



**St. Xavier's College (Autonomous),
Kolkata**

Young Sociologist

Journal of the Postgraduate Department of Sociology

2023



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Young Sociologist



Xavier's Sociological Society

Journal of the Postgraduate Department of Sociology

St. Xavier's College (Autonomous)

Kolkata

2023

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From the Principal's Desk

ST. XAVIER'S COLLEGE
(Autonomous)



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Kolkata - 700 016
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It is an honor to witness the commitment of the faculty members and students of the Department of Sociology to keep pace with the dynamic present-day world through their numerous undertaking. I will take this opportunity to congratulate the Department of Sociology for the successful publication of the twelfth edition of the Departmental Journal, *Young Sociologist*, which is a good example of the representation of diversity and inclusivity in today's world. The journal presents itself as a point of confluence of various perspectives and sociological thinking to develop a deeper understanding of our social landscape.

The journal will be launched at the Department's annual event- 'Verstehen', which literally means an empathic understanding of human behavior". The world is undergoing a metamorphosis, there is coherence on one hand but disruption on the other. The assuring force against these changes is human kind and it is our responsibility to nurture human talent guided by respect, trust and empathy. Our social fabric needs honesty in actions and sincerity in intentions, for all we require is a peaceful coexistence with everyone, where, we find strength and motivation in each other.

The most desirable way of dealing with the chaos that the world is experiencing today is to adopt an empathetic approach to solving problems. We need an empathetic understanding of social life to build for ourselves a beautiful world which is just, inclusive and where everyone has access to the bare minimum of life. It is time to stand for the well-being of others and look beyond one's own interests.

I wish the faculty members and students of the Department of Sociology to pursue all their future endeavors with relentless zeal and dedication. I believe that that the journal will be able to inspire students and provide them with an intersectional and diverse standpoint. I strongly hope that *Young Sociologist* becomes a forerunner in their future academic pursuit. God bless you all, Nihil Ultra!

Rev. Dr. Dominic Savio, SJ
Principal



From the Vice-Principal's Desk

ST. XAVIER'S COLLEGE
(Autonomous)
Department of Arts & Science



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I congratulate the Department of Sociology for their launch of the Journal “Young Sociologist”.

The Department’s unwavering commitment towards the field of research and publication is commendable. Over the years the Department has shown academic excellence and heightened participation in innovative research works.

The Journal “Young Sociologist” is the result of the department’s enthusiastic determination to keep itself relevant in the field of research. Dwelling on the intersectional approach and embodying a spirit of enquiry in the field of academia has been the Department's motto. This Journal has been a testimony to it. It will be an inspiration to young minds to pursue further research by providing them a means through which they can articulate their sociological imagination.

Prof. Bertram Da' Silva
Vice-Principal



From the Dean of Science

ST. XAVIER'S COLLEGE
(Autonomous)
Department of Arts & Science



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I want to offer my warmest congratulations to the Department of Sociology on the release of the Journal, 'Young Sociologist'!

'Young Sociologist' has truly evolved into an outstanding platform that nurtures collaboration and intellectual growth within the academic community. The unwavering commitment to organizing this magazine exemplifies the remarkable spirit that drives the department's success.

I extend my heartfelt appreciation to the entire team behind the Journal, whose tireless efforts have made this endeavour a resounding success.

I am confident that this issue of 'Young Sociologist' will continue to enrich students academically following the legacy of excellence of the Sociology Department.

Indranath Chaudhuri

Dr. Indranath Chaudhuri
Dean of Science



From the Dean of Arts

ST. XAVIER'S COLLEGE
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Department of Arts & Science



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It gives me great pleasure to know that the Postgraduate Department of Sociology is publishing its annual departmental journal Young Sociologist. I applaud the enthusiasm of the faculty and students of the department in their insatiable quest to question, explore and continuously push the boundaries of what is known.

My heartiest congratulations to the department in initiating young minds on the path of learning and discovery. May your words resonate far beyond these pages, leaving an indelible mark on the world of ideas. I wish the faculty and students of the department success in their academic endeavours.

I wish the faculty and students of the department success in their academic endeavours.

Farhat Bano

Dr. Farhat Bano
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 twelfth edition of the journal of the Department of Sociology-Young Sociologist. Like every year, students have undertaken social research on a wide range of topics that highlight contemporary issues and theoretical debates in the social sciences.

I would like to thank the editorial team led by Dr. Shoma Choudhury Lahiri for their dedicated efforts towards the publication of the journal. I would also like to thank my colleagues from the Department of Sociology for successfully guiding students to write these articles based on their BA dissertation. I am grateful to Prof. Bertram Da'Silva, Vice-Principal, Arts and Science, Dr Farhat Bano, Dean of Arts and Dr Indranath Chaudhuri, 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 with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

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, 2022-2023

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. This year, we spent our creative energies in designing the BA 4-year program in Sociology. While aligning ourselves with the NEP 2020 goals of inclusivity, multi-disciplinarity and experiential learning, we have retained our commitment to a critical pedagogy. 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.

Departmental Events

DATE	NATURE OF EVENT	SPEAKERS
02/08/2022	Monthly Colloquium: Performing Silence: Feminist History and the field of Performance Studies	Dr. Trina Nileena Banerjee <i>Centre for Studies in Social Sciences (CSSS)</i>
13/08/2022	Monthly Colloquium: Infectious Social Movements: Sex work in the time of Pandemics.	Dr. Toorjo Ghosh <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>

DATE	NATURE OF EVENT	SPEAKERS
20/09/2022	Monthly Colloquium: Of Discipline and Interdisciplines: Situating the Indian University in the shadow of NEP 2020	Dr. Debaditya Bhattacharya <i>Kazi Nazrul University</i>
24/09/2022	International Conference: Caste in Bengal	Dr. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay <i>Emeritus Professor, Department of History Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand</i> Dr. Sarbani Bandyopadhyay <i>Assistant Professor Department of Sociology St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata</i> Prof. Maroona Murmu <i>Professor, Department of History, Jadavpur University, Kolkata</i> Prof. Manosanta Biswas <i>Professor, Department of History Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, Purulia, West Bengal</i> Mr. Kumar Rana <i>Guest Faculty Institute of Public Health Kalyani</i>

DATE	EVENT	SPEAKERS
		Ms. Kalyani Thakur <i>Dalit Feminist Poet</i> Mr. Rajat Roy <i>Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science Presidency University, Kolkata</i>
07/02/2023	Monthly Colloquium: E-Governing through Speculative Infrastructures: Health and Well-Being in Datafied States in India	Sreya Dutta Chowdhury <i>Universität Leipzig, Germany</i>
11/02/2023	Monthly Colloquium: Economic Exchanges of Middle Class Siblings in India	Dr. Nazli Kibria <i>Boston University</i>
27/02/2023 & 28/02/2023	Inter-College Fest 'Verstehen': A two-day festival themed around Education and Inclusivity including a panel discussion, student paper presentations and a sociology quiz.	Panelists: Mr. Pawan Dhall <i>Queer Activist and Writer</i> Dr. Abdul Matin <i>Jadavpur University</i> Dr. Sarbani Bandyopadhyay <i>St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata</i>

Academic Achievements of faculty members of the Department, July 2022-June 2023

- Dr. Sarbani Bandyopadhyay** - Published a book chapter and a book review. Convened an international conference, participated in a refresher course, short term course and an FDP.
- Dr. Shoma Choudhury Lahiri** - Published a book chapter and a book review. Delivered 4 invited talks, participated in a refresher course and an FDP.
- Dr. Zaid Al Baset** - Presented in an international conference, delivered 5 invited talks and published a book review. Participated in an FIP (Faculty Induction Programme)
- Dr. Shaoni Shabnam** - Published a book chapter and participated in a refresher course. Presented in an international research workshop.
- Dr. Anushyama Mukherjee** - Published a journal article and a book chapter. Presented in 5 international conferences and 2 invited lectures. Participated in an FDP.
- Dr. Sweta Chakraborty** - Presented in an international conference and completed an FDP.

Dr. Shoma Choudhury Lahiri received the intra-mural research grant 2023-2024 from the College as a part of their Research and Development program. The committee granted a sum of 1.6 lakh for a period of one year to fund a research titled “Science City and Science Fairs in Kolkata : A Sociological Study of Science Popularisation in Kolkata city”.

Dr. Sweta Chakraborty received the intra-mural research grant 2023-2024 from the College as a part of their Research and Development program. The committee granted a sum of 1 lakh for a period of one year to fund a research titled “From Journal to Zameen”: Science, Pseudo-Science and Rationalist Organizations in Bengal.

Student Achievements during the Academic Year

NAME	SEMESTER	NATURE OF ACHIEVEMENT
Soumyojit Dey	UG Sem 5	Awarded certificate of merit for achieving third position in the t-shirt painting competition of Xavotsav held in February 2023
Sayan Sahoo	UG Sem 3	Achieved 3rd position in the Spectrum Quiz, 2nd position in the Verstehen Quiz, 1st position in the Biology Quiz.
Raina Talukder	UG Sem 3	Achieved 1st position in J.A.M., Goonj '22
Pratisruti Guha	UG Sem 3	Published a book of poems in June 2023 (Stardust)
Upamanyu Basu	UG Sem 3	Achieved 3rd position in Spectrum Quiz (Team); 2nd Position in Verstehen '23 Sociology Quiz (Team); 2nd Position in "Sui Generis" In Verstehen '23 (Team); 1st Position in Creative Writing

NAME	SEMESTER	NATURE OF ACHIEVEMENT
Ronjinee Chattopadhyay	UG Sem 5	in "Innovarium" fest of Scottish Church College Presented whitepaper as a semi-finalist in the Bengal Policy Hackathon, at IIM Calcutta (January 2023), Secured 1st position in Sui Generis in Verstehen 2023
Asmi Gayan	UG Sem 3	Secured 2nd Position in RJ Hunt contest during Xavotsav
Aanya Bosu	UG Sem 3	Secured 2nd Position in High Jump (Annual Sports Day), 2nd Position in Street Play for Xavotsav, 2nd Position in 100m Freestyle and 3rd Position in 50m Backstroke in SXC Aquatic Championship, 3rd Position in 25m Backstroke at Cossipore Club, 4th place in women's football for XPL (Titanium), Participated in JUMUN as South Africa Double.
Souritri Santra	UG Sem 3	Secured 2nd position in Enthusia '22 designing competition, won XDF '22 as a team, won the 3rd prize at Carnival of Rust (FAS) in Pixel Perfect - designing event, came 4th

NAME	SEMESTER	NATURE OF ACHIEVEMENT
Kunal Bhattacharyya	UG Sem 3	at a debate arranged by IIMC, got appreciation awards for Khwaab (XTS) and Literaria '23 (the English Academy) for being in the designing core Winner BITS Pilani Debate, Winner NITD Debate, Runners up adjudicator Presidency debate, Runners up adjudicator for IITD debate, Runners up IITB debate, Runners up IIMC debate, Winner Literaria quiz 2022, XDF winner and best speaker, 3rd in Heritage College debate, 3rd in NUJS debate
Ritwik Bhaumik	UG Sem 3	Stood second in the Whispers of The Past event of Samagam organised by Loreto college in December 2023. Stood second in Guitar Wars event of FETSU Sanskriti at Jadavpur University in April 2023.
Soumili Sinha	UG Sem 5	Secured 1st position in Sui Generis in Verstehen 2023
Mayuraksha Dey	UG Sem 5	Received the Pink Pearl Award from Pinkishe

NAME	SEMESTER	NATURE OF ACHIEVEMENT
Sanwoy Acharya	UG Sem 5	Foundation for contribution towards the NGO's growth, Secured 1st position in Sui Generis in Verstehen 2023, Secured 3rd position in Xavotsav Relay Story-telling 2023.
Sneha Chakraborty	UG Sem 5	Co-wrote and presented a paper on Irregular Migration at International Relations Scholastic Conclave (IRSC), 2023.
Simran Sharma	UG Sem 5	Co-wrote and presented a paper on Irregular Migration at IRSC (2023)
Ritika Dwivedi	UG Sem 5	Won the Gold medal in rowing (women double scull) in the Sun Rising Water Fest 2022 Shillong, 3 Bronze medals in the ARAE FEARA rowing Regatta 2023 Chennai, Bronze medal in the All India University Rowing championships 2023 Chandigarh, Gold and Silver in the West Bengal state rowing championship 2023
		Secured 2nd position in Charcoal painting Xavotsav '23; Attended the National

NAME	SEMESTER	NATURE OF ACHIEVEMENT
		Seminar on Nationalism in Colonial Bengal organised by the Ministry of Culture, GoI and the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies (ISCS) collaborated programme "Krantiteertha" as a part of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav.
Shilad Sengupta	PG Sem 3	Cleared UGC-NET June 2023
Raka Bhattacharyya	PG Sem 3	Cleared UGC-NET June 2023, Presented in Beyond The Screen: Mass Media and Society conference in Jadavpur University, Winner in the women's doubles and runners up in the Women's Singles in the Table tennis event for Xavotsav 2023
Diya Lahiri	PG Sem 3	Presented in Beyond The Screen: Mass Media and Society conference in Jadavpur University
Aharna Maiti	PG Sem 3	Presented in Beyond The Screen: Mass Media and Society conference in Jadavpur University

NAME	SEMESTER	NATURE OF ACHIEVEMENT
Shemusi Maikap	UG Sem 3	Won best actress award in Theatromania (Inter-College event hosted by Amity University) for Short Film, Participating in Ripples (inter-college event hosted by THK Jain College) for Short Film, participated in JUMUN as South Africa Double Delegation for UNHRC

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

SECTION - II

Selected Dissertation Articles

Love and Consent: Portrayal of “Non-Consensual” Relationships in Fanfiction

Adrija Das

Fanfiction has been the space to explore identities and new cultural and social experiences (Black, 2007). The creation of this space to explore and build on identities and experiences leads to the formation of certain trends of how social life is perceived by many. From the 1960s, we find the presence of the first piece of fanfiction. During the 1990s and 2000s, with the advent of the internet, fanfiction became a niche interest. Movie series like Star Wars and TV series like Doctor Who became the niche for fanfiction writers to explore character identities beyond what these movies and TV shows want to portray. This space for exploration needs to be studied sociologically.

Fanfiction authors have, on several instances, tried to look at various relationships, romantic or otherwise, shared by characters in TV shows, movies and books, and broaden or reimagine them to mold them into something different. This point is important to analyze because this re-imagination of relationships that is seemingly just another creative dimension of the human mind, tells the story of larger social ideas, ideals and imagination. This is an attempt to revisit the same story, to tell the story of the writer who writes them. Since 2011, we see a growing trend amongst young adults and teenagers who are writing fanfiction, exploring said TV shows, movies and books, and their characters. They do so through the lens of relationships that would be best described as violent and abusive under the guise of love. Often, these are clubbed under the category of #noncon or non-consensual relationships by the authors. Diana Humble (2020) in the “Inclusion of Rape and Other Non-Consensual Sexual Acts in Self-Insert Fanfiction” talks about this phenomenon of increased consumption of such content on online fanfiction writing apps like “Wattpad” and “Archive of Our Own”. Essentially, what these authors are describing are rape fantasies in

relationships with sexual acts that are non-consensual and criminal in nature.

The research question I am exploring in this paper is why the authors of fanfiction portray “non-consensual relationships” through their writings, and what this kind of fanfiction signifies to the authors. I have attempted to understand the position of the authors in writing such fanfiction and the challenge it showcases against the dominant narrative of popular culture. My aim through this paper, however, is to understand what inspires individuals to write fanfiction in the first place. The establishment of this argument is crucial to fully grasp the nuances of the individual choices made by the authors in the backdrop of larger socio-cultural elements.

The methodology this research paper follows is a qualitative analysis of the concept of writing fanfiction, especially “non-consensual” fanfiction. I have conducted in-depth interviews of four fanfiction authors from two apps “Wattpad and Inkitt”. The interview did not follow a strict or a rigid questionnaire pattern. The questions were open-ended to allow the authors to explain their individual experiences that led them to write fanfiction. My focus during the interview was to establish the correlation between their individual experiences and the larger social aspects along with the contemporary popular culture. The authors were chosen according to the specific kinds of fanfiction they wrote. The usage of the tags like '#non-con', '#forced', '#abuse' in their stories formed the basis for choosing to interview specific authors. A detailed review of literature preceded the conducting of interviews to critically understand the literature that already exists on fanfiction and place the focus on the authors of fanfiction, rather than the readers. The interviews were based on content analysis of the respective fanfiction pieces which the four authors wrote. The interviews were conducted via Google Meet. The fanfiction pieces were based on TV shows – Sherlock, Supernatural, Shadowhunters and Celebrity – Harry Styles. All the authors were in their teens when they started writing. Three of the four authors wrote on Wattpad and the remaining one, on Inkitt. While focusing on the content analysis of the stories they had written, I also did a content analysis focusing on comments and notes written by the authors in the site to gain the writer's perspective into writing. This allowed me to quantify the popularity of the fanfiction and the patterns of what makes a

fanfiction popular. These apps run on the system of tags or hashtags. I have used these to map out the specific elements of the fanfiction, especially the ones with non-consensual relationships, which make them popular. This can also help me to assess the popularity of fanfiction which the authors term as non-consensual and the wider implication of such portrayal for the authors themselves. This methodology not only helped me in establishing the inspiration behind writing fanfiction, but also put forth the context and lived experiences of the authors who were writing such texts. This analysis further helped in comprehending how fanfiction challenges the status quo by creating new places for self-expression - those which are not dominated and ostracized, unlike in the mainstream. Through this methodology I also aim to showcase the crucial yet distinct relationship which fanfiction, especially “non-consensual” fanfiction, has with popular culture.

The point where the depiction of seemingly normal relationships becomes problematic, is where the seemingly normal dominant submissive relationship, considered consensual by definition, takes the path of being abusive, toxic and non-consensual. This depiction is, thus, inherently problematic, but can also be empowering to the writers, providing space and agency to them. Gayle Rubin in *Thinking Sex* (2002) argues how one of the criticisms of feminism is that it fails to look at alternative forms of eroticism as according agency or being empowering to women. However, they do not look at writers having that agency; this paper attempts to explore that aspect. Yet another aspect that is explored by Alex Dymock (2012) in her article, 'But FEMSUB Is Broken Too! On the Normalization of BDSM and the Problem of Pleasure', talks about the how the female submissive and her role to save the morally grey heartless dominant with love and obedience has its own sets of power hierarchy and exploitation associated with it. Such works raise the question - Why do we see this depiction and what has led to such depiction? In 'Fan fiction and the Author: How Fanfic Changes Popular Cultural Texts', Fatallah (2017) explores the markers of change in broader cultural expression. I want to specifically explore the cultural expression and trends created by the authors of fanfiction. To carry out this entire work, the first aspect that needs to be recognized here is the popularity of fanfiction. “Between the Twilight fan fiction turned stand-alone novel *Fifty Shades of Grey* selling over 125 million copies, and a

One Direction fanfic with over a billion views getting a movie deal, it is safe to say that fan fiction has gone mainstream. Fanfiction.net has 40,000 Star Wars stories, 114,000 Supernatural stories, and a staggering 743,000 Harry Potter stories. There are multiple websites dedicated exclusively to One Direction fanfic, and Tumblr's fanfiction community is a sprawling labyrinth that hosts countless stories that range from squeaky clean to unspeakably filthy” (Vice, 2016). I aim to do a content analysis to comprehend the nuances that create such expressions.

This paper explores the meaning and expression of rape fantasies and abusive relationships depicted in fanfiction. The attempt of this paper is to navigate the inspiration behind writing fanfiction in the first place. The broad themes that emerged out of this aspect were the experience of fandoms, access to apps like Wattpad and Inkitt and the individual context. The argument of this section is premised on the basis that fanfiction is not the result of mere teenage obsession but an actual conscious choice individuals make to write and create their own space for self-expression, through various forms. Through this particular work I have focused on the depiction of relationships in fanfiction that the authors term as “non-consensual”.

The idea is to examine these depictions carefully in the context of individual choices and broader socio-cultural elements. What are portrayed in these specific fanfiction pieces are abusive relationships and rape fantasies. The reason why authors portray relationships that are non-consensual in the name of love can be evaluated through four main aspects. First, it allows them the freedom to express these safely, both sexually and romantically. They are able to experience 'alternative' sexual practices and romantic relationships like sadism/masochism and polyamory without judgment, especially when the society does not allow for free conversation on sex.

The second aspect is that fanfiction was their introduction to sex. Society makes it difficult to talk about individual sexual expression. Fanfiction, for them, became a way to understand sex and often created distorted ideals around what sex must be like because fanfiction is not written in isolation. It is influenced by popular heteronormative culture.

The third aspect explored here is how fanfiction like this helps the authors to make sense of what happened to them in real life. The authors shared similar stories on their experiences with sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect and social isolation in their childhood and early teen years. That is actually what pushed them to write the way they write. They already were part of fandoms, but their individual context became extremely crucial in determining the kind of relationships they portrayed. The lack of experiencing a healthy relationship cemented this version of romantic relationship in their minds. They were asserting their choice through writing. This kind of depiction showcases their bravery to confront their experiences in the form of writing. This, they believed, was the only way they could come to terms with their consciousness.

The final argument that the paper makes is that fanfiction is protest literature. They continuously question the dominant narrative of the society and at the same time question the narratives of the authors' personal lives. Fanfiction makes it possible for the authors to renegotiate their identity. Fanfiction is not passive writing. “Non-Consensual” fanfiction and its elements are now a part of popular culture. As much as it exists because of popular culture, fanfiction creates tropes and ideals of popular culture simultaneously. Books like *It Ends with Us* or *The Spanish Love Deception* borrow heavily from this particular fanfiction showcasing its wider implications in today's world.

The paper focuses on placing the individual, i.e., the author's consciousness in the midst of the context of popular culture. The paper notes that there is no one reason that pushes the writers to make the choice of writing about “non-consensual” relationships. There is no definite answer, because although there might be certain similarity of themes they have experienced, their choices are deeply intimate. It is not mere obsession but their consciousness that leads them to this pathway. Moreover, the reason cannot be limited to the expression of simply characterizing obsession as a mere 'teenage' phenomenon. Obsession is a more complex phenomenon. This dissertation looks into the sociological basis of such obsession as based on socio-cultural elements. At the same time it acts like a double-edged sword. Individuals' obsession is moulded by the social context. However, society is also dependent on the individual for the creation of obsession.

To reiterate, why we find portrayals of rape fantasies and “non-consensual” relationships in fiction demands an exploration of a combination of individual consciousness and broader socio-cultural elements. These authors share similar stories of experiences with violence, abuse, assault and neglect. Thus, for them, fanfiction is a way of resisting, protesting and coming to terms with what they have lived through. Fanfiction allows for safe exploration of sexual and romantic relationships which are based on the choices of the authors. Lastly, these elements of fanfiction are no longer limited to the apps like Wattpad and Archive of Our Own but its implication can be found in contemporary mainstream culture as well.

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A Sociological Analysis of Karate and Glocalization: A Study of Kolkata

Arkoprovo Sen

The globalization of Japanese martial arts during the 1970s-1990s through martial arts movies, the Sport-Karate movement, the ensuing rise in public interest for pursuing martial arts, and the establishment of Karate clubs in the major Indian cities led to wholesale shifts within the urban middle-class lives and values in Kolkata. Driven by a multiplicity of factors, middle-class men, women and children took up Karate for a plethora of reasons. However, being an ostensible exotic entity enmeshed with both sports and hypermasculinity, when the perceived ethos and outcomes of Karate clashed against the cherished middle-class dogmas around femininity, conventional education-based career and jobs, lifestyle and the social relationships, it necessarily incited local dimensions of cultural resistance in the form of animosity from the urban middle-classes and brought ubiquitous changes in the individuals and the urban society despite the backlash.

My dissertation is about the sociological location of Karate in Kolkata with its latent and manifest functions from the view of its process of glocalization, or the local experience of the global process of Karate's dispersal through cultural hybridization. Major theoretical frameworks behind the work are Paul Bowman (2014) and Phillip Zarrilli (1995). Some of the major questions evaluated in the process are how and in what ways is the global spread of Karate happening locally in Kolkata? Does Karate relate to masculinity or *masculinization* of its practitioners? What is the perspective of the students about this martial art and how do they perceive/experience its *glocalization* ? In what ways do media (print, digital and broadcast) and filmography impact the popularity and demand for Karate? By applying qualitative methodology, in-depth interviews of 10 Karatekas (7 men and 3 women), between 18-55 years of age from four Kolkata-based Karate academies are analyzed in this

research as case-studies. In-depth interview is a qualitative research method that involves intensive individual interviews with the respondents, to explore their perspectives on a particular aspect (Henn, Foard and Weinstein, 2006). An interview is a conversation for gathering information from the subject. I have used purposive and snowball non-probability sampling consisting of both Karate instructors and students. Sampling refers to the selection of a subset from the population as microcosm of the larger group or phenomena being studied. It is the selection of samples based on pre-determined subjective criteria for specific focus (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). My study uses non-probability sampling as I, precisely focused on Karate practitioners from Kolkata dojos, thereby making it specific and non-random. Snowball sampling relies on obtaining strategically relevant respondents from the population who can introduce other potential participants/respondents (Henn, et al., 2006) and purposive sampling is the meticulous selection of relevant samples on a specific field or a small group (Steinke, 2004). The field-site is Kolkata. Observation, situational conversations and in-depth interviews have been carried out in the field. Secondary sources such as books, journals, newspaper reports, magazines and blogs have been consulted for the purpose of research.

Academic books, journals, newspaper articles, periodicals, magazines, biographical accounts and television shows on martial arts are abundant in the modern era, but much of the available literature on the discourse of martial arts focuses either on the aspect of sport, rules and protocols (e.g., Edd, 2013) or on the vital secrets and procedures of the art (e.g., Sieler, 2015 and Kogel, 2010). Sociological literature in the field of martial arts has previously taken into consideration the Western context by Wendy Rouse (2018) who focused on women's self-defense movement in the United States through the learning of Western Boxing and Japanese Jiu-jitsu. Rouse's theory considers the racial, class, nationalist and cultural anxiety due to immigration and rise of exoticism besides the gender dimensions of masculinity and femininity. Paul Bowman (2014) evaluates the globalization of martial arts through major parameters of globalization studies, like consumerism, commodification, postmodernism, media along with traditions, institutions and fashions. He also talks about the concept of

postmodern martial arts. Phillip Zarrilli (1995) writes about the indigenous traditional martial art of Kalaripayattu in South India getting eclipsed by the exotic martial arts like Karate. Kalaripayattu has reached the global audience through the Western interest in exotic cultural practices, yet Kalaripayattu instructors there struggle every moment to make the practice survive on the face of a rapidly burgeoning Karate academies (dojos) in the South Indian states. These are valuable literatures for *glocalization* analysis based on cultural resistance in the context of martial arts.

Why Karate in Kolkata?

The first chapter, while delving into the pragmatic aspects of its existence and manifestations in the metropolis, explores the role of media and its consumption in constructing Karate in Kolkata as a postmodern martial art and the perspectives and experiences of the students and the instructors in the process. The inception of the Okinawa-born Japanese enigma of Karate in Kolkata has been an amalgamation of purposes and processes brewing with globalization of Japanese martial arts and Sport-Karate entwined with the demands for self-defence, health and fitness, and later miscellaneous reasons like career as instructor, athlete, spirituality and philosophy of lifestyle and nonetheless, for the preservation and conveyance of traditional secrets and deep philosophies. Being a non-autochthonous exogenous entity, the dispersal of Karate in India is closer to a postmodern martial art (martial art that develops during peacetime as effects of films, magazines, media and business) rather than a martial art developed and disseminated “in the cultural epochs and contexts of war, colonialism and imperialism” (Bowman, 2014: 4). This chapter aims to capture the purposes and dissemination of the sport through the evaluation of the pragmatic aspects of continued practice and initial enrolment for the students, aims of instructors regarding tradition and commodification, and flow of the lethal Karate secrets that made Karate dangerous before the idea of karate as a sport took over. Consumption of martial art movies of Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan, aided by other mass media, yielded enormous impact on middle class kids and youths of 1990s. With local *dojos* available for induction, clubs numerically swelled up followed by a general interest in the population. Every respondent confessed the role of films in their motivation. The split

between traditional Karate and Sport-karate, however, is strongly discernible with Sport-karate being numerically and institutionally dominant; hence, it is postmodern rather than lethal or martial.

Karate and the Bengali Urban Middle-Class: Changes and Processes

The second chapter investigates the transformation of individuals' lives and values from their ideal-typical rationalized middle-class milieu into specialized-disciplined self-conscious individuals. The middle-class mostly prefer cultural capital and formal-technical education as desirable. Boys spending their evenings in the field and girls preparing for feminine roles mark the legitimate play-study balance. Bruce Lee's *magnum opus*, *Enter the Dragon* (1973), and other martial-art films formed the basis of new middle-class masculinity and provided the impetus behind the martial arts boom of the 1970s-1990s. The culture-industry, hence, fused new interest into the middle-class kids and youngsters, directly transgressing the middle-class bourgeoisie ethics. Karate was perceived in popular culture as hypermasculine and having no career option or job market. Hence, the new generation's amicability with combat-arts broke the paramount importance of conventional educational cultural capital. Animosity from their parents' generation thus became an instance of cultural resistance. This caused many early Karatekas in Kolkata to sneak out and learn secretly out of parental watch. Modern-generation middle-class parents are conscious of the needs and benefits of Karate and respect children's choices more than their previous generation. Consequently, the succeeding generation of parents themselves became an agent of conscious dispersal of the meritorious practice for their children. Since the 2000s, Sport Karate has manifested itself as a good career option. Karatekas started becoming certified players with athletic accomplishments and recognized honours. With the rise of entrepreneurship of instructors with institutional certification, a new professional-entrepreneurial class of Karate-instructors has risen. By opening an alternative livelihood, Karate became one of the dissipators of the monopoly of engineering, medical and IT industries. Besides, signifiers like the Black-belt, the skills and complete spiritual mental and physical development manifested as significant status-symbols and pride.

Besides being a status-symbol, Karate has made itself into a desirable element within the structure and function of the city's fabric through institutionalization, sports and rising new area of interest. A source of social mobility and an asset for both men and women, Karate in Kolkata is doubtlessly a newfound cultural capital.

Middle-Class Masculinity, Women and Karate: The Real Pattern

The third chapter brings in the gender angle by evaluating middle-class masculinity in the light of the purported hypermasculine Karate-fighter's imagery pitted against both the men and the women of the Bengali middle-class family, albeit dealing with the women's question more closely. Though martial practices have traditionally been an area of strong men's domination, modern media has largely propagated the idea of women's self-defence, health and fitness, besides the rise of women's sports and female athletes. For all its pragmatic utility that draws women and girls to the Dojo, Karate-schools in Kolkata bustle with female students. This has caused a massive feminization of Sport-Karate and the advertising of the same, resulting in the loss of the masculine context. Men, in fact, cannot relate Karate with masculinity. Nonetheless, the Kyokushin full-contact style retains the pure fighter-spirit, embodying 'controlled masculinity' of traditional Karate instead of 'restrained masculinity' of Sport-Karate. Consequently, Kyokushin stands as a staunch critique of non-lethal commercial Sport-Karate. Middle-class masculinity evolved through cinematic hypermasculinity, restrained in Sport-Karate and embodied in Mixed Martial Arts and Full-contact Karate. Sport-Karate ostensibly feels feminized, my fieldwork reveals that instructors in the ranks of Sensei and beyond are overwhelmingly men. The spaces of authority and higher ranks are in fact heavily androcentric till now. Nevertheless, Karate is an agent of social mobility, empowerment and emancipation for the middle-class women. Women's struggle to get access to the Dojo and resistance from the patriarchal family persists till date.

Kolkata's Karate is distinctly a postmodern martial art. Its large-scale origin is the result of globalization and media proliferation rather than martial emergency or existential crisis. Mass-media and culture-industry through advertising and virtual construction of the enigma to

the masses created the initial base for the expansion of martial arts, attracting most of the city's middle-class kids and youngsters. Currently, the overall virtual advertising and presentation of Karate in social and public media are highly feminized with the female body commodified and represented more than the male counterparts. The purposes and uses of Karate in Kolkata are broadly utilitarian and pragmatic; martial elements are meager, if at all present. As an exotic entity seeping in through globalization, it necessarily initiates the dissipation of the local cultural fabric. The transformation of middle-class masculinity, prestige symbols and women's emancipation are the manifest impacts. Students of the previous generation, who absorbed the animosity of parental resistances, included both men and women. However, women's struggles are greater and still persist, while the men are mostly established. The higher echelons are still dominated by men, and masculinity is latent in its functions. But overall, Karate has become a recognized form of cultural capital in the metropolitan life of Kolkata.

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Financial Literacy and Negotiations: A Study of Middle-Class Women in Kolkata

Arushi Choudhary

In the 21st century, Indian middle-class working women possess their own jobs or businesses and earn their own income and have thus attained a degree of financial independence. This research examined whether these 'financially independent' women were also financially literate and participated in the decision-making processes pertaining to their financial matters, also analysing the negotiations involved. It also studied the effect that financial independence had on their personal relationships with their male family members on whom they generally rely in these matters.

The motivation to conduct research on the given topic arose from a video of a social experiment conducted by Paytm called "The Divide". The experiment sought to create awareness about Indian women's poor performance in comparison to Indian men regarding their knowledge and experience in handling financial matters. Living in the 21st century, this video served as a major eye-opener for me, showing that despite having experienced unprecedented empowerment, there are many Indian women who, unwillingly (or willingly), do not manage the money that they earn, and rely on their male family members for this task. This phenomenon intrigued me, causing me to wonder how this behaviour affected the status of women and their relationships with the male members of the family. It made me question whether women are truly empowered, even in this century. Furthermore, I also chanced upon several women who, despite working, found themselves in this situation, making me realize that this is a common problem faced by many, thus revealing the significance of this issue. This further propelled me to gain deeper insights into the process whereby these women negotiated with their male counterparts to make decisions regarding their earned money. Akshita Arora, 'Assessment of Financial Literacy amongst Working Indian Women' (2016) and Viviana Zelizer,

'The Social Meaning of Money: Special Monies' (1989), were my main theoretical authors.

The study explored the following issues: a) Indian working women's level of financial knowledge and awareness regarding the utilization of their earned money; b) the impact of this on their household financial behaviour, especially the decision-making power regarding financial matters; c) women's voluntary/involuntary reliance on their male family members concerning making of financial decisions, and the reasons of the same; d) ways of usage of money earned by women; e) women's negotiation of their status and their financial empowerment at home. The research adopted a qualitative methodology and used semi-structured interviews, based on a selection of certain themes. Such interviews have open-ended questions and enable the interviewer to probe the interviewee to expand on an earlier answer, or to delve further into a line of inquiry initiated by the interviewee (Fox, Mathers and Hunn, 2000). Participant observation was carried out throughout the fieldwork. Furthermore, situational conversation with different kinds of actors was undertaken.

The sample constituted six Indian middle-class working women, holding a job, being in a profession, being self-employed or being an entrepreneur, belonging to the age group of 22 to 58 years. These samples were chosen using the purposive sampling method whose selection method entails first identifying the most quintessential features of the chosen type it seeks to sample. Then, it searches for samples who meet these characteristics, and studies them (Baker, 1994). My field site was the metropolitan city of Kolkata. All the respondents were located in the urban areas of South and East Kolkata. These areas being well-developed were connected through proper roads, having availability of transportation facilities like buses, taxis and autos and amenities like pharmacies, educational institutes, markets, and grocery shops. This study also drew from secondary sources of data such as videos, books, journal articles, newspaper articles and blogs.

Arora (2016) studied the financial literacy of Indian working women in rural and urban Rajasthan, concerning three parameters, financial knowledge, attitude and behaviour. She concluded the existence of low financial literacy and a dearth in awareness of financial instruments, though she discovered affirmative results regarding financial planning

and decision-making. My study seeks to investigate the financial literacy level of middle-class Indian working women in urban Kolkata. Her analysis provided insights and understanding of the subject-matter under study and a framework to delve deeper into my research.

Zelizer (1989) conducted a study on personal relationships shared by American women with their male family members, discovering a pattern where men controlled pecuniary matters more than women and stating that money often caused disputes between husbands and wives, and parents and children. My research aims to study the same matter in the context of Indian women, looking into the correlation between their financial literacy and their negotiations and relationships with men.

Financial Literacy and Women: A Brief Introduction

This chapter examined the financial knowledge of Indian middle-class working women, who were the respondents of this study, and explored the ways in which they spent and utilised their own money. It is divided into two subsections of financial instruments and household budget. It also put forth their opinion about the financial literacy of women and probed into their retirement plans.

Financial literacy, as defined by Hsu (2015), is having an awareness of fundamental economic outcomes, such as judicious wealth management, multiplied saving, better retirement planning, and greater partaking in stock market. As Mason and Wilson (2000) say, financial literacy helps people to successfully handle their earned money and acquire full financial independence. Further, Akshita Arora (2016) has stated that, in order to have effective financial literacy one should excel in two elements, having knowledge about financial concepts, and also applying these concepts in their day-to-day lives. In this research, it was found that although Indian middle-class women had acquired financial independence and were working and earning their own money, they were still found to lack in these two aspects of financial literacy. They were not aware of financial concepts and lacked participation in matters relating to investing in financial instruments. Even if the respondents contained clarity in their concepts and fared well in the first aspect, they failed in the second aspect of applying those concepts, due to their disinterest in financial affairs. This was also

observed by Arora (2016). With regard to household budget, it was found that although women contributed to the household expenses, a heartening occurrence, they usually covered minor expenses while the critical expenses were handled by the men of the family. Thus, a woman might handle the minor housekeeping expenses, but "serious money" was a man's currency who handled the major, important expenses (Beecher, 1841 and Zelizer, 1989). In relation to retirement plans, it was found that women did not give importance to proper retirement planning, thus encountering retirement with inadequate savings. Most respondents did not have retirement plans and if they did, these were decided either together with or only by their male family members.

Thus, it was seen that Indian middle class working women had relatively low levels of financial literacy and awareness than their male counterparts and hence, a low performance in financial application. However, the respondents observed the appearance of a change in the financial behaviour and knowledge, with women of the new generation gaining financial literacy. There is still a long way to go as women of the earlier generation and certain social locations have greater financial illiteracy, especially married women who rely on their husbands in financial matters.

Decision Making and Negotiation in Using Her Own Money

This chapter examined the effects that the low financial literacy levels of working women and their characteristic money-utilization patterns had on their overall participation in financial matters and their voluntary reliance on men for the same. It further demonstrated the result on the women's role in the process of decision-making of money matters (both of their earned money and the household money) and on their negotiation and personal relationships with the male family members.

It was found that the respondents relied on the men of their family with regard to the handling of their finances. As Lusardi and Mitchell (2008) observed, this study too discovered that financial illiteracy existed preponderantly among women. The consequent self-doubt coupled with a discomfort with numeracy caused the respondents to rely on their husbands. Furthermore, this gap in financial participation between men and women could be due to the division of labour within the

household (Hsu, 2015). Tasked with household responsibilities, working women in this study too neither found the time nor the inclination to gain financial knowledge or handle finances. Financial decision-making entails making choices on spending, saving, and investing money in order to better handle one's finances. The findings of Chen and Volpe (1998) and Lusardi (2012b) stated that low level of financial literacy and knowledge would restrict the ability to make decisions. This may happen between couples by virtue of the division of labour, where married women do not put in time or effort in understanding and making complex financial decisions, and men specialize in financial decision-making. Many respondents of this research confessed of financial illiteracy, while others showed a preference to joint decision-making, which led to better acquisition of family wealth.

Zelizer (1989) talked about the Domestic "Fiscal Problem" of 1870-1930, where "more quarrels between husband and wife have been started by the mention of money than by chorus girls, blond waitresses, dancing men with sleek hair, [or] traveling men". These quarrels frequently drew the married couples to the courtroom, culminating in a divorce. Zelizer also investigated the varying social and power relationships between family members in the United States, where the family's expenses were "so much more under the control of the man than of the woman". The interviewees of this study may have subtly mentioned a similar power relationship, but this did not seem to be forced and negative. The respondents had no objection to their husbands handling their financial matters since they did not make the women feel degraded for their financial unawareness. The women shared an understanding and compatible relationship with their men who encouraged them to perform financial functions.

Thus, it was seen that regardless of the respondents' financial literacy levels, they shared a supportive relationship with their men. This research showed that wives trusted their husbands, who in turn, encouraged them, which had a positive effect on decision making.

Our society had, traditionally and predominantly addressed men and discouraged women to actively take charge of their finances. In contemporary times, when women are thriving in many aspects of life, working, and becoming self-sufficient, planning and management of

their finances still takes the second place. This study revealed that the low performance of the Indian middle class working women (respondents) in financial application could be attributed to low levels of financial literacy and awareness. It was also observed that there existed, in most respondents, a substantial lack of interest in acquiring the requisite knowledge and information in this field whereby they conveniently relied on their husbands or fathers for handling of their financial affairs. This reliance could be ascribed to a conformity to the gendered division of labour and women's household responsibilities, the lack of self-confidence, and a positive relationship with their male family members. The respondents' financial illiteracy did not cause them to be disparaged by their husbands or fathers nor did their husbands feel envious or insecure about their literacy. Their compatibility with the men engendered them to trust them and comfortably entrust the financial matters on them, thus leading them to not earnestly obtain financial literacy.

Although many women of the earlier generation had greater financial illiteracy, this study showed an emergence of a change in the financial behaviour and knowledge of today's generation. This could be viewed as a step further towards the complete financial independence of women.

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Of Practice and Acceptance of Homeopathy: A Sociological Exploration

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The discourses surrounding various medical practices, their scientificity, efficacy, and legitimacy have undergone countless changes across their years of practice, more so in the growing pluralistic healthcare systems. In the context of homeopathy in India, its legitimacy as a scientific medical practice has been debated since its introduction (Bhardwaj 1973, Hausman 2002, May and Sirur 1998, Borlescu 2011, Degele 2005). However, the efficacy of the homeopathic remedies has been a facilitator of establishing its legitimacy more than the system's scientificity (Frank 2002, Eyles, Leydon and Brien 2012, Gibson 2018). This has happened particularly after the system had been able to establish itself through professionalization and commercialization where scientific discourse did play an important role (Das, 2019). In such circumstances, it becomes important to assess the factors that shape the acceptance and non-acceptance of homeopathy as a system of medicine in such a diverse medical context of India.

Keeping both the macro and micro-sociological dimensions of health and illness in sight, homeopathy emerges as a 'heterodox' medical practice (Frank, 2002). An investigation into this heterodoxy, particularly in the Indian medical context, is necessary to analyze the translation of homeopathic principles into its practice. The study relies on the existing literature, as well as on in-depth interviews with ten practicing homeopaths to assess the factors that shape the acceptance and non-acceptance of homeopathy as a system of medicine through the lens and voices of its practitioners. There is also an attempt to analyze the dynamics that operate in this process to shape the discourses of evidence and legitimacy in homeopathy, particularly the

perceived nature of homeopathy's efficacy and how it is tied to its legitimacy.

An investigation into the existing literature reveals homeopathy's origins, its arrival in India, and certain poignant debates around the practice of the homeopathic system of medicine. According to the definition by Swayne (2002), homoeopathy is "a therapeutic method using preparations of substances whose effects when administered to healthy subjects correspond to the manipulation of the disorder (symptoms, clinical signs, pathological states) in the individual patient" (as cited in Ernst 2005: 547). Homeopathy, based on the principle of "let like be cured by like" (Latin: "similia similibus curentur"), is a system of medicine founded by the German physician Samuel Christian Friedrich Hahnemann (1755–1843). The origin of the homeopathic system and its inclination towards the administration of increasingly small doses to cure the patient can be contextualized in the periods of the invention of the first vaccine, the rise of 'Heroic Medicine', as well as the emergence 'therapeutic revolution' which was based on the highly visible reactions to be found in the chemistry laboratory (Fisher 2012, May and Sirur 1998).

The early 19th century saw the introduction of homeopathy in India. According to Ghosh (2010), the system first succeeded in Bengal before spreading across the entire country. Homeopathy's social acceptance expanded as notable patients, including maharajas and colonial officials, sought its assistance, and life-threatening illnesses, including cholera, malaria, and the plague, were treated with homeopathic medicines (Frank and Ecks, 2010). There was also an interplay of intricate and contradictory forces during the Bengali professionalization of this European medical system as Homeopathy was advertised not only as a medical practice but also as a moral and ethical way of life for Hindus, one that could result in the ideal joint families that were influenced by nationalism and were self-sufficient (Das 2019). However, this indigenization was not a unilineal process but rather was accompanied by a parallel process of scientification, particularly in the states of Southern India, portraying the malleability of the system as an indigenous practice (Hausman, 2002).

The scientificity of Homeopathic remedies is a highly debated topic in the larger medical community which emphasizes double-blind randomized control trials and laboratory-based tests to determine the scientific value of homeopathy and prioritize it over the results of homeopathic remedies in everyday practice (Shang et al. 2005, Milgrom 2007, May and Sirur 1998, Borlescu 2011, Ijaz 2020, Degele 2005). Homeopathy is, thereby, seen as a consequence of inadequate rules, a lack of scientific literacy, and a lack of health education among patients (Shang et al. 2005, Fonnebo 2007, Cukaci et al. 2020). However, qualitative studies like that of Eyles (2011), and Thompson and Weiss (2006) emphasize against the dismissal of any homeopathic benefit as a placebo effect as it obscures the full range of client experiences and the wide range of active ingredients like that of patients' openness to the mind-body connection, consultation empathy, time with the practitioner, in-depth examination of physical problems, disclosure, the remedy matching procedure, and possibly the homeopathic remedies. Therefore, to sociologically probe into this debate on the scientificity of homeopathy, it is also crucial to look into the “possibilities of narratives” (Mishra and Chopra Chatterjee 2013: 1) and investigate the benefits of narratives as a clinical intervention by tracing the voices of the otherwise marginalized medical practitioners.

The efficacy and legitimacy of homeopathy in India can be traced to its inception in how Bengali doctors developed homeopathy into a profession and a family-centered industry to proclaim the legitimacy of the system (Das, 2019). The notion of efficacy is intricately connected to its legitimacy, particularly if the homeopathic consultation is examined about “connection”, which facilitates in eliciting symptoms, identifying expectations, assisting with prescription, assisting patients in understanding homeopathic principles, and promoting healing (Eyles, Leydon and Brien. 2012). The legitimacy of the system is also structured by its 'reported use' and 'perceived efficacy' (Stoneman, Surgis, and Allum 2012: 3), even in the face of delegitimizing discourses proposing alternate scientific explanations for homeopathy's “successes” (Gibson 2018: 10), people still utilize homeopathy to foster a broader idea of well-being, as opposed to just treating poor health or specific symptoms.

Moreover, the compulsive formalization of homeopathy, its legalization, cost-effectiveness as well as Hahnemann's theory of health, disease, and treatment are consistent with ancient Indian philosophy in that the causes of both are spiritual rather than material, are causes for the growing popularity of homeopathy. Even in the institutionalization of homeopathy, the importance of "doing knowledge" over "knowing knowledge" seems to be increasing in everyday life as well as in education and science (Degele 2005: 128). In the present context, it is also important to locate Homeopathy in the AYUSH system which tries to raise knowledge of its effectiveness, as well as quality control and drug standardization. However, several studies (Gopichandran 2012, Shrivastava, Shrivastava, and Ramaswamy 2015) reveal that although numerous initiatives have been taken to ensure a systematic merger, the desired outcomes have not materialized because of differences in the fundamental practice philosophy, disparities in the approach to particular clinical conditions or in decision-making, a lack of specific guidelines to encourage cross-referral, open positions, unequal pay, minimal support in terms of logistics and infrastructure, an unexpected increase in cross-practice, and ethical concerns (such as hostile relationships between colleagues).

In India's medically pluralistic context, the diverse aspects of homeopathy's efficacy, legitimacy, indigeneity, and scientificity shape it as a Heterodox Medicine as we take into account both the macro and micro-sociological dimensions of health and illness. The term *Heterodox Medicine* was proposed by Stollberg in 2001 as a helpful umbrella term for all medical strategies outside of the biomedical field while still leaving room for the variety of ideas, techniques, and institutions, as well as different ways that patients and practitioners use it - an essential component in such a heterogeneous field of sociological study (Frank, 2002).

In homeopathy, the harmony of the triple principle of 'Simi, Mono, Mini' is the most important consideration in both its theoretical mode of healing and its actual practice. The principle of 'similars' states that "the cure must resemble the illness" (Borlescu, 2011: 12). The principle of 'single remedy' refers to the matching of the symptoms of patients with

the symptoms of various remedies as enlisted in the Materia Medica to determine one single remedy. In this context, an interesting dichotomy can be unearthed between the classical homeopath and the other, where the former takes immense pride in the title and it becomes a way of claiming high ground within the homeopathic community as well as a professionalization strategy employed to assert their status as a legitimate homeopathic practitioner. Finally, the principle of 'Minimum Dose' whereby a medicine *dynamized* and *potentized* through the processes of dilution and succussion or vigorous shaking is administered to the patient in minuscule doses to treat them. In this context, there is a direct correlation made between the minimum dose of homeopathic medicine and the lack of side effects as a way of legitimizing the system of homeopathy in the current medically pluralistic scenario. Another reiteration in the participants' responses was an articulation of the benefits of their practice as cost-effective, harmless, gentle, restorative, and holistic, in contrast to biomedicine's effect. This can be analyzed as 'a mode of resistance to the power and dominance of the biomedical system of medicine' (Bharadwaj 2013: 59). To further this argument, a protest against the marginalization and lack of acknowledgment from the community at large as homeopathy is sought out mostly when biomedical treatments don't work. However, it is also important to highlight that there are certain modifications like hybridization, combinatorial remedies, and monopolization of homeopathic knowledge within the family to be accepted as a legitimate practice in the Indian medical scenario.

The use of combination remedies, or medications in which various chemicals are mixed and given in specific instances, is a contentious subject in homeopathy as it involves a blend of outright rejection to more flexible approaches of using it in certain specific circumstances or even using it regularly. The heterodoxy of the homeopathic system is visible in the context of poly-pharmacy or what is referred to as combinatorial remedies in this study. Another aspect of the hybridization of homeopathy is the practice of keeping the patient's needs in focus.

This is highlighted through the prevailing discourses of the scope and limitation of different systems which fosters an environment of

cooperation with other systems to ensure the best results for the patients as patients' risk becomes a crucial criterion for medical action. This is also an indication of an underlying sense of vulnerability due to homeopathy's low social acceptance which creates a sense of susceptibility to criticisms of all kinds. Therefore, a form of conformity to patient's expectations is through rapid case-taking i.e. a kind of a short-cut homeopathic anamnesis, which is a form of adapting to the practicality of homeopathic practice to stay relevant in the medically pluralistic scenario. Another distinct form of hybridization emerges in the form of daily use of placebo drugs to satisfy the demands of patients. The use of a placebo is a subtle way of subverting dominant modes of thinking and practicing medicine. Thus, homeopathy's emphasis on 'doing knowledge' necessarily underlines the fact that just because we do not currently understand how a system could work, does not preclude the possibility that it does.

The possibility of narratives in the sociology of health and medicine is also brought out through an analysis of the challenges faced by homeopathic practitioners in the form of a medical scenario that prioritizes allopathy and emphasizes lab-based evidence. This is also manifested in the form of several institutional challenges like inadequate state support. Other challenges surface in the form of the commercialization of homeopathy, that diverges from certain core principles of homeopathy. Another set of intriguing challenges emerges from within the homeopathic community through divisive politics at play as well as monopolization of knowledge through the family. The practitioners' narratives unveil innovative solutions in terms of increasing visibility in medical and non-medical spaces, interdependence through an exchange of knowledge, and so on, to overcome the challenges facing the homeopathic community.

Therefore, the study is crucial in its efforts to sociologically understand what constitutes the discourse of evidence and its link to the efficacy and legitimacy of homeopathy through the narratives of its practitioners.

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Navigating Queerness in the Context of Muslim and Dalit Identity

Ayana Mukherjee

*“Of lovers whose bodies smell of each other” – T.S. Eliot
Queer pride march, with cops escorting us on either side,
like every letter of the poem, being odour-tested
for the scent of the other.” – Chandramohan S. (Angiras & Katyal, 2020)*

The decriminalization of Section 377 of IPC, in a landmark judgment passed by the Supreme Court of India in 2018, paved the way for practicing alternate forms of sexuality with some form of legitimation in the country. Although now legal, homophobia is still one of the most pervasive issues in the country today. Transgenders and intersex individuals have been the victims of systematic violence and ostracization both in this country as well as around the world. This dissertation attempts to contextualize the ever-present plights of queer individuals belonging to the Dalit and the Muslim community, the challenges faced by them with changing contemporary global politics, their shared lived experiences, the systematic repression of their identity by the dominant groups, and lastly, the expression of their queer identity along with their minority or subaltern identity.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought with it several social issues and highlighted the worst of discriminations that are imbued in our society. The period right before the pandemic, India was facing one of the biggest mass protests of all time against its Citizenship Amendment Bill 2019. The bill posed a threat to the identity of a huge number of Muslims, Dalits, Adivasis, and Bahujans, whose fate of citizenship is now dependent upon certain government documents. Then with the outbreak of the pandemic, came the migrant workers' issue which exposed the deep-rooted caste bias that is still prevalent in the economic structure of our country. The pandemic also brought with it a new

definition of purity and pollution, imbued with the rationale of hygiene.

I derived my preliminary understanding of the topic and became interested in working on it, after reading Dhiren Borisa's article, 'Hopeful Rantings of a Dalit-Queer Person' (2020). According to Borisa, the Queer movement is not an exclusive protest or fight for rights it is a matter of discussion in every major social movement, be it political, religious, or racial. He states, "The queer movement is not just in the pride parades and parties but in the long roads that migrants walked to go back home during the pandemic. Many of them would have had 'queer' desires." Owing to this idea, this dissertation attempts to bring about a correlation between the experiences of the sexual subaltern who also fall under the historical subaltern. The work can be divided into three basic themes: (a) The effect of global contemporary politics on the lived experiences of queer Muslim and Dalit individuals, (b) Increasing religious fanaticism in India and its effect on Muslim and Dalit queer identity, (c) Parallels between the expression of queerness of people from the Muslim and Dalit community. This project advances based on a qualitative content analysis method. It reviews relevant texts, both literature and popular culture, interprets certain literary works of novels, poetry, and cinema, and also analyses individual accounts of people's experiences.

An article named, 'The Loneliness of Being Queer and Muslim' (2020) by Aniqah Chaudhuri, is an account of being an individual with intersecting identities of being queer and a Muslim based in the UK. She talks about the struggles faced by an ordinary individual who has to navigate her life through not only queerphobia but also rampant Islamophobia. Aniqah says, "It took me three years to admit even to myself that I was bisexual and longer to tell other people... I kept hearing from Muslim and non-Muslim people, "How can you be gay and be a Muslim?" "There is an ambiguity of identity, a lack of knowledge, a belief that she might be the only deviant in the community. The gruesome murder of Xulhaz Mannan, an openly gay advocate of LGBTQ rights in Bangladesh, also highlights the dangers of being queer in an Islamic country where homosexuality is criminalized. Mannan defined what it was to be gay and different and yet a Muslim. To quote him, "In a country

where the whole concept of sex and sexuality is a taboo, we are learning to navigate our ways by highlighting 'love' as the center of all, as a human right that can't be denied, hoping for better, and maybe 'faster', acceptance... someday!" (Manan, 2019)

Shifting to the national domain, the marginalization of Muslims in India is not a recent phenomenon. History witnesses Muslims as encroachers and invaders of the native land. Much of Marathi-Rajput historical literature is a nationalistic attempt to incite patriotic fervor amongst the citizens, which has proven to be instrumental since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, in mobilizing the people under a collective national struggle. This hate has survived decades of modernity, despite constitutional secularism. Since its rise to power in 2014, the BJP has been actively carrying out systematic violence against minorities. Be it the revamping of Article 370 stripping Kashmir of its special status, or the Citizenship Amendment Bill of 2019, the state has been ardent enough to wage political wars on the entire Muslim community. Moreover, amidst the recent same-sex legalization attempts and the appeals to the Supreme Court, the Modi government has made a written submission to the Supreme Court stating, "Living together of persons in same-sex relationships cannot be compared to the Indian family concept of a husband, a wife, a child born out of the Union." This apprehension of the state about queer identity added to its hostility towards the Muslim population makes, the lived experiences of individuals with this specific intersection of identities, more difficult.

Along with rising hostility towards the Muslim community, India as a nation, being a Hindu majoritarian one, has always witnessed striking caste discrimination. The rogue state has been the perpetrator of systematic violence on the Dalit population of the country. Their right to self-expression has been contested on several occasions. Here, Sumit Baudh (2017) talks about the invisibility of "other Dalits" in the legal system of India. Transgenders in the Indian community have been discriminated against for a long time. They are treated as "untouchables," as Baudh mentions. Intersectionality comes in when we acknowledge that some of these transgenders are not just treated as untouchables but they are "untouchables." Their experiences are

therefore subjected to a hierarchy of oppression and there is a lack of acknowledgment of this intersection of identities. This is what Baudh (2017) terms as the “invisibility.” The queer movement in India is a Savarna dominated one. Like every other movement, it has also been vested with upper-caste narratives, there are very few openly gay activists who are privileged enough to advocate. An opinion piece named, “Dear Savarna queer men, let's talk about casteism within our movement,” talks about this Savarnisation of the pride march and gay activism in India. The author here highlights how the LGBTQ movement in India focuses only on a one-fold dimension of discrimination. Their concern is the inequalities faced by queer individuals. However, these organizations fail to highlight the various other intersections of identities that can occur along with one's sexual identity and the subsequent double oppression thus faced by them. The social space that they choose for a queer meet up, if it's a vegetarian restaurant in Mylapore, immediately makes a commentary on the question of caste. A sixteen-year-old Dalit queer in India, Rishi Raj Vyas , talks about his experience of coming out both as a Dalit and a Gay person. According to Rishi, it was easier for him to come out as Gay than to come out as a Dalit. People around him questioned his need to come out as Dalit. Since he already came out as a marginalized individual through his sexual identity, there was no need to overcomplicate it with another marginalized identity. It is as if the Dalit identity can be used only as a form of marginalization to get certain access to social resources, otherwise it is redundant.

The broader idea of intersectionality works in bringing all these aspects together. An individual who is already ostracised due to their religious identity will be in a more disadvantageous position if they come out as queer. There can be added discrimination faced by them owing to their class, gender and nationality. Through the accounted experiences of certain activists and the analysis of contemporary queer poetry, it can be concluded that there is a double and, in some cases, a triple oppression operating on individuals of these disadvantaged identities. Legislations and policies are not oriented for them, instead there is a conscious systemic oppression operating. Therefore, feminist movements in India, as well as the rest of the world have to be all-

encompassing. The problems of navigating one's identity are not just personal, but political. Individual expression and autonomy are related to one's basic human rights. Therefore, there is a social and political responsibility to increase discussions on this matter. If a gay marriage in Kolkata has been successful despite there being no legal provisions for one, at once the social position of the grooms comes into question. Would the union have gotten this much attention and coverage if it were amongst individuals of some other community? The rationale behind this argument is, that one's right to self-expression is heavily influenced by their social position.

However, repression of this self-expression has led to more rebellious accounts of it. In India, Queer Muslim and Dalit representations have been considerably low. Yet social media pages like that “yes we exist india” and “the Queer Muslim Project” have been instrumental in being the voices of these individuals. Moreover, poets like Asad Alvi, and Chandramohan S., have been predominantly writing on their experiences as queer activists scattered around the world. Asad Alvi's (2020) “La pulsion de mort,” talks about the suicidal contemplations that he experiences. With the loneliness of being queer, not being accepted in a Muslim family, and heartbreak from the only love he ever had, the poet compares his urge to end his life with that of Woolf's. To Alvi, there is no alternative other than death when one is born with his identity. The deep-rooted solitude of being an outsider, never belonging at one's home, added to the despair of failed love, often is too much for one to bear. The pessimism comes not out of sadness alone, but also out of political and social exclusion.

With the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, the question of intersectionality again gained prominence. While the chants of “Black Lives Matter” echoed around the world, India saw the rise of slogans such as “Dalit Lives Matter” and “Muslim Lives Matter.” That paved the way for the attempt to correlate all these three suppressed categories of people. Every individual has a unique experience in their life and is served with unique obstacles. Therefore, to bring about true equality, there has to be a better understanding of the varied forms of discrimination and their intersections. Throughout my research, I tried

to correlate these lived experiences of the two subordinated communities, their unique struggles owing to their religious or caste identity, and the point of commonality, which is their sexual identity. Global politics acts as a double-aged sword where on one hand, the propagation of Islamophobia aggravates the discrimination towards queer Muslims, on the other hand, the influence of Black feminism in the West paves the way for new dialogues in caste movements in India. There are certain commonalities between the experiences of the sexual subalterns belonging to these communities. Both these communities are repressed by their dominant counterparts, and in the case of India, Hindu religious fanaticism becomes their common oppressor. Both these communities have been repressed for decades owing to their historical subalternity, but individuals belonging to the sexual subaltern category, have faced added burden and double oppression. There has been the Savarnisation of the queer movement in India as well which has further marginalized these individuals in their communities. Even though intersectionality has come a long way theoretically, at the ground level discrimination, inequality, oppression, repression, and violence are ever-present. Therefore, more work is required in the field of intersectionality, where experiences are given primary importance and policies are formulated globally to the benefit of not one but all existing inequalities.

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Nationalism, Masculinity, And Violence in Contemporary India

Ayushi Banerjee

Hindutva has often been conflated with Hinduism. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, however, had distinctly characterised the two in *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (1923). He had said that Hindutva as an ideology was never creed-specific but embraced cultural history in its totality, furthering the urge to construct a Hindu Rashtra. However, over the decades, the increasing affiliation of radical and conservative Hindu factionalists with this ideology has rendered it violent. Among the various subterfuges this kind of political Hindutva indulges in, the most successful one is 'soft Hindutva'. Every time a communal attack is perpetrated, minorities are massacred, or the rightful owners of 'Hindustan' demarcated, 'soft Hindutva' is pronounced. The ideal manifestation of this can be found in Vivekananda envisioning the Hindu man as having 'muscles of iron and nerves of steel', concocted through an amalgam of Kshatriya power and Brahmin intellect. Masculinism continues through the use of religious ideas, and this masculinism has embedded symbolic violence in Indian politics (Chakraborty, 2019). With the purpose of saving the Hindu Rashtra from Muslim infiltration and imposing the Hindu way of life as the hegemonic code of conduct, masculinity's entitlement to performing violence has been wedded with political and religious affiliations. In *Savarkar Samagra*, we find a telling instance of a twelve-year-old boy, steeped in the aforementioned masculine ideal, performing violence.

We vandalised the mosque to our heart's content and raised the flag of our bravery on it. We followed the war strategy of Shivaji completely and ran away from the site after accomplishing our task. (Savarkar 2003: 152-153)

It is interesting to note how Savarkar's pride in Maharashtrian nationalism is symbolised through Shivaji. This monarch, often projected as hyper-masculine, was hailed as the first Hindu ruler to have defeated Muslim invaders and consolidated a Hindu Rashtra. At the heart of masculinised violence is not only Hindutva but a deep sense of national pride. To affirm this correlation between religion endorsed nationalism and masculinity, I draw from Cynthia Enloe's 'Bananas, Beaches, and Bases' where she asserts, "Nationalism has typically sprung from masculinised memory, masculinised humiliation and masculinised hope" (Enloe 1990: 45).

Given the omnipresence of deep-seated, masculinised violence tied with soft Hindutva, the cardinal question to be raised is - how is violence of this sort implicated in political speeches post 2014?

Origin

R.W. Connell explicates in *Gender and Power* (1987) that hegemonic masculinity is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities. A continuous attack on the indigenous variety of masculinity during colonial rule in India led to the emergence of *Suddhi* (purification) and *Sangathan* (congregation) movements from the 1920s. The Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha spearheaded the movement asserting a form of militant Hindu community. Charu Gupta has identified four implications of these movements:

"Firstly, they constructed a full-bodied Hindu masculine male in opposition to the image of the emasculated/effeminate Hindu male. Secondly, they evoked the spectre of Muslim rapist, seeing him as the 'other'. Third, it allowed the space for an obsession with Hindu female 'chastity' and 'purity' and someone who needs to be protected from the aforementioned 'other'. And fourth, it was linked to a fear of mass-scale conversion and decline of the Hindu race" (Gupta 1998: 727-728).

In this context of Hinduised masculinity, we can briefly turn to the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* – texts that are known for being the

custodians of Hinduism in this land, offering the dynamics of *Maryada Purushottam* to that of masculinity metaphors replete in the 18-day long Kurukshetra war. While Rama has come to be identified as the 'masculine ideal' and serves as the protector against the perceived weakness of post-Independence secularism and the threat of Western and Islamic influence, the *Mahabharata* portrayed male potency and procreative ability as a means to attain high social status. The ideal man was either a Brahmin or a Kshatriya - the reason why Iravan and Ghatotkacha, in spite of being sons of Arjuna and Bhima respectively but from tribal women, were considered pariahs.

Methodology

This study, upon performing a content analysis of around 20 political speeches delivered in India between 2014-2022, used a qualitative feminist rhetorical approach of political actors' self-presentation rooted in a linguistic tradition. The data analysis involved comparing the self-presentation of political actors with contemporary communication styles of emotionality, dramatization, negativity etc. The most striking similarity among the various thematizations and theorizations was that of populism. Multifarious populist ideas such as anti-elitism and people-centrism were evident throughout the speeches - representing India as a land of Hindus, urging the Hindu man to step into the ideal of heteronormative, hegemonic masculinity in order to save the nation in crisis.

The following sections will briefly look at the various thematizations of the collected data and seek to answer the posed research question.

Hindutva and the Muslim 'Other'

This section investigates the xenophobic attitude towards Muslims by analysing a wide repertoire of verbal expressions of influential Right Wing politicians, gesturing to communal violence accompanied by connotations or overtones of Hindutva. In February 2022, in Uttar Pradesh, BJP MLA Mayankeshwar Singh made a speech where he

threatened Muslims with bodily harm. He said, “If Hindus in Hindustan wake up the beard will be pulled and made into a choti (a tightened braid). If you have to live in Hindustan you have to say 'Radhe Radhe', else, like those who went to Pakistan during the partition, you can go too... you have no use here.” This sort of an ultimatum points to nothing more but an extreme form of the 'us' versus 'them' bifurcation, that places the rightful appropriation of India by Hindus as the fulcrum of the argument. Drawing from theory, this otherization of Muslims has taken place by claiming them to be: (1) descendants of foreign invaders who destroyed religious symbols in India, (2) Pakistani agents in India, (3) intent on dominating the country demographically by reproducing without control and by converting Hindus to Islam, and (4) sacrilegious individuals who eat cows, which is a sacred entity in the Hindu religion.

India, proclaiming itself to be a democracy, situates elections centrally. In this context, a political party at the helm of affairs with Hindutva affiliation lends a communal colour to violence circumscribing elections. For instance, BJP leader, Parvesh Kumar, while campaigning for the Delhi Assembly elections in January 2020, targeted the anti-CAA campaigners, predominantly Muslims. He cautioned his Hindu brethren by reminding them of the violence in the valley perpetuated against Kashmiri Pandits. The depiction of Kashmir and violence in the valley highlights the 'multifaceted dehumanisation of Kashmiris' (Kaul 2018: 126) enabled by a neoliberal state's masculinist appeal under the guise of Hindutva. This is because Kashmir has been the litmus test of feminisation of territory.

Armed Masculinity: Sants and Sadhvis

The kind of Hindutva propagated by the *sants* and *sadhvis*, replete with political underpinnings, has a powerful masculine disposition. For instance, Yati Narasinghanand had remarked at the Haridwar Dharm Sansad,

In order to make India a Sanatan Rashtra we must wipe out all Muslims. Hindus need to take up arms (*talwar*) to protect themselves and their nation. More and more kids and the best

quality arms will only save the nation. Every man has to fight his own battle in order to protect his wife, children, and religion.

The blatant expression of violence embedded in this statement calls out for building a Hindu Rashtra based on the principle of formation of the state as a social institution. Furthermore, as women's bodies come up to represent national honour, "saffron-robed Hindu *sadhvis* stridently calling for aggressive action against (perceived) Islamic betrayers of the 'Hindu nation' ingeminates the notion that masculinity cannot be merely reduced to an imitation of "maleness" (Banerjee, 2006). For example, BJP MP Pragya Thakur, had urged Hindu women to stock up on weapons and use the same if Jihadis attack them. In the face of such radical Hindutva furore among women, Indian feminists are critical of the harmonious Hindu family and the necessity to belong to the same. But as Sikata Banerjee observes, 'not belonging' comes with a cost. She brings in the example of millions of refugee women suffering in the camps, devoid of protection, just because they 'do not belong' to the nation-state (2006: 79). Thus, this Hindutva model of chaste wives, celibate warriors and heroic mothers lends a supreme sense of feminine empowerment that is difficult to do away with.

Classifying Masculinisation of Politics

R.W. Connell has extensively theorised on masculinity through various models. Two of the most important are those of hegemony and complicity. The normative definitions of masculinity require all men to comply and situate themselves within the realm. It is the strategic and well-designed plan that coerces individual men, through socialisation, to comply. Complicity is the key to attaining hegemony in a society. It is evident through the following statement - On January 23, 2014 in Benaras, Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) alpha male, Narendra Modi, drew attention to his broad chest as he attacked Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav. "Netaji (Yadav) has said Modi does not have what it takes to make another Gujarat out of Uttar Pradesh. Do you know what making another Gujarat requires? ... It requires a chhappan inch ki chhati (56-inch chest)", declared BJP's prime ministerial candidate,

thumping his chest King Kong style. Modi's fixation with such vital statistics establishes affinity with a very exclusive macho league of gentlemen - from The Great Khali, Premchand Dogra to Arnold Schwarzenegger. The performance of complicity is latently present in this expression of '56-inch chest' whereby it draws from ideals of "how men should behave and how putative 'real men' do behave, as the cultural ideal" (Morrel 1998: 608). This exercise of complicity becomes so important that we have an entire band of followers, 'bhakts' who attempt to reach the threshold of becoming a true man. As the country's supremo endorses a macho league, effeminacy does not stand a chance. Apart from the relevance of Connell's theory, this statement also requires a careful scrutiny of the speaker. He is the perfect representation of Vivekananda's warrior monk model, briefly mentioned in the previous section.

Elaborating further, the official BJP website proudly advertises its supremo's life trajectory. Born in 1950, he set out for his *Bharat Bhraman* in 1967 at the tender age of 17, (a true representation of Hindu Varnasrama's first stage of Brahmacharya) travelling across Rishikesh and the Himalayas. Apart from the ideals of Hinduism, Modi's contested Brahmacharya can also be understood in the context of Connell's theorisation of 'distancing' (2005), meaning necessary oedipal separation from the mother. In 1972, he joined the RSS, an experience not unlike a spiritual awakening. This ethos is embedded in the belief that "The Pracharaks, an elite cadre of RSS workers draw on Vivekananda's notion of warrior monk as they embrace celibacy and dedicate themselves to building a strong Hindu India through education and example" (Banerjee 2006: 68). Therefore, Narendra Modi too, upon disowning his wife and breaking off all familial ties, becomes the ideal representation of the celibate warrior model, embodying a fusion of hegemonic masculinity and spiritual vigour.

Rape and Weapon: Markers of Masculinity

A country where nearly 86 rape cases are recorded daily (NCRB, 2021), the legal provisions and politics around it invite a brief analysis of what

Mulayam Singh Yadav had said after the amendment of 376E of the IPC, post the Mumbai gang rape case (2013). He had, very blatantly, questioned the need to hang boys in a rape case if they are simply high on libidinal energy. On the other hand, Trinamool Congress MP and Tollywood actor Tapas Paul was in the middle of a controversy on June 30, 2014 after he was caught on camera threatening CPI(M) workers, talking of killing them and having their women raped if any of his party workers were attacked at Chowmatha village in Tehatta, Nadia. He said, 'If any opponent (of the Trinamool) touches any Trinamool girl, any father, any child, I will destroy his entire family. I will unleash my boys, they will rape them, rape them! (*Aamar chheleder dhukiye debo, rape kore chole jaabe, rape kore chole jaabe!*). While the former throws light on the ultimate entitlement of Hindu men to rape and get away with it easily, the latter evinces the concept of honour attached to the women's body which, upon being violated, will bring pride to the opposing faction.

The gun is assumed to be a penis-symbol, alongside being a weapon. This has its roots in the development of a conventional masculine culture through gun magazines with models in check shirts and boots (Connell, 2005). It was in the context of violence and attacks on the police during BJP's march to the West Bengal secretariat on September 13, 2022 that TMC MLA, Madan Mitra's comments stirred controversy. He said, 'If there is an instruction from the party's higher-ups, it won't take more than 10 minutes to thrash those who were involved in hooliganism and vandalism, attacked government properties, threatened TMC and the administration (during the march) and to teach them the lesson they deserve. We can retaliate with double the force of the attackers. We can send two boys on a bike who will hurl four crude bombs, which will make all these people who indulge in tall talks scamper away. 'Thus, Mitra's explicit reference to 'hurling crude bombs' engenders the core principle of the hegemonic masculinity model. That is how heterosexual males are bestowed with the responsibility to uphold hegemonic masculinity ideals to run corporations and state.

Sher ne Chhore Baagh: Understanding Violence

The practice and performance of violence revolves around the intention of mostly purposely harming, tormenting or instigating trauma in certain individuals and communities. Violence impacting everyday life and momentous social change occupies a central location in Sociology. On the occasion of his 72nd birthday on September 17, 2022, PM Narendra Modi released eight cheetahs brought from Africa's Namibia in the Kuno National Park of Madhya Pradesh under a landmark project, seven decades after the animal was declared extinct in the country. In the evening, he launched the National Logistics Policy in Delhi, where speaking about the project, the PM said, 'Once upon a time we used to release pigeons, but now we release cheetahs (*Ek samay tha jab hum pehle kabootar chhodte the, aaj cheetah chhod rahe hai*).' On the face of it, this political commentary might seem to merely be an endorsement of wildlife conservation. But the symbolism embedded in the image of the 'cheetah' represents an extreme form of masculine pride. The fact that language can express symbolic violence was also confirmed by Bourdieu. He did not consider language merely as a method of communication, but as revealing the rules and power relations of the cultural sphere (Sim, 2017).

The fact that the BJP is at the helm of affairs, entitles the supremo to vaunt off their schemes and policies using a masculine symbol equivalent to Connell's theorisation of heterosexual males vowed to 'Live Fast Die Young' theory. For instance, "If you have a fight and you win, you're a hero" (Connell 2005: 99). This ethos also operates in the animal kingdom with male cheetahs contesting to appropriate the mating partner. Furthermore, the media portrayal of this act equated it with the *Sher ne Chhore Baagh* (a lion setting free a tiger) allegory, with soaring masculine sentiments.

However, strategies are used to neutralise such asymmetry. On multiple occasions, the nation has witnessed an emotional side of the fiercely alpha masculine, formidable character that is Narendra Modi. On May 20, 2014, at the Central Hall of the Parliament, Narendra Modi got emotional after he was elected as the leader of the BJP parliamentary party. He went teary-eyed during his 30-minute speech, while

addressing the nation as a newly elected PM. He paid tribute to former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee and recalled how he used to acknowledge him after BJP won a majority in Gujarat in the 1990s. Modi quoted,

“Vajpayee patted me on my back and praised me for the number we secured. Back then, in his speech, he also listed his priorities and promised to work for the poor, women, youths, oppressed and deprived” (Kumar, 2021). The idea was simply to counterpoise their puissance to uphold a grounded image. Expressions of physical violence are incomplete without blatant reference to weaponry. An instance is Pragya Thakur's reference to using kitchen knives for self-defence or Yati urging Hindu men to use the talwar. Furthermore, the idea is that “violence is OK when it is justified, and it is always justified when the other man starts it” (Connell, 2005).

Conclusion

This study has spoken about the various kinds of violence metaphors replete in political speeches, where most of them align with Bourdieu's definition of symbolic violence. It is our habitus that promotes masculinism and the symbolic violence associated with it (Chakraborty, 2019). An interesting instance is the Prime Minister's mass mobilising speeches. They are the perfect amalgam of emotions and soft Hindutva, quite distinct from the other party affiliates and their vexed statements directing threats. His careful usage of language attempts to neutralise the provocative comments made by his colleagues but is nothing more than a guise for the tenebrous symbolism of violence. To that end, it may be asserted that, far from being natural, the luridly retro ideas and constructions around masculinity have initiated a testosterone rush and fuelled patriarchy, linked inextricably with Hindutva and the violence implicated in political speeches.

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Senior Citizens in Kolkata: A Sociological Study of Elderly Members Residing in Old Age Homes

Ayushmita Samanta

Ageing is a complex part of the life cycle that can be extensively defined as the process of growing old. It is essentially a multi-dimensional process that affects almost every aspect of human life. There is no fixed definition of ageing. It varies from scholar to scholar. Edward (1960) defined ageing as the element of time in 'living'. According to him, ageing is a part of living. Ageing begins at birth and terminates with death. It cannot be arrested unless we arrest life. The socio-cultural and economic reasons play an important role in an individual's life in growing old. Lack of attention, love, support and time makes the elderly feel lonely and abandoned. It has always been said that when a child fails to take care of his or her elderly members, "old age home" is the best place. However, that is not the scenario and it is explored through this research which is heavily guided by the studies undertaken.

One of the reasons given for moving to an old age home is the nuclear family system. The tradition of joint family in Indian society, which was founded on love, affection, and tradition, is slowly fading. It has also changed the lives of many families. People now believe in "nuclear family" rather than combined or joint. It has forced people to live with their own families, which include their husband, wife, and children. This culture has also had an impact on each individual's emotions. Parents today are afraid of their children, which is why they have begun to refuse to live with them (children). As a result, they have begun to reside in an old age home (Lalan, 2014).

Bharti (2010) carried out an empirical study in Hyderabad where she found that a majority of the elderly rely on their children for their daily

requirements and necessities. The main reason for moving to the old age homes was that most of them were not receiving any personal care from their family members. The study also concludes that, despite their age, some elderly people remain active by participating in various activities. Rishi Panday, Manisha Kiran, Prashant Srivastava, Saurav Kumar (2015) worked on a cross-sectional research design to assess and compare the quality of life of elderly persons living in old age homes and within the family setup. The findings of the study indicate that people living in old age homes have relatively better health because health facilities are available, doctors come for checkups, on a weekly basis. Findings also indicate that physical health, psychological health, and environmental health of those people living in old age homes was better than the people living in family setup. Social health was better for those respondents who were living with a family setup in comparison. Overall, elderly people living in old age homes had a good quality of life in comparison to elderly people living with family.

An old age home always brings forth a negative idea. The main aim of this research is to show the positive side of old age homes and how abandonment by children or lack of care is not a reason to reside in old age homes. Instead, the willingness of an individual to live a happy and independent life in the last years of his life paved a way to the popularity of old age home.

A qualitative research method using an exploratory study was conducted because this was found to be most appropriate for the present topic. This study ventures into a new arena of investigation of examining the quality of life of the elderly people who willingly chose to reside in old age homes, thereby this study is exploratory in nature.

This study, through the use of semi-structured interview schedule including both open and close-ended questions, aims to focus on different critical aspects of the lives of elderly residents of old age homes, like the reason that made them reside in the home, the difference between a senior living and an old age home, how they spend their time, whether they have any regrets or not and are proper health care facilities and social security available etc., to explore the old age home as an alternative space of socialization for the elderly people, focusing on how

it is both a regressive as well as emancipatory space. It would have been very monotonous for the old people to answer a fixed set of questions. Moreover, many questions crop up during an interview session which cannot be pre-planned; thus, rather than a strictly structured question schedule, a more flexible option like a semi-structured interview is more feasible.

A sample size of 10 (male-5, female-5), in the age group of 60-80 years, all belonging to the upper-middle class, residing “voluntarily” in the luxurious old age home of the Rajarhat known as “*Snehodiya*” was selected using the non-probability purposive sampling method. The fundamental questions this paper seeks to explore are as follows: (a) Why have the old people residing in old age homes decided to stay away from their homes? (b). How have their lives changed since they decided to stay in old age homes? (c). What is the “elderly’s” perception of life in old age homes? Therefore, the main aim of the study is to acquire a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the lives of the elderly who have voluntarily chosen to stay in the old age homes and to highlight the minute differences between an old age home and the experience of living with families for better understanding. After reviewing some existing literature, it was found that the elderly people in society were mostly neglected by their immediate family members and they were forced to stay in old age homes. However, it makes no mention of the elderly citizens who have voluntarily chosen to live in old age homes. The researcher's goal is to fill this gap in the prevalent literature by demonstrating an individual's willingness to live away from their own home in order to find peace and serenity and live an independent life of their own will and choice.

The dissertation has four chapters. The first chapter begins with a brief introduction on the topic and the nature of study, along with the objectives and research questions of the study to give a brief idea of the topic.

The second chapter includes the review of literature, whereby, theoretical arguments have been formulated on the basis of the understanding derived from reading materials of relevance written by prominent scholars, sociologists, anthropologists, and authors. This

section has been divided into several themes namely, dimensions of ageing, establishment of old age homes, quality of life and challenges faced by the elderly in the context of changing family norms.

The third chapter focuses on old age and old age homes and the establishment of such residences for the senior citizens. Here, a clear distinction between an old age home and senior living is highlighted for better understanding.

The fourth chapter talks about old age in the contemporary world, that is, how with changing times, with modernisation and urbanisation, the elderly people have accepted the changing norms and values in the society. It highlights the reasons behind the willingness of the elderly people to reside in old age homes and that gives us a completely different perspective.

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Coping with Death–How Does the Society Deal with The Dead

Jashwoshi Dhar

Death is a phenomenon which leads to the permanent termination of all life-sustaining activities in an organism. Very intriguingly, the life processes are such that the minute one is born one also begins to die. Death is the ultimate destiny that no human being can deny. The only thing common to any and every society is the concept of birth and death. In society, the nature of death and humanity's awareness of its mortality has for millennia been a concern of the world's religious traditions and philosophical enquiry. Even though death is an irreversible process, generations of mankind have endeavoured to look beyond death and bring the dead back to life. Coping with the sense of loss caused by the death of a close one requires huge personal strength and very often can have an emotional or psychological impact on a person. Death and how one deals with death has a direct impact on society in many ways and has therefore always been a subject of discussion, research and repeated reference.

Death is the focal point of many traditions and organizations. People tend to perceive death, their own and that of others, based on the values that their culture upholds. These customs generally relate to how the dead are taken care of. Each culture has its unique traditions and rituals surrounding death. For example, in a Hindu society, the dead are burnt and the ashes are poured into the Ganges, which is considered to be a holy river. Among the Christians, the dead are entombed in a wooden casket and then buried under the soil, upholding the fact that human beings rise from dust and return to dust. The Muslims also bury their dead because burying the dead in the ground is regarded as the correct way of respecting dead bodies. People in Tibet however have a different way of disposing of the dead, i.e., through sky burial by keeping

the dead body on top of a mountain or a cliff. According to Tibetan culture, the corpse is allowed to be eaten by birds or nature may cause it to decompose. The function of the sky burial is simply to dispose of the remains in as generous a way as possible.

Humanity has always been fascinated with the concept of death where they could not find legitimate answers to their unending questions. Hence, certain cultures made their conceptions about death and what happens after. The most famous are the ancient Egyptians for their fascination with death and the afterlife whereby they mummify their dead and build exquisite tombs. The tradition of “Famadihana” in Madagascar is another such example where the people open the tombs of the dead every few years to rewrap them in fresh burial clothes. This is done to speed up the process of decomposition and push the soul towards an afterlife. In some Nordic countries, many cultures have used water as a burial ground. They set the bodies adrift in “death ships” either along a river or sent out in the ocean with the rationale of giving the bodies back to the gods or places that are most valued by the people in that area. In contrast, we also have the case of South Korea where people cremate their dead and have taken a step further by turning the ashes of the deceased into beads. These beads can be placed inside glass vases or even opened in dishes. This is a way to keep a loved one close, even after they have passed away. Understanding how societies and cultures deal with the dead provides us with an access to understanding these societies and cultures in themselves. Therefore, death does not stand still. Our relationship with death changes in a slow fashion and is often undetectable, but there are always changes and developments in the way humanity deals with death. This essay tries to pose the questions: How does the society deal with the dead? Are the dead erased from society or do they remain a part of society in some sense?

Data from various sources have been analysed to bring out the importance of death rituals necessary to help individuals cope with grief. Content analysis has also been used for the study. I have used this method for collecting data from different articles, posts, blogs and e-news sites to enhance my study and to gather detailed information which helped me to analyse the topic better. The qualitative method

which has been used for this study is semi-structured interviews. The interview framework defines open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed information. For this method, face-to-face and telephonic interviews were conducted. Anonymity was promised to anyone who accepted to be interviewed if they so wished.

Death ritual offers a respite and allows time for society to accommodate the dramatic change. The acknowledgement of an individual's death comes slowly. Despite the lack of his physical presence, an image of him persists which is too strong to sever at an instant. Other than the extinction of the physical body, death leads to a blotting of the social identity. Ritual in this sense is a collective response to the attack and a reassurance that life will go on even after the loss of an individual. According to Van Genepp (1966), the rites of passage prepare a person to take on a new position or assume new responsibilities. The person has taken a new social identity and therefore he must be treated accordingly. According to him, regeneration is a law of life where the societies must be re-energized which is ensured by the rites of passage. For Radcliffe Brown, death rituals forge the collective expressions of feeling appropriate to the situation. People signal their commitment to each other and the society. Rituals therefore work to strengthen the social bonds. (Radcliffe Brown 1968: 186)

The Covid 19 pandemic, has played an important role in negotiating, re-affirming, and re-interpreting the previously dominant forms of spatial constellations associated with death and bereavement (Ghosh et al., 2022). It has been noticed that the person who has lost a close one during the pandemic has been struggling with complicated forms of grief. Some of them have been diagnosed with psychosomatic disorders. This gave rise to the concept of disenfranchised grief which is defined as the loss which is felt as not being socially validated or publicly acknowledged. In this form of grief, one might not recognize their right to grieve in the context of social support by reducing the opportunity to freely express their emotions and to obtain feelings of support and compassion. When a loss does not meet society's demands, the grief remains unrecognized and undervalued. Therefore, the person might feel that he has been denied his right to grieve. The bereavements which

are not socially acceptable cause a trigger to the emotions which often lead to disenfranchised grief. One of the main reasons for such a type of grief is the devaluing of mourning rituals which was seen at the time of COVID (Albuquerque et al., 2021)

When people lose their loved ones in a natural disaster, it gives rise to complicated grief disorder. Losing a loved one during a natural disaster generally means that the death is sudden, and unexpected. The suffering of a person increases as they are generally denied the basic funeral rites. People unable to portray their grief, suffer from complicated grief disorder. They usually require special treatment to help them get through the shock of the death of a loved one. (Gesi et al., 2021) Death ceremonies and grief rituals all over the world have changed. However, the grief remains the same. Human beings tend to keep their loved ones alive in their memory and to honour them in various ways they deem fit. Death rituals are immensely helpful in providing us with a sense of control in a situation where we have none at all. Hence, death rituals are cathartic in nature. (Wallace, 2022)

To understand death and how to cope with it, a proper historical study of death is required. Right from the Paleolithic ages to the modern ages, death has undergone various changes. The Hebrews believed in the concept of the existence of the soul. The Egyptians, however, stated the existence of the dual soul – the *ka* and the *ba*. The *ka* was the spirit that resided in close association with the body whereas the *ba* was the vitalizing soul that lived on in the world of the dead. The conception of the dual soul was also held by the ancient Chinese, who believed that one part of the soul continued to exist after the death of the body. During the Middle Ages, death was accepted as a destiny that was shared by everyone, while still being feared. Since death was a phenomenon that could not be explained, as a defence, the medieval people faced death together as a community. From the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, Europe experienced new waves of thought in the directions of economics, arts, social, scientific and political. A new self-awareness and emphasis on humans as the centre of the universe further fuelled the fear of dying. By the seventeenth century, there was a shift from religious thought to scientific thought towards death and dying. To seek

answers regarding death, lay people shifted from the disunited church towards the medical profession. Science was overriding all religious explanations. In the modern age, modern medicine is playing a very crucial role in the way people die and how their death is perceived by relatives and friends. Medical technology has caused death to become a de-personalised process. In modern societies, the bereaved person suffers from a paucity of ritualistic conventions in the mourning period. He experiences grief less frequently but more intensely since his emotional involvements are not diffused over an entire community but are usually concentrated on one or a few people (Blauner, 1992). Therefore, death has had a shift from the familiar surroundings of home and family to the sterile surroundings of hospitals and strangers. Death has become increasingly institutionalised: most of us will die in a hospital or long-term care institution attended to by professional strangers (Exley, 2004). The institutionalization of death has not reduced the fear of dying. Presently, for the living, the fear of death causes the fear of separation, of not being there for the loved ones. For the dying, it involves the prospect of facing death without the presence of loved ones.

All experiences from birth to death, no matter how personal it is, always have a social dimension inherent in them. The most personal thoughts and emotions are largely products of our social experiences, our social environment and the social expectations that are thrust upon us. We thrive on others for our existence and therefore our death becomes a part of all those on whom we are dependent. People, social norms, social institutions, and social organisations are in constant flux. Similarly, death is the ultimate form of impermanence. Even though a person who has expired will not directly contribute to positive social change, however, their death will bring about certain changes in the lives of others. It will cause modifications in patterns of existing relationships as well as the creation of new relationships. It may also help usher in new protocols and arrangements. This topic has tried to explore the existing structures of mourning and grieving with a reference to primary data on COVID-19 deaths. A commonality that has been found across cultures is that death rituals help in the grieving process. Death rituals help in the process of acknowledging the loss of a person. They also help

in providing a safe space for the mourners by legitimizing grief. Grief has varied impacts on people and, therefore the reactions that grief can trigger are also be varied in nature. However, two findings become evident. First, there are diverse needs of both individuals and collectives to cope with and make sense of loss and grief. Second, the significant role of the socio-cultural environment in the process of coping with grief. Death is a phenomenon that is personal and at the same time, it has the characteristic of being social. Death has a contradictory nature where death separates, but it also brings people together. Death separates in the sense that it makes a clear distinction between the mourners and the rest of the world. However, death also helps in forging ties in society.

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Motherhood, Marriage and Miscarriage: A Qualitative Study of Women's Experiences of Miscarriage

Kahinee Majumder

“Pregnancy, maternity and everything that has to do with getting and being pregnant has been surrounded by so many taboos and suffocating ideals that many women find it difficult to discuss the topic at all” (Winkler and Schonenberg 1989: 209). The experience of pregnancy loss may be subjective, but the stigma, shame and guilt attached to such loss is a familiar concern in most cultures of the world. In the *‘Obstetrics and the Newborn,’* miscarriage is defined as the process by which the products of conception are expelled from the uterus via the birth canal before the 28th week of gestation (Mackay and Beisher, cited in Leroy 1988: 13). In medical discourse, it is designated primarily in biological terms, even though there are significant sociological connotations embedded within it. For many women, it is a distinctly isolated, traumatic experience, accorded ‘little social and cultural support or recognition’ (Upton, 2019: 01). It is important to mention here that for the purpose of this research, the terms ‘miscarriage’ and ‘pregnancy loss’ have been used interchangeably. An argument for substituting the former with the latter has been presented later.

In a study conducted using the data of the National Family Health Survey (2015-16) and (2019- 21), it was found that the prevalence of miscarriage among Indian women has increased in both urban (by 8.5%) and rural (by 6.9%) settings during 2015-21. Even then, it remains one of the least understood and discussed phenomena in our country.

“Miscarriages do not occur solely in a uterus, but in a woman; and miscarriages do not occur solely in a woman, but in a family” (Cain et al., 1965, cited in Borg and Lasker 1982: 96). The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine lived experiences of miscarriage and locate them in the broader social context. It aims to understand the meanings patients attach to pregnancy loss and the nature of care they perceive as helpful. It also analyses the extent to which social institutions like family, marriage, kinship and the medical discourse matter in the recovery of women after miscarriage. Additionally, it debunks the societal stigmatization of miscarriage and the cultural patterns of blaming the mother for her pregnancy loss.

The primary data for this study was obtained using qualitative research methods. Five research participants from Kolkata were selected, who met the subsequent criteria: women who have undergone one or more miscarriages, men who have experienced the miscarriage of their partners, or healthcare professionals who have assisted families during their experience of miscarriage. In-depth, semi-structured interviews of these research participants were conducted to identify the unique meanings they attached to their experiences of pregnancy loss. Convenience and purposive sampling methods were employed for this study, given the potential sensitivity of the topic in everyday life. Secondary data, available in the form of existing research, WHO reports, literature and films, were also analysed before conducting the in-depth interviews, in order to structure the interview schedule. The recorded interviews were transcribed, coded and analysed to delineate a commonality of themes, which were then developed into the following sections.

Motherhood: Beyond the Maternal Ideal

The notion of an ideal mother dominates the narrative of all human cultures. From Christianity’s Virgin Mary to Hindu mythology’s Maiya Yashoda, the maternal ideal is inescapable for any woman, real or fictitious. These cultures celebrate motherhood as the most natural embodiment of womanhood, the ultimate state of fulfillment a woman

can achieve in her lifetime. This chapter refutes this popular notion of motherhood as the only destiny for all of womankind.

Contrary to popular belief, motherhood is exceedingly subjective. All women are not naturally sculpted to be great mothers. Their economic, social and emotional circumstances often shape the way they parent their children. It is wrong to assume that a mother will automatically prioritise her child's needs over her own. Successful parenting is about meeting the needs of both the parent and the child. In her fascinating book, 'Motherhood: The Second Oldest Profession', Erma Bombeck writes:

"Motherhood is not a one-size-fits-all, a mould that is all-encompassing and means the same to all people ... No mother is all good or all bad, all laughing or all serious, all loving or all angry. Ambivalence runs through their veins." (1983: 10).

Nevertheless, the ideal of unconditional maternal love continues to persist and reproduce unhealthy patterns of self-blaming among mothers who miscarry. One of my respondents, Deepti Saini who recently lost her baby, conveyed, "I am angry with myself and my body. Even though I don't want to, I can't help but think what a bad mother I must be. My body couldn't take care of her until she was ready to be born." Numerous descriptions of the experience of miscarriage illustrate how bereaved mothers look for 'flaws' in themselves to make sense of their loss.

Debjani Roy, who gave birth to her now four-year old after three miscarriages, recalls the experiences as the most traumatic years of her life. "For a long time, I believed I was causing my babies to die. I had an abortion many years ago, and I thought it was karma - that I was being punished for something I did when I was a dumb teenager. I kept thinking that I actually 'deserved' what was happening to me." The ideal of the devoted mother reinforces the cultural assumption that women are the most responsible for pregnancy loss, even if this loss is due to a completely unrelated medical or environmental factor.

The arguments put forth in this chapter could imply that the maternal ideal naturalizes motherhood and de-naturalizes pregnancy loss

through miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death. That reproduction is a 'natural process,' forges the naïve view that conception always leads to pregnancy, and pregnancy always leads to the birth of a baby. It ignores the fact that for several women, conception may not be natural, and for others, pregnancies may not last the full term. The notion thus serves to perpetuate the idea that a woman is 'unnatural' if she is not a mother.

The Aftermath of Pregnancy Loss: Marriage, Kinship and Rituals

This chapter addresses the carefully delineated roles of consanguineous and affinal kins, spouses or partners and families in the events of pregnancy and pregnancy loss. The notion of miscarriage as an isolated biological experience is a rather reductionist discourse prevalent in the global health arena. It ignores the social complexities of pregnancy loss as a phenomenon, triggering a gap between health policies and the daily life of women (van der Sijpt, 2010). According to David Schneider (1980: 24), "the relationship which is by birth or blood is real or true. It can never be severed. An ex-wife is possible. But an ex-mother is not".

This patriarchal obsession with 'blood' or 'carrying forward one's lineage' results in an incessant need to reproduce biologically, forcing women to undergo multiple pregnancy losses, even when warned against the possible risks of miscarriage. In the Indian milieu, miscarriage is embedded in socio-cultural connotations, kinship relationships and marital norms. When asked why she never considered adoption as an alternative after three consecutive miscarriages, Debjani Roy replied, "It was not that simple. My husband was never open to adoption. He said he would rather remain childless." So, to 'procreate' rather than 'parent' is considered more meaningful by some, and often most parents.

Most of the existing research on miscarriage does not take into account the differential roles played by consanguineous and affinal kins in the aftermath of pregnancy loss. All five of my research participants reported a stark difference in the approach and care they received from their own family (consanguineous kins) after the loss of pregnancy, as opposed to their husband's family (affinal kins). Respondent Sangita

Sengupta lived with her husband and affinal kins in Delhi. When she conceived for the first time, she planned on coming to Kolkata (her natal home) for her delivery. Around the 20th week, doctors diagnosed Sangita with jaundice and her parents brought her to Kolkata. Twenty-five days later, she had a late-term miscarriage. Sangita's in-laws blamed her family for the miscarriage and believed her decision to go to Kolkata was a mistake. It is clear from Sangita's account that much like a marriage, which is a conjugal arrangement between two families, pregnancy loss becomes an affair of families rather than individual partners.

In a similar way, the marital relationship between a husband and a wife largely impacts the way couples rehabilitate to life, post pregnancy loss. While communication is absolutely essential, it is difficult to open up to each other in situations of loss, even if the loss is shared. Although none of my research participants' husbands agreed to an interview, which itself says a lot, the general assumption is that men tend to bottle up their grief as they believe it is their 'job' to support their partners.

"By situating meanings of pregnancy loss within the complex dynamics of marriage and kinship, pregnant bodies are argued to be social bodies—the actions and interpretations of which shift along with social situations" (Notermans 2010: 381). A socio-cultural insight of miscarriage, especially in the context of India, may contribute to a better understanding of the experiences women undergo while coping with pregnancy loss.

Ritualization of Miscarriage

Anthropological evidence indicates that most societies have developed rituals for mourning the dead. However, losing a baby through miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death is often not viewed as 'proper' bereavement. Such loss tends to be devalued because there appears to be no person to grieve for. Birth and death, instead of being seen as two separate events, are treated as though one cancels out the other. But for the legitimization of mourning, there is obviously a need for the recognition of the dead baby as a person.

Empirical evidence, in addition to my own research, suggests that women often create their own rituals to navigate their loss. One such ritual is naming the baby, even if privately. It provides comfort by giving the baby the status of a real person. Even so, there exists a plethora of rituals in different cultures, like '*godh bhara*,' '*shaadh*,' or 'baby shower' which celebrate the forthcoming of an unborn child, giving it the status of a person before birth. It is only in the case of pregnancy loss, that the child loses its status as a real person and becomes a 'fetus.'

As a matter of fact, pregnancy loss is often 'de-ritualized.' In her narrative, Purnima Majumder states that when she was pregnant for the second time, her mother-in-law suggested that they do everything opposite to what was done the first time. "She was being superstitious. But the paranoia that I might lose my baby again made me not celebrate my *shaadh* (baby shower). No one in my family engaged in the rituals that are usually associated with pregnancy."

Purnima gave birth to a healthy daughter after two miscarriages, one neonatal death, two stillborn babies, and a decade of trying. She told me, "I met my husband on a trekking trip to Manali. When we sat down to discuss wedding details with our families, my father-in-law, a trained astrologer, predicted that our union although blessed would be troubled by problems of conceiving. I did not think much of it at the time. But my father-in-law was right to the tee, which is why when I finally had my daughter and he told me that I must sell her to someone else for her protection, I did not object. It was a simple ritual. My sister-in-law gave me an amount in return for my daughter." Although ceremonial, this ritual signifies the deep-rooted stigma against women who live through pregnancy loss. Such negative ritualization of pregnancy loss can be both harmful and counterproductive as they invalidate the feelings of grieving parents. The dichotomy between the ritualization of pregnancy and de-ritualization of pregnancy loss reinforces taboos against said loss.

Miscarriage and The Medical Discourse

Reproductive loss is predominantly located within the medical discourse; hence its meanings within this hegemonic discourse dominate its construction in the social world. The invalidation of grief by healthcare professionals may negatively influence the meanings women, their partners, and the general population attach to reproductive loss. Debjani Roy, one of the research participant had commented, "My gynaecologist went from calling my child "the baby" to "the fetus" in a matter of minutes. The insensitivity in her tone and the unbothered attitude left me feeling like there was never a baby, to begin with, that I was never going to be a mother."

A medicalized view of pregnancy loss frames miscarriage as a common and insignificant event, discrediting the emotional and psychological distress of grieving patients. The healthcare professionals, however, maintain that a medicalization of pregnancy loss is instrumental for their patient's recovery. Dr. Chandrima Dasgupta, an obstetrician-gynaecologist argues that "by telling my patients how common miscarriages are, I try to comfort them and minimize their self-blame." Ergo, a mismatch clearly exists between what patients perceive as meaningful assistance and what healthcare professionals anticipate as their patients' needs.

Hai and Sullivan argue, "because the nurse, doctor and aid are often among the first people to interact with the woman after the miscarriage, it is vital for them to understand the psychological dynamics of her experience and help her to cope with the situation. If the doctors are insensitive and dismissive, it increases her distress following her loss and may lead to depression or other types of mental illness" (1982: 89).

This chapter highlights the centrality of the medical discourse in influencing the experiences of patients as well as in shaping the social outlook toward pregnancy loss. The overt 'medicalization' of miscarriage is harmful to the psychological well-being of women who undergo the said experience. The medical discourse on pregnancy loss should rectify its ways and prescribe a more holistic approach to reproductive care.

Conclusion

From my qualitative research, it is possible to draw the following conclusions: what it means to be a 'mother' is distinctly subjective. The maternal ideology of motherhood as the natural calling of women, 'denaturalizes' pregnancy loss. It labels women who miscarry as 'unnatural' and flawed, propelling them into an unhealthy cycle of self-blaming. Even the usage of the term, "miscarriage" validates such a notion. It indicates that a mistake has been made by the person carrying the child. The term 'pregnancy loss' is a practical alternative that does not have the negative connotations of miscarriage and accurately conveys the reality of the situation.

Secondly, unlike the rather reductionist discourse of medical sciences that portray miscarriage as an isolated biological experience, my research argues that pregnancy loss is embedded in socio-cultural connotations, kinship relationships, marital norms and the patriarchal obsession with 'blood' or 'carrying forward one's lineage.' Furthermore, I have discussed the dual processes of ritualization (both positive and negative) and de-ritualization of miscarriage. The de-ritualization of miscarriage, whereby all rituals generally associated with the celebration of birth are suspended in the fear of repeating miscarriage, actually reinforces superstitions and taboos surrounding miscarriage.

Similarly, the overt 'medicalization' of miscarriage by gynaecologists, obstetricians, nurses and other healthcare professionals invalidates feelings of loss of their patients. A gap exists between what the medical care patients perceive as helpful and the care administered to them by professionals. There is a need for medical training of professionals in empathetic care that is essential post- pregnancy loss. Finally, the utilization of support groups, group therapy or counselling sessions may be recommended to effectively deal with the grief and loss that comes with pregnancy loss.

This qualitative study de-stigmatizes the diverse experiences of miscarriage and arrives at a general, social understanding of the phenomena. Its findings can be incorporated into the training of

doctors, nurses, midwives, and people working in alternative health care to ensure better reproductive care of women.

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Relevance of Climate Change and Sustainable Development Research for Environmental Policy-Making: A Literature Review

Mahima Hazarika

In the current Anthropocene epoch, climate change which was once considered a problem of the distant future has undoubtedly transformed into a daunting challenge and one of the biggest global threats to human health of the 21st century. The phenomenon of climate change has transcended beyond a mere subject matter for debate or even study material for academic curriculum. It has become a reality - a fight for survival and existence, impacting millions in this planet.

Environmental degradation and climate change is largely a human-made catastrophe, disguised under the claims of progress and development. In the recent decades, there has been a quantum leap in the population of the world along with consumption levels, yet the development models have remained the same. The exploitation of high-value natural resources has led to an interlinked web of problems. The intensity of the damage is so overpowering that even nature's tendency to always establish equilibrium seems inadequate. However, this is also an era where we have the necessary technological resources and ability to tap the potential of existing knowledge systems and urgently institutionalize stringent levels of mitigation and avoid further damage.

In 1949, Mira Behn, an ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi remarked of the short-sighted policies of “development” being followed in India in mindless emulation of the West:

“The tragedy today is that educated and moneyed classes are altogether out of touch with the vital fundamentals of existence — our Mother Earth, and the animal and vegetable population which she sustains. This world of Nature's planning is ruthlessly plundered, despoiled and disorganized by man whenever he gets the chance. By his science and machinery, he may get huge returns for a time, but ultimately will come desolation. We have got to study Nature's balance, and develop our lives within her laws, if we are to survive as a physically healthy and morally decent species”.

Article 1 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) defines this persisting issue of our century as a change in climate over time, whether due to natural variability or as a result of human activity. Climate change is observed as a change which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and an addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods. Shifts in the climate and atmospheric conditions have always occurred throughout the history of our planet, although in the last 10,000 years this had unusually stabilized. This gave way for civilizations to industrialize, advance in areas of agriculture and transport, and reach the present desired stage of development. However, there was a price to pay for this; it led to the acceleration of climate change at an unprecedented rate of unknown magnitude.

The proposed themes for exploration through a review of literature will involve, a) tracing the historical change in global production and consumption models as a cause of climate change, b) the disproportionate effect on women and marginalized communities, and c) importance of local indigenous knowledge systems in policy making that have been marginalized by neo-liberalism and colonialism.

Through the 1960s and 1970s, the scientific community believed that changes in the global temperature would take thousands of years to take effect. In the 1980s, this changed when renowned researchers and professors like James Hansen, Stephen Schneider and Bert Bolin concluded that climate change had arrived as a concrete threat

knocking at the doors of the present. The late 1980s saw a shift in environmental discourses with growing focus on sustainable development, that led to the recognition that environmental problems are fundamentally social problems, but are also simultaneously global problems too (Szerszynski, Lash and Wynne, 1996; Beck, 1999). This change left hope for a qualitative shift in the relationship between human, society and nature. Following this, a turning point for the field of climate science and policy was the founding of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988, whose aim was to analyze the scientific information relevant to determine the causes, risks, environmental, social and political impacts of climate change by publishing timely reports. Since the first IPCC Assessment Report in 1990, a deeper understanding of the interactive processes in the ecosystem that govern climate change has evolved. Along with this, climate models have progressed rapidly to acknowledge increasing evidence of anthropogenic influences on climate change and observed the deadly impact on human life.

At a basic level of understanding, causes of climate change have been attributed to the rapid increase in emissions of greenhouse gases, especially carbon dioxide, which trap the Sun's energy in our atmosphere, thus causing the 'greenhouse effect'. These shifts are partly natural, but post- Industrial Revolution, human activities have been the root cause of these ecological changes; primarily due to the mass exploitation of natural resources such as burning fossil fuels like coal, gas and oil for the production of energy and other contributing factors like deforestation, industrial processes and agricultural processes. After tracing the historical trajectory to understand the when and how of climate change, a comprehensive sociological analysis of production and consumption models in a linear economy becomes important to understand why ecological degradation is constantly being fuelled, especially in a context where more developed nations are successfully exporting the effects of their environmental problems to less developed nations. Ariel Salleh (1997) gives the notion of a metabolic rift that "denotes the effect of a specific mode of production, namely industrial capitalism, which destroys the humanity-nature metabolism in an endless pursuit of profits." She connects this deep-

rooted problem with the race toward resource accumulation creating transcontinental rift, and the extensive ecological footprint that has destabilized global climate patterns. Apart from the exploitative models of production, the rapid growth of our population is making it impossible to address serious environmental challenges because too many people combined with insufficient methods of creating and distributing resources ultimately leads to loss of life and ecology. Scientists may not know the “carrying capacity” of the Earth yet, but it is sure that the answer is not indefinite because more people mean more carbon footprints, waste and emissions.

This particular section of the paper offers insight into dual accountability – one from the production point of view which covers industrial resource extraction processes and one from the consumption point of view which highlights consumer driven behaviors promoting 'planned obsolescence'. Both of these recurring issues have been tackled in 'The Story of Stuff' by Annie Leonard. (2007)

Secondly, the social dimensions of climate change cannot be ignored because even though the epicenter of this crisis may be found in largely industrial processes, the tremors can be felt across all spheres of life such as health, food security, and natural disasters. Scientists have predicted that climate change will cause over 250,000 deaths between 2030 and 2050. Our planet is a holistic ecosystem where everything is connected; changes in one area can influence changes in all the others. It is becoming impossible to contain the effects of climate change which now include, among others intense droughts, water scarcity, severe fires, rising sea levels, flooding, melting polar ice, catastrophic storms and declining biodiversity. The number of reported weather-related natural disasters has tripled globally, leading to damaged homes and commercial establishments, lack of fresh water and sanitation, reduced crop yields and malnutrition. In order to understand which strata of society gets impacted by climate change most devastatingly and disproportionately, this paper undertakes a brief look at three categories – a) women, b) developing nations, and c) marginalized indigenous communities.

This calls for an urgent need to analyze already existing research in the field of climate science from a sociological lens to facilitate sustainable environmental policy-making. This dissertation aims to understand the current status of the discourse of climate change and unearth its challenges with solution-oriented policy-making. The goal of this paper is to establish the relevance of climate change and sustainable development research in enhancing the current global policy-making standard with a view to understand the alternatives available to cope with the phenomena of climate change. It draws upon literature on climate change to dwell upon, a) a historical understanding of the problem of climate change, b) a sociological understanding of the different themes, and c) global coping strategies.

Going beyond the solutions that we find in existing research and institutions, the paper also draws focus on the importance of indigenous communities and sustainable knowledge systems that were otherwise marginalized due to western liberalism and capitalism. Effective policy-making can be facilitated by a total restructuring and reconstruction of our collective conscience, which has to begin with local initiatives with a global vision addressing every human relationship with its extended environment, including nature and every other living form on Earth. At a time when humanity has long forgotten to live sustainably, it is very important that we document these endangered legacies of sustainable practices, which can be an effective way of mitigating climate change. The worldview of the indigenous people, their collective values have lessons of balance, tolerance, inclusion that are vital for perpetuating sustainable living conditions based on connectedness with nature, society, self and the continuity of existence through space and time. To be able to merge the multi-faceted tenets of sustainability from both the developed and the developing world standpoint is an important requirement to ensure successful decision-making.

It is assumed that the review of literature will reveal a number of hitherto unaddressed aspects, since it creates a firm foundation for advancing knowledge and development of a theoretical framework. This work attempts to situate the research question within the larger

scholarly conversation and emphasize how that particular scholarly work contributes to the conversation of climate change. It follows an integrative review method which is helpful in integrating different kinds of scientific, academic and sociological literature offering an interdisciplinary perspective. A creative collection of data may not have enabled the inclusion of all articles ever published on the topic but has rather simplified the process of combining perspectives and insights from different fields or research traditions. This work, thus provides a sociological understanding of the challenges embedded within climate change with the help of existing research for the larger goal of supplementing global policy making.

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Abortion in Bihari Community: Perspectives from Kalimpong, West Bengal

Pranjal Shah

This research presents a study on the illusion of abortion and sex-selective abortion in the Bihari community of Kalimpong. It has demonstrated their experience and changes brought by education and migration in the policy and practice of sex-selective abortion by incorporating other important aspects like kinship, marriage, family type, culture etc. The analysis of the research topic has been considerably influenced by the studies carried out by Mehribon Abdullaeva (2012), R. Pushpa Namdeo (2017) and Tejasha Kalita (2018) on abortion and women. The research question of the study is about the changes brought by education and migration in the Bihari community of Kalimpong that affected their decision-making process regarding abortion in general and sex-selective abortion in particular. The major query of the research is the role of the family, culture and money in abortion. Qualitative research method has been used as a methodology with semi-structured interviews. The profile of the respondents varied between the age range of 18-75, as women from three generations were interviewed. 6 (six) respondents were interviewed in Lava, Kalimpong among the women of the Bihari community.

While abortion is legal in India, it is a crime to abort a pregnancy solely because the foetus is female. In India, selective abortion of female foetus, kills over one million annually. "In some areas the ratio of females to males has dropped to less than 800:1000" (Ahmad 2010: 13-29). According to Mehribon Abdullaeva (2012), abortion is restricted by law, cultural and religious traditions and the scarcity of medical resources, especially in developing countries. It can play different roles

for different communities. In the case of sex-selective abortion in India, it is very common to abort a female foetus as there is a desire for sons. Hence this practice is also shaped culturally. Apart from culture, other factors like marriage, migration, lack of education, dowry systems, family, etc. influence the decision of the women about their body. According to R. Pushpa Namdeo (2017), women's empowerment in society and family are closely linked to decision-making influences. These systems embedded in Indian society make marriage a challenge to the parents which leads to a reduced desire to have a girl child. So, educated women have more decision-making ability than uneducated women. Social issues like dowry, makes the marriage of a girl a big problem for the parents (Kalita, 2018). The interconnection between marriage, son preferences, costs incurred to marry off girls, etc., leads to sex-selective abortions in many communities of India.

Why Abortion? Role of Education, Local Culture and Money

This section examines the reasons behind abortion in the Bihari community, focusing on unintended pregnancy and the changes brought by education, finance and culture. Women in this community believe that the main reason for abortion and sex-selective abortion is due to their financial position. For example, one of the respondents mentioned, "Abortion is wrong but in today's time coming from a middle-class family we cannot afford to raise 7-8 children. Bearing the expense of each child's education is very difficult". Social issues like dowry and the perception that sons take over the family, makes the marriage of a girl a big problem for the parents. Education is not given to women due to the pressure of dowry, making it difficult for them to pursue higher education. The Bihari community in Kalimpong has culture and rituals that are practiced by all women who belong to families with certain social prestige. This cultural preference for sons has been driving recourse to abortion in India, as women carrying female foetuses may decide to terminate their pregnancies. Rituals such as Bhaiduj, Chauth, Bahura, and Chath puja are performed for the sons, leading to insecurities among the women who didn't have sons.

Education became a tool and agent of social change that promoted new knowledge, values and ways of improving human condition. Many women have aborted on their own will by going against the society and families' opinions. The most important details in this text are that education has brought huge changes in the Bihari community among the women and their perspectives on abortion in general and sex-selective abortion in particular. For instance, one of the women said, "Education has helped women to take bold steps which were regarded as taboo previously. Also, previously women in our community had more than 5-6 children because of lack of knowledge about abortion and contraception which has changed now". Due to societal, socio-economic and cultural conventions and practices, the preference for sons over daughters has been a serious problem. However, women have been able to overcome them with the aid of education, which has led to their independence and importance in society. All these developments have empowered women to speak up for their bodies and make their own decisions.

Decision Making and Negotiation

Education has empowered women to make decisions for their life and body. This section explores the changes in their decision-making process and the role of their family in influencing them. A woman's decision was crucial to abortion and it had two sides. First, it was necessary that women took their own decisions to abort or not to go for abortion. This also pertained to sex-selective abortion. Two opinions were revealed, on the one hand older women had no choice of taking their own decision and the middle-aged women had a mix of opinions. One of the women had to abort twice due to the financial situation who stated, "I had to abort twice because of the unforeseen pregnancy and my decision to avoid having additional children was due to my financial situation." Another one having done a prenatal test when she was pregnant with her third child said, "I did a prenatal test when I was pregnant with my third child. Thankfully it was a son so I didn't have to abort but if it was a girl I would have gone for abortion". Both the cases

revealed a decision that was empowering on the one side and unethical on the other. The young women of the community were quite clear about what they wanted and were completely opposed to sex-selective abortion. Women have often had to compromise with regard to their education over marriage due to financial and family issues. This had resulted in women not working outside the households and being manipulated by the family, but the women of young generation were clear about their ambition. Lately, all married women were giving importance to education over marriage for their children. Most of the women living in Kalimpong choose to stick to their decision, while only educated women in Bihar were able to fight against their family and make their choices.

Therefore, there has been a significant shift in how the three generations of women in the Bihari community of Kalimpong make decisions. Women have gone from having no rights over their bodies to assuming personal responsibility for their actions. A few instances of sex-selective abortion occurred in Bihar rather than Kalimpong under the influence of families were mentioned. Women's decision-making process has been affected by education, culture, family and other factors. There is a positive change among women of younger generation but still women have to struggle to negotiate for basic rights.

Impact of Migration on Abortion

Migration has been a major factor in globalization, affecting families and individuals. This section focuses on the role of migration among women of Kalimpong who have migrated from Bihar and settled in West Bengal, for over 50 years. The study highlights its connection with abortion and free will of women. Migration has affected reproductive outcomes due to different socio-economic and cultural contexts, changes in the affective and conjugal status of women, and life conditions. Migration and cultural integration have given women in Kalimpong more freedom and authority, allowing them to take decisions regarding their bodies without being influenced by their family. The Bihari women of Kalimpong lead two distinct lives in two locations. Bihari women who

were born and brought up in Kalimpong were more radical with a very liberal outlook on abortion and sex-selective abortion. Whereas, the situation of the women was very different when they visited their hometown in Bihar. For example, one of my respondents said, “There are many restrictions on girls about their dressing sense, when I visit my hometown, I am expected to wear kurti. My mother is educated and got an offer in Bihar for a job, but my family did not allow her to work which I think would have been different if she was out of Bihar”. In contrast another respondent said, “As we have migrated, we are getting our education and freedom to do job and help our parents. My sister is handling our family business. So, migration has a huge role to play for the change in our family system and values because of cultural assimilation”.

Therefore, women who migrated have more independence because of migration and being able to work outside their home has given them a sense of authority. People were still conservative in Bihar which restricted them in many things. Caste has come up as an important factor for women's freedom in Bihar. Most lower caste women were not able to avail education and could not take decisions for they remained under the influence of their family. Migration has played an integral part in bringing change in the lives of Bihari women. They had two distinctive lifestyles in two places, one was more conservative that puts restriction on their actions and the other place where they were more independent to act and take decisions. Both the situations significantly affected the decision-making processes of the women regarding their life and body too. Therefore, it was noteworthy that migration played a major role in bringing change among the women of the Bihari community in Kalimpong.

The reasons for abortion in the Bihari community of Kalimpong include unintended pregnancy, financial difficulties, cultural considerations, and the gender of the child. Women's lives have changed due to education, empowering them with knowledge about abortion and giving them freedom to take their own decisions regarding their bodies. This has had a positive and negative impact on them, with some choosing to abort due to unplanned pregnancy and others performing sex-selective

abortions due to financial and cultural reasons. Although women are seen as personally responsible for their action, they have compromised on their education due to marital obligations but have planned to educate their children without any prejudice. The young women in the community who were pursuing their education had a clear vision of what they wanted.

A comparative analysis between Kalimpong and Bihar has revealed that Bihari women in Kalimpong have stayed true to their choices and have managed to evade this practice, while women in Bihar have had to abort female children under family pressure. Migration has been influential in the decision-making process of the Bihari women in Kalimpong. The social and cultural context has affected the perspective of girls in the community due to exposure to other cultures. Bihari women of different generations have experienced migration and resettlement in different ways as a result we can discern two distinct lifestyles in Bihar and Kalimpong. One of the causes for sex-selective abortion was cultural norms and practices which were changed because of migration as they were not bound to follow every ritual. Education and migration have also helped women to take actions based on their free will regarding abortion. The traditional perspective related towards sex-selective abortion has thus changed in the last decade.

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Challenges Faced by Visually Impaired Students in Mainstream Education

Priyadarshini Mukherjee

Disability is something that cripples a person not only physically, but also mentally and financially. A person who is visually disabled, or blind, perceives education as a ray of hope, as light amidst darkness. However, acquiring this light becomes a luxury for the disabled, more so in the absence of a truly inclusive education system. Although there has been some progress in terms of state policy and technological development, the path to higher education has remained difficult to traverse, for blind people. Being a blind student myself, my experience bears testimony to this harsh reality.

The main purpose of this research is to generate information and awareness about visual impairment, and the kind of obstacles visually impaired students may have to contend with when pursuing higher education. The distinct nature of problems posed by the deficiency of vision necessitates suitable attention to be paid to the formulation and execution of educational policy frameworks, so as to aid visually impaired students to perform well academically. Such students experience difficulties in not only understanding educational ideas and concepts, but also in performing assigned tasks and appearing for examinations.

Visual impairment does not only mean blindness, but also refers to certain deficient states of vision that can never be corrected. There are different types of visual impediments and blindness, such as partial blindness and low vision. It is difficult to ascertain accurately the visual capacity of a person with some degree of impairment, for the specific percentage or degree of impediment may not correlate with the actual experience of it. In other words, an individual who is 70-80% blind may not be able to perform a task that another, more severely impaired person may be able to do.

The Government of India has formulated and enacted various laws for disabled students to benefit from mainstream higher education through an inclusive education system. Low Vision was enumerated as a disability through the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016 as a step to ensure equal rights in education and other fields for the visually impaired. With technological advancement, Braille is no longer the only mode of communication and learning. Teaching is now also done through computers, using screen reader software programs such as Job Access With Speech (JAWS). Additionally, digital libraries and e-libraries have enhanced the accessibility of learning. However, caveats remain when proper assessment of the execution and impact of such initiatives is not undertaken. Lack of awareness among visually impaired students regarding these facilities also hinders their equal access to education. Thus, along with the formulation of laws and their execution, it is equally necessary for institutions to be equipped to implement and provide the necessary educational facilities to the visually impaired students. The specific rules and regulations of institutions become crucial to look at in this regard.

Helen Keller's autobiography, 'The Story of My Life', was the prime inspiration behind this research. Inspired by Keller, I have also incorporated an autoethnographic account of my own experience as a visually impaired student pursuing higher education. Drawing from my own lived experience was the best possible method to explain how visual impairment acts as a barrier for education. While there may be flaws and biases in the methods applied, it is essential that an attempt be made to present an authentic understanding of the situation at hand.

In the course of the autoethnography, some questions which arose were: Do classmates have any idea of the kind of problems the visually impaired students may face in class? Are they aware of the different types of blindness? Do classmates and/or teachers notice the difficulties visually impaired students face when lectures are delivered in class? If yes, then do they take the initiative of helping them? If a blind student repeatedly asks a certain question in class, do their friends/classmates feel annoyed? Is the student shunned by the others in class?

The aim of this research is to enable more visually impaired students like me to progress in higher education, by attempting to generate some degree of awareness among all those involved in the functioning of a higher educational institution, from students to the professors and the administrative and managerial personnel. Based on my own experiences, I believe that it is necessary to acknowledge the distinctive requirements of physically impaired students in higher education, and greater efforts need to be undertaken to truly make the process of acquiring education easier for them.

The degree or extent of blindness, as mentioned before, is difficult to ascertain even medically. Due to such ambiguity, it has often so happened that people around me have expressed doubts about my ability to see as I am unable to understand in definite terms how much I can or cannot see. Visual impairment and blindness may have several causes and forms; problems with eyesight may even appear in conjunction. In my case, I have low vision, characterized by the loss of middle vision, colour blindness as well as light sensitivity.

Given such conditions which all visually impaired students may suffer from, there is a dire need of facilities in higher education institutions, such as special instructors, the provision of scribes for writing examinations, technological aid, etc., to make the system inclusive. However, a number of institutions fail to arrange sufficiently for such provisions, leading to manifold issues faced by students who are visually impaired. For instance, there are problems we may face when the syllabus is not shared in an organized manner, or when the professor delivers a lecture from a distance where their face may not be visible. The lack of a special educator on campus worsens the situation, especially as there is no opportunity for parent-teacher or student-teacher interaction or discussion.

Infrastructural as well as informal support by professors, friends and peers has a crucial role to play in a visually impaired student's experience of higher education. It is necessary for an institution to arrange for audio books, computer software and special educators so as to equip the student to perform to the best of his/her ability. One may require the help of a friend or classmate to help identify professors,

gather audio books and other educational material as per need, and so on. Provisions such as allotment of extra time during examinations to account for the time taken by the student to fully understand the questions and instructions may also prove helpful. If professors who are not special educators teach a class with visually impaired students, it is imperative that they adopt inclusive strategies to accommodate the needs of such students. The structure of syllabi should also be simplified for blind and visually impaired students, who should also be provided with separate question papers and marking schemes.

Extra-curricular activities constitute yet another realm from where visually impaired students are often excluded due to their physical condition. However, in my case, the NCC wing of our college agreed to include me as part of the group, although as an exception. Such activities help diminish the sense of isolation and being 'disabled' among the students with impairments.

Thus, although significant initiatives have been undertaken in the form of legislation, policies and technological development to accommodate the needs of visually impaired students, there remains a lot more to be done in terms of infrastructural development, especially in institutes of higher education. Addressing grievances related to the classroom environment, teaching techniques and modes of assessment, for instance, are necessary to ensure a truly inclusive education for all.

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The Devi and the Demon: Understanding 'Bhor' in the Light of Agency and Social Position of Hindu Women

Rupsha Bhaumik

Since the dawn of primitive civilization, the very remote implication of religion has acted as the instrument for maintaining social order and solidarity in society. With the development of social anthropology along with comparative religion, scholars have tried to investigate the concept of possession and how it provides important insights on the psychological aspects of the possessed and negotiates their agency. In most cases, the Western notion of possession is tied to something evil. It is usually manifested through the bodies of women who are considered to be vulnerable and passive, having little agency of their own. However, in a country like India, possession continues to have a much broader meaning. My research focused on the Hindu tradition of possession in West Bengal, locally termed as *bhor in Bengali* (which means possession- signifying weight, pressure or domination). It attempted to map the social position and agency of women, particularly those residing in the suburbs of Kolkata. For a lot of Hindu women, possession is not only a ritualistic practice but acts as an instrument of either emancipation or more oppression. A careful analysis will reveal that in most acts of possession, the subject is often a woman, especially from a lower caste, often vulnerable in nature, having little agency of her own. Based on the ritualistic dichotomy of *bhoot* and *devi*, the social prestige of the subject is often determined.

The research intends to look at gender and social agency within the context of *bhor*. By reviewing the works on possession and women's agency by Mary Keller (2002) and other scholars, this study attempts to arrive at a more feminist methodological stance to re-evaluate the receptivity of such female, possessed bodies and argue for a more

empathetic approach. This work also tries to navigate the kind of social behaviour and position that is inflicted upon the women through the dichotomy between bhoot (Bengali term for ghost) and devi (which means Goddess in Bengali). An analysis of certain literatures showcased how the western notion of possession greatly varies with the Hindu beliefs around possession. Contrary to the western notion of possession, which is mostly regarded as the work of the Devil, the term possession in Sanskrit literature, implies both the negative and positive act of embodiment. Analyzing movies which are created in a patriarchal, late capitalistic setup, the female body is depicted as something which needs to be controlled. Hence, control over the productive and the reproductive capabilities of such bodies becomes essential by negating their agency.

The present research also tries to comprehend the reality through the subject's narrative by adopting a thorough participant observation and in-depth interviews. I conducted an ethnography in Durgapur where I analyzed the participant's narrative through the life history method. I also conducted interviews with her, online and over telephone, where she narrated her experiences. The narratives of witnesses who had seen my other participant's drastic changes in behavior within the context of possession were also collected and analyzed. Although I wished to conduct a thorough interview, she was not in a state to interact. However, these narratives allowed me to understand how their reality is constructed around the concept of possession, regulating their agency on an everyday basis. I was encouraged to do content analysis to show the dichotomy between the Western and Hindu aspect of possession. I analyzed the popular film *The Conjuring* to evaluate possession through the lens of female receptivity in Western culture.

Shikor and the Transgression

For the longest time, the bodies of women, especially that of a possessed woman, has been the battleground for contestations and debates. There have been incessant attempts by patriarchy to tame and bring such unruly, rebellious bodies under control. They have been reflected as passive, vulnerable and hysteric, in dire need for strict governance.

Amidst all of these, their agency has been taken away from them. Their identity as an individual being, capable of occupying a social position has been erased. During such a volatile juncture, a deeper introspection into the narratives of women's agency through the lens of *bhor* would help one to understand the actual reality and even liberate them from this labyrinth of suffering. This further encouraged me to conduct an ethnography in Durgapur.

It was a sultry Saturday evening, the sun setting quietly on the day of the week which is observed by praying to *Ma Sitala* (the Hindu Goddess Sitala). When I finally located her house, she was busy in the *Thakurghor* (a separate space for the Gods and Goddesses of the household) and I felt a tremble within. Although she was not allowed to talk as she was busy with her daily prayers, I could not help but notice that she was talking to *Maa Sitala*. Some of the fleeting words reached my ears which sounded like “*Maa tui khaa. Bhalo kore khaa. Janish kalke ki hoyeche...*” (Please eat mother. Eat properly. You know what happened yesterday...) After stumbling upon the fact that we're both *Bangal*, it became a lot easier to talk to her. Although I said I have never visited Bangladesh as my great grandfather had migrated to India during the partition, she kept on saying, “*Jaonai toh ki hoise, tao toh tumi Bangal e bolba*” (But even if you have not visited, you will still call yourself a *Bangal*). We shared a common ethnicity, the same *shikor* (meaning 'roots' in Bengali). This indicated how sharing the same roots and experiencing the collective horrors of partition can weave a bond between complete strangers. She told me how she started experiencing possession at an early age of 8, in Dhaka, Bangladesh. She narrated how she used to go to the terrace and feel like someone is calling out to her from a distance. Then, she saw a light and immediately became unconscious. Soon it started increasing and everybody in the village got to know about it. She believed that she experiences *Sitala'r bhor* (possessed by the holy goddess *Sitala*) and therefore should not eat something from the main kitchen which also serves non-vegetarian food on Saturdays.

During one of the conversations, she abruptly asked my surname and I was confused. After telling her that I was Bhaumik, she paused for a brief moment, as if she was trying to understand my caste identity and

then, slowly went on to reveal hers. Her surname was *Banik*. It is a Hindu sub-caste of merchants and traders. Though she quickly diverted the subject, I was left to wonder how caste identity plays a major role in understanding possession in India. After getting comfortable, she said she talks to *Maa* (here, Goddess Sitala) and it is her *Maa* who weaves her path of existence. For her, this constructs her reality mediating her power and agency. The Goddess (other) becomes part of her (self) while at the same time, she witnesses the embodied other outside her own self. During possession, the self and the other becomes one, providing an avenue for exercising her agency.

Our conversations continued over telephone and allowed me a deeper entry into her life. During one of our conversations, she revealed how her eldest son died during the riots in Bangladesh which took place during the 1975 surrounding Mujibur Rahman's death forcing her to leave Bangladesh with her family. While she was narrating the incident over the phone, her voice trembled and she quivered. I understood that the scars that she bore from losing her son and leaving her roots triggered her trauma which might have led to an increase in the frequency of her possession. *Bhite, mati* (residence, land) becomes a significant aspect here. The idea of leaving one's roots and starting a life in a completely different land can lace one with wounds of time. Even in Bangladesh, her physical space and the idea of a home kept on shifting and changing form. After permanently coming to Durgapur, her residence continuously changed. She could not stay anywhere for a long period of time. Can we then assume that dispossession from one's land can shape one's agency?

In a similar instance, I had the opportunity of witnessing a woman in my relative's house who was believed to be possessed by the spirit of a ghost (*bhooter bhor*) after visiting Bangladesh which is her natal home. The woman, named Arati (name changed), in her mid-50s, used to do manual work like sweeping and cleaning around my relative's building before she started experiencing such events. When I first saw her, she was murmuring things to herself and was not in the state to give me an interview. For the next interview, her relative Kakali agreed to narrate her experiences of witnessing Arati. Though I could not gather her first-hand narrative, Kakali's secondary accounts also helped me to gain

certain significant insights. According to her, before this 'act' started, Arati was a jolly, timid person. However, she used to often complain about her husband beating her up, not caring enough for her wellbeing. She said, "*Amar toh mone hocche uni bhor e poreche. Nahole khub bhalo manush chilo.*" (I think she has been possessed. Otherwise, she was a very good person). This statement underpins the popular idea of equating ghost possession as something which brings negative changes in a person, much like the West. While asking when did she start showing such behavior, Kakali informed that her strange behavior started happening after visiting Bangladesh where she used to go cycling on her own. In other instances, she also went with fishermen to catch fish at dawn without informing anyone. This brings me to the question: Is it the intense joy of returning to one's roots or the sheer agony of reuniting with the past that has triggered such an embodiment? According to my relative who has seen Arati up close for a long time, she always wanted to return to her roots. She was displaced during the late 1960s riots and came to India without any legal documents. In fact, she did not have a Visa or Passport and was living 'illegally' in someone else's land. Kakali further goes on to reveal that although Arati used to get beaten up by her husband before getting possessed, he has now even stopped living with her, leaving her alone during this situation. He believes it to be a fraudulent act. This has further deteriorated her condition. Such an incident also reflects how patriarchy reacts to such possessed bodies.

Is possession also mediated by caste? Can it act as an effective instrument for caste transgression? In both the cases, the women's possession has been mediated by caste. In the first instance, although the woman does not belong to an upper caste, she does not belong to the lowest rung of the hierarchical ladder. Moreover, since she was possessed by the holy Goddess, her agency and eventually her position in society went up. People started believing her to be the messenger of *Maa Sitala* who has the ability to solve all their problems. Even her sons were proud of their mother and almost everyone in her proximity respect and listen to her. However, while conducting the second interview, I understood how the caste identity plays a powerful role within the context of *bhor*. Although her experiences of possession are new, her

entire identity has changed around this one event. According to her relatives, she has been possessed by something evil, or in Bengali terms '*bhuter bhor e poreche*'. Although she was physically abused by her husband even before such experiences of possession, the present events have further decreased her agency. This along with her lower caste background made her body a passive entity which needs strict supervision and control. Her husband refusing to live with her further establishes the societal anxieties around such bodies, much like in the West. There is a need felt to chain such bodies which tries to transgress the normative expectations of how a woman should be.

Such inferences, however, cannot be generalized. Although caste identities are tied to *bhor*, it might not always be the case. Goddess Sitala, whose spirit is believed to possess my first participant, is considered to be the chief deity of the Savaras residing in South Bengal. Scholars like Pragya Ghatak (2013) in her work titled *Continuity and Development in the Folk Tradition of Savaras of West Bengal: A Case Study of Sitala Worship* wrote extensively on the history of Goddess Sitala. According to her, the Savaras are a marginalized scheduled tribe present in both North as well as South Bengal. In the Hindu social system Savaras are considered to be lower caste however, enjoying a higher status than the untouchables. Hence, Sitala is often considered to be a lesser goddess not part of the Great Tradition. Even the priests who worship Sitala are drawn from the lower castes.

Playing with the Body

The possessed body of a woman, thus, has been perceived differently in South Asia, especially the Hindus, than in the West. The Western media has represented the bodies of these white women who are in dire need of control. These ghastly and appalling women are the medium through which horror is generated for public amusement as well as underpins the social anxiety around such bodies. An analysis of a Western movie on possession through a feminist lens would help one to understand the perceived dichotomy between both these worlds.

Directed by James Wan, *The Conjuring* is one of the finest English films which perfectly narrates how the agency of a woman is negotiated through possession. The story revolves around the Perron couple, Roger and Carolyn Perron who moved to a shabby farmhouse in Rhode Island with their five daughters in 1971. After a brief period of time, the family starts to experience supernatural occurrences. Soon after, the mother seeks help from paranormal investigators Ed and Lorraine Warren. From the moment we are introduced to the character of Carolyn, we observe her as a timid, somewhat passive individual, juggling with the daily activities while swiftly performing the roles of a caring mother, a doting wife. This suddenly changes when she turns into a worshipper of Satan.

However, my interest lies in the way Carolyn Perron is said to be possessed by the spirit of Bathsheba Sherman. In one of the scenes, while researching on the history of the original farmhouse, Lorraine says that Bathsheba was related to Mary Towne Estye, one of the many women who was accused of witchcraft in Salem village of New England and later, hanged during the trials. The reference to such witch trials in the film provides an insight into women's agency. These witchcraft accusers had levelled accusations on both men and women who were superior to them both in terms of status and age. These groups of young accusers, popularly known as the 'Salem Girls' have been depicted as psychologically disturbed or mentally ill. Although they were termed as either fraud or pathological by most of the scholars, 1989 witnessed the first feminist study on the Salem witch trials. The book titled 'The Devil in the Shape of a Woman' by Carol Karlsen (1988) treated these young female accusers as the representative of all the young women of England by arguing that they were performing a "fierce negotiation.... about the legitimacy of female discontent, resentment and anger." This work was significant in reflecting the agency of these incredibly marvelous young women and their capability to challenge the patriarchal structure by deviating from the normative expectations of the society.

The approval of the Vatican for exorcism through the priest of the Church and its delay because of the family not being baptised reflects how the bodily agency of women is always controlled by men, here, the male religious authorities.

Even Lorraine herself, despite refusing to adhere to the patriarchal gender norms and choosing to work after marriage is also subjected to physical and emotional vulnerability in comparison to her husband, Ed. When Roger asks him about Lorraine, Ed even says, “It takes a toll on her... a little each time” indicating her vulnerability.

While being aware of the fact that one media representation is not sufficient enough to generalize that the Western notion of possession is intrinsically associated with women's reduced agency, most of the popular cinemas like *The Exorcism* (1973) and their immense success in the box office is indicative of how the society perceives the body of a woman. Most of the films portray a white female, cisgendered woman whose body has been invaded by something evil. A damsel in distress, whose agency is mediated by a man or group of men who ultimately try to rescue her. It continues to reinforce the hegemonic idea of masculinity and victimization of the female body by stripping off her agency. According to Michelle Lynne Pribbernow (2022) in her dissertation thesis titled, 'Possession: The Struggle for Female Bodily Agency in Exorcism Cinema', such portrayals also reinforced and reproduced the dominant, patriarchal notions around sex, gender, race etc. These representations establish the need to control the productive and reproductive capabilities of such female bodies in the late-capitalist, patriarchal cultural setup.

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Prejudice and Bengali Soap Operas

Samanwita Das

Bengali serials are a popular form of entertainment and are known for their engaging storylines, colorful characters, and emotional performances. That being said, Bengali serials, for many years, have shown a rather subjugated view of women in their stories. Women have been shown primarily as housewives, facing troubles from their in-laws. Daily soaps show a dramatized version of reality, which is often found to be exaggerated, to an extent that it is disconnected from reality. It is also found that soaps represent a disparaging view of female characters of lower caste. This study demonstrates that the problem is not limited to the normalization of gender stereotypes, but also to the marginalization of women of a particular social class. Instead of using this opportunity to promote gender equality and inclusion, Bengali TV serials glorify patriarchy. This study also delves into casteism masquerading as classism. This study focuses on class and caste-based discrimination upon female characters in Bengali soap operas. This paper also examines how these serials have evolved through the years.

Several studies have been conducted to show how female characters are shown in TV serials, some focusing on how they are portrayed in stereotypical roles and are often objectified, others on how this type of content impacts the society. Dr. Anamika Ray (2014) conducted a study on women representation in soap operas aired on Indian private TV channels. Aaliya Ahmed (2012) in her work shows that soap operas have historically been popular among women, and as such, the portrayal of female characters is of great importance. The way in which female characters are portrayed can have a significant impact on the perception of women in society, and can reinforce or challenge traditional gender roles. But usually, female characters have been portrayed as helpless and in need of rescue from male characters, perpetuating the stereotype of women as weak and in need of protection.

One common portrayal of women in soap operas is that of the “victim”. There have been several discussions around female representation in Indian cinema and television. But what are left out, are the discussions and debates around how television depicts class. In her article, Aindrila Chakraborty (2022) examines how the portrayal of women on Indian television is shaped by the intersection of class and gender. Caste-based discrimination is prevalent in all kinds of social institutions. Television being an important mode of communication has always restricted individuals belonging to the societal periphery. Bengali soaps have no less contributed to this phenomenon. Srija Sanyal (2019) mentioned in her article the fact that the common plot that can be found in the Bengali serials is that of a female protagonist - “What becomes problematic here is that the marginalized background that had been established with the introduction of the female protagonist is then conveniently sidelined as the story progresses.”

Content analysis has been conducted on two popular Bengali serials- *Ishti Kutum* (2011-2015) and *Jamuna Dhaki* (2020-2022). Research objectives are to understand and study the gender role stereotype in Bengali soap operas, to understand class and caste-based representation of female characters in soap operas and to see how the representation has evolved through the years.

Most of these television programmes tend to highlight women's primary role as being at home, reinforcing the stereotyped image of women in a delusional reality. All of these shows have a common theme: traditional male chauvinism, in which women strive for nothing more than a caring husband, loving children, and the so-called perfect life. Such characters are decked up in expensive gowns and larger-than-life jewellery, and their physical beauty is paramount. At the same time, they exhibit the sacrificing and compromising nature considered characteristic of women. This is the image of women that patriarchy wishes to project and cherishes, because it represents the value of women. From the content analysis done it can be found that the protagonist of *Zee Bangla's* popular serial *Jamuna Dhaki*, takes up the profession of beating drums or *dhak* – one of the rituals during Durga puja festivals, and challenges the gendered convention. This type of depiction is relatively new in this field. However, the storyline yet again becomes

problematic. In one episode, *Jamuna* is shown playing dhak in front of the Goddess Durga idol, dressed in a white and pink saree with subtle makeup and then the camera pans towards the idol behind her as if her character is elevated to the role of a goddess. A similar plot can be found in *Ishti Kutum* where *Baha* decided to live her entire life in absence of her true identity because she gave her word to *Archi* (Basu, 2012). The illustration of women willing to give up and compromising in soap operas has been widely accepted by the audience. They have relegated themselves to the role of a traditional and subservient mother, daughter, or wife. The most crucial problem is that, Bengali women, the primary target audience, are accepting and reinforcing these patriarchal portrayals.

While the stereotypical representation of women in Bengali serials is much spoken of, the angle of class is much less discussed. The female lead not only has to perform the role of an ideal daughter or an ideal wife but also undertake the norms of a particular social class. The common storyline of these serials is that of an upper-class household that objectionably welcomes a new member, a lower-class girl, the story of which must revolve around her trials, tribulations, and transformation. *Jamuna* is shown as obedient and dutiful. But *Geet* (Daughter of *Kedar Ray*) is introduced as hip and carefree. She is later seen causing trouble for *Jamuna*. She is also asked quite often by various family members to let go of “her lifestyle” as this is not something a girl of Ray family would do. However, in *Ishti Kutum*, *Bahamoni Soren* is treated and accepted as the daughter of the *Mukherjee* family irrespective of her class. They even support her in all possible ways for her education.

West Bengal has a diverse population with a significant number of Dalits, Adivasis, and other marginalized communities. However, the state's media industry is predominantly run by individuals from upper-caste backgrounds. Bengali *Bhadraloks*, are always put in a pedestal while being portrayed in any movie or television serial by Bollywood. Because this caste-insensitive discourse has been so successful, outright acts of discrimination against marginalized characters have traditionally gone unnoticed by viewers and critics. Caste in Bengal is not recognized, as people fail to acknowledge its reality in Bengal. It is as

if West Bengal were a “caste-less society”. It is believed that the upper-caste dominance in this media industry has resulted in limited representation and opportunities for individuals from lower-caste backgrounds. The lack of diversity in the industry has resulted in the perpetuation of dominant cultural narratives and stereotypes, further marginalizing underrepresented groups. Moreover, dominant caste ideology enables soap producers to further segregate the differences between rich characters and poor characters based on their caste. Therefore, we can say that this is actually caste-based discrimination rather than class-based discrimination.

In *Jamuna Dhaki*, the story revolves around the daughter of a poor drum player, *Ganga Dhaki, Jamuna*, who goes to the Ray mansion to play the drum on behalf of her father. *Sangeet*, the son of a rich aristocratic landlord *Kedar Ray*, falls in love with her. After some time, *Sangeet* and *Jamuna* marry, and *Jamuna* has to struggle to find a balance in her life in both personal and professional aspects. In various scenes, we find the family members insulting and scrutinizing *Jamuna's* every move. She is constantly reminded that she belongs to a poor lower caste family. Even her skill to play the drums is disregarded.

In *Ishti Kutum*, however, we find a somewhat sensitive representation of the Scheduled Tribe community. Here we find *Bahamoni Soren*, a girl from *Palashboni* village in forest area of Purulia district known for its Naxalite movements. *Baha* is trying to find her identity as she doesn't know her father. But *Baha's* main identity is as an excellent student, recognized by her teachers who have provided her with special attention in her studies throughout her academic career. There are some faulty tropes. She was forcefully married to *Archishman*. One night, *Baha* had to stay the night over at *Archi's* lodge due to heavy rain. The next morning, when word spread that *Baha* had not returned home from the lodge the night before, the entire village stormed out and began banging on the door of *Archi's* room. The villagers assumed the worst when *Baha* opened the door. The tribal law required him to either marry *Baha* or die. This kind of storyline marginalizes tribal communities even more, making them secluded. This serial was based on a real tribal community, Kherwal Santhali community. They were highly offended

by the improper representation. According to a news article by Zee News, a case was filed at the Calcutta High Court in which they raised strong objections to the language of the serial. *Baha* and other tribal characters are found supposedly using Bengali language with a “tribal accent”. It is crucial to promote diversity and inclusivity in media representation in order to challenge prevailing cultural narratives and stereotypes because the media significantly shapes societal attitudes and perceptions.

Analysis reveals that Bengali serials have come a long way in terms of representing women. In the past, women were often portrayed as traditional homemakers whose primary responsibilities were to take care of their families and homes. They were expected to be submissive, obedient, and passive. However, over the times, the representation of women in Bengali serials has evolved to become more diverse and inclusive. In recent years, we have seen more women being portrayed as strong, independent, and ambitious characters who have careers, goals, and aspirations beyond their homes. They are shown as capable of making their own decisions and taking charge of their lives. Moreover, we see women being portrayed in different roles such as doctors, lawyers, police officers, and entrepreneurs. But, if we examine them properly, we would find that these portrayals are distorted. For example, in *Aparajita Apu* (2020), *Apu* is a young and passionate girl, who aspires to become a government officer, but faces challenges in the form of her conservative mother-in-law. This again showcases how female characters are unnecessarily vilified.

We can say through the analysis that Bengali serials have not changed, but continue to propagate the same gender-based stereotypes. Additionally, there is a need for greater diversity in the portrayal of women, including women from different social and economic backgrounds.

Moreover, these serials have a patriarchal undertone with subtle sexism present in them, which according to various researches, is accepted as normal by the viewers. Women are still objectified in some instances. Even if this media industry tries to emancipate women, they end up failing miserably.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) in her renowned work refers to the “subaltern” as the misrepresented individuals of a society. This becomes true for women in silver screen media. Women are always depicted as marginalized. Caste-based marginalization is more prominent. Although they have tried to throw light on the women of lower-caste, they failed to do it properly. One reason for this misrepresentation could be due to the commodification of representation. The commodification of representation refers to the process of turning aspects of human identity and culture, such as race, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity, into commodities that can be bought, sold, and consumed as products in the marketplace. Critics argue that the commodification of representation can lead to the exploitation and misrepresentation of marginalized groups. But the audience plays a huge role here. They consume what is given to them without questioning it. This means what sells best is being served. Therefore, nothing much has changed over the years; women who are ambitious, dress in “vulgar” way, are divorced or single, are shown as villains plotting wicked things against the naive yet smart protagonist. They still show unnecessary family dramas, which is way beyond reality.

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Bovine Affections: A Sociological Approach to Emotions

Samarjit Chowdhury

The cow is a unique fixture in Indian society. Its uniqueness stems from its ascribed sacredness, making the sacral nature of the cow into a signifier for Hinduism. Formal education and socialization processes impress upon members of Hindu or Indian society this 'veritable' fact, leaving no space for enquiry. Any form of affront to this fact is met with an emotive response, often articulated in forms of violence (The Times of India, 2016). This violence is justified by both perpetrators and passive onlookers as a response of 'hurt sentiments/emotions' (Tejani, 2019) and continues to be the case as of today. Mohammed Akhlaq, a Muslim man, was fatally attacked in his home in Dadri, Uttar Pradesh, in September 2015 by a group of angry Hindus who believed he had killed a calf and consumed its flesh, with his family. The rumor was spread by members of a local Hindu temple. The police arrested eight suspects, but some locals protested the arrests and destroyed shops in retaliation. Akhlaq's family had to relocate from their village due to threats being meted out to them from the assailants. It was later discovered that some of the attackers had links to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Hindu nationalist party ruling the country. Prime Minister Narendra Modi merely expressed his sorrow over the incident. Subsequently, a local villager petitioned the court to register a First Information Report against Akhlaq's family for cow slaughter and animal cruelty. However, the suspected meat found in their fridge was later determined to be mutton, rendering the rumor that sparked the attack baseless.

The case of the Dadri lynching, as it has been termed in the media, showcases the emotional appeal of *Gaumata*. So strong is the emotion surrounding her (I use the female pronouns because it is the milch cow that the Hindu Right seeks to protect and identifies it as feminine) that

even the mere thought of violence being meted out to her must be balanced by slaying her perpetrators. *Gaumata*, in recent years (to be precise in the past decade) has become a symbol for political mobilization against non-Hindu and Dalit communities by the Hindu Right through the growth of these cow vigilante attacks on Muslims and Dalits, specifically. For these vigilante groups, their justification surrounding their violent and often illegal interventions is their zeal to 'protect' their 'mother'. The sentiment expressed by many Hindutva ideologues throughout political forums and over various forms of media is very similar to the ethos evoked in the quotation by Swami Shraddhanand,

The first step which I propose is to build one Hindu Rashtra Mandir at least in every city and important town.... While the sectarian Hindu temples are dominated by their own individual deities, the Catholic Hindu Mandir should be devoted to the worship of the three mother-spirits: the Gau-mata, the Saraswati-mata and the Bhumi-mata. Let some living cows be there to represent the plenty. (cited in Gupta 2001: 4291)

He was a successor to the Arya Samaj-ist project visualised by its founder Dayanand Saraswati, who is often credited with laying the groundwork for a pan-India anti-cow slaughter movement in early to mid-twentieth century. The question remains, how did the cow become '*Gaumata*'?

My study aims at exploring the following questions – (a) is the sacredness of '*Gaumata*' entrenched in collective emotions? (b) can the trajectory of the sacredness of '*Gaumata*' be traced historically through emotions? (c) in the digital age, how does the Hindu negotiate their 'feelings' about '*Gaumata*' (keeping in mind the practices of other cultures)? I aim to view and analyze the phenomena of *Gaumata* through the theoretical paradigm of sociology of emotions. I have tried to understand the dynamics of various emotions, that range from veneration to apathy, that work within actors in society vis-à-vis the 'holy cow-mother'. My rationale behind choosing the sociology of emotions as a theoretical paradigm for my research stems from the paradigm's engagement in studying emotions such as shame, pride,

love, hate, awe, wonder, boredom, melancholy and how it asks questions about how these emotions are culturally patterned, experienced, acquired, transformed, managed in daily life, and legitimated through accounts. My enquiry attempts to employ an approach which tries to situate '*Gaumata*' as a social object and view it sociologically than through a religious perspective. To explore the aforementioned questions, I have followed the paradigm of cultural theories of emotions which view emotions not as biological responses but as “social feelings” (Bericat, 2015: 499) and have focused on group or collective emotions.

In terms of methodology, I have tried to show through secondary analysis the significance and role played by emotions in the construction of the icon of *Gaumata* and tried to establish how it simultaneously influences the actors who believe in the sanctity of the cow. I have also conducted interviews among people who identify as Hindu about *Gaumata*. My interview sample consisted of 15 Bengali-speaking people within the age range of 18 to 35 years, who live or were born in West Bengal, settled in urban or semi-urban locales in Kolkata and Hooghly districts of West Bengal. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, with respondents being asked a set of standard questions while additional questions were discussed throughout the course of the interview.

The first thematic chapter analyses the politics that arise out of consumption and an individual's religious views and practices. I have tried to showcase the contradictions and diversities that exist around “*Gaumata*”.

The second thematic chapter studies how 'modern' Hindus relate to the idea “*Gaumata*”, i.e., how they relate to the notion of the sacredness of the cow in the contemporary context.

Review of Literature

The historian, D. N. Jha (2009, 2002) in his scholarly works, has highlighted the polymorphic nature of views surrounding the

sacredness of the cow. Jha argues that the Rigveda, the primary Veda out of its four counterparts, makes frequent references to the cooking of the “flesh of ox” (Jha 2009: 51) as offering for gods. Jha quotes from the Rigveda that Indra, the thunder god, is said to have eaten the flesh of bulls or a “hundred buffaloes”. Jha's work on the ancient Hindu scriptures is very important to counter the 'timeless' nature of the sacred cow.

In 'The Icon of Mother in Late Colonial North India: Bharat Mata', 'Matri Bhasha' and 'Gau Mata' (2001), Charu Gupta examines the emergence and transformation of the mother figure in late colonial North India. In her examination of the iconography of “Gaumata”, she states that the 19th century saw an upsurge in movements around protection of the cow. These movements took a systematic form due to advancements in the modes of communication aiding in their spread. Print media was a significant factor in the spread and reach of this movement.

Muhammad Akram et.al. (2021) have highlighted the role played by social media in mobilizing Hindus against Muslims by spreading hate. Social media in the Hindutva political campaign is a tool for manipulating the emotions of the masses, that is, Hindus. Akram et al. (2021) have cited that most common subjects that induced online hate speech and violence ranged from opposition to the sensitive issue of beef consumption and cow protection and interfaith marriages between Muslims and Hindus (Mirchandani 2018, cited in Akram et al. 2021: 225).

Smitha Rao (2011) analyses the parallels between the environmentalism followed by the German National-Socialist Party and that of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India. Through her analysis she has been able to draw stark parallels between the two parties. Rao understands the anti-cow slaughter campaign as one of BJP's shielded politics for securing their real objective of a homogeneous culture and a *Hindu Rashtra* through politically correct language and environmentalist discourse.

Jordan McKenzie et al. (2019) have provided a sociological understanding of anger as an emotion which is not just a form of

individualized emotion but a 'social' emotion which involves “an exchange between an actor, a target, and an audience”. Anger, it is argued, can also occur from or towards groups of people, such as in the cases of racism, xenophobia, or class resentment. It can function as an intentional emotion that provides motivation and energy directed at specific goals, but it can also be spontaneously provoked by circumstance or specific interactions with others. However, in a political context, anger as an emotion can be harnessed and invoked for the sake of participation in certain kinds of praxis. The authors further argue that anger and shame are “two sides of the same coin” (2019: 194) because both emotions are tied to identity. This is crucial for our understanding of the sources of the Hindu 'anger' that often, as most of these perpetrators feel, stems from their identity as Hindus.

Sara Ahmed, in her book 'The Cultural Politics of Emotion' (2004), argues that emotions are not simply individual feelings, but rather are deeply embedded in social and political structures that shape our experiences of the world. She explores how emotions are connected to issues such as race, gender, and sexuality, and how they are used to reproduce social hierarchies and power relations. For my present purposes, I have focused on the chapter titled 'The Organisation of Hate'. The chapter mainly deals with Ahmed's discussions around racism in the United Kingdom and how 'hate' is circulated, valued and exchanged in different social contexts.

Veronic Zink (2019) defines affective communities as phenomena that does not “evolve from process of collectivization, but are themselves a mode of relating individuals toward each other” (2019: 289). The concept of affective communities focuses on sensual infrastructures of social encounters and on modes of affective exchange instead of understanding social forms as a product of pre-supposed rules, hegemonic norms, and imposed structures.

Findings

I conducted interviews with Hindus in Kolkata and Hooghly to explore how they feel about "*Gaumata*" and beef consumption. I interviewed 15

respondents between the ages of 18 to 35 years who were either educated or pursuing higher studies. Out of the sample group, 10 respondents were non-beef eaters, and 5 respondents had consumed beef at least once. The dietary habits of all the respondents were described as comprising an average Bengali diet.

I found that while all respondents identified as semi-religious, they had different views on beef consumption and the sacredness of cows. The respondents' views on cows and beef consumption were influenced by their upbringing and exposure to cows, religious beliefs, and personal preferences. Socialization played an important role in shaping the views of my respondents about the sacredness of the cow. Some of the respondents by virtue of their secondary socialization outstepped the bounds of their primary socialization to formulate opinions and feelings, independent of their upbringing.

The relation between emotion and the sacredness of “*Gaumata*” is definitely present and it is a relation that is temporal in nature, that has experienced surges and dips, but is nevertheless always present in the fabric of Indian society. The emotional appeal of the sacred cow varies from individual to individual on the lines of identity. Moreover, all of my respondents have articulated an image of the cow that is laced with political implications. For them the cow has more political symbolism attached to it than religious meaning. It showcases how the cow has matured from a benign creature and a symbol of wealth in agrarian communities, to an icon of violence and communal hate.

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Sleep, not an Indifferent Judge: A Sociological Exploration of the Gendered Nature of Sleep among Mid-life Women in Urban India

Sanmoy Das

Sleep is an inescapable part of human life. However, it is perhaps one of the least understood aspects of our lives. From ancient civilizations like Mesopotamia and Egypt to contemporary times, humans have generated countless ideas and explanations about the nature and causes of sleep, and yet, we have only started to understand the phenomenon with all its myriad complexities. Today, the study of sleep falls under the domain of the emerging disciplines of Sleep Science and Sleep Medicine. Within these disciplines, sleep is primarily seen as a biophysical phenomenon, out of the bounds of social life. While it is undeniable that one's physiological and psychological makeup influences their sleep cycle, this study aims to demonstrate that sleep is a social activity that warrants sociological analysis. For the purposes of this study, sleep is understood in the following way:

Sleep, in short is more than a straightforward biological activity, it is also, in large part, a 'motivated act', bestowed with symbolic value and moral significance, and necessitating, like all other activities, the adoption of a prescribed socio-cultural role." (Williams and Bendelow 2002: 174)

Asymmetrical power relations and social hierarchies are reflected in the way sleep is socially organised and distributed. Sir Phillip Sydney had called sleep the "indifferent judge between high and low." (Poetry Foundation, n.d.) However, a sociological analysis of sleep would reveal

such a view to be rather naive. The quantity and quality of sleep that a person has access to, and the experience of “doing sleep” (Taylor, 1993) is dependent on their social location. Thus, sleep is no harbinger of equality. The rights and responsibilities associated with the “sleep role” are firmly rooted in the in egalitarian social order within which it is institutionalised (Williams, 2005). This paper attempts to sociologically analyse the patterns and experiences of sleep of a specific group of women, mid-life (40-59 years) middle-class women in urban India. Hislop and Arber (2003: 710) argued that “sleep can be seen as a window on the multiple roles women play in society and on the gendered nature of these roles.” This study aims to explore to what extent and in what ways do asymmetrical gender power relations prevalent at home and workspace in particular, and the society in general, shape the patterns and experiences of sleep for these women, and place constraints on their ability to get sufficient amounts of quality sleep. Medical literature suggests middle aged women are among the worst victims of sleep deprivation (Mozes 2017; Singh and Pradhan 2014). However, unsurprisingly, such sleep problems are attributed to physiological factors (Dolev, 2019; Owens and Mathews, 1998). This study challenges such one-sided understanding of the phenomenon. Sociological studies on the sleep of mid-life women in the British context like Hislop and Arber (2003), Hislop (2004) revealed that the pressure and normative expectations associated with gender roles they perform curtail their ability to get adequate amounts of quality sleep. There is a dearth of sociological studies on sleep in the Global South, making this study one of the first attempts to 'gender' sleep in the Indian context. The study poses the following questions:

1. To what extent do women in their mid-life in urban India experience sleep disruptions and unsatisfactory sleep?
2. Is there a relationship between their sleep patterns and sleep disruptions due to work and gender roles?
3. What kind of behavioural strategies do women adopt to cope with sleep disruptions?

4. Do these women take the lack of quality sleep seriously, or do they consider such disruption to be 'normal', thus brushing aside its implications for their health?

Sleep Studies: A Sociological Intervention

Sociology, since its inception, has neglected the study of sleep. This has led one scholar to observe, “Sociology is concerned with only two-thirds of the lives of its human subjects.” (Taylor 1993: 463). Although a few practitioners of the discipline did hint at the possibility of subjecting sleep to sociological analysis (Aubert and White, 1959a, 1959b; Schwartz, 1970; Taylor, 1993) in the 20th century, Sociology of Sleep emerged as a subspecialty within the discipline only in the 21st century. The Surrey Sociology of Sleep Group (see Hislop 2004; Hislop and Arber, 2003; Venn et al. 2008) produced a substantial body of research on the gendered nature of sleep and sleeping. In particular, Hislop (2004) and Hislop and Arber (2003) worked on the sleep of middle-aged women in Britain. They demonstrated that gender hierarchy within a family is reflected in sleep patterns and experiences of mid-life women. The purpose of this study is to analyse mid-life women's sleep in urban India with reference to the insights gained from the studies in Europe.

Methodology

This study followed a primarily quantitative methodology. The online survey method was used. The use of survey method allowed me to reach out to a large number of respondents within a short period of time. A questionnaire was distributed among a group of 22 respondents selected through snowball sampling through Google Forms. The collected data was analysed with reference to existing literature. Relevant secondary sources were analysed.

Findings

The study aimed to gauge the extent to which the respondents suffered from sleep deprivation. The aim, however, was not to undertake a medical diagnosis. Rather, an attempt was made to understand how the respondents interpreted and assessed their experience of sleeping and whether they indeed took disruptions and other sleep problems seriously. Thus, the study desists from trying to fit the responses within clinical models of sleep deprivation. The findings suggested that there was a clear gap between the quantity of sleep regarded as adequate by medical literature and the amount considered to be adequate by my respondents. While, on an average, my respondents received an amount of sleep (6.9 hours) that was only marginally lower than what is considered adequate by medical experts (7-9 hours) (Newmann, 2020), only 27.2% of respondents actually considered the amount of sleep they received to be adequate. Similarly, the way good quality sleep was defined medically was very different from the way the respondents defined it. Good quality sleep, according to experts, would have characteristics like being able to fall asleep soon after getting into bed, sleeping soundly throughout the night, waking up not more than once per night and feeling rested, restored and energized upon waking up (Suni, 2023). However, the collected data suggests that these characteristics are absent in the experiences of sleep of most of the respondents. 68.2% of respondents rated the quality of their sleep as satisfactory, good or very good. However, as many as 72.7% of the respondents struggled with problems with sleep (either often, almost every day or sometimes). Many of the respondents also experienced common symptoms associated with sleep deprivation like difficulty falling asleep (40.9%), or waking up several times during the night (59.1%) at least once in a week or more. Thus, it was inferred that although sleep problems and disruptions were widely prevalent among the respondents, they tended to regard it as a part and parcel of their everyday lives. This tendency of neglecting sleep problems was more pronounced among full time homemakers than women in paid employment. The findings of the study in this regard matches with the study on sleep of mid-life women in Britain conducted by Hislop and Arber (2003) who state that the women they studied saw disturbed sleep

as a 'women's lot', an everyday reality over which they have little control. However, many of the respondents did think that sleep problems had a noticeable negative impact upon their physical health (50%), emotional well-being (63.6%), personal (50%) and professional lives (54.5% of the employed respondents). Thus, they were not unaware of the suffering that lack of quality sleep caused.

Having established that most of the respondents lacked access to adequate amounts of quality sleep, the study set out to explore the factors that negatively impacted their sleep cycles. Disturbances arising from one's physical environment like lights, noises from the street, and uncomfortable bedroom settings had a negligible effect on the sleep cycle of most respondents. Health was an important factor that determined the quality and quantity of sleep. A correlation was observed between poor health and quality of sleep. The institution which played the most significant role in constraining women's ability to get an adequate amount of quality sleep was seen to be the family. The family is characterised by highly asymmetrical gender relations. Most of the domestic work is delegated to women, irrespective of whether or not they participate in paid employment. The burden of domestic work creates a sense of time poverty, leads to a significant amount of stress and interferes with women's sleep cycles. Most of the respondents devoted a significant amount of time per day to domestic work (6.8 hours on an average). 40.9% of the respondents felt that the pressure of domestic work hampered their sleep, and 27.2% of respondents reported that worries about the domestic chores that needed to be done the next day interrupted their sleep. It was observed that the pressure of domestic work and the negative impact it had on the sleep cycle was markedly more for the full-time homemakers, as compared to women in paid employment. Women are considered to be the primary caregivers in a family and a huge part of domestic labour entails caring for family members. It was observed care-giving responsibilities did not cease when women went to bed. Rather, they continued exerting physical and emotional labour to service the needs of their family members at night, even at the cost of ignoring their own sleep needs. Many of the women woke up earlier than they would have liked to, to help their partner, children or any other family member get ready for work or school

(40.9%). Worries about the safety and well-being of loved ones interrupted the sleep of 69.5% of my respondents. For many of those who were participating in paid employment, the pressures of professional life did have a noticeable negative impact on their sleep cycle. Thus, it can be concluded that for a significant proportion of the respondents, the sleeping space became an “invisible work-place” in which women's sleep needs are compromised by the unpaid physical and emotional labour necessary for the well-being and maintenance of their family.” (Hislop and Arber, 2003: 704)

Finally, the study attempted to understand the strategies employed by the respondents to cope with the lack of quality sleep. The most common strategies were listening to music, bedtime stories or ASMR before bed and meditation. It was observed that most of the respondents were not in favour of seeking medical help to manage their sleep. Only 31.8% of them had ever consulted a doctor regarding their sleep problems. Thus, the medicalisation model is inadequate to explain the sleep management strategies of most of the respondents. While some of the respondents did discuss their sleep problems with a family member, 31.8% of the participants did not seek help from anyone, despite experiencing sleep problems quite frequently. This may indicate that, for the respondents, that sleep disruptions had come to be seen as a 'normal' occurrence of their lives:

Though unwelcome, women have come to expect a degree of disruption as an inevitable outcome of complex nature of their lives with its competing demands of time. (Hislop 2004: 151)

Thus, to conclude, the study found that sleep problems and disruptions were widely prevalent among the respondents. The pressure of domestic work and care work which it entailed placed the most formidable challenges for them in their quest to get adequate amounts of quality sleep. A strong tendency of neglecting sleep problems was observed, as many of the respondents came to see it a 'normal' part of everyday life rather than as a serious problem. Thus, the social context in which sleep is performed determines its quantity and quality, while also shaping the way social actors think about it.

Future Prospects

It must be kept in mind this is only a preliminary study and the conclusions are tentative rather than authoritative. This study represents baby steps in the exploration of an arena of social life that has hardly been explored in the Global South. In order to develop a well-rounded understanding of the gendered nature of sleep, one needs to study the experience of sleep for men and non-binary people. Moreover, an intersectional understanding may be developed by studying the sleep patterns of women from a variety of social backgrounds, so as to understand how stratifiers like class, caste and region interact with gender to shape the experience of sleeping among Indian women. The largely quantitative findings of this study need to be supplemented through qualitative studies.

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A Study on Bengali Middle-Class Women's Leisure

Shaoni Sarkar

'Man finds he has two halves to his existence—leisure and occupation—and from these separate considerations he now looks upon the world. In leisure he remembers radiance; in labor he looks for results.'

— Mary Oliver, from *Upstream: Selected Essays*
(Oliver, 2016)

It is not very far from the truth that it is invariably a man who enjoys the two realms of work and leisure. Women however do not tend to have that luxury. Leisure, just as work, is a very strained terrain for women. It is with this objective, therefore, that this paper seeks to examine women's relationship with leisure. There has been some contention over the definitional problem of leisure. However, the unchanging characteristics pertain to pleasure, relaxation and a subjective moment of well-being. A sense of choice and motivation are also embedded within the concept of leisure, meaning that if it is forced or if it is not experienced out of one's free choice, it is not exactly leisure. (Kelly, 2012) This makes it imperative for us to explore just how much of free choice women actually have when it comes to leisure.

Upon asking the respondents about their idea of leisure, majority of them defined leisure in contrast to work. In other words, leisure for them is absence of work. Nevertheless, leisure does not mean idleness either. For them it means all the things one does for pleasure, in order to feel good, '*ekta bhalo laga*' for their own sake.

In recent times, digital goods, especially the mobile phone has become a large part of Bengali women's leisure as a very individualized and

vicarious sort of pleasure. Mobile phones as a consumer good have become indispensable to middle class women's leisure habits – be it conversing with friends or relatives or browsing the social media or e-commerce platforms like Amazon, Flipkart, Meesho and Nykaa. As a consequence, the smartphone and the internet has converted the Bengali middle-class woman into what Bart Simon and others have called a “cyberflaneur” (Simon, 2006). For Bengali middle-class women, another implication of online browsing pertains to the public/private dichotomy. Browsing and buying necessary products from the “safety” of home, away from the unwanted male gaze in public spaces, reinforces respectable women's association with the domestic sphere. (Bloch, H., and Richins, 1983)

Apart from that, all married respondents consider cooking meals to be a fun activity, and not exactly a chore or duty. However, it is invariably only cooking which is considered to be fun and not any other chores like mopping or washing clothes. This point can be related to Ray's work which states that cooking has been romanticized and aestheticized within Bengali middle-class homes. (Ray, 2009)

When it comes to younger respondents, they spoke about hanging out in cafes and malls and this again shows the link between consumerism and leisure in Bengali middle-class families. It is important to note here that these spaces are not public spaces in the truest sense because they fall in a liminal space between the public and the private and it is for this reason that women are allowed to be in these spaces. Men on the other hand never have to worry about the nature of a public space when they step out of their homes.

Having discussed some of the ways in which middle-class Bengali women partake in leisure, it becomes imperative to analyze the myriad factors which serve as an impediment to women's leisure. The most persistent constraint to Bengali women's leisure pertains to their lack of time. What consumes the greatest chunk of time for married Bengali women can be related to the household tasks that they have to perform every single day. Moreover, in the case of working women, because of the double burden of work, they find it difficult to engage in leisure on a

daily basis. Keeping aside leisure for their own sake, it is the woman of the family who is responsible for arranging the leisure of men and other members of the family.

Similarly, childcare poses another restriction because the mother is constantly being scrutinized with respect to her parenting. Moreover, I have found that for a father, taking care of the children is a fun filled and relaxing task for instance when he takes the child out to a park, whereas all the tasks relating to the child like preparing meals and washing clothes etc are taken care of by the mother. This shows that a father taking care of the child can be said to be a part of his leisure, but we cannot say the same in case of the mother.

When it comes to Bengali families, one of the most important values that is upheld is that of respectability. The honour of the family is tied to the women of the family and it becomes necessary to make sure that these Bengali middle-class women are always respectable. This concern for respectability is translated into women's leisure experiences.

In the Indian context, historian Partha Chatterjee (1990) has argued that in colonial Bengal, nationalists selectively chose aspects of western modernity espoused by the British. While they were willing to accede to the superiority of the 'modern' west in relation to science and technology, the nationalists claimed culture and cultural identity as sites to be protected from the dominance of the colonizers. These sites became part of the private world of the home, away from corruption by ideas of western modernity. Women, who were the mainstay of this inner or private sphere, thus became responsible for preserving the sanctity of national culture. (Phadke, 2011)

It is this very notion of being respectable that produces the narrative of a good girl versus a bad girl. A good girl is usually seen as someone who is decent, docile, submissive, and follows the norms without complaint (therefore respectable) whereas a bad girl is one who is rebellious, promiscuous, loud and has gone astray. (Phadke, 2011) Consequently, this necessitates monitoring of women's movement in public spaces and controlling their sexuality in the name of safety.

Apart from monitoring by others, another restrictive factor with respect to leisure is self-monitoring. This act of constant self-surveillance by women produces what Foucault calls 'disciplined bodies.' Foucault argues that in spaces like prisons, schools, hospitals and asylums, where people are constantly watched by those in authority, the subjects— inmates, students, patients—no longer have to be monitored because they begin to monitor themselves. What happens to women in public spheres is exactly similar.

Similarly, every time a middle-class Bengali woman intends to go out to have fun, she has to be careful about her choice of dress and has to do a balancing act between being respectable and wearing what she actually wants to. A woman's body is therefore used as a cultural weapon whereby certain women's bodies signify middle-class respectability and decency and hence are superior to other women's bodies.

It is also important to note that a woman's access to public leisure is conditional upon her having respectable company, preferably female companions because a woman in the company of a man or a group of men is seen as promiscuous and not respectable.

Now coming to the structural constraints, women's leisure experience outside the home depends not only on the availability of transportation but also on the type of transportation. For instance, Bengali middle-class girls prefer to take public transport during the day time but late at night they prefer using Uber or Rapido. This shows that women have to be calculative in the way they navigate public transport.

A very fundamental constraint women face, not only when they are out having fun but every single time that they step outside the house is the lack of toilets. The lack of toilets for women is a gendered problem and is reflective of disproportionate, inadequate and gender-insensitive urban infrastructural policy and planning. It severely restricts the mobility of women in public spaces. When it comes to pregnant women and mothers with newborn babies, the public spaces are even less accommodating.

Leisure has increasingly become interlaced with consumption and it follows that in order for women to consume/experience leisure, they need money and that is often restricted since it is controlled by men. In Bengali households, it is usually the men - the father or the husband - who are the custodians of family money and it is from them that transfer of money into the hands of women happens. "When I received around nine thousand rupees from my internship, my parents did not take it away from me but I had to tell them what I was using it for", Aishwarya, a college going respondent, admitted. This shows how women, even after earning their own money, are made to answer regarding their practices of spending money. There is thus, a monitoring of women's money, which again restricts their leisure.

The next parameter which stands as one of the greatest challenges to women's leisure experience relates to crime and the fear of crime. It is not just the public sphere where the possibility of crime looms large. It is there inside the homes as well in the form of domestic violence. Crime and the threat of it is a lived reality of women and every aspect of their lives, including leisure is shaped and navigated in that context. The responsibility of avoiding crime rests squarely on the woman, and this is articulated as the primary reason to curtail women's movement and public leisure.

In a departure from a critical analysis of constraints to leisure, I would like to turn the attention towards women's agency. Agency implies that 'all human beings, regardless of their class, age or gender, are viewed as acting subjects that live within durable structures that shape their lives and actions.' (Waldrop, 2012). Foucault (1975) has stated in *Discipline and Punish* that wherever there are relations of power, there is also a possibility of resistance. And in spite of all the constraints, women still participate in leisurely experiences, and they do access various avenues of leisure both outside the bounds of the home and within. Women negotiate the power structures in which they are themselves enmeshed, which substantiates their own power and agency.

Firstly, an increase in financial control implies a corresponding increase in leisure opportunities. An income can go a long way in terms of gaining

autonomy over leisure. Another factor which serves to facilitate women's leisure pertains to moving away from home because anonymity provides a certain degree of mobility to women. When women are in spaces where they will not be recognized, they feel relatively freer. This freedom is experienced when women do not feel the need to demonstrate respectability.

Another tactic that young women often use in order to escape parental control is by concealing information or giving incorrect information so as to have unrestrained access to leisure. For example, by concealing one's actual location or company from one's parents. This strategy of concealing information with regard to their whereabouts relates to the way in which women present an image of a "good girl" in front of their parents. This becomes a necessary performance in order to preserve the honour and respectable status of the family. The concern for respectability leads women to make use of the public space in a strategic manner and by following the curfew which men rarely have to follow.

These strategies for safety, however, only serve to put the responsibility on women and absolve the actors who actually perpetuate fear, anxiety and violence. The fact therefore remains that power is skewed in favour of men, when it comes to accessing leisure. The tactics detailed above are only a way of navigating the patriarchal system which constrains women every step of the way.

All this necessitates an intense restructuring of socio-cultural perception towards women's leisure. Material and infrastructural barriers also need to be broken down in order to make leisure a much more equitable phenomenon.

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