

THE NEHRU CENTRE NEWSLETTER



The Nehru Centre (TNC), New Delhi is an independent think tank, set up in 2024, with the goal of producing accessible research findings in the fields of history, policy, law, and governance in India. We aim to bring this knowledge to a wider audience through articles, podcasts, events, and other forms of public communication. At its core, our work is about engaging with the issues of our time, fighting misinformation, and encouraging a deeper understanding of India's evolving political, social, and economic landscape.

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

We're excited to share with you the fourth issue of our newsletter! It's been an incredible journey, and we're so grateful for all the support and feedback we've received. As we navigate through a rapidly changing world, our pieces bring forward insightful perspectives on pressing issues that shape our society today.

A special thanks to our guest columnists for their contributions this month and to the TNC team members who have brought everything together to make this issue what it is.

As always, we hope these pieces inspire you to reflect, discuss, and engage with the world around you. Your feedback is always appreciated, and we look forward to sharing more with you in the upcoming issues.

We look forward to your continued engagement!

Best,

Divya Singh Chauhan

The Nehru Centre, New Delhi



Researching Truth, Reimagining Democracy

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CALL FOR GUEST WRITERS

The Nehru Centre (TNC) is now accepting submissions from guest writers on a rolling basis for our upcoming newsletter. Please read our editorial guidelines carefully before sending us your submission.

We invite submissions in the following formats:

1. Opinion pieces – Arguments backed by facts and figures (not rants) (700-900 words)
2. Socio-political, law & policy, and historical articles – National or international scope (600-800 words)
3. News reports – Curated or original reporting based on primary field research (500-600 words)

How to Submit ?

1. Email your submissions (doc) to thenehrucentre.india@gmail.com with a short author bio & your social media handles.
2. Mention the title of your piece in the subject line and specify if it is time-sensitive.
3. For the write-ups, please use English (UK), Times New Roman, 12pt, and line spacing 1.15.
4. If selected, the editor will review your work and request edits, if necessary.
5. You will be informed about the expected publishing date once the newsletter goes live.
6. Your article will be shared on TNC's multiple social media platforms and you will be tagged (depending on social media accounts provided by you).
7. We retain the final say over headlines, publishing dates, and images used.

AI & Plagiarism Policy

We value original thought and authentic writing. While AI tools can assist in proofreading, structuring, or shortening content, all AI usage must be disclosed to the editor. AI-generated content without human oversight will not be accepted.

Terms & Conditions

1. Indicate if your article is exclusive to The Nehru Centre or has been published elsewhere. We prioritize original content and typically do not republish blog posts.
2. Copyright for material that is published exclusively is held jointly by The Nehru Centre, New Delhi and the authors.
3. If others request to republish your article, you must seek TNC's informed consent before granting permission.
4. Once an article is published, it cannot be removed/ taken down except in legal, copyright, or safety-related cases.
5. With the exception of trans writers, we do not allow any writer to change their name or write under a pseudonym for The Nehru Centre to ensure complete transparency and to avoid any legal hassles going forward. However, writers wishing to publish personal narratives can choose to write anonymously for us (editorial records will still require full author details).

GUEST COLUMN | POLITICAL COMMENTARY

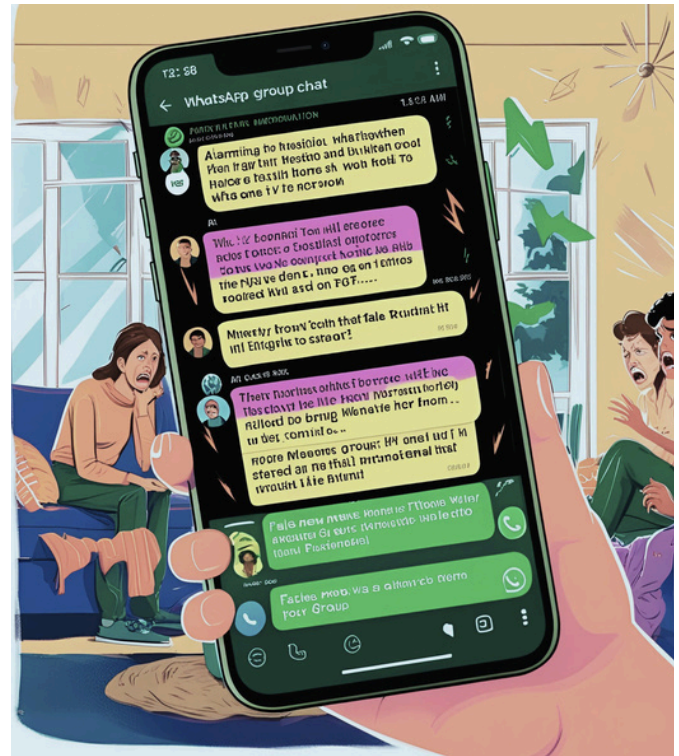
WHATSAPP NATIONALISM: YOUTH, MISINFORMATION AND THE NEW POLITICAL SOCIALISATION

By Saloni Pradhan (she/her)*

From October 2024 to January 2025, I conducted fieldwork in two central universities in India, hoping to understand how young people engage with political ideologies in institutional spaces. What I found was not just politics in its conventional form — student parties, protests, and policies, but politics lived through rumours, WhatsApp forwards, and conversations in hostels and canteens. This piece argues that Hindutva today is not simply learned, it is absorbed through repetition, emotion, and peer affirmation, especially on digital platforms. Rather than being imposed from the top down, it is being co-produced, performed, and personalised in everyday spaces, most powerfully among students.

Political socialisation, traditionally understood through the lens of family, school, media and state, has taken on a new life in India, one that is deeply intertwined with the everyday digital interactions of youth. Through in-depth interviews with students from across regions, castes, and academic disciplines, one thing became glaringly clear: social media has not just become a site for information, it has become a space for ideological immersion.

Take, for instance, a student who told me, with full conviction: “The Taj Mahal and so many other monuments in India have been mortgaged by the Congress government to the World Bank.” Another claimed: “Temples that are energy centres were shut down and India hasn’t been able to prosper.” These statements are not anomalies, they are part of a growing echo chamber of misinformation, conspiracy, and myth-making that forms the emotional and intel-



-lectual terrain of everyday Hindutva. At another interview, a student was profoundly affected by the idea of a ‘caste and religion census’. They had heard that based on a caste and religion census conducted, there will be a wealth redistribution. While the argument used economic jargon, it was no less an emotional statement. Very often they do not remember where the information came from, but they remember discussing it with friends, having conversations in WhatsApp groups.

These narratives may not emerge from textbooks or formal lectures, but they are deeply believed, repeated, and shared. While this may generally be classified as misinformation, rumours, fake news and such, they are the building blocks of a person’s political identity.

In many cases, students described how their political awareness was first shaped not by family or institutional curricula but by WhatsApp groups, YouTube channels, and Instagram reels.

While a few developed the tools to critically assess and question these narratives, many others absorbed them as unchallenged truths, weaving them into their understanding of India, identity, and history.

What complicates this further is that these students are not necessarily from the same ideological camp. Some come from RSS-affiliated families and have carried those beliefs into university spaces.

Others, raised in liberal or apolitical homes, found themselves drawn to the certainty and pride offered by nationalist narratives online. Still others, especially from marginalised backgrounds, engaged with Hindutva ideology for reasons of visibility and inclusion, even while being structurally excluded from its leadership and authority.

What makes this phenomenon so compelling and concerning is that it operates beyond the traditional boundaries of state control. However, it is also a state-sanctioned project. This is what gives it such power: it is not solely imposed through official policies or institutions, but seeps into everyday life through informal networks, digital channels, and cultural narratives. At the same time, the state often legitimises, amplifies, or selectively ignores this ideological spread — through symbolic gestures, educational reforms, and silence in the face of misinformation.

The result is an ideological ecosystem where state authority and social circulation feed off each other, blurring the line between what is state-driven and what is societally reproduced. Ideology is not being handed down; it is being performed, shared, and co-created by youth themselves.

In speaking with students from varied social and regional backgrounds, one realises that political ideologies are no longer confined to manifestos, they live in memes, manifest in misinformation, and are made credible by repetition. Hindutva nationalism, in this context, is not just imagined, it is lived, re-posted, and deeply felt. If we are to understand the future of Indian democracy, we must look not just at polling booths and party speeches, but at the silent, glowing screens in university hostels, and the voices they amplify.

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**AUTHOR BIO: Saloni Pradhan (she/her) is a Postgraduate Researcher at the University of Leicester. Her PhD. research focuses on religious nationalism and political socialisation. She holds a Master's degree in Political Communication from Cardiff University, Wales and a Bachelor's degree in Media, Economics, and Political Science from Christ University, Bangalore, India.*

Saloni's research interests lie in nationalism, populism, and political communication. For her thesis she is studying Nationalism and political identity among youth in India, looking at identity formation and intersectionality of identity in the face of political ideology.

GUEST COLUMN | OPINION

TO BE OR NOT TO BE IN A MARRIAGE IS THE QUESTION

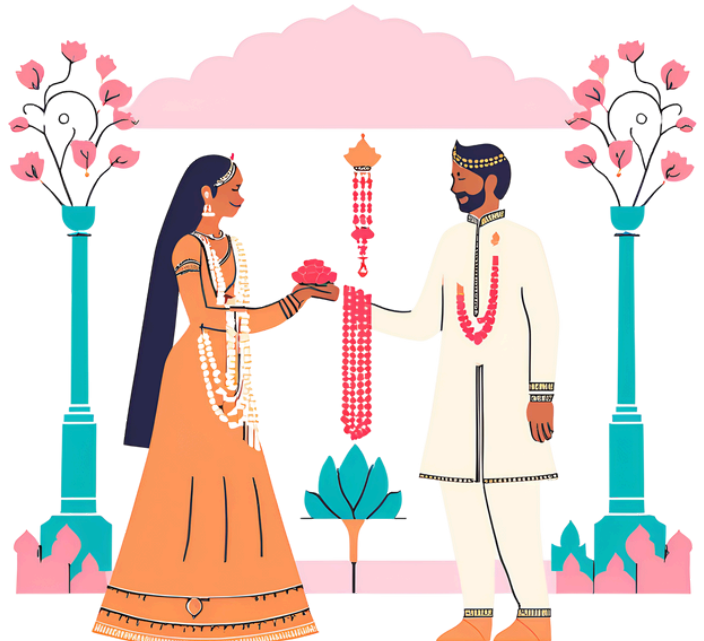
By Kaushalya Bajpayee*

The recent news of the acquittal of a man convicted of raping his wife who died of severe injuries have revived the long pending debate on marital rape. Debates on marital rape have put a question mark on the viability of marriage as an institution. Marriage is commonly defined as a state of being united as spouses in a consensual and contractual relationship recognised by law. But the incidence of marital rape is a challenge to such consensual partnership which operates within the power structure of patriarchy. India is one of the few countries in the world, which does not have a marital rape law and the legislature has refrained from framing one in view of the social, cultural and political backlash.

Criminalisation of marital rape has been denied as unconstitutional because according to the law, sexual intercourse between a man and his wife cannot be termed as rape if the woman is more than 18 years of age.

Historically, the brutality of rape has been separated from the pristine domestic domain of marriage consummation. Spearheading the movement for the *Age of Consent Act*, more than a century back, was a very similar incident.

In 1891, Phulmoni Dasi, a girl of ten years died after she suffered severe injuries following the act of sexual intercourse by her husband, Hari Mohun Maiti, a man of thirty years. According to the post – mortem report, her vagina was ruptured, causing haemorrhage leading to her death. Her mother, who rushed to the spot on hear the shrieks of the girl lying in a pool of blood. The uncanny resemblance between the two events that are set more than a century apart is not only striking but also dreadful.



More than a century later, in 2017, the thirty-year-old woman died from ‘unnatural sex’ perpetrated by her husband. In her dying statement, the woman had mentioned about the gruesome acts of anal sex by her husband for which she suffered severe injury, peritonitis and rectal perforation. The husband was accused under Section 375 (rape), 377 (unnatural sex) and 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) and the trial court of Bastar’s Jagdalpur had convicted him with a sentence of ten years of imprisonment.

However, the trials of both the cases appear to be a mere repetition. In the trial for *Queen Vs Hurree Mohun Mythee* on 26th July, 1890, in the Calcutta High Court, the husband, Hari Mohun Maiti was accused of culpable homicide (not of murder) and voluntarily hurting his wife inflicting serious injuries causing death. However, Justice Wilson argued in front of the jury that according to the medical evidence, there was no external injuries and that it could not be in anyway proved if the husband was aware of the consequences of his rash and negligent acts. However, he was only found guilty of causing grievous hurt by doing a negligent act dangerous to life.

In February, 2025, the Chhattisgarh High Court pronounced its verdict where the husband is not liable to any punishment because according to Indian law, sexual intercourse, even forceful and unnatural, with any women into a marriage, cannot be termed as rape. There is no provision of marital rape in the law of our country, neither there is any significance of the term 'consent'.

Interestingly, in both the cases, the 'law of rape' did not apply. During the procedure in 1890, Justice Wilson mentioned that though the wife is not a 'property' of the husband and shall not be subjected to inhuman behaviour, this case did not belong to the IPC and had no association with rape law. The law of rape, did not apply as between husband and wife after the latter had attained the age of ten years. He argued that rather than focusing on the age of the girl, rape laws should be identified on the basis of the intention, rashness, negligence and of consequences, which in this case was of not much significance.

The Report of the Native Paper, September 1890, mentioned the need for a judicial intervention by the British government in the context of personal liberty and free will. Arguing for the need of legislative measures, it reiterated the importance of 'consent', to free the 'slavery of the weaker to the stronger sex and the virtual death so far as the higher potentialities of the life are concerned of a large fraction of the Hindu race. During the debates in the 1890s, on the Age of Consent Act, thus, age emerged as the fulcrum of discussion and the age of consent was raised from ten to twelve.

In India, it is an irony that marriage can be dissolved or one can file for divorce on the charge of impotence as dissolution of marriage on that ground is a medico – legal problem. But marital rape is not. In spite of the severe injuries inflicted on the women, it cannot be reported, examined and challenged in the court of law.

While the final verdict on the issue by the Supreme Court is pending, it raises some intriguing questions related to individual liberty and institutional viability.

Firstly, in the absence of marital rape law, often the cases are filed under the Domestic violence Act. But does it violate the wife's right to privacy? Secondly, in the absence of such laws, the agency of women is rendered absolutely powerless, not only in terms of physicality but also socially and financially as even a financially independent woman can be subjected to daily humiliation and objectification. Reiterating patriarchal power balance, it gives the male an avenue to avenge their pleasure legally and fans up the rape culture without being convicted. If a girl refuses a proposal, the girl can be wooed/arranged to be married (no need of acid anymore!) and then be subjected to torture and humiliation regularly. Thus, it perpetuates absolute denial of the same status to women within the institution of marriage.

According to a 2023 judgement by the Bombay High Court, intercourse with any girl, under the age of 18 is rape, whether the girl is married or not. Both POCSO Act 2012 and the Indian Penal Code, 1860 peg the age of consent at 18 years. It means that all persons under the age of 18 are defined as children and the 'consent' of a child is defined as irrelevant by law. But, in view of the consensual relationships, the age of consent seems to need a further reconsideration, in view of the incongruity between the biological and social reality of the adolescents. It is often argued that often the adolescents are channelled into early marriages as because in Indian society, marriage is considered to be the 'socially legitimate space for the expression of sexuality in the country'.

While this situation puts a question mark on the social viability of the POCSO Act, it also forces one to rethink about the institution of marriage and

the laws guarding them. While socially, the freedom of sexual expression is forcing adolescents to opt for early marriages, is marriage a 'safe space' to be in? The absence of marital rape law in India has evidently exposed the irrelevance and insignificance of the term 'consent' and female agency, thereby opening up the Pandora's box of gendered notions of 'equality'. It has also led to a number of 'marrying your rapist' cases, where the perpetrator is ready to marry the victim and the victim is forced into the situation by her parents and neighbours because of social stigma and shame. However, one can hardly comprehend the trauma of rape, leave alone the trauma of staying with the perpetrator for the rest of the life.

Today, a girl below 18 years would be considered a child whose consent would not be legally accepted in case of a trial. This puts her in a situation where institutionally her agency or voice of sexual expression is curbed. On the other hand, if she gets married, her consent bears no legal validity as her husband can treat her the way he likes within the domestic walls.

So, how far have we travelled in these hundred years? There have been a number of academic interventions on the issue of consent and female agencies in the past decades, especially in the context of feminism and gender studies. The feminist movements, the films like *Pink* and *Thappad* have spoken unequivocally about the need to understand "No means No". But have we? Are we moving in that direction if we still do not have a law? Rather the absence of law and legal provision would perpetuate the rampant rape culture and endanger the institution of marriage itself. We have been the witness to gruesome incidents of Nirbhaya, Abhaya or the teenage Dalit girl from Hathras who were inflicted severe injuries and eventually succumbed. However, it's not only the streets, but also the four walls of domesticity which is calling out for intervention.

In South Korea, the 4B movement is an indication of the radical repercussion that oppression might engender where the girls have not only decided to refrain from motherhood and dating but also from marriage and having sex. It has also become popular in the US as a protest against the curbing of the women's reproductive rights. It is high time for the legislature and the judiciary to step in and ensure that the term 'consent' is significant and relevant in practice and that does not sound like a travesty or shall we be prepared for a backlash?

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**AUTHOR BIO: Kaushalya Bajpayee is currently teaching as Associate Professor in O.P. Jindal Global University. She is a historian of British Imperialism/Colonialism and Modern South Asia, colonial medical health policies and public health in colonial and post-colonial India. As part of her research, she focuses on social history of medicine, gender and reproductive health history, medical education, colonial policy and legislative debates, health enactments and making of health policies as well as environmental and ecological concerns of the late colonial period.*

She has published with journals like Global Public Health, Medical History, and Contemporary South Asia. She is a member of the "Asian Society for the History of Medicine" and a part of the "History of Body Politics in the Global South" network.

GUEST COLUMN | SOCIAL IMPACT

REVITALISING EDUCATION: EMPOWERING MARGINALISED STUDENTS THROUGH POSITIVE TEACHING AND STRATEGIC SUPPORT

By Prasoon Kumar*

The article assertively demonstrates that a teacher's positive attitude toward students' learning abilities significantly boosts their board exam performance. The girls' school, established in 1927 by a Marwari business family in Nawalgarh, Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, plays a crucial role in supporting students from marginalised backgrounds who often lack resources available to their middle-class peers. Recent initiatives aimed at enhancing board exam performance are part of a broader strategy to revitalise the school, previously a leading institution for girls' education in Jhunjhunu district. In 2019, the Sakseria Foundation enlisted my expertise to elevate the school's performance in the Rajasthan board exams. Schools, like any institutions, require attentive management as they evolve, and traditional solutions may not suffice.

Through discussions with teachers, we identified effective strategies to instil confidence in this historic institution, once a leader in girls' education in the region. The school's influence, shaped by its founder's experiences, extends across India. We recognised early on that board exam results are pivotal to the school's reputation, despite the challenge that many teachers face in assuming that improved performance is synonymous with true academic excellence. While high results often correlate with strong academic knowledge, they represent only a fraction of the overall picture. The underlying issue concerns the structure and management of board exam papers, a complex topic that requires attention. Additionally, teachers highlighted the vital role that parental education, alongside religious and socio-economic factors, plays in shaping student outcomes.



While students' backgrounds and gender do have an impact, the most significant factor remains the lack of resources. These girls frequently lack access to the basic support that children from middle-class families take for granted, such as a conducive studying environment, parental guidance, or additional learning resources. Simply discussing these challenges undermines the girls' self-belief in their learning capabilities. Learning inherently involves overcoming failure, but attributing struggles to external factors creates psychological barriers that complicate the process.

It was essential to communicate to teachers that blaming parents does not absolve schools or educators of their responsibilities in formal education. We reviewed various examples demonstrating that teaching subjects like grammar or mathematics extends beyond parental abilities. It is the duty of teachers to impart subject knowledge. Given the importance of board exam performance, I collaborated with teachers to develop strategies to improve exam results.

We analysed exam question patterns and discovered that only 20% assessed conceptual understanding and intuition, while the majority focused on memory skills. Many memorisation-based questions were frequently repeated, sometimes verbatim. We targeted these questions and utilised guidebooks that consistently predicted exam questions. Our approach yielded success: in 2022, every student passed; in 2023, all students achieved 1st and 2nd class; and in 2024, all students passed in 1st and 2nd grade, with science stream students achieving an impressive 100% in 1st class and three students securing spots on the state merit list.

Reflecting on our journey, it took over a year to convincingly show teachers, through evidence, that every student can learn when provided with the right context. A pivotal lesson we uncovered is that exam results do not accurately reflect students' academic knowledge; rather, they depend heavily on how exams are approached. Successfully navigating exams requires understanding question patterns and engaging in repeated practice. Students with solid subject knowledge tend to find exam questions easier to tackle, while those less familiar with the material may need strategic planning to succeed. We identified layers of questions across grades 7 to 10, where those requiring intuitive understanding represented only 20 to 30% at best. We leveraged this insight to progressively improve the school's board exam results.

This improvement catalysed a significant shift in mindset among the teachers. They now recognise that students from any social or economic background can excel and learn when provided with appropriate support. This newfound belief has led to enhancements not only in board exam teaching but also across all subjects and classes within the school.

We are committed to preserve the momentum generated by each successive board exam result and its broader impact, both within our school and on neighbouring institutions in a region that has long held the belief that learning cannot be separated from these contexts.

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**AUTHOR BIO: Mr. Prasoon Kumar has been working in school education for the past 25 years. Previously, he was an educational advisor at Vidya Bhavan Society in Udaipur, an institution catering to disadvantaged students throughout the Mewra region of South Rajasthan.*

Mr. Kumar now works as an educational consultant at Saksaria Foundation School in Nawalgarh, Jhunjhunu District of Rajasthan.

BOOK REVIEW

ANIMAL FARM

By Mansi Singh

George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is a masterful political allegory that remains as relevant today as when it was first published in 1945. On the surface, it is a simple tale about a group of farm animals who overthrow their human farmer in hopes of creating a society where all animals are equal. However, Orwell's sharp prose quickly reveals a darker, more complex narrative, one that critiques the rise of totalitarian regimes.

The novel's brilliance lies in its simplicity. Using a cast of animals, from the idealistic pig, Snowball, to the tyrannical Napoleon. Orwell translates the complexities of revolution and power into a form that is both accessible and chilling. Each character represents a societal archetype, turning the book into a satirical mirror reflecting the corrupting influence of power.

The novel opens with the stirring rhetoric of Old Major, whose speech incites the rebellion. He declares, "Man serves the interests of no creature except himself" a statement that sets the ideological foundation for the revolution.

As the pigs consolidate power, Orwell charts a chilling descent into tyranny. Boxer, the loyal cart-horse, becomes a tragic symbol of the exploited working class. His personal mottos, "I will work harder" and "Napoleon is always right", illustrate his unwavering faith in a system that ultimately betrays him. These phrases, repeated like mantras, expose how propaganda and loyalty can be weaponised.

The final line of the novel, "The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig... but already it was impossible to say which was which", delivers a haunting message. The once-liberated animals now live under a regime as cruel as the one they overthrew, a grim commentary on the cyclical nature of power and corruption.



Orwell's writing is clear, direct, and emotionally resonant. The transformation of the farm, from a hopeful utopia to a brutal dictatorship, is gradual and haunting, with the infamous line, "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" captures the essence of political hypocrisy and the core of Orwell's work that revolutionary ideals can be twisted into tools of oppression when power goes unchecked.

Short in length, *Animal Farm* delivers a profound message about the dangers of dictatorship, the manipulation of truth, and the fragility of freedom. It's a must read for anyone interested in politics, history, and the enduring power of literature to challenge and provoke.

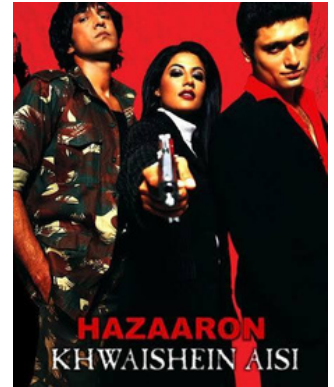
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TNC WATCHLIST: MOVIES FROM THE PAST

Recommendations by Midhat Samra

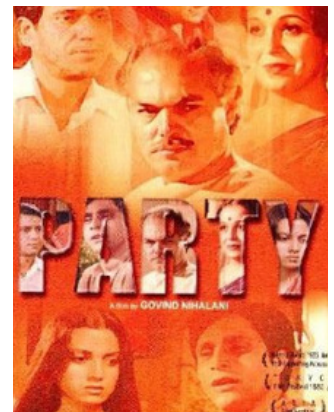
HAZAARON KHWAISHEIN AISI by *Sudhir Mishra*

Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi is a 2003 film, which deals with idealism and realism. It is a story about a complicated love-triangle during a complicated time of social and political changes in India. It is a story of three friends who grow close and apart against the Indian politics. It is a story of love, loss, betrayal and hope. It is a story of compassion and courage. The story remains as relevant as it was two decades ago. The film shakes the viewer from within. Not a single character in the film is white or black, they are all coloured in shades of grey. It is a film that cannot be easily forgotten.



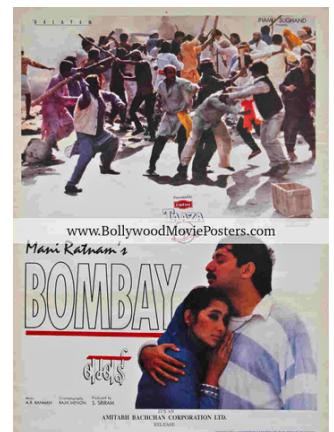
PARTY by *Govind Nihalani*

Released in 1984, PARTY is a satire on the apathy of the privileged. The film revolves around a party, that is held in honor of the recipient of a literary prize, attended by the elites in town. However, Amrit, a writer who left his literary career to become an activist, is missing from the party. His attempts to bridge the gap between words and deeds spark conversations between the elites and compels the viewers to ask questions. Questions like - does your art sit in the comfort of rooms or does it fight against injustice? Who are you in times of trouble? and many more.



BOMBAY by *Mani Ratnam*

Produced in Tamil language, Bombay is a 1995 romantic drama cum political thriller. It depicts romantic relationship between an inter-religious couple. The couple fall in love in their home town but decide to move to Bombay after facing backlash from their families. The couple is blessed with twins soon and decide to bring them up in different religions- depicting tolerance and harmony. The film majorly centres around the Babri Masjid demolition and the life of the couple and their children post demolition. The movie brilliantly puts forward intense sociopolitical comments about violence and interfaith relationships and opens up space for discourse.



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