On December 16th, 2012, a young woman named Jyoti Singh Pandey was brutally beaten and gang-raped by a group of men while riding aboard what she had believed to be a public bus in New Delhi, India. Thirteen days later, Pandey died, but not before she had inspired an international media sensation. She was called “Nirbhaya,” fearless one, in some of the early news coverage, and the name stuck. Suddenly, people everywhere were talking about rape as news reports of more brutal gendered violence in India made headlines. The “Nirbhaya” event became a rallying point for a reinvigorated discussion of women, violence, safety, and public space. As an eruptive political event, the gang rape of Jyoti Singh requires performance in order to make legible its relationship to normative cultural trends in India. In fact, Lieder argues that the violence against women that is currently occurring worldwide is performative by definition; it is only through the enactment of gendered violences both large and small that the possibility for rape weaves itself into the fabric of daily life. In this talk, she will discuss a number of plays and performances that have been created since the Nirbhaya event. Each of the performative responses she engages intervenes in the ways in which violence against women is performed and constituted in the terrain of every day life, insisting that both the large and traumatic and the small and quotidian enactments of gendered violence are equally important factors in the growing number of sexual assaults currently being reported both in India and worldwide.

K. Frances Lieder is a PhD candidate in Interdisciplinary Theatre Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Her current research interests include the ethics of witnessing and the role(s) of violence in performances in “the global south”, political performance in public spaces, and the performance of gender in popular culture in South Asia. She is currently working on her dissertation, which analyzes the ways in which the Delhi Bus Gang Rape in 2012 exists as an ongoing performative event used to make a diverse set of politicized claims about women, class, citizenship, and public space. Her most recent performance credits include directing a staged reading of Harvest and a site-specific performance of Lights Out, both by Manjula Padmanabhan.

This event is free and open to the public! Samosas will be served!