

Voicing the Word
The emerging Social Phenomenon of Poetry Slam in Delhi

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Poetry Slam is an emerging social phenomenon capturing an important social and political aspect of urban life in India. It originated as an experimental addition to the growing culture of live entertainment with groups like Delhi Poetry Slam, Mildly Offensive Content, Airplane Poetry Movement and other groups scattered in metropolitan cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore and Pune.

Originally, Slam poetry started in 1985, by construction worker and poet named Marc Smith in Chicago Jazz Club. It is conventionally defined as an art of competitive performance poetry with its roots in the oral tradition of spoken word. It is a bridge between music, poetry, conversations and experiences. Gradually, it evolved from its blue-collar roots in Chicago into the richly diverse socioeconomic and multi-ethnic expression that now reaches well beyond American borders into Canada, Germany, France, India, etc. (Timbreza 2010: 205-207).

Tracing the history of spoken word, it is reminiscent of the 1920s Harlem renaissance in USA, where it came up as a form of rebellion among marginalized African-American who were subject to racial discrimination. It later caught on with feminists and the queer community as they voiced out their lyrical contempt. It uses the mechanics of performance intertwined with the power of words to infuse an audience with the emotions, thoughts, and understandings of the performer (Glazner, 2000). Adolescents are using these performances and their poetry to explain, understand, and protest both culture and society. With much cause to fight for and to express a community's grief, spoken word poetry found its place in urban culture. It also started taking ground when a recognized group of poets and musicians of the African-American Civil Rights Movement called The Last Poets came around in the 1960s; they are said to be the pioneers of hip-hop and slam poetry.

Our attempt through this research is to include some general definitions and their implications for understanding the phenomenon as it exists in Delhi. These aspects represent areas of significance for understanding the slam scene in Delhi and at the same time illustrate the similarities and differences that exist among the participants as well as the audience when it comes to defining and understanding this phenomenon. To be sure, spoken word is not a new phenomenon, but the academic concern becomes important given an entirely fresh and different form that this phenomenon has come to acquire in the name of poetry slam in Delhi.

Our field work was conducted across six weeks in the months of June and July 2015 in Delhi. We mostly proceeded through semi-structured interviews, conversations, observations and

reference to secondary data sources. We covered events conducted by five organizations in Delhi, viz. Airplane Poetry Movement, Mildly Offensive Content, Poetry Couture, Poets' Collective and Delhi Poetry Slam. A detailed description of our fieldwork is discussed in the sections that follow.

I.

Our first field visit was on 3rd of June 2015 in a cafe named Imperfecto in Hauz Khas Village, a popular urban centre of Delhi which usually attracts youth of a particular class and social status. The Poetry slam session was organized by the Airplane Poetry Movement which is a Pune based non-profit organization. However, now it is expanding the networks to cities like Chandigarh. The event was informal in nature with a casual and intimate setting.

It was observed that there was a consistent element of defiance and resistance as opposed to the mainstream which was reflected in the interiors through portraits, pictures, props and the and the layout of the cafe. Flavours of the hip hop culture existed in the music played before and after the Slam Session. On interviewing Nandita, a student from Lady Sri Ram College and the chief organizer of the event told us the difference between Poetry Slam and Slam Poetry. According to her, the former is an umbrella category while Slam Poetry, as a form of competition, is a component of it. She also stated that, Slam Poetry consists of performing poetry as per certain rules such as time limit (in this event it was 4 minutes per performer).

The slam session organized was a non-ticketed event. The organizers in return assured the venue management to attract a considerable number of customers to the venue through this slam session. The event was promoted through social media using platforms like Facebook and campus diaries.

The session started with Shashank, the emcee of the event, delineating the rules of the slam along with the history of APM. He conducted the session in a very informal and casual manner (quoting from films like Inglorious Bastards and taking jibes at his fellow performers) which was in sync with the mood of the performers and audiences alike. Firstly, three people from the audiences were asked to voluntarily become judges for the event, though it was clearly mentioned that the performers cannot be judges. In the event of only one person doing so, Shashank took the matter in his hands, and randomly hand-picked two people from the audiences to become judges. The judges had to mark the performers on a scale of 1 to 10 of which 5 marks were for content and the rest for performance. However, the results were not declared on the same day.

As far as the format of the session is concerned it was made clear by Shashank that the slam was not to promote cut-throat competition among the participants but a feeling and sense of companionship. Also, the format was open to participants performing either in Hindi or English. The audience was asked to show their appreciation during the performance in form of snaps, in tune with the intimate relation between audiences and participants. It was noticed that all the poems were narrated in first person and dealt with personal experiences and conditions i.e. the self as emerging in the social context. The issues of the poems performed

during this session ranged from the most personal to the most political like gender oppression and the subordination of female sexuality. The burning issue of corruption in the governance was raised through a satirical piece in Hindi titled “Jeb” which received massive and enthusiastic applause from the audience. Even recent calamity of earthquake in Kathmandu was emotionally dealt with, through the poem “KTM”. However, even such an event was described in the form of a personal experience with a friend in Kathmandu. Through his performance, it seemed that poetry transcended space, time and people creating an emphatic imagery of despair, hopelessness, pain and agony.

It was witnessed that most of the performances were preceded by a brief introduction about the poem by the performers themselves to provide a context to the poem. However, an exception to this rule was Kannan Kapoor’s performance who chose not to provide any introduction or explanation for the content of his poem on Greek Mythology. He exercised his “creative licence” and gave enough room to the audience for an interpretive understanding of his poems.

Another performer from LSR spoke of how a female body is construed as per social conventions. Through her performance, it was depicted that the so-called “perfect body” is a pre-requisite to be successful and garner male attention. Thus, patriarchy creates an illusion where we continuously compare our body-types with other women and simultaneously objectify them.

It was also witnessed that some performers had memorized their pieces while yet others were reading it out from their phones or pages. Hence, there were no hard and fast rules when it came to memorizing the poems.

II.

The second slam session which we attended was the Pockets Rockets by Mildly Offensive Content (MOC) held at Boheme in Vasant Vihar on 11th June. MOC came into being in the year 2013 as an initiative that began through the efforts of Natalia Sanchez and Aeron Carter. The Piano Man Cafe in Vasant Vihar served as the main venue. MOC aims to create like-mindedness among the audiences and the participants through their sessions.

Unlike Imperfecto which symbolized defiance against the mainstream, Boheme had an intimate and relaxed atmosphere favourable for having a Poetry Slam. The format was not competitive as in the previous session. It was followed by a Stand Up comedy gig. The poets in this format did not adhere to any time-limit instead there was a limit on the number of performances to be delivered by each poet.

The session started with a duet performance by Mayanka and Ankita, both students of Lady Sri Ram College. Most of the issues in this session were about personal experiences.

However, issues related to the impoverished conditions of children living in squalor on the streets were also raised through a thought provoking poem by Neelanjana. Most performances had a soothing background score that further enhanced the performance.

Sugandha, a senior member of Mildly Offensive Content works in Uttarakhand. Retired in her mid-20 from a lucrative corporate career, she exemplifies “reverse migration”. She told that they go through a session of prior screening of the pieces which are to be performed where they practice and discuss the content. Additionally, the poems chosen for a particular event are above all, audience-specific, in tandem with the mood and the nature of the venue where it is going to be performed. For instance, when they perform at educational institutions, they don’t shy away from raising political or serious issues. While, at casual settings they reserve their topics to personal experiences and non-serious issues, for she believes that „serious issues can disturb the mood of a relaxed evening“.

With regard to funding, Sugandha told that the MOC poets earn a little by charging a certain negotiated amount from the restaurants and cafes where they are performing. She believed that their events bring audiences which help the venues in generating revenue. At the same time, they abstain from such a policy when it comes to performing at educational institutions. Also, MOC believes strongly in the policy of keeping all its shows as non-ticketed and open-to-all.

In a semi-structured interview with Mayanka, another core member of the MOC, the scope of poetry slam in India was highlighted. According to her, the scope of poetry slam is certainly immense. However, she believed that the horizon must expand not through commercialization but through popularity; the change has to be organic and not radical. She also acknowledged that their audience base is to be expanded by reaching out to poets who perform in regional languages and Hindi. She also believed that it is indispensable for the poets to make the content of their poems reflexive in nature so that the audience can empathize with the poet.

III.

A poetry meet was organized on 20th of June by the Poetic Collectives in Greater Kailash, Delhi. Poets Collective is an autonomous group which has members from all sorts of backgrounds ranging from corporate professionals, artists, journalists, university students to home makers and teenagers who have just passed out from school bubbling with experiences of adolescence. We saw that teenagers had taken recourse to performing poetry to vent out their personal experiences of emotions, pain and agony. The setting of the venue was very informal, held in an apartment of a member of the Collective who is a social activist. The ambience was warm, welcoming and comfortable. The gathering was of around 45 people coming from all walks of life using poetry as means of expressing their opinions and views, which again fluctuated from most personal to the most political.

Saumya, a post graduate student in English from University of Delhi organises the sessions. She calls Poets Collective as an initiative to be one self, feel free and express whatever one wants to. Poetry gives an individual the poetic license to carve out their own realities, to structure thoughts into words, to communicate these words to “like-minded people” who understand and recognize it.

Ria who just passed out of the school spoke of her new found sexuality and identity. She had coloured her short hair in florescent green and blue. She wanted to break the stereotype of how scantily clad women are perceived to be dumb in the society capable of only wooing men. She calls herself a rebel who fears nothing and believes that words have the power to create a change she wishes to see. For her Poets Collective is a family, where she feels secure and appreciated. Another law student presented a poem on Corruption in India in first person narrative “MAIN CHOTA AADMI HOON” in Hindi. He spoke of the harsh reality of every day experience in India where Social Darwinism exists, survival of the richest, where the rich is getting richer and the poor is getting poorer. Few lines were highly emphatic. He mentioned a politically satirical form commenting on a few politicians blatantly. Poetry for him is a democracy of art and expression. Having read a lot of celebrated Hindi Literature Poets already at a young age he feels that Poets Collective gives him that space to agitate and vent out experiences.

Another performance at the Poet’s Collective was on how Abuses have been normalised in our everyday parlance and people don’t think twice before using swear words. Most of these swear words are condescending to the female genitalia and therefore reflect misogyny existing in our society. The performer through his emphatic tone and gestures made everyone ponder upon the issue. He raised pertinent questions like- Why is swearing so frequent and normal? Does it hint towards how patriarchy normalises swearing to the extent that anti-female attitude is evident in language too? This was one poem which made the audience muse and there was constant snapping.

The next performance was on the burning issue of Kashmir. Atif who hails from Kashmir presented a poem titled Firdaus. Using hyperbolic similes for Kashmir’s unparalleled beauty

Atif narrated how Kashmir is the paradise on earth, with nature bestowing its perfection in all hues and shades. But the paradise on earth is also home to widows, orphans and helpless parents whose kith and kin have been attacked by raging terrorism in the state and this leaves this paradise on earth in melancholy. The poet wishes to see his homeland free from the clutches of terrorism and militancy and the havoc caused by it leaving the people in a state of turmoil.

There was another performance by Seema. She recently got her poetry published and presented a poem on female foeticide. She raised the issue of decision making, with the pregnant woman. A dialogue between the unborn female and the mother was presented. The

mother wants the female child too but is torn between the familial pressure to abort this baby.

This poem raises the feminist issue of patriarchal control over women's bodies especially the reproductive choice. Patriarchy eliminates the agency of decision making from the women and Seema's poem raised this issue and made the audience reflect on this.

Another poem was presented by Ashish Jhangra, a member of the Poets' Collective who recited a comical poem on a girl from Haryana who comes to Delhi to study and her journey encountering the urban culture. The new found Delhi culture is threatening to the traditional mind-set of the "small town girl". The poem was presented in Haryanvi which added the rustic element to the tone of the poem.

Touching upon the themes of love, humour, social issues desire, sexuality and confusion. The meeting held by the poets collective reflected the vibrant dynamics of Delhi as a melting pot of different cultures. The meeting also had a musical twist to it when a member, Girish Sharma, who is a journalist with Ndtv, came and sang self-composed songs using his guitar. The acoustic strumming added vibrance to the meeting, leaving all with smiles on their faces. Who said poets are quiet and introvert beings that prefer to stay alone, musing in their own world? In fact, Poets' Collective claims to be an association of like-minded misfits dabbling with different social and personal issues weaving reality into words.

IV.

The workshop by the Airplane Poetry Movement took place in a secluded area of the canteen in South Campus. An informal setting, it set the mood right to discuss about poetry and performance over snacks and cold drinks. Attended by around 10 people, the workshop was presided over by Geetha, a member and senior intern with Airplane Poetry Movement. Geetha started with a discussion on poetry slam and also talked about the way it originated in America. Interestingly, she drew a parallel between poetry slam and Jazz in terms of their ontology among the working class group and how both these forms of art emerged as an instance of defying the mainstream. Surprisingly enough, Chicago is the city that dwelled these revolutions in the realm of art.

Videos of three famous spoken word artists were shown in order to highlight the way poems are performed within a specific time frame and the different styles that can be adopted for the same end. The three videos were- Priyam Redican's "Of marriageable Age", Phil Kaye's Repetition and Sarah Kay's Extended Development. It was as if the model for all the interns was the artist and not the art itself if poetry slam can be called an art. A discussion ensued following each video oscillating from the content to the style. Poems were not performed by the interns during the session. Rather, all focus was given to the famous pieces that have been performed by world renowned artists and the way they did it. The discussions were more oriented towards the future for the plans to organize more workshops and get more interns for the same, and ways in which poetry slam as an art can be promoted at large were also laid out. The resistance to commercial poetry came out as a dominant theme. Interns also learn the

importance of body language and voice intonation. Many such famous videos are also posted time to time on the Facebook page of this group.

V.

Delhi Poetic Adda is an open group of poets which organizes sessions of open mic, spoken word and poetry slam not just in Delhi but in other metropolitan cities like Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai. A lot of emphasis is laid on building a rapport with the audience through the performance of the poets. On 24th June Poetic Adda organized “Open Mic Poetry” in Hauz Khas Village at ELF Cafe Lounge inviting poets across the city to “celebrate a Saturday night on a Wednesday evening”. The session also exhibited some thought-provoking paintings by Astha Mittal, a regular at Poets” Collective, where different emotions were depicted on circular canvases.

The venue for the event had an extremely casual setting with the perpetual intermingling between the audience that had come for the event and those at the cafe. Disturbingly, there was constant noise in the background and the audience wasn’t very encouraging when it came to appreciating or even acknowledging the performances. No snaps could be heard.

The Emcee for the event was Raghavendra Madhu. The feature poets for the evening were Aditi Angiras who delivered beautiful Haikus, Riya Ray who contemplated about the condition of modern women and her sexuality which is constantly tamed and Michael Creighton. The evening ended with the songs played by the band Bandey with Girish, as the lead singer.

VI.

The Delhi Poetry Slam group organized their monthly ticketed event on July 5, 2015. This was a lively and vibrant spoken word event that brought together a broad spectrum of exciting performers all under one roof. Apart from stellar spoken word artists there were intrepid martial art fighters, stunning poi dancers and musical styling of a reggae band. The venue which was earlier at Nanaksar Thath Isher Darbar was later changed to Sanatan Dharm, Vivekananda hall, S block, Greater Kailash -II. The hall with a capacity of 150-200 people had a formal setting with a centre stage to which the audience faced symmetrically. This was unlike the setup of the other events which had an informal setup. The tickets ranged from 500-600 rupees per person which were sold online and at the box office of Sanatan Dharm on the day of the event. The information of the event was advertised through the social media and even through word of mouth. Also, the participation was pre-registered.

The event witnessed the sale of various food items, paintings and panties. The paintings depicted defiance in its own subtle ways, where in one of the paintings the woman was shown shaving her long hair while the other showed two gay men kissing each other in front of the India gate with the flag of India in the backdrop. The highlight of the sale was the

“feminist panties” which portrayed defiance through the feminist, women empowering and satirical quotes that were printed on them. However, the price of these items was dear.

The event started at 4.30pm with the emcee, Ngurang Reena, a performance poet herself and a research scholar from JNU briefly talking about Delhi Poetry Slam and its success in the city. To commence the session, the LED dancer was invited, who stunned the audience with his flair. The LED ploy was followed by the most awaited event-slam poetry. The rules for the slam were clearly delineated, as per which it was required of every artiste to stick to the time limit of 4 minutes. Additionally, the lines of the poem had to be memorized; poems read out of paper or electronic devices stood the risk of being disqualified from the slam. The work performed had to be original. Collaboration with another artist and use of theatre, music, dance or hip hop or for that matter props and costumes were allowed in the performance. Poets were to perform primarily in English keeping in mind the multiculturalism of the audience present at the event. It was also made clear that Delhi Poetry Slam stood as a non-judgmental and hate-free platform discouraging any filtration of creativity.

After this, three people from the audience were asked to voluntarily preside over and judge the Slam. They were required to show their score cards after the conclusion of each performance on a scale of 1 to 10. However, it wasn't clarified if the winners will be decided solely on the basis of the marks given by the judges or any other parameters. On liking the content which the poets performed, the audience was given the liberty to showcase it through tapping the feet or snapping of fingers.

The first performer was Upasana Rai, a student from JNU who performed a heart-wrenching piece on the unborn child. It beautifully talked about the feelings of a child who was killed inside the womb and not allowed to see and experience life. It wonderfully captured the difference in the mother's attitude the moment she discovers that the embryo in her womb had its “X-chromosomes stronger than Y-chromosomes.” The poem was delivered in first person and a narrative style. Though Upasana forgot a few times during her performance, she was profusely encouraged by the audience to not lose hope and continue her poem without any fear by excessive snapping and clapping. She was eventually scored as 9, 7, and 7.

After Upasana, came Ankit Prasad, the youngest slam poet for the evening and a student at the American Embassy School. His poem named “Fire” was centred on individualism where he emphasised on the belief that the work of an individual defines his/her personhood and not the ascribed position. According to him, everyone possesses the fire inside them which simply needs to be unleashed to lead their life the way they deem right. His scores stood as 8, 8 and 10.

Prasad's performance was followed by Sapnu George's poem “Lunch with Grandma”. Hers was a musical symphony that traced the difference in everyday life between the generation of her grandma and the present era. Unlike others she took the aid of paper during her performance and through her beautifully woven words showed that if in the age of her

grandmother “When we couldn’t talk to anyone how empty we felt, we wrote diaries” unlike in today’s digitized world a person would

“And post photos to make a lost love jealous

You scan a bar code to catch a flight send a virtual carnations for a funeral

You email to get mergers confirmed and whatsapp to call in sick”. For this symphony, Sapnu was awarded 6, 8, 6 points by the judges.

The tempo of the session got a notch higher when ARN, through his rap “Manali” gave the audience a glimpse of the hip-hop culture. He used certain instruments and music to give it a rhythmic touch and talked about his fascination for the place. The audience snapped their fingers as the tempo varied and all the three judges awarded him 7 points each.

After ARN’s performance, Neeti Prakash enthralled the audience with her poem “Dear 15 year old” which she wrote after the completion of her high school. Neeti articulated about the emotional and physical trials and tribulations of a 15 year old who struggles with these changes but eventually accepts them and adjusts in his/her own skin. She remarked through the following lines that it is not the body of an individual which changes for the better but it is the individual himself/herself who changes.

“And i really want to tell you that “it” gets better, but “it” doesn’t “it” never gets better you get better”

The young audience empathized with the content and vividly appreciated her poem through snapping. She was awarded the maximum scores by the three judges – 9, 9, 8.

The slam session was concluded by the amazing performance of feature poets’ duo Mahi Roy and Amaaya Dasgupta. While Mahi recited, Amaaya played the guitar that enhanced the performance. The first poem entitled “How are you?” bemoaned the human tendency to maintain a strong facade even when people may be crumbling inside. They believed that a conscious acceptance of the real vulnerable „us“ would alter the way people perceive the world and this would simultaneously change others’ perception about „us“.

“If they ask you how you are then say it

Because you will see things differently and people will see you differently
You are not going to change

You are not drowning in the oxygen while everyone is swimming.”

The second poem on “Hospital” traversed the tragic paths that patients undergo which reeks full of uncertainty, hopelessness and despair. While interviewing her, it was brought to our notice that the poem was an artistic release following the unfortunate episode of her father’s

heart attack. The last piece on “Maths” highlighted the limitation of the subject when it comes to solving real human problems for according to her no formula can serve as a magic solution to the emotional or mental turmoil that humans undergo.

It was witnessed that all her poems were in simple, lucid language devoid of urban jargon and swear words. Additionally, all the pieces were memorized. Throughout the performance the audience showed their appreciation and acknowledgment by way of snapping and tapping the feet, especially so when the poet would falter and forget.

The poetry slam was followed by stand-up comedy by Parvinder Singh who tickled the funny bones with jokes on his Punjabi upbringing. After a 15 min utes break, the session resumed with Martial art demonstrations. Interestingly, the spectators were also made a part of the act by inviting them and teaching them a few kicks and ultimately requesting everyone to connect with the bushido spirit of samurai by way of meditation. Everyone in the hall was clearly thrilled by the flying kicks.

The attention again shifted to poetry with the open mic session. Around 10 performers registered themselves for the open mic and performed on topics ranging from history to global power, from relationships to identities. In the open mic, the performers were not constrained by any rules- they were not required to stick to time limit or English language. In fact, one of the performances was a rendition of the famous song “Titanium” which made it neither an original composition nor a poetry performance.

The free flow of art continued with jamming and singing by the reggae and folk rock music band Woody Accouche Project. Interestingly, the band members- Calvin Wumbaya, Nitin Virat and Kartikeya Vashisht all use only recyclable materials to make music and abstained from resorting to electricity as much as possible. Performance Park came to an end with a thrilling fire dance by Feature Artist Pyranout. The audience was awestruck by this amazing spectacle.

In conclusion, this concoction of poetry, music, art and comedy was an evening that created an inclusive space which encouraged the audience to share skills with one another in a cosy performance space. It was a performative experiment as also a collaborative space with a sense of community that offered interesting artistic opportunities for people of Delhi. And as

Delhi Poetry Slam wrote on their Facebook page, “DelSlam shows are all about meeting like-minded people and making friends that last a lifetime.”

ANALYSIS

Our research methodology comprised of semi structured interviews, participant observation, online questionnaire and printed hand-outs and reviewing the secondary data sources. The analysis comprised of looking at the trend of poetry slam in Delhi, its reach to a certain audience which claims to be “likeminded.”

The quantitative technique comprised of online/printed questionnaire for which we received 110 responses. The questions asked through the questionnaire were following and the subsequent trends discovered are also mentioned:

1. Of the 110 respondents, a total of 60 people attended poetry slam sessions in Delhi, out of which 45 are females. It was also observed that 47 respondents were in the age group of 18 to 23 years, i.e. college going students.
2. Slam scene in Delhi- What exactly is it; is it competitive or non-competitive? The trend discovered through the surveys and our fieldworks implied that the slam scene in Delhi is inclined more towards non-competitive aspect where 47 respondents attended non-competitive sessions rather than competitive which happened to be attended by just 9 respondents. While a miniscule number of the remaining people attended both the formats. As mentioned above in the field report by Shashank, member of Airplane Poetry Movement the motive is not to promote cut throat competition but to encourage a sense of companionship and celebrate poetry. This feeling is reiterated in sessions conducted by most of the poetry groups as well. Thus, it can be concluded that the poets and the groups organizing the events put more emphasis on performance poetry rather than competitive poetry slam.
3. Is there hegemony of a particular language or are the events bilingual? It was observed through our fieldwork and confirmed through the survey that most of the slam sessions in Delhi are open to both Hindi and English. The statistics revealed that 48 people out of 60 attended bilingual sessions. While the events by Poetic Adda, Poets' Collective and Airplane Poetry Movement welcomed poets to express in any of the mediums; Delhi Poetry Slam made it a rule for the performers to stick to English while participating in the slam. However, Hindi poetry made its presence felt in the open mic session of the DelSlam event. Similarly, all the performances of Pocket Rockets by MOC were in English but through our interviews with their members it was made clear that they do not always perform in English nor do they encourage it. In fact, one of their members Mayanka has performed few sessions in Gujarati.
4. Are there any common themes at these sessions? Through our survey it was found that there was no dominance of any particular kind of issues. We witnessed that diverse issues were addressed in the events which only epitomizes the complexity of the phenomenon that we attempt to investigate. The performers ruminated on love, rejection, relationships, friendships, sexuality as also about corruption, global power, patriarchy, female foeticide etc. Through the art of spoken word a myriad of issues found lyrical voice and contempt ranging from the most political to the most personal. Among the diverse and multi-ethnic crowd at performance poetry, artists with radical beliefs and opinions are welcomed as openly.
5. Where do these events take place? In sync with the casual and informal nature of these events, these were found to be organized mostly in popular cafes and lounge as informed by 32 respondents who are college-going youngsters. The survey also explicated that the next preferred venue for

the performance poetry are educational institutions, where the poets not only express themselves but also promote this art. Other venues like IHC, Malls, and Auditoriums also host these events but very occasionally.

6. How it is being promoted and popularized and the scope of poetry slam?
While analysing the responses, it was seen that most of the respondents came to know about these poetry sessions majorly through social networking sites (41 respondents) followed by word of mouth (33 respondents). It is also seen that such events hardly get traditional advertisements like those published in newspapers, posters, hand-outs, pamphlets etc. (2 respondents). The trend reveals that no single medium was dominant, as many respondents came to know about the sessions through both the mediums- Social networking sites and word of mouth.
7. What purpose does a platform like performance poetry serve?
Some responses of this subjective question were as follows: First and foremost, it was witnessed that people believed that through performance poetry and slam sessions an art like poetry transcends individual boundaries and takes

the form of a “community art”. According to Deeksha Ranjan, “Poetry slam is helpful in evoking social change. With the help of poetry we can raise many issues such as corruption, environmental issues, male chauvinism, violence etc. Social change can be progressive if it is presented in the form of poetry. Poetry is the reflection of social life, human nature etc.”

Swadha, another respondent from JNU wrote, “I don’t think it can be labelled any kind of force as of yet. It can just be thought provoking for a really small minority who have access to such performances both in terms of the places where these are performed and in terms of understanding its content or level of thought or abstraction. It is an elitist activity in terms of the performers, the audience and the places where these are performed.”

Suhrita highlighted the potential of a platform like poetry slam by writing, “The kind of slam poetry sessions which I attended were mainly based on personal issues so from that perspective slam poetry may fail to evoke a social change but I do think that this medium has the potential to evoke social change if pertinent issues are raised and brought to the fore.”

However, Mansi Jain emphasised more on the aspect of free speech that this medium entails “I do think that speech and expression are the primary vehicles of a democratic institution. Slam poetry by promoting a free and open medium of communication provides a space to exercise and utilise a space.”

Poetry slam serves as an outlet, a vent to release emotions or views outside the academia. Resisting the hegemony and dominance of the written word in literature is underscored through this platform. In this way, Poetry Slam comes across as a pure form of democracy in art. This is reflected in the fact that poetry slams are not real contests and as a rule do not

typically utilise noteworthy and learned judges. These are the embodiment of the idea that art belongs to people and not institutions. It proves that art meant for people ultimately belongs to people and proves this to the point that it demands their opinion to be made known to be considered a genuine slam experience. Also, this lessens the distance between the performer and the audience who engage in the performance through acts of snapping, hooting, clapping, tapping, etc. which serves as a form of encouragement when the performers falter or forget.

In a way, it illustrates Goffman's idea of 'tact regarding tact' as a form of **presentation of self** in everyday life where the self employs strategies and techniques in the presence of others. Here, the 'others' also appear to sustain the interaction through affirmative responses.

In any field of study, through awareness comes change. Slam certainly, is one area where this dynamic takes place with a common frequency. By generating interest in people in poetry it hopes not only to open their senses to the beauty of language and world around them but also to have people consider how they might affect the world around them through what poetry has to show them (Scott Woods).

It was also observed that there was a larger number of female students attending such events as compared to their male counterparts as these places serve as counter public spaces where the issues of the "second sex" are spoken and reflected upon. From the patriarchal control over the female body to the taboos associated with menstruation or the notion of so-called ideal female body images", these spaces serve as mediums through which marginality of certain sections of society finds voice. **Counter public spaces** are defined as a place where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs. Such spaces are also sites of resistance whether the resistance is a militant or not such a discourse which targets the mainstream/ majority culture speaks of an alternative reality.

The way hetero-normativity is normalised in our society and how it regulates the behaviour and desire is widely contested through poems. The poets draw inspiration from various sources, including their own emotional journeys, personal experience with oppression, structural systems of oppression, privileges, and the perpetuation of privilege and the queer politics itself. In this specific context, Poetry seems as political. Political work is invested in tearing at the fabric of our culture, creating space for people to grieve and experience trauma, creating space for people to feel validated and creating spaces for people to dream up new worlds.

So what we observe and infer is that platforms like these create a civic discursive space where issues that are not otherwise taken cognizance of in the mainstream are discussed and contested which thereby raises certain questions about the existing mainstream notions. Thereby this platform emerges as a social phenomenon that has the potential to evoke like-mindedness and spread awareness, in situations which demand so. The intimate and casual environment as seen through the venues where the events take place facilitated the interaction. However, many issues like caste and religion which have an integral space in the

Indian social fabric have not found voice through these platforms. This problematizes the conception of poetry slam as a civic discursive space given its reach only in the urban spaces to a limited section of society who have access to such spaces, the late evening time slots preferred for these events and the limited range of topics which are addressed through these platforms.

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