

‘Ways of Resisting’, curated by Vivan Sundaram, SAHMAT, Rabindra Bhavan, New Delhi, 2002

Ways of Resisting: 1992-2002

Dear XXXX

The Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust (Sahmat) was formed in February 1989 as a platform for solidarity and creative action in defence of the democratic and secular traditions of our country. Over these last fourteen years, Sahmat has acted as a rallying point for several initiatives of resistance to the regressive ideology of Hindutva.

The resistance to Hindutva and the Sangh Parivar has come from various sections of society. It has come from artists, theatre persons, film-makers, photographers and writers, as much as from scholars, journalists, academics, scientists and other sections of the intelligentsia. The resistance has also come in various forms: they have participated in street demonstrations, taking public positions in defence of the secular; they have, at the same time, worked it into their creative practice and devised a language with which to reflect upon and critique the threat of fascism.

Sahmat has worked, all along, with the conviction that the artists and intellectuals of our country will not be silent when the times are dark. Sahmat is impelled to action by the words of Brecht in the time of fascism:

‘They won’t say: the times were dark

Rather: why were their poets silent?’

THE PROJECT: WAYS OF RESISTING 1992-2002

The last ten years, from the demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6 December 1992 to the recent genocide in Gujarat, have witnessed the growing rise of rightwing Hindutva forces in our country and, through them, a systematic assault on the spirit of nationalism and the cultural imagination of this country. The unprecedented levels of hatred and violence reached during the recent genocide in Gujarat point to a new stage in this offensive. Sahmat proposes, in the year 2002, to mark the history of these ten years.

Sahmat proposes to present an exhibition of artworks, photographs, videos and archival material that represent ways of resisting the rise of fundamentalist and fascist forces. Many of the works assembled in the project will have been part of political activism since the 1990s: of artists who have worked with collectives to confront the forces of regression. Several other works will have the longer-term agenda of developing a critical language that reflects and critiques the historical situation: the distortion of democratic and secular values, and the parodying of these values by the rightwing ruling coalition.

Multimedia Installations

We will exhibit multimedia installations and sculpture that present political allegories to understand the present. Interspersed will be current work by artists involved in direct interventions in the politics of a city.

Paintings

The exhibition will have work by painters who question the easy appropriation of the Indian tradition (of its myths and symbols) by the distorting ideology of Hindutva and who thereby reclaim an iconography that speaks about a creatively plural and syncretic culture. This will be complemented by the work of painters who speak in a more urban/contemporary vocabulary of secularism:

Documentation: Photograph, Video, Film

The exhibition will comprise a large section of photographs in a range of genres: reportage to documentary to narrative. Relatedly, there will be a continuous screening of

video documentaries and thematized narratives about the consequences of an ideological mind-set that valorizes (male) aggression and justifies violence against already marginalized groups and communities in society. This largely documentary section, recording instances of political outrage, will also reflect upon the long-term changes that the ruling ideology is effecting — and on the modes of opposition devised by the artist and citizen alike in the form of a counter-ideology and its representational strategies.

Posters and Graphic Art

There will be a focus on posters, other forms of graphic design, such as cartoons and stickers, produced as part of an activist intervention in the public domain whereby citizens' participation is made possible. We hope to convince the Delhi Government to put these up in a mass scale.

Archival Material

Archival material pertaining to the political struggle put up on various fronts during this decade will form an integral part of the exhibition. This includes reports prepared by investigating teams, activist groups and lawyers on the politics of hate and violence perpetuated by the Sangh Parivar culminating in the genocide in Gujarat.

Theatre and Music

Apart from the exhibition, the project will include specially created theatre productions. There will be collection of music produced during this period.

Publications

There will be a publication of an anthology of poetry written during this period.

Lecture Series

During the month-long programme there will be a series of lectures by social scientists on the intellectual and educational implications of this decade-long history where the democratic and secular aspirations of this country, this plural and diverse polity, have suffered serious political distortion. There will also be teach-ins in the three universities of Delhi. Also invited will be key activists from different parts of the country.

Publicity

A website will be created.

Innovative publicity will be an important feature of the project. Emphasis will be laid on drawing different social groups, from schoolchildren and university students to the working people, through various political and activist organizations. Students and professionals will organize conducted tours of the exhibition.

‘They Shall Not Pass’, the famous freedom slogan of La Pasionara, will be the motto that guides the entire project.

I am writing to you on behalf of SAHMAT, to invite you to participate in this ambitious project at this historical significant juncture.

Vivan Sunrarm