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Central Terms in the Exhibition *Poulomi Basu – Phantasmagoria*. The glossary was written by Moubani Maitra.

Adivasi

In India, Adivasi is a self-designation used by Indigenous communities that are generally defined on the basis of their geographical location. They differ culturally and socially, and often live in isolated forested and hilly regions of India. Adivasis have a strong affinity with their land and forests that creates a sense of home and belonging within them. They have experienced exploitation at the hands of policies that threaten to take away their land and resources. There have been numerous Adivasi-led movements against the state for land and forest rights. This type of resistance is often closely connected to fights against displacement, deforestation and state interventions that threaten their ways of life. For them, the fight for land and forest is not merely a matter of law but one of survival and self-determination.

Agency

One's exercise of agency includes resisting forms of **oppression**, such as **patriarchy** and **caste** hierarchies. It also includes exercising one's rights and fighting for one's rightful place in society against systemic injustices. Agency is more than simply self-empowerment; it is the ability to gather together as a community to **reclaim** space and demand justice. Though agency reflects an individual's ability to act independently, it is always shaped and constrained by social structures, norms and institutions.

BIPOC

The acronym BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour. The term recognises the distinct experiences of these groups within the broader context of systemic challenges. It is used to emphasise that identity plays a critical role in systemic issues such as racism, discrimination and social exclusion. It highlights the structural racism these communities face based on their appearance, which in turn affects their opportunities in life and shapes their lived experiences.

Caste

Caste is a complex and enduring system of social stratification, operating as a hierarchical structure that governs access to power, privileges and resources. Historically, caste is linked to occupations (an economic concept) and has developed into a deeply rooted system that governs experiences both at an individual level as well as at the collective level. Within the caste system, Dalits, who fall into the lowest stratum, are subjugated, **marginalised** and prevented from fully participating in society. It is a barrier that hinders their ability to exercise their rights to the full extent and therefore disenfranchises them. Caste can have a political aspect related to domination and governance at local and regional levels. It can also have an ideological aspect, which is reflected in concepts of purity and impurity or the hierarchical structure of rituals. In India, discrimination based on caste remains pervasive across various sectors like education, employment and politics. Furthermore, caste intersects with other identities such as class and **gender**, reproducing **social hierarchies** and often exacerbating inequalities. It continues to profoundly influence who has access to opportunities and whose voice gets heard.

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism can be described as an overlapping set of theories and activism that incorporates aspects of both environmentalism and feminism. (→ **intersectional feminism**) It seeks to understand the relationship between the subjugation and suppression of women and the exploitation of nature, which are both fuelled by the same **patriarchal** power structure. Ecofeminism highlights the lived realities of women in disenfranchised communities, like **Adivasis** and **Dalits** (→ **caste**), who are doubly **marginalised** and therefore particularly vulnerable.

Gender / Gendering

Gender is not a biological fact but a social construct, shaped and reproduced through societal norms and values. Gender is not based on biological traits or attributes, but encompasses what we are taught in society: how we are raised as well as the roles we internalise and learn to play. As a result, gender identity is

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dynamic and extends beyond the male-female binary, which calls into question and challenges traditional roles that restrict people's **agency**. Gendering is the social and cultural process of conditioning individuals into certain gender roles. It is an ongoing process that assigns certain attributes and behaviours to men and women, thus making these roles appear natural or normative. Through gendering, distinctions between masculinity and femininity are enforced, which further reproduces power imbalances and limits agency.

Intersectional Feminism

Intersectional feminism is a movement that strives to eliminate all forms of gender-based discrimination and promote equal rights and opportunities for all **genders**. It also calls for critical engagement to dismantle broader systems, such as **patriarchy**, that underpin and enable inequality. An intersectional approach not only recognises the existence of multiple identities but is also able to account for the intersectionality of **caste**, class, race and other social identities that overlap and interact with one another to produce particular **lived experiences**.

Lived Experience / Positionality

The terms lived experience and positionality describe how a person's unique social and cultural context informs their worldview. They recognise that knowledge is not objective but is derived from perspectives shaped by a person's identities and acknowledge that power relations define which perspectives are silenced and which are heard.

Magical Realism

Magical realism is a genre in literature and the visual arts that blends realism with fantasy, treating the extraordinary as part of everyday life. This technique can also be used to explore various social, cultural and political themes by seamlessly intertwining the supernatural with **lived experience** and blurring the lines between reality and imagination. (→ **speculative futures**)

Marginalisation

Marginalisation is a mechanism by which individuals or communities are systematically driven to the fringes of society. **Gender**, caste or other social identities can be the reasons behind this exclusion. Marginalisation deprives individuals or communities of the rights and opportunities available to others in society and often perpetuates poverty and social inequality. As a result, marginalised communities like Dalits (→ **caste**) and **Adivasis** are often rendered invisible in the dominant narratives, and their inclusion in the policy-making and decision-making process is hindered, which subsequently has a major impact on their lives.

Misogyny

Misogyny is often defined in simple terms as an intense dislike and prejudice against women. It reproduces the notion of male superiority that gives rise to biased and often violent and demeaning behaviour on the part of men towards women. But misogyny is not simply an individual disposition; it operates in a manner that sustains a social system which reinforces gender hierarchy. (→ **societal hierarchies**)

Oppression

Oppression can refer to the maltreatment and overt violence toward a community; it can also refer to the systemic and structural discrimination that robs the same community of rights and opportunities. Such exclusion often takes place along identity lines – **gender**, **caste**, class, sexuality and race. Women and non-binary people experience more structural hindrance and barriers than men in a **patriarchal** context, since political and socioeconomic structures are set up in a way that gives preference to male power and authority.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a long-standing power system that upholds gender hierarchies (→ **societal hierarchies**) and **oppresses** women. It's a system that reinforces male supremacy by outlining **gender-based** responsibilities, expectations and opportunities, which then affects social, economic and political institutions. It also imposes rigid gender binary classifications, especially on women and non-binary

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gender minorities who do not fit its predetermined standards. In this way, it is a system of power that favours one gender over others, perpetuating inequalities in order to preserve the status quo.

Reclaiming

When certain groups are rendered invisible by systems such as **patriarchy**, **caste** and colonialism, reclaiming becomes an act of resistance. It encompasses the act of taking back space, identity, history and power that has been systematically denied and / or erased. Reclaiming often questions structures of power, thereby threatening those who hold positions of power and authority. Whether by language, cultural symbols or bodily autonomy, reclaiming is one way of asserting one's selfhood and agency.

Representation

Representation refers to how people and communities are portrayed or expressed, most often through language or in visual media. Representation isn't only about visibility, though. It concerns itself with ensuring that marginalised communities have both meaningful participation and **agency** in shaping narratives, policies and cultural spaces democratically. This is a call that involves more than symbolic or tokenistic inclusion but also redistributing power to those who are often misrepresented or spoken for, so that individuals, particularly women, non-binary people, **BIPoCs** and **Dalits** (→ **caste**), are able to speak their own **lived experiences** in their own terms. True representation recognises the multiplicity of identities, amplifying the voices of those who have been silenced for eras.

Societal Hierarchies

Societal hierarchies structure access to power, privilege and resources. They set up a social order based on diverse identities like **gender**, **caste**, class, race and sexual orientation. **Patriarchy** provides men with much more status than women and non-binary people, which is also reflected in their different representation, rights and opportunities. Similarly, social hierarchies – like caste – determine access to opportunities and influence socio-economic mobility. While **Dalits**, **Adivasis** and other marginalised groups experience discrimination

because of such hierarchies, dominant caste groups (such as upper-caste Hindus) are the ones who often control land, labour and political institutions.

Speculative Futures

Speculative futures involve envisioning possible, probable and alternative futures through creative and critical exploration. This approach provides alternative social visions through the use of narrative, design and visual arts. It calls for a critical reflection on the different aspects of the world – ethical, social, cultural and political – and the implications that they have on the near future, questioning in what way they can be shaped. Speculative feminism (→ **intersectional feminism**), for instance, is about imagining an alternative future where oppressive gender norms are dismantled completely. Often paying homage to science fiction and utopian/ dystopian literature, speculative feminism critiques present-day realities by offering radical reconfigurations of **gender**, power and society. Artists operating in this paradigm often create dystopian or fictionalised narratives to challenge existing gender norms and imagine and potentialise alternatives beyond **patriarchy** and gender hierarchies. (→ **societal hierarchies**)

Subaltern

Based on the analysis of postcolonial theorists, the term subaltern is used to refer to populations that are left out of existing sociopolitical discourses. Subalterns include groups like **Dalits** (→ **caste**) and **Adivasis**, whose voices are regularly overlooked or **marginalised** in mainstream paradigms and discourses. These voices are silenced or filtered through the lenses of elites; they are also often excluded from institutional and political spaces. The study of subalternity is a critical analysis of who gets to speak, whose histories are recorded and how power structures deliberately silence specific communities.

Trauma (collective / shared / intergenerational)

Trauma is not always a singular, isolated or an individual experience. It can be passed down through generations, influencing collective

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memory. Collective, shared or intergenerational trauma refers to the enduring impact of historical and systemic oppression, violence and discrimination that informs an individual's perception of the world. The terms demonstrate how trauma may transcend personal suffering and transform into a shared experience among people with similar histories. In this sense, they may also provide some forms of solidarity among individuals, groups and communities with similar pasts.

Untouchability

Historically, untouchability denotes the caste-based discrimination faced by Dalits, who were considered impure by the upper-caste Hindus. This in turn produced a social order that continued the systemic exclusion and subjugation which marginalised Dalits. It is important to understand that the term untouchability has specific connotations, related to the unique experiences faced by Dalits as per their specific caste location. Thus, the term cannot be easily applied to describe other types of exclusion, as these experiences are also mediated by particular historical and socio-cultural contexts that are culturally specific to caste-based discrimination.

The glossary is part of the publication accompanying the exhibition *Poulomi Basu – Phantasmagoria* (Distanz Verlag, 2025).

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