

## Hashtag Solidarity: The Delta Meghwal Discourse

*I, on the other hand, sense that we are rapidly approaching an era of half voluntary and half enforced secrecy, the dawn of a desire that is, among other things, political.*

*And you too, its as though you think doing a book about me gives you some power over me. No way.*

Deleuze, Negotiation. (1995)

This is an age of solidarity; the age of revolutions is over. In the past decade we have witnessed the creation of a number of worldwide movements against neoliberalism, the popular swells of the Icelandic, Nepali, Tunisian and Egyptian people as well as a confused and continuous wave of riots, strikes and occupations in our own nation state in almost an industrial scale, a frequency that has been unmatched since the last great social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The World Trade Organisation is seen to have lost the plot, Hindutva and Brahminism is seen to be on the rise, national history is being re written everyday, and welfare states around the world are steadily stripping away public services at an unprecedented rate to bail out financial institutions. Given the rise in global unemployment, poverty, housing, foreclosure and environmental devastation that surrounds these events, the structural viability and desirability of state and capitalist forms of political life are being increasingly put into question. Slavoj Žižek comments on the hope of revolution- “the taboo is broken, we do not live in the best possible world. But there is a long road ahead. There are truly difficult questions that confront us. We know what we do not want. But what do we want? What social organization can replace capitalism? What type of new leaders do we want?” (Žižek 2011a). It is time that we stop thinking about the possibility of revolution, and rather discuss the age of solidarity: “is another world possible?”

The philosophical question that relates to the possibility of solidarity is becoming relevant where the current body of literature thinking about it has tended to under theorize and often simply neglect this crucial dimension within any form of social change- the actuality of solidarity itself. By the actuality of solidarity we mean the degree to which the idea articulates and is articulated by a set of concrete and embodied practices by a cross section of individuals from a number of social groups. Opposed to establishing the philosophical foundations of politics, or merely showing the aporetic conditions of impossibility for such foundations, or even affirming the purity of a potential or hypothetical idea of solidarity, the actuality of solidarity is the process that gives a body to a normative ideal: a body that is articulated and transformed by local and concrete notions of struggle. To put it simply, where is it that we see that we see the ‘idea of solidarity’ in action today? Where and to what degree that we see solidarity being articulated in the name of revolution that further elaborate and transform this idea?

The tendency of contemporary philosophy to under-theorize the dynamics of solidarity, there are two philosophers whose work has become a focus of contestation in this regard and offers us an exemplary point of departure for beginning a philosophical investigation into the concrete modalities of the idea of solidarity:

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Through an analysis of the digital discourse of the Delta Meghwal case of 2011, and a contestation of the same through Deleuze and Guattari's political philosophy of revolution, this paper tries to understand the danger of merely affirming to the idea of solidarity and in ways to relook at the potentiality and actuality of revolution. In order to accomplish this we have divided the paper into two parts. The first part would deal with the neglect of the actuality of revolution, or what has been called 'speculative leftism' by Bruno Bosteels following Alain Badiou which is to be located in three specific places within the political philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari. The second part of the paper locates these debates within the Delta Meghwal case presenting alternative viewpoints. In particular the online discourse is used to illuminate one of most under reported events of Brahmanical brutality: the Delta Meghwal rape case.

### **Speculative Leftism:**

What we are witnessing today is a rise of a new popular idea of "revolution" which is very different from the idea of revolutionary socialism that was bound by the political body of the party, state or vanguard organization. Instead what we see is the rise of a middle class movement that has its own distinct ideological formations within and alongside old ones that have not been sufficiently theorized. The recent return to revisit the idea of revolutionary communism is seen to have the strength of isolating within communism several of its political "invariants" (like equality, universality, and solidarity) (Badiou 2010, Ranciere 2006) while simultaneously subtracting from it many of its (often undesirable) concrete historical articulations: its authoritarianism, its gulags, its hierarchies, and its internal suppressions.

Deleuze and Guattari offer one of the strongest points departure to begin an analysis into the actuality of solidarity and revolution; not at all because of their emphasis on deterritorialisation, desubjectification and ontological multiplicity (which are undeniable dimensions of their thought), but because their work represents the heated debate within the axis of contemporary political theory (and practice): the tension that exists between the affirmation of potentiality and difference and the need for a concrete political organization of some kind to realize this difference. We question the speculative left thesis that affirms ontological difference in itself or pure multiplicity, often understood only philosophically, in *A Thousand Plateaus* we put to question Deleuze and Guattari's insistence that multiplicity needs to be constructed requiring complex assemblages of different (largely non-philosophical) types that function according to their own logics.

Deleuze and Guattari's political writings including *A Thousand Plateaus* has been the subject of attention and criticism. Since 1999 three full-length books have been dedicated to a critique of Deleuze's philosophy: Alain Badiou's *Deleuze: the Clamor of Being* (1999); Slavoj Žižek's *Organs Without Bodies* (2004); and Peter Hallward's *Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (2006). From these works we can see the dangers that come to be associated with their philosophy: political ambivalence, virtual hierarchy, and subjective paralysis. These critiques are important to understand the actuality of revolution and solidarity in contemporary politics.

- (1) Political Ambivalence- “Affirming Difference in the state of permanent revolution [*affirmer la Différence dans l'état de révolution permanente*],” as Deleuze says in *Difference and Repetition* (75/53), may overlook the historical problems of vanguardism and party-state, as well as a new danger: that which is associated with the ‘pure affirmation of Difference’ which is ambivalent. Solidarity provides a non-representational space of liberty, or it provides a ruptured open domain for a new discourse of rights or it may simply reproduce complicity with the processes of capitalist deterritorialization necessary for new capitalist reterritorializations. Slavoj Žižek is seen to particularly share this view when he attributes capitalist ambivalence to Deleuze and Guattari’s politics (2004, 184). But to say, with Alain Badiou, that affirming the potentiality for transformation as such is to affirm a “purely ideological radicality” that “inevitably changes over into its opposite: once the mass festivals of democracy and discourse are over, things make place for the modernist restoration of order among workers and bosses,” would be to overstate the problem (Badiou and Balmès 1976, 83).
- (2) Virtual Hierarchy- In addition to the ambivalence that is related to understanding the concept of solidarity, according to Badiou and Hallward, risks a second danger, one of creating a political hierarchy of virtual potential. Badiou is seen to argue in *The Clamor of Being* that,

*... contrary to all egalitarian or “communitarian” norms, Deleuze’s conception of thought is profoundly aristocratic. Thought only exists in a hierarchized space. This is because, for individuals to attain the point where they are seized by their preindividual determination and, thus, by the power of the One-All—of which they are, at the start, only meager local configurations—they have to go beyond their limits and endure the transfixion and disintegration of their actuality by infinite virtuality, which is actuality’s veritable being. And individuals are not equally capable of this. Admittedly, Being is itself neutral, equal, outside all evaluation ... But ‘things reside unequally in this equal being’ (Deleuze 1994, 60/37). And, as a result, it is essential to think according to ‘a hierarchy which considers things and beings from the point of view of power’ (Deleuze 1994, 60/37; Badiou 1999, 12–13).*

If we are to understand revolutionary change as the pure potential for change as such and not actual change for or against certain forms, then, contrary to any kind of egalitarianism, there will instead be a hierarchy of actual political beings that more or less participate in this degree of pure potential transformation. The more someone is seen to renounce their local and specific determinations and affirm their participation in the larger processes

of difference-in-itself, the more powerful they become. Thus, if the point of examining any local political intervention is in every case to show to what degree it renounces its concrete determinations and might “become other than it is” (as a virtuality or potentiality), there is, according to Badiou, a risk of “asceticism” and hierarchy in such a relationship of potential (Badiou 1999, 13).

- (3) Subjective Paralysis-Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of revolution can be differentially read in order to avoid the problem representational subjectivity—that it can reject or affirm particular desires but never change the nature of the “self that desires”—but it does so only at the risk of diffusing the self into an endless multiplicity of impersonal drives: a self in perpetual transformation. This leads to the third danger, that of subjective paralysis. To simply read Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of revolutionary subjectivity as a “simple fact of one’s own existence as possibility or potentiality” (Agamben 1993, 43), or as Paul Patton has called it, one’s ‘critical freedom’ (“the freedom to transgress the limits of what one is presently capable of being or doing, rather than just the freedom to be or do those things” (2000, 85)). This suggests an ambivalence of action. What are the conditions and factors by which one might decide to take an action or not? Emancipation and enslavement in this sense are merely just different things to be done.

Secondly we see that without any notions of subjectivity how would agents qua multiplicities operate in between or distinguish different political decisions? Without the representational screen of reason what might something like a dispute or argument look like? If “becoming other is not a capacity liberated individuals possess to constitute themselves as autonomous singularities,” but “what defines ‘autonomy’ itself” (2006, 146). With what Simon Tormey argues as the political danger and which according to Hallward is the fact that the subject is simply replaced by the larger impersonal process of transformation as such: “pure autonomy.” The radical affirmation seems to have nothing to contribute to the analysis of solidarity, participatory democracy and collective decision making, which is seen to be seemingly occupy the core of many of today’s seemingly radical political struggles. A theory of subjectivity defined by its potential for transformation is to be forever stuck in a kind of paralysis of endless potential change, which is seen to be no less disempowering than subjective stasis. Or as Hallward puts it, Deleuze “abandons the decisive subject in favor of our more immediate subjection to the imperative of creative life or thought” (2006, 163).

## The Delta Meghwal Case and its consequences

A middle class person is seen to ignore potentiality all together due to their privileged positionality. In a popular documentary called *Jai Bhim Comrade*, AnandPatwardhan, an upper caste filmmaker is seen to pay homage to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar by documenting the spaces and equations that relate to 'customs' of lower caste Dalits. It is curious to see how the film's middle class audience makes sense and solidarize in relation to the Dalits from their spaces of comfort. The filmmaker is himself to suffer from a similar form of solidarity by his act of making the film. The film's DVD is seen to cost somewhere between Rs. 300 and Rs. 500 for his Hindi and English subtitled versions.

Solidarity is thus seen as an act that has no reaction. The act of documenting the *Lokshahirs* (People's Poets) got a certain amount of attention from the privileged classes but the *shahirs* themselves still got no attention. The potentiality of the *shahirs* within the film is overtaken by this solidarity.

We borrow certain notions of the term solidarity from the American civil rights movement where the term was used in relation to the Union or depressed classes and was mostly a Marxist usage.

Within this sense of the word and in the Indian context this concept is feasible yet lacks substance. When an upper caste Brahmin is seen to show empathy to a Dalit, it is to be seen in a very different way when a Dalit is seen to empathise with another Dalit. A Brahmin's sympathy and empathy is constituted of capitalist privilege as seen from the example of 'Jai Bhim Comrade'. To take into account the struggle of Dalits within the Indian context there is no structural agenda of any form in the contemporary context, instead what we see is a need to solidarise stemming from guilt. As mentioned earlier, guilt and solidarity remain within an upper caste location. As Deleuze puts it forth in *Negotiation*: "The idea of feeling guilty, for me, is just as repugnant as being someone else's guilty conscience".

Delta Meghwal, a Dalit girl from Rajasthan's Barmer district was raped and killed by her upper caste PT (Physical Training) teacher. She was pursuing a course to become a schoolteacher from the Jain Adarsh teacher-training institute for girls in Nokha, Bikaner, Rajasthan. In an article published in the *twocircles.net* she was seen as a bright student who was interested in painting, topping a state-wide art competition organized in Rajasthan when she was in the eleventh grade.

Her warden PriyaShukla, a Brahmin, had sent her to the PT teacher as part of reprimanding her where she was sexually assaulted and then murdered.

The news coverage that was related to the incident was zero- whatever was reported in local sources focused on Delta's father constantly seeking justice from the mainstream arrangements. After a while few organisations and online portals like *sabrangindia.in* were seen to take an interest.

Activism is seen to primarily run through the Internet today, with the so called progressives and the regressives running riot over the seemingly free and democratic space. This is especially seen within the discourse of Delta's case.

SharadPatil in his book '*Marxwaad, Phule-Ambedkarwaad*' (1993) develops the philosophy of 'bridging'. He uses Marx's historical materialism within an Ambedkarite methodology. Varna and Caste are seen to be separate yet at the same time caste is seen to be inherited while varna is seen to be ascribed. Delta's narrative of being a bright student was taken over her caste. The warden who reacted to it saw her very existence as a challenge. The activism and solidarity that is seen following her murder becomes a reaction of the second order.

## **Conclusion**

Within the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari we see a tendency that points to the dangers that are associated with speculative leftism, we believe that it is now time to take up the question of "what are the actual dimensions of the revolution of solidarity that is underway?" rather than "how is the revolution possible?"

This is obliquely close to what Badiou, Hallward, and Bosteels claim to be looking for in their own political formulations of "consistency", "commitment" and "solidarity" than the pure becoming that is seen to be associated with Deleuze and Guattari. The current discourses of digital solidarity that began with the new millennium has according to Alberto Toscano sketched out new regimes of organization, new forms of subjectivity ... at a distance from the accepted forms of mediated representation ... [such that] that we might begin to think beyond the intra-State logic of representation" (2004, 224). The task of a political philosophy of solidarity must begin with an analysis of these subjectivities and role of both power and guilt within these new organisations and subjectivities.

The valorization of post globalization digital movements and their "lines of flight," "rupture," and "heterogeneity" as they break free from or within power, without a positive account of how such lines compose a new consistency of their own, are—and here we are in agreement with Badiou and others—"the concrete definition of revolutionary failure," (Badiou 2004, 80). Struggles that trace solidarity, as their engines of functioning must be questioned within their scope of isolated outburst against or within power. Without a cohesive theory of how to diagnose, transform, and create these new political *bodies* connected through mutual global solidarity, we cannot hope to understand the actuality of the present revolutionary sequence.

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