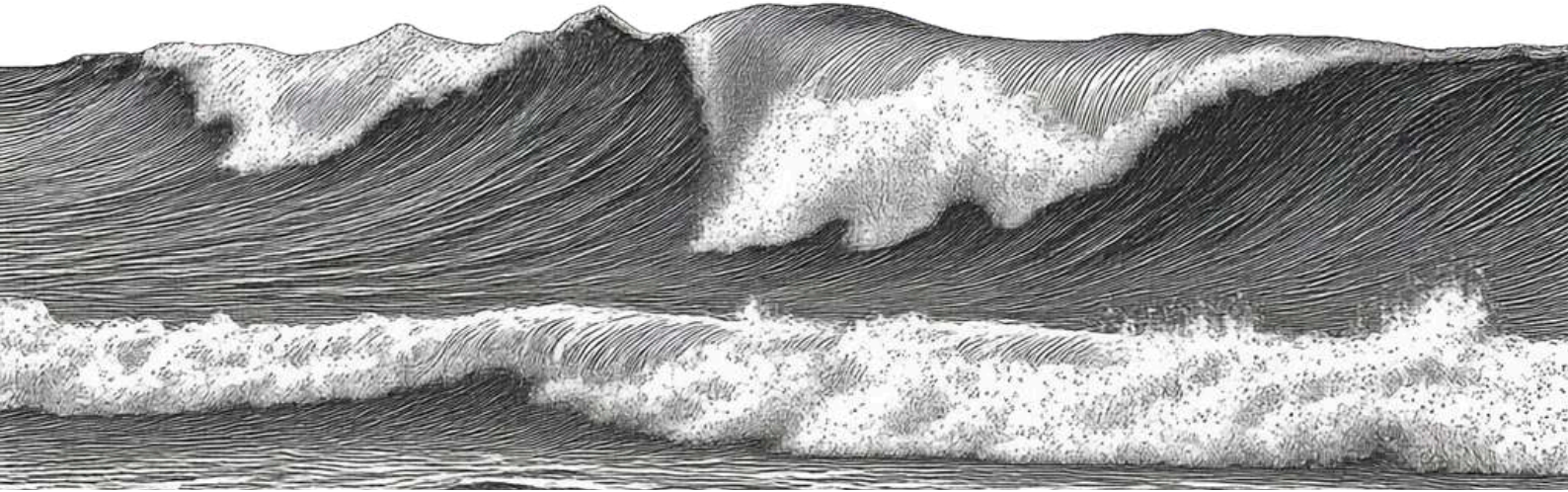
ಲೋಕದ ಕಣ್ಣಿಗೆ ನಾನು ಹೆಣ್ಣು , ಬೆಳಗಾಯಿತು ಎಂದು ನನ್ನ ಕಣ್ಣುಗಳು ತೆರೆಯುತ್ತಲೇ ...  
ಜೀವನವೆಲ್ಲ ಸಮುದ್ರದಂತೆ ಲೋಕದ ಗೊಂದಲ ಮರೆಮಾಚಿತು, ಸ್ತಿವಾದದ ಭಾವಗಳು ಅಪ್ಪುತಲೆ ಇದ್ದವು ....  
ಆದರೂ ಸಮಾಜ ಸೃಷ್ಟಿಸಿದ ರೇಖೆಯನ್ನು ಅನುಸರಿಸಿದೆ ....  
ಆದರೂ ಅಲೆಯೊಂದು ನನ್ನೆಡೆಗೆ ಬಂದು ಅಪ್ಪಳಿಸಿ ಮತ್ತೆ ಮತ್ತೆ ಅಪ್ಪಳಿಸಿ ಹೋಗುತ್ತಲೇ ಇದೆ ...  
ಈ ಅಲೆಗಳು ನನ್ನೆಡೆಗೆ ಬರುವುದಿಲ್ಲ ಎಂಬ ಅಪಾರವಾದ ಬ್ರಾಂತಿ ನನಗೆ,

ಒಂದು ಅಲೆ ಹೋಗುವಷ್ಟರಲ್ಲಿ ಇನ್ನೊಂದು ಅಲೆ ತಲುಪುತ್ತದೆ. ಆದರೆ ಕೆಲವು ಅಲೆಗಳು ತುಂಬಾ ಭಾರವಾಗಿರುತ್ತವೆ.  
ನಗರದಲ್ಲಿ ಮಳೆಯಿಂದ ಜೀವಗಳು ಹೋಗುವ ಸುದ್ದಿಗಳು, ಪರಿಸರದ ಸಮಸ್ಯೆಗಳು, ಜನರ ನಡುವೆ ಹಿಂಸೆ, “ತಾನು ಮೇಲು, ಅವರು ಕೀಳು,  
ನನ್ನ ಧಾರ್ಮ, ನಮ್ಮ ಪಕ್ಷ, ವಿರೋಧ ಪಕ್ಷ....” ಅಬ್ಬಬಾ..ಎಷ್ಟೊಂದು ಅಲೆಗಳು...  
ನಾನು ನಿಂತು ಇದನ್ನೆಲ್ಲಾ ನೋಡಬೇಕೆನಿಸುತ್ತದೆ. ಆದರೆ ಅಲೆಗಳು ನಿಲ್ಲೋದಿಲ್ಲ.

ಆದರೂ ನಾನು ಮುಂದುವರೆಯುತ್ತೇನೆ. ಮಗಳಾಗಿ, ತಾಯಿಯಾಗಿ, ಸೊಸೆಯಾಗಿ, ಸ್ನೇಹಿತೆಯಾಗಿ, ಸಂಬಂಧಿಯಾಗಿ, ಪ್ರಜೆಯಾಗಿ ಕೆಲಸದಲ್ಲಿ,  
ನನ್ನ ಮಾನವೀಯ ಪಾತ್ರಗಳಲ್ಲಿ. ಅಲೆಗಳ ಮಧ್ಯೆ ನಿಂತು ಸಮತೋಲನ ಹಿಡಿಯುವಂತೆ.

ಕೆಲವೊಮ್ಮೆ ನಾನು ಯೋಚಿಸುತ್ತೇನೆ, ಈ ಅಲೆಗಳ ಜೊತೆ ಬದುಕೋದು ನಾವು ಕಲಿತಾ?  
ಇಲ್ಲವಾದರೆ ಅಲೆಗಳು ನಮ್ಮನ್ನು ಹಾಗೇ ಒಯ್ಯುತ್ತಿವೆಯಾ....?  
ಇದರ ಮಧ್ಯೆ ಇನ್ನೊಂದು ಅಲೆ ಎದ್ದಿದೆ , ಸ್ತ್ರೀವಾದದ ಅಲೆ.  
ಇದು ಕೆಲವೊಮ್ಮೆ ನನ್ನನ್ನು ಪ್ರಶ್ನಿಸುತ್ತದೆ, ಕೆಲವೊಮ್ಮೆ ಶಕ್ತಿ ಕೊಡುತ್ತದೆ.  
“ಯಾಕೆ ಹೀಗಿದೆ?”, “ಬದಲಾವಣೆ ಹೇಗೆ?” ಅನ್ನೋ ಪ್ರಶ್ನೆಗಳು ಇದೇ ಅಲೆಯಿಂದ ಬರುತ್ತವೆ.  
ನಾನು ನಿಂತು ಇದನ್ನೆಲ್ಲಾ ನೋಡಬೇಕೆನಿಸುತ್ತದೆ. ಆದರೆ ಅಲೆಗಳು ನಿಲ್ಲೋದಿಲ್ಲ.

ಅಲೆಗಳು ನಿಲ್ಲೋದಿಲ್ಲ. ಆದರೆ ನಾನು ಕೂಡ ನಿಲ್ಲೋದಿಲ್ಲ. ನಮ್ಮ ಸಮಾಜ ಅಲೆಗಳಂತೆ , ಸಮಯದಂತೆ, ಭಾವನೆಗಳಿಗೆ ನಿಲ್ಲದೆ, ತನ್ನ  
ಮೌಲ್ಯಕ್ಕೆ ಆಧ್ಯತೆ ಕೊಟ್ಟು ಮುಂದುವರಿಯುತ್ತಲೇ ಇರುತ್ತದೆ. ಅದರಂತೆ ನಾವು ನಿಲ್ಲದೇ ನಮ್ಮ ಜೀವನದಾ ಮೌಲ್ಯವನ್ನು ಕಂಡುಕೊಳ್ಳೋಣ....



The piece reflects on life as a series of unending waves that represent personal responsibilities, social crises, political divisions, environmental disasters, and struggles for justice. Amid these overlapping pressures, feminism emerges as a powerful force that both challenges and empowers, prompting critical questions about inequality, social norms, and the possibility of change. For the author, feminism encourages reflection on why society functions as it does and how it can become more just.

Feminism becomes a vehicle for mobility by enabling individuals to question boundaries, challenge restrictive roles, and imagine new possibilities for themselves and society. In this way, mobility is understood as the capacity to navigate change, adapt, and move toward greater freedom, agency, and inclusion.

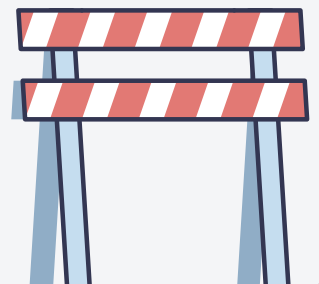
# BRIDGE OR BARRIER?

These are various infrastructures that exist that could **inhibit or enable** one's mobility. Reflect and **circle** those that serve as bridges and **cross** those that are barriers!

Well-lit bus stops	Poor street lighting	Dark underpasses	Emergency helpline numbers displayed	Isolated bus stops
Safe pedestrian crossings	Lush trees	Pathways with different kinds of people	Broken footpaths	Narrow pathways
Wheelchair-accessible buses	Accessible public toilets for EVERYONE	Blocked walkways	Priority seating	Multilingual information boards
Affordable public transport fares	Clean and maintained public toilets	Reliable public transport schedules	Construction debris blocking pathways	Surveillance through CCTVs
No staff available at OSCs during late hours	Panic buttons in buses to alert communities	Tactile paving/braille blocks	Isolated and deserted waiting areas	Non-functioning traffic signals
Aggressive law enforcement officers	Vehicles speeding through residential areas	Catcalling or verbal harassment	Safe pedestrian crossings	Passengers and staff at public spaces intervene during harm

How many of these are **bridges** or **barriers** in your daily journeys?

What do your answers reveal about **the journeys people make (or can't make?)**





on the move...

