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***Special Edition — Gender & Popular Culture:  
Representations & Embodiments***

***In Association with SLC (University of Delhi)***



# THE DISCUSSANT

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*The thought process of the activists of the JNU, who have of late been working overtime to find a Kurukshetra (if their book permits the use of the word) in the Delhi University, have been propelled by their Marxist teachers*

The title of this issue's editorial is of course inspired by Charles Dickens' 1859 novel, "A Tale of Two Cities." One of the underlying themes of the novel was that be it Paris or London, the two cities in question, though divided by different languages, cultures, and sea, they remained similar in many ways. My inspiration from the novel is limited to finding a suitable headline as I do not see many similarities between University of Delhi and Jawaharlal Nehru University, rather wish to expound on the differences between the two institutions.

The newspapers were full of headlines and social media is more violently stirred with the fact that "Delhi University is on the boil." I think that's an overstatement. I wonder if it would be alright to say that just the main campus of Delhi University was on the boil. My friends tell me that even this would be an overstatement. What would be the most appropriate description of the "prevailing tension" on the campus? According to my friends, who are also residents of the campus, there is "no prevailing tension"; it visited between 11 am to 2 pm on a working day. At best, the "tension" could prevail for another two hours in the evening before the bells tolled for dinner in most of the hostels. This nature of protest describe adequately how different Delhi University is (the main campus of which is located in the northern part of the city) from its southern counterpart - Jawaharlal Nehru University.

The only times when Delhi University had actually been on the boil in the recent past was when the Vishwanath Pratap Singh government decided to introduce reservation in the jobs for other backward classes, in 1990; and a decade and half later when Arjun Singh as HRD Minister decided to introduce quota for the OBCs in the classrooms too.

During these two agitations, the students of Delhi University were also joined in by pupils from technical institutions in the city, be it the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, or the Delhi College of Engineering. JNU largely kept aloof from the agitation on both the occasions. The Marxian ideologues of the teacher and the student bodies of the verdant campus did not join hands with the agitating students from other institutions, which in the coming years saw the influence of Left wingers remaining limited to the campuses and getting reduced in the legislatures. This explains the difference in the composition, nature and character of the students of Delhi University and JNU. While JNU can afford to remain on the boil for days and months together, DU finds it unnecessary to be in a state of "hyper-activity" even beyond the - what we called in our times - the U-Special hours. The U-Specials were the buses operated by the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) from the campus to various parts of the city. The first of the fleet moved out at 12.30 pm and the last at 3.30pm.

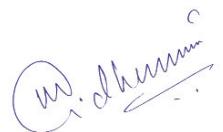
It was difficult to find "agitated souls" on the campus after the U-Special hours in the yore, as there was not much "excited audience" to give them a "patient hearing" except for the hostellers. JNU on the

other hand, lives through the night singing anthems which revolutionised Latin America, whose hero later became an iconic motif printed on the t-shirts produced in the United States. For JNU students, doubling up as the residents of the government subsidised accommodation and the mess, the energy for such “agitated activity” comes in plenty. It is interesting to point out that majority of hostels of Delhi University have no subsidy on the food served in the mess and the rules for the retention of hostel accommodation are very stringent.

On the other hand, in JNU, one can continue (the perception goes) to be a resident while being a student only in sense of the word and not exactly in spirit. Thus, Delhi University goes on the boil across all its campuses only when a threat looms “on the future of the students”. The definition of future in the case of most of the DU students is very narrow - finding livelihood for a decent survival. On the other hand, in the case of the JNU students “the concerns are much wider” including “societal concerns.” Such thoughts are natural to them especially when their immediate concern for ‘roti’ and ‘makan’, if not ‘kapada’, has been taken care off. However, it must not be forgotten that the thought process of the activists of the JNU, who have of late been working overtime to find a Kurukshetra (if their book permits the use of the word) in the Delhi University, have been propelled by their Marxian teachers.

In a recent article, historian Ramchandra Guha, writing on the attacks on the freedom of expression, says that “in fact JNU has long been suspicious even of academics who challenge the university’s ruling certitudes. Several departments in JNU have been dominated by a monochromatic Marxism; one being so narrow-minded that (as I recall) they would not allow a scholarly discussion on the Narmada Andolan, since environmentalism was a bourgeois deviation from the class struggle.” Now that’s some criticism of the activism, which is sought to be transplanted from JNU to Delhi University. Guha is no votary for the Right wing, we all know, and elsewhere in the same essay he calls the present ideological struggle between the Right and the Left as a struggle between “Left’s dogmatism and Right’s bigotry.” In fact he goes to even say that the right on several occasions has justified its actions as a counter to the Left’s intransigence.

Delhi University has been there for nearly a century. It has been a fine centre of scholarship, promotion of diverse cultural aspirations, free flow of ideas, and given the nation some of its finest citizens. Nation and its wellbeing have been its unstated agenda and those looking to create troubled water here to fish in will find it difficult to get a toehold.



31 March 2017

Sidharth Mishra

# secretary's desk

**I**t's with great humility and also sense of achievement that we enter into the fifth year of unbroken publication of *The Discussant*, which has been an asset in promoting research among young scholars across the universities. In this time and era when publication industry is increasingly coming to be controlled by corporate bodies, I reiterate, it's no mean achievement for a think tank like the Centre for Reforms, Development & Justice, to have managed to publish the journal regularly. We have completed four years of unbroken publication of *The Discussant* as an RNI registered quarterly periodical. We had received the ISSN accreditation a year earlier.

I am happy to share with you that our online edition too is crossing new frontiers and getting accessed from new territories, which gives our writers a global exposure unthinkable for any journal of our vintage.

*The Discussant* has come to be recognized as journal of honest endeavour. It gives me great pride to present before you the January-March 2017 issue, which is a special edition on the issue -- Gender & Popular Culture. The issue is being brought out in partnership with the Women Development Centre (WDC) of Shyamlal College, University of Delhi. It's matter of pride that we have started the year by bringing out another special issue. Last year we brought out three special issues of the four quarterly editions published.

As I we have repeatedly mentioned in reports at the beginning of the various past editions, the members of Centre for Reforms, Development and Justice including Centre president, self and other members have taken up academic activities in the right earnest participating in seminars and deliberations of national importance. Our president Sidharth Mishra is emerging as a public intellectual of repute getting invitation from reputed centres of learning to speak of topics from demonetization to revisiting Gandhi. He has also been invited by the Ministry of I&B, Govt of India to be on a committee to examine the possibility of framing a media policy for the nation. In the past three quarters, yours' truly had the opportunity of being associated with Ministry of Parliamentary Affair's project 13th National Youth Parliament competition as group coordinator.

As mentioned earlier too, the highpoint of last year was the release of Gorkha - Society and Politics, authored by Brigadier CS Thapa and published by the CRDJ. The book was launched by Mr Deep Kumar Upadhyay, Nepal's ambassador to India at a well-attended function in Dehradun on October 27, 2016 which included city's crème de la crème especially from the Gorkha community, a delegation of very bright cadets from the prestigious Rashtriya Indian Military College and large number of mediapersons. The launch was chaired by Mr Ramesh Batta, Chairman, Kasiga School, Dehradun and Mr Rakesh Tyagi, Senior Advisor, Manipal Group was the guest of honour.

With Warm Regards,

31 March 2017



Dr Sanjeev Kumar Tiwari

**SPECIAL EDITION**

# GENDER & POPULAR CULTURE: REPRESENTATIONS & EMBODIMENT

In association with

Women Development Cell,  
Shyam Lal College,  
University of Delhi



# **preface**

This volume of The Discussant features the proceedings of the National Conference on “Gender and Popular Culture: Representations and Embodiment” which was hosted by the Women Development Cell, Shyam Lal College, University of Delhi on December 14-15, 2016. The Conference posed the question: “How gender and popular culture are connected in multiple layers and do the representations of gender in popular culture create exclusive ideas of masculinity and femininity?” Over three hundred delegates from academia, policy making, civil society and Industry from India and abroad voluminously engaged in deliberations over two days of the conference, and thus the conference was very rich, as the proceedings in this volume depict.

When the WDC, SLC planned this two day event, the prime motivation was to inspire a dialogue between the community of academics, activists and media representatives on one hand, and the research scholars and student audience on the other hand, discussing how gender and popular culture intersect at odd angles giving rise to representation and misrepresentation of gender in popular culture, literature and cross-cultural context. The major theme that emerged from this multidisciplinary conference was how certain aspects of popular culture resist or reproduce dominant gender norms and stereotypes. Therefore, beyond the diverse thematic approaches to gender and popular culture brought about by the very nature of the initiative, there would also be a major impact at various levels among students at understanding how gender is a fluid category and can be reshaped through persistent questioning and participative action.

Determined to reach our goals, the members of WDC, SLC under the Headship, guidance and constant encouragement of Dr. Rabi Narayan Kar have tried to maximize on the resources and support system offered by the College to organize such a conference with multidisciplinary approach. The Conference committee members including Dr. Alka Sharma (Director, National Conference), Dr. Kusha Tiwari (Convenor), Dr. Komilla Suri (Organizing Secretary), Dr. Samrendra Kumar (Treasurer) and other core committee members put in a great effort in managing all organizational aspects of the two day extravaganza. Above all, it is the student volunteers who with their zest, involvement and synergy made this conference a stimulating and engaging experience for all. We are particularly pleased for giving the opportunity to a wide range of research scholars from different academic backgrounds to present their work at our conference. The Conference, spanned over two days, had research papers on a broad range of topics such as gendered patterns/identities in society and literature, notions of femininity and masculinity as constructed in popular culture, counter popular narratives and changing gender perceptions, popular narratives and the Queer discourse among others.

We would like to express our gratitude and thanks, on the behalf of the organizers, to Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), University Grants Commission (UGC) and Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) for giving financial assistance and support for the successful conduct of the conference. We would also like to thank our sponsors Central Bank of India,

S. Chand & Group and Mazars Group for facilitating the event. A special thanks goes to our Hon'ble Chief Guest Prof. Manoj Kumar Sinha, Director, ILI who inaugurated the Conference, with Smt. Savita Gupta, the Chairperson of SLC Governing Body being the Chair of the Inaugural session. We are grateful to all the luminaries from the world of academics and business that graced the event including Prof. Ruchira Gupta, New York University, USA (Keynote Speaker), Prof. Madhu Kishwar (Founder, MANUSHI), Prof. Savita Singh (Centre for Gender and Development Studies, IGNOU), Mr. Pankaj Butalia (Filmmaker), Prof. Karen Gabriel (St. Stephen's College), Prof. Rajkumar (University of Delhi, Delhi), Prof. Uma Chakravorti (University of Delhi, Delhi), Prof. Kshiti Bhusan Das (Utkal University, Odisha), Prof. Charu Gupta (University of Delhi, Delhi), Prof. Baran Farooqi (Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi), Dr. Lakshmi Kannan (Writer), Ms. Kamla Bhasin (Gender Activist), Ms. Madhureeta Anand (Filmmaker), Sh. S.C Prusty (Registrar, ILI), Prof. Shuchi Sinha (IIT, Delhi), Ms. Nandita Pilania (Mazars India), Ms. Sumati Sharma (BHEL), Dr. Minakshi Kar (University of Delhi).

The valedictory addresses of Prof. Kavita A. Sharma, President, South Asian University, Delhi (Chief Guest), Sh. Sidharth Mishra, Consulting Editor, Millenium Post and Sh. Shakti Sinha, Director, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library - the Guest of Honour and Chairperson Smt. Savita Gupta offered an apt conclusion to the conference with specific summing up of the theme of the conference and the acknowledgment of the efforts of the whole WDC team, Shyam Lal College and the Principal Dr. Rabi Narayan Kar who set the tone of the session with the Power Point Presentation of the achievements of the College in the last few years that clearly stated that Brand SLC has arrived, and there is nothing to stop it from marching forward.

Thus having accomplished our primary purpose, we take pride in publication of the Proceedings of the Conference that will attest the encouraging success of such an attempt. In spite of time limitations and our lack of experience, we believe in the core value of this idea, and the large audience who attended the conference represents by itself a great reward. We hope that our initiative will meet the expectations of the readers and that there would be other similar initiatives in the future from team SLC that would take the debate surrounding gender issues further.

— Editorial Board

# introduction

## **GENDER AND POPULAR CULTURE: REPRESENTATIONS AND EMBODIMENT**

DR. RABI NARAYAN KAR\*

DR. KUSHA TIWARI\*\*

**P**opular culture, an umbrella term, ranges from folk culture to mass culture with further emerging subcultures that interrogate as well as consolidate social constructions. Popular culture is a comprehensive and highly mediated phenomenon that consists of an extensive range of cultural texts and practices from films to newspaper and television, from designing computer games to creating cartoon series. The social recycling of identity, over the time, through these subcultures creates realities that are naturalized, historicized and ritualized. In particular, it is the gender dynamics that acquire significant material and symbolic dimensions in the workings of popular culture. These contemplations and ideas germinated and materialized into the WDC national conference organized by SLC on "Gender and Popular Culture: Representations and Embodiment". The aim of the conference was to draw attention to gender identities as created and dismantled in the everyday exposure, of the young minds and masses, to the popular cultural practices, narratives and perceptions. The possibilities in popular culture in contemporary times have blurred the boundaries between the virtual and physical reality. This blurring of boundaries has created new parameters of identity construction and fashioning that have in turn led to realignment of gender identities.

Gender as a social and religious construct is continually produced, consumed and represented in popular culture and it is these processes of consumption, production and representation that interact to create what we commonly identify as gender identities (Meyer and Milestone et al., 2012). The category of gender is not interchangeable with that of sex that denotes the biological difference between men and women. Media spaces/texts are central to the popular culture as they construct narratives of fanciful youthful experiences. Representations of gender in mass media/new media create exclusive ideas of masculinity and femininity that are internalized and imbibed as behavioral attributes by society. The stereotypes associated with

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the masculine and the feminine further affect the developing understanding of the adolescent mind about his/her environment. Men and women are expected to perform, believe in, and adhere to precise gender roles and stereotypes that have been established by society. Males are expected to be strong, self-reliant and athletic whereas females are expected to be gentle, submissive and attractive nurturers. Social conformity to such gender attributes is boosted by media representations. Gender differences in dress and behavior are overtly pronounced in Ads featuring children such as the Surf Excel (*daag achae hai*) commercial that features little boys as dirty, naughty and rowdy while the little girls are projected as delicate creatures in beauty soap commercials like masoom Pears. It is as if girls cannot play mud puddle or boys are not *masoom* enough to promote beauty soaps. Our daily experience is continually mediated through such omnipresent symbolic media practices including film songs such as *baby doll* and *paaniwala dance* that portray women as agents of titillation. Talking about T.V serials women have commonly been portrayed as Devi or as vamps and currently it is trendy to (re)present women as either naagins or dayans in family dramas. Video games and cartoons hardly have any female character as superhero. Then there are Whatsapp jokes on gender stereotypes spammed in bulk and pornography that legitimizes overtly violent and degrading sexual acts among others. There are other facets of the popular culture that are part of lived experiences such as wedding spectacles, religious rituals, glamorized festive extravaganzas and gendered world of sports. All these cultural constituents create/promote gender identities that are mediated through discourses of power and inequality.

On the other hand, there are counter popular culture narratives that contend that the categories of sex and gender are not fixed but fluid and should not be restricted to conventional gender identity binaries. Intersex identities face constant stigma and oppression due to the homophobic and sexist reactions based on the popular misrepresentation of these queer individualities. Popular culture thrives on the contradictory nature of reality and its resulting chaos as opposed to dominant elite cultures that apparently generate the principle of social harmony. But when it comes to understanding these plural experiences of identity formations in the contemporary times, we realize that there are certain gaps in the popular conception/perception of the 'different' subjectivities. The trans identities challenge rigid classification of the gendered self and have been an integral part of our culture and mythology. Thus it is pertinent to explore those aspects of popular culture that resist or reproduce dominant gender norms and stereotypes. Gender itself is a deeply political and contentious concept and due to its performative nature, it becomes so customary and naturalized in the practical world that it is imperceptible. Thus an oversimplification and polarized perceptions of gender subtleties in/through differing cultural modes tend to (mis) represent queerness as an aberration giving rise to a certain gender phobia that is reflected in homophobic jokes and negative cultural depictions. There have been many films and media forums that have marginalized and stereotyped LGBTQ identities. The film and television world's use of queerness has been a matter of active public debate in the recent decades with websites, films, magazines and other cultural products as producing and dismantling queer stereotypes. Queer issues in mainstream Hindi cinema, especially, are dealt with hostility and biasness wherein the LGBTQ characters are mostly depicted as caricatures or socially deviant or psychos. Films like *Dostana*, *Bol Bachchan*, *Sadak* and many others reinforce these stereotypes and present gay characters as overly horny and lusting for a straight man (mainly the hero). However, in recent times there have been films like *My Brother Nikhil*, *Margarita With a Straw*, *Aligarh*, *Mitraa* among others that have handled the issues bisexuality and homosexuality with great sensitivity, compassion and open-mindedness. These films are hard hitting and absorbing, and indicate a paradigm shift in the depiction of homosexuals in Indian films.

Gender as a social construct is appropriated through different variants of popular culture in various ways in our day to day life. Popular culture plays a very important role in constructing exclusive ideas of femininity, masculinity, gender relations and perceptions. The culture of mass media and new media continually engage with and influence the changing cultural perception in the society about gender roles and stereotypes. Thus sometimes there are confident expressions of women's power alongside reports of battered women or graphic reports of violence against women or rape are placed within the same space as cheeky ads of escort services. Thus both the virtual and real worlds are dominated by gender politics and sexist

appropriations. The articles in this special edition of The Discussant on SLC, WDC conference theme reflect and interrogate the polarized depictions of gender in mass media, popular media and new media, and scrutinize the multilayered dimensions of the subject of study. The papers are particularly relevant in the contemporary Indian context as they create awareness around popular representations of gender relations and stereotypes in varied fields of media and track the changes that have taken place in Indian society in terms of changing/unchanging gender perceptions. Shilpi Singh's paper "Media Driven Consumerism and the Perfect Brides in Indian Weddings" explores how class becomes amenable to transformation of taste and distinctions with a specific role played by media, image building and consumption. The paper raises socially engaging questions about how capital is shaping the tastes and preferences of the social matrix with which it has to interact, and how it is acquiring new forms in the process. Anamta Rizvi's paper "Interrogating the Image of the 'New Woman' in Select Indian Advertisements" highlights how women's sexuality still remains an unfailing tool for advertising companies as they navigate their way through the traditional and conventional image of a 'Hindustani Nari'. The Indian woman, as depicted in popular ads, has discarded her position of servitude and is appearing in a new avatar that gives a pro-feminist impetus to the marketing strategies of such companies. Aneesha Puri's paper "Linguistic Conventions and Discursive Construction of Gender Identity: Sexism in Mainstream Culture and Consolidation of Cliches" scrutinizes the use of language to sustain heteronormative societal relations. The paper explores how the linguistic conventions of English language, consciously or unconsciously, help to maintain gender ideology by repeatedly reinforcing gender stereotypes. These papers give an inclusive critical overview of the transformations, representations and embodiment of gender norms as propagating in Indian society through films, television, ads, internet, facebook, pornography, youtube, computer games, cartoons etc. Some of the papers initiate and contribute to debates around gender and familial representations and patriarchal norms in Indian society. Kaustubh Ranjan's article "A New Window of Stereotype Celebrations: Facebook and WhatsApp (Re)Shaping Philosophies" puts forth how the social platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram etc. affect and effect gender equations and roles. Mediums such as WhatsApp and Facebook, in particular, are flooded with creative thoughts and quotes wherein everyone is shaping his/her pseudo-philosopher image by sharing and liking the available views/quotes/status etc. on socio-digital universe. Interestingly, Debjanee Ganguly's "Selling Sex, Selling Condoms: Desirous Women in Commercials" raises questions around the coded language of sex as is still practiced in India and how a woman's body is heavily sexualized and eroticized in media or the male gaze.

The critical impetus of the articles in this special issue works by rejecting the grand narratives of the elite culture in favour of the micro-politics of everyday interactions that shape our gender orientations. There is an emphasis on the transformations in Indian as well as global society in the emerging scenario of virtual hyperreality. The world is no longer defined by local/national/global affiliations rather it is the all pervasive virtual 'connectedness' that dominates our lives and provide us with innumerable avenues to express/share our convictions, thoughts and memories. Contributions like Jayaprakash Mishra's "Migration and Marginalization: Issue of 'Double minority' among Indian Queer Diaspora" and Yamini's "The Well of Loneliness: Smashing the Conspiracy of Heterosexism" bring into focus the counter popular culture narratives that contend that the categories of sex and gender are not fixed but fluid and should not be restricted to conventional gender identity binaries. J. P Mishra's paper exposes the general tendency to see the Indian queer diaspora as a privileged lot and place them on a pedestal that ultimately homogenizes such a diverse group of individualities. Yamini's article analyses *Well of Loneliness* (1928) by Radclyffe Hall and how it brings the same-sex love between women out of the closet and into the everyday discussion among the common people. Another very interesting take on gender stereotyping is offered by Aparna Dixit in "Redefining Jewelry beyond Custom and Décor: A Feminist Interrogation" wherein the author explores the socio-cultural role of jewelry as it signifies ownership, status and as a marker of 'Stri Dhan'. The paper investigates the socialization of a girl/woman in the frame of jewelry tradition. There are also papers that engage with the exploration of gender dynamics in literature. Deeksha Suri's "The Motif of Waiting Women in the Works of Raja Ravi Varma and Rabindranath Tagore" explores how Tagore and Ravi Varma

depict women's predicament within rigid social constructs as well as locate unfailing spirit in women to interrogate and reconstruct their identity by questioning masculine domain of intellect and worldly concerns. Interestingly, Shipra Gupta's article "Realities vs Fantasies: Examining the Character Representation of Young/adolescent Girls in Imaginary Lands" examines how Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* shows the organized and coordinated identity of the girl child being affected when faced with out-of-the-ordinary situations. Gender perceptions are rapidly changing in the society and different cultural contexts that draw attention to the impact of mass media and new media in negotiating, establishing and questioning identity formations in terms of gender, class and race. We have seen continuing engagement, in the academic circles across the world, with these issues where researchers and experts codify and de-codify the existing/new definitions of human relationships, practices and identities.

The volume as a whole looks into the issues of created identity perceptions in mass media, social media, new media, films, advertisements, daily soaps, songs etc. In present times, when our physical reality and identity is intricately connected with the multiple virtual identities that we embrace through Whatsapp, Facebook or Twitter, it becomes all the more important for us to understand that it is we who are contributing to the stereotyping of identities as we are both the producers as well as consumers of popular gender practices. The volume engages with the ideas around the performative aspects of gender and its political implications and outcomes. The article in this volume also raise the point of how we need to further our understanding of issues where greater and coordinated actions at the global level are needed to rise and speak against any kind of oppression and discrimination related to race, class, community and gender so as to facilitate and develop a world without pain, agony and violence.

# **THE MOTIF OF WAITING WOMEN IN RAJA RAVI VARMA AND RABINDRANATH TAGORE**

DEEKSHA SURI\*

## **ABSTRACT**

**C**onsolidation of the binary between male and female leads us ineluctably to the question of the relationship of the feminine with the community at large. Writers like Rabindranath Tagore explored women's predicament by shedding light on their undue endurance within rigid social constructs. The writings encapsulate Tagore's agenda of unveiling and challenging the conceptual notion of woman as an appendage. The aim of this paper is thus to analyze the motif of the 'waiting woman' in Tagore's novella 'Broken Nest' along with two short stories 'Two Sisters' and 'Giribala'. The effort to trace the consciousness of alienation in this paper also includes visual representation of waiting in Ravi Varma's paintings such as 'Sita Bhoomipravesh', 'Hamsa and Damyanti', 'Sita's Exile' and more. His paintings capture women in the state of deliberation or psychological introspection, hence breaking the stereotype of showcasing mere objective appearance. The ontological anxiety of women expressed in the works of Tagore and Ravi Varma places 'Otherness' as the basis of the inhabited space. This distinction between 'One' and the 'Other' not only undertakes physical space but also differences in ideas. The prerogative is thus to locate the tendencies within women to interrogate and reconstruct their identity by questioning masculine domain of intellect and worldly concerns.

**KEYWORDS:** Waiting, Alienation, Other, Identity, emancipation, Bharat Mata

Tradition and modernity are two aspects responsible for the discernment of culture politics. Different historical periods interpret their definitions of development with their own sensibility. At the time of emerging nationalism, the increasing impact of the West led to radical social formation and corresponding changes in the subjectivity of the masses. But, according to Geeta

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Kapur in *When Was Modernism*, "Rather than distancing alternative civilization...into objects to be processed by western subjectivity, the nationalist intelligentsia makes some genuinely anxious, and responsible appropriations within their own societies." (279). It thus requires an attempt to locate the visual practices and literary ideologies that appropriate the Indian modern through a redefinition of the past and a self - critical perspective towards the present. Combining these two forms of expression, this paper will focus on the motif of 'waiting women' in the works of Raja Ravi Varma and Rabindranath Tagore. In the words of Harold Schweizer, waiting can be "a meditative temporal space in which one might have unexpected intuitions and fortuitous insights."<sup>1</sup> Hence the paper will engage with women's ontological anxiety and attempt to locate the development of their individuality and creative abilities in the hours of abandonment and isolation.

The works of Raja Ravi Varma (1848 - 1906) engage a subtle dialogue between the past and the present, the indigenous and the West. During his time, the scope of paintings was primarily limited to the images of gods and goddesses on the walls of temples or palaces. But in his paintings, Indian myths gained new vision and interpretation. The subject of his paintings range from portraits to the delineation of narratives. He referred to epics for the sources of his work and various classical treatises provided him the examples for painting moods, gestures, postures and emotions throughout his work. Western techniques such as easel painting, academic painting, a estheticization of the female figure and the use of still life were applied, which introduced novel means of exhibiting psychological states through form. Women characters in his paintings are generally the central characters from epic tales. Analyzing his women models, Geeta Kapur argues that Ravi Varma, holding true to the Indian standards of female beauty delineates the "erotic fullness of archetypal figures which becomes in turn the pre - condition for their erect dignity and poise in a society already aroused by history." (*Indian Painting: Essays in honour of Karl J. Khandalawala*, 233) Along with such unprecedented representation of beauty, his depiction of women holds a tendency to go beyond the objective portrayal, to hint at the predicament of women at both the levels of presence and evanescence. By focusing on the heroines' moments of existential quest in his paintings, he brings forth a model of Indian women with resilience and passion.

Paintings by Ravi Varma are evocative of love, separation, expressiveness and tender emotions. Thematically, various paintings portray women in the situations where they are alienated from their husbands or familiar environment. In such instances the motif of waiting can be traced. But, in order to grasp the significance of the waiting motif, it is necessary to focus initially on how one experiences waiting. The paintings titled 'Nala and Damayanthi', 'Princess Damayanthi talking with Royal Swan' (1899) and 'Sita's Exile' are psychologically intense for their depiction of heroine's gravity of emotions at the time of cleft in their relationship with men. The moment chosen in the painting 'Princess Damayanthi talking with the Royal Swan' brings to view the abstraction of women from the physical and linguistic space inhabited by men. Here, the Royal Swan transforms into the symbol of male and the channel of communication becomes symbolic. Through this distancing the binary of the 'one' and the 'other' can be seen as the concern of the painting where the female subject is waiting for an entry into the space inhabited by her male counterpart. The centre of waiting hence lies in the consciousness of being the 'other' in the patriarchal order of society. It is to survive the waiting when 'time must suddenly be endured rather than traversed, felt rather than thought.'<sup>2</sup> The reflective mood of the paintings by Ravi Varma is denser than the beauty and the fine exteriority of the female figures. 'Even as the erotic is rendered into a spectacle the supporting allegory is nevertheless adduced in favor of moral purpose and transcendental sentiments.'<sup>3</sup>

The depiction of Ravi Varma's heroines is sensuous and luminous in their delicate repose. But, the sequences selected by him are exemplary for the courage exercised by the heroines in the situations which gave them the opportunity to manifest their strength. They have a strong objective appeal with an equal emphasis on the subjective aspect of their individuality. The painting titled 'Sita's Exile' is the matically based on Sita waiting for her husband, who has abandoned her for the established codes of morality. The subject of the painting is reflective of Sita's predicament and her subsequent reflection on her existence as an abandoned wife. Another painting titled 'Sita Bhoomi Pravesh' (1880) demonstrates the moment when Sita is forced to

take the test of chastity for the second time. The emotion of distress, anguish and trauma reflecting through her eyes showcase her resolve of not sacrificing her autonomy. 'It has emotive overtones which language can hardly convey.'<sup>4</sup> Rejected, she returns back to the womb of her mother Earth as an act of defiance. The historical narratives or myths prevalent in our society are imbued with the authority of the males. But those who wander in alienated waiting, withstand an existential predicament. Thus the recurrent depiction of abandonment in these paintings bring out multitudinous aspects of a woman in her contemplative patience and in her pride and dignity in not reassuring her husband.

Ravi Varma's frames, with a particular retelling of popular tales and sensuous portrayals opened new doors of perception. The images of women undergoing introspection regarding their existence in the society and other existential urgencies led to the consciousness of separate space inhabited by them. The separation of the inner and outer spaces consolidate the binary between male and female segments of the society. Women, being the preserver of tradition and domestic sanctity were away from the masculine exigencies. In his paintings they are in the position of self - possessed dreamers, questioning their predicament and taking a firm stand. The psychologically complex portraiture prompted a revision of the model of Indian society. 'For most of northern India, where men were molded by an intense patriarchy, Ravi Varma's heroines were bold'<sup>5</sup> and commanded respect. The visual framing of the narratives gave voice to the woman's question and refurnished their presence in the contemporary social scene. Geeta Kapur hence maintains that 'If the third world intelligentsia, among them artists, perform a task, it is to bring an existential urgency to question of contemporaneity.'<sup>6</sup> 'Since Ravi Varma's time the modernizing impulse is best understood as the beginning of historical self - consciousness under the twin banners of the past and future.'<sup>7</sup> The beauty of form and the engaging psychological intensity urged the Indian audience to get involved in the nuances of art and relate to the subject matter.

The changing role of women in the domestic and larger political and social space was the subject of both the visual and literary cultures of this time. Rabindranath Tagore (1861 - 1941) was the chief literary figure in highlighting the subject of women in his short stories, essays and lectures. Tagore's oeuvre spans from national issues and national identity to the marginalization of women and their secondary status. His writings challenged the dominant ideologies through a reconfiguration of traditions and social sanctions. According to Sisir Kumar Das, 'The short story as a new form of art, distinct from fables and tales of the older periods, started gaining popularity in this period.' (*History of English Literature*, 362). His short stories generally have female protagonists, going through a dilemma between self - preservation and maintaining the sanctity of the household. Monologues of the female protagonists within the stories highlight the social injustices and the disintegrating harmony in the relationship of men and women. The whiff of female emancipation can be sensed in the persona of almost all his heroines, whether it is Binodini of *Chokher Bali*, Mrinmayi of Samaptior Mrinal of *The Wife's letter*. The central clash in the stories is of the space inhabited by women and men in the home and the world.

Within the scope of the paper, home can be as an inner space and world as an external entity representing the domain of monetary interests. World is where men are engaged in controlling the power mechanism. Home is where women retreat within the confined spaces. Hence, the dynamics of the stories question the meaning of a united society by acting as a mirror to its deformities. Tagore becomes self - reflexive within the domain of short stories as they critique the patriarchal order operating in the upper class, the class to which Tagore himself belonged. In order to discuss the following concerns, this paper focuses on the novella *Nastanirh* (1901) and two short stories 'Man Bhanjan' (1917) and 'Dui Bon' (1933). All the three texts transcend the typical expectations from women characters and deal with the realization of their essential self. The texts reflect the fragmented social space with women waiting for the feeling of self - worth and fulfillment. The form can be perceived as similar to female bildungsroman of progression from a status of confinement to refinement through education and cultivation of creative talents. Thus, 'these women characters may be seen as models of modern Indian female subjectivity, instrumental in heralding the age in which we live and continuing to resonate towards a more egalitarian Indian society.'<sup>8</sup>

In the Nineteenth century Bengal, Tagore contributed to the question of feminine selfhood through his writings. 'Nastanirh' translated as 'Broken Nest' is the story of Charulata, trapped in a typical Bengali household battling with her alienation. In the story, her husband Bhupati aspires economic standing and social stability unlike Charu, who seeks love in their relationship. Charu is skirted by the predicament of being the subjugated 'other' not only in terms of alienation from the physical space but within the world of ideas too. While men like Bhupati are enveloped in the contemplation of the larger questions of the outer world, women like Charu are involved in thinking about the immediate, the situations which affect their inner emotions. Within the novella, Charu forms a special bond with her brother-in-law Amal, who changes her life by nurturing her creative talent of writing. As they both share a sense of aesthetic sensibility, Charu is able to construct a world of her own where she can cherish her subjective vision and learning in the creative process. Their belongingness showcases that, detachment from the male world can only be negotiated if men themselves enter a woman's domain. Through her encounters with Amal she finds her freedom in the form of language and the spirit of imagination. But her quest for self - discovery within the confined social structures soon shatters with the departure of Amal. She gets entangled in deep inertia when is unable to follow her heart due to the shackles of duty and loyalty towards her husband. She confronts 'cruel separation, helpless situation, beyond all question, beyond all redress.' ('Broken Nest,' 85). At this moment, her husband Bhupati attempts to return to her in the phase of economic difficulties. But after an entire life of waiting for her husband, this sudden rush of his presence unsettles her and because 'he had not made Charu his life's greatest necessity;...she cannot find anything to satisfy him.' ('Broken Nest,' 72) 'The contribution of women to the progress of men has always been disregarded. Women have lived an obscure existence for centuries, cloistered within the confines of the house'<sup>9</sup> where man is able to exercise his intellect through his freedom and access to the outside world. He finds the means of self - aggrandizement by moving out of the world of domestic duties. Woman's freedom from this waiting only seems possible by a journey inwards. The consciousness of her alienation, seeping in during the hours of waiting does not allow her to accept her husband. The will for self - preservation can thus be seen as an example of the rise of modern Indian woman's subjective consciousness, proclaiming a progressive egalitarian society.

The preservation of the Hindu household was assumed to be the primary concern of women. But, Tagore's stories reflect his understanding of a woman's inner consciousness. His story 'Man Bhanjan,' translated as 'Giribala' is one such representation of Tagore's sensitivity towards women's world. Giribala is wedded to Gopinath in a rich household. She has an exuberant character with all the charms of youth to provide for a happy domesticity. Gopinath on the other hand, has created a space of his own usefulness with the actress Lavanga. Therefore, love seems an impossibility within such matrimony where its mutuality holds no hope. This helpless situation of Giribala lands her within the confines of a household which does not contain her love, desires and identity. But the period of waiting is a space in itself with its own possibilities, instead of being just an interval before fulfillment. In the story, this period serves the formation of a new relationship between Giribala and her maid Sudha.' Giribala, in the seclusion of her lovely youth, felt like a queen who had her throne, but no subjects.' ('Giribala,' 317) Sudha is her companion in the silent household and the only one to appreciate her beauty and charm. She understands Giribala's yearning and desires like a friend, although slight traces of lesbianism are apparently visible. As the unutterable desires of attaining her husband are strangling her, she decides to invert her situation and move out to explore the world her husband enjoys i.e. theatre. She experiences a different face of society and dissolves all her fears within its mesmerizing charm. As the story proceeds, Giribala's husband drifts apart from her by running away with Lavanga. But, after a tumult of grief on this account, Giribala finally assumes a new role to attain independence through her decisiveness. She exposes herself to the pleasures of theatre and frees from the gravitational pull of society. In the beginning 'The protagonist suffers from a sensual alienation from her world.'<sup>10</sup> But towards the end she embraces her inclination towards art and moving out of her role as a wife, she attains a new role that reflects her identity.

In his story 'Dui Bon' translated as 'Two Sisters', Tagore has tried to penetrate into the nature of different women. In the beginning he states, 'Women are of two kinds, the mother - kind and the beloved - kind.' ('Two Sisters', 3) These two aspects

are represented by Sharmila and Urmila respectively. In the story, Sharmila's household is her only responsibility and Sasanka, (her husband) her only subject. But as the story progresses, a drift towards balancing his professional life takes Sasanka away from the world created by Sharmila with selfless love and sacrifice. Tagore in his book *Nationalism* proclaims a similar stance that, 'War has been declared between man and woman, because the natural thread is snapping which holds them together in harmony, because man is driven to professionalism...continually turning the wheel of power for his own sake.' (21). In the story, another character Urmila stands as a foil to Sharmila and exemplifies Tagore's version of modern woman in the social scenario. She is an educated, refined and independent woman but tangled in a commitment with a dull companion Nirad. She expects ecstasies of love out of Nirad but 'for such an expression of ardor on his part her heart ever waited, and for want of it, remained unfulfilled.' ('Broken Nest' 26). With such yearnings in heart, she enters Sharmila's household and instantly forms a bonding with Sasanka. Their growing intimacy creates a gap between Sharmila's imagined ideal of conjugal harmony and the bitter reality. She realizes her distance from her husband's love but unable to alter it, she forbears the divided love of her husband and becomes a constant victim of mental oppression. Tagore till the end does not offer a resolve for Sharmila from her household presence to apparently focus on the depiction of the reality of an Indian woman within an Indian household. Traversing through futility and desire, 'waiting' defines her forever. Also, as the opportunity of communication is absent within the household, the scar cannot be repaired.

'Dui Bon' also showcases household as apparently an analogy of the larger colonized nation where subjection works according to the binary of inner and the outer world. In the inner world of the household women are enchain to the expectations of traditions and submit to their subordinate status to that of men. Men, on the other hand have to submit as subjects of the colonizer, similar to the predicament of Sasanka in the story. This proves that the binary of society is nothing more than the space segmented between the feminine and the masculine. In the Nineteenth century, increasing nationalist ardor inspired men to contribute to the nationalist struggle and contemplate over the larger issues of a united nation. Hence, the prominent figure of Bharat Mata became 'an embodiment of the patriarchal visualization of the nation.'<sup>11</sup> The increasing sense of association with the figure of Bharat Mata resulted in an entirely new relationship between a man and a woman in the social world, i.e. of mother and son. But due to men moving out 'the defense of Hindu domesticity, the preservation of the Hindu home, fell away from the nationalist agenda.' (*Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, 52) By sacrificing themselves to the cause of the nation, they detached themselves from other institutions and the revered structures of society. This surge in nationalist struggle was dominated by the masculine discourse which completely eclipsed over the question of a woman's relationship with the figure of Bharat Mata. How did she relate to such representation of the feminine ideal was not widely received within the dominant male ideology.

In the works of both Raja Ravi Varma and Rabindranath Tagore an attempt to shape the consciousness of the masses becomes evident. Their works venture into the woman's world and unearth her struggle for existence. According to Partha Mitter, 'Ravi Varma's prints created modern Hindu religious icons with an India - wide circulation, thus contributing to the "imagined community", the emergent nation.' (*Beyond Appearances*, 27) He weaved incidents from the popular ancient narratives in his works and thus represented images highlighting the subjective realm of women. Similarly, Tagore's work brings forth the dynamics of desire within women which becomes the source of internal contradiction regarding their existence and consequently prompts them to transgress the domestic space. Their works shape a new woman who can interrogate and modulate her position in society which thus transformed the contemporary ways of understanding women and their concerns.

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# **INTERROGATING THE IMAGE OF THE ‘NEW WOMAN’ IN SELECT INDIAN ADVERTISEMENTS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Women’s sexuality has invariably been one of the major preoccupations in Indian advertisements. However, an aberration from this trend is discerningly perceptible as the recent advertisements eschew the stereotypical image of the woman and present her as the ‘new modern Indian woman’ who encompasses the potential to economically equate herself with that of the level of a man. Her position of servitude is now being questioned, and in redefining the new Indian woman, these advertisements possess a certain feminist rhetoric. However, an issue as critical as women empowerment is subtly moulded into a marketing strategy by the advertising companies. In the 20th Century, Adorno and Horkheimer asserted that there are various ways through which advertising agencies create marketing strategies which assist them in selling their products. This paper will therefore try to explore how the advertisements encompass a certain paternalistic tone and govern the modes of the life of consumers. They formulate their advertisements according to the sensibilities of the consumers. The paper will attempt to validate its argument by considering three recent advertisements- Titan, Havells Appliances and Ariel- and will delineate on the above mentioned arguments and will endeavour to situate it in a theoretical framework.

**KEYWORDS:** Advertisements, Indian women, Sexuality, Theodore W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Marketing strategies, Consumers.

Navigating their way through the traditional and conventional image of a Hindustani Nari, the recent advertisements, apparently, in the pursuit of recreating the image of Indian women, have endeavoured to depict their new avatar. While

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women's sexuality still remains an unfailing tool of advertising companies, these advertisements, depicting an elevated status of women, seem to be carving a new trend in this industry.

These recent advertisements cast away the stereotypical image of a mother, wife, sister, etc and portray her as a career oriented woman whose sole aim does not rest only with the household chores but to economically equate herself with that of the level of a man. Interrogating the norms of patriarchy, these advertisements, with new ideals vested in them, instantly become a hit among the viewers. They depict that Indian woman has ascended from just being the 'woman behind the successful man' to that of a 'successful woman' herself. Her position of servitude is now being questioned, and in redefining the new Indian woman, these advertisements possess a certain feminist rhetoric. Women empowerment, a critical issue in today's India, is subtly moulded into a marketing strategy.

However, Adorno and Horkheimer, in the 20th century, asserted that the only motive of these advertising companies is to multiply their productivity, to increase the demand of their respective commodities and to gain maximum financial benefit. Strategically, they bring to surface those sensitive issues, circulating in the society, which strike the right cord with the consumers and manipulate the market forces according to their own set goals. While the paper will discuss this issue, it will also consider that to what extent these advertisements impact the consumers' needs or demands, which further facilitate the profitability of the suppliers.

This paper will attempt to answer the question that how the advertisements hold a paternalistic tone and in a way dictate the modes of the life of consumers. Noticeably, it is only specific products, like detergent powder, jewellery, kitchen appliances or matrimonial sites, whose target consumers are essentially upper middle class women, take up the theme of women empowerment in their advertisements. The paper aims to study that how the advertising agencies strategically tailor their advertisement in order to suit the sensibilities of their consumers and target the audience accordingly. The paper will attempt to validate its argument by considering three recent advertisements- Titan, Havells Appliances and Ariel- and will delineate on the above mentioned arguments and will endeavour to situate it in a theoretical framework.

## 1

The symbiotic relationship of market and consumers has been a highly debateable topic of various disciplines. A general consensus affirms that firms tactically manipulate their products in a way that it seemingly appears to be indispensable to the consumers. The firms structure their marketing strategies in such a way that it necessitates the consumer's demands. This is also known as 'consumer culture' which Douglas Holt in his article 'Why Do Brands Cause Trouble?' defines as, 'the dominant mode of consumption that is structured by the collective firms in their marketing activities' (Holt 302). He continues, 'The cultural structuring of consumption maintains political support for the market system, expands markets, and increase industry profits.' Marketing techniques are manipulatively carved to seduce the customers and make them participate in 'commodified meanings embedded in brands.' (Holt 303). This perpetual cycle internalizes consumer culture within the consumers as they, without being cognizant, grant the authority to the market gurus to create their own choices. This idea stems from the two distinguished members of Frankfurt school Horkheimer and Adorno who consciously chose the term 'culture industry' over 'mass culture' as they significantly point that this culture cannot be traced arising from the masses but in fact has its roots in the 'culture industry'. According to them, each product is modified in such a way so as to give maximum financial benefit to their respective industries. Their main argument is that commodification of culture hampers the rational faculty of the consumers, thereby compelling them to think according to a set pattern and eradicating autonomous thinking. Holt, echoing Adorno and Horkheimer, concedes, 'The technologies of marketing- market research, segmentation, targeting, mass advertising- lead to a channelling of culture that erases idiosyncrasies.' Later in the century, these ideas were also reiterated by Stuart Ewen and George

Ritzerwhere as they assert that 'marketing is largely successful in channelling desires through brands.' (Halt 304)

However, the other side of this study throws light positively on this subject. The Marxist tradition, influenced by Antonio Gramsci, opines that while many consumers succumb to the seduction of cultural industry, a certain section of the consumers defy these marketing strategies by investing in products with 'particularised meanings'. Therefore, the consumers purchasing practice is not solely determined by these market manipulators but they sagaciously use their discretion in choosing a particular commodity.

Reading this discourse in the context of the Indian advertising industry, the argument is further consolidated and affirmed that Indian capitalist market, via its profoundly vigorous advertising agencies, manipulates the market according to its capitalist rationality. Tracing the genesis of Indian advertisements since the beginning, this industry, like the West, witnessed its first advertisements in periodicals and newspapers. James Augustas Hickey, in 1780 started with Hickey Bengal Gazette, and gradually advertisements paved a way for themselves in the newspapers. The first advertising agency was established in 1905 by B. Dattaram who realised the potential of this industry and paved a way for a large number of successive advertising houses. As foreign advertising agencies, during the First World War, navigated their way through India, a new era was ushered and there was no looking back. Anthropologist William Mazarella divided the era of Indian advertising into four different stages. The fourth stage, which started in 1980 and continues till today, is characterised by a synthesis of effective marketing mechanisms and a high level of creativity. Mazarella also draws a trajectory from the beginning of mass consumption as a self-consciously sensuous challenge in 1980 to the severities of state-led developmentalism. He affirms that in the 1990s, when India opened the doors for foreign brands to the Indian consumers, new relations were established between the local and global but also, in this process, another witnessed change was the transition of advertising gurus into guardians of cultural integrity. (Mazarella 381)

Earnest Elmo Calkins, the first American branding guru, believed that the manufacturers should strive to position their brands as concrete expressions of valued social and moral ideas (Lears 243). Previous advertisements highlighted the attributes of the products; thereby promising miraculous results. However, the modern paradigm finds its root in two most important instruments of advertising, that is, abstraction and cultural engineering. Calkins developed a new trend in advertising that harped on the fact that 'products materially embodied people's ideas eg. their aspirations concerning their families, their place in society, their masculinity and femininity, which were only tenuously linked to functional benefits.' This idea of Calkins was perfected by David Ogilvy and Leo Burnett who redefined the concept of brand image.

However, drawing from the above mentioned arguments, Indian advertisements are strategically created in order to create an indispensable need among the consumers. The foundations of patriarchy are so deeply entrenched in the Indian scenario that women empowerment remains one of the most important issues of this country. Women have been subjected to great degrees of commodification and their sexuality has been rampantly used for advertisements in varied products. However, an attempt of divergence does not go unnoticed when advertisements portraying women as just not the home maker but as an independent financially successful woman is rampantly shown on the television. This new wave stems from organised studies of the marketing experts; hence accordingly they mould their ideas, project their products vis-a-vis the present scenario of India.

The following section will discuss three advertisements which shed light on this subject.

## 2

In the first advertisement as the two elderly women discuss the two contrasting zamanas, the mother-in-law takes pride in announcing that her daughter-in-law earns much more than her son. However, the same advertisement implicitly yet explicitly shows the male chauvinism as the husband darts in to interrogate why the laundry hasn't been done yet. 'Share the Load', the last statement that comes on the screen, aims for equality and expresses an aspiration

to initiate a change in the society. Nevertheless, Ariel, an expensive brand among the detergent powders, automatically becomes as symbol of women empowerment, and henceforth in this process declares its target consumer, the upper class women. The price of this brand is double as compared to that of the price of Nirma, Ghari or Rin, as they aims to sell its product to the urban upper middle class office going women, and in this process create this product as a signifier of equality. This psychological manipulation is one of the most effective strategies of the market experts which hits the right cord at the right time. For Raymond Williams advertising is 'magic' because it transforms commodities into glamorous signifiers and these signifiers present an imaginary, in the sense of unreal world. These advertisements tend to become signifiers, symbols, metaphors and allegories and embody social and psychological properties. Therefore, a sense of liberty is only achieved when you have the Ariel detergent powder, a necessary tool for equality.

The second advertisement shows that an engaged couple, on the issue of job, as neither of them quits their work, finally breaks up. Towards the end, the confident expressions on the woman's face announces her as an undeclared winner vis-a-vis the nervous man, who is left fumbling for words, is obviously the loser. In this advertisement, the constant play with the Titan watch, an action apparently unawaringly done, is a very conscious act and a very significant part of the advertisement. Here again, sophisticated urban upper class woman is the target consumer and therefore the expensive, shining, glamorous Titan watch becomes the signifier of a woman's identity. Possessing a paternalistic and didactic approach, these advertisements direct consumers as to how they should live their life and why this particular brand signifies their strength in a certain way.

In the third advertisement, Havell appliance steam iron again becomes a symbol of egalitarianism and therefore orchestrating their customer's choices. Their tag line 'Respect for Women' almost becomes synonymous with the product itself as the woman in the advertisement demands her respect by not compartmentalising her as 'stree' (steam iron) but to respect her individuality as 'stree' (a woman). A series of advertisements of Havell appliances are shown with the same theme which shows that how these advertisements are created under the light of scientific principles which channelize the need of the consumers according to the industry's gains. Later in the twentieth century, Ernst Dichter, Pierre Martineau, well known advertisements experts, convinced numerous large corporations that they could use clinical psychology to tap into the deep unconscious of consumers to magnetically pull consumers to their brand with archetypal images or situations. (Holt 365)

These advertisements do not target all sections but a privileged class which would be their potential consumers. These products which are self declaratory tool of empowerment are not within the reach of ordinary working class women. This calculative strategy is well played by choosing a subject which is the most crucial in today's India. In these advertisements, empowerment remains an untouched issue in the rural spaces and thereby strengthening the dichotomy between the privileged and under privileged classes.

The bloom of this advertising industry is a no co-incidence as it metamorphosed from a low profile industry to a highly strategically advanced instrument for the capitalist market. As television entered India in 1960s, the communication of advertisers with their consumers became much simpler, and soon urbanisation proved a catalyst in multiplying the needs of the commodities. Now these brands acted as social glue that started bringing in strangers under one domain and in a way accelerated urbanization. Holt concedes that while capitalism asserts that we are free to choose what we want to consume, large marketing firms seemed to be claiming the power to author our consumer lives through branding (Holt 325).

In the West as people gained awareness of this branding paradigm, consumers realised it as threat to their ideals. The consumers realised that their needs should not be determined by the motives of these brands. However, in India, a section of people may have the knowledge of the superficiality of this industry, but a large section remains devoid of this knowledge and therefore this industry rampantly orchestrates their needs according to their set targets.

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# **REDEFINING JEWELLERY BEYOND CUSTOM AND DÉCOR: A FEMINIST INTERROGATION**

APARNA DIXIT\*

## **ABSTRACT**

Jewellery is a very fascinating terms for an Indian woman. Women love to buy, gift and invest in it but there is another dimension of this Jewellery tradition which is the 'Socio-cultural role of Jewellery' that has very intense relationship with women. If we try to understand this tradition or the culture of Jewellery, it somewhere reflects control, honour and sex. It has very specific gendered role and ultimately reverberates women's oppression in different human societies.

Jewellery can be used to understand more fully the construction of gender and power dynamics from a feminist perspective. This paper will try to explore the unsaid relationship of Jewellery with different traditions, its socio-cultural role and its role as tool of adornment. Under this, the paper will try to investigate Jewellery as a symbol of ownership, status symbol and its role as 'Stridhan'. It will try to understand socialization of a girl or woman in the frame of Jewellery tradition. The Paper will expand the concept of femininity in the context of Jewellery tradition. In brief, it will be a focused analysis of the relation of Gender and Jewellery.

**KEY WORDS:** Gender and Jewellery, Stridhan, Socio-cultural role of Jewellery, Jewellery tradition

## **INTRODUCTION**

Jewellery is not only a means of decoration of body but it's our most primitive urge of control, honour and sex. There is a relation of body and jewellery and it depends on how body treats jewellery. In this sense it's inescapably political. Its meaning is bound to the possibilities of the body it lies on. Indeed, the fate of body is often bound to the jewellery. This paper aims to deal with gender question in the frame of jewellery tradition.

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There are lots of scholarly articles that discussed jewellery in relation to marriage, engagement, or inheritance in terms of its technical, artistic and aesthetical effect, without adequate critique of its impact on the women who wear it. However, jewellery is far from an arbitrary aesthetic expression. 'There is nothing accidental or gratuitous about a people's passionate desire for self ornamentation. For them, symbolism is not just intertwined with body adornment. Symbolism is in its very essence.'<sup>1</sup> It's meant to express, to articulate things and specifically to communicate an idea or pattern of society. Jewellery can be used to understand more fully the construction of gender and power dynamics from a feminist perspective.

Jewellery tradition may be a way to understand gender in terms of adornment, more specifically ornamentation of a body that speaks louder than words. On other hand jewellery can be an urge for emancipation depending on its use. In different societies women have been demanding jewellery as their right and this is called 'Stridhan' that has been used often as compensation by women and in some cases as an urge to get financial security.

## **JEWELLERY AND THEORIES OF ADORNMENT**

In a broader sense, Jewellery is a concept of adornment. In a process to understand relation of Gender and jewellery one has to look at different theories of adornment. In the connection, Georg Simmel is very important. In his work a section entitled, roughly, 'An excursion on the sociology of adornment'; Georg claims man's first property as weapons, and women's first property as jewellery. According to him, 'all sexual difference flows from the original division of property...Men first use weapons to impose their will by force on others, above all on women, women use their first form of property, ornamental jewellery, to seduce, to charm and to please others with their beauty, chiefly men but also other women.'<sup>2</sup> Therefore, Simmel defines jewellery as tool and means of power, but of a limited and bestowed type. Beauty is the power of Women. Innately they are powerless. Therefore, they can only extend their power on men through their beauty. 'Whereas men achieve rank as a result of explicit achievement, difference among women are generally seen as the product of idiosyncratic characteristics, such as temperament, personality and appearance.'<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, as beauty is directly related to age and beauty, so it's impossible for a woman to remain beautiful throughout her life. Importantly, since there is no relation between beauty and intelligence/achievements/ or merit women's power remain in the same way unconnected to matters of substances. It's conferred power rather than earned. He sees that women obtain not only power, but also pleasure through their providing pleasure to others. They are passive actors, feel satisfaction through endless giving. He believes that these characteristics come naturally to women.

**Judith Butler** offers an opposing point of view. Butler conceives Gender as constructed category that is reinforced through action and tradition: performing gender, 'Gender is in no way a stable identity tenuously constituted in time- an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as a mundane way in which body gestures, movements, and enactment of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.'<sup>4</sup> Jewellery can be seen as a method of socialisation to construct gender. It infuses difference in status and self perception.

**Laura Mulvey** also has a counter view point to George Simmel's theories of performance of Gender and Gaze. In her work on narrative cinema, she discusses the way the gaze interacts with the female figure in terms that can be applied to ornamentation as well. 'In world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly...' <sup>5</sup> Women become 'other' through the presentation of body, that is adorned. This act cause women's objectification and develop power dynamics between male and female. It's called reinforcement of patriarchy.

**Neomy Wolf** criticises Simmel on very different ground. She implies the concept of heroine and heroism in 'The beauty myth', 'A beautiful heroine is a contradiction in terms, since heroism is about individuality, interesting and ever changing, while "beauty" is generic, boring, and inert. While culture works out moral dilemmas, "beauty" is amoral.'<sup>6</sup> Heroine is like a leader

in her only group and this leadership is about beautification, ornamentation and adornment. Unlike heroism is about centralization of power, It carries a self and this is directly related to construction of Gender.

Simmel doesn't see 'Gender' as a 'constructed' category, while others are much concerned about the role of jewellery to make female more feminine or vulnerable but there is another connotation of the act of ornamentation as well.

### **JEWELLERY: SYMBOL OF OWNERSHIP**

'The burnt umber will be taken into your skin by the branding iron to emphasize and darken the mark-make it prettier-and I have tightly bound you, not because of any protest you may show, but because movement will spoil the mark... The tip will not be red hot, as it is when branding for punishment, but just hot enough to mark.'<sup>7</sup> This is a part of conversation that a Jewish girl have had with another Jewish girl at the time of branding. The tradition of branding has been popular all over the world and almost in every civilization. It aims to leave a specific sign on the body of slave to privatise her/him. The process of human branding is very painful and to submit pain through the process also means to legitimate suffering in 'the relation'. Likewise bracelets, necklace, anklets and earrings are easily recognised ornaments. The dividing line, however, is far from clear cut.

Struggle for control is a hallmark of human civilization, patriarchy and the effort to control women's bodies, sexuality and production an almost universal constant. Jewellery, as an art form defined by interaction with body, is deeply bound up with the social structure vying for control of those very bodies. Ruth Barnes and Elizabeth Bubolz Eicher, concerned about gender and dress, elaborate on the different ways that dress, including jewellery, can mediate social interactions and bodily processes. 'Dress may be a direct alternate of body in the case of some body modification such as...cutting body tissue to introduce lip plugs. It can also be an alternate as it serves... as a microenvironment and an interface between body and macro environment.'<sup>8</sup> Control is manifested through both these forms of modification, through the physical incapacitation of the wearer and through the symbols that define and constrict the range of options available to the wearer in the context of society, often through communication of a subordinate role.

Jewellery symbolizes ownership in two ways. First, by physical incapacitation and another by controlling sexuality of that very gender. In earlier, ornament causes physical pain, as in case of Hausa people, 'Young (Hausa) women in Negar wear heavy bronze anklets that smith forges from metal ingots and incise with Islamic design. These shackle like rings, which also serve as currency, make it difficult for women to walk, but a cumbersome gait is considered highly attractive.'<sup>9</sup> It reflects two important facets, first the pain that these ornaments cause and second their 'value' as sign of wealth, prestige and adult status and therefore socially desirable for the wearers.

Historian and feminist scholar Gerda Lerner observes that, '[t]he exchange of women [through marriage] is the first form of trade, in which women are turned into commodity... The Exchange of women, according to Levi-Strauss marks the beginning of women subordination. It in turn reinforces a sexual division of labor which institutes male dominance'<sup>10</sup> Jewellery is also used as a means and symbol of this kind of ownership of sexuality. Through physical incapacitation, control and ownership is exerted on body as whole. These are the pieces that physically restrict use of the sexual organ as well as pieces that, within the context of a specific society, are created to communicate fertility and/or availability status. The most obvious of that usage would be wedding and engagement in fascinating ways that speak about the power dynamics between women and men.

In India, basically in Hindu community these ornaments are not only for beautification of a bride but are symbols of marriage, '(The) Wedding day...marks the beginning of a women's life as a decorated being. Ornament is the right and responsibility of a wife while her husband is alive... Once[Single women] have married, acts of self adornment are linked inextricably with the husband. For many women...It becomes impossible to separate the desire to be ornamented with the desire to please one's spouse.'<sup>11</sup> The "Pativrata"<sup>12</sup> concept of Hindu married women is also linked with the act of adornment that clearly meant to control sexuality.

### **JEWELLERY: STATUS SYMBOL OR GENDERED HONOUR**

There are situations in which the financial value of jewellery become significant, primarily in the context of tradition that involves a transfer of jewellery between men and women or men over women. There are examples when men use jewellery to show their power, wealth and status. It is worth extending the examination of male jewellery as a paradoxical symbol of power, as a declaration of being beyond the risk of feminization- as a symbol of specifically male honour. Dowry jewellery has functioned for millennia as symbol of family honour, function in strictly prescribed way to mediate relationship and specify hierarchies between potential relatives. Finally, jewellery can be marketed and understood as way for male honour to be mapped on to female bodies. Each of these usages extend the honour and status implicit in the relevant jewellery beyond the conferred by the sum of its parts.

In other cases, women wear jewellery, but are understood as primarily or exclusively vehicles to transfer and make visible the wealth of the patriarchal family. While there are many forms of dowry practiced worldwide, one particularly common form involves the transfer of wealth, primarily in the form of jewellery, from the bride's family to groom's. Brides sometime retain a nominal degree of control over her dowry, but in most cases the dowry is seen as payment to groom's family for taking on the burden of the wife. These transfers usually involve a high degree of visibility, and serve to cement status and hierarchy among family groups in a society.

In both the cases jewellery seems to be like symbol of status but in earlier one, male adorn himself just to show his power of wealth through the act but in other case woman heavily adorn herself to symbolise status of her in-laws and it's very gendered role of jewellery.<sup>13</sup>

### **ROLE OF JEWELLERY IN CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER**

Jewellery is frequently used to emphasise the difference between male and female body for the purpose of social interaction. This becomes clear when one looks at the adornment of even young children, for instance, ear piercing of babies, before their secondary sexual characteristics are developed, in order to make their gender obvious and encourage interaction with child to follow gender-specific norms. In an analysis of incomparable Ghysels collection of ethnic jewellery, Colette Ghysels and Frances Tylor writes, 'Certain kinds of objects are worn by men, others by women. Unisex adornment is little valued... among its other purpose, self decoration is designed to underscore or even flaunt difference between the sexes to restate anatomically obvious.'<sup>14</sup> This becomes crucial when females are marked through physical incapacitating jewellery usages, as femininity itself becomes intertwined with the fact of disability. This manifests in the understanding of females, regardless of the abilities of individual, as inherently inferior, disabled by their gender rather than ornament themselves.

Why do the women themselves not object? Because this linkage of femininity with disability also leads to an understanding of able-bodied female as not only unfeminine, but unable to be considered female within the context of society. One might consider the disgust with which a society used to foot binding viewed in the large 'Masculine' feet of western women. In India young girls prior to puberty do not generally own or wear significant jewellery, and are culturally consider non-sexual and therefore without the need to ornament themselves. However some flexibility is allowed, especially experimenting with their later role. 'Young girls up to age 12 are allowed some innocent ornamentation and even the henna of married women at celebrations. At puberty they lose this option and undergo either strict Muslim Purdha or an adopted Hindu or Jain version of it.'<sup>15</sup> From childhood, girls go through experimentation with jewellery. They directly or indirectly understand their gender in the frame of ornamentation.

### **JEWELLERY AS MEANS OF ECONOMIC SECURITY/STRIDHAN AND FEMALE EMANCIPATION**

There are range of traditions, ancient and, modern, that utilize jewellery as means and symbol of independence, physical and physiological. Some of these practises have an inherently empowering basis or effects in terms of day-to-day to life, while others provide independence that is more conceptual, although no less real. Most directly, jewellery has frequently functioned

as the primary or soul source of wealth under direct control of women, and its historical effect on their ability to function as independent entities, in family and marriages and in society as whole, can hardly be overstated. In times of turmoil, jewellery has repeatedly proven to be an invaluable resource as portable wealth, allowing women to lead independent lives or provide for their families, as the case may be.

Jewellery functions as a portable and personal repository of wealth for women, and therefore is a threat to those who would oppress them. For much of history, political leaders have had no need to exercise power over their wives' person and belongings. Jewellery has often been an exception to this rule, and it provides a fascinating lens on the construction of ownership and power relation. Many societies either make explicit the husband's control of his wife's assets, including personal belonging or develop a system whereby cultural norms overcome theoretical independence of ownership. When jewellery is under the control of women, it has varying justification. In some cases jewellery is excluded from the husband's purview by its feminine therefore potentially polluting in nature, while in others it is representative of recognition of women's independence, or even the first stage of a general shift towards equal inheritance and agency for women in society.

Many cultures that practice the giving and receiving of dowry justify it partially through the claim that it serves as an insurance policy of sorts for the bride but this is far from being universally true. 'The practice of taking all forms of wealth back from a woman who decides to leave a husband is common...The claim that dowry is a form of female property is therefore not accurate...Among the women interviewed, high-caste women did not lose any of the gold jewellery that their(natal home) gave them, whereas lower caste women lost on an average nearly all.'<sup>16</sup> Indeed, documents attest that they disposed of at will. 'Women owned and controlled slaves and a small amount of personal property...which consisted primarily of the clothing and jewellery they brought to the marriage. Women donated small objects of property, such as jewellery to gods.'<sup>17</sup>

Considering all the view points, it's clear that jewellery as a means of female emancipation is a paradoxical concept. Some where women use these pieces of metal for adornment to show her prosperity and wealth, another dimension is economical value of metal that made her confident and physiologically powerful.

## FEMINIST INTERVENTION

Jewellery can and has been used for drastically different purposes across cultures and time periods, and like women it is not inherently passive. Jewellery both symbolizes and contributes to the construction of gender identity, while preconceived gender norms limit the wearer to jewellery appropriate to their hierarchical position within society. Jewellery and social construction are inter-complimentary, jewellery creates gender and vice-versa also holds validity. It's not good or bad in nature inherently but simply reflection of the nature of medium and its inescapable connection of the politics of body. Relationship of gender and jewellery is paradoxical, somewhere (in case of man wearer) gender leads jewellery and reverse is also true (but in case of female wearer), but a grey portion is also somewhere there, when women use jewellery as a socio-economic and cultural compensation against jewellery.

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# **THE WELL OF LONELINESS: SMASHING THE CONSPIRACY OF HETEROSEXISM**

DR. YAMINI\*

## **ABSTRACT**

Till the 1920s, same-sex love between women was an issue relegated to the religious, juridical, and medical-sexological discourses. Religious and juridical discourses condemned it as 'sin' and 'crime' while the medical discourse was still trying to understand it. Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) depicts it through a straightforward, frank realism and simultaneously reveals the immense difficulty of that exercise. Esther Newton posits, "Hall uses a masculinized body and a strong, active mind to symbolize women's rejection of traditional gender divisions and bourgeois values". James Douglas, London editor of the Sunday Express, and the British Home Secretary, unofficially declared it obscene immediately after its publication. While it generated negative publicity because of the charges of obscenity, perversion, 'sex degeneracy', and stormy censorship trials, Hall had achieved the aim of bringing same-sex love between women out of the closet. Publicity around the trials led to the sale of around 20 million copies in a month, much more than Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, published the same year. This paper looks at the manner in which Hall thwarts the boundaries of essential femininity and masculinity to explore the early possibilities of 'Queerness' and to expose the inadequacies of a heterosexist discourse in accommodating multiple embodiments of gender/sexuality.

**KEYWORDS:** Same-sex Love---Queer Identity---Radclyffe Hall---The Well of Loneliness---Sexual Dissidence---Heterosexist Discourse---Heteronormativity and Homoeroticism

'I claim that far from encouraging depravity my book is calculated to encourage mutual understanding between normal persons and the inverted which can only be beneficial to both and to society at large' (qtd. in Taylor, 255). Hall's statement in

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the Publisher's Weekly reveals her agenda behind writing a 'controversial' book like *The Well of Loneliness* (1928). Though neglected by psychoanalytic criticism and 'lesbian' feminists since the 1960's, it still stands as one of the first and most significant literary attempts at presenting same-sex love between women. Lillian Faderman writes, 'There was probably no lesbian in the four decades between 1928 and the late 1960s capable of reading English or any of the eleven languages into which the book was translated who was unfamiliar with *The Well of Loneliness* (qtd. in Inness, 304). Hall has been applauded for being radical and brave, and derided for establishing stereotypes about women-loving women. Along with applauding Hall Faderman also criticizes the author for creating stereotypes of the butch-femme roles adopted by some 'lesbians' and also the stereotype of the unhappy 'mannish lesbian'. The shock among her contemporaries led to stormy censorship trials in Britain and then America. James Douglas, London editor of the Sunday Express commented, 'I would rather give a healthy boy or a healthy girl a phial of prussic acid than this novel' (qtd. in Inness, 303). Leslie A. Taylor provides a detailed account of the trials, the reactions of the judges, the general public, and the contemporary authors and critics. Written in the Social Realist form, *The Well* was unacceptable because it held up a mirror to the society which was strangulating same-sex lovers with its silence.

Taylor writes, '...because of its scandalous obscenity trial, *The Well* became the first 'lesbian' novel in English precisely because it carried 'the legal mark of that pronouncement' (Taylor, 284). Hall is often criticized for the 'sentimental' realism of her work at a time when modernist techniques like 'stream of consciousness' were being used by the authors to depict the reality of the human mind. Hall's realism might decrease the literary merit of the novel but that is precisely what makes it a radical attempt as she managed to humanise and naturalise same-sex love. The similarities between same-sex lovers and 'normal' people were unfathomable for a large part of Hall's contemporary society. Magistrate Hyman Bushel could not accept the appeal for tolerance presented in the novel. He believed that the novel could 'debauch public morals' precisely because, 'The characters in the book who indulge in these vices are described in attractive terms, and it is maintained throughout that they be accepted on the same plane as persons normally constituted...' (qtd. in Taylor, 281).

To naturalise same-sex desire Hall thwarted the boundaries of essential femininity and masculinity in the creation of Stephen to show that she is different yet similar. Stephen is 'a narrow-hipped, wide-shouldered little tadpole of a baby'; she likes dressing as William Tell or Nelson, abhors her dolls and is good at fencing, hunting and horse-riding. She hates her 'abundant long hair' and feels 'idiotic' at wearing dresses yet, she is very affectionate, tender, and caring. She shares an excellent relationship with her horse, Raftery. She feels quite content when she goes for riding and thinks, 'This is better than being young Nelson...cause this way I'm happy just being myself' (Hall, 40). During the initial days of fencing, 'She discovered her body for a thing to be cherished, a thing of real value since its strength could rejoice her; and young though she was she cared for her body with great diligence...' (Hall, 58). Under the support of her father, Phillip, and her governess, Puddle, she is completely at one with herself because her identity is not attacked. It is social reactions which disturb her comfort and peace with herself. Colonel Antrim's response to her riding astride and the comparison with Violet Antrim enrage her and make her 'self-conscious. She is confident that she is 'different to' Violet and not a 'rag doll' but the visits to the Antrims and the social gatherings make her uncomfortable because she is put under the public eye which views her as 'strange'. She easily beats Roger Antrim but she envies him for, 'his splendid conviction that being a boy constituted a privilege in life' (Hall, 47). Her mother views her as a 'social disaster', 'a failure' at 'garden parties', 'seemingly ill at ease and ungracious' (Hall, 74). She finds conventional girls inferior to herself and boys too distant. At such parties, 'While despising these girls, she yet longed to be like them....It would suddenly strike her that they seemed very happy, very sure of themselves...' (Hall, 76). The boys 'found her too clever if she ventured to expand, and too dull if she suddenly subsided into shyness' (Hall, 77).

Through these incidents Hall does not show Stephen's inadequacy but society's inability to accept difference. '...they were firmly conservative in spirit, as conservative as the marriage service itself, and almost as insistent upon sex distinction' (Hall, 77). The only time they readily accept Stephen is when they believe that she is engaged to Martin. Martin comes as a source

of happiness for her 'because of his great understanding'. The attitude towards her is reverted to the earlier disdain and misunderstanding as soon as she rejects Martin's proposal for marriage. They perceive her as 'odder than ever' and she realizes that their goodwill was 'a thing entirely dependent upon Martin'. Hall makes it clear that their 'antagonism' came out of the fear of an 'outlaw' as 'theirs was the task of policing nature'. Hall uses the sexological term, 'congenital invert' to describe Stephen which enables her to completely naturalise Stephen's position. Similarly, she also uses religious discourse to present the 'invert' as a being created by God like all others. Catherine Stimpson believes, '...having Stephen Gordon to a congenital invert who has no choice about her condition strengthens Hall's argument about the unfairness of equating homosexuality with punishable deviancy. The novel claims that God created homosexuals' (Stimpson, 368). Stephen's last cry at the end of the novel challenges religion and society. 'Acknowledge us, oh God, before the whole world. Give us also the right to our existence!' (Hall, 437).

Also, she does not restrict Stephen to the position of a 'congenital invert' who is bound by nature but also presents the role that family plays in the conditioning of an individual. Stephen is the first girl child in a family whose legacy continued 'from father to son until the advent Stephen' (Hall, 105). Her parents were expecting a male child which accounts for her 'masculine' name, Stephen, to which they added 'female names' to 'mollify' the Vicar. She is named 'Stephen Mary Olivia Gertrude'. During her growing years she constantly faces expectations of being the 'son' which Sir Philip wanted. Sir Philip wants her to have 'the same education' he would have given to his 'son'. Though Stephen tells him, 'I'm not your son...', he says, 'You're all the son that I've got'. He takes her out for riding and hunting and encourages her education in the Classics and her training in Gymnastics. Hall reveals that these masculine privileges develop Stephen's personality on the one hand, and confuse and enrage her on the other. Hall employs sexological terminology to 'name' Stephen's 'condition' but she strategically uses it to show its adequacy as well as inadequacy.

In terms of her class, Hall does not make Stephen an 'other' but a part of the gentry. Her upper class background establishes her firmly in the society and also burdens her with the responsibility of carrying the family legacy forward. It is precisely this tie that she remains unable to snap till the end. She pushes Mary out of her life because of this 'respect of the normal'. 'And now she must pay very dearly indeed for the inherent respect of the normal which nothing had ever been able to destroy, not even the long years of persecution, an added burden it was, handed down by the silent but watchful founders of Morton' (Hall, 430). Hall voices the displeasure of same-sex lovers at being unable to define themselves because the society does not provide them the opportunity or the vocabulary to do so. Stephen embodies the struggle for self-definition from childhood. She continuously asks her father 'Is there anything strange about me...' when she wonders 'what was she' (Hall, 101). This confusion continues in the later years as she grows up to become an artist. She faces difficulty in expressing herself as a writer at various points.

Even while praying she could find 'few words that seemed to encompass her meaning, for she did not know the meaning of herself' (Hall, 187). She constantly strives to find a solution to the riddle of her unwanted being. Hall gives a name and definition to this struggle by presenting the first 'lesbian' protagonist who tries to locate an identity in the very world she inhabits. Puddle, herself a lesbian, tries to boost Stephen's confidence and also reveals that Stephen has to find a niche identity since the world has not named her and when it does, it would name her negatively. Puddle states, 'You're neither unnatural, nor abominable, nor mad; you're as much a part of what people call nature as anyone else; only you're unexplained as yet' (Hall, 154). Esther Newton credits Hall for voicing the sexual desires of same-sex lovers and taking the relationships among the literary characters beyond the platonic or homosocial. 'What they needed was a new vocabulary built on the radical idea that women apart from men could have autonomous sexual feeling' (Newton, 565). She views Stephen as a symbol for the 'lesbian struggle to define and assert an identity' (Newton, 568).

By endowing a biological female with a masculine self, Hall both questions the inevitability of patriarchal gender categories and assents to it....The Well explores the self-hatred and doubt involved in defining oneself as a 'sexual

deviant'. For in doing so, the lesbian accepts an invidious distinction between herself and heterosexual women. (Newton, 573)

Through Stephen's relationships with Angela Crossby and Mary Llewellyn, the author presents the immense joy and happiness in same-sex love relationships. Stephen is highly pleased to find a partner in Angela. Angela derives the pleasure from Stephen which she never gets from her husband. It is the pressure of hetero-normative society which snaps their bond. Angela tells Stephen about the difficulties she has faced in life and the limited opportunities available to women in a conservative society. She wants the security of marriage which neither Stephen nor any other women can provide her with. Stephen leaves Morton to save her love and desire from being disgraced and dishonoured. Her relationship with Mary and their sojourn to Orotava proves to be the most pleasing experience for them. Their love and desire blossom in 'a veritable Eden of a garden, obsessed by a kind of primitive urge towards all manner of procreation' (Hall, 305). 'And as all such things have seemed wonderful to lovers throughout the ages, even so now they seemed very wonderful to Mary and Stephen' (Hall, 309). They find their love as 'primitive' and 'age-old' as nature and feel that they 'had a right to their share in the love songs of the world' (Hall, 310). Hall appropriates the language of heterosexual love to show that language 'is surely too small a vessel to contain those emotions' (Hall, 317). Stephen and Mary 'no longer felt desolate, hungry outcasts; unloved and unwanted, despised of the world....Love had lifted them up as on the wings of fire, had made them courageous, invincible, enduring' (Hall, 317).

Hall exposes the hypocrisy of a society which has fewer problems with same-sex love itself than the visibility of it. While Stephen's open 'queerness' or 'strangeness' proves detrimental for her, she is not the only 'invert' or 'lesbian' in the text. Hall presents a range of women characters and the relationships among them. Stephen is 'masculine' but women like Angela, Mary, Puddle, and Valerie Seymour are 'feminine' in their appearances. Miss Puddleton is described as a 'little grey figure', 'square' and 'tiny' (Hall, 67). Angela Crossby is 'amazingly blonde' with a childlike, innocent, and trustful expression (Hall, 131). Valerie is 'perfectly proportioned', has a 'humourous' face, 'kind' eyes which are 'blue and lustrous', 'slender and shapely shoulders', and 'thick fair hair' (Hall, 244). Mary is the 'perfect' woman, has 'short black lashes', 'black arched eyebrows', 'dark brown hair', and 'well-modelled' lips which are 'fine in texture' (Hall, 278). Moreover, Hall also presents Jonathan Brockett, a dandy-figure whose 'hands were as white and soft as a woman's' and 'went so ill with him somehow; he was tall, broad-shouldered, and of an extreme thinness' (Hall, 226). Critics have often focused on Stephen to criticize Hall's presentation of a 'mannish lesbian' but she presents a complex range of characters that cannot be categorized as stereotypes. Esther Newton defends Hall's presentation of 'masculine' women and 'effeminate' women.

Why should we as feminists deplore or deny the existence of masculine women or effeminate men? Are we not against assigning specific psychological or social traits to a particular biology? And should we not support those among us, butches and queens, who still bear the brunt of homophobia? (Newton, 575).

Through the introduction of the Paris salon culture Hall presents a variety of men and women who are forced to lead a clandestine life because of their sexuality. Stephen and Mary meet the 'most normal abnormal' people at Valerie's parties. Women and men like Jamie, Barbara, Wanda, Margaret Roland, and Adolphe Blanc feel comfortable in each other's company and join such groups when they become sick and tired of 'pretences and subterfuges'. Valerie, a hedonist and a true survivor, is representative of the positive aspects of the life of sexual dissidence. She is a 'kind of pioneer who would probably go down in history' (Hall, 243). Hall also breaks the myth that these gatherings are centres of degeneracy, drinking, and drugs. Wanda is a regular at the church and prays fervently out of fear. Her desires do not have sanction from her faith so she tries to immerse and forget herself in either art or drinks. 'Like a whipped cur she crawled to the foot of the Cross, without courage, without faith, without hope of mercy. Outraged by her body she must ruthlessly scourge it....' (Hall, 350).

Despite its presence as a support system, Hall does not present these groups and parties as the ultimate solution for the sexually dissident because she wants them to be accepted by the society at large. '...to her own kind she turned and was made very welcome, for no bond is more binding than that of affliction. But her vision stretched beyond to the day when

happier folk would also accept her...' (Hall, 356). These friendships take them 'into no-man's land, the most desolate country in all creation' (Hall, 356). After witnessing the 'garish and tragic nightlife of Paris' and Mary's 'pitiful revolt' against life's injustice and the hostile world, Stephen is sure that such a life of partial freedom cannot go on forever. Hall makes her protagonist take on the world from the front and not by devious means or hypocrisy. Valerie too insists she despised those 'who were ashamed to declare themselves, lying low for the sake of peaceful existence...they were traitors to themselves and their fellows...' (Hall, 406). Catherine Stimpson points out that Hall rejects both 'silence' and 'excessive coding'.

Stephen's decision to give Mary up to a man is also an attempt to strengthen her own will to work towards her aim of getting recognition for herself and her 'kind'. Though critics have often viewed the novel's end as pessimistic and a defeat of same-sex lovers in the face of hetero-normativity, the novel actually ends on a positive note where Stephen is ready to continue her fight even if she is alone. She is the representative of everyone who is being unjustly persecuted for his/her dissidence and she assumes the right to speak for them. Martin accepts defeat before Stephen and Mary's love. 'It's all over, you've beaten me....The bond was too strong' (Hall, 432). Tara Prince Hughes writes, 'Despite the grief to them both, Stephen decides to spare Mary the loneliness that faces herself' (Hughes, 39). Laura Green points out that the novel does not conclude with a wedding.

We may assume a wedding, but we never witness one. Unlike previous stories of heroines who express artistic ambitions or rebel against the conventions of heterosexuality....*The Well of Loneliness* does not demand either its protagonist's marriage or, as the price of avoiding it, her death (Green, 291).

Despite a lot of criticism from 'lesbian' feminists after the 1960s, *The Well of Loneliness* stands as a radical text when seen in its context. During the 1920s, the scientific aspects of sexuality were still new and fluidity in sexual choices was still being explored. At such a period of 'general confusion' Hall took a clear stand on the status of same-sex lovers. Stephen's struggle is precisely against the established and developing discourses which categorize same-sex love as 'abnormal' and she challenges them openly.

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# **LINGUISTIC CONVENTIONS AND DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER IDENTITY: SEXISM IN MAINSTREAM AMERICAN CULTURE AND CONSOLIDATION OF CLICHÉS**

ANEESHA PURI\*

## **ABSTRACT**

**B**y deploying an eclectic approach consisting of Judith Butler's notion of performativity, Althusser's study of ideological apparatus and Foucauldian conceptualisation of discourse, I will endeavour to explore and examine how the generic conventions, stultified stereotypes, narrative compulsions and intertextuality in mainstream culture of English language users work to consolidate gender clichés. I will analyse the regressive advertisement of Mr Clean (2011), the language of slut-shaming in female high school cliques in the movie- Mean Girls (2004), the lyrics of a chartbuster English song - Blurred Lines (2013) which trivialises the consent of the woman for sex and the viral post on the website Elite Daily titled 'The All-Knowing Dictionary: 15 Things All Girls Say And What They Really Mean' which reinforces the cultural stereotype of women's manipulation of language to confuse men. My paper would argue for a shift from an essentialist and binarised conception of gender to a differentiated, contextualised and performative model which questions generalised claims about gender because it is important to remember that language not only constitutes but also carries potential to resist, challenge and subvert the sexist assumptions that constitute our social reality.

**KEYWORDS:** Linguistic conventions, masculinity, femininity, naturalisation, popular culture, sexuality, heteronormative, performativity, discourse, intertextuality, interpellation, subversion.

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To begin with, this paper attempts to foreground how the linguistic conventions work in tandem with the structuring of normative social reality, or at least what people perceive it to be. I wish to explore how the linguistic conventions of English language, consciously or unconsciously, help to maintain gender ideology by repeatedly reinforcing gender stereotypes. By foregrounding the problematic consequences of assuming that gender can be adequately analysed by simply dichotomising into male and female, I want to put under scrutiny the use of language to sustain heteronormative societal relations. English speakers and writers have traditionally been conditioned to use masculine nouns and pronouns in context where the gender of their subject(s) is unclear or variable, or when a group to which they are referring contains members of both sexes. Male-based generics are other indicators and function to perpetuate a hegemonic system in which 'man' in the abstract and men in the flesh are prioritised over women.

Our apparently innocuous language choices have repercussions backed by socio-cultural biases. The popular culture in the form of cinema, music, magazines, media, advertisements, etc. reinforce the dominant gender ideology by often providing very little alternative space for scrutinising what has been dominantly represented as 'natural' and 'universal'. Of course, I am not trying to argue that all representations in popular culture are necessarily sexist nor am I saying that my paper is exhaustive of all kinds of representations. I am just focussing on a dominant trend in my analysis. We are all familiar with Raymond Williams tripartite divisions of 'dominant', 'residual' and 'emergent' elements' co-existence in any societal culture at a given moment and know better than to assume that the dominant trend seeps through every nook and corner of society. Had such been the case, there would not have been a single revolution in social thought and politics.

By deploying an eclectic approach consisting of Judith Butler's notion of performativity, Althusser's study of ideological apparatus and Foucauldian conceptualisation of discourse, I will endeavour to explore and examine how the generic conventions, stultified stereotypes, narrative compulsions and intertextuality in mainstream culture of English language users, work to consolidate gender clichés. I will analyse the regressive advertisement of Mr Clean (2011), the language of slut-shaming in female high school cliques in the movie- Mean Girls (2004), the lyrics of a chartbuster English song - Blurred Lines (2013) which trivialises the consent of the woman for sex and the viral post on the website Elite Daily titled 'The All-Knowing Dictionary: 15 Things All Girls Say And What They Really Mean' which reinforces the cultural stereotype of women's manipulation of language to confuse men.

In the study of the intricacies of language and sexuality, the question that has been most persistently raised and deliberated is along the lines of 'how does the language of homosexuals differ from that of heterosexuals?' This not only foregrounds the modern western perception of identity based on same/other gender preferences as the most pertinent dimension of sexuality but also the socio-linguistic understanding that language using is an 'act of identity.' This understanding is premised upon an assumption that speakers employ the resources of linguistic variation to signal their identification with one social group and difference from the other ( Cameron and Kulick, 2006, p. 3).

As post-structuralists have increasingly highlighted now, that while sex itself is universal, its manifestation and expression is influenced by a multiplicity of factors depending on the particular conjuncture of historical moment and geographical location. It would be fatally flawed to assume that the homo/hetero distinction or the kind of identity associated with it in the contemporary western societies will be accorded the same significance in every society and historical period. These concepts are not 'natural', but are cultural constructs that arise in particular times, places and circumstances. This necessitates a paradigmatic shift from an essentialist approach that is informed by a generalised understanding of language usage by generic homosexuals or generic heterosexuals to the one which emphasises the heterogeneity and complexity of linguistic practice.

Foucault tells us in *History Of Sexuality* that the issue of sexuality as identity and of homosexuals and heterosexuals as types emerged in the west only in the 19th century, when the description and regulation of sexual conduct became a scientific and secular enterprise from its erstwhile concern of moral and religious authorities (Cameron and Kulick, 2006, p. 3).

Judith Butler (1990) has foregrounded in *Gender Trouble* that identities like 'man', 'gay', 'woman', 'lesbian' etc. are not just pre-existing attributes of individuals that their behaviour expresses, but are actually brought into existence and then consolidated through the repeated actions an individual performs. The social identity 'woman' is constituted by repeatedly acting in ways that are in sync with the culturally stereotyped 'womanly' behaviour ( and conversely untypical of 'men'). These repetitive acts do not emanate naturally from the kind of sexed body or anatomy a person has, rather they are acquired like language through cultural osmosis.

Only because language is performative, it is possible for someone who is not a female to pass off as woman as some drag queens and MTF transsexuals do, conversely women who are anatomically classified as 'female' are not exempt from the obligation to perform femininity. Ontology does not produce practice, on the contrary practice produces ontology that is, the subjective sense of who we are ( Coupland, 2006, p. 97 ).

Judith Butler argues that our actions do not just manifest our social positions, they attach us to those positions. Identities are established over time. This means that they have to be continually reinforced. Once is never sufficient as identities are at risk of collapsing if the actions that invoke it are not repeated. This implies that what constitutes and sustains identity is not some irreducible essence inside a person but rather a signifying regime into which they are socially conditioned and through which they interact ( 2006, p. 98).

French post-structuralists like Althusser have made a similar argument that practice instils in us a sense of who we are. What an ideological analysis of the mainstream culture, influenced by Althusser's thinking, attempts to reveal is how certain ideas and beliefs are legitimised and 'made real' through their media representations. It prevents people seeing or thinking of themselves as ideologically indoctrinated subjects. Rather it creates an illusion of us being free-thinking, sovereign autonomous individuals. A little digging of the surface of the popular culture as exhibited through songs, advertisements, movies would reveal how they are structured around this 'common-sense' centrality of individuality. This effectively sidelines the fact that identities are subject to and consequence of inextricably intertwined socio-political and cultural complexities. Althusser argued that one of the most important ways in which ideological state apparatuses position individuals is by the process of interpellation or hailing. The media and other cultural texts 'hail' readers and in the process position them in relation to what they are consuming. As a result of interpellation, the individual recognises him/herself as the subject of ideology but at the same time according to Althusserian scheme of things, the individual also misrecognises him or herself. As a result of misrecognition, the individual become the active agents of ideology and perpetuates the very ideologies that exploit them. Advertisements for example, continually offer the individual consumer a clear, ideological definition of who or what they should or maybe. They solicit him or her to see themselves or a potential self, in the advertising images as autonomous individuals who can make consumer choices. Yet in Althusserian conceptualisation, their identification with the ideological subject position offered by advertising is misrecognition. It is this naturalisation of particular interests, beliefs and desires which corroborates the argument that advertisements sell the dominant ideology (Taylor and Willis, 1999, pp. 31-33).

In 2011, in celebration of Mother's Day, Mr. Clean released an advertisement representing a mother and a daughter rejoicing in the wonder of cleanliness (the clichéd depiction of women as jubilant domestic goddesses). Of course there is nothing wrong in glorifying cleanliness, but what is problematic is the added connotation that it is a job that concerns only women, gendered division of household labour. What makes the ad even more regressive is that the speaker is represented as a man (Mr. Clean) telling the mother-daughter pair (females featured in the ad), "this Mother's day get back to the job that really matters." The ad is deeply disconcerting for a variety of reasons- firstly conveying that the only work women can do that matters is cleaning( by association, domestic chores), secondly the daughter is represented as being ideologically indoctrinated into the stereotypical conceptualisation of domestic femininity and that too by her own mother( this can be understood through the foucauldian notion of the woman being a capillary of patriarchal power) and thirdly this ad is demeaning to those women that take more or equal pleasure in their careers. This ad illustrates how language is used to

reproduce a hegemonic heterosexuality which is embedded in the larger context of hegemonic masculinity. Through representation in mainstream media, the cultural meaning of gender is repeatedly constructed using institutionalised set of conventions and this shows the dual and mutually reinforcing function of language as a cultural edifice and for everyday communication.

Robin Lakoff's (2004) book, *Language and Woman's Place* has pointed out that gender complementarity is a pre-requisite for sustaining the heteronormative mode, women and men are required to be not only different but binary opposites. This binary division is maintained by not only constructing gender differences but also eroticising it. As Cameron and Kulick have rightly argued 'performance of heterosexuality must always be in some sense a performance of gender, because heterosexuality requires gender differentiation, there is no such thing like generic, genderless heterosexual: rather there are male and female heterosexuals' ( 2003, p. 72). '

The 2004 teen comedy film - Mean Girls, represents the female high school cliques and the devastating effects it can have on the girls. The evil queen bee Regina's 'Burn Book', a notebook filled with scandalous gossip and slut-shaming, drives the plot and demonstrates the lethal nexus of how young girls seek empowerment and popularity by bad-mouthing other girls and eventually end up conforming to the patriarchal stereotype of being spiteful, catty and superficial. In the climactic scene, Regina decides to revenge against Cady by spreading around the contents of her 'Burn Book.' This creates a riot like situation in the school and Principal Ron Duvall sends all the girls in the school to gather in the gymnasium. Math teacher Sharon Norbury, whom the 'Burn Book' slandered as a drug dealer asks a very pertinent question to restore order, 'who here has ever been called a slut?' Most of the girls raise their hands.

The first observation one might make is that one would not normally draw a contrast framed in terms of opposition between virginity/ chastity and sexual activity for young men. Sex is considered a normal and legitimate interest for all kinds of boys. 'Slut' for young heterosexual woman is so enmeshed in peer group social practices and there is no corresponding epithet which could be used to police boy's behaviour, implicitly conveying that sexual promiscuity does not disparage a boy's social status the way it does a girl's.

The girls' investment in heterosexual femininity initially promises excitement and a sense of power but then gradually transforms into a discourse of female objectification and subordination (Eckert, 2006, p. 195 ). Debbie Epstein and Richard Johnson show in their more recent studies "Schooling Sexualities" (1998), that some women do seem to bask in the notoriety that comes from being known as sexually active but a label like 'slut' carries significant power to shame. Women do not strikingly challenge the ontological status of this label, in other words, the presupposition that some women are 'sluts.' Their insistence that they personally do not merit the tag only reinforces its power and reproduces the assumptions about gender and sexual agency on which the tag is based (Cameron and Kulick, 2003, p. 33 ).

The lyrics of the chartbuster English song Blurred lines (2013) are about 'liberating' a 'good girl' by demonstrating to her that she actually wants 'wild sex' that she isn't asking for. Robin Thicke keeps repeating 'I know you want it' while his musical partner T.I. casually mentions 'I'll give you something big enough to tear your ass in two.' The most debated contemporary concern of feminists is the sexual politics of consent. The orthodox heteronormative assumption entails that men are active initiators of sex, while women's role is to accept or reject their advances, in addition to that, women are supposed to play hard to get by not giving in too easily. This carries the problematic consequence that their saying 'no' or signalling a lack of interest is not to be taken *prima facie*. Linguistic utterances do not function in isolation of the social context and cultural knowledge.

The comprehension of linguistic forms depend on social context, including shared cultural knowledge, the question of whose beliefs and values inform this cultural background knowledge is fundamental to understanding how linguistic conventions get consolidated (Ehrlich, 2006, p. 202 ). The feminist critic Catherine Mackinnon once wrote that 'man fucks woman, subject verb object.' This observation embodies a persistently pervasive commonsensical conceptualisation about gender and sexuality: that only men can be active sexual subjects, while the role of women is to be passive objects of male

desire. This has negative consequences for women: on one hand it restricts their freedom to behave as actively desiring subjects themselves, while on the other hand, it can make them vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse by men who treat them as objects rather than as equal human subjects ( Cameron and Kulick, 2003, p. 29).

Quintessential femininity dictates that 'good' women are expected to put up a show of reluctance when it comes to sex, in order to confirm their credentials as 'respectable' and 'worthy', but this is a formulaic gesture and men should not be deterred, resistance is only to be expected from women and women for their part are held to expect men to grind down the resistance. On the other hand, 'real' men are expected to act in ways that does not cast aspersions on their manhood. Songs like Blurred lines severely trivialises the consent of women for sexual intercourse and consolidates sexist stereotypical assumptions.

Elite Daily's post 'The All-Knowing Dictionary: 15 Things All Girls Say And What They Really Mean', apparently tries to celebrate women for what they are but ends up perpetuating the stereotype of women being clever manipulators of language and not actually meaning what they say. The post has collected clichés like "I'll be ready in five minutes...", "Do I look fat?", "OMG! I would never tell anyone.", "she is not even that pretty!" and then deconstructs them to consolidate the popular perception of how women use language. This post can be viewed as an offshoot of popular books like Deborah Tannen's You Just Don't Understand and John Gray's Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus which make universalising and globalising claims about male-female misunderstanding and communication breakdown. The intertextuality of such posts on websites not only reinforces stereotypes but does so by offering readers enormous pleasure because they allow them to celebrate their shared commonsensical notions.

Trinh T Minh-ha (1998, pp. 38-43) highlights the problems inherent in any uncritical attempts by feminists to reclaim ideas of sexual difference, the devastating consequences of making the issue of difference a unitary one, polarising masculine and feminine while glossing over the multiple differences that exist among women as a category or men as a category. Such simplistic dichotomisation is culture's way of fixing what will count as reality in a world endowed with the potential for multitude permutations and combinations as far as identity is concerned.

There are lexical differences in the way in which women with power and men with power are normatively talked about. English language has many unsavoury labels for women who vie for power. Epithets like 'shrew' and 'bitch' are premised on the inappropriateness for a desire for power in women. It has no masculine equivalents. There are labels presupposing negative connotations for men who do not exercise the societal-sanctioned control on their wives, 'henpecked' and 'pussywhipped' among them. It has no female equivalents. The popular culture is dominantly obsessed with employment of linguistic conventions to celebrate a rigidly demarcated notion of masculinity and femininity. A shift from an essentialist and binary conceptions of gender to a differentiated, contextualised and performative model which questions generalised claims about gender is paramount because language not only constitutes but also carries potential to resist, challenge and subvert the sexist assumptions that constitute our social reality.

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# **A NEW WINDOW OF STEREOTYPE CELEBRATION: FACEBOOK AND WHATSAPP (RE)SHAPING PHILOSOPHIES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The contemporary 'smart age' is ruled by various socio-digital platforms like: Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and the list goes long and these platforms are purveyors of certain social changes/ revolutions/ campaigns etc. Anything transpires around the world and we see the reactions on social platforms in various ways. The present paper believes these social platforms are also affecting and effecting gender equations and roles. It tries to study mediums like WhatsApp and Facebook which are actually celebrating gender stereotypes under the purdah of jokes, memes and various pages. These mediums are flooded with creative thoughts and quotes and hence everyone is shaping his/ her pseudo-philosopher image by sharing and liking the available views/ quotes/ status/ pages/ pictures/ notes etc. on socio- digital universe. We are trying to showcase beliefs and thoughts by relying on quotes taken out of context. Our posts and our thoughts are suffering from exaggeration or stereotypes for instance under the cloak of humour 'Feminists are being called as Femi-Nazis'. These innocent jokes and links on Facebook and WhatsApp are giving birth to dogmas and the entire members of this social family and made to believe that actually 'reality is different and we are working towards a change'. It seems we are confused generation where we have the freedom to choose between millions of thoughts bombarded on us every day through various mediums and interestingly we also have the freedom to change it the very next day due to anything more attractive and appealing and while we are doing so anyone hardly cares. Our ideologies are being colonised and we are playing ignorant. We don't endorse 'what I believe should be on Facebook or should be my status on WhatsApp' but it's the other way round we endorse- 'what is there on Facebook is what I believe in'.

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**KEYWORDS:** Socio- digital space, Gender (in)equality, Pseudo-philosopher, Gender stereotypes

The contemporary 'smart age' is ruled by various socio-digital platforms like: Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and the list goes on and in recent past these social networking sites have emerged as popular mediums to conduct political dialogues. This paper aims to trace the contours of popular practices associated with such dialogues in the form of Facebook status, pictures, videos, sharing, liking etc. These dialogues created through social networks allow us to engage with various social issues like educate the girl child, terrorism, corruption, Olympics, Para Olympics etc., which were never circulated among the masses on such a high scale. The socio digital space has emerged lately as a very strong medium to put forth your viewpoint on any social issue and my concern in this paper is Gender (in)equality and the popular social network. The way social networking sites are dealing with the issue of Gender Equality is highly ambiguous. This paper believes these social platforms are affecting and effecting Gender equations and roles in various ways through pictures, jokes, memes and statuses. If we study mediums like WhatsApp and Facebook minutely, we will observe that, in reality these mediums are celebrating gender stereotypes under the veil of jokes, memes and various pages. These mediums are flooded with 'creative thoughts' and quotes and hence everyone is shaping his/ her pseudo-philosopher image by sharing and liking the available views/ quotes/ statuses/ pages/ pictures/ notes etc., without actually understanding even the basics of Gender Studies. Feminism, as a theory, is no more limited to some popular texts on theory and criticism by authors like Raman Seldon, Peter Berry or it's not limited to theorists like Judith Butler, Elaine Showalter, Helen Cixous etc., but, it has reached these socio-digital spaces where one becomes a feminist by reading a quote or two taken out of context from some unknown source by some unknown author or theorist. For example, take this quote I downloaded from the Facebook wall of a very dear friend of mine:

"She did not need much, wanted very little.  
A kind word, sincerity, fresh air,  
clean water, a garden, kisses,  
books to read, sheltering arms,  
a cosy bed, and to love and  
be loved in return."

- Starra Neely Blade

Digital Image 1

Now people often come to us to ask what such lines mean, as being English Major and Professors, it is believed that we understand Feminism greatly and we all are feminists, especially academicians from the 'other' sex. Users who share such pictures believe that 'I am a free thinker and I stand for gender equality' but actually they have just come across any random idea and have no clue about the source and context and they share such quotes because it has the collection of nice words and may have a deep meaning they aren't aware of but can always pretend.

Feminists are being perceived as a category of man-haters on social networking sites and the main reason behind such perception building is adulteration in the complete idea of Feminism and culprits behind this dilution are the pseudo-philosophers and fake feminists who see Feminism as a new trend and try to get into the sleeves of something that is trending. I am reminded of Andy Warhol's famous words that, 'In the future everyone would be world-famous for 15 minutes' in the program of 1968 Exhibition. Social networking sites or social media has given us the audience, the mass, who can make anyone a celebrity for a short span of time. We have started seeing Twitter, Blogs, Facebook posts or WhatsApp status as philosophies and hence we run after lucrative quotes or lines to build our 'intellectual' image. But we need to realise they are not philosophies but vague popular beliefs which we are considering as philosophies and we are ready to be judged by someone based on the four line quote we have shared by any author, theorist, poet or a novel we have never read. Let's come back to Feminism and the notions build around the movement. For example see this image:

**Equality according to men**



**Equality according to Feminists**



Digital Image 2

After seeing the picture we need to question ourselves from where this thought is building up, either Feminism has gone wrong or pseudo philosophers among social networking users have increased who fail to understand gender equality in its true form. Feminism is constantly under adulteration in the present scenario, the innocent jokes and links on Facebook are not as innocent as they appears. Let's see some images taken from random Facebook walls:

Since when did the struggle for equality or planning for better society became subject of jokes and memes! The way theories and paradigms of Feminism are presented before the readers and users in contemporary times are misleading and demand immediate rectification. Judith Butler's idea of performative nature of gender was brought down to this level by our social networking sites:



Digital Image 4

Or look at this:

 Shamsher  
@MastCalender  
  
Feminists be like  
  
"Why is it Abu Dhabi and not Ammi Dhabhi?"

Digital Image 3



Digital Image 5

These jokes are giving birth to dogmas and all the members of this social family are made to believe that actually 'reality is different and we are working towards a change'. Our posts and our thoughts are suffering from exaggeration or stereotypes, for instance, under the cloak of humour, feminists are being called as 'Femi-Nazis'. It seems we are a confused generation, where we have the freedom to choose between millions of thoughts bombarded on us every day through various mediums and interestingly we also have the freedom to change it the very next day due to anything more attractive and appealing and while we are doing so, anyone hardly cares about what should be done as a responsible social being.

Our thought process depends on our 'likes' and 'dislikes' and interestingly, as an outcome of this equation, at times we see bipolar ideas coming together through sharing and liking. One who celebrates Feminism by sharing any quotes by Judith Butler or Elaine Showalter on the Facebook wall, the very next moment we see him/her celebrating gender stereotype by sharing a picture or meme which marks the 'second sex' as technologically ignorant. It's being generalised that 'second sex' can have no knowledge or opinions about specifications of mobile phones or laptops or the lot who are aware of such stufflead a grim life devoid of any kind of light enjoyment, they are often perceived as geeks.

Talking about this latest viral joke on Facebook accusing some unknown Sonam Gupta of being bewafa (cheater, disloyal), one of the professors teaching in Shyam Lal College writes on her facebook wall 'a girl's name has been inscribed on a note which has become a discourse of entertainment for the Facebook users on which we all laugh and share with our e-friends and further she is reminded of Chatur's speech in the film 3 Idiots where words like dhan (money) and chamatkar (miracle) are changed with similar sounding words like stan (breasts) and balatkar (rape)' and



Digital Image 6

interestingly if you observe closely the entire audience to this episode is mostly a male gathering. We go for a laugh riot on such scenes, jokes, pics and episodes and the professor calls this behaviour as a reflection of violence lying somewhere deep down in our hearts. How can such generalisations about any Gender be funny or matter of joke being shared by millions on the social networking space through various mediums and dimensions!

Last year a video titled 'My Choice' starring Deepika Padukon made huge uproar on the internet. Deepika, who is a famous actress in Bollywood, in this video says that her body is her choice and whatever she does with the body is also her choice. She may choose to have sex outside marriage and she may love a man and a woman and even both, she may love forever or temporarily. The video was sponsored by Vogue India under the caption 'Vogue Empower', and their reason behind the video was clear -'Woman Empowerment'. People criticised this video for various reasons. Some said that the video is stupid because it tries to place women at the top of the gender hierarchy, thus it commits the same flaw that patriarchy commits. Many said that the women portrayed in the video cannot showcase the real picture of Indian Woman. Some said that some of the 'Choices' the women in the video claimed are morally irresponsible and selfish. Many reaction videos and parody videos were made. One of them was titled 'My Choice - Deepika Padukone || Criminal Version || Reply Video' by a YouTube channel Jhol Jugaad Network, where there were men instead of women. In this video, men are saying that they can rape and murder and spread terrorism because it's their choice. The problem here is that we are not differentiating subjective choices from objective ones. The Vogue sponsored video displays a woman (Deepika Padukon) in the centre, voicing her own desires as she repeatedly says 'MY CHOICE', but the motif behind the video was not to focus on an individual but, a sect of people who are oppressed. For this contradiction, when Deepika says 'My Choice' in the video, it actually means 'Choice of Every Women'. Though in a country like India, where everyday women are harassed, shamed, raped and murdered, they have to voice their desires, their pleasures, their body and mind as we see in the Vogue video. But still it's no one's job to preach what a woman should do and it's very hard to practise those choices in real world. Interestingly, we should also not forget that Vogue is sponsoring this video, so there must be a capitalist agenda hidden under the apparent innocence. I am reminded of Plato who put forth four big ideas to make life and society beautiful and one of them is Reforming Society, for which Plato identifies various problems that need to be addressed for the desired reform and one of those problems is, the society runs after popular opinions and the contemporary idea of 'Popular' is made of rich or famous sections of society. Hero worship, or let's say celebrity worship (to avoid the gender clash behind the idea of hero and to make this more contemporary), has amplified so much in our daily lives that our thinking is being governed by what actors/ actresses/ business tycoons believe in or tweet about or post on Facebook. Plato believed that it was a matter of great concern that whom society admired, as admiration leads to influence and this influence will decorate even the follies of bad heroes in glamorous manner. Plato's idea stands very relevant in the existing society and its thinking process. Its high time that we replace the idea of celebrity worship or we choose our 'Heroes' wisely, not only based on glamour and limelight, but keeping various other factors in mind like service to society, wisdom etc.

It's not as if Feminism only has gone wrong but the 'mightier' sex is also suffering from similar issues. They are being hated and in the name of Feminism and their role is being questioned. Their concerns towards Feminism or gender inequality are seen as patriarchal. In one of my published articles on Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like a Man*, I had written 'it is not only a woman's struggle in a 'Man's' world but also 'man's' struggle in a Man's world'. The so called keepers of the 'phallocentric order' are equal victims of this derision, where strong body is often linked with romantic ignorance or the complete image of fragile body goes together with homosexuality or lack of 'manhood' . We have a number of pages and links which are titled as '10 types of men you should date', '10 things that men like/dislike', '7 types of men who will treat you as their queen' etc. Human expressions or behaviours are being over generalised on various grounds. Such web links are being shared for sheer humour, but are highly sexist, both in nature and order.

Socio-digital space has been cropped up as a space where interestingly we have the availability of multitudes of thoughts and we are free to opt for many streams at one go. If someone has the power to restrict our digital thought process, it can only be the

respective social networking sites. I am reminded of the same philosophy of Plato that I discussed above. One of his ideas to change society and make life beautiful was, Think More- in which he criticises us that we rarely give ourselves time to think more logically about our lives and further he says that, sometimes we go along with the popular opinions like - follow your heart or for that matter any of Chetan Bhagat's quotes to take an example. The problem is, popular opinions, at times, adjust towards the wrong values and ideologies and that is what exactly the present social media is doing to us. We have lost the capacity to think and are believing and living and sharing someone else's thoughts. The availability of innumerable opinions has blinded us completely and when we are just 'chilling' after a day's heavy work on social networks we are being completely thoughtless and irresponsible in the stream of bipolar thoughts and beliefs available on digital space. Our expressions are being manipulated and we are playing ignorant. We don't endorse 'what I believe should be on Facebook or should be my status on WhatsApp' but it's the other way around. We endorse- 'what is there on Facebook is what I believe in'. The rampant ideas like 'be yourself' or 'do what your heart tells you' often projected on Facebook, come under Facebook censorship when someone actually tries to exercise those philosophies. Philosophies, theories and movements at times are filtered by social networking sites on the grounds of political incorrectness. Such new paradigms and shifts in socio-digital space are shaping up or contributing significantly in the making of various contemporary discourses in general and gender in particular. For example:

It's not as if things are entirely wrong. We, at times, see the sites circulating various stereotypes and celebrate gender equality in its true sense. There are various web series and links that have made Feminism come out of the dogma that it can be understood only by thinkers, academicians and scholars. Socio-digital space has not only made ideas about Feminism and gender equality popular but also ideas like climate change, corruption, etc are being discussed in households because of it. I know what anyone's post on Facebook, tweets or WhatsApps should not be a matter of my concern, but, we live in a society and most of us don't believe in its absurdity and want it survive. Hence, without overgeneralizing certain things it is important for us to rethink and redevelop our sense of humour and be sceptical.



Digital Image 7

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# **SELLING SEX, SELLING CONDOMS: DESIROUS WOMEN IN COMMERCIALS**

DEBJANEE GANGULY\*

## **ABSTRACT**

**T**alking about sex in India is still a taboo. Despite being the land of Kamasutra, Indians are very hesitant to talk of sex or related issues in public. This is evident in mainstream media where scenes of intimacy still make news. What happens to advertisements of condoms in that case? The most recent condom ad featuring Sunny Leone was mired in controversy as it was considered too improper for public consumption. This highlights India's discomfort with the open depiction of female desire. The objectification of the female body in media is age-old and continues unabated. Female sexuality is still seen through the lens of the man. The imagining of the woman as demure and godly, has taken shape during the national movement, where the glorification of the Vedic past and the shame in the prevailing (perverse) Hindu culture contra Victorian morality, the nationalists scripted a 'Bharat Mata' image of the woman. She is the 'Bharat Mata' and the sexually desirable woman at the same time. Among those ads which break this stereotype of the objectified woman are the condom ads featuring Leone. Is this break from the past going to stay or will it hurt the prevailing misogynistic sentiments of the public and face censure?

Adding to the list of causes for high rate of rapes in India is the latest condom advertisement (ad) Manforce condom, this according to a senior CPI (Communist Party of India) member Atul Anjan. The advertisement shows a seductively dressed Sunny Leone on a bed of strawberries or at times going around a vineyard. The tagline indicates that the man here is of less consequence, 'Excitement. She can't hide'. This ad unlike most, is an overt attempt at talking about a woman and her desire, it almost reverts the male gaze even though in a dubious way. The ad does objectify the body but also shows a woman has control of it too, in her authoritative tone and the obsolete role of male performer.

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It is probably this second class citizen status that men like Anjan are not used to witnessing that brings out his disgust for the ad. Once again women become the reason why men rape. It is the oldest trick in the book. This ad has been mired in controversy since its release and it has been proposed by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting that it should be aired (if at all) between eleven in the night and five in the morning, when the target audience would probably be fast asleep and children wide awake. What is missed is the importance of the product in terms of health and precautionary safe sex, aspect of consent of the parties involved and bringing sex out of the taboo list in Indian parenting, thereby de-mystifying the entire concept.

## SEXUALITY AND THE NATION

India enjoys a nebulous relationship with sexuality and particularly with female sexuality in public. Under colonial influence the dialectical discourse that unfolded between the Hindu nationalists and the morally 'superior' colonialist played out at times to 'rescue' the native women from her current status and at others to push her into glorified Vedic antiquity, all of which seemed less to do with the woman and more for building a nation that rested on the high ideals of the elite upper caste Hindu male. The reformers perceived themselves through the lens of Victorian morality, which they could not outrightly reject nor completely embrace. The English woman was demure, modest, more in control of her body than the loosely principled, scantily clad, unaware of her rights, Indian woman.<sup>1</sup> The vital role of image creation, the Indian as the Oriental, the naked fakir, inferior, presented as a lack not only by the British but by the Indian subjects themselves.

The turn of the century was a period of great change in terms of authority, economy and private life. Earlier forms of authority of the Mughal rule, court and temple lost their influence in the hands of the merchant capitalists of the West. The emergence of new forms of bureaucratised authority and with privatization being the new economic order, defined the contours of 'respectable' and 'disrespectable' sexuality more sharply, confining acceptable forms of female sexuality within the sphere of reproduction, namely the family. Morality became one of the many tools the British used to gain control over India by imposing customs alien to Indian society. One can see that the call for widow remarriage itself was an attempt to control the potentially dangerous sexuality of the upper caste widow. Similarly, the Devadasis were relegated to the status of prostitutes given their communitarian family set-up unlike the western concept of private households.<sup>2</sup> With a thrust to monogamy and private property, women were given the responsibility of house-hold care, thereby adequately containing the immoral or erstwhile 'promiscuity' of women within the four walls of the home.

In the process of nation building sexual urges were seen as an impediment. Vivekananda's call for sexual abstinence was for the betterment of the nation. Gandhi believed that semen was an energy resource which should be channeled into national benefits.<sup>3</sup> Hindu men were called upon to control their sexual urge, gather discipline to defeat the colonial rulers. Marriage was central to containing sexual urges in the 'decent' way.

The quest for a decent past led to purging of many existing literatures, cheap novels and magazines that were declared unfit for public consumption. In the late 19th century there was enacted a law, Obscene Publications Act under the IPC section 292, 293, 294. The law immediately had the impact of illegalising literature which hitherto had mass appeal. In the canonized high Hindi literature, the erotic and sexually active Radha of medieval poetry was replaced by the chaste and virtuous Hindu wife and mother, and later the Bharat Mata. The assertion of a moral code in a canon of literature became a national virtue.<sup>4</sup> The frank descriptions of the erotic in kathakatas in colloquial Bengali was now shrouded in somber tones. Bengali literature on erotic gods became sanitized and Sanskritised by the mid-19th century.<sup>5</sup>

Advertisements on sexual pleasure too felt the impact of the cleansing of Hindi literature. The authorities molded their language sometimes in moral perceptions, giving guidance for safe sex and not over indulging in it. The British government campaigned to purify the language of these advertisements. By the early 20th century the market was flooded with medical advice on healthy sex life, attainment of the perfect figure, etc.<sup>6</sup>

Thus we see the backhanded approach to sex was at least partially driven by the necessity to project the Indian as a progressive individual - a challenge thrown open by Victorian morality. By the 20th century India had her icon firmly in place in the road towards freedom, Abanindranath Tagore's Bharat Mata took form and shape of the docile, pious godly figure of the Indian woman who needed to be protected by the men. Thus the roles of sexuality of pre-independence (and even post-Independence) man and woman was given shape. Men had to channel their unbridled sexual energy to national freedom and women had to take care of the passions of the man by marrying them as early as the onset of puberty. Sexuality became a matter of the private or the home. The earlier open depiction of sexuality, desire and love in literature and language got cloaked in the virtuous guise of Mother India.

### **THE RETURN OF THE EROTIC WOMAN**

The burden of being a cultural stalwart of the nation lies heavy on the shoulder of the woman. Debates on morality and decency spun around her honour, izzat.

Women were doomed to be the epitome of sacrifice for the nation; perfect wives, mothers and daughters. 1990s onwards there was an expansion of the public into the private, wherein women were seen advertising pressure cookers to cars (the Hindustan Motors ad of ambassador cars). From the home-bound dutiful wife to the active player/consumer in the neoliberal era, women have crossed a chasm to place themselves firmly in the public sphere. Sexuality hitherto reserved for the private space or small circles has burst into the public imagination through advertisements, movies, beauty pageants and chat rooms even, encasing the desires of the woman in a relationship.<sup>7</sup> Thus the woman has gone on from being the lack which represents male sexuality to being eroticized for the same consumptive capitalist heteronormative purpose. The neo-liberal era has brought within it a shift in the legal and social understanding of public morality which is reflected in the mass consumption of the eroticized woman. Nudity still a rare phenomenon in the late 20th century became passé by the turn of the century.

The new erotic woman has once too many brought about a surge of moral panic in society, the Bandit Queen movie of 1996, the moral outrage regarding the infamous lines, 'cholikepeechaykyahai', the ad of Tuff shoes in 1995 that took fourteen years to be declared as not obscene/depraving (as the sales of the shoes surged post the ad which indicates that it did not hurt moral sentiments according to the court), are a few examples when the depiction of the Indian woman in the center stage of political and social circles. Women being docile and appropriately unaware of their sexual appeal in their docility and attire, and the hapless, entrapped man whose sexuality contra emerges as the aggressively pursuing, stalking, singing songs, double meaning speak, is how the female and male have come to embrace their sexuality in the Indian media. The female's sexuality must be guarded as it is seen as the prime mover of crime/love index. The continual objectification of the woman and her sexuality becoming a marketable object is present even today.

The concern for this 'exploitation' came in the form of several legislations like the Indecent Representation of Women's (Prohibition) Act 1986, establishment of Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI). The general tenor of these laws and legal bodies is that they seek to prevent the proliferation of material that is denigrating or derogatory to women or which is likely to deprave, corrupt or injure public morality or morals. The ASCI seeks to ensure that the contents in ads is kept within the bounds of generally accepted standards of public decency and propriety.

These laws often work in ways to only further entrench the male gaze of morality in society, where women as agential, desirous beings are left in the cold storage. While we have moved from an abject ban on nudity in films etc to a search for a moral, social good in the message, we have still a lot of ground to cover in terms of de-objectifying (without de-sexualizing) the woman. The legislative authorities look to contemporary society standards to gauge the impact of certain content on public morality, thereby giving the power of change to the public. When it comes to re-interpreting women and sexuality, the colonial past of the dutiful woman hangs heavy, and is slow to reform. The media has mostly stuck to the given script of women being mere sex objects and less of being a relevant part of the story-telling.

The transition of women as desirous beings and not solely desirable objects is still being made. Along with the advent of the modern women came an explosion about sex itself. Sex need not be so cut and dried as condom ads had earlier made one believe. Neither did sex have to come with the tag of marriage. The Kamasutra condom ads of 1991 made sex desirable, and less predictable. Far from condoms being only about health and HIV, having sex became an act of volition, of pleasure. The ad featuring Pooja Bedi and Marc Robinson had a shock value which sent the sales of condoms shooting up.

The recent uproar in middle class households over the depiction of Sunny Leone as a woman desiring sex or fantasizing about her man bespeaks of a certain discomfort in society, with the agency of women. Clearly, when Ranveer Singh can garner so much adulation for his sex appeal in similar condom ads, so should Leone. Unfortunately, her reputation as a porn-star has repulsed the bhadralok and the bhadramahila. The former chairperson of Delhi Commission for Women, Barkha Shukla Singh too came out very strongly in favour of banning the commercial. She goes on to say "...The shabby, ugly or immoral way the actress seduces or sexually provokes a man in the advertisement to use condoms is nothing but serving immorality and bad practice to the audience of the country which is not acceptable in a country of moral values, ethics, religious values and spiritualism renowned as abode of gods around the globe".<sup>8</sup> It has been noted by another lawyer that such ads have made condoms associated with free sex, in place of the (more morally upright) marital sex. We see a specific notion of the woman and sex being played out once again on colonial/nationalist/Bharat Mata lines. Obviously Leone seems to be the typical example of the corrupting influence (prostitute?) in good society that must be banished forever by IPC section 292. She shames the decent Hindu

woman and brings agony to the helpless Hindu man who must watch a woman demand a service from her partner. The unkindest cut of it all being that there is no hint of matrimonial alliance between the two!

## **CONSENT AND SEX**

Apart from the fact that advertising condoms prevents unwanted pregnancy and promotes safe sex, they are also very much about consent. In our sex talk shy nation, even buying a condom can be a source of great embarrassment to the individual. Condoms need to enter the public sphere like a storm unseen, just like the Leone ads. The discourse of masculine sexual urge that is cultivated in the Indian patriarchal family system needs to change and women need to have their voices heard too. So far one had seen that women were the aids to men for sexual pleasure, mere objects to be used, with no agency. In the neoliberal era the docile and ever efficient homemaker now balances with equanimity both home and work. Remember Airtel's boss ad where the woman was the cold boss by day and then is on a guilt trip, so she plans dinner? The double burden of labour needs re-thinking and it can happen when advertisements show a shared role of house-care (as suggested by the Pril ads), of bringing up kids and of the act of sex. Sex is about consent. Sex is about both Sunny Leone and Ranveer Singh enjoying it. In a country where marital rape is still not recognized because it is not thought 'possible' to take place in our culture, the act of using a condom or giving agency to the woman will make TV watchers sit up and take note. If the legislative authorities are not keen on stepping into private matters to ensure equality of genders, (though the court is determined to pervade into the lives of same-sex couples) the concept of consent in sex must seep in through other doorways. Commercials can do what other media cannot. Condom advertisements can bring sex out in the open, into the sphere of the public (even in a drawing room full of women and men). That is the first step to change. Banning it or screening it in the obscure hours of the day will be doing a great disservice to society.

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# **MEDIA DRIVEN CONSUMERISM AND THE PERFECT BRIDES IN INDIAN WEDDINGS**

SHILPI SINGH\*

## **ABSTRACT**

The economic reforms that took place in India along with a dynamic role of image making that is played by media, produces a hegemonic discourse stressing on the aspiration of what is a good and desirable life, affecting individuals and communities and their relationship with one another. The increased circulation of desire, images and capital inflect and reshape the class configurations. As my research interest in this paper, I will be studying how class becomes amenable to transformation of taste and distinctions, as formulated by Bourdieu through an in-depth understanding of the role of media, image building and consumption. Thus, this paper will look at television shows and movies as an interface between the economy and culture and illuminate the realm where aesthetics and utility are made to merge.

**KEY WORDS:** Conspicuous Consumption, Aspirations, Subjectification, Weddings, Spectacle

## **INTRODUCTION**

Over the years, we have witnessed not just the economic policies undergoing a transformation. We have also seen, consumption becoming a crucial component of study and a significant mode of defining ones identity. In this paper, I try to understand the meaning and implications of consumption. I try to understand concepts like symbolic consumption and aspirational consumption, where the aesthetic and the social signal given by the commodity trumps the utility of the commodity. I use weddings as a metaphor while engaging with these practices. I also discuss the significant role played by media in accelerating such practices and impacting individuals at the micro level.

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## THE SOCIAL MEANING OF CONSUMPTION

There was a rise of mass consumerism in India in the 1980s which is seen as an explicit challenge to the developmentalist dispensation of the post- Independence years by many scholars. Scholars like Ulrich Witt have argued, that the motives behind the first class of consumption were specifically linked to innate and physiological needs. In contrast, the second class of consumption motives arises from needs that are not physiologically determined, but that seem to be partly innate as well. Examples of these are the needs for sensory arousal, for social recognition, or for consistency in one's self perception.<sup>1</sup> In line with this, William Mazzarella, argues that the new consumerist ontology bases its understanding on the idea, that the sovereign consumer is the final arbiter of all normative questions. Thus, the idea that becomes hegemonic is that- 'the customer is always right.'<sup>2</sup>

Ulrich Witt goes on to argue, that the corresponding expenditures in the second class of consumption are motivated mainly by the symbolic value they have for transmitting the signal.<sup>3</sup> Thus, what has now come to count is consumption's socially agreed capacity to function as a symbol. Goods and representations of goods are seen as signifiers. It was the positions within structures of signification that rendered the goods meaningful in particular settings. This socially agreed capacity to function as a symbol can also be broadly referred to as the practices of symbolic consumption. Scholars have argued that, symbolic consumption operates at two levels: outwardly in constructing an ideal self we expose to the world and inwardly in creating a desired self-identity (Elliott, 1997). It is because of its ability to affect an individual at so many levels, that it makes my engagement with the concept important.

These changes, along with a dynamic role of image making that is played by media, then produces a hegemonic discourse stressing on the aspiration of what is a good and desirable life, affecting individuals and communities and their relationship with one another. Thus, Arvind Rajagopal argues, that the economy runs through the rhetoric of the image and the image itself runs through the rhetoric of the economy. It is with such an understanding of the role of media, image building and consumption that, scholars have argued that advertisement and other tools of media use popular cultural practices more as symbolically rich forms. Consumerism has thus, come to become the new integral value of India.

According to Mike Featherstone, what is central to consumer culture is a certain use of the concept of transformation. The magazines, advertisements, television etc present a range of material on the transformation of lifestyle, living space, relationships, identities and bodies.<sup>4</sup> Featherstone argues that the body is considered the central vehicle of the consumer culture of good life: the source of pleasurable sensations which must be looked after. On the other hand, body is also understood in terms of its image as a visible indicator of the self, and thus there is increasing need to pay attention to the look.<sup>5</sup>

It is with these developments, that William Mazzarella's concept of aspirational consumerism becomes relevant. It is this, aspirational consumerism that marks the new kind of subjectivity and agency in the neoliberal India. Consumption is no more a vice and has transformed into being a virtue, and this shift has been characterised by Mazzarella as 'progress by pleasure'. The expansion of the wedding industry can be seen as a consequence of these developments and a marker of progress by pleasure.

Aspirations and desires are however, not the only driving force of consumerism. According to Thorstein Veblen, the basis on which a good repute in any highly organised industrial community rests are leisure (exemption from productive work) and conspicuous consumption of goods. However, the common factor in both these basis is the principle of conspicuous waste.<sup>6</sup> Neoliberal weddings in urban India, reflect both the practices of leisure as well as conspicuous consumption and thus result in conspicuous waste. One can easily look at destination weddings, theme weddings or weddings in royal- heritage hotels as practices that entail leisure as well as conspicuous consumption.

Patricia Uberoi has argued on similar lines that, in the South Asian context, the most visible site of conspicuous consumption and conspicuous waste is- weddings. There thus seems to be an acceleration of commodity culture which plays with the desires and aspirations of the people leading to the crafting of neoliberal subjects who are disciplined into consuming, behaving and looking in certain ways. What marks this process of subject formation, is co-opting the target group with certain restricted kinds of freedom, enabling a sense of agency and empowerment among the target group. In

the context of weddings in India, we see the brides and lately also the grooms constituting this target group.

As Patricia Uberoi argues, that today being modern, global and also Indian has started to mean the freedom to choose in all spheres of consumption.<sup>7</sup> However, she points out that, this freedom is just limited to selecting the commercial products and services and not about freedom to make important decisions like the freedom to choose one's life partner. One needs to understand that the choices women make rely heavily on consumer products. This participation of women in consumer culture, as Lieu argues requires an intense regimen of self-maintenance that demands attentiveness to microscopic detail.<sup>8</sup> It is this very subjectification of women to patriarchal notions amidst intensifying capitalist consumer culture, particularly in the context of Indian brides and weddings, is what I intend to explore.

Christian Brosius' in her book talks about what Miriya C. maintains which is, that nowadays there is a celebration of the beautiful self.<sup>9</sup> She interestingly points out the difference between 'feeling good' and 'looking good'. For her, the first refers to a subjective awareness of one's own self relevance, for the shaping of personal identity. However, the second involves the fetishisation for an external beholder.<sup>10</sup> It is through this process, as has been argued by Brosius, that the previously declared economic independence of the 'new woman' is overshadowed by the subtle panoptic social control which is internalised and reproduced as 'care of the self'. This implies that, there will be no status and recognition until there is submission to particular norms of self-regulation and self-disciplining. Scholars like Shoma Munshi, have argued that beauty is part of a moral discourse revolving round the experience of modernity. A beautiful body is now a happy body.<sup>11</sup> The new codes and regulations for a good life, as argued by Brosius, appeal to specific forms of physical and mental wellness and beauty. For her, even when these appear natural and liberating they reflect the panoptic gaze of the emerging pleasure-driven disciplinary society.<sup>12</sup>

Weddings are such public spectacles where brides are sexualised as women and turned into an image to be looked at and consumed, unfortunately with absolute legitimacy. According to Mary John, to be sexualised as a woman is to be objectified as an image to be looked at, while the power of man is in the gaze, the pleasure and anxiety generated by the desire of looking.<sup>13</sup> Such an understanding can be an effective tool in understanding the processes that take place at weddings. Weddings can be seen as a public spectacle that give legitimacy to the gaze along with the pleasure and anxiety generated by the desire of looking good. It is through such public spectacles, as argued by Rupal Oza, that norms and ideas about sexuality and gender are fixed or in what Butler might call materialised.<sup>14</sup>

Scholars have argued that weddings are now not celebrated but performed. In this act of performance, with aspirational and conspicuous consumerism, brides are turned into Bridezillas, a term coined by US-American Gail Dunson which refers to the new category of persons, that of the soon-to-wed women, who magnify the idea that wedding is their 'day'.<sup>15</sup> This is one of the new modes through which women experience subjectivity. Much pressure is exerted on the brides in terms of her performance and the fear of losing credibility.<sup>16</sup> Thus, as argued by scholars, weddings can be seen as rituals, that serve as stages for social control as certain forms of self-fashioning tools and display of economic and cultural capital.

## MEDIA DISCOURSES

The display of economic and cultural capital can be witnessed in various movies and television shows. I would be specifically picking up movies after the introduction of the economic reforms of 1990. These movies depict a shift towards making consumption an acceptable and legitimate activity, divorcing Indian population from the Gandhian hangover. These movies also reflect on the slow incorporation of the cultural and sacred spheres of our lives like weddings, into the domain of entertainment and public discussion. To start with, let us look at *Hum Apke Hai Kaun*. According to Rustom Barucha, *Hum Apke Hai Kaun* is one of the most banal super hits of Indian cinema. It is categorised as a clean family entertainment which celebrates the supreme human event of shaadi with all the merriness, pomp, joy and happiness.<sup>17</sup> There is so much of merry making and such overdose of happiness that it appears as a utopia for the general audience. The problematic here, as argued by Asish Nandy is that a realised utopia can be yet another name of terror.<sup>18</sup>

Richard Dyer, while understanding entertainment and utopia, has argued that the world of entertainment responds to the needs that are real in a paradoxical manner. It defines and delimits what might constitute as legitimate needs of the people in society. These entertainment giants pose utopian solutions like abundance, intensity and energy to the everyday real problems of the people like paucity, scarcity and exhaustion. Dyer is of the opinion that, entertainment addresses only those problems and needs which capitalism promises to address or meet. The world of entertainment reiterates the dominant set of signs in different forms to establish it as a seemingly acceptable norm.

*Hum Apke Hain Kaun* is definitely a movie in line with the liberalisation of our times. The display of wealth is a constant in the movie. From the bungalow they live in to the homely display of games like billiards, swimming pools, fireworks, open roof gypsy, and foreign visits to the diversity in food delicacies which was most often wasted. All showcased the abundance of wealth. The representation of capital and wealth is loud and extravagant tossed with an element of fun. Through this display, the movie targets and fetishises the deepest needs of society, which can be bought through money. This includes a happy family, romance, fun, and food. Barucha, thus argues that the utopia of the movie succeeds in domesticating the idea, that a good life can be achieved through unrestrained flow of money resources. Thus, we see that capital plays a decisive role in our cultural space. What becomes crucial for us to also look at is the practice of consumption. We see consumption being transformed from being a mere activity to that of a spectacle. Rustom Barucha argues that consumption as spectacle in parody form is the anticipation of a utopian situation.<sup>19</sup>

Let us now move to the discussion on the movie *Monsoon Wedding*, which uses a lavish punjabi wedding as an occasion for the reunion of the family members. The story is set in a burgeoning suburb of New Delhi, showcasing the idea of a global India. According to scholars, this term does not just imply Indians living in a diaspora but also the socio-cultural transformations India has undergone and is undergoing since the new economic policy of 1991.<sup>20</sup> Since then, we witness the movie sets and the market place getting flooded with consumer goods. We also see, that the movies made since 1991, which were commercially successful, emphasised the significance of owning wealth, fast cars, cosmopolitan lifestyles and cultures. They also emphasised on youth culture and brought sexual topics for discussion into the inner sanctum of the family, which had earlier never found any mention. These movies insisted on making everything glossy. What we see is the western gloss desi soul<sup>21</sup> as argued by Jenny Sharpe. Bollywood movies combine the eastern and western cultures into what scholars like Sharpe like to call as believable fantasies.

*Monsoon Wedding* tries to present the contradiction of everyday life that the economic reforms of globalisation introduced. It showcases a world where cell phones, emails coexist with age old rituals and occupations. Scholars have argued that, most of the films in the 1990s deploy the new cinematic style based on family melodrama.<sup>22</sup> They feature the wealthy Indian families with traditional values rather than featuring India's underclass. The movie reflects that stage of anxiety, where one is trying to leave the age old rituals and traditions aside, and transform oneself according to the new standards set by the market, through the introduction of numerous goods produced. *Monsoon Wedding* is a brilliant display of the economic travails and desires of the new middle class. It shows the anxieties and financial crunches that a metropolitan middle class household has to undergo in order to meet the high levels of consumerism and standards set by the society while getting their daughters married. Even though, the father of the bride which is being played by Naseeruddin Shah, finds it difficult to meet the financial ends for the wedding, he is still convinced that the wedding needs to be big. He is even forced to borrow money from his friends in order to hold a big wedding. In one of the scenes he is seen hauling at the event manager saying 'shadi is one of the biggest event and there should be nothing that should go wrong.' This movie shows the important role an event manager or planner could play in making the day perfect. *Monsoon Wedding* also creates an acceptable space for professions like wedding choreographers, who now have good business during the wedding season.

In the movie *Band Bajaa Baraat*, one gets to clearly see the logic of the other side of weddings that is the market, at work. The space that was created in *Monsoon Wedding* is seen prospering. The flourishing market around marriages, can be captured by one of the scenes right in the beginning of the movie where the protagonist says she wants to become a wedding planner, for as she puts it - "best business hai, kareena, Katrina ki teen filmey pit jaye to woh to out, lekin recession hoja inflation shaadiyan to

hotirahengi, log lakholutaterahengey". This can be taken as of what is happening in the larger society in general. There is a glorification of the wedding ceremonies motivated by consumerist practices with the idea of showing the status one comes from or the status one would want to get elated to. Though, these movies clearly mark the presence of the market in Indian weddings, they fall short of depicting the extent to which it particularly affects Indian brides and women in general.

To bring out the impact of these developments on women, and specifically on the brides in India, I would like to discuss and analyse a television show run by the channel NDTV Good Times called 'Band Baja Bride'. In this show weddings are shown as a special once in a lifetime experience and how it becomes a crucial responsibility of the woman getting married to make it special, to begin with, by looking special. The entire show thus, focuses on how to make the bride look perfect. Every minute detail about how her smile looks, her facial hair, texture of the hair, jewellery, dress and location is taken care of. The episodes show how the entire process of preparing for the wedding can involve visits to and treatment of by a range of specialists, like dentists and dermatologists. This show is linked to practices like- going to the parlours, getting facials and other kinds of treatments done makes you feel fabulous, wearing diamonds makes one look beautiful, it is good and normal for the brides to sacrifice, make all the efforts to look good, not for herself but for the groom and that in order to be happy for a life-long, a big wedding becomes a must. These episodes, very candidly spell out all the elements around the market of marriage that are problematic. It not only highlights the excessive need for grooming of the self that is required by the bride and groom, more so by the brides. This show also tells us about the entire economy that is silently functioning from behind making these weddings go bigger in scale. Thus, it is a good study of patriarchy and market at work.

Discussing all the episodes of the show will not be possible here, but it is only right that we discuss a couple of episodes that starkly bring out the nexus of patriarchy and market at play. In one of the episode, taking place in Hyderabad, Aditi, the bride says she didn't want a wedding in which crores of rupees would be spent and thousands of people being invited. She did not want a big wedding but a small one in which everyone who comes can truly bless the bride and the groom. She decided to get married in a five hundred year old temple. She also claimed to be a progressive couple who would be contributing to wedding expenditure. In order to be able to do this, the couple worked over time along with taking part time jobs to save money. This was a moment of empowerment for them, and as she claimed, taught them discipline. However, what one could argue is that, this is exactly how the neoliberal rational of the market works. The neoliberal rational in subtle ways disciplines and creates subjects who are self-enterprising, self- disciplining as well as self- regulating. We see the couple doing all of this in order to pool into the logic of the society and the market to have a fancy wedding, to show to the world. On being asked why Aditi chose Band Bajaa Bride (BBB), she replied saying that, she was a doctor but was an absolutely girly girl at heart who likes to dress up. She said that - 'I took up BBB because I wanted to transform, from a busy doctor with no time for herself to a pampered bride, and wanted to leave the pampering to the experts.' Although, what one fails to register is that, this transformation is only of the outside, to satisfy the gaze of the other or the external. So, what the show in arbitrary yet acceptable modes tries to communicate, is that it is important for a bride to transform, but only from the outside, with the help of commodities created by the market, to gratify the external gaze, reducing women to commodities and puppets behaving exactly how the patriarchal instincts want them to. In most of the episodes, one common thing that one sees is that, the mother-daughter bond is celebrated because it is an eternal timeless bond. In this episode it was celebrated by Evara platinum jewellery. They mention that, Evara jewellery symbolises bonds which cannot be broken, and are meant for the lifetime. The uniqueness of Evara is that, every design has a different strand signifying the coming together of different kinds of relationships. In a few other episodes it was celebrated by Sabyasachi gifting a saree for the mother too along with the bride. In all of this we see how the material symbolism of a saree or a jewellery signifies the emotional or relational significance that exists between people.

It is also interesting to notice, how and what kind of advertisements are shown while the telecast of the BBB. It is fascinating to look at how the timing of the advertisements and the content of the show might be playing with the psyche of the audiences and captivating them. During the show, the so called flaws are pointed out by the experts, along with showing the means and ways of

rectifying those flaws. The audiences, which might include the young girls, who are planning to become brides soon relate to the flaws pointed out. The advertisements that follow include beauty products like Fair and Lovely, acne and pimple removing creams, creams for the removal of body hair like Veet, anti-ageing and skin tightening creams like Olay, shampoos and conditioners for stronger, longer and healthier hair and jewellery by Tanishq to name a few. While the show points out the problems, the advertisements provide the solutions.

## **CONCLUSION**

These are the ways in which weddings have become sites of social performance of one's class and gender. In is in this context, that Beauvoir's idea of body being a continual materialising of possibilities and a historical situation can be seen to be appropriated by the patriarchal capitalist processes in society. The ideas of a perfect body and beauty, which can be achieved through following a particular regimen of life, involving the conscious and careful cultivation of fashion, clothing and style, prompted by the capitalist market leads to the constant objectification of the brides and women in general, which in turn results in crafting of women as new kinds of fetishised subjects. What makes the situation of these women worse is the fact that they give willing consent to their own subjectification oblivious of the consequences.

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# **LIVING REALITIES THROUGH FANTASIES: EXAMINING THE CHARACTER REPRESENTATION OF YOUNG/ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN IMAGINARY LANDS**

MS. SHIPRA GUPTA\*

## **ABSTRACT**

It has been a matter of deep concern, especially in modern times with a growing need for emancipation of women, to rethink the way women have been conceptualized and represented in literature and media. A study of Lewis Carroll's and L. Frank Baum's children's works shows how this trend is only a reflection of the way women are conditioned, since their very childhood, to create an understanding of themselves as not individuals but as objects that are acted upon and as beings that are expected to abide by the authoritative/authoritarian patriarchal norms. This paper attempts to delve into such a psyche of young and adolescent girls that triggers in them such desires and highlights such character traits that do not find fulfillment and space respectively in a world just described. This will be done through an analysis of not only the fictive texts of the authors mentioned but also through a comparison with their adaptations in movies which will facilitate a larger scope in the understanding of the said issue.

**KEY WORDS:** Girl child, identity, fantasy/ dream worlds, imaginary lands, gender stereotypes, representation of women in literature and media, cinematic/movie adaptations of literary texts, Victorian childhood, child psychology, identity theory, behaviourism.

'The only way to achieve the impossible is to believe it is possible' says the headstrong Alice in the 2016 Walt Disney adaptation of Lewis Carroll's *Through the looking Glass*. Her assertion, and the journey she undergoes to reaffirm this belief

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against all odds, is what spurs one to renegotiate the gender stereotypes that establish certain things as impossible territories for girls and some as possible for boys. Thus, if any attempts are made to analyse the various reproductions of dominant gender norms and stereotypes in popular literature and movies, an examination of the psyche of the young or adolescent child, in whose mind these binaries are embedded, becomes indispensable, as it is only through the formulation of these binaries that a young girl is instructed to lead her life.

When it comes to a child's psyche one is inadvertently reminded of the conception of the 'fresh' innocence of the child as perceived by authors like Rousseau, Locke, Wordsworth, Blake and Coleridge who were all concerned with childhood, interested in the growth and continuity of the child and who traced the organic development of the child's consciousness. The works of Dickens and Mark Twain as well, have strongly evoked the romantic symbol of 'life' in childhood but the changing times, especially the early 20th century, see the figure of the child embroiled in more complex issues. The child's identity, even before it was formed properly, was called into question when he/she was bombarded with instructions on what was/was not acceptable behavior especially with respect to gender.

Lewis Carroll's intention behind the creation of Alice, that she should have 'the eager enjoyment of life that comes only in the happy hours of childhood, when all is new and fair, and when sin and sorrow are but names- empty words signifying nothing' (Coveney 330), is easier said than done, as Alice experiences/ braves a lot of conflicts and threats to her identity once she encounters creatures in Wonderland. This paper then would explore, what the perception of the girl child's identity was in the late 19th and the early 20th century as seen in the literary works under scrutiny, and see how her organized and coordinated identity is affected when (in such cases) she is faced with out-of-the-ordinary situations. The study would attempt to analyse what affect both the internal factors, like an innate sense of psyche and the external factors like the family and the world that the child inhabits, have in the formation of the child's identity. It would also explore how the child perceives and conducts herself, given these influences and guiding principles. Along with this the adaptations of these texts into movies will also be analysed to argue how the 20th and 21st century performance arts have changed the way these 18th century girls are represented in media. The fact that the literary characters are at the formative stage of life falling within the 7-10 year age group, whereas their adapted counterparts in movies are much older falling within the age of 16-20 years further makes the analysis interesting and suggests the ever changing desires of girls and how they are manifested in the real world.

A look at a girl child in Victorian England- as represented by Alice in the Walt Disney adaptations of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) and *Through the Looking Glass* (2016) - and one in agrarian America i.e. Dorothy Gale as shown in the 1939 musical adaptation of L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*, provides us with an illustration of how an adolescent girl acquires a sense of discipline and morality in the regulation of daily life once she enters an imaginary or dreamlike world and unravels the mystery to her identity by solving the mysteries of her surroundings.

In Sarah Gilead's words, 'the journey out is really the journey in.' (Gilead 284) According to her, there are three categories of works of children's fantasy literature that feature the return- to- reality closural frame. 'In the first the return completes a history of psychic growth and interprets the fantasy narrative as a salutary exposure of forbidden wishes and emotions'; (Gilead, 279). *The Wizard of Oz* fits this model because Dorothy's 'exposure' to such a place, 'neutralizes antisocial impulses. Obsessive inquiry, resentment, anger, or anxiety is symbolically enacted in the fantasy and thus reduced to an acceptable level, so that the formerly fragile or threatened ego returns as a more fully formed social entity' (Gilead, 279). Dorothy, through a cyclone, is swept out of a poverty stricken, gray, dull and joyless life (signified by the black and white frame), into a fairy tale land (brightly coloured) where she acquires a new identity as the savior and is welcomed as the 'National heroine of the munchkins' [The Wizard of Oz (TWO for subsequent citations), 1939] having unconsciously killed the wicked witch of the East. This is like a dream come true of a 'place far, far away' (TWO, 1939) for her as she has just been told by her Aunt Em that she should 'find your (her)self a place where you(she) won't get into any trouble.' (5:15) As we move ahead we realize that this escape is necessary for her survival because it enables her to acquire knowledge (Gilead, 8).

The second type of child's fantasy literature 'features a return that rejects or denies the fantasy by misreading it sentimentally and ignoring its subversive force. This return simulates the closure effects of the first type but disrupts, rather than smoothly concludes, a linear socialization "plot"' (Gilead, 279). Lewis Carroll's

Alice books fit this category quite well, as Alice is made to question her identity following every encounter with a creature in wonderland. In both cases then, it can be seen that, 'On holiday...the children long to loosen or defer the tightening ties to social realities that characterize growing up' (Gilead, 290). Dorothy, having shifted from an adult world oppressively ruled by the identity principle, finds expression in the wonderland as Baum, through his 'Modernised fairytale' (xx) addresses himself exclusively to the 'child's wholesome and instinctive love for stories, fantastic, marvelous and manifestly unreal' (xix)

Both the girls, Alice and Dorothy, in their own ways, are on a quest to search for their identity, the former to understand it, in relation to the new concepts in wonderland and the latter to regain her-self that has changed, with a change in the position of the house. An analysis of the conception of the Victorian child would help to understand better as to how the two protagonists experience the possibility of a change in their identity.

In the Victorian period, the child had to conform to certain rules and standards of behavior. According to J.A. Hadfield, the child 'had to be obedient, docile, well behaved, seen and not heard, and made to fit in with social requirements and moral standards' (17). The little girls of the Victorian era were seen as the 'purest member(s) of a species of questionable origin, combining as they did the inherent spirituality of child and woman' (Auerbach, 335). In this age young girls were sentimentalized as emblems of purity and beauty and both Carroll and Baum, one a children's photographer, the other a great magician, regarded little girls with great adoration, almost worship.

Alice herself in Lewis Carroll's books stands as an image of a Victorian middle-class child with her prim and proper demeanour, 'confronting a world out of control by looking for the rules and murmuring her lessons' (Auerbach, 334). But interestingly she is seen as defying those norms in the movie adaptation where she refuses to wear her corset underneath her clothes and the socks as they make her feel constrained. The movie shows her making her second journey to the 'underland' (as the creatures call it) but she remembers her first only as a dream and not a reality. Her knowledge becomes a touchstone for proving whether or not she is the same little girl that she used to be. Her memories of her first trip get manifested in the real world in the form of, what she thinks are, recurrent nightmares with unbelievable images of 'a smiling cat, a dodo bird and a blue caterpillar.' [Alice in Wonderland (AIW for subsequent citations), 2010] She confesses to her father that she thinks she may have 'gone round the bend, bonkers and mad' which her father affirms but being a visionary also assures her that 'all

the best people are (mad)' (AIW 2010), something that the mad hatter also reiterates in the sequel to this movie. [Alice Through the Looking Glass (ATTLG for subsequent citations), 2016] It is because of the confidence that her father instills in her, to think ahead of times and to never be afraid to think differently, that she is able to uninhibitedly talk about her visions 'of women in trousers and men in dresses' (AIW, 2010) an implausible idea in Victorian England. Her first visit had made her privy to the wonders of the imaginary land, of the talking creatures and plants, and made her utter such things as 'to paint the (white) roses red' which her aspiring fiancés mother finds 'an odd thing to say' (AIW 2010) Everyone expects her to say yes to the publicly arranged proposal as in her sister's words, 'she won't be pretty forever' (AIW 2010) and because she wouldn't want to end up unmarried like Aunt Imogene. But her 'soon to be twenty' self cannot shirk away the distracting image of the bunny in a waistcoat that is almost beckoning her to go back to the fantasy world. These visions can be seen as manifestations of a desire to assert one's identity that is otherwise not openly welcomed in the real world but finds expression in the imaginative one owing to its subversive forces.

Dorothy Gale, of L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* (TWO for subsequent citations) who may be regarded as a part of the future first lot of women suffragists in America, too is aware of the status that she holds amongst the creatures of the land of Oz when she confidently asserts in the book that she belongs to a 'civilized country'. (Baum 10) This difference in status and a realization that they have an upper hand over the rest of the creatures of the fantasy land would result in a sense of pride and

fearlessness in the two girl protagonists, a basic boost for every child that is denied in the real world. Dorothy in the movie scolds the lion for being ashamed of himself for attacking the petite scarecrow. While on her own farm she was considered fretful and was not paid attention to at all, in the Land of Oz she does deeds that deserve a mention in the hall of fame, empowering her like never before. Undoubtedly there is also a class consciousness in Alice who tries to overcome the shrinking- stretching- scratching- getting stuffed into a tea pot by saying that 'I'll decide where my dream goes, I make the path.' (AIW 2010)

In Victorian times, following the teaching of the philosopher Locke, the child was regarded as passive, like a piece of wax on which impressions had to be made or as the Tabula Rasa i.e. an empty slate on which anything that was written would leave a mark. But the British conceptions of the child stated that "every child is a going concern". (Hadfield 28) Parents insisted, on giving expression to the native potential of the child, including the child's natural desire to learn, and directed them to write ends. Simultaneously America saw the advance of a new theory called Behaviourism which emphasized the importance of environment in shaping the character and destiny of the child reducing the influence of hereditary factors, like the instincts, to a minimum.

Early in the Preoperational period of child development (age group 4-7 years) as conceptualized by Jean Piaget, the child's

'Self-awareness is relatively primitive and centred around physical appearance, name, important possessions and personal qualities which are seen as important. As children get older, more and more interpersonal and social qualities become recognized and integrated into other self-concept schemes, but appearance, possessions and physical abilities remain especially important aspects of self-concept, throughout the early years.' (Brophy 228)

This is why Dorothy, even after insisting that 'I haven't killed anything' (Baum 8), is expected to take responsibility of the Witch's death and is answerable for her property's (house) odd behavior. As the old woman says, 'your house did (kill) anyway and that is the same thing'. (Baum 8) Even though according to the scarecrow, having a brain is just what makes one human, being human in Kansas means being bound inextricably to one's property and relations, almost to the extent of feeling imprisoned. In the fairy tale world the self follows freely and is defined by one's property no matter how one comes about it. Dorothy wants to be seen and taken only for what she sees herself to be- 'an ordinary little girl who had come by chance, of a cyclone into a strange land'. (Baum 18), but the objects she acquires while on her journey to the Emerald City and the deeds she unintentionally performs, elevate her to the level of a witch, who for her is always 'ugly and old' (TWO Movie, 1939) again highlighting the ingrained stereotypes. Dorothy, as a child of the agrarian American ideology, envisions the family farm as an alternative to the dislocation of the self. When her house displaces her, the home to which she returns at the story's end promises stability and a more comfortable relation between self and property, by establishing a secure distinction between what she essentially is and the identity constructed for her by the things she has acquired only by chance (like the magical ruby shoes in the movie adaptation).

Hence one can see that both the girls learn differently from their respective fantasy worlds. In the 1939 movie Dorothy still presents herself as 'the small and the meek' harmless, innocent girl in a hostile world that constantly threatens her with possibilities of death, personal destruction or complete severance of contact with the previous life she lived. She tries to maintain some modicum of sanity by clinging onto a prior held notion of her identity which is bound with her existence in the real world. Whereas Alice, in both the 2010 and 2016 movies comes out

more confident, full of ideas and more enlightened having lived in the fantasy world. After her first trip as a small girl when she returns to the 'underland' as an adolescent the Mad Hatter claims that she has lost 'her muchness' (AIW, 2010) which is a clear indication of the fact that the real world does not let girls explore and exhibit their true selves constraining and straight jacketing them into following the stereotypes. When she enters the second time round it is her potential that she exhibited the first time that makes the creatures of the fantasy land have faith in her and believe that she can slay the jabberwocky. But her return to the real world has tainted and corrupted her true potential making her feel otherwise making her say, 'I don't slay

anything, so put it out of your mind' (AIW Movie 2010) All this is a sure insight into how child upbringing needs to be reconsidered.

All the three books represent the child's struggle to survive in the confusing world of adults. To understand the adult world, both Alice and Dorothy, have to overcome the open-mindedness that is characteristic of children. Dorothy lingers on in the Land of Oz for longer than needed because of the shrewdness of the wicked Witch of the West and because of her own innocence. The witch 'happened to look into the child's eyes and saw how simple the soul behind them was, and that the little girl did not know of the wonderful power the silver shoes gave her'. (Baum 96) Alice, on the other hand, struggles with the importance and instability of personal identity and this doubt is nourished by continuous changes in her physical appearance. In the 2010 movie also she struggles against the oppressive forces of the Red Queen who is a personification of a thick headed, full of herself character projected in her bulbous, orb like head that is shown to have once been hit accidentally. (ATLG 2016)

According to identity theory, 'an identity is a set of meanings applied to the self in a social role or situation, defining what it means to be who one is in that role or situation. (Burke and Tulley 1977; Stryker 1980) Identities are organized into a hierarchy of salience and commitment reflecting the embeddedness of the individual in the social structure'. (Burke, 43) Individuals seek to ascertain self- meanings through interaction with the others. So when in the 2010 movie Alice is fed up she says 'I've been told what I must do and who I must be' she is trying to make sense of the whole situation and assert her own identity in this incomprehensible world. But her return to this very world in the 2016 movie sees a drastic reversal because this time she returns to reaffirm for herself an identity which nobody is ready to accept in the real world, that of a captain of a ship which is a male oriented profession. So it is only through her championing of problems in the looking glass world that she will be able to assure herself that she would be successful in the male dominated real world. When her mother says in the

beginning that 'you can't always have things however you want them to be' (ATLG, 2016) she does not know that in the end her daughter will prove her wrong and the mother herself will publicly declare her trust in Alice and let her regain the wonders of living her life on her own terms by captaining her father's ship 'Wonder' the one place where her self-expression found an outlet to begin with.

Dorothy, in the China country, is particularly attracted to the figurine of the Princess- "But you are so beautiful...won't you let me carry you back to Kansas and stand you on Aunt Em's mantel- piece?" (Baum 151) Dorothy forgets everything else and tries to create her own display that shows a consumerist, selfish streak in the child. Her identification with the home becomes a way of advertising the self. But on the china figurine's request, Dorothy has a revelation and refuses to perform this labor of consumption in which something live and beautiful could be reduced to a lifeless state. Apart from possessions, another very important aspect that is considered the biggest identity marker is the names, seen as labels or symbols of identity. Alice, in *Through the Looking Glass*, feels rootless because she goes into the Forest where things have no names and there she experiences a memory loss. On being asked - "what do you call yourself?" (Carroll 137) by the fawn, she stands confused and says "I wish I knew!" (Carroll 138) Dorothy, as well, realizes the importance of how one's identity is inextricably bound up with the name one has. The moment she reaches the fantasy world, a magical message appears that says, "Let Dorothy go to the city of Emerald". (Baum 12) Even though nobody knows her name there, it is clear that the fantasy world recognizes any individual by the name that he/she bears.

Hence, it is clear how, in all the books and their movie adaptations, the protagonist's already formed identity comes in contact with special situations through which she gets an opportunity to understand herself. It would be apt to summarize that for both Alice and Dorothy, even though in different ways, the journey through these fantasy worlds marks a movement from childishness to maturity. Both of them begin to understand the intricacies of their identities which helps one see what bearing the fantasy worlds have on the mind and psyche of a girl who has urges of performing such roles that are in conflict with the established standards in society. So when an Alice feels like taking on the masculine role of a ship's captain, is branded a hysterical woman in the process and kept contained in an institution (AIW, 2010) she needs to set matters straight in the

fantasy world to be able to give her confidence in the real one. The modern movie adaptations then are more progressive in their representation of a girl's identity as someone who should not be bound in gendered categories. These movies act as precursors to the

idea that one should not need a fantasy land to express one's heart's desires especially when one is a female. If things are set straight in reality and desires are openly expressed without being called into question as per gendered parameters then there will actually be 'no place like home' (TWO, 1939).

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# **MIGRATION AND MARGINALISATION: ISSUE OF 'DOUBLE MINORITY' AMONG INDIAN QUEER DIASPORA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this paper, I will look at the experiences of Indian queer diaspora abroad (mostly in the west) and will try to locate their constant tension of navigating between two poles of cultures and sexualities. The paper attempts to address the 'dual marginalisation', firstly as ethnic minority and secondly, as sexual minority among the queer Indian diaspora. I will engage in a reading of two movies 'My Beautiful Laundrette'(1985) and 'Touch of Pink'(2004) in order to foreground and examine the double minority status of the queer Indian diaspora. I will engage in thematic analysis of both movies and audiences' reception in order to bring out the issues they are faced with. This will also highlight how the narrative techniques of blending realism and fantasy successfully represents the condition of the community. To conclude, I will discuss briefly how support groups and organisations have come up and have evolved over the years to reach out to the South Asian queer community in the diaspora.

**KEY WORDS:** Indian Queer diaspora, LGBT Support group, Queer movies, Queer popular culture

## **INTRODUCTION**

When we think about queer diaspora, the usual tendency is to keep the community at a pedestal for various reasons. The general belief is that they are better off than their Indian counterpart, economically, socially and, in majority of the countries enjoy better political privileges too.

In fact, the general leaning to think of Indian queer diaspora as a privileged lot is extremely prejudiced and judgemental.

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The first problem to keep the Indian queer diaspora at a pedestal is to homogenise them. They are, most of the time, presumed to be the techies and business executives living in the city of Sanfrancisco or Melbourne with a lavish and liberated life with well-paid jobs. But, Indian diaspora is also diverse enough to include the cabbies of the small town in the US to middle class Trinidadian who have their own set of problems. In the same way, when we say Indian queer population, it is equally diverse. Two closeted lesbians in any unnamed village of West Bengal or Kerala are as much part of the Indian queer community as two self-dependent partners sharing an apartment in any of the metro cities.

Now the question is, 'is it justified to homogenise such diverse population'? So, is the assumption of queer Indian diaspora as a chunk of population who are 'chosen few' and who are entitled to the best of things in life still hold truth?

The second question associated with queer Indian diaspora is whether by transcending geographical boundaries are they able to surpass cultural boundaries as well? To simplify, are they ready to accept the new-found gay subculture, long term partnerships, same-sex marriages and do they feel more confident about coming out to their families, friends and to public back home?

Does being part of the queer diaspora empower them to lead a life of less difficulties and hardship?

Do we tend to portray the West as more tolerant to homosexuals and all inclusive? Is the Indian queer community, who have acculturated to the west, are privileged? Are the second and third generation Indian queer diaspora more liberated and do they enjoy more legal sanction, political privileges and social acceptance?

## SNAPSHOTS

While watching some of the videos in the Project Bolo , a collection of oral narratives of selected LGBT persons from India, I came across many people who have either realised their homosexual orientation and/or have decided to come out to public only after going abroad.

So, can the facts be overlooked as mere coincidences? Or does the liberal west play a role in their coming to term with their sexualities?

So, by mis/assuming Indian queer diaspora as a privileged lot, do we fail to notice the fact that they may have their own set of problems? Isn't navigating between two cultures, particularly when one is personally struggling with his/her own sexuality more difficult?

In this paper, I will try to locate the constant tension of navigating between two poles -cultures and sexualities- among Indian queer diaspora.

The paper attempts to address the 'dual marginalisation'- firstly as ethnic minority and secondly, as sexual minority-among the queer Indian diaspora. I will engage in a reading of two movies 'My Beautiful Laundrette'(1985) and 'Touch of Pink'(2004)in order to foreground and examine the double minority status of the queer Indian diaspora.

The first film My Beautiful laundrette is about a south Asian gay man called Omar and his reunion and eventual romance with his old friend, a street punk named Johny. The plot addresses several issues like homosexuality and racism depicted within the social and economic climate of prime ministership of conservative politician Margarate Thatcher. The film has been criticised for the simplistic portrayal of the character of a South Asian man Omar. His sexual status has been projected as absolutely unproblematic. I will try to respond to the question that many critics have raised regarding the movie's failure to address the constant tension that a gay South Asian in England faces between cultural loyalty towards family and White gay subculture.

The second movie, Touch of Pink chronicles the two different possibilities that the protagonist with a South Asian origin is faced with. On one hand, he can live a happy and gay life with his white boyfriend in the liberal American society; on the other hand, he may succumb to the pressure of marriage to a girl by his devout Muslim mother and lead a life of constant pain and suffering.

### A unique blend of realism and fantasy as narrative strategy:

When we analyse the audience reception of the movie My Beautiful laundrette, we realise that it has been criticised for its misrepresentations of many different kinds. One quarter of the Asian diaspora criticised the movie citing that the movie promotes a bleak picture of the South Asian community. They are majorly portrayed in the movie as homosexual, promiscuous, alcoholic and people who deals with narcotic substances. They thought this is too much in a society which is already racist in nature.

Another chunk of the community criticised the movie for portraying the South Asian community in an overtly positive light, which is too unrealistic. They have been cast as wealthy businessmen having white mistresses and white servants. One segment of the Asian community, however, had an overwhelmingly positive response to the film: gay South Asians throughout the diaspora. Trikone, a magazine for the South Asian queer diaspora, devoted almost an entire issue to the film in 2001 stating "the kiss between Johnny and Omar has, to many a queer South Asian, become the moment they came out to themselves" (Roy 2).

In the same issue actor Gordon Warnecke, who played Omar, recounts how many gay South Asians have told him they identified with his character and were grateful for the film. In fact, gay communities internationally-South Asian and otherwise-responded positively to the film and it continues to be cited as a favorite gay romance.

Part of this popularity results from the fact that rather than depicting its characters as conflicted over their sexual identities, the film shows Johnny and Omar simply as two men in love. Some viewers praised the film precisely because of this ease, while others objected, claiming it was unrealistic. This tension again raises the issue of realism. If we expect the film to accurately represent reality and adhere to a realist narrative style, then My Beautiful Laundrette is a disappointment; however, if we read the film as a blend of fantasy and realism, it becomes much more internally coherent and successful.

In the movie My Beautiful Laundrette the laundrette has been contrasted with the outside world. The laundrette is shown as a beautiful place with freshly painted walls, fish tanks, and television and with good music played inside it. The outer world is all in chaos where things are falling apart, streets are seen with protesters depicted the sordid picture of urban life. Thus, the laundry has been projected as a safe space, a blend of both reality and fantasy, where romance between Omar and Johny develops. A unique concoction of fantasy and realist mode of narrative offers the audience a space where two lovers from two ethnic groups and two different social strata unite, at the same time without actually claiming to transcend the social, racial and cultural boundaries.

Similarly, the movie Touch of pink features Kyle MacLachlan who plays the 'spirit' of Hollywood superstar Cary Grant who constantly accompanies and advises Alim (Jimmy Mistry), a gay Pakistani film studio photographer who lives with his British boyfriend Gile (Holden-Ried). Alim grew up watching Grant's films, and now he imagines the dead actor observing, commenting on and guiding his life. The amusing part is that all of Cary Grant's suggestions, when followed, make Alim's life complicated and silly. The boundary between fantasy and reality is deliberately kept blur to position the viewer in a state where they can transcend to a place where reality doesn't matter much, but at the same time don't cease to exist.

### DOUBLE MINORITY

The protagonist of the movie Touch of Pink faces two kinds of dilemmas. Firstly, being a second generation immigrant in the US, he is no longer the devout Muslim that his very conservative mother wants him to be. Nor can he assimilate in the White subculture for being a brown he has always been considered as the is other. Secondly, he also has to struggle to come out as gay for being gay is considered sinful and is not socially accepted, more in the South Asian Muslim community.

Discussing the reasons for the emergence of the South Asian queer groups in America, Sandip Roy refers to the 'Double Minority' status that Queer South Asian Communities in general, and the Queer Indian Community in particular, lives with. He further elaborates, 'many people find it difficult to fit into other's spaces. They find it hard to assimilate into the mainstream

(read White) gay community. Apart from dealing with their sexuality, they also have to deal with the racism, very much evident in the appearance-conscious White gay bars'.

Talking about the inadequacy of institutions like South Asian Community or Gay and Lesbian Society, Rakesh Ratti in his Introduction to an edited volume of Queer South Asian narratives titled A Lotus of Another Colour(1993) writes "we stand with one foot in South Asian Society and other in the gay and lesbian world."

In fact in the movie The touch of Pink, the character of Alim is contrasted with his cousin brother who also belongs to the diaspora community. His cousin conforms to the conventional mode of a closeted gay man getting married to a woman and then continues with his promiscuous homosexual life. In contrast, Omar who is mighty committed to his British boyfriend has to deal with the tension between his sexuality and his emotional responsibility towards his family by encountering his bossy mother.

The clash is not between the clashes of ideologies between mother and son, rather it a clash of cultures. If we take a closer look, we can see that Alim's white boyfriend Gile doesn't have to be closeted to his family and is easily accepted by his sister where as Alim has to take all the trouble to hide his sexual orientation under the carpet from his mother. Even if being in the diaspora for long her mother's generation has not yet been able to accept homosexuality with ease.

In a different twist to the story, the parents of Alim's gay cousin expect their son to get married to a girl and offers them grandchildren even if being aware of their son's homosexual status. They are not at all apologetic about it, rather they try to justify their act. Here, this guy succumbs to the mounting pressure by his parents and might have internalised the belief that there is no other way out but to get married and continue with his secret homosexual life.

There are many instances where even homosexual man in the diaspora community doesn't lead a better life than their Indian counterpart. To cite an example, this unfortunate case of Indian origin British Millionaire Shrien Dewani who was accused of killing his wife during their visit to Cape Town for their honeymoon. Later on, it was found that Dewani was bisexual and he wanted to get rid of his wife for which he offered money to some contract killer of the Cape Town to get his wife murdered.

There are lot of people belonging to alternative sexuality community who are in fact caught up between two different cultures and sexuality. They lead a life of utter misery with their dual marginalized status. To address some of the issues of the queer diaspora, in the early 90s there came into existence some of the queer activism groups of South Asian diaspora in the west.

### **South Asian queer organisations in the West:**

In an attempt to reach out to the South Asian Lesbians and gay people, two Californian expatriates Subir and Arvind founded Trikone. Apprehensive of their endeavour they published the first newsletter in January 1986 and got a huge overwhelming response from the queer diaspora community. Their post box started overflowing with emotional stories all around the globe. Following this success, November 1986 saw the formation of Trikone Los Angeles and in December the same year Trikone Chikago was formed. Khush, another Gay and Lesbian South Asian queer group was formed in Toronto in 1987. Shivananda Khan established Shakti in London in 1988. Ashok Rao Kavi published the first issue of Bombay Dost in 1990.

To keep the members engaged throughout the year there were publications of News letter. There were publication of Trikone, Khuskhayal, shakti Khabar, Shamakami in the West. Anamika which was the first Indian Lesbian and bisexual Women magazine was published too. As a response to this in the Indian subcontinent there were the publication of some magazines like Pravartak (Calcutta), Arambh(New Delhi), Freedom (Gulberga ) and Friend's India (Lucknow).

Then there was a revolutionary change with the introduction of internet and the spurt in communication. The Khush list was formed which is a database of 600 LGBT south Asians which further helped the members of the community in keeping

in touch with each other. Desi dykes for Lesbian and a bisexual women was formed that offered them a unique space to interact with each other.

Magazines started publishing many coming out stories. People started getting connected. They also started counselling people how to avoid marriage pressure from South Asian parents and they also tried to connect homosexual males and females for a long term relationship with an option to opt out if the relationship doesn't work out. South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association (SALGA NYC) was formed in 1991 to improve the awareness and acceptance of queer people who self identify themselves as South Asian and have South Asian heritage in the Newyork city metropolitan area.

These groups abroad and some of them back in Indian homeland have been trying to keep the LGBT community closely-knit by organising conferences, cultural events, protest-march and by publishing newsletters and magazines.

So, the Indian queer diaspora in particular and South asian queer diaspora in general are not communities to be kept at pedestal assuming that they are the privileged lot who enjoy all the benefits of the home as well as host countries. Contrary to this belief, they have their own set of problems of which not being able to fit in to other's space remains the most difficult of all. In addition to that the problem of dealing with one's own sexuality becomes all the more difficult when one is trying to navigate between two different cultures without actually being able to step firmly on any. But, fortunately some of the associations like Trikone, SALGA, MASALA (Masachucette Area South Asian Lambda Association) and many more are actively taking up issues related to South Asian queer diaspora community and working relentlessly to make the world a better place to live in.

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## Book Review

Sanjeev K Jha

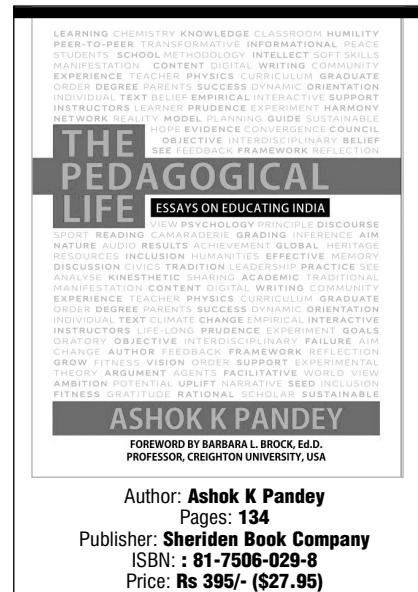
### INDIAN EDUCATION: THE HALLMARK OF 'ADAPTIVE ENTERPRISE'

In a span of time, when memory is being erased and the political relevance of education is dismissed in the language of measurement and quantification,

Ashok K Pandey's groundbreaking 'The Pedagogical life (Essays on educating India)' seems to be the legacy in this stream. This book, consisting both passion and principle, would help the students to develop a consciousness of freedom. It also recognizes authoritarian tendencies, empowers the imagination, connects knowledge and truth to power and describes how the world as part of a broader struggle for agency, justice and democracy.

While describing 'valuing education', the author categorically offers the very best, perhaps the only, chance for young people to develop and assert a sense of their rights and responsibilities to participate in governing, and not simply being governed by prevailing ideological and material forces. When the author states: "In the global world, cultures and nations, economies and businesses, come together in cooperation and competition. Education in India has shown, the true hallmark of 'Adaptive Enterprise': instead of sticking to the age-old approach to education, where some experts and learned scholars ordained what was good for one and all. Such was the model before and after Independence until well up to the nineties. In the earlier paradigm we followed 'make and sell' model and now we have entered in the era of a 'sense and respond' model," he wants to know the exact requirements regarding skills and competencies.

When the author surveys the current state of education in India, he finds that most universities are now dominated by instrumentalist and conservative ideologies, hooked on methods, slavishly wedded to accountability measures and run by administrators who often lack a broader vision of education as a force for strengthening civic imagination and expanding democratic public life. One consequence is that a concern with excellence has been removed from matters of equity, while higher education - once conceptualized as a fundamental public good - has been reduced to a private good, now available almost exclusively to those with the financial means. Universities are increasingly defined through the corporate demand to provide the skills, knowledge and credentials in building a workforce that will enable India. There is little interest in understanding the



Author: **Ashok K Pandey**  
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pedagogical foundation of higher education as a deeply civic and political project that provides the conditions for individual autonomy and takes liberation and the practice of freedom as a collective goal.

Talking about values and their presence in our lives, the author feels that the Indian society has become prone to using refrains like 'A crisis of values', 'An erosion of values' and 'What has happened to this generation', to voice concern and frustration about the appalling deterioration of values in the contemporary society. Pandey categorically says, "Values pervade every sphere of human activity across all age levels. Often we mistake the values attributed to physical objects as the values to be imbibed. It is vital to recognize that the faulty and misleading value constructs have crept into our lives at large. The values we must place importance on, are the values that, by nature, are eternal and pertain to evolution, progress and conduct of human beings. They may appear ancient chronologically, but they remain ever fresh. They transcend time and they provide the foundational structure for human existence."

While describing about 'teacher preparedness', quoting the recommendation of Justice J S Verma Commission's report on 'teacher preparation', the author categorically mentions: "The Verma Commission recommendations seek to address the typically fragmented approach to teacher preparation in which teacher training institutions are isolated from one another and school....When schools embed such a roadmap for professional learning in their calendar, and when teachers are themselves the designers of that professional learning, accountable for its implementation and success, supported by the vision of their school leaders, they stand a good chance for sustaining useful professional learning and being successful at achieving their learning goals."

Thus, 'The Pedagogical Life' insists that one of the fundamental tasks of educators is to make sure that the future points the way to a more socially just world, a world in which critique and possibility - in conjunction with the values of reason, freedom and equality - function to alter the grounds upon which life is lived. It offers students new ways to think and act creatively and independently, while making clear that the educator's task, as Pandey points out while paying tribute to India's former philosopher-statesman President Dr Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, "Learning, it should be remembered, is not an end in itself. It is a means to reform and improve one's conduct and behavior."

What 'Pedagogical Life' does insist upon is that education cannot be neutral. It is always directive in its attempt to enable students to understand the larger world and their role in it. Moreover, it is inevitably a deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge, values, desires and identities are produced within particular sets of class and social relations.

Indian education is in the midst of a crisis of quality - starting from primary schools to universities, the dominant view is that our students are not learning as much as they ideally should and what is more worrisome is that rote learning and memorisation seems to be the dominant mode at all levels. This is not to say that there are no exceptions or that all institutions are equally bad; the main issue that confronts us today is that majority of our educational institutions do not pay adequate attention to pedagogy. In the attempts to grapple with improving transaction and the experiences children have in schools; the government has primarily focused on the delivery system and inputs. The focus is on the teacher's role and what they do rather than engaging with children, how they are learning, what they are learning and the effort they make in the classroom.

In the last two decades various attempts to evolve a set of principles that moved away from teacher-centric and information focused transactions have been multi-pronged. The NCERT over a series of documents tried to move the discourse away from mere teaching to teaching-and-learning. The educational policies in the late eighties and the nineties also laid stress on the child being active and their learning gauged by the competencies developed rather than the amount of information they hold.

This understanding of pedagogy was central to NCERT's efforts, to reimagine and reformulation the National Curriculum Framework (NCF). A large number of educators and educationists were involved in thinking through the content and process of education - leading to a comprehensive set of documents on elementary and secondary education. The sad reality is that even after many years these ideas have barely reached all schools.

At last but not the least, 'The Pedagogical Life' even addresses many 'unattended' questions on child education with its opportunities and challenges.

## Book Review

Sidharth Mishra

### AN EMPEROR LOOKING FOR SPIRITUAL EMANCIPATION

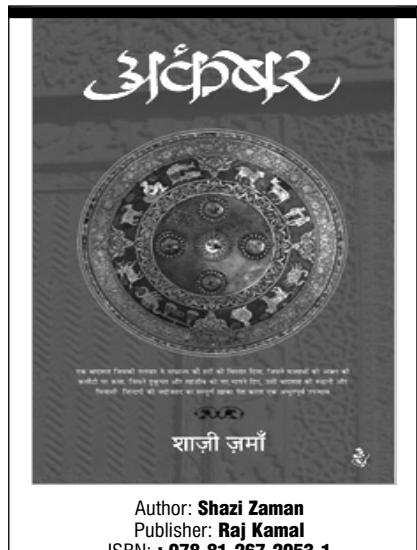
t's seldom that somebody who studied history at St Stephen's College and later Oxford, chooses to write a text on history in Hindi language. This pioneering effort is to be appreciated for scholarship levels in the Hindi language publications have not shown to achieve the same benchmark as those in English. No wonder, given the increasing number of students craving for quality texts in Hindi language, a great market for translated texts is flourishing.

According to Zaman he chose to write the book in Hindustani and not Urdu or English, for he wanted to write in Akbar's language. "He was a great proponent of communal harmony and had a deep knowledge of religions. Akbar gave the world something new, be it his architecture, clothes, philosophy, poetry, political acumen. At the peak of his life, after winning all wars and being the most powerful man, he looked inward to find a place in the spiritual space," says Zaman, adding the book will be translated into English.

Shazi Zaman is a trained historian in limited sense as he has been a practicing media person known better for his creativity in producing extraordinary television news features. 'Akbar', is based on the life and times of the Mughal dynasty's best known ruler - Akbar, who also enjoyed the epithet of being the Great. According to the author's own admission, the book contains many hitherto unknown and unsolved aspects about Akbar, and is a result of 20 years of intensive research. Thus his attempt of doing a historical text demands greater attention for the sheer difference in approach a media person would adopt from a practicing historian and also the time management skills he must have utilized to give equal attention to his vocation and evocation.

Zaman claims that he kept himself away from films, TV Serials and even books on Akbar so that his research was not impacted by these. The idea was to reach primary sources of information. In this endeavour he read a lot of available literature penned by writers considered close to Akbar, regional or vernacular sources and even letters written by Christian priests.

He also put a special focus on studying Mughal era drawings that were available. To reach the very heart of Akbar's life and times Shazi Zaman researched material associated with Akbar from Kolkata's Indian Museum till London's Victoria Albert. Here he studied Akbar's drawings or those made by artists at the beckoning of the emperor. Zaman also researched on the monuments



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and buildings related to Akbar and those of his close associates. An intense study of treatises right from 'Akbarnama' to 'Muntkhbutwaarikh', 'Babarnama', 'Humayunnamma' and 'Tazikratulwakyaat' was done.

A very interesting fact that the book reveals is that comes Akbar had dyslexia, something reflected from the close study of and experts' input on documents bearing Akbar's writings. The book also claims that Akbar recited 'Dohas' in Braj Bhasha.

Zaman claims that photograph of an armour said to be worn by Akbar in war, part of the collection of a museum in Mumbai, was sent to Oxford to estimate the height and physical dimensions of Akbar."I needed to have his reflection in my mind, his face, physical attributes, look," says Zaman.

If Zaman's fascination for his subject is an indicator, the novel, probably fearing a run down from trained historians he calls his work fiction, is a worthy read. In the eight years he spent writing the novel, as mentioned earlier, Zaman consciously stayed away from all fiction related to the Mughal emperor - including the 2008 film, Jodha Akbar. "When I finally submitted the manuscript, I felt such an emptiness, like I had nothing to do," says Zaman.

More than the political conspiracies, administrative reforms and military strategies, the book focus on the emperor's spiritual being. "I was very keen to explore Akbar's deep spiritual anxiety, his religious curiosity and his desire to bring multiple streams of faith together," says Zaman. Akbar's abiding love for Sufi orders, his mysticism, his preoccupation with faith are all well-documented. Kings over the course of history have appropriated divinity, but the embattled Akbar stands out, racked by spiritual dilemmas, obsessed with the idea of a perfect faith. And his obsession to look at himself as the spiritual guide of the people, not merely a worldly emperor.

An episode from 1578 forms the crux of Zaman's novel. The king was camped on the banks of Jhelum in Punjab when he experienced what many say was a mystical vision. Zaman chanced upon a Rajasthani account of a courtier who was beside the king when the vision occurred. This was a turning point in Akbar's personal history, from where his grappling with religion took a decisive turn.

This kingly quest towards spiritual awakening culminated in Akbar's founding of Din-e-llahi, a new order which combined aspects of Hinduism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Jainism among others. "But he never forced any one to follow Din-e-llahi," says Zaman. Those who did, laid down their head gear on the emperor's feet as a mark of submission. Those who didn't, such as Man Singh, an important courtier and related to Akbar by marriage, continued to enjoy the king's patronage.

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