



St. Xavier's College
(Autonomous), Kolkata

YOUNG SOCIOLOGIST

Journal of the Postgraduate Department of Sociology
2022



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Young Sociologist



Xavier's Sociological Society

Journal of the Postgraduate Department of Sociology

St. Xavier's College (Autonomous)

Kolkata

2022

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From the Principal's Desk

ST. XAVIER'S COLLEGE
(Autonomous)



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From the Principal's Desk

I am pleased to note that the Postgraduate Department of Sociology is releasing the eleventh edition of their department journal titled, 'Young Sociologist' for the year 2023.

Even in the face of the raging pandemic that severely hampered the academic process, the Sociology Department proved its resilience and its commitment to academics. Through various international and national conferences and webinars, the department has introduced the students to varied concepts and encouraged several enriching discussions.

The journal has forever been an exemplar of rich and critical thoughts that the Department has successfully cultivated in its students. The publication of the journal bears testimony to the high standards of teaching and learning that the department promises, and which it refuses to compromise with, even in difficult times.

I heartily congratulate the entire faculty headed by Dr. Zaid Al Baset, and the students for their steadiness and perseverance. I wish them much greater success in the years to come. I hope that the journal carves its own niche in the greater academic circle. Nihil Ultra!

Rev. Dr. Dominic Savio, SJ
Principal



From the Vice-Principal's Desk

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Department of Arts & Science



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From the Vice Principal's Desk

I congratulate the Postgraduate Department of Sociology for the sustained quality and merit with which it is releasing the eleventh edition of the department journal, *Young Sociologist 2023*. The journal, since its inception, has stood out in its brilliance and commitment to the discipline of Sociology. I am certain the through the cumulative efforts and hard work put in by the professors and students, the journal will better the rigorous standards that it has previously set for itself. All this underscores the enthusiasm of the department in nurturing and inspiring research and the spirit of enquiry in its students who consequently learn to think and analyze critically and independently.

Prof. Bertram Da' Silva
Vice-Principal



From the Dean of Science

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From the Dean of Science

I wish to congratulate the Postgraduate Department of Sociology on the publication of the 11th edition of its journal, *Young Sociologist* 2023. The journal perfectly showcases the hard work and creativity that students and faculty members invest in research endeavours. The wide range of sociological topics that students undertake in their dissertation at the undergraduate level is indeed commendable. I am certain that the department will uphold its academic regour and continue to enrich and encourage young minds.

Prof. Tapati Dutta
Dean of Science



From the Dean of Arts

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From the Dean of Arts

It is with immense pleasure that I write this message for the eleventh edition of the *Young Sociologist* - the annual journal for the Postgraduate Department of Sociology. I congratulate the faculty members and the students for successfully completing eleven years of the publication. The current volume includes some of the research studies undertaken by the students of the academic year (2021-2022). These research articles have been supervised by the faculty members of the department and address a wide gamut of issues such as caste, gender, religion, social media among several others. Most of these issues have global relevance in the socio-political and cultural scenario of the contemporary times. I am confident that the selected essays would definitely make for absorbing interpretations- both for general readers and specialized researchers alike.

I sincerely express my gratitude to the faculty members and the students of the Sociology department for their persistent efforts in constantly showcasing the research potential of the department. Over the years, the *Young Sociologist* has successfully endeavoured to encourage students to further hone their research and creative skills.

My best wishes for the Postgraduate department for the coming years.

Dr. Argha Kumar Banerjee
Associate Professor and Dean of Arts



From the Head of the Department's Desk

Department of Sociology
St. Xavier's College (Autonomous)
30, Mother Teresa Sarani
Kolkata - 700 016

I am glad to present before you the eleventh edition of the journal of the Postgraduate Department of Sociology-*Young Sociologist*. The Department is invested in encouraging students to pursue critical academic research. The journal includes articles drawn from the best BA dissertations written by final year Sociology students (batch 2019-2022). We are proud of our students for undertaking social research on a wide range of contemporary social issues and theoretical debates in the social sciences.

I would like to thank the editorial team led by Dr. Anushyama Mukherjee and Dr Sweta Chakraborty for their dedicated efforts towards the publication of the journal. I would also like to thank my colleagues from the Department of Sociology under whose able guidance such works have been written by the students. I am grateful to Prof. Bertram Da'Silva, Vice-Principal, Arts and Science, Dr Argha Bannerjee, Dean of Arts and Dr Tapati Dutta, Dean of Science for their constant support and encouragement. Lastly, I extend my gratitude to our Principal, Rev. Dr Dominic Savio, SJ for his commitment to a research-centric pedagogy at St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Zaid Al Baset". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Dr. Zaid Al Baset

Head of the Department

Postgraduate Department of Sociology

SECTION - I

Reports

Report on the Activities of The Postgraduate Department of Sociology, 2021-2022

The Department of Sociology was established in 2001. The post-graduate program in Sociology was introduced in 2020. The UG and PG Programs of the Department are designed to offer an engaged pedagogy that cultivates the creative and critical faculties of students. Our courses adopt an interdisciplinary and intersectional approach to sociological concerns. The department has been committed to continuous revision of syllabus, innovative methods of teaching and research. All members of the department are actively engaged in research and encourage students to participate in academic activities beyond the curriculum.

The success of the department can be accessed by the presence of our alumni in esteemed national and international universities as research scholars and faculty members. Presently, our students are pursuing doctoral research at University of Cambridge, University of Michigan, University of Sussex, IIT Gandhinagar, IIT Kanpur, IIT Roorkee, IIT Kharagpur, Presidency University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, University of Delhi, Azim Premji University, TISS etc. Some of them are also teaching in colleges and universities such as Miranda House (DU), Loreto College (CU), Savitribai Phule Pune University and in international colleges/universities such as University College London, UK, and Western Sydney University, Australia.

Academic Achievements of faculty members of the Department, January-December 2022

- Dr. Sarbani Bandyopadhyay** - Convened an international conference and published a book chapter.
- Dr. Shoma Choudhury Lahiri** - Delivered 3 invited lectures and published a book review.

- Dr. Shaoni Shabnam** - Published a book chapter and participated in an international conference.
- Dr. Anushyama Mukherjee** - Published 3 articles and participated in two international conferences.
- Dr. Sweta Chakraborty** - Presented papers in two conferences.
- Ms MeghaMarik** - Participated in an international conference.

Departmental events organized from January- December 2022

DATE	EVENT	SPEAKERS
26/02/2022	Research Colloquium: Introduction to Singles Studies	Dr. Ketaki Chowkhani Assistant Professor Manipal Centre for Humanities
07/04/2022	Journal Launch and National Webinar: Urban Ethnography	Dr. Debapriya Ganguly Assistant Professor Savitribai Phule Pune University
02/08/2022	Research Colloquium: Performing Silence: Feminist History and the field of Performance Studies	Dr. Trina Nileena Banerjee Assistant Professor in Cultural Studies, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta
13/08/2022	Research Colloquium: Infectious Social Movements: Sex work in the time of Pandemics.	Dr. Toorjo Ghosh Associate Professor, University of Pennsylvania
20/09/2022	Research Colloquium: Of Discipline and Interdisciplines: Situating the Indian University in the shadow of NEP 2020	Dr. Debaditya Bhattacharya Assistant Professor, Department of English Kazi Nazrul University, West Bengal, India

DATE	EVENT	SPEAKERS
24/09/2022	International Conference: Caste in Bengal	Dr. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay Emeritus Professor, Department of History Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand Dr. Sarbani Bandyopadhyay Assistant Professor Department of Sociology St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata Prof. Maroona Murmu Professor, Department of History, Jadavpur University, Kolkata Prof. Manosanta Biswas Professor, Department of History Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, Purulia, West Bengal Mr. Kumar Rana Guest Faculty Institute of Public Health Kalyani Ms. Kalyani Thakur Dalit Feminist Poet Mr. Rajat Roy Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science Presidency University, Kolkata

Student Achievement during the year

NAME	SEMESTER	ROLL NO.	DETAILS OF ACHIEVEMENT
Shrestha Ganguly	UG Sem 5	263	Secured 2nd position in the "1st IFK Indo-Nepal Karate Championship 2022" (Venue: Kathmandu, Nepal; Date: 6th May - 8th May 2022)
Ritika Dwivedi	UG Sem 3	250	Secured 2nd position in Snappit (photography event) in Exabyte, a departmental fest conducted by the Department of Computer Science of St. Xavier's College.
Atrayee Set	UG Sem 5	216	1. Secured 2nd position in the Poster Making Competition organized by the Red Ribbon Club of WBSAP & CS, Dept. of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of WB (12th August, 2022)

			2. Organised a Stationery distribution drive- 'UNMILIT' for 100 children residing in the Tikiapara slums (28th September, 2022)
Adrija Das	UG Sem 5	213	Organised a Stationery distribution drive- 'UNMILIT' for 100 children residing in the Tikiapara slums (28th September, 2022)
Ronjinee Chattopadhyay	UG Sem 3	206	Spoke as a member of a panel on menstrual tax in PinkTalk, a programme organised by Pinkishe Foundation. (September 2022)
Mahima Hazarika	UG Sem 5	251	1) Presented a poster at the International Conference on Climate Change: Global Cooperation

			2) Qualified as the Quarter-Finalist at the Climate Science Olympiad 2022 3) Qualified as a finalist for the Exhibition Concert of Crescendo XI, 2022 conducted by Calcutta School of Music
Pranjal Shah	UG Sem 5	220	Secured 2nd position in inter-department table tennis competition.

The Department is working towards the establishment of the Doctoral Programme in Sociology in the near future.

SECTION - II

Selected Dissertation Articles

“Stand by your Man”: Analysing Gender Roles in Country Music

Anushka Sikder

Few years back I came across a song by Maddie and Tae, named ‘Girl in a country song’. After listening to it, I found some of the lines very interesting:

*“Be in’ the girl in a country song How
in the world did it go so wrong?”*

Like all we’re good for is look in’ good for

You and your friend on the weekend, no thin’ more” (Maddie and Tae, ‘Girl in a Country Song’, 2014).

Eventually, I started looking for some country songs to see how men and women are portrayed in them. I came across many songs like, ‘Stand by your man’, ‘A girl who’ll satisfy her man’ etc. performed by both male and female performers. When I went through the lyrics, I was able to figure out why Maddie and Tae have written those lines mentioned above. Most of the songs that I came across have lyrics that stereo typically portray different gender roles for males and females. In this research I have tried to figure out how country music lyrics portray and construct gender roles for both men and women, how differently men and women are presented in country songs and whether women portrayed in rigid gender roles and objectified more in male fronted songs or is it vice versa. This research has been conducted as a content analysis. In this research, the content comprises of twenty-five country songs that had made it to the Billboard Hot 100 list and Billboard Hot Country list in different years. After the data was collected, it was thoroughly studied and eventually segregated under several themes like ‘Lost Love’, ‘Strong Love’, ‘Temptation’, ‘Sexuality’, ‘Infidelity’, ‘Domestic

Life', 'Ideal Woman' and then analysed. At the end of the analysis the results are presented from two perspectives - 'Gender roles for men as portrayed in both male fronted and female fronted country songs' and gender roles for women as portrayed in both male fronted and female fronted country songs.

'Country music' is a genre of popular music that originated in America in the early 1920s. The term 'country music' gained popularity in the 1940s. The origins of country music are found in the folk music of working-class Americans and blue-collar American life. Broadly, the music has six different generations. The first generation – 1920's, the second generation – 1930's to 1940's, the third generation – 1950's to 1960's, the fourth generation – 1970's to 1980's, the fifth generation – 1990's and the sixth generation – 2000's to present. Studies have shown that American-style country music has a strong international following. Country music is the second most popular genre of music after pop music. The popularity of country music is not only limited to its home country but has immense global popularity (Sanderson, 2021). A Spotify survey shows that there has been a 21% increase in the share of country music streaming outside America since 2015 (Spotify, 2018). Moreover, it's not only older people who listen to country music. Over the years the audiences have got younger (Sanderson, 2021). Country music is a successful and influential genre within main stream music which also acts as a culturally influential force. It is not only for entertainment but also has the power to shape the way of thinking within a society. Thus, the messages that are imparted through the lyrics of these songs become extremely crucial.

The term 'Gender' refers to the cultural and social characteristics attributed to men and women on the basis of perceived biological differences (Baxter & Hoffmann, 2019). 'Gender role' also known as sex role, is a social role encompassing a range of behaviours and attitudes that are generally considered acceptable, appropriate and desirable for a person based on that person's sex (Alters & Schiff, 2011). The specifics regarding gendered expectations may vary substantially across cultures, while other characteristics may be common throughout a range of cultures. Gender roles influence a wide range of human

behaviour, often including the clothing a person chooses to wear, the profession a person pursues, and the personal relationships a person enters. Lewis describes country songs as “three-minute word-movies,” which “reflect... the everyday trials, troubles, hopes, fears, and dreams of their audience” (Lewis, 1991, pp.103). This simple, “easy to understand” song writing format actually serves to reinforce the messages and morals presented in country songs, and to encourage a belief that the song or artist is “authentic”, i.e., that the performer honestly believes what he or she is saying, and that the words have truth to them as well (Shusterman, 1999). Country songs often discuss the tension and disconnect between the partners of a heterosexual relationship (Stack & Gundlach, 1992). Regarding the issue of disconnect, a study by Freudiger and Almquist found that lyrics by female country artists, presented themselves as the weaker link in a relationship, which male artists seemed to be in agreement with: women in the lyrics by male artists are portrayed as supportive yet submissive, inconsistent, and valued for their looks, rather than their abilities (Gallego, 2016). Lewis’s (1991) work points out that the madonna/whore dichotomy in country music divides women into “honky tonk angels” and “mommas,” which are two fields with a fair degree of overlap (Pruitt, 2006). “The woman is, before marriage, supposed to be free and sexual enough to attract a man but, at the same time, be socially responsible enough that she ... can be considered a legitimate candidate for marriage” (Lewis, 1989, 235). Saucier (1986) similarly argues that “the only acceptable role for women in country music is of housewife, mother, and lover” (Saucier, 1986, pp.157). Women in country songs are expected to offer both sexual dynamism as well as maternal figures. Ching (2001) argues that men in country music are often buffoonish figures, wallowing in self-pity, incapable of making any improvements whatsoever to their situation (Ching, 2001). Ellison (1995) says that the role of women in country songs differs strongly from the male role, specifically, songs by the most popular female performers focus on life’s successes, personal independence, and triumph over adversity. Very rarely do they wallow in the kinds of exaggerated self-pity found in the songs of popular male performers (Ellison, 1995).

If we talk about the gender roles that are assigned to men in country songs, then we will see that the roles vary in cases of male fronted and female fronted songs. In male fronted songs, as per my samples, I have found that mostly men are represented as heartbroken fools who spend their nights crying into their beer over the woman who have done them wrong. They act as a heartbroken wreck who has been abandoned by the woman he loves and is thus incapable of putting her memories aside and moving on with his life. They are lonely, hysterically self-loathing, have a constant tendency of self-pitying. They wail and moan and cry and almost seem to be engaged in a contest to see who is the most miserable (Ching, 2001). Most of the time it is shown that they are addicted to liquor to healthier broken heart. They hate themselves for the mistakes that they make. They act as a 'hopeless romantic' and is mostly seen in a tormented state of mind. Many a times they are portrayed to have a low self-esteem. Then again, they are represented as 'hell-raisers' who are always ready to break laws and get themselves in trouble, who are sexually promiscuous and live a reckless life. He is presented as someone who wishes to exist free of any social constraints. They always want a woman in their life who fulfils the criteria of being an 'ideal woman' as discussed above. In many cases, they are also portrayed as rugged individuals. In female fronted songs, men are often portrayed as a serial heartbreaker. This serial heartbreaker is never seen in songs performed by male artists. This, more or less, exists in the world of country songs by females. "The serial heartbreaker keeps a string of women under his wiles at all times, and each one of them believes that she is the only one he is interested in" (Pruitt, 2006, 62). Mostly they are lustful, charming, smooth talkers. Many a times they are presented as someone who makes false promises and breaks them. They use the woman for their own needs. Often, they are also presented as the 'knight in the shining armor' who has the power to protect the woman. Again, they are portrayed to be careless and indifferent towards family and domestic life. A variety of gender roles are also assigned to women in both male fronted and female fronted songs. Some of them vary and some are similar. In male fronted songs, as per my sample, women are generally portrayed as heartbreakers. For some vague reasons, they depart a committed monogamous relationship. They act

as a tormentor. They are portrayed as a mysterious figure, defined only by their absence and the pain it inflicts on the unlucky male. Sometimes she cheats on him and leaves for another man, sometimes she leaves because of the narrator's fault and sometimes she leaves for no specific reason. The women in these male fronted country songs are objectified to large extent. They are portrayed as irresistible and so much attractive that a man cannot help but fall in love with her. Through the lyrics it is presented as if it is up to the woman to keep the man from falling in love with her. They are represented as someone who does not have any regret or repentance over what they have done to a man. In most of the songs, the female character lacks any kind of motivation. Another important point that needs to be noted is that in most of the songs in my sample, women are defined by their relationship to men. This can be seen both in male fronted as well as female fronted songs. Moreover, they are often portrayed in a domestic light and are presented as the one who maintains a household and performs all domestic works along with taking responsibilities of the children. The maternal role is presented as the educational and moral upbringing of a child in addition to domestic duties such as providing meals. Again, in male fronted songs, women's sexuality is constrained and is only allowed to be brought into play when a male deems it appropriate. In these songs there is no promotion of free-spirited sexuality for women. Another frequent role that a woman plays in male fronted songs is that she acts as an 'ideal woman' whose love can change a hell-raiser to a 'perfect man'. If we look at the female fronted songs then we will be able to see that, mostly women are portrayed as loyal, submissive, non-rebellious and someone who is ready to do anything for her man without even questioning him or his actions. Even in songs performed by female singers, women are defined by their relationship to men. It is repeated again and again in most of the songs that it is the duty of the woman to be a perfect partner for her man. Here also we see that the notion of an 'ideal woman' is presented again and again. It is being reinforced even by female singers that each and every woman should try to become and act like an 'ideal woman'. In some of the songs it can be seen that the woman is begging the man not to leave. Women with high self-esteem are rarely portrayed. Most of the time they are found to be lamenting over their situation. The primary

roles that a woman needs to play, according to these songs, is to heal a heartbroken man with her selfless love, sacrifice a lot for him, manage the household and the domestic sphere of life, take responsibilities for her children. She is expected to be in a committed monogamous relationship and never question the actions of a man. Some of the songs clearly say it out loud that whatever a man does is justified because at the end of the day he is a man. She is not at all expected to complain regarding any issues.

From my analysis, it can be noted that, both men and women are assigned various gender roles, which are most of the time stereo typical in nature, by both male and female artists within country music. Men are often portrayed as someone who is a heartbroken fool, tormented, lonely, self-loathing, hopeless romantic, hell-raiser, drunkard, careless, law breaker, living a reckless life, always in search of an 'ideal woman', rugged individual, serial heartbreaker (which is mainly portrayed by the female artists), lustful, breaks promises and indifferent towards domestic life. They are presented as someone who is aggressive, independent, not easily influenced, active, dominant, worldly, decisive, tough, not easily hurt emotionally, less talkative as compared to women, less sensitive towards others feelings, not very desirous of security, rarely complaining, logical, analytical, non-nurturing and cruel. On the other hand, women are portrayed in these songs as a heartbreaker, tormentor, mysterious in nature, attractive, irresistible, domestically oriented, caring, submissive, most of the time having all the qualities that are needed to become an 'ideal woman'. Almost all the time they are defined by their relationship to a man. They are portrayed or represented as someone who is not aggressive, dependent, passive, submissive, easily influenced, home-oriented, indecisive, gentle, talkative, easily hurt emotionally, sensitive to wards other's feelings, understanding and ready to sacrifice, very desirous of security, cries a lot, complains a lot, emotional, verbal, kind and nurturing. Many people tend to think that music is only for entertainment and has nothing to do with the things that are going on in society or the beliefs that are prevalent in the society. But the analysis above shows that it indeed has a great impact on society because it stereotypes gender roles through its

lyrics and continuously reaffirms and re-establishes the already existing ones. Social cognitive theory says that continued exposure to a repeated, rewarded and simplified message makes a viewer learn and draw ideas from what they have observed (Mastro & Stern, 2003). Thus, country music listeners hear the messages presented in song lyrics, internalize the ideas presented in the songs and use those ideas to shape their world view.

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Labelling of Sexual Orientation among Middle Class Non Hetero-Normative Women in Kolkata: Is it Freeing, Restrictive or Both?

Chitranjana Bandopadhyay

There is something innately human about labelling. The whole idea of compartmentalising and differentiating objects, people and other living beings finds its place in the very humanness of existence. Labels are also created in place for the ease of interaction, communication, and furthermore for many people labels themselves can help in the creation and assertion of one's identity. Labelling aids people to put objects and people into particular categories and in doing which there is lessening of a feeling of ambiguity and arbitration regarding said object or person. When someone is labelled by us, we understand who they are in relation to us and what their roles are vis-a-vis us and furthermore, who we are in relation to them. In other words, labelling helps in defining someone. Just like regarding other aspects of one's personality and one's identity, labels are also present regarding one's sexual orientation.

Labels associated with sexual orientation are continuously expanding. Going against the binary of simply dividing the spectrum into 'Gay' and 'Bisexual', in the contemporary period, labels such as Pansexual, Demisexual, and Asexual are found in different societies. It is precisely because of this reason that the initialism of LGBTQIAP+ is followed with a '+' symbol to signify that there exists a plethora of sexual orientations that exist beyond the initialism but which are very much a part of the queer community and the umbrella of sexuality. The '+' showcases that there isn't a confirmative end to the initialism. As and when there are more orientations about sexuality discovered, the initialism keeps on growing.

Even though the common sense-verse notion of labels is that it brings clarity, this clarity is also followed with certain consequences which may not seem as completely positive in nature. With labelling, follows certain negative and positive assumptions, stereotypes and rules which bind the person to that label. In light of the above, it is important to understand and assess how labelling is also extremely central when it comes to sexual orientation or sexuality.

It is important to understand that Sexual orientation and its various forms have existed before the formation and creation of labels. People of different sexual orientations have existed prior to the creation of the labels regarding said sexual orientations. The only difference lies in the fact that there was not a specific or a particular name that could be attached to that person regarding their sexual orientation. It is from the period of the late nineteenth century, that the notion of distinct sexual identities emerged. Terminology used historically which were used to describe sexuality were vague and ambiguous, lacking specificity that exists in the contemporary period. Along with labels such as 'Bisexual' and 'Lesbian' which have been in place since the nineteenth century, labels such as 'Pansexual' and 'Asexual' have also followed suit in the contemporary period.

The aim of this research paper then is to assess whether labelling sexual orientation among non hetero-normative middle class women in Kolkata can be seen as more freeing or more restrictive along with if it can be seen as both freeing and restrictive for some. This research has also tried to bring forward the lived experiences of these people who identify as middle class women and as non-hetero-normative. It has attempted to understand and assess what it means to be non hetero-normative for these women. Furthermore, it is important to analyse through different lenses how something that binds these women together, very much has the capacity to bring forward different emotions, different behaviours and different lived experiences within them. For some, the idea of being labelled as a particular label may offer them a sense of belonging or comfort and safety; whereas, for others the idea of being placed in a water-tight compartment may be restricting and alarming for them. This research has also tried to bring into light

how different middle class non hetero-normative women with differing experiences and opinions on labels manage not to invalidate the experiences and the opinions of those who feel differently than them.

Even though there has been research conducted upon labelling of sexual orientation before, it is important to understand that said research is mainly in the context of western countries and cultures—namely American and Dutch cultures. Furthermore, these researches haven't focused specifically on people who identify as women as this research does. Therefore, this research has attempted to play its part in bridging the gap in information and knowledge regarding the consequences of labelling sexual orientation in India, more specifically in Kolkata. This will do its part in breaking the western monopoly over this research topic and bring in the lens of the research perspective of the East as well which has different cultural and societal notions, traditions and nuances. Furthermore, research based on labelling of sexual orientation has primarily been through the fields of psychology and social psychology. Doing research narrowed in the lens of the mentioned disciplines and led to the analysis and assessment of data to be geared towards a more psychological point of view leaving a gap in the sociological point of view or perspective. However, this research tries to bring in the guidance of sociology in its assessment and analysis of data. It must also be understood that even though there's a variety of information available regarding the restrictive nature of labelling, there lies a dearth of academic information regarding the aspect of labelling that offers comfort and freedom to the woman in question. But this can't be taken for granted that the latter comforting aspect of labelling and labels don't exist for many middle-class non hetero-normative women in Kolkata. This research has tried to give due and equal weightage to both the mentioned aspects.

Academic literature by different scholars like Lisa M. Diamond, Steven Eipstein and Loren B Brown, Kath Weston etc. have been read to try and build the framework for this research. Along with academic articles, non-academic articles have also been read to try and understand the colloquial view upon labelling of sexual orientation among women. The research analysis that has been conducted in this dissertation utilises

the framework that is built by the above-mentioned existing review of literature and it also takes into consideration of the nuances and the subjectivities that each research offers vis-a-vis the realm of labelling and labels of sexual orientation.

For the primary data for this research topic, an in-depth interview was conducted with 17 respondents of an age cohort of 17-30. The analysis has been divided into 4 different chapters: - Sexual Orientation, Family, Identity and Validity and Restriction and Freedom.

The chapter of 'Sexual Orientation' itself has been thematically arranged as per according the sexual orientations that were mentioned by the respondents- Bisexual (10 respondents), Demisexual (2 respondents), Queer (1 respondent), Pansexual (1 respondent) Lesbian (1 respondent) and Biromantic (2 respondents). The intricacies of each group of sexuality has been recorded and assessed under the sub-topics of the same. 16 of the 17 respondents chose 'yes' for identifying as non hetero-normative, while 1 respondent chose 'maybe'. Furthermore 9 out of the 17 respondents stated that they found labels to be both restrictive as well as freeing for them and justified the same along the lines of the notion that even if labels portray a sense of authenticity and gives forth a better understanding of a person to themselves, it gives rise to the idea that one has to make themselves fit within a compartment which has no moving space, therefore, it leads to a watertight compartmentalisation of individuals. It must also be kept in mind that even though for the majority of the respondents (13 respondents, or 76.47% of the respondents) their families are not aware about their decision to label their sexuality because of the social stigma that is attached with the idea of being non hetero-normative for the family, social factors still didn't influence their own identification with a particular label.

Segueing into the topic of family as stated in the chapter 'Family' most of the respondents had stated that they hadn't come out to their families regarding their alternate non hetero-normative sexualities. The reasons of not doing the same for everyone has gone along the lines of the fear of the ostracization, ridicule and stigma. The notion of stigma of non hetero-normative alternate sexualities has been linked to the concept of deviance and the notions of the correction of deviance in a country like

India of which Kolkata is a part of. Indian families generally tend to see alternative non hetero-normative sexualities as something which is morally wrong. A family's reaction to a child coming out has often been (as has been in the cases of the respondents who came out to their families) denial or more extreme reactions of sending the person to "corrective facilities." It is important to mention that there is nothing "corrective" of these facilities as non hetero-normative sexualities aren't something to "correct in the first place." Families play an extremely important role in the self-perception and self-identity of an individual. Therefore, often, because of rejection from consanguineous families, non hetero-normative women often choose their families of people they feel safe with and comfortable with as exemplified in Kath Weston's works.

Two very important questions asked to the respondents were whether they feel that labelling of sexual orientation is crucial for (a) self-identity and (b) validity in the larger queer community. In the chapter labelled 'Identity and Validity,' the research findings and analysis of the data regarding identity and validity are recorded. 12 out of the 17 respondents feel that labelling isn't crucial for self-identity. They also talked about the ills of forcefully labelling oneself which can lead to queer imposter syndrome (a phenomenon where one feels that they are being fraudulent in their identification with the queer community). Regarding whether labelling sexual orientation is crucial for finding validity within the queer community, 8 respondents stated that it is crucial, whereas the other 9 stated that it isn't. But it must be kept in mind, like other social learning, how one views sexual orientation is too based on previous experiences with labelling, and what they've learned and came to understand about labels to begin with. Even though some brought in the dangerous aspect of adhering validity to labels, this research has also showcased why the larger queer community may establish a sense of validity with labels for entrance and acceptance within said community. The research findings in this section have also been backed up by existing research findings.

The final section labelled 'Restriction and Freedom' deals with the main research question as to whether labelling is (a) restrictive, (b) freeing or

(c) both. The majority of the respondents, that is, 9 out of 17 respondents regardless of sexual orientation mentioned that for them, the whole process of labelling their sexual orientation is both freeing as well as restrictive. Then there is not a singularity of freedom or restriction that is associated with labelling and their labels. They mostly stated that while they found a sense of solidarity and community bonding in the whole process of labels and labelling it also bring forward a compulsion of sticking to one label even if said person sees sexuality as fluid. Furthermore, for a community that has been reprimanded, ridiculed ostracized and punished for seemingly being “different” from the mainstream, the community itself ironically establishes normativity in various forms that homogenises the members of the community on the basis of their labels. Another reason why some may be wary of labels and labelling themselves is the sense of ‘betrayal’ that exists within the community if one decides to change their label. However, at the same time, the collective history of non hetero-normativity is overburdened with oppression. In order to speak out against the collective history of oppression, there is a need of a vocabulary to voice out and protest against that oppression. Labels provide that vocabulary. Labels can help discuss and manoeuvre around power structures. Therefore, labels can be seen as both restrictive and freeing for majority of the respondents.

Therefore, this showcases that labelling sexual orientation among women isn’t homogeneous for all. Through the answers of the respondents, it has also been found that even if the women are of differing opinions regarding labelling sexual orientation they haven’t invalidated the others’ differing opinions and lived experiences with labels once again showcasing the diversity of what it means to label sexual orientation. The research has tried to play its part in inviting other researches upon the topic so that the nuances and understanding of labels among different groups of people can be assessed through different lenses.

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Representation of Alternative Indian Masculinities in Media: How the Indian Man Embodies and Engages with the Alternative Masculine

Dyuti Chatterjee

Masculinity, as a subject of sociological investigation, has gained increasing visibility post R.W. Connell's phenomenal and groundbreaking work on masculinities, (Connell 1995). Connell identified 4 types of masculinities and elaborated on the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' as the 'culturally exalted form of masculinity'. Connell's theory since has itself become "hegemonic" (Anderson 2011; Hearn 2012; Wedgewood 2009). Later scholars have pointed out conceptual ambiguities in her theory (Beasley 2008; Donaldson 1993; Hearn 2012; Martin 1998). Such critiques furthered the discourse on masculinities and opened up avenues for discussions surrounding the non-hegemonic forms of masculinity. This paper wants to carry forward the research on the non-hegemonic masculinity, theorized as "alternative masculinities" (Carabi & Armengol 2014) which appear as a nemesis to hegemonic masculinity, with the potential to herald a "changing world". Carabi (2014) defines alternative masculinities as "those masculinities which question hegemonic and dominant male behavior and embody more egalitarian forms of manhood." The "alternative masculinities" are "characterized by being not sexist, not racist, not homophobic, not classist etc." Elsewhere, Eric Anderson through qualitative studies of team sport athletes and fraternity members, conceptualize "changing masculinities" characterized by decreasing display of sexism, a "softer version of masculinity" that is not premised on alpha male behaviour, masculine bullying, racism and homophobia. He terms these masculinities as "Inclusive Masculinity" (Anderson 2011). In the Nordic stream of gender studies, the term "new

masculinities” is employed to refer to the increasing involvement of men in caring practices (Lund et.al. 2019) which have traditionally been thought of as “feminine” arenas. These caring male figures also pose a threat to the hegemonic who hitherto had premised his machoism on an avowed capability of transcending and concealing emotions. In the domain of the non-hegemonic masculinity, crucial also is the conceptualization of “hybrid masculinities” (Bridges & Pascoe 2014) which refer to “men’s selective incorporation of performances and identity elements associated with marginalized and subordinated masculinities and femininities.” Although hybrid masculinity often works towards concealing systems of power and inequality in novel ways, by symbolically distancing men from hegemonic masculinity and by diminishing the meaningfulness of masculinities associated with the young, white, heterosexual men in comparison with the significance of masculinities associated with the various marginalized and subordinated other (Bridges & Pascoe 2014), it does stand as a challenge to the hegemonic masculinity.

GLOBAL SHIFTS: LOCAL RAMIFICATIONS

In the global arena of popular culture, the omnipotence of the once dominant hegemonic masculinity has been severely undermined by the Korean wave comprising of the Bangtan Sonyeondan, better known as the BTS. Putri & Mintarsih (2020) write, “BTS experienced a shift in their display of masculinity, from showcasing complicit masculinity towards hegemonic norms to challenging the socially accepted values of being men by performing soft masculinity.” Popular culture today is going through a shift in terms of the masculinities that are depicted or they embody. Be it in Indie Rock Bands (Houston 2012) ; in Hip Hop Culture (Dhaenens & Ridder 2015) ; in sports through personalities like David Beckham (Gee 2014), in American popular TV series through characters such as Jake Peralta in Brooklyn Nine – Nine, Patrick Brewer in Schitt’s Creek, Rogelio de La Vega in Jane the Virgin, traditional hegemonic masculinity is being slowly but steadily dismantled everywhere. In this context of this shift in the character of the global masculinity, ripples of such changes are being felt in the Indian context too. The portrayal of alternative masculinities in Hindi cinema comes as

a wisp of fresh air, post the omnipotence bestowed on the angry young man era of the 1970's. Meghna Mehra (2019) writes, "The "Angry Young Man" era was the era that laid the foundation of what a man should be." From 1960s to the 1990s, it was all about women being painted as damsels in distress who needed to be saved by an efficient, tough and righteous guy willing to take on the corrupt system and society for his lady love. From the 1990s, the 'macho' masculine character got replaced by goofy, carefree male figures who chose to peddle inherent misogynistic narratives as a hint of comedy. Salman Khan in *Biwi Number One* is one such character. This era also saw Sooraj Barjatya films like *Hum Saath Saath Hain* and *Hum Apke Hain Koun*. All these films reinforced gender ideologies and popularized internalized misogyny through hegemonic male characters. The 2000s saw a trend of "prince charming" (Mehra 2019) with movies like *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* and *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* where women were treated as trophies, devoid of personhood, swooned over by the charm of the male figures. In the context of such raging depictions of the most hegemonic of masculinities, when in 2010s, there started emerging shifts in the portrayal of masculinities, it caught the attention of not only the audience, but also of many scholarly studies. Although toxic hegemonic masculinities still make their presence felt in films like *Kabir Singh*, we also see films like *Shubh Mangal Savdhaan*, where the protagonist Ayushman Khurrana is depicted as having erectile dysfunction, a disorder widely considered in society as a loss of masculinity; *Jaane Tu Ya Jaane Na*, which depicts the male protagonist as rotationally making breakfast with his mother and as one who inherently hates aggressiveness and so on.

CONTEXTUALISING THE AREA OF STUDY: THE ALTERNATIVE HETEROSEXUAL PARADIGM

The term 'alternative masculinities' has been used out of all the various synonymous terms encapsulating the same essence of males committed to a gender democracy. The reason why the term, alternative masculinities seems appealing is because it stands as one broad category that takes into account the plethora of non-hegemonic masculinities. It is in the challenges to and the continuous power

struggles with the hegemonic, that the “alternative masculinities” with all its agency, can be placed. It is important to understand here that Alternative masculinity is often conflated with queer masculinities. But this study places alternative masculinity in the context of heterosexual masculinities. For long, alternative has been associated with queer and hegemonic with the heterosexual. This study breaks through that to inspect how the heterosexual interacts with the alternative, thus putting in place an alternative heterosexual paradigm.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study sets out with two broad research questions.

1. How has Bollywood represented the alternative heterosexual masculinity on screen?
2. How does the Indian man engage with and embody such representations?

Two primary methods are used. To study representation, content analysis of select characters have been attempted, within the time frame 2016-2020. The characters have been divided into alternative father figures: Colonel Anup Saxena in ‘Gunjan Saxena’ and Sachin Sandhu in ‘Thappad’; and alternative husband figures: Iqbal Syed in “Raazi” and Kabir Bansal in “Ki &Ka”. To study the impact of these representations, in-depth interview of 5 heterosexual middle class men spread across caste, religion, within the age group 18-25 have been taken.

REPRESENTATION: FROM A TOXIC PAST TO AN ALTERNATIVE PRESENT.

Vemuri (2017) drawing from a range of scholarship argues that representation of masculinity in Bollywood exemplify different eras of heroes that define specific type of masculinity. Regarding the nature of masculinity represented, Bollywood’s representation of masculinity on screen has evolved from a toxic past to an alternative present. For the longest time, “portrayal of men in Bollywood has always been in a way as

to project masculinities that exist and in contrast to femininities in an aggravated form when compared to reality.” (Vemuri, 2017: 25). However with the advent of these alternative masculine characters, more realistic and diverse representations are being noted where males and females are no longer being constructed against each other as two different entities. Instead there are conscious attempts to weave them into one meaningful framework of positive conversations, selfless support and genuine love. Starting from 2010, there has been a host of masculine characters on screen, who have been unique and alternative in their own specific ways. In view of this radical transformation, one is lured to ask why and how did this transformation actually happen? The answer to this is provided by media researchers like Milan who argue that “popular culture is a ‘mirror’ that reflects the culture and, creates culture by reproducing and reinforcing norms and social benchmarks.” (as cited in Finklea 2014: 16, as cited in Vemuri 2017: 14). The rigorous change in the social constitution of practices and conceptualisations associated with the masculine and the feminine, is argued by Cleaver (2002). Citing evidences he posits that the tremendous transformations in the economy have led to “crises of masculinity” around the globe. Drawing from Thompson (2002) and Barker (2000), he argues that poverty and economic change had a ‘demasculinising’ effect on men. Edwards (2007) takes forward Cleaver’s stance and argues that the “crisis of masculinity” is equivalent to a “crisis of representation”. Apart from this material background, in India, the Me Too Movement and the ascendancy of the digital platforms which push in global socio-political ideas are also responsible for the transformations in the representations of masculinity.

The characters analysed here are-

Alternative Father Figures

Col. Anup Saxena: In a patriarchal society, against his own family stands with his daughter’s dream of being a pilot. “Pilot toh woh bankerehegi.”

Sachin Sandhu: Challenging society, and grossly restructuring power relations, Sandhu in ‘Thappad’ stands firmly with her daughter in her decision of divorce for ‘just’ a slap.

Alternative Husband Figures:

Kabir Bansal: Dismantling the breadwinner “ka” and homemaker “ki” model, Kabir unabashedly flaunts the role of a homemaker. It’s really all in the mentality.

Iqbal Syed: A subtle display of love and a commitment to partnership characterises this husband who recognises his wife as the person she is and protects her from being guillotined in the conflict of their respective national identities of a Pakistani and an Indian. An army man loyal to Pakistan, yet a committed husband to an Indian wife, respectful of differences and accordingly of space.

HERALDING THE “NEW MAN” IMAGE

The representation of the hegemonic male characterized by factors like physical strength, generational misogyny, career centrism is gradually giving way to the imagery of a ‘new man’ (Nixon 1997) whose performance of masculinity differs sharply from the hegemonic. “Traditional masculinity has been revised by the ‘new man’, so that he embodies the sort of anti-sexism which is characterized by his attempts to form non- oppressive relationships with women, children and other men.” (MacKinnon 2003: 13). Jeffords (1994) argues that the primary difference between the hegemonic and the new man lies in the “strengths in their individual personalities” (Vemuri 2017: 18). While physical prowess and emotional unavailability were the reigning factors in the hegemonic male, the New Man is adept at expressing his emotions, at fathering children and in valuing inter-personal relationships.

INTERACTING WITH THE “ALTERNATIVE MASCULINE IMAGERY” : CASE OF FIVE INDIAN MEN

This part analyses the in-depth interviews conducted of 5 Indian men that has been conducted on four themes namely, men on the prevalence of hegemonic masculinity; men on the idea of alternative masculinity; men on the increasing representation of alternative heterosexual

masculine characters in Bollywood; and men on performing alternative masculinity in their day to day lives.

MEN ON THE PREVALENCE OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

All of the respondents upheld the standards of dominant/hegemonic masculinity to varying degrees. Through rigorous socialization and naturalization, these traits have been instilled in them which they also perform in their day to day lives. However, one important point here is that these men are capable of articulating their behaviour in words which proves that they are conscious of their attitude. The fact that they still will not or in some cases cannot change it is indicative of the generational normalized patriarchy that such attitude is rooted in.

MEN ON THE POSSIBLE IDEA OF AN ALTERNATIVE MASCULINITY

Revealed variations. Some respondents agreed alternative masculinity might emerge among heterosexual men too. To these respondents, the definitions of alternative masculinity aligned with the existing literature. Pro-feminist, emotional, caring, understanding, were some adjectives with which they described “alternative masculinity”. The other set of responses also used the same adjectives to describe alternative masculinity but they linked the idea of alternative masculinity to queerness. They believe that heterosexual men only can act a certain way (performing the dominant images of masculinity).. When refuted with the fact that there are many heterosexual men who do behave in ways different to the dominant imagery, this set of respondents showed a lot of scepticism. They argued that when heterosexual men behaved the other way, they have their own vested interests, most prominently extracting sexual favours from women. A more important insight is that people who refuse to accept alternate characteristics in heterosexual male population and characterize them as a queer, predominantly, homosexual quality automatically create a hierarchy of gender relations because they have already accepted the dominant male images as signifying “real manhood”.

MEN ON THE INCREASING REPRESENTATION OF ALTERNATIVE HETEROSEXUAL MASCULINE CHARACTERS IN BOLLYWOOD

This section contains three subthemes: Whether these representations were necessary, whether these changes were realistic and whether these portrayals attacked the dominant images of masculinity and if yes, whether that is desirable. The first subtheme revealed variations. The majority said that it was unnecessary. One of the common reasons for their argument was that the light, joyful aspect of Bollywood is declining and it is becoming too serious. Two of the respondents however said that such portrayals were necessary. Bollywood films have always wielded a great influence and films reflect the society, they argued. The second subtheme again revealed variations. Two of my respondents think as against the angry, tough, muscular images of men who refused to show emotions, it is easier to relate to the new portrayals of men who are willing to be emotional and sensitive without being ashamed about the same. However, both of them agreed that despite the fact that they would want to see such men in real life, it's difficult to find such men. With changing times, even if there are changes in the attitude of some men, the majority mentality still remains the same. The other three respondents argued that such portrayals are not realistic at all. All of the respondents unanimously agreed that the portrayals challenged the dominant images of masculinity. However opinions were again divided when they were asked whether the dominant images of masculinity should be threatened. Two of my respondents said that it is absolutely desirable because as pointed out earlier by them, it is necessary not only for the society at large but also for individual men who have to hide their emotions and “man up” because Bollywood has set unrealistic standards for men. The others argued that it is no good dismantling the male image by putting in place standards which cannot be achieved in reality. The common point in their argument was that men should be a certain way and they are a certain way. For the latter section, it just reiterates the fact that they cannot think about men being any other way than what traditionally has been. This also goes on to explain their disdain towards present Bollywood which questions their sense of comfort and taken for granted attitude towards gender roles. Even the minority respondents among whom the changing portrayals does seem to have a favourable impact, find little relevance to

these portrayals outside of their individual perspectives, when assessed against the broader social reality that is driven by complicity towards the hegemonic male.

MEN ON PERFORMING ALTERNATIVE MASCULINITY IN THEIR DAILY LIVES.

This section is divided into two subthemes: Whether they perform and what are the challenges associated with it, and how the women react to it. The first subtheme revealed variations. Some of them said that they are trying to embody more non-normative masculine traits. Others in line with their previous response said that they don't want to. Both of them unanimously conceded that society poses a huge challenge to those who transgress the normative standards of masculinity. Regarding the second subtheme, all of them unanimously agreed that irrespective of what women say in public circles, in close, intimate circles, they do prefer "dominating partners". "This is not to say that women are willing victims of the worst results of hegemonic masculinity such as violence, but rather that the production of hegemonic masculinities as viable and socially acceptable subject positions for men must require at least some kind of 'buy-in' from women and, probably, active participation in the construction and perpetuation of discourses." (Talbot & Quayle 2010 : 4).

CONCLUSION

The representation of heterosexual masculinities on screen has transformed from a macho, muscular, tough imagery which employed aggression at its worst and sexist humour at its best to win over women to a more gender-sensitive, understanding, empathetic imagery of males who are willing to self-reflect and treat women as their equals. Concomitantly, the nature of the plot has also changed from an erstwhile male-driven narrative, with a larger than life superhero as the center of the storyline which otherwise had minimum depth to more thought provoking storylines that challenges societal conventions, breaks through them and heralds new possibilities. An analysis of the in

depth interviews however reveals ambivalence surrounding the impact that such changing representations have had. While some rejected every potential of such changing representations, even the respondents who consider such representations to be necessary and desirable, concede that they struggle to embody such alternative personality traits in their daily lives because the society is just not wholly ready for it.

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Racism Against the North-Eastern People of India

Jessica Burbidge

This research was based on an attempt to bring to light the prevalence of racism in India against the North-Eastern citizens of the country. The reason for doing this research is because there is a lack of sufficient investigation into this area. Not much extensive literature exists that explores and studies racism against the north-east. In the academic circle, contemporary Indian political and social sciences have also remained mute on the process of racialization of the North-Eastern citizens. Thus, this research attempts to examine the reasons as to why such contentions exist in the Indian society, through observations, reflections, personal experiences and survey. My personal experiences have also drawn me towards researching on this issue. There have been various incidents where I have been called “Chinese”, “Cheena”, “Chinki” or a “Nepali” on assumptions made by many people based on my physical features.

This research is significant as it is sociologically relevant. There is also a need to spread awareness and educate people about the North-Eastern states and its people. Secondly, to remove the notions that are based on their physical features and appearance which associates them to look like a certain way that is, having an East-Asian physical structure. They need to be perceived as Indians. Awareness needs to be spread on this topic and education of the masses is an important medium to mould the mind of the future generation to help them build and connect with people from different regions with the knowledge that they are people of the same nation.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- Is racism against North-East a reality or a myth?
- What are the causes of racism against the north-eastern citizens?
- Are the laws in the country strict enough to check on discrimination against the North-East?
- Does discrimination lead to racial attacks and abuse against the North-Eastern people?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This research on “Racism against the North-Eastern people of India” is an attempt to bring to light the prevalence of racism against the people from the north-east in mainland India. ‘Mainland’ here refers to the entire nation except the eight north-eastern states- Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya, that is collectively referred to as the north-eastern region and frontier.

Entrenchment of racial ideology is not recognized in the Indian society, by the government or in the academic circle, but it is experienced by the North-Eastern citizens of the country on a daily basis in mainland India. In the past, not much attention has been paid on this issue and no extensive literature exists that explores and studies this issue. However, it was only after the two violent deaths of Richard Loitam and Dana Sangma in 2012 that attracted media attention towards racism in India and caught people’s attention through informal channels that acted as a catalyst for protests against racism and for justice. At present, the articulation of such events is limited to personal experiences, limited examples of institutional racism and a call to include chapters on the North-East in the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) books. There is a need to strengthen and deepen this articulation with the help of scholarly attention.

The research has attempted to focus on various themes, such as: migration to major cities, assimilation, name-shaming and racial slurs,

Constitutional rights and acts, news reports regarding racial violence against the north-eastern people and their insecurities they may suffer due to their identity.

METHODOLOGY

The research is based on data collected through survey (questionnaire) and interview methods in order to collect relevant data on racial discrimination faced by the North-Eastern youth in India, with specific reference to the city of Kolkata. The data collected is qualitative in nature as it is utilized to collect adequate data to reveal the perspectives, world view and experience of the respondents. The questionnaire used for data collection contains both open and closed-ended questions. The youth from the north-eastern cities of India come to major cities in mainland India for education or employment purpose. The In-depth interviews were conducted among them, specifically with reference to the north-eastern youth in Kolkata, who were readily available to speak on this issue and share their experiences strictly for this research purpose. A few respondents however, no longer reside in Kolkata but have shared their past personal experiences of racial discrimination in the city. I have also focused on major registered cases of discrimination faced by the north-eastern citizens in other metropolitan cities of the country like Bangalore, Delhi, Chennai etc. in order to support my argument. Most important cases being that of Nido Tamia, a nineteen-year-old student from Arunachal Pradesh; Richard Loitam, a nineteen-year-old architecture student's mysterious death in Bangalore; Ramchanphy Hongray's murder in New Delhi; and Dana Sangma, 21-year-old student from Meghalaya's suicide at Amity University Management in Manesar. This has helped enhance the research with more elaborate data and detailed personal experiences of racial discrimination faced by the north-eastern citizens of the country.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Primary Data: The primary data used has been collected through survey with the help of Questionnaire and Interview methods, collected

from 22 respondents, with personal information of the respondents and their experiences of racial discrimination in mainland India, specifically with reference to Kolkata, including some who no longer reside in the city but have shared past experiences of discrimination here.

Secondary Data: The secondary data used has been collected from various articles, books, journals, newspaper reports, related websites available from both published and unpublished works and a documentary style short film “Stranger in my Land” (2014) by DuyuTabyo.

LIMITATIONS

The Covid-19 Pandemic was one of the obstacles in conducting this research. It was difficult to convince people to talk about racial discrimination faced by them, there were also some respondents who delayed appointment and sometimes did not explain their answers elaborately. I also acknowledge that personal biases to some extent can influence the research, as it is difficult to put aside preconceived beliefs and my own personal experiences on being discriminated on the basis of my physical features.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

According to the analysis and interpretations of data collected, it can be stated that majority of the north-eastern youth come to mainland India for the purpose of education and employment. However, unfortunately they are discriminated against on the basis of race and their culture. They face racial discrimination on a daily basis because of their physical features which are typically East-Asian physical structure. Their dressing style and their culture are also different as compared to mainland India which acts as a distinction maker. This kind of treatment meted towards them by citizens in mainland India results in them feeling treated like an outsider in their own country.

They are judged and treated like foreigners and denied of their rights and privileges. Both educated and uneducated people tend to stare and

pass comments or racial slurs like ‘chinki’, ‘chini-mini’, ‘Chinese’, ‘Nepali’, foreigner etc. even though such words are held as offensive in accordance with the Supreme Court. They are also asked questions like, “which country are you from?” or “how are you able to see with those eyes?” which is very offensive.

The north-eastern girls are also observed to be harassed in mainland India; they are perceived by the local people in Indian cities to have “tainted character” (Bezbaruah Committee, 2014). This is where the gender dimension in the perception of the use of the term “chinky” also comes in. They suffer double stigma, besides being called “chinky” because of how they look they are also considered to be morally loose in nature.

The Covid-19 pandemic, has played a crucial role in increasing the violence meted out against the north-eastern citizens. 90.9% of the respondents felt that there was an increase in racial discrimination against the north-east. There were several instances of racial attacks on people from the North East in different parts of India following the outbreak of the coronavirus. A few incidents faced were of people blaming them for the virus, calling them corona. They avoided walking close to them and always maintained an extra distance. Many people who remained here were told by neighbours to leave their premises.

The North-East are of the view that people of mainland India do not take this kind of racial discrimination seriously because they lack education and knowledge about it. People in mainland India have a mindset regarding citizens of the north-east, they feel a sense of superiority over them. The government and the media do not readily represent or take a stand against any injustice faced by the north-eastern people. According to a Naga student, the government and the media do not give enough attention to the violence meted out toward the north-eastern citizens. However, if the same kind of violence is faced by an Indian in a foreign country or even if one talks about racism in other countries the media and the government then speaks on the cases or takes a stand.

CONCLUSION

Racial ideology in Indian society has not been recognised by the Indian government or in the academic circle but it is experienced on a daily basis by the people from North-East in mainland India. One such example is the tragic incident of Richard Loitam in Bangalore which led to strong protests for justice against racism. However, there are so many other cases that are not registered and continue to take place daily at colleges, workplaces or other public places. Majority of the North-east students face racial abuse just because they look different and come from different regions but the government and media do not pay much attention to such issues.

The issue is sociologically relevant as there is a need to strengthen and sustain awareness of it through scholarly intervention and assistance. Educating the masses plays an important role, to spread awareness and make people aware of the prevalence of racism in India. The government should create actions to promote equality, unity and awareness. Discrimination of any kind should be discouraged in society and proper education and awareness program should be given in schools and colleges for spreading awareness on the discrimination faced by the north-east. Through education, awareness programmes and by adding extra curriculum regarding the history of the North-East region of India, discrimination can be reduced to some extent. Thus, with the help of data collected and secondary literature used in this research, it can be concluded that racial discrimination in the Indian society is in fact a reality and that the Indian society has normalised racism against the north-eastern citizens of the country. This is prevalent due to the stereotypes, unfamiliarity and ignorance of the people in mainland India who discriminate against the north-east.

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Acceptability and the Other Gender: Tracing their Roots and Position in Manipuri Society

Kribina Dey

We live in a world that is increasingly leaning towards the inclusion of minorities in the mainstream, despite the obstacles and opposition to the same. Rights of the marginalized are occupying global debates, as they should. Overall, there has always been a history of persecution of many minorities and a denial of their rights, which has fueled movements globally in an effort to claim the same. The LGBTQ+ community has become quite prominent in their effort to assert their rights and, to an extent, succeeded, as witnessed in their acceptance and integration in western societies. It is a different story in India however. Prejudice and discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community in India has definitely reduced, yet still quite rampant.

The 'T' in LGBTQ+ stands for the Transgender community. Alongside other members of the LGBTQ, the transgender community too have never had it easy in India. As marginalized people, they are looked at as objects of ridicule and fear. The transgender community are easy victims of violence and sexual abuse for being 'different' from the 'normal'. In recent years there have been encouraging signs of the community being granted certain rights. On the 15th of April, 2014, The Supreme Court of India passed a landmark judgment in the National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India that declared transgendered people as the 'third gender' and granted them access to fundamental rights as prescribed under the Constitution of India. There was also the inclusion of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019. This act aims to provide a statutory basis for constitutional rights and inaugurate procedures that would ensure the enactment of such rights.

However, even after such acts, the struggle of acceptability amongst the transgender community has remained stark. They are still marginalized in everyday society and have to struggle to secure equal and inclusive rights, legal protection, respective ecosystems, and the support of the society. The road towards accomplishing constitutional guarantees of freedom, justice, equality, and liberty is yet a long, winding, and rocky one for the ‘trans’ community.

It is against this backdrop that questions about their acceptability and role in society gain significance. Globally, the LGBTQ+ movement has gained recognition and momentum which has led to more visibility and acceptance of the extended community. In India, the movement is confined to urban spaces and only a handful of transgender persons have gained some respectability, notably in the arts and entertainment field. For the majority, it is still a tale of persecution, exclusion and victimization. Thus, when it comes to light that there is a part of India where this community has achieved a measure of acceptability, it becomes news of significance and deserves to be investigated. This part of the country where the transgender community gains a certain level of acceptance as juxtaposed with mainland India, is Manipur. The transgender community under focus here, goes by the name of “NupiMaanbi” (literally meaning ‘looks like a girl’ in the local Manipuri language), an indigenous trans women community.

Do the NupiMaanbis of Manipur enjoy a certain level of acceptability in society as juxtaposed to the transgenders of mainland India? Are they integrated in the Manipuri society? This is the question I would like to explore through my research using the interpretive paradigm by conducting extensive interviews. From the ancient times to the contemporary ages, the NupiMaanbis have played a vital role in the artistic, cultural, and administrative life of Manipuri society. They have a stronghold over the beauty sector and their work in the same is of remarkable significance.

There exists a few studies that explore the genesis and role of the transgender community of Manipur. One of the few notable studies is by Yumkhaibam in 2020, who traced the early prototypes, i.e., the ‘feitas’

to their modern counterparts, i.e., the 'NupiManbis'. The author has argued that their identity is firmly embedded in the economic niche that the subjects inhabit as professionals in the increasingly popular fashion and beauty parlors in contemporary Manipur. In fact, the transgender community in Manipur occupy a large chunk of the beauty sector occupations.

Some Community Based Organizations (CBOs) owned by the transgender community are also working in the state with support from civil society groups and agencies towards their issues. They are also involved in social issues to some extent and thus create an atmosphere of empowerment and upliftment. The trans community do their part in contributing towards society.

My research will center around two approaches – studying papers and publications in archives on the topic, and, talking to members of the community. The first will enable to understand how the community evolved, how they tackled their issues of acceptability, and their presence in the society in the cultural and religious fields. I was able to interview some of the NupiMaanbis and find out what they feel about participating in the cultural activities and also how they are or are not accepted by the Manipuri society at large. This allowed answers to the research question on the acceptance and role of this community in Manipur. I also hope to juxtapose their acceptance against the mainstream reaction in India, and attempt to trace a comparative study between the acceptability in Manipur and the other states.

The NupiMaanbis I interviewed were – Pintu, a make-up artist, GudyKonthoujam, a beautician, PinkiPaonam, a hairstylist, and Thoibi Thokchom and Romila, bridal make-up artists & hair stylists. Other transgenders in Kolkata who were interviewed are – Vinita Singh and Maitrayee, both college students, and Aparajita, an entrepreneur.

Through my research, I aimed to understand the following aspects of the Transgender community in Manipur:

- Tracing their history in Manipur and the first signs of their participation in the cultural activities of the state.

- Examining the relation between their cultural participation and their acceptability in Manipuri society.
- Estimating the percentage of the population who subscribe to this community and their professional profiles.

My research was structured into three parts. Firstly, the emergence of the transgender community in India and then, in Manipur, are discussed. Here, the studies of RubaniYumkhaibam and S. Parthasarathy provided the basis for secondary research and highlighted the community's status in the present scenario. Several factors are responsible for the emergence and acceptance of the transgender community, aka, the NupiMaanbi community of Manipur. A few of these factors range from the formation of several community-based organizations developed solely for the NupiMaanbis like the All Manipur NupiMaanbi Association, the Maruploi Foundation and the NupiSabisingeeTenbangLup. In the 1990s, HIV/AIDS gained increasing medical attention which was also coupled with a lot of backlashes against AIDS research. The AIDS campaign was also a driving force that led the NupiMaanbis to establish organizations that would help improve their socio-economic situation. This led to various movements that fought for the inclusion of the NupiMaanbis in different social arenas and legislations concerning transgender subjects in India.

Funds provided by both national and international organizations towards community-based organizations run by the NupiMaanbis have given rise to their acceptance and emergence as a distinct social group in Manipur. Many transgender-led organizations fight continuously towards their cause. For example, The All Manipuri NupiMaanbi Association have continued to voice concerns of the transgender communities against issues regarding their socio-economic plight. In response to a PIL filed by Santa Khurai, secretary of the All Manipur NupiMaaanbi Association, the Manipur High Court directed the state government to include transgender communities within the Covid-19 Affected Livelihood Support Scheme in September 2021. Prior to this, the Manipur government, in an exemplary step, had opened dedicated quarantine centers for transgender persons who returned to the state, in May 2020. And in a historic decision, the Manipur State Commission

for Women has announced the launch of a transgender women's grievance cell from 9th April, 2021. This is probably the first of its kind in the country, and has come about after long years of struggle for inclusion of transgenders in formal structures.

Secondly, the contributions of the NupiMaanbi in Manipur's theater, cultural, and art sector are focused upon. The NupiMaanbis experiences in various cultural events helped gain an insight into their life in society and understand whether their participation in these events help them feel empowered. Here, I analyze two big festivities of Manipur- the Shumang Leela and the ThabalChongba.

Shumang Leela translates to a courtyard performance and has been performed in Manipur since the 20th Century. Within the cultural context and space of the Manipuris, the theatrical art form has the function of informing, guiding, entertaining, educating, and sensitizing the public on many subjects pertinent to society. Through its meaningful themes and enactments of socio-economic-political issues, the Shumang Leela acts as a medium of communication to make the public aware of important issues. The Shumang Leela is a unique theatrical performance owing to the fact that it is mostly performed by NupiShabis and NupiMaanbis. NupiShabis are male actors that play roles of women on stage but do not identify themselves as females or transgenders offstage, whereas NupiMaanbis are transgender females. The primary reason for this is that in ancient times women would not be allowed to leave their homes at night, which is when the performance takes place. Thus, men would pretend to be females and enact their roles in the Shumang Leela. They were known as NupiShaabis. In contemporary times, NupiMaanbis started performing as well. Pintu, one of my respondents, would assist the NupiShabis and NupiMaanbis in their make-up before the performances.

ThabalChongba is a community dance performed in Manipur during the five days of Yaosang or Holi, the largest festival. It is performed to celebrate the onset of spring and is said to invoke prosperity, fertility and a prosperous harvest.. While most ThabalChongbas are centered around cis-gendered people, it is of great significance that the people of Manipur organize and celebrate a separate ThabalChongba for the

Transgender community of Manipur. The NupiMaanbis have found significant representation in the beauty sector of Manipur; however, their participation in the ThabalChongba has given a platform to the trans-women to portray their creativity through design and attire, apart from providing their community visibility in the society. All five NupiMaanbis I interviewed confirmed that they have taken part in the ThabalChongbas in the last few years and spoke of their eagerness in engaging in this open acknowledgement of their 'otherness'

Finally, with contributions from both Yumkhaibam, 2020, and Sashikumar, 2009, I analyzed the role of the NupiMaanbis in Manipur's beauty sector; Imphal, in particular. Their experiences in establishing themselves in their profession helped analyze the working life of the NupiMaanbis. According to studies, sixty percent of Imphal's beauty salons are owned and operated by the homosexual and transgender community. They are gender-neutral salons that cater to both men and women. The NupiMaanbis are involved mostly in make-up and hairstyling. The beauty industry provides for the major share of income to the transgender community of Manipur. One of the most well-known transgender make-up artists in Manipur is Jenny Khurai who paved the way for transgenders in the beauty sector. In an interview with Nikita L Sharma, Jenny mentions "I am a very independent person and don't like to depend on anyone for anything. I love self-independence and have strived to help my fellow transgenders in coming out of their shells to become someone of their own and be happy about who they are." The strong sense of self-assertion in her voice is a marker towards the level of acceptance enjoyed by the NupiMaanbis in Manipur.

In contemporary Manipur, prejudice and alienation still persist, but transgender identity has resurfaced in the NupiMaanbis, arising from conflicts and frustration with AIDS research, a lack of organisational assistance for the subjects, and society's tenaciousness.

The socio-economic niche of the beauty parlors and salons run by the NupiMaanbis reinforces this thread of self-determination. The NupiMaanbi community of Manipur gains recognition through the cultural activities catered towards them alongside their involvement in various professions, fashion and beauty being the one that is most

prominent. Their work and participation in various every-day activities is a medium of self-expression, one that is rarely seen in the transgender communities residing in other parts of India. Today, there is a special grievance cell catered towards the freedom and rights of the transgenders of Manipur. Their participation in other activities like football has also started to emerge. However, their fight does not end here for it is just the beginning. Their struggle will be to gain legal rights that will enable them to live at par with the mainstream society without being forced to stick to only a few professional activities. The acceptance of their identity is not as widespread in society especially among the elders and rural communities. However, it is heartening to see the younger generation are much more accepting and comfortable with their presence, with many cis-gendered youths counting NupiMaanbis among their close friends. This is the way forward that will enable them to be part of a more inclusive mainstream Manipuri society.

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Does the Bombay Hindi Film Industry Adequately and Accurately Represent the Queer Community?

Prarthita Bandopadhyay

Owing to the wide reach of cinema, films become an influential form of mass media that impacts a large population. A side from being a source of entertainment, films are also powerful tools for communication and conditioning. Cinema not only functions as a medium of dissemination of ideas and messages but also aims to reflect the existing social milieu through the representation of society. Bollywood, the Hindi sector of the Indian movie making industry, emerged during the 1930s in Bombay (Now Mumbai). This enormous empire produces almost 1000 films annually, and has become one of the largest film industries in the world. Hence, representation through films has significant impact on society. However, in order to cater to the dominant majority audience, representation of minority communities is determined by tokenism, stereotyping or typecasting. This results in minority groups, such as the queer community, always being represented in a certain way, which further influences people's perception of them.

National conversation in India about the queer community was sparked by the release of Deepa Mehta's film, *Fire* (1998) (Chopra 2020). The film depicted the lives of two women, abandoned by their husbands, who find solace in each other. With increasing public awareness and debates, Indian media has been experimenting with queer representations (Satpathy 2005). There has been increasing visibility of the queer community in Indian main stream Hindi cinema. While some have been positive representations such as "*Fire*" (1996), "*Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga*" (2019), "*Subh Mangal Zyada Savdhan*" (2020), there have been many films depicting a negative, stereotyped, or

tokenistic representation of the queer community, such as “Girl friend” (2004), “Dostana” (2008), “Laxmii” (2020). With the repeal of Section 377 of the Indian Constitution in 2018, homosexuality has been legally decriminalized. This Section was introduced in 1861, under the Colonial rule. Section 377 criminalised carnal intercourse against the force of nature, and classified it a sun natural offenses. However, in a historic judgment passed by a five-judge Constitutional bench, this Section was repealed, thereby allowing consensual homosexual intercourse among adults. However, it still remains a taboo topic for much of the Indian population. This hesitance over discussing queer issues is reflected in the lack of queer-themed movies produced in the Bombay Hindi film industry.

Despite the increasing awareness about LGBTQIAP + issues, the representation of the same in Hindi films requires some analysis. In "An analysis of queer representation in Hindi cinema" by Raja (2018) suggests that while there has been an increased representation of homosexuality in Bollywood Hindi films, there has been a lack of representation of other sexual identities within the community, such that those of bisexuality, pan sexuality or asexuality. Moreover, there has been a lack of star cast representations of alternate sexualities. However, Raja considers the lack of the use of the word “queer” in the promotional features or advertisements of such movies a shift in paradigm. In an article by Bose and Sreena (2021), through the analysis of *Girl friend* (2004) and *Unfreedom* (2014), their presentation of female homosexuality has been depicted. While both movies had pivot characters of alternate sexualities, the film “*Girl friend*” attempted to consciously re-establish existing taboos regarding lesbianism through problematic stereotypes and *unfreedom*, in an attempt to challenge dominant norms of heterosexuality, ended up serving the perverted male gaze of heterosexual men. In an article by Kaur (2017), it was stated that Hindi cinema is guilty of portraying queer characters in a very demeaning manner for the purpose of entertainment as well as of reinforcing of stereotypes and myths about the queer community. However, Kaur raises questions about the changes in the attitude of the audience towards the queer community following the commercial failure of LGBTQIAP + movies. Fedtke (2014), in their analysis of the

movie “My Name is Khan,” discusses how a sexuality is portrayed as a disability that requires overcoming in order to be established as a “real man” who is sexually active. This goes on to imply that asexuality is illegible as well as that it is a sexual disability that can and needs to be overcome. Dasgupta (2012), in his analysis of *Dostana* (2008) and *Kal Ho Na Ho* (2003), highlights the ambivalent discourse of the movie where in there is a level of tolerance for queer desires, however, the inevitability of heterosexuality is established by the climax.

During the analysis of queer themes in Bollywood Hindi cinema, various questions need to be addressed. How much representation does the queer community receive in Bollywood Hindi Films, in as much as that the pivotal character represents an alternate sexual identity? Is the queer representation adequate to portray the reality of queer issues and people? Which sexual identities are most commonly represented? Are queer people represented as part of primary social institutions? What are the issues that are highlighted in queer-themed movies?

Queer issues have been gaining attention in Bollywood movies. However, movies have mainly highlighted the revelation of sexual identities of characters, alternatively termed as “coming out of the closet.” Furthermore, there is a distinct lack of representation of physical intimacy between queer characters, indicating some sort of discomfort about discussing queer intercourse. The objective of this work is to analyze the absence of representation of queer people in the primary institutions, such as marriage or politics. The aim of the analysis is to observe whether the failure to be represented as part of such primary institutions leaves queer people outside the discourse of mainstream sexual identity or gender, treating them as exceptional situations. Additionally, an attempt is made to analyze whether the lack of sexual representation of the queer community contributes to the discomfort about and stigma against queer sexual activities.

This work aims to observe and analyse the frequency and the accuracy of the representation of alternate identities as part of primary institutions in main stream Bollywood Hindi films. The objective of the analysis is to observe the nature of the character representing an alternate identity (i.e., whether they are a pivot character or not) and

how their identity affects the plot of the film. Moreover, attempts have been made to identify the nature of interactions of these characters with other characters in the film as well as to make note of any scenes in the film that portray physical intimacy between characters of alternate identities. This research aims to subjectively interpret qualitative data collected from four main stream Hindi Bollywood films. The films have been selected on the following criteria: i) the protagonists of the elected represent an alternate identity (i.e., non-cis-gendered and non-heteronormative), ii) the selected films were produced and released between 2019 and 2022. The stipulated time period post-dates the decriminalization of homosexual intercourse between consenting adults in 2018, iii) all films belong to the drama genre of films with U/A film certification. The selected films include *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga* (2019), *Shubh Mangal Zyada Savdhan* (2020), *Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui* (2021), and *Badhai Do* (2022). This work aims to conduct a qualitative data analysis of the above-mentioned films. A narrative analysis of the films has been conducted which includes the examination of the story elements, narrative structure, characters, and plot, taking into consideration the entirety of the film and the story it seeks to tell. The process of open coding has been employed to analyse the films. Open coding involves close examination of the films in an attempt to create “codes” based on common themes to further group them under a broader scope of “categories” to establish a “pattern”.

There have been significant achievements in terms of queer representation in mainstream Hindi Bollywood films, especially in terms of the seriousness of the issue. Following the repeal of Section 377 of the Indian Constitution, in 2018, main stream Bollywood Hindi films have tried to address the issue of non-heteronormativity, with the aim to reduce stigma and otherization. However, in the trajectory of the selected films, there has been a tendency to “otherize” queer people, especially through derogatory terms. In an attempt to establish the prescriptive nature of heteronormativity, the queer identity has been posed as a “problem” that requires solving rather than a natural state of being. By labeling heteronormativity as “normal” and “standard,” these films then indicate that queer identities are outside the main stream discourse of sexuality and gender identity. There is also a distinct lack of

representation of queer people in conjugal families. Each film shows an instance, where a heterosexual marriage was proposed to prevent a queer relationship. However, following the acceptance of these relationships by other characters, there is no further discussion of entering into conjugal relations by the queer characters. This indicates that while queer relationships are acceptable, they are not acceptable in primary institutions such as marriage or family. This is explicitly evident when the desire to get married, as expressed by Aman in “Subh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan,” is denied or when Suman and Shardul, in “Badhaai Do,” agree to remain married in order to adopt a child. There is also a significant contrast in the portrayal of intimacy in queer relationship and heteronormative relationship. While heteronormative physical intimacy is publicly discussed and addressed, physical intimacy between queer characters remains a private and isolated affair.

There is an attempt to reduce stigma which becomes evident through the trajectory of the films that have been selected for analysis. The queer protagonist in each film undergoes two phases of “coming out.” In the first instance, the queer identity of the character is established and the relevant stigma is highlighted, thereby indicating that the queerness of the character does not align with the assumed norm. The second instance of “coming out” is the high point of the film, preceding the climax. It is in this scene, that the film attempts to explain the queer identity of the character to the audience in an attempt to “normalize” it. The acceptance of queer characters and their alternate identities is depicted in the climax of the film. It is important to note that there is change in the way non-heteronormativity has been portrayed in the selected films. While previously, films with queer themes often reiterated and reproduced a variety of stereo types associated with queer individuals. For example, in the film “Girlfriend” (2004), the main character, Sapna, assumes that a night of physical intimacy with Tanya resulted from their close friendship. Equating same-sex love to close companionship was a characteristic of the Victorian era (Seidman, 2002). Similarly, Dostana (2008), portrays two men pretending to be in a same-sex relationship and eventually realize their feelings for each other. This reiterates the commonsensical notion that sexuality is a

“choice.” In contrast however, the films that have been selected for analysis in this work, treat non-heteronormativity as a serious issue. They aim to highlight the prejudices against and struggles of queer individuals with the objective to reduce, and eventually eliminate, the stigma associated with queer identities. Despite the achievements in queer representation in mainstream Bollywood, queer identity remains a “problem” that needs to be addressed and solved. Majority efforts of media representation of queer identities in mainstream Bollywood, have been to “normalize” non-heteronormativity. The films that have been analyzed have made attempts to establish queer identity as part of the mainstream discourse of sexuality and gender, instead of being viewed as the “exception” to it.

Qualitative data analysis and content analysis are not without limitations. Owing to the subjective nature of analysis, the researcher is at risk of making errors, especially in terms of relation analysis or creating common codes or categories, at the time of interpretation. Additionally, personal bias, preconceived notions and values might affect analysis and conclusions. Moreover, due to the paucity of time, there is an absence of audience review. Such a review would have strengthened this work by highlighting the impact of the film on the audience, and the reception of the film by them, thereby shedding light on how these films are perceived and how they influence public opinion. This work, in particular, lacks an intersectional approach to the analysis of sexuality. It fails to highlight whether other aspects of the identity of an individual (such as gender, class, etc) affect the lives of the characters or their process of coming out.

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Queer Disability, Resistance and Censorship: A Cyberethnography of Queer and Disabled Content Creators and Activists on Social Media

Rayana Ghosh

The domain of social media and cyberspace manifests itself in a myriad of ways when seen through the intersecting lenses of queerness and disability. When it comes to the creation of content and using platforms like Instagram to gain recognition and remuneration, queer disabled content creators are often wrought with the issues of accessibility as well as censorship - hindrances that severely affect their modes of artistic and self-expression. My research focuses on the marginalisation of queer and disabled artists on Instagram and the subsequent silencing of their art, activism and identities through stringent media regulations in a space dominated by the hegemony of heteronormative able-bodiedness.

I have chosen to adhere to Alison Kafer's hybrid political/relational model of disability that builds on social and minority model frameworks and reads them through feminist and queer critiques of identity (2013). This departs from the medical model of disability which views deviance from the norm as something defective and pathological. The focus instead, is on the various social and institutional processes that restrict and contain the lives of disabled people. Politicising disability challenges the hegemony of ableist discourses and demands critique, contestation and transformation of such spaces, in order to reclaim them.

The intersection of queerness and disability is one of my primary focal lenses - one of the reasons for which is that both present themselves as

an example of the connectedness and complexity of human oppression and identity (Valdivia, 1995). A heterosexual, able-bodied individual unquestionably is a hegemonic ideal - which is not compromised by either queerness or disability (McRuer, 2021). My research explores these intersecting axes of oppression - more specifically, how queer, disabled users access virtual cyberspaces and battle censorship of the content they put out.

Following the aforementioned debates and developments, this research aims to:

- 1) Conduct in-depth interviews with queer, disabled content creators and activists on Instagram to understand how they deal with the feeling of “taking up space”, and how the intersecting nature of their identities (whether visible or non-visible) affect the way they navigate social media
- 2) Analyse pages and personal accounts of those who engage with creativity and disability industries - aims to understand how activism for their identities and accessibility takes place in the cyberspace.
- 3) Explore and critically reflect on issues of censorship on Instagram, what content gets censored and how, if at all, queers, disabled creators are more at risk of their art getting flagged as “inappropriate”.

I have conducted my primary research using the methods of cyber ethnography. Cyber-ethnographers participate in and observe blogs, websites, and chat rooms. They analyse how people form social networks or groups online and establish cultural identity. I studied such virtual communities by observation as well as through interviews.

I have also taken the help of secondary resources on social media. The platform of Instagram provides several features such as Story Highlights, Instagram Live streams etc. that operate as archives that can be revisited multiple times. Through a content analysis of these above-mentioned spaces, I sought to understand the kind of content that queer and disabled social media users put out in order to educate

others about the kind of oppression and micro-aggressions they face. As for my respondents, I was fortunate enough to talk in detail with a few social media users who identify as queer and disabled. Due to the transnational nature of social media, my respondents came from diverse geographical and cultural locations. This poses one of the limitations of my thesis, wherein the pool of respondents is quite small as compared to the millions of users on Instagram, and local generalisations cannot be made based on their experiences.

CONTEXTUALISING THE QUEER CRIP IDENTITY

The term Queer Crip has been used by those who fall at the intersection of being both disabled and queer, to not just validate their unique experience of oppression and stigmatization, but also as a personal aid to navigate between two communities. Both “queer” and “crip(ple)” have been used as slurs, a narrative that is being reclaimed by the disabled, queer community. Not only does it allow people to be out and proud about their gender and sexual identities, but it is also a way of subverting the narrative that disability should always be hidden away.

Being a queer crip also means navigating two worlds that don’t always see eye to eye. Queer spaces aren’t accessible the vast majority of the time - with disabled people being otherised in these spaces by ableist opinions and language, because ableism crafts the space itself. It is common to see disability-centric spaces just as cis-heteronormative as mainstream non-queer spaces, meaning queer people are otherised inside and outside the spaces. Similarly, it is fairly acknowledged that gays, lesbians, transgender people, bisexuals and intersex people experience very high rates of violence and hate crimes, but the experience of hate crimes against disabled people is not as known (Sherry, 2000)

THE NEW FRAMEWORK OF DISABILITY JUSTICE

Disability Rights Movements and queer theorists find a lot of common ground when it comes to shared experiences and histories of

marginalisation. Both face similar adversities and afflictions such as familial isolation, high rate of violence, discrimination and stereotyping; and also struggle with the twin aspects of “passing” and “coming out” (Stein & Plummer, 1994). Both the communities have also repeatedly strived to deconstruct identity categories that are essentialist in nature - and in their own ways have made use of the concept of performativity. In fact, queer and disability justice advocates have sought to reclaim identities that were previously stigmatised and considered to be deviant.

In a context where power is present, stigma refers to people experiencing a devalued identity because of certain (assumed) distinguishing characteristics (Goffman, 1986). Stigma may be rooted in cultural or religious beliefs, for example, the belief that disability is the result of witchcraft or previous generations' sins. Disabled people are sometimes said to possess ‘supernatural’ qualities or be endowed with special ‘gifts’. The stigma associated with having a child with disabilities means that often, mothers can be forced to abandon, or even kill, their disabled children (Bond Disability and Development Group, 2017). Such similar attitudes have been found towards queerness and non-heterosexual identities too.

A key factor underlying the development of queer theory was the AIDS outbreak, particularly the individualizing nature of medical responses, changes in sex education (from an emphasis on sexual identities to an emphasis on sexual practices), the continuous referencing of AIDS as a “homosexual disease” (Jagose, 1996). To understand the inception of the Disability Rights Movement, one needs to be aware of the historical legacy of eugenic policies (the most famous example being that of Nazi Germany)- wherein hatred towards disabled people led several countries to institutionally massacre them or carry out sterilization programs to prevent their conception. Juxtaposing both these movements, then, we arrive at the (fairly) newly established paradigm of Disability Justice, which calls attention to the ways in which ableism is linked to multiple other systems of oppression.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN ABLEIST HETERONORMATIVE SPACE

Every respondent I interviewed has affirmed the fact that Instagram as a social media platform has been extremely ableist and inaccessible for queer people with disabilities. While the nature of the problems faced by each depended on their particular disability, they were all very cognizant about how their queerness and disability affected their user experience as well as the reach of the content they put out.

Several respondents blamed underrepresentation for the several invalidating experiences they have had from other social media users who have a very restricted and unidimensional idea of what disability is. Recalling an incident where someone in the comment section of one of her posts demanded “proof” of her autism - Apurupa (@inappropriate) remarks that disabled people (especially those with invisible disabilities) constantly have to bear the burden to look “disabled enough”. She says, “In fact, it was very easy for me to come out as queer, but it was a challenge for me to come out as disabled on social media. It was because you need to deal with a lot of backlashes while coming out as neurodivergent, especially when you pass as neurotypical.”

Following this, I draw upon Ellen Samuel’s (2003) analogy of “coming out” as disabled - which applies to those whose physical appearance may not immediately stand testimony to their disability. The analogy alludes to the “queerness” inherent in disability - a discussion that prompts me to explore the politics of being “seen”, of being visible as a social identity and the ramifications that it may have in how disabled, queer individuals advocate and fight for their space. LGBTQIAP+ rights movements and disability activism find common ground in this regard - considering how Western culture predominantly operates on the logic of visibility. This becomes a source of dilemma for those whose disabilities do not manifest explicitly. It makes people question their rights to assistive technologies, making it hard for them to assert their identity due to a lack of “proof”.

CENSORING IDENTITY POLITICS AND THE QUESTION OF ACCESS

For the disabled community, social media participation is almost always restrictive due to the lack of access – with cyberspace reflecting the ‘compulsory able-bodied’ nature of the offline world. To ensure that disabled social media users have the complete social media experience, as is their right – there needs to be a coming together of technology and the conversational connectedness that such platforms promise. According to Hollier (2016), to ensure such seamless online participation and independent interaction between disabled users, assistive technology (AT) has come to play a huge role.

AT or assistive technology is a term most commonly used to refer to a software program that runs on popular computer operating systems and supports people with disabilities. On the platform of Instagram in particular, the most forms of AT have been automatic alt texts, which use object recognition technology to provide a visual description of photos for people with visual impairments. However, this function can be accessed only if the user is accessing the site with an external screen reader app, i.e. it is not an in-built feature of Instagram. Another popular way for the disabled community (and one much advocated by them) to make Instagram more accessible is to add image descriptions in simple language as well as closed captioning for videos with audio content.

However, Instagram’s assistive technology has proved to be extremely unreliable, since the platform by itself does not have an in-built option for making texts audible for visually impaired people, or automatic closed captioning. On this, Apurupa reflects, that often, the onus is on the users to make content more accessible, while a platform like Instagram which can take down pictures of female nipple, refuse to have in-built AT functions.

ACCESS AS A RIGHT

Social media has become a fundamental aspect of disabled, queer lives – playing monumental roles in asserting their identity and being vocal

about their oppression, as well as acting as a platform that serves as a window to the offline world which they might not be able to access.

Rhea Lhaskar (who goes by @rainbow_cerebellum_journal) is a person with cerebral palsy and Auditory processing disorder (APD). In their interview, they spoke in detail how Instagram has been a platform for their self-expression and has been a tool for developing self-confidence. She also talks about how filters have always been a very accessible tool for her since she cannot actually do make-up.

Unfortunately, such benefits are hard to reap when Instagram does the bare minimum to make its features accessible to the disabled community. A lot of my respondents agreed that online shopping especially through independent sellers/thrift shops on Instagram was more accessible than physical markets - however, even the online space is designed for potential customers who are expected to be non-disabled. Mary Fashik (@maryfashik), a chronically-ill disability rights activist, considers this to be a reflection of how society as a whole never considers disabled individuals to be worth the effort. "If those who are disabled/chronically ill were considered viable members of society, companies would take the initiative and make their content accessible." (M. Fashik, personal communication, January 1st, 2022).

MISREPRESENTATION AND 'INSPIRATION PORN' AS A TOOL OF OPPRESSION

Incorrect representation (or under representation) is one of the prime reasons why there is such a unidimensional and misinformed understanding of what disability is. Accessing social media without being subject to ableist slurs, without constantly having to bear the burden of proof - is also a right of disabled users, which suffers a hard blow when under informed people saturate the platform with botched understandings of disability. Second, misrepresenting a community that is already marginalised, prevents their actual experiences from coming to the forefront, thereby censoring their voices and narrowing down the space for their struggles and narratives.

Many of my respondents pointed to the fact that representing disabled queer people as ‘inspiration porn’ often posed a hindrance when it came to them accessing spaces with dignity. Often, the image of a disabled person is used to talk about how having a disability is pitiful and undesirable, and how disabled people are brave and courageous for achieving feats despite it all. This is a very objectifying gaze which reduces disabled people to be sources of inspiration and dehumanises their lived experiences. Stella Young in her 2014 TEDx Talk coined the term “inspirational porn” to denote such representations (TED, 2014). For example, using the photographs of parathletes and captioning it “Nothing is Impossible if you are Brave Enough”, “Your Excuse is Invalid”, or “If They Can, So Can You”.

SHADOWBANNING AND INSTITUTIONAL SILENCING: RAMIFICATIONS BEYOND CYBERSPACE

According to Rekdal (2021), Shadowbanning is “A moderation technique first popularised in bulletin boards and early web forums... (that) blocks users or individual pieces of content without letting the offending user know they’ve been blocked.”

On Instagram, shadowbanning may include making hashtags inaccessible, restricting account visibility to followers only (rather than to the entire Instagram community), preventing the account handle from appearing in the search bar, or filtering posts out of followers' feeds (Middlebrook, 2020). According to a recent survey conducted by Salty’s Algorithmic Bias Research Collective (Fitzsimmons, 2022), plus-sized profiles, queer people, and women of colour have been experiencing shadowbanning at a disproportionate rate to those within mainstream communities. If these content creators and users are disabled, one can only expect them to feel the effects of shadowbanning and censorship more harshly. Due to shadowbanning, their content suffers from minimised reach, lack of engagement, reduction of followers and the like. Needless to say, this affects disabled, queer social media users who use the platform to remunerate and publicise their work - something, that has, in fact, increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

When asked how far Instagram's censorship affects their content, and why they think their content gets censored in the first place, Apurupa did not hesitate to say that she often talks about political issues that she cares about. For example, whenever she talked about disability justice, queer phobia or even contemporary issues such as the recent Hijab ban in some schools in India - her posts performed the worst. She goes on to say, "For example, this has been the case when I talk about disability justice and raise very specific demands. I do not get shadow-banned if I, for instance, talk about Disability or Queerness in a cute way with artistic posts. But the moment I make it political, I get shadowbanned".

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to study how disabled queer social media content creators on Instagram engaged with issues of accessibility and censorship, while simultaneously using their platform to be vocal about their identities and linked oppressions. The intensive cyber ethnography conducted for over three months as well as in-depth interviews with the respondents helped me arrive at the conclusion that, for queer disabled Instagram users, the battle against censorship and for access is an non-negotiable part of their daily social media existence.

A close study of hashtags such as #ableism #instagramableism #censorship #queerdisability and the like helped me understand the extremely hostile undercurrent of Instagram as a platform - where technology had the power to silence anything that even made a squeak of dissent. Although officially denied by the authorities multiple times, practices of 'shadow banning' and censoring queer and disabled bodies, images and content are almost an everyday phenomenon in the community. Opinions that are politically charged, factually correct and a manifestation of everyday lived experiences are regularly taken down by the excuse that they "go against community guidelines". What no one ever has clarity over is the question of who makes these guidelines, and how far they go at upholding the status quo. Nonetheless, users continue to post, unabashedly so, as their own personal acts of defiance, their own version of activism.

Although I had all of Instagram as my field of research - it is still not viable to study the online existence of an entire community, and generalisations can be hard to draw because the experience of disabled queer users with vary depending on other linked factors and additive identities they might harbour. However, given the limitations of this thesis, what other practitioners can take away from it, is the need to fill in the dearth of quantitative studies done on accessibility and censorship issues on Instagram. Only with enough evidence and statistical proof can targeted policies be suggested, designed and implemented.

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Accessing Water: A Sociological Study of Class and Gender Dynamics in a Neighbourhood

Richa Singh

Access to water in urban areas and water-related infrastructure has received academic attention in the recent years. Nikhil Anand (2020) and Matt Birkinshaw (2017), provide detailed analyses of urban water infrastructure in the cities of Mumbai and Delhi respectively. While Nikhil Anand (2020) seeks to sensitize both the government and the public about the significance of conducting repair works so as to maintain existing infrastructure, Birkinshaw (2017) uses the concepts of informality, infrastructure and ground water to throw light upon the surreptitious power play and negotiations surrounding access to water. Through raising the issue of attempts at the privatization of water services, Birkinshaw (2017) seeks to assess peoples' attitude, expectations and hopes regarding water across class identities. An intersectional perspective, taking into consideration class and gender identities, such as that of Tanusree Paul (2017), Susan Spronk (2020), Ratoola Kundu and Suchismita Chatterjee (2021) and Farhana Sultana (2020) enable us to get a glimpse of the various considerations at play while negotiating access to water. However, it would be wrong to assume that only the Third World countries have been affected by such problems. Malini Ranganathan and Carolina Balazs (2015) in their work– with the situation spiralling out of the governments' control owing to the onset and prolonged sustenance of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This study under taken in a neighbourhood in South Kolkata sought to understand the ways in which people think of water as a resource that they use everyday. Respondents were encouraged to comment on the nature of water supply in their locality, the challenges to accessing water, their ideas about water conservation and storage, factors

influencing differential access to water and the possible resolution to the 'water problem' in their area. The study sought to find an answer to the research question, "Is there any difference in the access to water supply for the middle classes and the lower classes in a particular Kolkata neighbourhood?" If so, how does class position and gender affect perceptions, expectations and shape the negotiations for getting access to water for consumption in an everyday basis? Is the perception of the state also shaped by class and gender based inequalities? By conducting a study among seven middle class households / families in a high rise apartment and 10 lower class households in the adjacent informal settlement, answers to the above questions were sought. The research was undertaken to see whether people get access to sufficient water as per their expectations, and if not, what could be the probable reasons for the denial of such a basic need. The research also sought to ascertain whether the governmental initiative to impose a fixed water tax could provide a resolution of these infrastructural issues?

While most of the large-scale studies conducted on water infrastructure usually deal with one or two dimensions at length, focussing mainly on the infrastructural dimensions, therefore sometimes tending to be rather narrow in scope, this study attempts to analyse the factors leading to the differential access to water within two class groups within the same neighbourhood. Secondly, this research captures the state of the water supply and infrastructure in the pre-election, election and post-election stage (referring to the 2021 Kolkata Municipal Corporation election). As was expected, in the pre-election stage, the problems in terms of negotiating access to water supply were far more especially within the informal settlement area where the poor live, with not really much difference in the middle class's experience. Seemingly, many of the earlier problems were resolved in the post-election period for the settlement dwellers in light of the installing of 3 new tubewells just days before the election. However, the real analysis here would be to deduce whether the state actually responded to the people's plight, or was it simply motivated by its own goals to win the elections even at the expense of its own citizens' trust? In the case of the lower classes, if the local authorities do their job well, there is immense scope for the condition of the lower classes to improve. While everyone in the settlement area in the post-election period has a good opinion of the

state and the authorities, all on the basis of the installation of a few tubewells and vague promises by the local councillor – promises which have been broken almost every time if one seeks to look at the precedent. Thirdly, seeking to elaborate upon the very structures affecting access to water, one can refer to the instability of the living arrangements of the settlement dwellers. Living as illegal encroachers, the dwellers live on a borderline illegal, unplanned area without any structural amenities. This setup was compared with a consciously and painstakingly planned building, where there are systematic and well-planned plumbing connections and pipelines laid out, and reaching right into the flats of all the residents. This extensive infrastructure is missing in the settlement. In order to receive the same supply as that of their more affluent neighbours, the settlement dwellers must first ensure that they have a registered title deed of the land they live on in their names. The ferrule or the water connection through which the housing complex residents get their supply from, also passes through the settlement area. But the piped water supply remains out of access for the settlement dwellers as their houses are illegal and unregistered.

Mapping the networks of water usage in the locality involved gathering information from the lower and middle class households within the same neighbourhood. The subjects of the study in the working class neighbourhood were mostly the women folk tasked with the responsibility of collecting water for their households, seeking to conduct spontaneous and free-flowing interviews. The study was primarily qualitative in nature. This was ensured by visiting the households for conducting interviews door-to-door. In addition, in order to understand the over all demand for water in the settlement, it was found there are approximately 40 to 42 types of small businesses operating within this settlement of the poor people. The process of data collection involved conducting in-depth interviews of middle class residents of a particular housing complex. The researcher approached those residents who are more actively involved in the workings of the complex (the members of various committees, in particular the repair and maintenance committee and the President of the housing complex) in order to obtain more detailed and insightful observations. In order to increase the validity and reliability of the data collected, attempts were made to talk to more than one, if not all members of the family.

Three major findings can be deduced from the study. Firstly, on the basis of responses provided by the respondents of this study as well as on the basis of evidence gathered during fieldwork, it is clear that there is a stark difference in the water supply as well as in water infrastructure accessed by the middle class and the lower class households in a particular Kolkata neighbourhood. This difference is both qualitative and quantitative – with the lower classes having access to fewer public sources of water to meet their daily requirements as opposed to middle class households. Hence the former suffered more on an everyday basis rather than the latter to secure these basic needs. The middle classes, however, after having managed access to adequate water to meet their needs, now want a qualitative improvement in their water supply. Secondly, in addition to class considerations, gender is an important variable in determining access. While women of both classes, irrespective of their socio-economic position, had to engage and struggle more on a daily basis as the men were engaged only externally and peripherally. The lower class women, owing to their disadvantageous class position were affected the most as they were forced to involve themselves in pettyfights and ceaseless struggles just to collect water for their households - a struggle which the middle class women were spared from. Finally, extending both the previous findings, it can be stated that the state too had a different manner of dealing with both the classes. While the more affluent, self-serving middle classes were seen as legitimate citizens of the state, since they could articulate their needs in the language of 'basic' rights (such as access to adequate water supply) vis-a-vis the state. The lower classes on the other hand were viewed as a burden. Being dependent on the largesse of the state, they were viewed as a group who could be made to wait in definitely for access to such rights.

This study highlighted how structures affect access to natural resources, with even the differential attitude of the state or the government being a reason for the prolonged suffering of the lower classes. The intersectional dimensions of gender and class further allowed us to understand the experience of exacerbation better. A sociological review also found out that this issue not just an isolated incident affecting the Third World, but rather a reality for millions of people world wide even today (Ranganathan & Balazs, 2015; Agada,

2020; Ruiters, 2020)- with millions being forced to struggle on a daily basis just to secure enough water to meet their demands.

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The Social Role of Ashrams in Indian Society: A Sociological Study of The Shreejashram

Rounak Ghosh

Ever since my preteen years, I started visiting an Ashram situated in the Western Ghats in India called Shreejashram for small retreats and celebrations. These retreats gave me a lot of peace and I used to go to the Ashram to feel rejuvenated for school and the daily humdrum of life. However, the lockdown of 2020 did give me a chance to stay in the Ashram and this gave me an opportunity to understand what it means to live in an Ashram and how different it is than life in the city. This made me wonder what Ashrams do for society and the sociological relevance of the existence of various ashrams and monasteries as institutions in society as they have a unique position. Ashrams are very much part of Indian society but a general assumption by the people in society is that leading a monastic life is unusual. However, there are many ashrams which, though somewhat away from the chaos of society, do contribute a lot to its neighbouring social milieu and beyond. Ashrams have been a part of Indian society since time immemorial, though the organization of ashrams and the forms of life within have undergone transformation. In the Hindu *varnashrama dharma*, renunciation or leading a monastic way of life is a stage in the development of human beings, though it is generally assumed that leading a monastic life is not for everybody.

Sociological literature on the ashrams emphasises the role of ashrams as religious institutions (Ranjan 2015) which guides individuals to fulfill their needs as well as orients them towards social services. Then there are ashrams like the Sabarmati Ashram, which are different from the traditional ashrams in some respects, but have some overlap with regards to the values (Gianolla 2019). Inspired by the ideals of Gandhi, the Sabarmati Ashram undertakes social welfare programs and is oriented towards creating measures for social emancipation, social reliance, gender equality and democracy in villages rather than intense

spiritual practices witnessed in other Ashrams. With a significant proliferation of ashrams and gurus in contemporary times, especially among the middle classes in India as a means of resolving their practical problems (Srinivas 1995) and thus navigating the uncertainties in life, this study attempts to understand the sociological relevance of ashrams in society and how it enables modern individuals to be in this world.

The methodology for this study largely consists of qualitative methods including participant observation and in-depth interviews of 8 respondents who are associated with the ashram from its very inception. Interviews of spiritual practitioners within the ashram and also outside the ashram have also been supplemented with an insider's account, that is, of the researcher, through insights gained from the process. Along with the social role that the ashram plays, the respondents were asked about their personal association with the ashram and how it helps them negotiate their relation with society in uncertain times. Hence, the study compares the influence of Shreejashram as an institution in the lives of the respondents and tries to analyse the parallels and the contrasts that the ashram has with other ashrams or institutions. For example, by comparing Shreejashram with the Sarva Dharma Ashram in South Africa (Gurcharan and Bhagwan 2021), similarities and differences between the two helps one to understand the institutional positioning that the ashram has and the roles that the ashram plays for the individuals in society and this in turn highlights the sociological significance of ashrams in society.

The Shreejashram Charitable Fund was created to form Shreejashram, in a land in the Western Ghats, in order to spread the philosophy of Shree Guru Maashree, in the hopes of having an institution to provide space for seekers for their growth, not only in numbers but also their inner-development to provide an environment suitable for practising ascetic practices. In my dissertation, I have studied, three groups of *sadhaks* who include young *sadhaks* who stayed in the ashram for long periods of time, a group of older *sadhaks* who stayed for a few months and had to go back to the city due to commitments and came back again, and lastly a group who only came during retreats. The young *sadhaks* stayed because they did not have other commitments and could manage office and classes from the ashram itself. The *sadhaks* from all three groups have gone through various changes in the past two years. All of

them in various degrees have been able to change themselves in the way they manage time, stress and are able to work more than usual as they feel more energetic due to the practices that they do as instructed by the Guru. Life in the ashram is routinized and this in turn has positive effects on the *sadhaks* as they learn time management and the art of multitasking. The life in the ashram being routinized does not impose hard rules on anyone. *Sadhaks* often bend their timings as they have meetings online or classes online to attend, hence following the routine completely in the ashram is difficult. However, all *sadhaks* still strive to follow the routine and have noticed changes within them which in turn help them in their work and their daily activities.

As a participant observer, I have noticed the ways and methods by which Shreejashram extends its hands to help the villagers who live in the vicinity of the Ashram. Maashree, the Guru of the *sadhaks* is always teaching the members of the Ashram to be more sensitive not only to the people who live near the ashram but also to the animals who stay near the ashram grounds. It is the Guru who has been the driving force behind steering the *sadhaks* to engage in various social services that can be given to the people who live near the ashram. For example, the ashram plays a crucial role in helping the villagers around the ashram as well as the animals that are around or in the ashram. Food and clothing are distributed on special occasions and medical camps are arranged every year. The Guru has a vision of establishing a concept of 'God Family' in everyone's minds because she firmly believes that every living being deserves to live with respect and dignity because every living being is a family member of God. Hence, every living life is connected to each other. The Guru sets a schedule which is beneficial for the masses, though the hurdles faced by every individual are unique, the Guru is able to address each and everyone's problems and help them cross it. The institution where one can avail the direct attention of the Guru is in the ashram. In terms of the social role of the Ashram, I received answers from two different perspectives. One perspective was about the social service that the ashram aims to do, and the second perspective deals with the role that the Ashram plays in the lives of individuals living in society. The ashram envisions a future to help members of society to help spread humanity, peace and joy.

Through the various chapters in the dissertation I have found, by interviewing and also by being a participant observer, that despite the

challenges that the *sadhaks* face in urban life, the *sadhaks* try to hold on to a monastic life by applying the teachings of the Guru in their day to day activities. The luxury of staying in the ashram to do 'sadhana' might not be there but *sadhaks* treat city life to test themselves in order to check how much they can hold on to the practices that one did in the ashram. One tries to hold onto the institution in their minds even when they are away from the institution. Hence, the sociological significance of Shreejashram in the lives of the people associated with it and in the lives of the villagers living near the ashram has been examined. The lives of social individuals who are seekers of peace and self-development and also those individuals who only have feelings of love for the Guru have associated themselves with the ashram. In turn, they are slowly noticing changes in their day to day lives, where they have expressed that they are a lot more grateful, calmer and can manage time and work in a balanced manner. They also feel more compassionate and their love for the Guru only increases their love for everyone around them, hence they find themselves to be more at peace and are more emphatic with everyone around them thereby making them better versions of themselves. Gender and caste are almost completely ignored within the ashram and hence do not matter to these individuals. Domestic labour within the ashram is divided equally and hence *sadhaks* co-exist together by sharing intellectual, domestic and physical labour within the ashram.

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Impact of Diverse Parenting Styles on Adolescence Attachment Pattern

Srabastee Biswas

Parenting styles are constellations of parental attitudes, practices, and nonverbal expressions that characterize the nature of parent-child interactions across diverse situations. Universally it has been identified as one of the most crucial roles (Anderson, 2010). Awareness circling it is growing day by day. It is considered to be a skill that requires experience and training. Due to this, in this contemporary era many parents find themselves struggling to become a perfect one. There is no one way or a clearly defined rule to perfect 'parenting'. The challenges in this course is inevitable, especially during the growing years of adolescence. Parenting from a traditional parenting paradigm gives rise to great problems when it comes to disciplining teenagers. It is because the traditional parenting paradigm poses the parent on this pedestal of superiority. It might work well until the kids hit their teen years. Hitting teen years developmentally, they are re-entering their own assertion of their own autonomy and their own independence. Hence the parent who had been parenting from the traditional model where parents thinks they know them and put themselves on this pedestal of superiority now feels highly threatened by this budding autonomous spirit who is going to challenge everything that their parents have so far taught them. As the child reaches the adolescent years of life, it is not very uncommon to note a shift in terms of attachment with parents. Seemingly the inclination is more towards their peer group than their parents which is a shift in scenario from the phase of childhood to adolescence. It is very common for parents to feel isolated while parenting teenagers which could possibly be attributed to this shift in attachment patterns. When a child is born in a family, it becomes the place where one's first formative experiences with relationships take place. It is the place where one is

first programmed. This means an individual's childhood experiences, primarily in the family, is where their patterns begin. These are the very patterns that set them for things like success and pleasure or failure or pain. The sociology of adolescence focuses on the biology, social, economic, and psychological development of youth during the period between childhood and adulthood. In this period one attains cognitive reasoning abilities, majority status, and social privileges (Herman, 2012). Developmental sociologists examine the change in the context of family, peer group, neighbourhood, work, houses of worship, and extracurricular activities. Even though this field has many commonalities with the psychological study of adolescence, developmental sociology focuses more on the institutions in which adolescents develop, from whole societies to ethnic groups, from school to homeless shelters, etc. In the context of family, parents and primary caregivers function as agents of socialization for the children.

The Bengali culture is patriarchal and traditional, with strong norms of male and female roles. This traditional Bengali parenting style has an impact on the attachment style of the child. However, as children age, they begin to separate from their primary care givers, becoming independent and autonomous. This separation from their primary care givers is the manifestation of the adolescent autonomy style of attachment. This style is characterized by a desire for independence and a fear of closeness. This separation from their primary care givers has a direct impact on the adolescent's attachment style. This paper will explore the attachment style of Bengali adolescents, the impact of parenting strategies on this style, and the way that these patterns have changed over time. This paper will also explore the role that family plays in the formation of the adolescent's personality and the ways that they might contribute to the formation of their adult personality. It will also discuss the ways that the family can be a source of support, and stress, both positive and negative experiences. It will explore the ways in which adolescent adjustment can be influenced by different family structures and parenting styles. The focus of this paper will be, 'how have different parenting strategies impacted the adolescent attachment pattern with their primary care givers in the context of Bengali middle class families at this contemporary age between 2010-2021?'

For example, smacking is very common in Bengali families for disciplining children. It is easily observed that smacking children is a common practice in our culture. Most of us got slapped or smacked by our parents for mischief, disobeying, for failing in exams, etc. for example, Dr Desai says, “Slapping children and transferring the anger and frustration by one or both parents is very common in Bengali families and specially in Metro cities. The pressure of performing and meeting higher expectations set by parents, peers, etc. take on the child. Also to mention the complexity of relationships in parents, work frustration of working parents, lack of quality time between parents and children and unhealthy study habits all are common causes of child being the target and thus smacking, slapping, punishing etc., is very common in every other family.” Scolding children in an aggressive manner under the garb of disciplining them can have a disturbing effect on them too.

Disciplinary techniques such as slapping, beating leaves negative imprints on the subconscious mind of the child of any age. The event or incident is registered as a negative trauma in the mind and its effects are felt throughout life, every time the negative memory gets triggered. Implications could be developing fears, low-self esteem, anger, hatred, stammering, passive aggressive behaviour and much more (Desai, 2015). My research is the study to find the impacts and outcomes of diverse parenting styles and practices on the adolescent attachment pattern. For this research an interpretivist paradigm of approach is chosen because it helped to obtain an understanding of an individual perspective. The research methods for this paper included survey and structured interview. This survey is conducted via online mode where respondents had to fill out a Google form. In this survey two sets of questionnaires were used, one for the adolescent age group and another for the parent’s group.

I took up snow ball sampling technique of 50 including parents and adolescents (between 13-18 years) because my research work that dealt with the impacts and outcomes of parenting styles and practice on adolescent attachment pattern within Bengali class families residing in Kolkata. The research draws data from both primary as well as

secondary sources. In the course of data analysis, the responses obtained through survey method, those quantitative data are analysed and represented through graphical representation.

It was observed that most teenagers in Bengali middle class families do not develop a secure attachment style with their parents. There is an inclination towards developing an anxious pre-occupied attachment style or an avoidant attachment style. Additionally, gender discrimination among siblings was also visible in the data. On the other hand, male teenagers who said they do not see any difference in his parents approach towards him and his sister. Thirdly, what was found was four out of six parent agreed that dealing with their teens during the Covid19 pandemic lockdown was challenging for them. They found it an extremely difficult task to discipline them. Two out of them even said, yelling and screaming was the only way to get their teens listen to them and they were always arguing and she felt extremely helpless. There was a shift in the way these parents deal with their teens vs how their parents used to interact with them. Despite all the differences the biggest change that was found was, granting autonomy. Parents in this contemporary era found it very important to invest in their career rather than bestowing heavy responsibilities on them at an early stage. At the same time two out of six parents still hold the feeling that traditional way of parenting which reflects the clear traits of an authoritarian style of parenting is the best way to discipline them, and granting their teens permission to make important choices about their life will be a risky choice and may lead to permanent damage because they feel by making the choice for their teen is a way to protect them.

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Romantic Comedies and Their Effect on the Romantic Imaginations of the Youth in India

Sreyoshi Mitra

Romantic love gained traction in the 18th century and gradually became a foundation of marriage, especially in Western societies. Before that, they were completely separate from each other, and marriages were based on mutual convenience. There is also a very sublime differentiation between “passionate love” and “romantic love” (Giddens 1992). While romantic love came to be seen as a basis for marriage, passionate love was disruptive and a threat to duty and social honour. As with other social changes at the turn of the century, romantic love also underwent a social transformation. By employing the social constructionist approach, which states that there is no concrete reality and every society and individual has a completely unique understanding (Berger and Luckmann 1966), Beall and Sternberg (1995) posit that love and romance can also be seen as a social construction. They also say that culture plays an important role in this approach, in that, culture provides the common sense (Geertz 1973) that is required to navigate the nuances of love and romantic relationships. Cultures are central in constructing appropriate notions of love.

Storytelling is one of the oldest forms of communication. The power and weight that good stories hold, and their impact can be felt universally, transcending time, space and cultural boundaries. It is also a known fact that throughout the bowels of history, media has impacted societies and cultures profoundly. With the introduction of modern media, storytelling has become even easier. Films have taken the top spot for storytelling since their inception in the late 19th century. Filmmaking is a magical, visual medium. The language of cinema is universal and transcends boundaries. Visual storytelling actively involves people into

the very emotions that make them human. An important aspect of cinema and filmmaking is how romance and romantic relationships are depicted in cinema. The combination of romance and films produces narratives that construct a picture of what love and romantic relationships should look like.

With the introduction of Western cinema into Indian culture, a process that has gained pace in the 21st century, there has been a kind of syncretism- the creation of a hybrid culture. This impact of westernisation started in urban areas with access to media technology, but now it has spread to rural and semi-urban areas as well. The area I will be focusing on in this research is the changes that have been brought about due to exposure to western cinema, specifically through their depictions of romance and romantic relationships. Indian teenagers get their ideas of romance from these Western movies, since Indian culture is quite conservative and does not exactly allow the freedom to pursue any kind of romantic relationship with one's peers. Traditional forms of marriage, as well as family-controlled courtship; all of this has been affected by the new, westernised depictions of romance. Teenagers are defying their familial norms and cultural expectations more and more by engaging in romantic relationships.

My objectives for this research include: How are the conceptions and social constructions of love different across different societies? How has the avid consumption of Hollywood romantic comedies set in the 21st century, shaped romantic aspirations among teenagers?

Are the aspirations of love changing among teenagers, especially with the rapid globalization of mass media in the 21st century? Do these aspirations of romantic love affect women differently than men?

This study has used qualitative analysis. Content analysis has proved to be extremely useful in this study, because the ideals that are shown and reproduced in romantic media, time and time again, are also incorporated into the real-life romantic relationships and imaginations of teenagers in India. In-depth interviews have also been conducted in order to understand how Hollywood's romantic comedies have impacted romantic imaginations of the Indian youth in real life. Participants were recruited through the snowball-sampling method, and a total of 10 people participated in the study, within the age range of 18-21 years.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF ROMANTIC LOVE

The idea of romantic love has gained significance since the late 18th century and it was not love the way it is seen in the 21st century. Love redefines and reconstructs itself to fit into the ideals of the present cultural milieu. Societies differ in their understanding of love and romance, and cultures, across time and space, have defined love in various different ways. Romantic love can be taken as a universal feeling across cultures, but the way it is shaped depends completely on the cultural context, because culture manifests its effects on the behaviours and perceptions of people, and how they think, feels and behave in their romantic relationships. For this section, two romantic movies were looked at, along with in-depth interviews. *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* (2003) and *The Proposal* (2009) are two of the most popular romantic comedies of the early 21st century. Both these movies portray the traditional archetypal love story. The traditional archetypal love story most commonly portrayed in romantic movies is when a man and a woman meet, they gradually become friends, and they start to fall in love. Soon afterwards, there is some kind of crisis, which the main couple has to overcome before they promise to spend eternity together. They are outstanding examples of how romance, romantic relationships and their outcomes are portrayed in societies like the United States. When I interviewed my respondents, almost all of them said yes when asked if they thought that the imaginations of romance and romantic relationships were different in Indian society from how they are portrayed in Hollywood's romantic comedies. They mentioned that in societies like India, romance and romantic relationships are usually kept behind closed doors and remain restricted to the private realms of one's life. Coupledom is not as celebrated in India as it is in Western countries, and therefore public displays of affection are very limited. They mentioned that Indian society is much more conservative about romance. When the respondents were asked whether they thought that romantic comedies portrayed unrealistic standards for romantic relationships, most agreed that, to a major extent, unrealistic expectations were a problem. They mentioned that such relationships played out differently in real life than in movies.

THE GENDERING OF THE CULTURAL NOTIONS OF LOVE

Women are expected to conform to far more norms of being in a romantic relationship than men. The pressure is also entirely on women, to keep things afloat in a relationship, to keep the emotional intimacy intact. Women are also taught to put their needs last in a romantic relationship. Socialisation plays a huge role in this too, wherein women are made to internalize behaviours that keep them subordinated. They are also socialised into believing that men are permitted, and it is even natural for them, to behave in a different way from women. Romantic media also perpetuates these unhealthy gender stereotypes. Individuals, especially adolescents, who viewed large amounts of romantic media content, were found to believe in the difference between men and women in a relationship, that sex should be perfect and that women are responsible for the overall well-being of a relationship. This section too utilizes both content analysis and in-depth interviews. The movie, *Sierra Burgess is a Loser* (2018), was chosen. It is a movie from the second decade of the 21st century, and it beautifully portrays just how much body image issues can weigh down women in romantic relationships, due to crushing societal expectations regarding the women, and how she has to conform to the beauty standards set by society to even be considered worthy of being in a romantic relationship. When asked about the differing expectations from men and women in a relationship, especially heterosexual relationships, half of the respondents reported that they had felt that expectations from women, and the scrutinization of women in a relationship was much more than the men. They agreed that gender roles and socialisation played an important part in the expectations in a romantic, heterosexual relationship. They also felt that trying to live up to these expectations felt like a huge weight on their shoulders, and sometimes they also suffered from low self-esteem and the fear of 'not being good enough'.

THE SHAPING OF ROMANTIC ASPIRATIONS BY ROMANTIC COMEDIES

The strongest non-familial influence for love and romantic relationships come from mass media. When scholars study adolescents and their

relation to media culture, they often ignore the concept of imagination (Bachen and Illouz 1996). The romantic imagination happens to be very important in mass media, because it helps to shed light on the interplay between an individual's imagination and their cultural constraints. The romantic imagination incorporates culturally and socially produced meanings. Young and impressionable adolescents often turn to movies for romantic inspiration. For this part of the study and the next, only in-depth interviews were used. When asked if their views on sex and intimacy had been changed in any way, after viewing romantic comedies, almost all the respondents said yes. One respondent said that romantic comedies show that sex and intimacy is always fun, while in real life, that is not always the case since there are a lot of other factors affecting it. When asked about whether they believed in the concept of 'soulmates', especially how they are shown or described in romantic comedies, interestingly, all of the respondents said that they didn't believe in the concept that there was one specific person for everyone and that it was pre-destined. All of the respondents mentioned that love was something that had to be worked for, and the romance was kept alive in a relationship through active efforts. The respondents had varying responses when asked about how they manifest 'romance' in their relationships. Some mentioned physical acts of intimacy and spending time together, others mentioned that it was about the little things rather than grand, romantic gestures. One respondent also mentioned that romance was an encompassing term, and it was made up of a lot of little things. When asked about if these ideas had been influenced by their viewing of romantic comedies, most of the respondents mentioned that while they had been to some extent, they tried to keep it grounded to their social circumstances and context. A few other respondents mentioned that it was difficult because they had not really identified with any of the main characters or the social settings of the movies, for that matter. However, the respondents mentioned that one area where they had been majorly influenced by romantic comedies was, going outside on dates, watching a movie or eating a meal together, or buying symbolic presents and other such things.

THE GLOBALIZATION OF ROMANTIC COMEDIES OF HOLLYWOOD AND THEIR GLOBAL INFLUENCE

When asked if they thought that the romantic imaginations among Indian youth were changing due to watching these romantic comedies, that are now available to watch quite easily due to the massive globalization of media, all of the respondents unequivocally said yes. Most respondents mentioned different aspects of romantic imaginations and relationships that they felt had been impacted most. However, the most common response was that these romantic comedies had actually them to become more accepting of romantic relationships and the part that had been affected most was how they felt about sex and intimacy. The mixing of these kinds of viewpoints leads to a certain cultural hybridization, especially when elements of western culture are incorporated into Indian society. It leads to cultural syncretism and the formation of a new kind of culture. Cultural experiences have not simply been moving in the direction of hybridity and standardisation. Hybridity serves a purpose based on the assumption of differences between things that go into the melange. However, the very process of hybridization shows these differences to be relative, and therefore, the relationship can be described as an affirmation of similarity. American culture and non-western audiences are the axes upon which the transnational reception of American popular culture is aligned. American popular culture sets the global standards of taste that are to be emulated by the rest of the world. Foreign audiences, therefore, create hybrid cultures themselves, while succumbing to the seduction of westernised or Americanised popular culture (Kraidy 2002).

This study mainly focused on how the romantic aspirations and imaginations of the Indian youth have changed, after their exposure to Hollywood's romantic comedies as a result of the massive globalisation of media. It also takes in other factors like the differing conceptions of love in different societies and how expectations are different from men and women involved in romantic relationships. How romantic love is perceived by different people in different societies across the globe is extremely subjective, a social construction unique to them, and is also wholly dependent on the social and cultural norms of the society. The prevalent cultural and social standards actually define how romance is perceived in a society. On top of that, there are huge differences between

individualistic societies like the Western countries, and collectivistic societies like India and China. In India, romance and romantic relationships, especially among young people, is not spoken of too freely. When couples do engage in romantic relationships, they need the approval and consent of not just immediate family members but also extended family and other networks of social relationships. In fact, the more social approval a couple gets, the more comfortable the relationship, especially as the couple starts to get more and more intimate.

Mass media affects every part of our lives and romantic comedies happen to constitute a large portion of it. Extensive research has shown that adolescents and teenagers often turn to romantic movies to get their questions answered on romance, love, romantic relationships etc. They view these movies extensively and then attempt to emulate them in real life. This phenomenon has actually been behind courtship moving to more public spaces and becoming associated with going out on dates, going to the movies, buying each other things, going for dinner etc. However, the problem lies in the fact that movies often show exaggerated, out-of-proportion events that have no similarity with real life whatsoever. Things rarely pan out so smoothly in real life situations, social location becomes extremely important and trying to imitate romantic comedies and incorporate them into real life can end up being detrimental.

The situation in India has changed after the youth has been exposed to the glamorous romantic comedies that are made by Hollywood. Due to the boom in the globalization of media, standardized western movies came to be distributed widely, all over the world. World culture started to become Americanized. Romantic relationships, especially ones in which youngsters were involved didn't count for much. Once romantic comedies became easily available to most people, it led to a lot of elements of romantic imaginations in the west, being incorporated in the romantic imaginations of people here. Since cultural experiences and syncretism don't follow a straight path to standardization, it led to a strange sort of cultural hybridity where the youth does try to incorporate elements of romance from the movies that they view so extensively, but they also have to keep in the mind the social and cultural factors that influence their lives. The gendered differences in

romantic relationships in countries like India are also more profound than they are in western societies, and women are expected to maintain the harmony and intimacy in a relationship, and intuitively understand their partners' needs. They are also more likely to be blamed if anything goes wrong in the relationship and are expected to hold themselves to certain standards of behaviour. To the contrary, men have no such restrictions or expectations from them.

This research has aimed to find out the extent of changes on romantic imaginations on a typical Indian teenager involved in a romantic relationship, and if there have been any substantial changes in the scenario of romantic relationships at all, after the avid viewing of romantic comedies produced by Hollywood.

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Beyond Just Humour: Usage and Effect of Internet Memes on Everyday Interaction

Sumilita Das

The aim of this study is to find out why internet memes have gained such cultural significance and how has it changed the way we interact. It also focuses on analyzing the role of the audience in the meme culture and see whether memes are merely a part of our digital experience or do they impact our day-to-day behaviour and impact our conceptions about ourselves and others.

Since its inception, sociology has been concerned with social relations, institutions and change. In the initial stages, the focus was mainly on the broader social structures and social institutions. Classical sociological thinkers like Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx and Herbert Spencer have focused on the macrostructural aspects of the society like societal evolution, class conflict, religion, etc. Importance was placed mainly on principals of scientificity, empiricism, objectivity and value-neutrality. With Max Weber's concept of *Verstehen* (the German word for understanding) there was a shift from towards an interpretative understanding of social reality. With the development of the symbolic interactionist school, the focus shifted from macro social structures to the study of individual social interactions. Interaction that takes place between two individuals is seen as the basic unit which makes society possible. In the works of G.H. Mead, Herbert Blumer, Ervin Goffman, and many other thinkers it is evident that social interactions have important consequences for both the individual and the society at large.

Technological advancements, particularly the development of the Internet and eventually social media and social networking, have opened up a new field of analysis for social science disciplines like sociology and anthropology. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter,

Instagram now have millions of users across the globe. In recent times, most of our interactions takes place online. Consequently, subfields such as digital sociology, sociology of social media and digital anthropology have developed for the critical analysis of such platforms.

In this new era of Web 2.0 which is characterized by a shift from static web pages to dynamic user-generated content and a participatory media culture, one of the dominant ways in which netizens communicate is via memes. The term ‘meme’ was coined by the British biologist Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene* (1976) who described a meme as replicators that “propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense can be called imitation” (Dawkins 1976: 192). Just like any other form of new media content, memes are mostly user-generated and are constantly in the process of being re-shaped. Dawkins, in his work, talked about three basic properties of memes – longevity, fecundity and copy fidelity. One of the main reasons why memes have had immense success in this digital age is because the Internet enhances all these three properties. However, Internet memes are different from the Dawkinsian sense of the term. One of the most important aspects of Dawkins’ conception of a meme is imitation. But, as Wiggins (2019:1) suggests, “the essence of Internet memes as a digital phenomenon marked not by imitation but by the capacity to propose or encounter a discursive argument through visual and often also verbal interplay”. In his later works, Dawkins himself has talked about internet memes. He mentions that “The Internet meme is a hijacking of the original idea. Instead of mutating by random chance, before spreading by a form of Darwinian selection, Internet memes are altered deliberately by human creativity”. Shifman (2014) describes this digital environment as being dominated by what she calls ‘*hypermeme logic*’. In such an environment memes become almost all-pervasive and have a multidimensional presence. Now a days we see memes in advertisements, political campaigns, friendly conversations and even in marriage proposals.

The netizens describe internet memes as “multimodal artifacts remixed by countless participants employing popular culture for public commentary” (Milner2013,2357). A majority of memes in the

contemporary times depends heavily on visuals: videos, GIFs (Graphics Interchange Format) or still images. This is what marks their difference from traditional memes. According to Lasn (1999), this dependence of Internet memes on visuals have made them extremely popular in the advertising industry. People use memes because they are short, to-the-point, self-explanatory and helps the user to express his ideas or feelings much faster and sometimes in a better way than long textual messages or posts. Memes are also highly contextual, i.e., in order to understand a meme, one needs to have a knowledge about the words, images or the situation that it contains or is addressing. Internet memes, then are essentially social in nature. Wiggins (2019) mentions that internet memes are 'iterated messages' that are spread by the users of a participatory media culture for the purpose of satire, parody, critique or any other sort of discursive activity. That is why this concept has gained so much popularity, especially in this digital culture of social media and social networking and has become an integral part of it.

One of the main characteristics of any internet meme is that they are humorous. Dainas (2015) goes to the extent of suggesting that internet memes are a subgenre of humour and creativity. Internet users often use memes in a way that highlights their creative ability of representing a particular situation in a humorous manner. This research attempts to gain an understanding of how and why memes are used by social actors in quotidian online interactions and what implications can this seemingly very mundane practice can have on the society at large.

While memes have become an inextricable part of popular culture, we often conceive of them as units that evoke light humour. They are considered as a humorous presentation of ideas or opinions, appropriate only in informal interaction contexts. However, in recent times, memes have been used extensively not only in interpersonal communication in informal contexts, but also by various companies for advertising purposes. In addition, they are also used by various political parties across the world for political purposes. They pervade almost all digital interaction spaces like blogs and social networking sites. A very recent example is that of the Bengal Assembly Elections held in 2021 where political parties used memes extensively for the purpose of political propaganda. People constantly remain engage with them and

help in their further transmission by commenting, tagging or sharing them. This is the hallmark of participatory new media culture. This process becomes extremely significant as it plays a huge role in maintaining the hegemonic cultural notions or in bringing about a change. Similarly, this also means that memes may shut out the voices of those who are unable to participate in this digital culture or are not 'digitally literate netizens'. This shows how deeply embedded a meme is in its society and how it is one of the most important "*emerging patterns in public conversations*" (Milner, 2016). However, in the common sensical discourses, they are often perceived as humorous, something which is meant for entertainment and which should not be taken seriously. In this research, I have tried to look beyond just the humorous aspect of internet memes and understand the deeper implications that they might have based on empirical data.

The aim of this study is to gain a sociological understanding of the implications of using memes in day-to-day interactions. As the title suggests, this study tries to look beyond just the humorous aspect of Internet memes and tries to understand:

1. briefly how social media has radically altered our interaction patterns
2. why memes have gained such enormous cultural significance
3. how the audience, as a collective, is affected by these memes
4. are memes merely a part of our digital experience or do they impact our day-to-day behaviour and impact our conceptions about ourselves and others

Qualitative methodology have been used primarily for the purpose of this research because this research seeks to answer questions like how do memes affect individual behaviour and helps in the construction of an online personae. It is extremely difficult to understand these phenomena only with the help of numerical data and statistical analysis. Although this is predominantly a qualitative research, I have used some numerical data like percentages and average to give a precise understanding of the general response.

For collecting the data, an online survey using a semi-structured questionnaire has been conducted. The survey has been conducted using Google Forms because in this global pandemic situation because it was easier to reach out to the respondents via the internet. The questionnaire that has been used in this survey includes both open and close-ended questions. Snowball sampling has been used for the purpose of collecting samples as it enables one to gain access to the larger audience. The size of the sample used in this research is 30 and the sample has been selected from the age group of 20 to 30 years. The collected data has been analyzed using thematic analysis.

CONCLUSION

Humor has been the interest and the food for thought for many scholars. They have attempted to answer questions like what constitutes something ‘funny’, what are the functions of humor and what consequences it can have. While the superiority or disparagement theory of humor suggests that humor is derived from witnessing the suffering, pain or misfortune of another person, the incongruity theory suggests that the juxtaposition of incongruent elements produce humor. However, the point on which most theorists agree upon is that humor is not ideologically neutral and is highly contextual. What is humorous for one person may be offensive for another.

In the course of this study, when I asked the respondents what does the term ‘meme’ mean for them, the point that almost every one of them highlighted is that memes are a humorous way of expressing oneself or interacting in an online environment. Most of the respondents have mentioned at some point that memes are all about humor, light-hearted sarcasm, friendly mocking and joking. But are memes, and the whole concept of humor for that matter, merely light-hearted? As Drakett et al. suggests, a critical approach to the study of humor can potentially point out the negative aspects of humor contrary to the popular belief that humor can only be positive and a beneficial aspect of life. The power relations of the society are often expressed through humor. Humor can act as a tool for the dominant groups to mock and further marginalize the oppressed groups. As in the case of this study we see how Internet

memes can act as a tool for perpetuating racial oppression and gender stereotypes. Conversely, humor also provides a way of resistance and rebellion. We often see counter- discursive memes challenging the dominant ones. Moreover, as shown in this study, Internet memes have the potential of affecting our thinking process, language, behavior and opinion. Apart from that, internet memes have also redefined 'audience' as a concept which calls for rethinking and reshaping of the existing theories. Audience is no longer a passive consumer of information but they are active participants in this digital media age who also engage actively in content creation.

Internet memes also play a significant role in framing and maintaining identities. Social actors are able to create a virtual identity for themselves by continuously sharing or curating memes according to the proclivities of the identity that they want to create or maintain. Memes also act as social regulators and restrict our behavior as we try to avoid being the 'meme material'.

Hence, I conclude that internet memes, which may appear as a very trivial and mundane part of our daily online interactions, have a deep impact on our interaction processes and patterns. Internet memes are not merely a part of our social media experience which are just out there for entertainment purposes. They are discursive in nature and are very much capable of shaping our opinions and behaviour.

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The Importance of Language in Tibetan Nationalism

Tenzin Norzin Bhutia

This paper deals with the role of language in preserving the idea of Tibet alive in Exile. Situated in the contemporary context, this paper dwells on how the Tibetan people in Exile hold on to their language in everyday transactions, in religious and cultural practices, in practices of teaching and learning in schools and through institutional efforts (Basu 2012). Tibetan Language for over 63 years has been playing an important role in keeping the rich and unique Tibetan culture alive especially in exile (Roche 2017). Tibetans comprise a ‘nation in exile’ with its ‘citizens’ scattered all over the world, the majority of them being in India having fled the territory after the Chinese occupation in 1959. There is a colossal human tragedy with no sight of their exile coming to an end, which was initially supposed to be a temporary situation (Yeh 2007).

Tibetan culture, religion, and language have been systematically wiped out inside Tibet, and with it so has the core identity of the Tibetan people. Thousands have followed their spiritual leader in fleeing Tibet (Thakur 2015). “When anyone wants to investigate Buddhist thought today, Tibetan language is the best means through which to do it” – says the spiritual leader, H. H, The 14th Dalai Lama (Choesang 2013). According to him the acquisition of modern education, the preservation of Tibetan language, culture and Buddhism is important. Tibetan language is linked to the rituals and everyday life of Tibetan people in conserving the very identity of Tibetan-ness (Samphel 1988). Tibetan language is the backbone and main identity of Tibetan people. Without knowing the language, no one can perfectly perform the traditional rituals and maintain or conserve the very identity of Tibetan-ness (Wang, Chao, and Sun 2019). Some of the important questions that my research has analysed are the importance of Tibetan language in

keeping Tibetan nationalism alive in India, the use of language in different context and the personal and institutional efforts to conserve it and how it forges a sense of community among the ethnic group of Tibetans.

This study has addressed some of the questions raised through qualitative methods. Data is collected in two ways, textual data and respondents' methods, through which I try to understand the importance of language in keeping the Tibetan nationalism alive in exile. Eminent Chokor Rinpoche– a Tibetan monk, learned Tibetan scholars, teachers, house wives, students were my respondents. I have adopted qualitative research methodology. Due to Covid-19 pandemic, data collection of ten individuals from 3 generations happened face-to-face and through telephone, living in exile (in Kalimpong) in Tibetan language. In the interview they were asked about the importance of language in their lives and how they preserved or are preserving it. This research is also close to my own identity and a part of the Tibetan community. Relation to the community happened with the commonality of language and shared history of exile, migration.

Studying the importance of language in keeping the Tibetan culture, practices, religion alive in Exile is the significance of the research. Also, there has been very few research done in sociology encompassing the field of importance of language in keeping one's culture alive, and specifically, in context of Tibet. This paper has brought out the significant issues surrounding language and Tibetan nationalism, and evaluate it from bird's eye view as well as interpretations, whether or not is the language really helping to maintain the issue of Tibetan nationalism. This paper is unique because it has tried to unravel the real experience of exiled Tibetan people in India, Kalimpong, who are truly involved in it.

The exiled community has taken great lengths to preserve language for the younger generations. One thing became very clear that although they are living in exile, a home away from home, the love for their mother land, Tibet, and its language and culture is very deeply rooted in their hearts, and also that in order to save their language, culture, practices. After One's identity is known by one's language and culture. Lastly, I

conclude this by quoting the famous saying by Minae Mizumura (2014: 198), a Japanese novelist, “One’s identity derives not from one’s nation or blood but from the language one uses”.

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Do Millennials have an Aversion to Commit? - A Sociological Study on Commitment among Millennials in their Personal and Professional Life

Voshiana Camille Williams

We are in a world today where choices are unending. For every need there are ten different options to choose from. The Millennial generation is considered to be the best representation of this globalised world. They have seen the transition to the modern state we are today. With great power, however comes great responsibility and a lot more criticism, hence there is a stereotype attached to millennial as being one of the brightest generations but with a tendency to shy away from any form of commitment, be it in the personal or the private sphere. Commitment is an everyday phenomenon that can be seen in all aspects of our life (Becker 1960). From simply being committed to one's job with the drive to do well, or even commitment to a particular person to stay faithful and loyal. The millennials are the generation that have been most plagued by this aversion to commitment. This is the generation that has seen the transition from one age to the other. It is the first generation that has had an exposure to gadgets and the internet (Lyons, Schweitzer and Ng 2015, 8). The millennial generation is considered to be the best workforce, even though many studies have even called them the 'the job hopping generation.' Millennials are less likely to stay in their jobs because they are constantly looking for better opportunities.(Adkins 2019). In the private sphere, the Millennials are the ones who are marrying much later compared to the previous generation. (Barraso, Parker and Bennett 2020). Even though there are significant studies and empirical data on this information, yet the explanation as to why this phenomena is taking place, is significantly absent. This research tries to fill in the gap from the Millennial, by the Millennial and off the Millennial.

The Millennials due to their difference in values see the world in a different way from their predecessors. This study tries to understand the stereotype from the point of view of millennials and whether their adversity to commit is a fact or a fad. It aims to look at the following questions: What are the reasons for this behaviour among the millennials? Is it because of globalization and its free market economy, allowing people to feel that they can rise to the top anytime? Is it the fear of failure or missing out? What does commitment mean for millennials? What do they want to achieve from their personal and professional lives? Do millennials feel that they are the 'commitment phobic' generation?

I have adopted mixed method approach where both quantitative methods like statistical data and qualitative data, in the form of peer review articles and interpreting answers on a questionnaire were utilised. My research has analysed the phenomena straight from the millennial themselves, therefore the focus group for this research was a group of millennials from different socio-economic backgrounds and from the same city. The group comprised of individuals between the age of 25- 42 from The data collected from this research also provided an analysis like examining the increasing divorce rate and unemployment due to frequent career changes. It has also helped the millennial themselves understand the phenomena and maybe realize what could be their condition in the years to come if this is not tackled with.

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Partition of India Through a Gendered Lens: Narratives from Kolkata

Yashodhara Bhalotia

The British "Great Divide" of 1947 was a life-changing event for the millions of people who were uprooted and compelled to migrate. The violence that escorted was unprecedented, sudden, and catastrophic, resulting in a variety of repercussions of Partition, including family division, cross-border friendships, coping with trauma, lamenting over the loss, searching for the family members, and experiencing dislocation and displacement. Memoirs and literature from the period aid us in understanding the deplorable conditions of the time, but the official memory has excluded the gendered perspective of systemic oppression and this is the gap I have attempted to fill through my research. I have used qualitative method of in-depth interviews centred in Kolkata and have implemented purposive sampling. Having interviewed four female and two male Partition survivors both in-person and telephonically, my research is largely aimed to understand the specific gendered experiences based in context and location for a more intimate knowledge of the subject and to demonstrate how social interactions influence gender disparities. While my discussion of Partition is influenced by men's political and communal experiences, it is not the focus of the narrative I will be presenting, and my questions are mostly gynocentric. Apart from the oral histories, my research is heavily guided by studies undertaken by Indian feminist socio-historians Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon (1998), Urvashi Butalia (1993, 1997, 1998), Veena Das (1996), Arunima Dey (2016) and Shumona Dasgupta (2015), who have written extensively on Partition and women.

The first thematic chapter, *The Female Body during Partition: A Site of Violence*, highlights how gendered Partition violence positioned the

female body as a vehicle of retribution between two religious communities and nations. There were two kinds of gender-based violence throughout this ethnic genocide. Firstly, there was the violence perpetrated against women by males of the opposing religious group, which included abduction, sexual assault, genital mutilation, and public humiliation. The ostensible goal of such violence was to degrade the males of the opposing faith to which the women belonged. The abuse inflicted on women by their own family members was a second type of violence against women. This ranged from honour killings to male relatives insisting that their mothers, daughters, or wives commit suicide in order to preserve the community's purity and chastity. Both forms of violence reinforce the notion that women were not treated as humans but rather as markers of communal and national pride. Men sexually assaulted and abducted women from other communities in order to harm that particular community's dignity, as well as to emphasize their masculinity over the other community's men. But similar acts of violence occurred within communities as well, whether it was forced suicide, continued assault, or absolute abandonment, which directly led to death. Sexual assault and abduction "desexualized" a woman and negated her role as a mother and wife and rendered her impure. Although the problem of abducted women was addressed through the Recovery Act of 1947, it only reinforced the patriarchal dictum of Indian Society. In the second chapter, Gender and Memorialization, I argue that Partition exists in a duality of public and private while distinguishing between the public mainstream androcentric memory that emphasized politics and employment and women's private Partition memories that mostly centred around rebuilding homes. Women survivors of the Partition suffered from a shame-fear dishonour syndrome that included fear of sexual assault and the resultant shame, fear of abduction and conversion and the subsequent societal rejection, which makes it difficult to talk about this period. Moreover, breaking silences enshrined in patriarchal structures of shame, guilt and honour can be seen as agential for women. The third thematic chapter, Locating Women within the Nation-State: Questions of Agency and Otherization traces the intention of the Indian state to act as a paternalistic savior figure for women that paralleled the widely held belief that women lacked agency and were treated as second-class

citizens. The question of agency of women during Partition is entangled with the 'choice' to commit suicide. Men describe the acts of violence and defence by women as otherworldly courage to keep women within their 'aukat'. However, Partition did alter gender roles. Many women, who had previously never stepped outside domesticity, now out of sheer exigencies of survival, rose to serve as direct sustainers, forging different avenues for generating and supplementing family income. This did not, however, change the fact that women were treated as liabilities for men and their national belonging was mediated through the institution of heterosexual and patrilineal nuclear family. The Recovery Bill ensured that women were 'recovered' and returned to where they 'belonged'. The term 'recovery', in its terminology or semantics, denotes the commodification and dehumanization of women. This helps to understand why these women's agency is completely ignored. Women's autonomy was invaded, and they experienced double emotional and mental dislocation as a result of their forced recovery. The state took on the paternalistic responsibility of arranging marriages and dowries for unattached women reinforcing the patriarchal ideology of the Indian society, thus denying women any scope of agency.

Through the collection of narratives, I found that at the period of Partition, the horrific violence inflicted on many women destroyed whatever sense of self – social or existential – that the patriarchal system had bestowed on them. This had discursive implications on the social collective at large, in addition to being a traumatic material experience of embodiment. The brutality perpetrated on women's bodies became a metaphor for the Indian state's obligation to respond which it did through the state-sponsored recovery of abducted women. Rather than insisting that women's voices be heard or that the gendered violence of Partition be addressed in an official capacity, this occurred. Thus, women's narratives have a special intervention to make in a masculine realm where women are viewed as symbols of honour in gendered terms that frame the nation as a masculine realm. They interfere in the masculine domain via speaking rather than existing as symbols. That is the reason why the voices of women had long been silenced. I have tried to break this silence through the oral histories I collected during my fieldwork.

However, it is essential to understand that a gendered engagement is not only about engaging with women. It is also a consideration of how dominant and marginal tales are cast in gendered ways, allowing some narratives to be public and dominant while others are private and marginal. Understanding the ideology driving violence against women followed by the paternal state's recovery and rehabilitation of abducted women allows for the revealing of numerous truths rather than a single official state sanctioned reality. Furthermore, this parallel history highlights the physical and psychological trauma associated with gender-specific torture. By consolidating collected narratives and works of aforementioned feminist scholars, I aim to trace the relationship between gender, violence, memory and the Indian nation-state during the Partition of India.

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