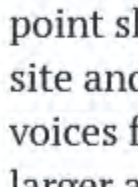
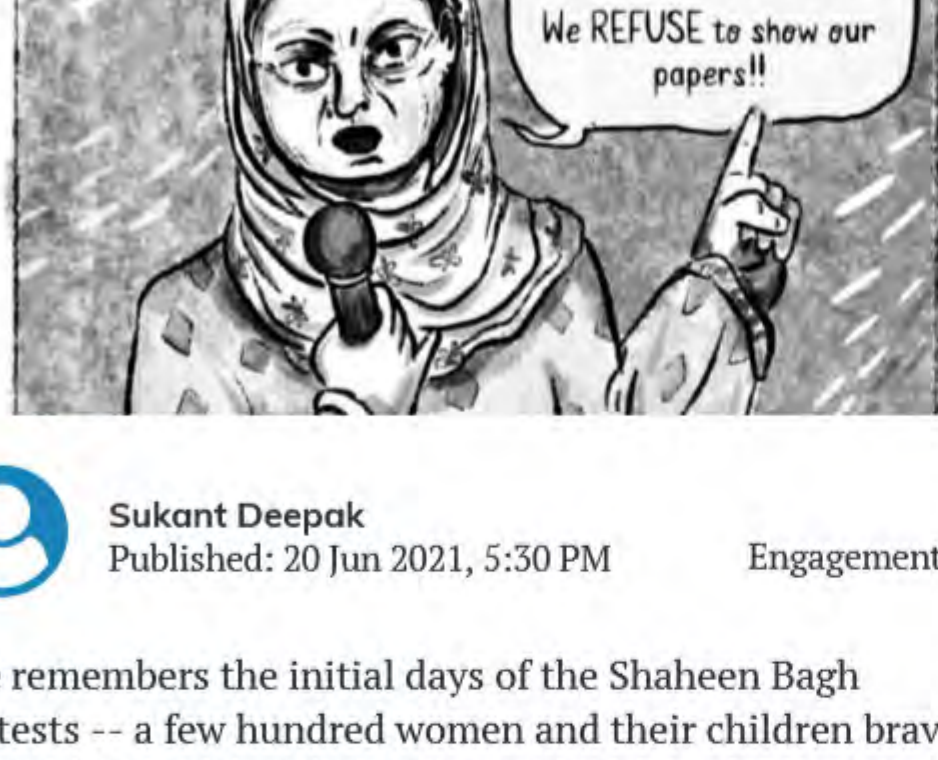


ART

The phenomenon of Shaheen Bagh in sketches

'To have Muslim women create a space for democratic dialogue...to have public space that felt so safe for women even at the dead of night - this was a first and unlike any other protest,' says Ita

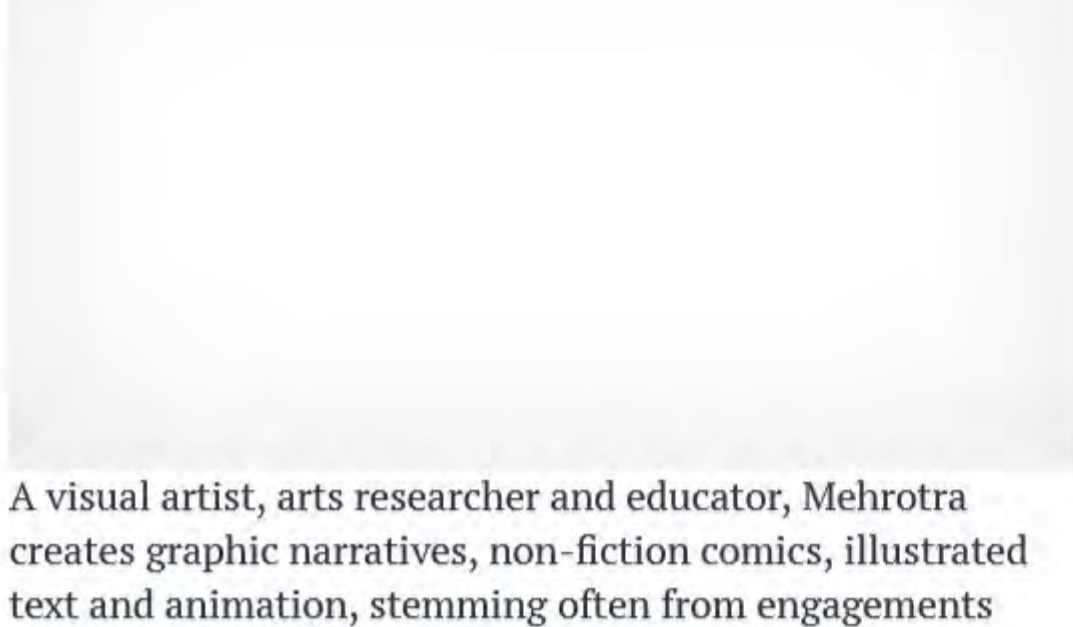


Sukant Deepak
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Engagement:128

She remembers the initial days of the Shaheen Bagh protests -- a few hundred women and their children braving the cold and raising their voice against CAA-NRC. At that point she just put out her sketches as posters at the protest site and social media. However, soon Ita Mehrotra felt that voices from Shaheen Bagh needed to be heard by a much larger audience. The result is the graphic non-fiction 'Shaheen Bagh: A Graphic Recollection' published by Yoda Press.

ADVERTISING



A visual artist, arts researcher and educator, Mehrotra creates graphic narratives, non-fiction comics, illustrated text and animation, stemming often from engagements within socio-political shifts around her.



Ita Mehrotra

She noticed that as the CAA-NRC protests grew into a mass movement, there were thousands in attendance on some days, but women remained the center of struggle, and that they were up on stage with slogans, speeches and poetry. "To have Muslim women take hold of this city and create a space for democratic dialogue like never before, and while doing so, to have public space that felt so safe for women even at the dead of night - this was a first and unlike any other protest," she points out.



Being at the protest sites, be it at Shaheen Bagh, Hauz Rani or Jama Masjid, and listening to women speak against not just the CAA but also lack of employment, demonetisation, police brutality and mob lynching – she remembers that the force of the speeches was so overwhelming that she had to do draw and put down notes.

"I had long conversations with a few of the women from Shaheen Bagh who were part of the protests from the very beginning. However, owing to the lockdown later, it was hard to go into the site at all - so I continued to have phone calls, relied on my notes, photographs by a friend who had been taking a lot of images of protests, and reports in newspapers etc.," says the artist who is the Director of Artreach India.

Having graduated from St. Stephens' College, she completed her MPhil from JNU. In the book on Shaheen Bagh she looks at the protest through the eyes of Shahana. "The protests were led by Muslim women first, not just in Shaheen Bagh, but across the country. Also, Shahana was one of the women who I met early on and we connected instantly."



"The art making follows these engagements. Also, I am not trained in visual arts completely, but have a mixed background in social science, working with grassroots NGOs, community schools and in community art spaces."

She has also made posters of women leaders at the ongoing farmers' protests and hopes to draw out longer versions of these in days to come.

Talk to her about the explosion of anti-government memes on social media in recent months and she sees the work of artists, through music, puppetry, memes, videos, posters, satire, to be able to poke, prod and question the government. "I think this can crack the otherwise seamless single narrative, in small ways. It's very inspiring to see what other comics makers are doing - from Sanitary Panels to Orijit Sen."

Currently working on a longer graphic narrative of the Chipko movement in Garhwal Himalayas, Mehrotra is also looking at ongoing indigenous movements in different parts of the country. (IANS)

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