

A close-up portrait of an elderly woman with a yellow headscarf, looking directly at the camera. The image is slightly blurred and has a warm, aged tone. The text is overlaid on the image.

Textura India

...

A student magazine collaboration between 20 journalists from Bethel University and seven from India that examines social justice issues and celebrates the culture of (mainly the women in) the Northern Indian villages in Haryana.

Textura is an international social justice storytelling project by journalism and graphic design students from Bethel University and their in-country partners.



Students spent 22 days listening, learning, photographing, designing, reporting and writing in the villages of Haryana in Northern India in January 2020.

https://issuu.com/betheluniversityartdesigndepartment/docs/texturaindia_full



Textura India: A thread of hope

By Emma Harville, Textura editor

I felt the thud of every pothole and the thumping bass of a Punjabi song as I sat in a white SUV elbow-to-elbow with Manisha, one of our reporting partners from Haryana.

I was looking out the window at a man behind a pomegranate stand when Manisha leaned over to me and said, “So tell me, Emma, why hasn’t the United States elected a woman for president?”



Manisha's round cheeks and warm smile make her look even younger than her 22 years, many of which she's spent memorizing Robert Frost stanzas and physics formulas to fulfill her dream of attending Jawaharlal Nehru University, or what some area academics call "the Harvard of India."







The fact that the United States – a country Manisha idealized and longed for throughout her education – has never elected a female president truly perplexed her. India elected Indira Gandhi, Nehru's daughter, in 1966, six years before Title IX legislation in the U.S.

Unlike myself, who gave up hope of a female president back in 2016, I quickly learned something from Manisha: We must refuse to accept some injustices.



When our group of 20 students and two professors ventured to Haryana to create Textura, we wanted to capture such injustices – not in a way that belittled the people who are suffering or stripped them of their dignity, but rather in a way that would challenge an American reader with preconceived ideas about India and its people.

Thanks to dedicated community activists and seven student reporting partners, including Manisha, we sought to tell stories accurately and empathetically and culturally appropriately.

We spent two weeks eating roti and drinking chai tea with our sources in their homes, hearing their stories and experiencing glimpses into their daily lives and the oppressions many of them face.





Manisha is Dalit, the lowest caste in Northern India. Deemed an “untouchable,” her classmates and teachers treated her like she had an invisible disease they might catch if they got too close to her.

Manisha spent hours studying each night so that she might reject the hard-labor or domestic life she’d been prescribed. While most women in Manisha’s neighborhood will marry young, have kids and work in the home just as their mothers did, Manisha aimed higher.

During our daily drives to the village, I saw groups of women balancing clay jars on their heads in perfect formation, their faces covered by village-required veils so only their husbands received the privilege of looking at them.



I joined about 20 of those women for tea in a small village called Peoda one afternoon. I asked them about their hopes, their fears and what they'd become if nothing could hold them back.

Most of them kept it simple: They wanted an education, for themselves and their children.



A 9-year-old girl named Khushboo told me, “I want to be a doctor. I don’t want to get married because then I’d have to leave my family.”



I recently read it's a luxury to be shocked by injustice. Many of the students on the Textura project team were shocked by the words these women uttered, the hell they've gone through and, for some, the literal scars they have to prove it.

Whether we realize it or not, Americans tend to dehumanize the hardships of people in developing countries. But the people enduring hardships in Haryana are not statistics. They have names, they have passions and they have desires for their future. And above all, they have hope.





My hope for those who read Textura is they don't skim over the complex and often painful stories inside and simply say "Oh, that's so sad," or "Wow, she's been through so much – what a strong woman."

Instead, I hope people read these stories and put names and faces to the beautiful green landscapes and vibrant colors of Haryana. I hope people read these stories and become motivated to educate themselves on domestic violence, poverty and discrimination in rural India while finding ways to support this community.



Or better yet, I hope they realize these issues haven't escaped the U.S., and ask themselves: Who is the Manisha in my own community and how can I support her?



Because the people featured in Textura are not just characters in a story. They are not immortalized or frozen in the pages of our magazine. Their struggles continued the second we boarded our plane back to Minnesota and continue still today.



Manisha's story, which can be found at the end of the magazine, embodies what Textura is about for me. Her persistence amid struggle – and her hunger for justice and determination to create a better life for herself and her community – are all reflected in many of the stories we wrote.





We've described Textura as “stories of heritage, hardship and hope.” Of these three, I believe hope is the thread that ties each story in Textura to the next.

In Manisha's words: “To start our journey, we need to decide our path. We are not following anyone else.”

AN INTERNATIONAL STORYTELLING PROJECT / VOL. 2

TEXTURA

JANUARY 2020

HARYANA, INDIA

Stories
of heritage,
hardship
and hope.

BETHEL UNIVERSITY JOURNALISM & GRAPHIC DESIGN

https://issuu.com/betheluniversityartdesigndepartment/docs/texturaindia_full





Textura India



A student magazine collaboration between 20 journalists from Bethel University and seven from India that examines social justice issues and celebrates the culture of (mainly the women in) the Northern Indian villages in Haryana.