

# Eidos 2021-22

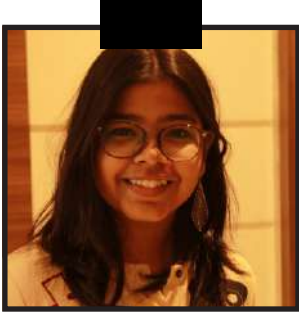
## World Of Colour



Department of Sociology and Anthropology

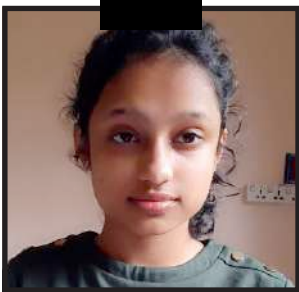
# TEAM PROFILES

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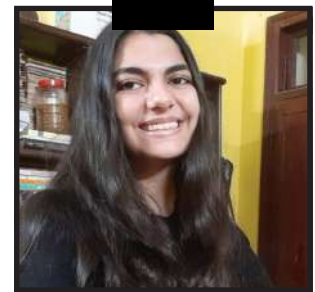
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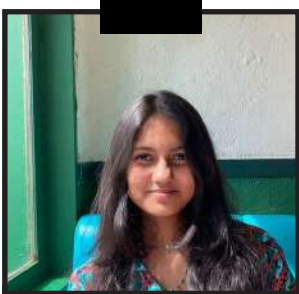
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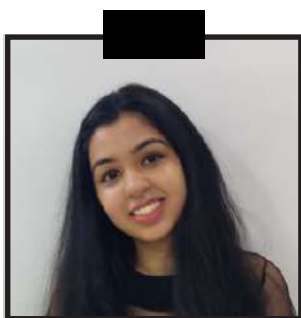


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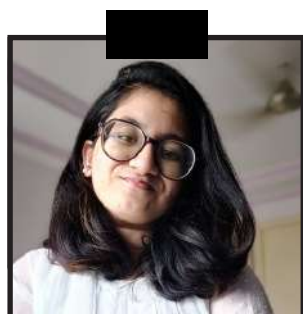


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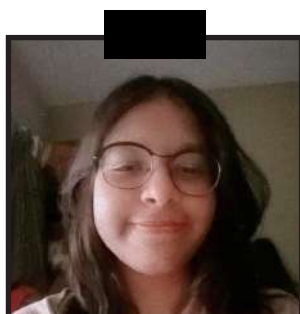


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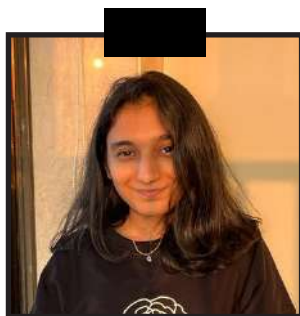
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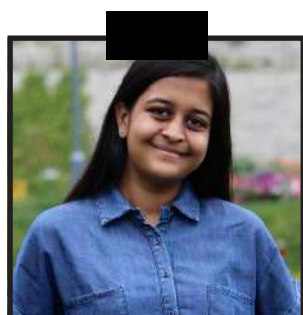


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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Eidos 2021-22: World of Colour, is an amalgamation of the dedicated efforts of many people. The diverse array of articles published in this edition would not have been possible without the enthusiasm and perseverance shown by every student writer. We are indebted to all their efforts in researching, writing and rewriting to be able to put forth their best works. The journal extends gratitude to its team of wonderful editors- Hannah Cardozo, Ishwari Sonawane, Gayatri Thakkar, and Priya Norohna for their unwavering support and diligent work.

The publication is thankful to the Graphics team- Khushi Shah and Annie Thomas for their relentless creative contribution to the vision of this year's journal. A special token of gratitude for the team of extremely talented illustrators and layout designers who helped beautify this vibrant edition. Our heartfelt appreciation to Ridhi Jain for single-handedly overseeing Social Media Marketing and organising various activities for Eidos. Our gratitude to Rashi Shah for helping us during the first few months of this project despite her educational path taking her to new pastures.

We would like to thank our extremely supportive faculty- Dr. Pranoti Chirmuley, Ms. Radhika Rani, Ms. Ankita Gujar, Dr. Sahana Sen and Ms. Arpit Gill. Most importantly, we would like to extend our gratitude to our faculty coordinator, Ms. Ankita Gujar, for being the steadfast support system we could rely upon and for making us feel confident, with her unwavering enthusiasm and infamous sense of humour. We are also grateful to the staff and students who helped us incorporate two remarkable papers from this year's annual seminar of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology on the theme of 'Hope' into the journal.

We would like to thank our guest contributor, Ms. Sefi George, for bringing an intersectional approach to the journal through a memoir of recounting her experience of creating illustrations and designs using the discourses of Social Anthropology and Ethnography.

And lastly, a huge thank you to our readers, we hope you have a wonderful and colourful reading experience!

# EDITORIAL

As the team of Eidos 2021-22 gathered to decide on a theme, our unanimous vision for this year was to come up with something holistic and engaging, inclusive of writers and readers belonging to various milieux. We wanted to capture an everyday phenomenon that influences various social interactions, yet goes unnoticed because of its seemingly ‘oh-so-obvious’ quality. We thus present to you the overarching theme for Eidos 2021-22: **World of Colour**.

Colour is a multifaceted phenomenon with abstract, social, and material features. It is abstract, as it is a concept and an idea, social, as it is a product of social interaction, and material, because of its physical qualities. We invited writers from various disciplines to explore the *world of colour* through the tinted lens of Sociology and Anthropology. We were overwhelmed with the responses we received from students and their eager interest in writing for the journal. With the magnitude of enthralling ideas for articles, the wonderful team of Eidos worked extremely hard to curate and choose a diverse range of multidisciplinary articles for this year’s publication.

Eidos 2021-22 aims to probe into and invigorate the readers to understand the implication of colours, through the lived realities of people belonging to different regions, races, gender, socio-economic and political contexts. It inspects the symbolism of colour in understanding gender and sexuality; addresses issues of race and politics along with the intersection of media studies, which depicts the significance of colour through Symbolic Interactionism. This issue inquires into the sociological interpretation of colours in exploring media, art, and aesthetics while emphasising the interdisciplinarity of such subject matter. The journal provides the readers with a vibrant and engrossing array of articles covering a plethora of topics.

We organised an Art Review Competition this year, accepting academic articles on any piece of visual or performing art. We also had the delightful opportunity to publish a captivating memoir by Ms. Sefi George. Being a multidisciplinary artist, she brings an intersectional approach to the journal while recounting her experiences of creating illustrations and designs using the discourses of Social Anthropology and Ethnography.

I would like to extend my gratitude and congratulate the Editorial team for their hard work throughout. My heartfelt appreciation to our Graphics and Social Media Marketing team, who did a phenomenal job at making our theme even more prominent with their vibrant work. Even with the hurdles posed by the ongoing pandemic and the online mode of communication, the determination of these extraordinary women made every task exciting and inspiring.

We wish to take our readers on a hopeful and colourful journey of exploring Sociology and Anthropology through this edition of Eidos. We hope to make these disciplines accessible and instrumental for people from various walks of life. Our vision remains to give our readers a holistic experience and lead them to ponder over the ‘oh-so-obvious’. If we were able to engage you in a sociological and anthropological journey through our vision, please do write to us about your reading experience at [journal.eidos@gmail.com](mailto:journal.eidos@gmail.com). Even if we weren’t able to do that, we would be more than eager to reflect back on some constructive criticism and keep working towards enriching Eidos.

Wish you a bright and colourful read!

Sudeshna Roychoudhury  
Editor-in-Chief

# DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY & ANTHROPOLOGY

## ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

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*The academic year 2021-22 was a blend of new opportunities, trials & errors and learnings for the Department of Sociology and Anthropology along with its constituent student bodies namely - The Academy of Sociology & Anthropology and the magazine EIDOS. The year began in a continued virtual space. By the end of the semester in October, the college and the Department shifted to the hybrid mode of teaching-learning. However, considering various logistical and other limitations, the events were carried out by the Department through a virtual medium. From Panel Discussions to Annual Seminar, we have planned and executed engaging events throughout the year. Here are a few highlights of the Department activities throughout the present academic year:*

### **The Mentor-Mentee Programme** *September 2021 - November 2021*

Mentor-Mentee Programme is the student-led initiative that aims to familiarise and provide academic support to the students of Sociology and Anthropology. In the past, this programme has guided, supported and helped Mentees to know their subjects and disciplines better. It gave Mentors an opportunity to bond with their juniors and learn from each other's experiences. This year, taking into consideration the online mode of learning, for the first time ever, our flagship programme was carried out in online-virtual format. The programme was carried out with the help of a virtual academic platform called 'Padlet'. Despite having a few technological drawbacks, the programme was well received and effective as of its offline mode. The programme helped FY and SY Sociology-Anthropology students to connect with the subject, explore various discipline-oriented career options and a space for academic discussions.

### **Indian Sociology, Ethnic Identity and Conflict** *25th September 2021 & 4th October 2021*

The Academy of Sociology and Anthropology organised a series of discussions under the guidance of Prof. Radhika Rani, which were primarily focused for the SYBA students of Sociology and Anthropology. The discussions were carried out under the theme of:

*Ethnicizing Partition Politics in Assam & The Citizenship Question*

Prof. Binayak Dutta  
25th September 2021

The discussion was instrumental in explaining the effects of partition and arising citizenship questions of North-Eastern Indians. The migration and displacement of North-Eastern Indians and how politics play a major role in ensuring the protection of them as citizens of India were the key themes of his discussion. Prof. Binayak Dutta with his extensive background and study of North-East India and its citizens provided the attendees a candid look into their social life.

*Bodoland Conflict*

Dr. Suryasikha Pathak

4th October 2021

Dr. Pathak, who is an Associate Professor at the Department of Tribal Studies explained how factors such as gender, religion have their own set of restrictions, furthering the atrocities experienced by the marginalised communities.

**Panel Discussion on Capitalism and Mental Health***1st October 2021*

As much as we know, none of us can escape Capitalism and it has been a primary focus of academic writing for a range of sociologists, economists, psychologists and even politicians. The Academy organised a Panel Discussion which hosted panellists with various backgrounds and perspectives which provided theoretical as well as practical bases. The panellists for the discussion shared a multi-disciplinary background, which helped us to understand how Capitalism plays a major role in different parts of our life. Ms. Janhavi Pandya, a Counselling Psychologist was accompanied by Ms. Sroojana Iyer, who is an experienced Corporate employee, provided their real-life experiences in a Capitalist work space and what effect that has on one's mental wellbeing. The students panellists Ms. Titiksha Raushan, a final year Sociology student along with Ms. Dhanisha Raj, a final year Economics student, provided various theoretical explanations and perspectives on the topic. The discussion not only focussed on the negative aspects of Capitalism but also looked at what advancement it brings to the table and helped to look us beyond its prima-facie understanding. It was followed by a question-answer session, which highlighted the importance of discussions on such day-to-day life concepts.

**Filmy Friday (Theme : Capitalism)***Books & Movies Recommendations**October 2021*

Continuing our theme for the Panel Discussion, we presented a curated list of movies and books (non-academic) which talked about Capitalism through different perspectives and time periods. Movies ranging from Citizen Kane to The Platform presented Capitalism in its truest form and has been a point of academic interaction in lectures and panel discussions carried out by the Department. Some non-academic literary pieces such as 1984, The White Tiger, Attack on Titan were recommended by our student audience on the lines of our theme.

**Department Blog: Deconstructing Realities**

“Training Sociological Lens on Films” was the annual theme of The Academy blog this year. Students across the streams and years were encouraged to write on the theme and bring in diverse academic perspectives through their articles. In addition to this, few submissions of assignments which shared common themes as of blog were taken into consideration by the team and published periodically. Some of the themes included ‘romanticization and/or normalisation of socially deviant behaviours’, ‘escapism’, ‘the power movies hold in today's world’, ‘representation in films : a boon or bane’, ‘the problems of inclusion in the film industry’, ‘a look at nepotism in the film industry’ and so on.

With the dawn of 2022, the Academy of Sociology & Anthropology and the Blog: ‘Deconstructing Realities’ became independent student bodies and were led by the respective professors-in-charge.

## **Application Fair**

*23rd & 27th November 2021, and 17th January, 2022*

A series of interactive sessions were organised, especially for the TY students of the Department, which threw light on the process of applying for postgraduate courses in the country as well as abroad. Recently graduated alumni from the department were invited as panellists to share their experiences of applying for postgraduate courses. They also shared some tips and answered the doubts of the students. On the respective dates mentioned above, three such sessions were conducted online:

1. MA Opportunities in India (with Kshiti Shobha Vikas, Vani Sharma, Kritika Sharma, and Muskaan Palod)
2. MA Opportunities abroad (with Diya Prabhu, Asiya Syed, Priyanka Elango, and Simone Lobo)
3. Tips to Prepare for Entrance Exams (with Om Kumar)

## **Annual Seminar as an Honours Program Activity**

*17th & 18th February, 2022*

Abiding by the COVID protocols and to ensure that the seminar was accessible for all, the event this year was conducted entirely online. The theme for the seminar was 'Hope'. A total of 16 papers were presented in sessions of 4 across 2 days. The topics covered ranged from hope for refugees to queerbaiting. Each interpretation of the theme was unique, engaging, and critical. The papers were written individually or in pairs, and they were all assigned a faculty supervisor for support. The writing process culminated in the presentation of the paper at the seminar. Respondents amongst the students were chosen who served as catalysts for a dialogue between the presenters and audience which facilitated critical discussions after each presentation.



## Staff Updates



(From L to R: Ms. Radhika Rani, Dr. Sahana Sen, Dr. Pranoti Chirmuley (HoD), Ms. Ankita Gujar, and Ms. Arpit Gill.)

Dr. Pranoti Chirmuley, was Convenor, TEDxStXaviersMumbai 2022, on the Malhar, End Semester Exams, Research Ethics committee besides, part of the anti ragging cell in college. Dr Chirmuley also took over as Coordinator for the Special Course on Human Rights. She was invited for a guest lecture in L S Raheja College of Arts and Commerce on the 19th of March 2022 on Careers in Sociology. On the 3rd of February 2022, she was invited by the Department of Sociology to deliver a lecture for their RUSA funded certificate course on ‘Social Research Methods and Academic Writing.’ She was also invited by the Department of Interreligious Studies (DIRS) for delivering 4 lectures : on 9th, 12th, 16th and 19th November 2021 as part of their course on Indigenous Traditions. She also contributed an article written in Marathi in the College Magazine titled: *Aai kuthe kaay karte*

Ms. Radhika Rani joined the doctoral research program in Sociology of Education at Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Mumbai) in August, 2021. She completed an inter-disciplinary refresher course in social sciences that was conducted by the Department of Geography, Mumbai University in November, 2021. She wrote an article in Hindi for the Marathi Vangmay Madal’s annual magazine *Pakharan* on their theme of ‘behind the curtains of communication’. She also participated in a 5-part workshop conducted by Fr. Gordon Daniells on “Teaching Value Education” in early 2022.

Ms. Ankita Gujar joined the Environment Committee and the Magazine Committee this year (2021-2022). She attended the Colaba Townhall (online) with a team of St. Xavier’s College students, conducted by ORF with the Minister for Environmental Affairs for Maharashtra, Mr. Aditya Thackeray. She attended a workshop on the New Education Policy held at St. Xavier’s College - Autonomous, Mumbai. She completed an eight day Faculty Development Program on “Pedagogy and Research Skills Development” from 21st to 29th June, 2021 organised by the Amity School of Languages, Amity University Maharashtra. She also successfully completed a 4-Week Online Orientation Programme for “Faculty In Universities/Colleges/Institutions of

Higher Education” from 17 September - 16 October 2021. This was conducted by the Teaching Learning Centre, Ramanujan College, University of Delhi. She collaborated with the Department of English to conduct a lecture on a Sociological and Art-centric gaze on the works of Kafka along with Dr. Rashmi George. She also conducted a session with the students of the University of Stuttgart through the short-term programme of the CIP on Public Art and Artists in the time of the Pandemic. She led a team of 35 students to conduct micro-ethnographic fieldwork as a part of their discipline-centric SIP for the department. She wrote an article for the Marathi Vangmay Mandal’s annual magazine, *Pakharan*, based on their theme for 2022: ‘Behind the Curtains of Communication’. She also conducted a talk on ‘Street Art, Information and Expression in Urban India during the Pandemic’ as a part of the Harvard Central-Asia Program through the CIP on the 17th of March, 2022.

Dr. Sahana Sen had joined the Examination Committee in the academic year 2020-21. In November 2021, she presented a paper in the Indian Sociological Society organised All India Sociological Conference titled, “Re-imagining Bernstein’s Restricted Code: A Sociological Enquiry of the Buddhist Monastic pedagogical techniques in South India”. She also was a part of a discussion based on the theme ‘Class in Campus’ which was organised by the ‘Student Inclusion Cell’. Additionally, she organised a guest lecture for her course, Organisational Change and Development (ASOC 0609). The speaker was Mr. Sauraveswar Sen, the Chief Mentor and Founder of an organisation called Catalyst Learning Services on 3rd March 2022. She took over as the professor-in-charge for the department’s blog, ‘Deconstructing Realities’.

Ms. Arpit Gill contributed to a podcast episode for the Department of Inter-religious Studies’ podcast, ‘*Krupaya Dhyam Dein*’. She took over as professor-in-charge of the student-led Academy of Sociology and Anthropology. She conducted a guest lecture for the second year students on ‘Gender and Sports: Bodies and Power’.

Ms. Radhika Rani and Ms. Arpit Gill organised a session on preparing for MA entrance exams in India. This session was conducted by Kshiti Shobha Vikas, Vani Sharma, Max Palod and Kritika Sharma. All of them had graduated in 2021 and had joined various MA programs right after.

Dr. Sahana Sen and Ms. Arpit Gill helped organise and were panellists for a talk held by the Student Inclusion Cell, titled ‘Conversations on Class’, on the 18th of December, 2021.

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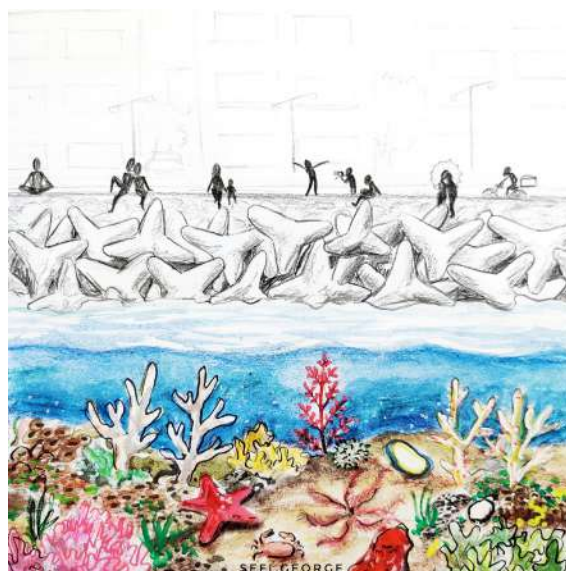
## GUEST ARTICLE

## A MEMOIR BY SEFI GEORGE

I was in my last year of college in 2016, majoring in Sociology and Anthropology, when I began to see art as more than just a hobby. Through the unit on ‘Anthropology of Art’ that we had as a part of the Applied Anthropology course, Ankita Ma’am introduced us to various artists and art movements. I was especially enthralled with Banksy, the pseudonymous street artist based in England, and I spent a long time studying his art and its social context. I began to see how complex ideas and conversations could be instigated by a simple image.

At that time, I was planning to teach sociology/anthropology as a career. But I always had a problem with the jargon-filled journal articles we had to read. It was wonderful knowledge, yes, but also terribly restrictive, and often boring. Only students or researchers who needed references for a project would bother to spend time reading them. I aspired to be a teacher who would visually explain themes to my students in a way that could be accessible, interesting, and have theory explained in context. Along these lines, I created a comic strip for an assignment on ‘Development and Wildlife Conservation’. For the first time ever, I got 19/20 for Pranoti ma’am’s assignment! That gave me a lot of encouragement to proceed along these lines. I did two more projects as a visual submission during my MA course—one a comic explaining Weber’s concept of the protestant ethic, and the other a large mix-media piece explaining the various perspectives on land use in Sanjay Gandhi National Park. What could be explained in 20-30 pages of jargon was understood in a few minutes by those who saw the art piece (of course, I also had to submit a written assignment, thanks to academic restrictions).

After my MA, I spent one year teaching sociology at St. Xavier’s (B.Voc) and at NMIMS school of Design. That one year, I brushed up on my art skills, learnt



*Artist’s description:* This illustration uses color to draw attention to the life that exists under the waters of the marine drive promenade. The artist wishes to indicate that the people who come to marine drive live their own lives oblivious to this treasure that exists just below.

*Alt text:* Illustration of people at the marine drive. Below it, there are star-fish, seaweeds, and corals in different shades of primary and secondary colours with water covering them.

a few softwares, and created a portfolio. I applied, and was selected, for a one year certificate course in Children’s book illustration at Riyaz Academy of Illustrators. The course was based in Hoshangabad, Madhya Pradesh, a small, religious town on the banks of the Narmada, with a large Hindi speaking population. I, being a sheltered and privileged English educated city girl, had no experience with small town life. The culture shock was very intense for the first few days. But once I settled in, a whole new experience awaited me.

As anthropologists of old times would go to study

‘the other’ in order to understand their own society, through this experience, I began to learn a lot about how ethnocentric my worldview was. When I went to study ‘Illustrating children’s books’, the books I had in mind were the ones I read as a child. Enid Blyton’s books, the Nancy Drew series, Rapunzel, Cinderella, and The Three Little Pigs were the kind of stories I expected to learn illustrations for. But we were introduced to lovely local stories from India—stories of jalebi makers and Madhubani artists, naughty kids from Nagaland, mysterious ghost stories from Rajasthan, tales of local markets and busy streets; stories that were firmly rooted in a specific cultural context. These stories and its accompanying illustrations made these places come alive. The publishers, authors, illustrators working on these books had done the very necessary deed of making Indian children feel like their childhood and culture was worthy of literature.

The process of illustrating local stories requires a



*Artist’s description:* A live sketch done at Khau Galli, churchgate (one of my usual hangout spots around college)

*Alt text-* Illustration of a person standing at a Juice Centre, facing the counter with various fruits like bananas, oranges, sweet limes. There is a menu to her left, and parcel boxes on the counter and a water carton in the right bottom corner.

tool that I have been trained in- Ethnography. Both anthropology and drawing are ways of seeing and ways of knowing the world. Through observation, quick conversations with people, listening to them talk about the things that matter to them, I could gauge the meanings they place on artefacts, the social

relations that exist in a group, and the worldview they collectively hold.

Very often we go into the field expecting to see certain things, and we quickly make notes of that and come back and write it down very elaborately, using academic jargon and well-thought out connections. But when you intend to draw the scene, you begin observing it in a different way. As Michael Taussig put it, citing Berger, a “line drawn is important not for what it records so much as what it leads you on to see” (Taussig, 2011; Berger 2005). The act of actively seeing, rather than looking passively, contributes immensely to knowledge creation. For example, during the course we were once assigned to observe and sketch a group of labourers building a house. We started off with generic sketches just to complete



*Artist’s description:* Observational sketch of a lady who sells fish in my area. What drew me to the scene was the comfort she had with the animals around, even though they all wanted the fish she was selling.

*Alt text:* Illustration of a person wearing saree, sitting cross-legged on the ground. There is a display of various fishes in front of her with bags, boxes and cartons behind her.

the assignment, but as we observed, we began to notice things we took for granted—how they created makeshift rope ‘elevators’ to pull up the bricks, how the women draped their sarees to enable free movement, how the children of the labourers used a narrative of play while helping their parents. When

your intention is to capture a scene graphically, you tend to observe and listen much more in-depth than if you were looking to write a description back when you're home.

Another interesting aspect of drawing for ethnographic recording is the response that the people have towards you. When you're drawing, there are two major opportunities that arise. Firstly, you soak in the world around you with more of your senses. You're 'seeing' what you're looking at, listening to conversations and sounds around, even noticing the smells that characterise the location. Secondly, your presence is bound to elicit curiosity, often leading to conversations with the people around. These conversations can give you insights about their interactions with the things you're drawing. Sketching is often viewed as a much less intrusive and more humane way of recording the world than taking photos or videos, or even thrusting a mic and recorder at them. People tend to welcome you more warmly if they see you as an artist rather than as a researcher with a checklist and a recorder. They will approach you and often give you suggestions and critiques. It not only gives the artist-ethnographer a glimpse into what they hold important in the space, but also creates the opportunity for more participative research. Moreover, when you're concentrating on drawing, you're forced to listen more and talk less, a good practice in ethnography!

Drawing as a form of alternate ethnographic outcome is something that isn't given much academic value. For some reason that I fail to understand, more value is placed on jargon filled English text rather than on visual representations that can be more widely accessible, and can often convey more than words can. Leonardo Da Vinci wrote next to one of his famous studies of anatomy: "Which words, O writer, will you use to describe with similar perfection the entire configuration that this drawing here provides?" (Lester, 2014).

Every line drawn in an illustration is intentional, much more than in photography or videography. Nothing just appears in the scene unless you place it there yourself. When creating an illustration, if a scene refers to just a conversation between two people, the clothes, the accessories, the things in the background, all play a part in contextualising the story and conveying

meanings. Even more intentional is the use of colour. The colours and textures used in an illustration can convey emotions (eg. using black and blue to denote sadness), locations (the warm 'dusty', slightly racist filter used to show places like India and Mexico), and a whole lot more. The colours used to depict higher classes are mostly soft pastels, or deep tones of green, maroon and purple. Depictions of lower classes tend to show either more earthy tones, or gaudy, saturated colours. Look through the character design of villains in cartoons. What are the predominant colours used? Contrast them with the colours used for the hero, and see how color is used to create a 'good' vs 'evil' story. Over time these depictions don't exist just in books and visual media, but they translate into reality—



*Artist's description:* This illustration is based on *Dub and the power of spoken word as a means of protest and resistance. The article focussed on Caribbean women and their poetry. The colours used are indicative of the rage, power, and intent in their words.*

*Alt text-* Illustration of a person speaking into a microphone. She has cornrow braids and a scarf on her head, she's also wearing a large earring.

colouring our ideas of people, places, and things. Illustrators have the power to challenge and create meanings, if done in a well-thought out way. Ezra Jack Keats introduced African-American characters as protagonists in picture books, a genre dominated by depictions of white children. His book 'The snowy day' showed a common childhood theme of exploring the neighbourhood during the first snow. He didn't



*Artist's description: Me at my window sipping coffee and looking at the little bit of greenery I have in Mumbai.*

*Alt text: Illustration of a person sitting on a chair holding a cup and looking out of the window behind her. There are some plants on the window sill.*

intend to create a statement on race, but the mere fact of showing life through a black child's point of view casted a humane light on an underrepresented section of society.

Books that are intended for children are the most obvious ways of learning what culture deems important for its members to learn. Illustrators have a major responsibility in ensuring their depictions avoid prejudice and ethnocentric views, while also stimulating the reader to think about their culture and its norms. Indian publishers are increasingly focusing on instigating curiosity and observation in children. Priya Kuriyan's illustrations in 'When Ali became Bajrangbali' touches upon issues such as development, conservation, religion and blind faith, which are conveyed more through her choice of illustrations than through the text. She draws the tree where the creatures live in, with a similar layout as Mumbai's old housing colonies, creating an alternate narrative about builders trying to take over such living spaces for larger commercial projects.

I work largely on environment based illustrations, especially those related to Human-wildlife interactions. Especially when it comes to issues

related to conflict, hiding valuable information in inaccessible jargon is very counterproductive. Creating illustrations and stories about leopards, for example, can pass on tips for managing conflict in sustainable ways among people who may not be able to read an academic report on problems and solutions. Visual depictions can be used to save lives and create a peaceful coexistence.

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## 01

# What you don't see: A linguistic lens on colour

Author - Lovina Newton

*Colour is an expansively explorable territory. This article attempts to connect two seemingly disconnected, extremely engaging discussions revolving around colour. While the former half introduces and explains variation in colour terms across languages, the latter delves into the knowledge argument. Mary's Room thought experiment uses colour qualia to do the same, yet it remains a thought experiment. Moving away from the tug-of-war between abstract and pure science and investigating using the social sciences—a middle ground—would aid in understanding the different ways in which people perceive, communicate and discern colours.*

Although colour has always been a largely visual medium of perception and expression, a substantial amount of verbal and non-verbal communication relies on the direct and euphemistic use of colour terms. Throwing colour hues into the tricky blend of perception and expression of the perceived makes the grounds of empiricism subjectively murkier. And yet, social and positivistic scientists look into and uncover new spectrums that could bring us to new horizons of understanding concepts currently in our blind spots. Here is a similar attempt, through an analysis of various published studies, to put colour under the cross-sectional lens of linguistics, perception, biology, and philosophy of knowledge.

Almost every linguistic study of colour introduces itself with Berlin and Kay's Basic Colour Terms, so it makes sense to start there. Berlin and Kay (1969) summarise their study as, "Our two major findings indicate that the referents for the basic colour terms of all languages appear to be drawn from a set of eleven universal perceptual categories, and these categories become encoded in the history of a given language in a partially fixed order" (p. 4-5). The eleven basic colour terms emerge in the order shown

below and the languages seem to be segregated into evolutionary stages.

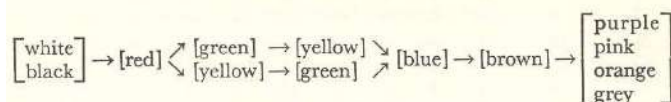


Figure: The Berlin and Kay encoding sequence (1969)

The colour terms appearing in any lexicon diversify as cultural and technological complexities increase. It is then the contrast, starting at black and white and then fleshing out into hues, that gives colour terms their meaning (Kay & McDaniel, 1978; Turton 1980, p. 329). The universality of colour terms has been checked through practises like weeding out suspect terms and universal colour markers like Munsell chips (Berlin & Kay, 1969). And yet, there remain some exceptions to the universality of colours. In Anna Wierzbicka's (2008) article about colour universals in language, she presents the Australian language, Warlpiri, which has no word for "colour". Wierzbicka uses Warlpiri, which uses vibrancy and patterns for description, to question absolute colour terms. One crucial point highlighted in this paper is the way in which studies try to understand the colour terms of the language in the context of the English-

speaking world. Take for example the term *kunjuru-kunjuru*. It means ‘smoke-smoke’ but it is often translated as ‘dark blue, smoky grey, purple’ so that the Anglo reader is able to understand its referential range (Wierzbicka, 2008, p. 410). Such practises put empiricism of the research in jeopardy as relativism cannot be verified, or dispelled, through the etic perspective.

However, it is important for researchers to include information that might not be available in the emic epistemology. One such case is the study of Yolngu Sign Language (henceforth YSL), used by the Yolngu Aboriginals in Australia. In YSL, MOL—used to denote dark/black—is signed by pointing to the opposite upper chest or arm of the signer, which seems like pointing at the skin. The sign WATHARR, used to denote light/white, is made by quickly rubbing the arm of the signer (Adone et al., 2012, p. 61). While research suggests these signs can be used generally to say white and black, YSL does not have any inherent term for colour. The sign that means colour/overall design of an object is accompanied by mouthing *minyt’ji*—a *Djambarrpuy(n)u* concept—or *kala*, borrowed from the English word colour (Adone et al., 2012, p. 60). They do have the signs for colours that are used in ceremonial face painting—Red, Yellow, Black, which appear to mimic the application process of the colour. Contrasting these concepts of YSL with each other gives rise to the possibility of the entire concept of colour being borrowed, not just the colour terms.

Colours often find their source of emergence in culturally important aspects of the environment; like types of soil or cattle. Some colour names, with an expeditiously globalising world, are borrowed from other languages. Understanding this varied recognition of colour in different languages holds significance which will surface as the forthcoming argument unfolds. ‘Mary’s Room’, a thought experiment or the knowledge argument put forth by Frank Jackson (1982) goes like this: Mary is a brilliant scientist who knows all physical facts about colour. But she lives in a black and white world and has never seen colour herself. What happens when she is introduced to a red coloured object, say an apple? There are quite a few ways to look at this debate going back and forth between philosophers and



*Shows the effects of colour on Mary, a girl who has only seen in black and white.*

**Illustrated by Kyra Sparrow**

*Alt text- Illustration of a person sitting on the floor of a black and white room and peeping out through a keyhole on the door. There are colourful rays of light entering from the keyhole.*

physicists. The physicalist school of thought claims that everything is physical and hence, explainable (Jackson, 1986). For example, Mary knows what wavelength reflecting off the surface of the apple would enter her eyes and what kind of reactions it would cause in her brain. Thus, physicalism also claims that Mary would not gain any new knowledge or give a surprised reaction on seeing the colour red. She already knows all there is to know.

The physicalist train of thought is slowed down by qualia—an individual instance of conscious, subjective experience. Even if every single fact about colour is known to Mary, seeing colour herself will be different than knowing what it is like to see colour. Much like having in-depth knowledge about muscle cramps does not induce the feeling of a cramp. No amount of linguistic physics would enable Mary the ability to imagine the colour red. Colour is a sensory, or to be precise, visual experience. Unless one is given a point of reference, visualising colour becomes an impossible task. Keeping qualia in the equation then prepares the foundation for the existence of non-physical knowledge; it makes

space for theories like the Ability Hypothesis and Acquaintance Hypothesis.

In Acquaintance Hypothesis, Bigelow and Pargetter (1990) allow for Mary to have gained new experience and yet not learn anything new about the colour. She is simply acquainting herself with colour in a new way and therefore, gaining no propositional knowledge. The Ability Hypothesis (Lewis 1983, 1988; Nemirow 1980, 1990, 2007) works along these lines as well. It suggests no new propositional knowledge is gained on visually knowing a colour. What Mary gains is the ability to imagine, recognise and remember the colour. Going along the Ability Hypothesis, Mary would not be able to recognise a colour she has never seen before. Similar lapses in recognition were noticed by researchers about participants' ritualistic language practises. When certain colours are not used by people in their daily parlance and have not gained cultural importance linguistically, the colour seems to be noticed, recognised and remembered less by the people.

“Having a category term for something—whether it's an object or a colour—speeds up a person's ability to identify that item among a host of others” (Young, 2018). The terms like *ble* and *galazio* in Greek (Maier & Abdel Rahman, 2018) or *qinker* and *huhe* in Mongolian (He et al., 2019) give the native speakers an advantage in identifying the shades of blue as the English, German and Mandarin speakers identify it. Participants in Maier and Abdel Rahman's (2018) experiment were asked to look for a grey semi-circle, present in every trial as an attention grabber while noticing the presence of a colour contrasted triangle within a circle was the actual test for the participants. The contrasts were of three kinds, light and dark blue, light and dark green, and blue and green. Greek and Russian speakers, who have fundamental linguistic categories for light and dark blue, were more likely to see the blue contrast triangle than English and German speakers. The influence of native language on the early stage of visual processing was also recorded with the help of an electroencephalogram (EEG) used during the experiment, thus hinting that native language does play a role in our perception of the world and how we function in it.

Various such researches have connected colour terms present in language and the speed in discriminating between certain colours in peripheral vision. Regier and Kay (2009) studied Whorf's linguistic relativity with neurobiology, along with other studies on the cognitive functions of the two hemispheres of the brain. Franklin & Finnegan (2016) clarifies a small but important detail about colour cognizance—“Language hasn't fundamentally altered how colours are seen, but it has changed what we do with the information.” The experiments done on the intersection of linguistic, cultural and biological colour processes are few and their conclusions are not lucid. They provide minimal affirmation of the effect language has on colour perception on a lower or higher-complex processing level. And yet, attempting to capture the colour experience, or the lack thereof, not only in the context of hard facts but inclusive of the socio-cultural reasons supporting the experience, would give new directions to this interdisciplinary web.

The latest research co-relates the presence of particular colour terms in certain languages with enhancing perception, memory, and even the ability to discriminate, or recognise colours differently, if not better. These criteria are also listed under the Ability Hypothesis. It would not be possible to find or create Mary, who knows everything and lives in a black and white world. But turning the lens toward people who process, communicate and see colours differently could open the door that holds the peep-hole we are looking through. Purely scientific research has often been considered as the root of knowledge. This belief in science makes us err on the side of inclusion, which could bring new perspectives of looking at the equation we've been puzzling over. Colour is something that stands between objective and subjective. Centring the forces of biology, neuroscience, social-anthropology, language, and psychology on colour qualia could just be the key to establishing a wider epistemology. Perhaps the assimilation of different discursive understanding of colours with the current beliefs could lead to new colours for us to paint our world with.

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# 02 Chromotherapy: Colours as a Symbol of Healing since Ancient times

Author - Muskan Ramani

*The modern practice of colour healing, that is Chromotherapy, was already an established healing treatment during ancient times, and it has evolved in its techniques since then. This article aims to explore and understand the therapy through cultural, psychological and physiological aspects. It also attempts to examine the cultural understanding of colours as a healing method through the lens of medical anthropology. The article further probes to understand the acceptance of Chromotherapy around the world, and propose novel ways to study this ancient practice.*

Ever since ancient times, human beings have been successful in harnessing and using natural resources. Colours, as a natural resource, have been extensively used by humankind for healing purposes and to enhance the human experience. Medical anthropology studies such human experiences by examining cultures, societies and their medical systems. The biocultural approach of medical anthropology studies the concepts of ethnomedicine and healing in cultures.

Evidently, the established therapy of colour healing, popularly known as Chromotherapy, can be examined through such anthropological gaze. Being seen as an effective healing treatment by some in ancient times, Chromotherapy was unknown to the world till the 17th century. But with the recent popularity of healing and curing diseases through natural methods (Gupta, 2007), colour therapy emerged again as a Complementary and Alternative Medicine System (CASM). Chromotherapy is the method of treatment that uses the visible spectrum (colours) of electromagnetic radiations and the invisible spectrum, which includes infrared and ultraviolet light to cure diseases (Gul et al., 2015).

People in ancient times had already developed an awareness of colour beyond its purely pragmatic aspect (Wauters & Thompson, 1997). Although they were unaware of the scientific facts of colours

as medicine, they nonetheless had more faith in healing through colours (Azeemi & Raza, 2005). The use of colours in cave paintings dates back to prehistoric times. Anthropologists have implied that the ones who executed said paintings attributed spiritual and earthly symbolism to certain colours and used these qualities in the manifestations of shamanistic healing (Wauters & Thompson, 1997).

The Egyptians and Greeks used coloured minerals, stones, crystals, salves and dyes as cures. They even painted treatment sanctuaries in various shades of colours (Azeemi & Raza, 2005). The *Papyrus Ebers* that dates back to 1500 BC, records the list of 'colour cures' like white oils, red lead oxide, and green copper verdigris for curing illnesses. In ancient China, they used natural elements like earth, fire, and water as colours for the holistic development and treatment of the mind, body and soul (Wauters & Thompson, 1997). The ancient *Ayurveda* physician Charaka, who lived in the 6th century BC, recommended in the text *Suriya Chikitsa*, to use sunlight for the treatment of a variety of diseases. In ancient Greece, colour was used intrinsically for healing and restoring balance (Azeemi & Raza, 2005). Thus, the implementation of colours in the treatment of health has existed in the ancient world through variations of the same technique.

In the 17th century, Newton understood how colours work in a scientific manner. He discovered the phenomenon of the visible spectrum and drew diagrams to illustrate how sunlight can be broken down into bands of different wavelengths, each one representing seven major colours. After this successful discovery, the 18th and the 19th century saw the emergence of colours and light as integrated together for healing purposes. In the 1890s, Finsen pioneered modern colour therapy by successfully experimenting with the use of ultraviolet light on patients, thus generating remarkable cures (Finsen, 1895). In 1932, psychologists Gerrard and Hessay, scientifically established that blue light has a calming effect and red stimulates power on human beings (Tofle et al., 2003). In 1933, Ghadiali and Spitler developed the new science of spectrochromotherapy that involved the use of direct light on the body for treatment (Wauters & Thompson, 1997).

The treatment of Chromotherapy is in prescribing specific-coloured lights to deal with a variety of ailments (Wauters & Thompson, 1997). A study conducted in the 1950s and 1960s examined the use of coloured lights and confirmed that white

light replaced high-risk blood transfusions in the treatment of neonatal jaundice. Later, blue light was found to be more effective and less hazardous than full spectrum light (Ebbesen et al., 2015). Later research at the American Association for Advancement of Science reported that red light has been shown to be effective in the treatment of cancer, constipation and healing wounds (Azeemi & Raza, 2005). A Chromotherapy treatment used to cure *Cutaneous Leishmaniasis* used green colour to clear wounds and ulcers, as green is considered to be an antiseptic, germicidal and disinfectant that eliminates microorganisms and prevents decay (Wauters & Thompson, 1997). Blue and red colours were also successfully researched to prove that they helped in removing toxins from the body (Azeemi et al., 2011). Evidently, even with Chromotherapy's ancient origin, scientific research has proved its effectiveness over time.

Culturally, psychologically, and physiologically colours are an integral part of our lives (Scott & Theodorson, 2019). Thus, the mindset of individuals, groups, societies and cultures have evolved from past uses and associations of colours (Walker, 1995). As one of the natural elements found on earth, colours have a powerful influence on human moods and emotions. The influence varies as different colours have different effects on the emotional spectrum of every single individual (Wauters & Thompson, 1997). For instance, research on the influence of Chromotherapy on prisoners' behaviour in the American penal system has shown that colours of a specific spectrum such as pink light have a calming effect among the inmates. It suppresses hostile, aggressive and violent behavior. In contrast, research states that the use of a yellow spectrum of light on the streets of many American cities is linked to violence and criminal behaviour during the night (Radeljak et al., 2008).

As medical and healthcare knowledge, Chromotherapy is indirectly widespread in various cultures. Through the theoretical discourse of medical anthropology, the acceptance, application and differences of colour therapy in various social and cultural groups can be understood more fluidly. A recent cross-cultural research comparison between Koreans and Romanians was conducted to



*The healing power of colours*

Illustrated by Britney Dharmai

*Alt text: Illustration of a silhouette of a person sitting cross-legged with hands on their knees. There is a wheel-like figure in gradient behind them with a mandala design.*

test the Healthcare Environmental Colour Index as a basis for practitioners in the field of healthcare design (Ardelean et al., 2021). The recorded data showed a higher awareness of Koreans (81%) than Romanians (69%) on the potential impact colours can have on their health when applied to healthcare spaces (Ardelean et al., 2021, p. 137). The cultural knowledge of Koreans being more aware of healthcare than Romanians gives suitable explanations for the research findings.

Thus, anthropological knowledge about various cultures becomes a tool that facilitates the understanding of aspects like behaviour, needs, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status in the context of healthcare. Consequently, a group's specificity and preferences which distinguish it from another group become relevant. The patterns of choices and cultural differences in the healthcare environment can also be understood through cognitive anthropology. It can explain what people from different groups know and how that implicit knowledge changes the way people perceive and relate to the world around them (Ardelean et al., 2021).

Additionally, cognitive and medical anthropology together provides a holistic understanding of Chromotherapy in healthcare in contemporary times. It not only studies the cultural and emotional effects of colour but also its effects on human physiology. Whenever we see colour or coloured light, there is a biochemical transformation within our body cells, via hormones that have a profound effect on our moods and emotions, our physical well-being and our behaviour. For instance, a colour entering our optical system can stimulate the production of melatonin, a hormone secreted by the pineal gland, that helps and regulates our sleep patterns and mood swings (Wauters & Thompson, 1997). Colours like violet and indigo are considered to soothe one's nerves, whereas colours like deep red excite or heats the blood (Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016). Hence, due to the interdisciplinarity of medical anthropology, the psychological and physiological aspects of a group and how the processes of cognition, preferences, perception, and motivation are shaped by the healthcare environment becomes increasingly relevant (Ardelean et al., 2021).

As discussed earlier, Chromotherapy is one of the ancient healing techniques that has been used in several parts of the world. It has been used to cure neonatal jaundice, ulcers, and wounds. It has been researched to study the implications of colour on healthcare environments. Albeit its wide use in the medical sector for the treatment of various ailments, Chromotherapy is still considered a pseudoscience. It is often seen as an alternative treatment alongside other curative systems such as naturopathy, *ayurveda* treatment, aromatherapy, and homoeopathy. Such treatments are often overlooked and dismissed as they don't conform to a 'classical' medical approach. Most people prefer a treatment that will provide them with immediate results such as surgery or taking allopathic treatment.

However, recent research on Chromotherapy, along with Auriculotherapy proved to be a successful treatment option for some patients facing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The research also focused on how colour therapy affects the mental health of people belonging to different social classes, gender, age, and cultural backgrounds differently (Asis et al., 2012). Yet, it can also be debated that because of people's lack of trust and interest in natural healing therapies, the acceptance of Chromotherapy is still limited in the 21st century.

The study of environmental influences and cultural interpretation of colour on our health, along with genetic inheritance and socioeconomic conditions (Brown et al., 2009) is facilitated through medical anthropology. Through the discussions in this article, Chromotherapy warrants more ethnographic research. The diversity of the theoretical perspectives in medical anthropology helps in understanding and answering certain questions about health and healing. Consequently, through ethnomedical and biomedical approaches, Chromotherapy can be researched in a more effective manner and questions that scientific discourses are unable to answer can be further explored. Thus, by comparing, analysing, and disseminating knowledge, the fervour and development of research around novel ways of examining the impact of Chromotherapy in the 21st century can be understood.



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# 03 The Fine Red Line

Author - Sanjana Santosh

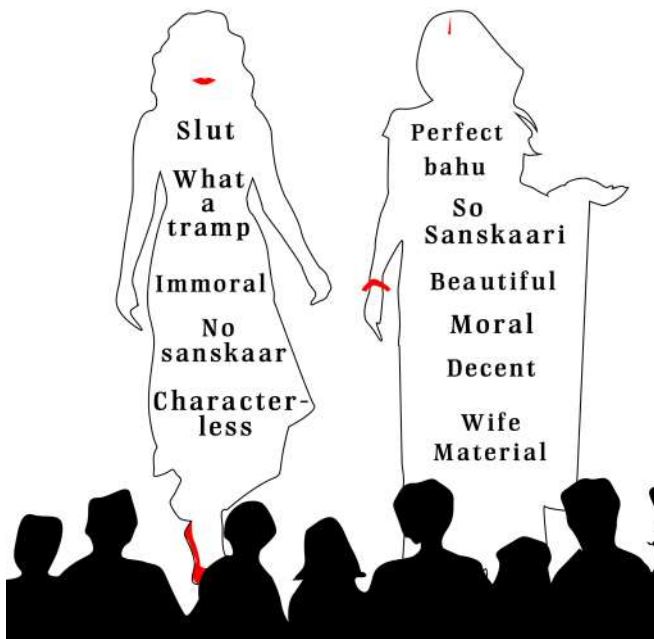
*In India, the colour red has great religious significance. Hindu brides are often seen wearing red on their marriage day and are traditionally expected to wear red Sindoor after marriage. While the red Sindoor is a sign of honour, the red-coloured lipstick is not. Despite sharing the colour red, the two receive stark opposite treatment. To further understand the underpinnings of this antithesis, this article aims at exploring the connotations of the colour red with respect to the morality of women, in the Indian context.*

Colours are so much more than mere visual devices; they are meaningful and symbolic. Every colour comes with an identity of its own and can be perceived as both good and bad. The colour red is symbolic of sacrifice, passion, lust, and revolution. It is a powerful, emotive symbol and its vast semiology provides evidence for the colour's universal symbolism and significance through the ages (Pastoureau, 2017). The current research article aims to explore the dichotomy of how the colour red is viewed in India.

In parts of India, red lipstick is seen as bold and deviant, unlike the more subtle nudes, pinks and browns which have relatively garnered more acceptance (Kaith, 2020; Pramanik, 2020). This understanding of the red lipstick as unacceptable evokes curiosity, as traditionally, the colour red holds great importance in India, with a large number of women adorning red outfits on their wedding days. Red bangles and a red Sindoor are also considered to be auspicious signs of a married woman. These are all a part of the Solah Shringar or sixteen bridal adornments that are integral symbols of the Hindu bride, indicating that traditionally, red is seen as a colour that upholds the morality and culture of Indian women (Bhatnagar, 2004). However, the same colour takes on a different connotation for the lipstick.

The dichotomy in the perceptions surrounding red, perhaps stems from the fact that the red Sindoor and red lipstick, both associated with femininity, do not convey the same idea of femininity. Historically, red lipstick has been used as a sign of defiance. This can be traced back to the suffrage movement of 1912 when thousands of women protesters adorned red lipstick, adopting it as a sign of rebellion and liberation. Adolf Hitler famously hated red lips and hence during World War II, red lips became a sign of resistance (Schaffer, 2006). In 2018, red lipstick was used to defy the arrest of anti-government protestors in Nicaragua. In December 2019, thousands of women took to the streets of Chile wearing lipstick as an act of denouncing sexual violence (Palumbo, 2020). Thus, it is evident that red lipstick is often associated with non-conformist movements in the West.

In India, western ideologies and influence are often viewed as a threat to Indian values and culture. The prevalence of this belief came to light when in 2015, the then Minister of Culture, Mahesh Sharma, discussed the necessity of protecting India against westernisation during several media interactions. In India, the red lipstick is seen as a sign of western corruption and western dominance (Guichard, 2017; Das, 2020a). An example of this prevalent ideology can be seen in Bharat Ratna awardee,



*The juxtaposition of two women, wearing red differently, are perceived differently.*

**Illustrated by Britney Dharmai**

*Alt Text - Illustration of outlines of two women, one with red lipstick and 'Slut, what a tramp, immoral, No sanskaar and Characterless' written on her outline, and one with red sindoor with the words 'Perfect bahu, so sanskaari, Beautiful, moral, decent and wife material' written on her outline.*

Satyjit Ray's 'Mahanagar' when an Englishwoman, Edith, offers an Indian wife, Aarti, red lipstick to wear. Her hesitance prompts Edith to ask her, if she can wear vermilion on her forehead, why not this lipstick? Aarti relents, and the red lipstick is seen as a symbol of breaking away from traditional conformism (Ray, 1963).

The use of red lipstick as a symbol of revolt has been prevalent in India too. In 2020 a person named Pushpak Sen wore red lipstick and posted pictures on social media as a sign of solidarity with his mother, who at 54, had been shamed by her relatives for wearing red lipstick. This incident is a reflection of how in several parts of India, women irrespective of their age are policed for wearing red lipstick (Das, 2020b). This shaming of red lipstick is summed up by Kaith (2020) in the line "The male gaze will either shame or objectify us. And the red lipstick is but one symbol of this defiance",

this conveys the message that men often perceive lipstick-wearing women as an object of desirability and at the same time, as one of immorality, whereas to women wearing red lipstick, it is a symbol of breaking the mould patriarchy sets for them (Kaith, 2020). A similar use of red lipstick as a sign of rebellion becomes apparent when trans rights activist Laxmi Narayan Tripathi not only titled her autobiography 'Red Lipstick: The Men in My Life' but also featured on the cover of the book wearing red lipstick as a marker of her sexual and decisional autonomy (Tripathi & Pande, 2017).

Over time, the red lipstick's non-conformism and the red Sindoor's conformism have been reiterated and exploited by several industries. The beauty industry has often done this by marketing red lipstick as a product worn by women who defy society. This kind of marketing of lipstick was first enacted in Revlon's Fire and Ice advertisement. Such advertising ensured that the red lipstick came to symbolize something that a woman wore to express freedom and sexual agency (Gill 2003; Tungate, 2011). Even today, advertisements promote lipsticks as an important accessory in showcasing a woman's "feminine strength" (Gurrieri & Drenten, 2021). These advertisements define what society sees in the red lipstick; other advertisements showcase the underlying message sent through the absence of a Sindoor on a woman's forehead. An example of this would be the "I Am Shining India" campaign advertisement. In this advertisement, three women were shown in an office set up to display increased career and educational opportunities for women; what ought to be noted here was the absence of Sindoor on their forehead, which portrayed that only single women were oriented towards their careers (Kaur, 2016). These portrayals of women reinforce and propagate certain patriarchal ideas of the rebellious and ideal woman, and treat women who wear red lipstick as mutually exclusive from those who adorn the Sindoor.

The entire notion of viewing women as one-dimensional, non-dynamic beings, meant to fit into society's predefined categories has been prevalent in a patriarchal structure. This becomes evident through concepts like the Madonna-Whore Dichotomy (MWD) where women are seen as either good and

pure, like the Madonna; or bad and impure, a whore. Red lipstick was used to differentiate between these two categories of women in ancient Greece and Victorian Europe (Schaffer, 2007). In India even today red lipstick is often seen as a characteristic of prostitutes, which is a profession traditionally associated with the ‘bad woman’ (Gangoli, 2007; Sarkar, 2016). The feminist theory believes that MWD is a way to fortify patriarchy. Feminist scholars argue that it promotes gender roles that are unequal and restrains a woman’s agency, freedom, and self-expression by putting her into one of two social scripts (Bareket et al., 2018).

Such categorisation of women into dichotomies can be further understood through the concept of benevolent and hostile sexism. Benevolent sexism refers to the idolization of women who abide by the traditional gender norm and hostile sexism refers to hostility towards women who do not abide by these gender norms. Both these forms of sexism restrain women from expressing their agency (Travaglia et al., 2009). The reasons behind the differential treatment of the red Sindoor and the red lipstick can be traced back to such patriarchal frameworks.

The enforcement of these concepts can be seen in various movies and shows where women are portrayed either as the traditional, ideal wives, or the modern, manipulative vamps (Sarkar, 2013). This binary showcases the MWD complex in the Indian context (Habib, 2017). The use of the red Sindoor and red lipstick in the portrayal of these two kinds of women is evident through famous Bollywood dialogues such as, ‘Ek chutki Sindoor’ which portrays the Sindoor as something invaluable to a woman, a marker of honour and respect (Shastri, 2011). The vamps are usually categorised by their bright red lipstick and western clothes (Ahmed, 1992). It should also be noted that movies, shows, and advertising not only influence the urban Indian population but also influence the rural population, determining their consumption patterns in the area of beauty, further enforcing these ideas of morality into the minds of Indians across the board (Johnson, 2021).

The need for categorising women is also evident in the concepts of purity and pollution. This concept would usually be used in terms of keeping

menstruating women, or rather the ‘polluted’ women, away from their families (Bean, 1981). The applicability of this can also be seen in the red lipstick and red Sindoor dichotomy. Red lipstick is associated with women claiming their agency and sexual autonomy, thus making it fall under the category of polluted as compared to, say, a virgin bride who would fall in the category of pure. The notion that anything associated with female sexual autonomy is polluted, when not linked to a man, becomes evident through many instances. For example, sanitary pads were taxed under goods and service taxes in 2017 as a non-essential commodity, whereas the symbols of marriage such as the Sindoor and bangles received a tax exemption under essential commodities. The tax on sanitary items was revoked in 2018 after much protest (Das, 2020a; BBC, 2018).

Overall, India is a patriarchal society, just like most of the world. This patriarchal structure thrives on the idea that men are superior to women. The control of female sexuality and expression is one way of asserting this male dominance. Hence, the fine line between the red Sindoor and the red lipstick is not the women who wear either, but the patriarchy that dictates how a colour shall taint a woman’s character. In an ideal world, women will exude power, autonomy, and a strong moral character wearing either, as long as it is their choice.

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## 04

# The Colours of Misogyny: A Short Analysis of the Power Dynamics Embedded in Hair Colour

Authors - Vedang Karlekar & Shreya Cheekatla

*While we admire the impressive array of hair colours people sport around us, rarely do we stop to think about the role that something seemingly insignificant, like hair colour, plays in society. We find that stereotypes with respect to the colour of one's hair, which hide behind thin veils as mere jokes, are largely misogynistic. With appearance being made central to a woman's identity, the fetishisation of hair colour becomes prominent. This article attempts to tear down these veils, and examine the hegemonic masculinity behind hair colour, and how it still operates today.*

Humans, throughout history, have not necessarily dealt well with differences. Seemingly obvious, visual things, such as skin colour and hair colour became the focal point of stereotypes across the globe. Unlike skin colour, notions about hair colour took a different course. Cultural hegemony resulted in narratives that are made dominant in a society by the ruling class. These narratives often decide what goes and what doesn't, and end up becoming the dominant stereotypes of that society. This perhaps serves as an explanation to the idea that the stereotypes of hair colour are catered more towards women in society. Keeping in mind the vicissitudes of the tumultuous history of hair colour, certain beliefs about hair colour today deserve to undergo closer inspection.

Increasing stereotypes about hair meant that the length, colour and style of one's hair became socio-cultural markers. The colour of

one's hair started to signify positions of power, status and class. When inspected through the lens of race and ethnicity, hair and hair colour became weapons to assert one's uniqueness and challenge the status quo. Lately, hair colour has been linked to notions of attractiveness, competence, personality traits and intelligence. Ideas like "Blondes have more fun", "Red-heads are fiery", "Brunettes are boring", and such have become set-types for thinking, which propagate the belief that, blondes, for example, are promiscuous, not intelligent, and more likeable. Furthermore, hair serves as a plane for power struggle between genders and also between dominant and marginalised communities.

The roots of stereotyping women's hair can be traced to hegemonic masculinity, which establishes the idea of determining the worth of a woman solely based on her looks. The hegemonic masculinity prevalent

in most societies across the world fosters an environment in which the pressure to look good and conform to an ‘ideal’ hair type is higher for women, in comparison with men. This might partly be the result of mainstream media that propagates misogynistic ideas about physical appearance as being “more essential to the feminine than to the masculine gender role” (Voges et al., 2019). Due to this tendency of categorising women based on their physical appearance, men tend to fetishise hair colour and categorise women into different stereotypes based on it.

When it comes to hair colour, ideal types for women are a dictated and homogenous standard. These ideal standards demand that women indirectly conform to them, as they decide what is beautiful at an instant and what isn’t. For centuries, white people deemed the Afro as an African-American physical trait that was essentially repulsive, and meant to be concealed. Despite their attempt at rebelling against pre-existing definitions of what was deemed professional, acceptable, and presentable, most African-American women fell and continue to fall under the social pressure to emulate Eurocentric beauty ideals (Lewis, 2020). For a man, physical appearance typically does not play a significant role in acquiring social power; for a woman, a certain physical appearance that fits the stereotype of a responsible woman is vital. Physical appearance then becomes “an important site of a power struggle between men and women” (Weitz, 2001), where women try to acquire power through maintaining a certain stereotypical appearance.

Women with blonde hair “are well aware of cultural ideas that link blondeness

to sexuality and beauty” (Weitz, 2001), which explains their overrepresentation in magazines and mainstream American media. For instance, Rich and Cash (1993) found that blondes were overrepresented in beauty magazines over four decades, thus delivering a message to society that blondeness is a prominent ideal of feminine beauty and that this may have contributed to our cultural preoccupation with blondeness. Lisa Kudrow (originally a brunette) dyed her hair blonde and noticed that it softened her, made her less threatening, and allowed her to play the ditzzy-ish character of Phoebe in ‘Friends’ (Klein, 2018). In contrast, blonde hair for men carries a positive connotation. As a study conducted by Clayson and Mauhaug revealed, blonde men are perceived as “strong, active, attractive, and pleasant in demeanour” (Takeda et al., 2006).



*A woman contemplates changing her hair colour to fit societal norms.*

**Illustrated by Kyra Sparrow**

*Alt text- Illustration of a woman getting her hair coloured by two pairs of hands. Her brow is furrowed as she looks at the different colour dye boxes in her hands.*



Hair colour not only affects how women are perceived, but also their social mobility in the workplace. A study found that “Blondes, who are viewed historically as incompetent and likeable, were underrepresented in positions of corporate leadership in the UK” (Takeda et al., 2006). Whereas, brunette and black were the preferred hair colours for positions of power. In recent decades there has been an increase in the representation of marginalised communities in the workplace. Centuries of internalisation and conditioning have led African-American women to associate their Afro with adjectives such as “aggressive”, “wild”, and something that needs “taming”. Most African-American women that choose to straighten, or rather, tame their hair choose to do so in order to be accepted into their workplace. The ones that consciously choose to embrace their marginal identity trait are therefore viewed as rebelling against the dominant norms in society by asserting their racial uniqueness and fighting against stereotypical notions that come attached to their hair (Lewis, 2020).

In the Indian Subcontinent, where women largely live under scrutiny and judgement, colouring one’s hair is often interpreted as a sign of rebellion against the status quo, where women are largely expected to have long, straight, luscious, jet-black hair (Sehra, 2020). This is associated with the idea that even a streak of coloured hair ‘sets you apart’ from everyone else, the desired standard. Recently, in this regard, American mainstream media has also successfully tried to counter a stereotype with another stereotype, the idea that Asian women with coloured streaks and leather jackets are ‘badass’ or tough, as opposed to the mild mannered, docile Asian girl stereotype (Shi, 2017). In India, most

often than not, dyeing one’s hair in colours other than black also carries allegations on their ‘dignity’ and ‘character’. In this context, henna (which is used for dyeing hair) satisfies the requirements of being subtle on the eyes and importantly, belonging to the Indian culture and not something foreign or Western, which is associated with rebellion. Thus, individuals’ desire to dye and ‘tame’ their hair may be a deep-seated belief to conform to and identify with the pre-existing stereotypes (Giles & Strawbridge, 2014).

Another aspect where hegemonic masculinity operates is in terms of grey hair, where double standards continue to persist for men and women. Grey hair for men is considered a positive trait as it “signals experience and maturity” (Robinson, 2017). Grey hair on men is desired, perceived as sexually attractive, confident and modern, and does not lead to the deterioration of their position in society. Women, however, have a complicated relationship with grey hair. Women with grey hair are often associated with “eccentricity, dependence, disengagement, poor health, personal neglect, ugliness, failure, unfemininity and obsolescence” (Robinson, 2017). This phenomenon persuades women into believing that colouring their hair will get them more respect, validation and authority. Women are expected to infantilize themselves by appearing younger in order to have access to some measure of power and authority.

The acceptance of this status quo contributes to the persisting inequality between men and women when it comes to hair colouring. For example, men in mainstream media, including politicians and newsreaders, exhibit grey hair colour, with George Clooney being the poster

boy for grey hair since his early thirties. Whereas, one can barely find actresses much older than Clooney (Cher, for instance) flaunting any greys, to prevent themselves from being considered as irrelevant and discounted (Robinson, 2017). This is perhaps the result of toxic masculinity and its stereotypes that establish men as “confident, independent, and self-focused” (Voges et al., 2019) as they age, which essentially leads to an “overestimation of their own competences and characteristics”. Stereotypes of hair colour for women, on the other hand, render them anxious about ageing, and make them want to retain the markers of beauty that characterised their early twenties. This case is a prime example of the reality that men and women, even of similar ages, engage differently with grey hair, suggesting that hair is central to a woman’s social position, especially when it comes to factors such as respect and acceptance.

Differences pertaining to hair colour have given rise to stereotypes throughout history; stereotypes that have subconsciously rooted themselves in the collective conscience of societies. Hair colour and stereotypes associated with it carry deeper notions of class, status, and power, with hegemonic masculinity dictating that the worth of a woman be derived based on her physical appearance. The disparity in the treatment of men and women explains the observation that hair colour is central to gaining respect and acceptance in positions of power, and therefore central to a woman’s social position. Moreover, differences are also observed in hair colour, texture and styles when it comes to women of colour and for women in the subcontinent, where the existing ideals like the obsession with straight and lighter hair

and culturally appropriate colours continue to dictate hair colour preferences. Even though hair colour remains a personal choice for most people, it cannot be ignored that at the end of the day, women, in particular, face the brunt of hair colour stereotypes. Currently, studies pertaining to hair colour emphasise the descriptive aspect of hair colour stereotypes, but there is a lack in the exploration of the deeper implications of such stereotypes, and their gendered nature, for society at large.

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# 05 The good, the Bad and the pink

Authors - Shrishti Iyer & Janhavi Ghosalkar

*Pink has an unusual history; it has evolved from being a masculine, war-resembling colour to having more 'youthful' connotations and eventually, to represent the current notions of 'femininity'. This article briefly discusses the history of the colour pink, analyses the societal norm of Pink as 'feminine' and why being 'feminine' is deemed as detrimental to oneself. It aims to analyse the dynamic history and changing notions around the colour pink. While pink and feminism are interwoven, just like symbols are attached to groups, how then, does something as basic as a colour stand for a set of beliefs rich with intersectionality and sexism?*

“Pink for a boy and blue for a girl is a generally accepted dictum, though why nobody quite knows, unless a boy’s outlook is so much more roseate that the girl is fairly typified by blue” - The Lafayette Gazette, October 28th,

An interesting quote, albeit unexpected. It’s a common knowledge in today’s world that pinks and purples are associated with girls and femininity (Mauney, 2020). A good example of this includes Mattel Inc’s Barbie. The iconic fashion doll who graced the homes of most people assigned female at birth, with her ample amount of pink clothes, shoes, and accessories. In contrast, blues were associated with masculinity. Why exactly is it that this newspaper quotation mentions the reverse?

The colour pink has a somewhat unusual history. It gained popularity for being the favoured colour of a mistress of Louis XV and hence rose to prominence as a representation of royalty. A common description of Pink in the early 1900s was a ‘precursor shade to red’, the colour worn by men in the army and hence was meant for young boys. By the mid-1950s, the colour had mostly transitioned into associations with femininity (Mauney, 2020). While no one can determine exactly how this happened, this association has only grown stronger. The origin of Pink, however, is not as important as the association of pink to certain behavioural traits.

From the time one is old enough to grasp the concept of correlation, pink is never disassociated from cis-women, girls and femininity and blue from cis-men, boys and masculinity. Even children assigned male at birth who prefer traditionally feminine ways of self-expression, are termed ‘pink boys’ (Grisard, 2017). The association of femininity with submissiveness, innocence, and the patriarchal expressions of a ‘woman’ eventually progresses to rejection of pink as a colour itself instead of the aforementioned standards.

A good example of this is displayed in the book ‘All About the Girl: Culture, Power and Identity’ by Anita Harris. An extract from a conversation between the author and a schoolgirl is as follows, “Yeah, I wouldn’t wear pink or anything like that now... I’ve just gone off pink, it’s too feminine right” or “they’re all so girly and flowery...nothing just plain... it’s all girly and pink and stuff like that” (Harris & Fine, 2004).

Instances like these are great examples of how, in order to distance themselves from femininity, young

girls avoid material items traditionally associated with it. This can often be expressed as either a complete change in direction from femininity or the ‘I’m not like other girls’ phenomenon where cis-girls will attempt to diversify their interests into more niche (or masculine) genres in order to stray from the inferiority felt by embracing classically feminine interests. Another interesting study conducted by Lancaster University looks at the women-loving-women (wlw) community; their findings reported that gay women had a greater dislike for Pink, some even stating that it was “the association with gay men that ‘ennobled’ the otherwise rejected colour” (Koller, 2008, p.408).

The feminist theory itself has had its differences with Pink. The second wave of feminism brought with it the rejection of the idea, that cis-women were professionally inferior to cis-men (Sidler, 1997, p.27). Professional wear for cis-women became sturdy and darker, i.e., less ‘feminine’. The colour that initially was used as the primary representation of a woman was despised. Feminists wanted equal representation, and in the process, femininity as a

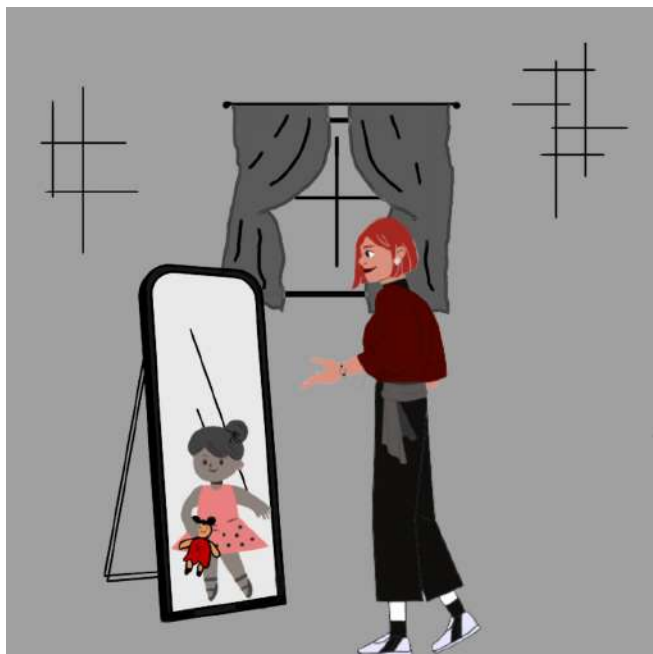
concept was vandalised, not only by cis-men but also by cis-women. As one interacts with various social entities in a repetitive manner, the byproduct is a pattern of interaction that levies on symbolic, shared meanings that pertain to these interactions or the symbols through which said interaction occurs (Blumer, 1992).

This is known as Symbolic Interactionism. “Symbolic interactionism as a social theoretical framework starts from the presupposition that our social world is constructed through the mundane acts of everyday social interaction” (del Casino & Thien, 2009). ‘Pink’ hence, becomes a symbol beyond its materialistic boundaries, consequently weaving various sociological and subjective realities.

Due to the development of such concrete ideas, people make mental categories in which they section the things they come across, depending upon the meanings associated with them. When one detaches themselves from the colour pink, it mirrors detachment from the gender norms that society had symbolically associated with femininity (or pink), which may lead to internalised misogyny.

In order to elaborate further, one can look at how at some point in a cis-woman’s life, they have distanced themselves from the colour pink. This particularly shows in late middle school to highschool, where they really start noticing and understanding sexism as previously observed. This cannot be blamed solely on cis-women, but on how society has almost emphasised a need to avert women from Pink. Even in pop culture, pink is often used to put down certain types of people. Characters who embrace ‘femininity’ are usually portrayed in unnecessary amounts of pink and are associated with stupidity.

In *Mean Girls* (2004), Regina George and the rest of the ‘Plastics’ are the classic highschool villains—decked in Pink, empty-headed and portraying the exact trope of femininity previous waves of feminism denounced. Not only are they branded with harmful names such as ‘The Plastics’, but also no other character in the film possesses the specific traits they do, hence implying that their interests in makeup or fashion and lack of



*Older girl looking at her younger self, reflecting on the influence of pink in her life.*

**Illustrated by Fiona Nazareth**

*Alt text: Illustration of a woman wearing dark colours facing a mirror in a grey room. She is looking at a smaller girl, clothed in pink with a doll in her hand in the mirror.*

academic knowledge are correlated. One can even look at Legally Blonde's (2001) main character, Elle. She is doubted in her abilities to join Harvard and become a lawyer simply because she was the society's definition of a 'girly girl'.

These are clear examples of the media one consumes, allowing for the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes. "It's important to understand that it's not femininity as a whole that people try to avoid, only a certain side of it which involves being passive and immature" (Harris & Fine, 2004, p. 105). It is also important to remember that traits like 'girliness' aren't inherently bad; it's what those traits imply in society that causes people to openly avoid associating with them. The rejection of pink could stem from a desire to fight against the power and privilege cis-men hold, which comes at the cost of others. Like internalised misogyny, Gender-Conflict Theory also sets out to explain the same. It discusses how "social problems are created when dominant groups exploit or oppress subordinate groups" (Farrington & Chertok, 1993).

A less talked about group is effeminate men who also tend to struggle due to toxic masculinity. A male passing individual needn't show visually effeminate traits to be condemned. This ties into the concept of traditionality and how when one behaves differently from the expected norm, they tend to be punished for it.

A stark example of this is an incident that unfolded in Central Kings Rural Highschool in Canada (CKNW Kid's Fund, n.d.). A Grade 9 student was bullied on the first day of school for wearing a pink shirt and was called homophobic slurs. A few Grade 12 students charged against this by distributing pink t-shirts to their schoolmates and made the message behind the same clear. This incident was picked up by the local news as well as CKNW, a broadcast network. CKNW incorporated this into their Kid's Fund, and eventually, resistance towards gender normative discrimination led to the start of the 'Pink T-shirt Day', now held annually on the 23rd of February in Canada.

This incident shows that meanings associated with symbols, in this case, pink, do not permanently have

malicious notations, or rather, people strive to change the symbolic nature of norms over time. This suggests that the inherent meanings of symbols become much more metaphorical as societal relationships barter on the basis of them. Just like Pink T-shirt Day, where wearing a pink t-shirt became a symbolic stand against bullying, societies have begun to interact with pink in various ways that go against the course of history.

The third and fourth waves of feminism have witnessed various instances where women have reclaimed pink as a stand against traditional gender norms. This onset was pioneered by the growing need for 'girl power' and 'girlie' culture which women previously denounced. This includes wearing bold pinks, heavy makeup, and even reclaiming misogynistic slurs (Snyder, 2008). Simultaneously as identity politics gained mainstream attention, it led to socio-political discourse surrounding traditional gender norms. Pink, even if still considered feminine, is not just limited to feminine gender roles. Pink, which was condemned in order to fight for our rights, is now being reclaimed, as it is being understood that sexism, not femininity is to be condemned. Reclaiming feminine traits while simultaneously fighting for equal rights is the current discourse for gender equality.

Furthermore, pink is being actively used by marginalised communities to represent their ideals. The queer narrative has adapted pink as a part of various flags under the queer umbrella. These flags pertain to the representation of pink to traditional femininity, same-sex attraction as well as female-identifying individuals. The lesbian flag in particular reclaims pink as an identification of femininity as well as a safe place for female attraction devoid of gendered boundaries.

While it is debatable whether post-feminism can achieve real social change, it has at least constructed a new type of confident, hedonistic femininity that defies notions of subservience and dependence (Wong, 2019). This discourse, which started from empowerment through rejection, to eventual conscious acceptance of femininity and usage of a previously condemned colour as a symbol of resistance, all encompasses the vivacious history of pink.

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# 06 Bleeding Pink

Author - Deeti Gupta

*Pink capitalism is a result of the high purchasing power of certain members of the LGBTQ+ community. It has led to the appropriation, exploitation, and commercialisation of the Pride movement. This article explores such effects and the reasons behind them, along with trying to understand why queer people fall prey to such exploitation. It also highlights the need for a contemporary political pride movement today. It examines the signs of performative allyship, which have become increasingly common with rainbow-washing.*

In the mid-1960s, the concept of ‘pink economy’ emerged in the US as corporations started realising the high purchasing power held by people from the LGBTQ+ community. This purchasing power is commonly known as ‘pink money’ or the ‘pink pound’ (del Rio, 2021). While LGBTQ+ people often spend less, mainly due to the lack of a traditional family or living as a ‘double income, no kids’ couple, McDermott (2014) explains how gay affluence is a myth spread by corporate America. This myth became a common public perception because high-income LGBTQ+ individuals were more likely to reveal their identity, perhaps due to safety reasons. Jesus (2018) states that high-income queer people seek to acquire more expensive goods and quality services. In the twentieth century, markets noticed the consumption potential of these people, while the call for LGBTQ+ rights was growing louder. This led to the realisation of the purchasing power of the LGBTQ+ community, mostly of the upper-class gay cisgender men—which was estimated to be \$3.9 trillion worth of spending power globally in 2020 (Li, 2021). This market focus towards queer individuals was referred to as ‘pink capitalism’. Due to being profit-driven, pink capitalism is inherently exploitative and has led to several detrimental effects, the largest being the commodification of the

LGBTQ+ community and the exploitation of their sentiments.

This exploitation is most visible during Pride Month, where all of social media and advertisements are drowning in a wave of rainbows, with corporations changing their logos to incorporate rainbows and releasing limited edition rainbow collections. This is known as rainbow washing, a form of performative activism that occurs mainly during Pride Month, i.e. June. According to Champlin and Li (2020), this refers to the usage of LGBTQ+ symbols to showcase support through advertising without engaging in actual support of the community. The lack of real support is a major issue. Some brands actively fund anti-LGBTQ+ organisations or openly support laws that are harmful to the community, while capitalising on them. For instance, Amazon and Walmart donated huge sums to American politicians who voted against the Equality Act, while changing their logos to rainbows during pride month to garner profits from LGBTQ+ sentiments (Chalabi, 2021).

The question then arises: why does the community fall for such performative allyship? The distinctiveness theory of marketing proposed by McGuire (1984) explains how queer individuals are convinced to



spend money on products that are related to their identity. The rainbow flag is a sign of inclusion, diversity and has a rich history. Most consumers are unaware of the actual political position of a brand in the context of the community, so when they see a symbol that represents their community, they assume that the brand is supportive and fall for this form of capitalism. Moreover, members of the community gain confidence and a sense of pride in wearing rainbow clothing, as most of them have struggled to come to terms with their identity. Thus, seeing such representation invokes the pride of these people in themselves and the community. McGuire's theory claims that the distinctive states of an individual, especially for a minority group, will be more salient than the common traits (Deshpande & Stayman, 1994). Taking a different approach to this theory, LGBTQ+ targeted advertisements make consumers aware of their distinctiveness and appeal to this part of their identity to persuade them. According to Brighe (2018), there is a need to resist this sort of advertising, despite it being validating because this is a means of capitalising off the community and

ignores the original purpose of Pride as a movement of activism and resistance.

Pink capitalism is detrimental to the community, as the widespread availability of rainbow merchandise makes cisgender heterosexual people believe that the LGBTQ+ community has gained widespread acceptance. This creates a perception of equal footing, which is far from the truth. This is one of the reasons for the demand for 'straight flags' and 'straight pride' and leads to the ignorance of a history of struggle and suffering. Moreover, Pride has distanced itself from political issues and turned into a commercially marketed event which, once again, erases the struggles of the LGBTQ+ community and the discrimination that continues to persist (McLean, 2019). O'Flynn (2018) also points to this shift and highlights the need for massive financial resources to organise Pride parades, which makes this shift inevitable. He gives an example of Sheffield, England, where Pride was declared as a celebration, as opposed to a political protest, in 2018. In his article, he also states that there is no escape and, at this point, Pride has become an event that requires, as well as generates, a huge amount of funds and there is an apathy seen towards this corporatisation. He quotes Shon Faye in his article to explain the issue of commercialisation of Pride: "*Anyone who's LGBT and isn't a cis white gay man still has plenty to protest. The wrong people are in charge of Pride if they think it should be a party...capitalism only sees money*" (O'Flynn 2018).

Queer theory has been critiqued on account of the commodification of the term 'queer.'

At its most basic, queer theory is characterized by a variety of methods of interrogating desire and its relationship to identity...it has been primarily interested in how such categories as 'heterosexual', 'gay' and 'lesbian' came to be seen as stable identities and, in the process, reveals them as fragile constructs, constantly reliant on the successful performance of gender. (Watson, 2005, pp. 68-69)

Kirsch (2012) talks about how queer theory mirrors late capitalism, in that, it changes the focus of queerness to the individual rather than the collective. He also acknowledges the importance of



*Pride remains a monthly affair*

**Illustrated by Fiona Nazareth**

*Alt Text: Illustration of a shopping cart in a circle, divided by a line in the middle. On the left side, 'June' is written, with a rainbow bag and rainbow hearts in the cart. On the right side, 'July' is written with an empty cart*

looking queer over being queer itself. This ‘look’ is enhanced by rainbow-washing, further entrenching the stereotypes of what a queer person is supposed to look like or dress as, leading to an alienation of anyone who does not look ‘queer enough’. McNeil (2020) points out the problem of generalisation of the habits of the entire community as well, which leads to the same problems, putting a whole diverse community into a box of traits and excluding anyone who does not fit. However, as Kirsch (2012) points out, in late capitalism, fragmentation has replaced alienation, thus dividing the LGBTQ+ community, weakening their political power and affecting their fight for equality.

With rainbow-washing and rainbow capitalism, “the ‘TQIA+’ is left far behind,” (Express News Service, 2021). The queer community is fragmented due to the lack of representation of identities other than gays, lesbians and, sometimes bisexuals. As homosexuals are the most visible members of the LGBTQ+ community, most brands advertise to them and ignore the existence of the other identities in the community. McLean (2019) also explains how queer bodies are policed and othered based on race, class and queerness. The commercialisation of pride has caused merchandise to be targeted towards these privileged, urban members of the LGBTQ+ community, ignoring the financially weaker, underprivileged and more marginalised members. This causes a rift within the community, with half the community believing such brands to be supportive of their cause and the other half being left out.

Such rainbow-washing can also be referred to as performative allyship, or performative activism. Kalina (2020) refers to performative allyship as a proclamation of support to a marginalised group in a way that is, at best, not helpful, if not actively harmful. The ally is motivated by some reward for their support, in this particular case, profit. According to Kalina (2020), the lack of personal responsibility and not addressing the root cause of problems is a sign of performative allyship. Such ‘allies’ remain silent about the issue until it is somewhat trending; for example, acknowledging LGBTQ+ people only when Pride month is around the corner. Another sign of performative allyship is loudness. Often, it even speaks over the voices of the marginalised

community that it pretends to represent. It is heavily marketed with little to no real-world impact, except to the reputation of the ‘ally’. To identify whether a company is a real ally or not, it is important to check whether it employs the people that it acts as an ally to—in this particular case, the LGBTQ+ community—and whether its work ethics are inclusive, whether it amplifies their voices and helps them even when it is not profitable. Hickey (2019), making use of these signs, shows how rampant performative activism is with reference to the LGBTQ+ community.

While the LGBTQ+ community has existed as long as humans have, it has only become the focal point of marketing teams since the movement has gained attention in recent times. Many trends and marketing strategies are used as an attempt to rope in LGBTQ+ consumers. This is more visible during Pride month, where all companies change their logos to rainbow coloured versions of the same on the 1st of June, changing it back as soon as the month ends. Rainbow-washing, then, is a purely commercial occurrence. The only way in which it relates to queerness is by making the queer community the target audience and commercialising their political movement. While the queer community is, in part, responsible for responding to this performative allyship, ignoring their social and economic privilege in doing so, the majority of the onus lies on the corporations which exploit a largely marginalised community and their struggle from a profit motive.

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# 07 Shades of Green(washing)

Author - Ashna Ranade

*Cheap, attractive products come at a high cost, having an adverse effect on the climate. Having realised this, how true would the belief that 'sustainability starts where greenwashing ends' be? This article will unfold the gradients of green claims made by firms, and what it is about the human psyche that drives us to purchase green-washed products.*

In the face of rising worries about global warming, pollution, deforestation, animal extinction, and resource depletion, it seems only natural that businesses adopt green approaches to their profile. We often come across labels on beverage bottles that read “100% natural”. On further examining the bottle, the ingredient list consists of added artificial preservatives, not to mention the bottle itself is single-use plastic. Despite purchasing a beverage that claims to be natural, the notion of trying to be more sustainable is in vain. It is crucial to understand why brands adopt such contradictory marketing practises that lead conscientious consumers to purchase disingenuous products. Greenwashing is described as the convergence of two distinct company behaviours: communicating the positive impact on the environment while actually showcasing bad environmental performance. Environmentalist Jay Westerveld created the term “greenwashing”. This concept arose at a time when most people got their news from television, radio, and print media, and didn't have the benefit of fact-checking like we do today (Delmas & Burbano, 2011).

Typically, the gradation of greenwashing is done in stages (de Jong et al., 2019). The first and the most common one is when environmental issues are prioritised over another issue. Mainly, greenwashing is frequently used to divert attention away from

serious environmental issues such as climate change and pollution. Paper harvesting, for example, is not always environmentally friendly, even if it comes from a responsibly harvested forest (FAO and UNEP, 2020). The second stage involves claims about the environment that aren't backed up by facts. Products that state that a particular percentage of the product is made from recycled content without offering any accurate details fall under this category. This lack of proof or ambiguity about the product is portrayed through irrelevance and hidden information. Lastly, claims about products that don't have any environmental benefits in the first place—for instance, organic cigarettes—are known as the ‘lesser of the two evils’ stage, also called the one-sided approach.

Resorting to buying such products causes the glorification of false labels seen on products (de Jong et al., 2019). Brands like Nestle and Fiji have repeatedly used pristine footage and enticing imagery for their bottled water advertising campaigns. Nestle (water manufacturer of Pure Life, Arrowhead, and Poland Spring) debuted the Pure Life “Eco-Shape” bottle in 2009, claiming to use 15-30% less plastic in advertisements (Forsell & ÅKerblom, 2020). The disclaimer next to the percentage pointed readers to the fine print, which stated that the figure was compared among all plastic container types, including



*The facade of green-washing products as environmentally friendly*

Illustrated by Khushi Desai

*Alt Text: Illustration of a packet of chips, plastic water-bottle, soap bar, and chocolate bar, wrapped in green ribbons imprinted with dollar signs*

soda and juice bottles. This is a classic case of the ‘Lesser of Two Evils’ greenwashing sin: regardless of how ‘responsibly’ a plastic water bottle is created, single-use plastic water bottles play a detrimental role in an environmentally aware society. A mobile phone company saying that the device is CFC free would also be an example since CFCs are already banned by law. These three stages complement one another and the presence of more than one stage can also be seen (Forsell & ÅKerblom, 2020).

Greenwashing is not just consumer-based, but investor based as well. Companies believe that doing “good” may benefit their social image. Taking part in corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities may improve a company’s reputation, purchasing intentions, and customer loyalty. Greenwashing has the potential to dilute the entire CSR movement, lowering the burden on businesses (Forsell & ÅKerblom, 2020). Although corporate greenwashing is a common occurrence, it has consequences on consumers. The ‘green’ marketing urges consumers to think that they are making an informed decision about their purchasing choices,

based on the contradictory promises of commercials and product descriptions. Though not sustainable in the long run, greenwashing does work in favour of the brands in appearing to be a company that would care about the environment and its people while in reality, there is nothing ground-breaking in what is being practised. Over the years, companies that have participated in widespread greenwashing have made headlines. Chevron, for example, commissioned a series of expensive television and print advertising in the mid-1980s to promote their environmental commitment. Whereas at the same time, they were actively breaking the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act, as well as leaking oil into wildlife refuges, during the now-famous “The People Do” campaign (Delmas & Burbano, 2011).

Similarly, businesses can keep a majority of environmentally sensitive customers engaged by making a cosmetic appeal to green needs without changing unsustainable business practises. Often, it involves praising one positive feature of sustainability while neglecting a more serious environmental hazard. Globally popular clothing brands like Zara and H&M promote in-store sustainable collections and use of paper bags while concealing underlying issues such as unsustainably manufactured clothing. H&M first launched its “Conscious” Collection in Sweden in 2010, an experimental initiative, before expanding it to other markets across the world, without actually being clear on what it means. The clothing line was crafted using sustainable materials such as organic cotton and recycled polyester, according to the brand’s own description in its 2017 annual report (Segran, 2019). Consumers were made to believe that at cheaper rates, they are buying seemingly more sustainable clothes when in reality, there is a vast difference between the environmental footprint of organic cotton, which will decompose, and recycled polyester, which will never biodegrade. The issue is that no industry standard exists for what “sustainably sourced” actually implies, and the brand does not specify how it defines the phrase. Unclear how it obtains any of its resources, consumers do not have knowledge about how much of this ostensibly sustainable material is used in each outfit (Segran, 2019). E-Commerce giants like Flipkart and Amazon too, retail “environment-

friendly” products. The authenticity of such claims, heavy use of plastic and other equivalent materials for packaging raises various questions that need to be answered.

Analysing this gradient on the consumer’s side, consumption is necessary if not central to someone’s life, or even the entire purpose of existence. Marx states that consumers in a capitalist society have lost sight of what is and isn’t useful to them, and end up purchasing commodities whose sole purpose is to enrich those who arranged their manufacturing and distribution (Torelli et al., 2019). It is the cheaper, more attractive products that consumers are more likely to purchase. Take for example the aforementioned cases of fast fashion brands like H&M and Zara, similar practises are opted by SHEIN, a fast-fashion brand, accused of greenwashing. Claiming to be doing its best to source recycled fabric, this fabric is currently being used only for 64 out of 52,000+ outfits on the website (Bellinger, 2021). Such a brand’s popularity stems from its inexpensive prices and the outstanding ability to replicate designer clothing in a couple of hours. With the number of customers growing, so does media attention and a public attempt to dissect an untenable business model. This mentality is used by mass-producing brands to their advantage.

A rational consumer with an immense will to purchase a product or indulge in accepting a service would continue using the service or purchasing the product anyway. Their perception would not be affected after realising that the product is greenwashed (if it is) due to being influenced by multiple factors like purchasing power, spending power and individual budget. Yet, if a product is specifically marketed to be environment friendly, a consumer will be more inclined to purchase it as compared to other products or keep purchasing it for the sole reason of it being environment friendly (Weiner, 1985). Consumers emerge highly probable to purchase these items, suggesting that it is hard to retrieve from divulged greenwashing. If a company does not genuinely put efforts into sustainable initiatives, and instead takes the deceitful route, they stand to lose more than if they continue to operate normally. Such behaviour can be understood through attribution theory, which

studies how ordinary people understand the reasons for behaviour and occurrences. It is fascinating to see how much consumers’ attributions influence their intentions and views while buying/purchasing (Weiner, 1985).

The most predominant colour in a supermarket shopping trolley is green and its allied shades (Gatti et al., 2019). This brings us to an important aspect of what consumers actually look at while buying products, especially the greenwashed ones. A greenwashed product would lead us into checking the kind of value it adds to our lives rather than whether or not the product is sustainable. There is a perception that millennials are the most environmentally aware citizens worldwide. Their purchasing decisions are not just dependent on the availability and affordability of products, but also on their environmental impact. These intentions are not supported by new fast fashion brands engaging in rampant greenwashing. Brands conceal their higher environmentally hazardous actions by creating a minimal positive social impact which helps in maintaining a good brand image. Affordability, product efficacy and product excellence often do not go hand in hand necessarily, along with the requirements of the buyer. Today, consumers are aware of the repercussions of greenwashing on the environment and try to expose brands that practice them. There is an increased concern about the green movement and support of environmentally friendly products, but buying the right ones still stands the test of time.

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# 08 Perfectly Less: From Canvas to Life

Author - Gauri Mande

*“Does this (article) spark joy?” If unsatisfactory, Marie Kondo recommends at least thanking the author before discarding it. Kondo is one of Minimalism’s many commercially successful lifestyle gurus. The journey of Minimalism from a revolutionary art form to becoming a guiding principle of life is fascinating, especially as it often paradoxically facilitates a consumerist lifestyle. This article attempts to study the Eurocentric roots of contemporary minimalism that is changing age-old brand logos and becoming a self-help industry, with a disregard towards colour.*

Minimalism, a niche avant-garde art movement of 1960’s New York has become a lifestyle. The capitalist superstructure has subtly co-opted this aesthetic often sold as subversive to the consumerism of industrialised societies. By ascribing higher moral value to having “less” not only in possessions but also in colour due to its preference for simple colour palettes, it can be argued that this Western aesthetic has disprivileged colour. This leads to a sense of alienation from an internalised disapproval for cultural aesthetics in post-colonial and neo-colonially ruled states. “Minimalist pop philosophy” with self-help books and decluttering podcasts appear to be an anti-materialist rejection of ‘excess’. Yet, the capitalistic eurocentric superstructure is inventive and flexible. It has found ways to co-opt this reactionary movement. Far from a critique of modern society, minimalism is often understood by some as a tool of the status quo to delegitimise colours.

Minimalism can be traced to the Minimalist art movement of the 1960s often heralded as aloof from society and sentiments. According to Donald Judd, a canonical Minimalist artist, his art has nothing to do with society, institutions and grand theories (Chave, 1990). Ironically, his work and that of many minimalist artists attracted elite collectors and institutions. Considering the geometric uniformity, stable design and colours,

and commercial production of these works, it is apparent why the elite patrons saw minimalist pieces as being in line with their ideals rather than as “opposing society”. Hence, Minimalism has found acceptance with the cognoscenti and loathing with the public. While negative emotions for minimalist pieces are often cited as “art at work”, this art is not a detached entity. It is a reminder of what disturbs people most in their lives—alienation from the impersonal faces of technology and commerce (Chave, 1990). Minimalism as a life philosophy parallels the art movement’s performative avant-gardism. Minimalism in the 21st century comes with an inherent pressure to conform to its ideals which can often be visually oppressive. While discussing the disregard for colour, Chayka (2016) observes, “Whiteness, in a literal sense, is good. Mess, heterogeneity, is bad—the opposite impulse of artistic minimalism. It is anxiety-inducing in a manner indistinguishable from other forms of consumerism, not revolutionary at all.”

Originating in the USA, a country based on individualistic consumerism, minimalism may sound like healthy anti-consumerism yet, it has become a thing of privilege created by and for the affluent. Consuming less is often affordable only when one has enough money. Thus, minimalism is then portrayed as a philosophy of deliberate restraint that is transformed into an aesthetic that

asserts a ‘walled-off luxury’. This leads to the irony of, “a self-centred and competitive impulse that is not so different from the acquisitive attitude that minimalism purports to reject” (Tolentino, 2020). Hence, as an aesthetic, the minimalist lifestyle hinges on two prerequisites (Gibson, 2016). Firstly, purchasing the “perfect” commodity which makes supplementary buying unnecessary. Secondly, the discarding of non-essentials based on the security of surfeit to avail commodities if needed. It has established its own oppressive orthodox rejection of colour and heterogeneity best summarised as “It too often looks like a homogenous style, or a commandment of a particular way of living, or the decision to opt-out of society—it’s an expulsion of the human” (Budds, 2020).

Marshall McLuhan’s Principle of Inseparability according to which “the medium is the message” posits that given communication technology—‘medium’ in his terminology—has effects on society as a whole (McLuhan, 1964; Ponzoni, 2015). The messages in the media go far beyond the actual content. There are latent messages being sent that are often not discernible through common knowledge. As McLuhan puts it, “A pervasive environment, a pervasive medium is always beyond perception.” Here is where modern technology and colonisation join hands to further the European aesthetics beyond our field of perception. For example, Chakya (2016) critiques Instagram as becoming one of minimalism’s biggest forces for mass appeal by saying, “The way it presents images and the blank white space is well suited to minimalist aesthetics.” Social media platforms like Instagram and Twitter focus on reinventing their image owing to their majorly young consumer base. The principle of inseparability can be used to explain the importance of this trend. Hence, brands wanting to align with market aesthetics to be ‘modern’ through the ‘medium’ of brand presentation lend themselves to disprivilege colours.

For a discourse on this tendency of brands in general, it is important to establish the components of brand identity. It includes three elements: logo, brand name and slogan. In context to pervasive minimalism, brand logos are of primary focus as they are visual indicators of brand values and

perception. Minimalist logos are often designed in tandem with the psychological aspect of memorability, as clearly observed through the ubiquitous Apple logo (Blake et al., 2015). Ever since the 2010s, there is a tendency for brands to use minimalist non-descriptive logos even though research suggests that descriptions add authenticity, help customers connect to the brand, making them more trustworthy and profitable (Luffarelli et al., 2019). According to the logo design trends for 2020 and 2021, a good logo combines simplicity with atypical visual effects such as modernised minimalism. Despite conflicting ideas on whether minimalist logo designs truly are more successful, the assertion that “Everything simple is ingenious” encompasses the reasoning behind this shift. This further suggests that colours, either too many or too flashy, are unnecessary detail.

Consider the evolution of the Mozilla Firefox logo from the early 2000s to 2019. The release of its newest logo in 2019 sparked many internet memes on what the logo will devolve into next. After weeks of suffering jabs for its new logo, Firefox published a blog assuring netizens that the symbol of fox in its logo was here to stay. Indian brands are accepting



*An iconic painting stripped of colour and complexity; reimaged minimalistically.*

**Illustrated by Britney Dharmai**

*Alt text: Illustration of the Mona Lisa, with a minimal outline sketch and no colour.*

the minimalist idea and changing their brand identity as well. Although their branding decisions are motivated by their placement as local brands in an emerging market, as opposed to Firefox—a global brand in a largely stable market. India’s young market base has several distinct segments within the demographic, and they relate to national and global brands differently, often driving local brands to project themselves as global (Koshy & Narayanan, 2017). This is due to key changes in the Indian market including urbanisation, the growing reach of mass media, widespread penetration of the internet, and mobile technology. Subject to these changes is a young consumer group that is aspirational, status-seeking, privy to national and global trends, open to change, and increasingly self-confident (Koshy & Narayanan, 2017).

### Firefox logo evolution



Source: Mozilla Foundation

As an attempt to capitalise on the new demography, many brands evolved identities in order to resonate with the youth. For instance, Dabur transitioned from a muted brand of wellness products to a more dynamic one offering a wider range of products coupled with a new logo change to emphasise change from “health” (a sacred banyan tree) to “life” (a tree made from vigorous people) (Koshy & Narayanan, 2017). Indian phone brand Micromax Marketing-Head, Pratik Seal, commenting on its changed logo said, “We all decided that the Punch logo is a true reflection of the Micromax brand which is young, innovative, dynamic, bold, extrovert and fun” (News18, 2012). Punit Goenka, ZEE MD & CEO, explains that their new bright blue logo adds renewed freshness and reflects an identity that truly articulates their spirit.

Obviously, brands care to appear minimalist. Additionally, minimalism has pervaded the everyday as well which can be understood in the Indian context by adopting a symbolic interactionist approach towards colour. According to this theory,

humans interact with things based on meanings ascribed to them, meanings which come from interactions with others and society (Aksan et al., 2009). It is apparent from the various cultures and religions of India and their art, religious practises, and festivals, that there is immense value ascribed to colour in the everyday and the spiritual. Looking at formal wear in Indian white-collar jobs, office dress codes mandate western wear, especially for men. ‘Indian formals’ exist only for women with many unspoken restrictions. For example, fashion blogs recommend wearing earthy or subtle colours with small or no embellishments and prints on the fabric. This also highlights patriarchal roots of minimalism wherein it disprivileges not only colour but through it, feminine expressions of identity. What art critic Chave ascribes as patriarchal oppressive features to the Minimalist art movement spills over into the current pop philosophy (Chave, 1990).

Hence, in the minimalist lifestyle, non-European aesthetics of colour are kitschy. At its global scale, it is a suppression of other cultural expressions and aesthetics through colour and detail. For those living in post-colonial or neo-colonial states with a history of European imposition, it creates or exacerbates a sense of alienation towards one’s own self and culture due to an internalised disapproval of any art, clothing, architecture or cultural practises which exude colour or possessions. Therefore, in its current form, it can be argued that minimalism is a colonially rooted enterprise of an oppressive lack of colours in a world skewed towards the global North.

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## 09

# The colour of your sweater was selected for you by people in 'this' room

Author - Isha Shah

*The most quoted speech for validating the importance of haute couture till date remains Miranda Priestly's iconic theory from 'Devil Wears Prada', where she explains to an oblivious Andrea Sachs—the journey of the colour Cerulean Blue from Oscar de la Renta's exquisite gowns to "tacky" jumpers sold at a regular store. Important to note here is that no matter how unaware one thinks they are of these colour trends, buying clothes automatically renders a subscription to another's choices: perhaps a designer's but more often, a colour forecaster's. This article explores their role as tastemakers and intermediaries between designers and consumers, and investigates both - the 'tacit' and 'dictating' nature of this practice.*

Colour is not only one of the first things that attracts one to a garment, but has also been rated as the most important aesthetic criteria by consumers in terms of garment preferences. Undoubtedly, it holds a prominent place in fashion (Eckman et. al., 1990) and even makes the difference between what sells and what does not. Consequently, colour forecasting agencies like Pantone, WGSN, Promostyl and Colour Marketing Group (CMG), among others, have emerged as a group of tastemakers, important to the fashion universe—providing it with a direction that influences creative choices and at the same time, fulfils the industry's desire for a continuous novelty. In September 2021, Pantone, in its Fashion Colour Trend Report, released a list of 10 colours including Coral rose, Bubblegum, Fair green, Popcorn and Sudan brown that are expected to prevail in fashion during the forthcoming Spring/Summer '22 season (Pressman, 2021). Is this list really predictive or does this in fact drive the ebb and flow of trends within the fashion marketplace?

Colour forecasting is the highly intuitive and little understood process of identifying precisely those colours and hues that will dominate the markets 18 to 24 months in the future (Diane & Cassidy, 2005).

While the methodology of colour forecasting has changed tremendously over the decades—the late 60s/early 70s era was more of trendspotting, roaming the world, taking photos, reporting what people were wearing in European clubs and cafes. Whereas, colour forecasters today combine instinct, years of experience, theory and a lot of mathematics—the basic premise of trying to position oneself as an organic barometer of the zeitgeist has remained constant (Whitfield & Whelton, 2015). For instance, some experts cite the reason behind the current rise of Yellow (also called 'Gen Z Yellow') to be its association with climate change and the subsequent rise in heatwaves. Kim et al. (2011) also subscribe to this ideology wherein trend forecasters look for the 'overall direction of fashion' on the streets, on fashion and lifestyle media, in fairs and other places.

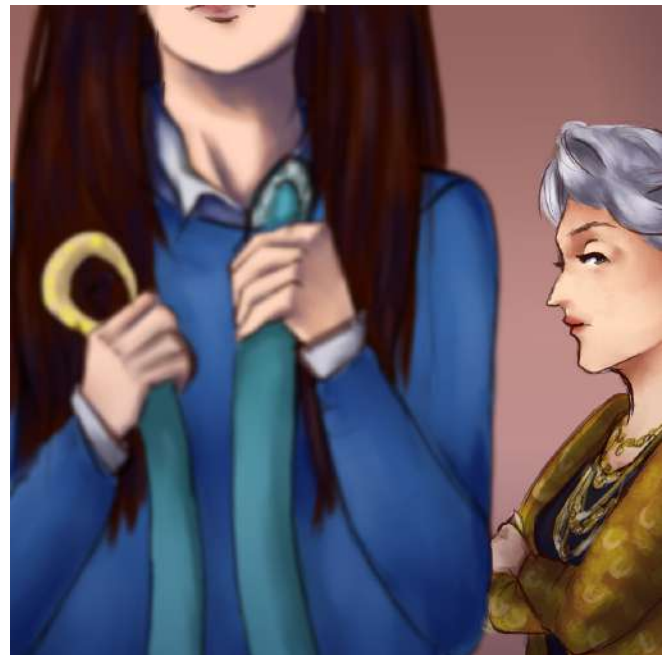
To illustrate this, coming back to Gen Z Yellow—the origin moment for this shade was when Rihanna wore a yellow gown by Guo Pei to the 2015 Met Gala, then it was Beyoncé who wore a Roberto Cavalli in the same shade in 2016, later Amal Clooney wore her famous yellow Stella McCartney to the Royal Wedding in 2018. Eventually, it trickled down to the high street where it is now dominating the collections

at Topshop, Urban Outfitters and Marks & Spencer. If a colour is in demand it makes sense to keep coming up with similar tones and hues which raises the question: are forecasters even innovating or simply responding to societal cues? In other words, are they publishing a self-fulfilling prophecy?

Today, colour forecasting is focused as much on market analysis as it is on spotting street trends. Cassidy (2020) believes because of the increasing global competition in an already saturated fashion marketplace, colour forecasters today are expected to predict those trends that will ensure the maximum level of sales. Rooted in the fear of being ‘wrong’, since the subsequent outcome would be revenue loss due to unsold garments, the industry relies on more creative intuition and market reality without caring much about the human-business interface and cultural meanings of colour. In that sense, colour forecasters, by promoting a fallacy of a trend, have a significant influence on the consumers’ decision-making (Tham, 2008). As consumers are aware that more colour options will be made available to them in a relatively short time period, they will normally subscribe to the trend.

Bourdieu (1993) notes how this power of particular individuals with important positions in aesthetic economies like art and fashion depends upon their mythical status within the cultural system. Looking at the symbolic power of these tastemakers, he envisioned some key implications. Firstly, he describes these people as having certain indefinable qualities or “cultural capital” in the form of cultural competency, expertise and an acquired aesthetic sensibility. This cultural capital, as well as the social and institutional relationships which sustain them, are critical for all kinds of commercial transactions, particularly the sale of commodities and thus, economic calculations of all kinds in aesthetic economies are by default cultural ones (Entwistle, 2009).

This is relevant to the selective praxis of colour forecasting that expects forecasters to have the appropriate ‘fashion’ capital in the form of knowledge of fashion trends, brands and names in the industry, which also extends to wearing fashionable clothes, having a sense of ‘style’ and appropriate high-



*Includes all key components from the iconic scene ‘Devil Wears Prada’ that generated the Cerulean Blue Theory*

**Illustrated by Kyra Sparrow**

*Alt text- Illustration of a woman (Andrea Sachs) wearing a cerulean blue jumper holding a belt and a woman (Miranda Priestly) behind her.*

fashion taste. It is this symbolic cultural capital that is legitimised and translated into colour palettes and trend reports, which is further transferred to the production chain. In fact, Lantz (2018) refers to these forecasters as “insurance companies”, as their reliable reports support fast and accurate commercial decisions and allow the designers to plan ahead of fads. For instance, the mood for bright, futuristic Pink, which is the latest colour trend of 2021 was set when Lady Gaga wore an internet-breaking electric Pink gown to the 2019 Met Gala.

Secondly, Bourdieu (1993) describes these people as cultural intermediaries—those who bring ‘culture’ forward to the public and, in doing so, add value. The greater the display of one’s cultural capital and social hierarchy, the more readily one’s personal tastes are transformed (Bayley, 1992). In that, personal taste is nothing but an individual’s display of understanding, connecting and adapting the cultural status markers already set in the society. Colour forecasters thus occupy an important position in the middle between designers and consumers, symbolically creating

products with high cultural value (trend reports/forecasts) and helping to shape and forge tastes of the masses in the process. Their forecasting practises are therefore the critical but invisible link between production and consumption.

Thirdly and most importantly, due to the transient nature of both taste and fashion, aesthetic preferences and collective tastes are constantly changing and always in production. As colour forecasting aligns with the inherent obsolescence of fashion's constant change, it implicitly depends upon the existence and evolution of colour trends. Moreover, it often involves forecasters drawing on their own identities and consumption practises, the result being the mediation (reproduction) of existing tastes and consumption practises as opposed to leading the cultural vanguard and forging new tastes (Entwistle, 2006) Hence one can perhaps state that innovation in forecasting is somewhat illusory. However, since a desire for novelty is what fuels the entire fast-paced fashion system, subscribing to colour forecasting practises becomes important for designers and brands to stay competitive.

While it has been established that colour forecasting is indeed the lynchpin of the current fashion system, some experts still question the 'tacit' nature of this practice, and in turn it's credibility. Entwistle (2009) argues that fashion capital in terms of knowledge/information is largely tacit in nature, since knowing what is 'in' is not quite the same as being 'in the know' and fashion insiders are usually two steps ahead of the mainstream. This tacitness and the subsequent information asymmetry largely reflects in the practice of colour forecasting as it is unclear how such a holistic methodology of 'roaming the world, catching zeitgeist, detecting fashion' translates into reports on colour palettes, predictions and themes. The ambiguous nature of this practice with its apparent lack of consensus about frameworks, theories and methodologies results from the fact that there is still no single standardised 'rulebook' for the process of identifying, analysing and predicting trends (Higham, 2009).

Furthermore, while it may appear that colour forecasters and in turn designers, through their runway collections are 'dictating' future colour

trends, Lopes (2019) argues that the final choice is really in the hands of consumers. For instance, in the history of some of the biggest fashion disasters, one came from an attempt by Harper's Bazaar to push the colour Sunset Pink for everything: an entire collection of bags, coats, dresses, gloves in order to promote a train called the Sunset Limited. This colour experiment was blatantly rejected by fashion consumers costing the magazine millions of dollars in unsold items.

Lantz (2018) points out that most trend forecasters try to avoid being represented as 'dictators' and instead promote an inspirational image, that is, they are merely informants and not actual creators of these trends. Additionally, it seems with the rise of social media, consumers are now less willing to blindly follow trends set by forecasters and designers and are demonstrating more trust in personal opinions of internet influencers, bloggers and celebrities. Thus, the role of a tastemaker doesn't exclusively belong to a forecaster now, as these trendsetters have emerged as the new drivers of change in fashion. In this way, taste is not something that colour forecasters impose on markets, rather emerges out of active engagement between the two. In other words, colour forecasters' decisions are highly influenced and dependent on consumer choices particularly those consumers who are relevant or influential enough to be observed and thus have a fundamental role in determining what is going to be in or out the next season.

Colour trend reports are therefore, recycling ideas, themes, and palettes already available, thought of or worn by someone influential. This explains why colours like Bold Fuschia and Cyber Yellow pop up every couple of years to hibernate for prolonged periods of time. In that, colour forecasters may be seen as wary observers of change, who can be more accurate in their observations as their cultural capital allows them to recognize repetitions in behaviour patterns more often, thereby making them the tastemakers in this process. However, taste is not to be seen as a priori (as something belonging either to consumers or forecasters) but as a hybrid or networked creation, forged out of the negotiations, or mediations, between forecasters, designers, and consumers. In other words, colour forecasters neither entirely lead or forge tastes nor do they merely

‘follow the customer’ slavishly. The practice of colour forecasting rather simply focuses on change in detail to create something new or something that appears to be new and is chosen by the right individuals.

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## 10

# The Chosen Ones: A commentary on the elitist subculture of Dark Academia

Author - Divanshi Ramnani

*Dark Academia is a social media/fashion aesthetic recognised for its symbolism. The features that ran across this aesthetic displayed an intellectual leaning toward the idea of superior liberal European education and culture, and fantasising about secret clubs, poetry, mystery, and murder. This article attempts to investigate the reasons for the subculture's resurgence while also attempting to establish ties between the subculture's aesthetics and its eurocentric and elitist tendencies. It also looks at how capitalistic corporations might profit from delusory historical views, as well as whether the subculture will remain exclusive and where outsiders can fit in.*

“Medicine, Law, Business, Engineering, these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But Poetry, Beauty, Romance, Love, these are what we live for.” Through John Keating from Dead Poets Society or through the Slytherins from Harry Potter, one must have unconsciously encountered Dark Academia. In contemporary times, Dark Academia could be subjected to a lifestyle, subculture, or visual philosophy. It is essentially a subculture that is reenacting the glamorised education and culture of Europe of the 19th century, in the 21st century. It questions as well as romanticises the nature of life and often is accompanied by a tint of mystery and secrets. It idealises the time when education was not a means but an end in itself.

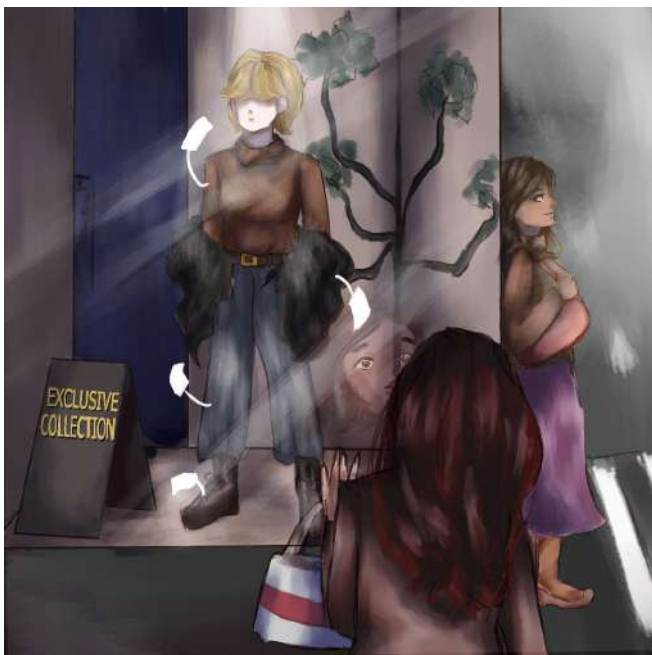
In its most elemental ways, it could be thought of as Modern Renaissance as it tries to revitalise humanistic scholarship and approach. During the Renaissance and Neoclassical times, education, especially the humanities, developed significantly. Similarly, Dark Academia tries to keep artists such as Keats, Oscar Wilde, and Lord Byron alive in their spirits by drawing inspiration from their core approaches. Wilde had extensively contributed to the introduction of homosexuality in the genre, while Lord Byron is credited for the ideal romantic

hero that the genre follows—emotionally dark and complicated with guilt, secrets, and melancholy. This article attempts to establish a link on how Elite theory and Eurocentric ideals have been portrayed in Dark Academia's colours and aesthetics. It would look at how erroneous historical beliefs like “the White Man's Burden” are still ingrained in our minds through trends like these, and how cunningly capitalistic markets profit from them.

The subculture of Dark Academia has been around for a very long time and has transcended from being a genre to a social media aesthetic, with a sudden rise in its popularity in the past few years. The explanation could be as simple as a longing for university and campus life in this global pandemic or as serious as an effort to preserve the soul of education from extinction. In the developed and technical world of the 21st century, these disciplines are seen more as fantasies rather than of any utility. Quiring (2021) states that “As departments are underfunded, tenure lines cut, and adjunctification rages, students are increasingly encouraged to pursue STEM and business degrees in the hopes of finding a lucrative career.” Thus, a degree in disciplines like English or History is often considered to be a luxury. This could also be a consequence of corporate interference in

education, where often students can't afford to take such majors as they are not economically fulfilling careers to pay off their debts after graduating. This has an altering effect on academics as well, as often the researches are funded by corporations that could infringe on the outcomes of the studies. These capitalistic motives have now reduced academics as a mere tool to sponsor their agendas, which hinders the core values of the spirit of enquiry. This could be seen as a striking comparison of the capitalistic corporations of today to the catholic church of the pre-Renaissance period (Corazza, 2013).

While the subculture tries to focus on the quality of education and revival of Classics, the more contemporary approach has made it a social media trend, where the take has been more towards visual philosophy. Plaid skirts, blazers, turtleneck sweaters, cotton trousers, etc, all in shades of brown, beige, navy blue, purple, and certainly a leather bag overflowing with books. In short, pretty much everything that



*Marketing the elitist aesthetic of Dark Academia.*

**Illustrated by Kyra Sparrow**

*Alt text: Illustration of a person facing a window display where a mannequin is wearing dark, neutral shades of clothing, with an 'Exclusive Collection' banner beside it. There is another person on the right wearing similar shades of clothing as the mannequin.*

replicates visuals of a preppy European university student from the 19th century. This replication also points towards the elitism factor of art and aesthetic throughout history (Bell, 1974). For example, the colour purple has often been associated with royalty and luxury for centuries because of its scarce availability, hence only individuals of high prestige could afford it (Anderson et al., 2014). Even when this is no longer the case, the association continues and reflects in various places. Colour meanings are often based on subjective and cultural associations. Despite the fact that colour symbolism and psychology are two separate ideas, they quickly get entangled since our taught colour associations frequently match with our intrinsic reactions to the same colour (Elliot, 2015).

These arguments lead us to the sociological theory of Symbolic interactionism which in this context suggests that due to frequent association of this colour palette and aesthetic to the European elite class, our reaction to any such situation in the contemporary world would be conditioned by this association. Nonetheless, with this approach towards aesthetics, the core ideas seem to be lost in translation as now it is just a cosplay of intellectuals. Aesthetics in itself is a branch of philosophy that uses notions of perception and taste to determine what is good or bad (Shelley, 2020). Dark Academia originally offers a similar duality as it puts collapse and collaboration together, it expresses existentialism as well as a romanticisation of life. It has literal darkness in deep earth tones, gloomy weather, and a metaphorical one with mystery, wildness, and melancholy around it. This kind of setting is seen throughout the aesthetics, even in today's media. For instance, BBC's *Sherlock Holmes* (2010) and Netflix's *Queen's Gambit* (2020), both have been inspired by renowned literature. Even when put on screen, they continue to represent Dark Academia components within their colour palette. The presence of dark and cool tones represent an aura of mystery, and an isolated protagonist considered to be a gifted genius and often a manic in a powerful community. This periodic replication also brings out the critic of exclusivity as origins of Dark Academia are concentrated in European culture, and after all these decades continues so.

Dark Academia has been preceded by various

aesthetics as well, that are inspired by European culture and artists, and this thread still continues to represent discriminative and white supremacist beliefs (Malik, 2020). Evidence of this argument lies in the subculture's essential text *The Secret History* (1992) by Donna Tartt, which celebrates gothic architecture and mysteries around the institution and a "chosen" white exclusionary elite group of students. These elements have been a reiteration throughout the genre. Through her research in the aesthetic practises of Dark Academia, Burton (2021) sheds light on the conservative and elitist nature of this aesthetic. In an interview with Newcastle University, she states that "Outside of thin, white, Europeanness, there is little scope to legitimately imagine yourself into this aesthetic." Even after all these centuries, the kind of education it romanticises is still accessible only to a certain socio-economic class who seldom are able to represent the interests and beliefs of the majority, which makes this a vicious cycle of exclusionary elite privilege. Dark Academia does not work against the Anglo-Saxon higher education system's hardwired elitism, it instead, "reinforces the reigning paradigm not just on economic terms, but also in aesthetics, making it clear that only certain bodies are welcome in its quaint and chalky microcosm" (Baconsky, n.d.).

Participants in Burton's studies reveal that this exclusion is seen as imposter syndrome. It portrays an idealistic vision of academic work that ignores the realities of university life's responsibilities and pressure. Even as fourth-generation colonised people, we continue to subconsciously feed the assumption that European methods and culture are superior. The colonisation of the mind before the land was an efficient technique of colonising (Dascal, 2018), leading to repercussions such as colonial mentality, which has been passed down through generations and has sown the seeds of reverse ethnocentrism in European colonies such as India. As a result, not only the concerned elites but also we, as outlanders, fetishise and marginalise subcultures like Dark Academia.

As aforementioned, Dark Academia has evolved from being a genre to a social media aesthetic and a fashion trend. As a fashion trend, it has aided capitalistic corporations such as Ralph Lauren's

2006 fall collection, in profiting off a concept that is strongly based on delusory ethnocentrism. The capitalistic motive is not at fault here; rather, the benefit it derives from the misled customer belief is problematic. Individuals and cultures have been able to find their place in this typically eurocentric subculture, as the subculture has been exposed on social media platforms. The Instagram account, 'Indian Dark Academia' is a wonderful example of this. It attempts to add the colonial narrative to the subculture by exploring Indian history through the aesthetic's lens. While this evolution has given outlanders of this eurocentric subculture a stronger voice, it appears that this is mere 'pretend inclusivity'. The concept that education cultivates pupils into autonomous individuals is at the heart of the subculture, and even centuries later, the institution that delivers this level of education remains limited and constrained. Thus, by incorporating this subculture into a social media trend, the focus has switched to the pretence of romanticising higher education rather than accomplishing it.

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## 11

# A Glimpse into Colour Pollution

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*Colour Pollution can be any disharmonious colour arrangement that causes or increases disorder in one's environment. Like other forms of pollution, one may get habituated to colour pollution, leading to repercussions which go unnoticed. This article discusses the subjective nature of colour pollution. It talks about how outdoor advertising is one of the most common reasons for colour pollution, and how that conflicts with the advertisers' requirements. Lastly, it discusses how the state can, and does intervene in such situations.*

Colour pollution is “an inappropriate colour arrangement which causes or increases disorder in the perception of the visual field within an urban or natural environment” (Arrarte-Grau, 2021). Colour Pollution is a part of visual pollution, and it can include “unorganised dumping of litters, billboards, cables, wires, worn-out buildings, heaped construction materials, graffiti etc” (Jana & De, 2015). Repeated presentations of these colour combinations may decrease one's response to the stimuli; like other forms of pollution, one can get habituated to the disturbing colours in one's surroundings too.

Although one may get habituated to the colour pollution around them, it does have its negative repercussions. Colour pollution may cause a state of confusion in the body. It can lead to an overstimulation of senses and a consequent waste of energy. Colour pollution also causes stress and fatigue (Arrarte-Grau, 2021). High visual quality is thus considered important. The same is also important because it furthers safe behaviour from the viewers and can bring about better interaction amongst the members of a community (Portella, 2014, p. 10). It is believed that visual quality may also affect other factors such as “how people use the city centres, how long individual activities

last, and which activity types may develop” (Portella, 2014, p. 11). Studies also show that people require a minimum level of visual stimulus to achieve psychological well-being. Individuals who are placed in an environment with low stimuli experience feelings of anxiety after some time (Kumar & Joshi, 2007).

A concerning example of colour pollution is Japan. After the Meiji era in Japan, a wave of Westernisation led to a combination of Japanese and Western design. Japan's ruination due to the Second World War and the subsequent cheap construction accentuated the chaos (Kodama, 1990). For example, in 1981, buses in Tokyo were painted yellow with broad red stripes. Previously, these buses were white with blue rims. This change led to much protest, and the Japan Colour Research Institute claimed that the red/yellow buses would neutralise the purpose of safety signs, which are generally red. The Transportation Bureau of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government then held voting and people were asked to vote for one of the four colour combinations: white/red, white/blue, white/green, and yellow clouds on a green background. The white/green combination received maximum votes and several buses were re-painted in this combination. However, failure to re-paint all buses left the streets with an unwanted amalgamation



*Aspects of Cultural Relativism have been mixed with colour pollution.*

**Illustrated by Tanya D'souza**

*Alt text: Illustration of hands of different colours emerging from the tops of grey skyscrapers, against the backdrop of a blue sky.*

of white/green, white/blue and the red/yellow buses. This increased the confusion and colour pollution manifold. Automatic vending machines, buses, and other aspects of the cityscape were then studied and re-coloured too (Kodama, 1990).

Japan also saw an eruption of neon and other bright billboards, which led to immense colour pollution. Other urban contemporary spaces are also being polluted by unconstrained outdoor advertising. While outdoor advertising is essential to advance the brand and image of companies, it negatively impacts the locals' quality of life. It often hinders the spatial order and the historic nature of the cities (Portella, 2014, p. 1). It was found that streetscapes with more than seven visible outdoor advertisements were viewed as being visually polluted (Chmielewski et al., 2016). If the advertisements are not "well designed, reflecting the characteristics of buildings and areas concerned", the cultural and natural heritage of the site may be affected (Portella, 2014). Research shows that restrictions on advertising had a positive impact on the public space in Poland during the interwar period (Pluciennik, 2019). It is possible

that similar restrictions may positively impact the public space at present time too. However, this is also culture-dependent. Studies on Nigerian cities show that the placement of neon-sign electronic billboards, cold-cathode incandescent light and computerised billboard system could refurbish them (Bankole, 2013, p. 9). This would also involve the removal of unwanted graphic materials to enhance the vitality of the environment of the country. Such cultural interventions have to be made by the state, and would require proper implementation.

In Japan, the Study Group for Colour Use in Public Places (SCPP) was formed in light of colour pollution, and deliberate efforts were made to reduce the same. Widespread reconstruction and redevelopment of the cities reduced the colour pollution, so the environment does not "trample our nerves and tire our eyes" (Kodama, 1990). The government also doled out "Public Colour Awards" to encourage a rational use of colour in the environment. The committee published bulletins in their various conferences and exteriorised methods for the implementation of positive environment colour planning. The basic intent was to create a commercial streetscape which could be regarded positively by different stakeholders. Introducing guidelines which regulate the installation of commercial advertisements and hoardings can enable such a streetscape. Ralf Weber, an architect researcher claims that, "the more orderly a configuration, the higher its aesthetic value" (Portella, 2014, p. 9). This may also be subject to cultural variation, but Gestalt Psychology supports Weber's views and claims that a space's visual quality is determined by its regularity, orderliness, simplicity, and symmetry (Portella, 2014, p. 10). A study on Pakistan shows that, developing a spatial decision support system (SDSS) for homogenising the placement and location of advertisements can reduce colour pollution (Wakil et al., 2016). Numerous measures can be taken to regulate colour pollution; if such regulations can be implemented, effectively implemented, visual harmony and aesthetic improvement can be achieved.

However, it is also crucial to consider the importance of colour from an advertiser's perspective. While the state may impose limitations on advertising,

certain rules govern the creation of hoardings as well. A study shows that the hue, saturation and lightness of the advertisement's colour influences the viewers' emotions (Lichtlé, 2007). The relation between these factors and emotions vary amongst individuals, depending on their optimal stimulation level (OSL) (Lichtlé, 2007). Advertisers also have to consider the cultural context in which they are advertising. While the colour blue may indicate royalty in India, the same may indicate stability in America. Similarly, white may stand for peace in India and innocence in America (Kumar & Joshi, 2007). If the cultural interventions by the respective states do not consider these colour symbolisms, the restrictions may obstruct effective advertising. Research indicates that colour impacts the viewers' willingness to read by 80%, improves decision-making by 70%, increases retention levels by 78%, increases recall by 60%, increases attention-span by 82% and increases selling potential by 80% (Kumar & Joshi, 2007). Colour also affects shopping habits, whereby impulsive shoppers are attracted to red, orange, black and blue. Shoppers who plan their expenditure are attracted to pink, teal, blue and navy; traditionalists respond best to pastels such as pink, rose, and blue. Similarly, fast food restaurants all over the world prefer using shades of reds and oranges because people's hunger is kindled in the presence of such colours (Kumar & Joshi, 2007).

Along with colour symbolism, the meaning and importance of "aesthetic" also varies in different cultures. One reason is because different people pay heed to different components of the environment. Individual differences are also influenced by numerous factors such as social and cultural values, lifestyle and professional interests, past experiences, gender, age, personality, and ethnic groups. Some local authorities in American cities suggest that the parts of buildings, including windows, doors, parapets, and other components should be in proportion and harmony with each other, through with each other, through the use of textures, lines, and such. Newly constructed buildings should also bear a similar semblance to older buildings in the area (Portella, 2014, p. 18). However, terminologies such as "good proportion" and "harmony" are subject to individual interpretation. Such lack of objectivity makes it difficult to implement their

advertising is considered to be one of the most common sources of colour pollution. This can be controlled if the state imposes certain restrictions. These regulations can vary in their intensity. For instance, the city of São Paulo in Brazil has imposed a complete ban on billboards. However, developing nations like Pakistan are unable to do the same because billboards are a major source of tax revenue (Wakil et al., 2021). Restrictions can thus vary from stern to moderate management; some nations also impose restrictions on the placement, size, colour and content of these billboards. The federal Highway Beautification Act of the United States prohibits the placement of billboards and other signs near interstate highways (Nagle, 2009, p. 544). Within the context of India too, it thus becomes difficult to make any generalised claims. People from diverse socio-economic backgrounds inhabit the land, and colour preferences vary. While some groups prefer the kitsch aesthetic, others may consider it to be gaudy. Thus, the answer to what is and what is not colour pollution is not dichotomous. What may be colour pollution to one can be pleasing to another. This is because the perception of colour is contingent on individual and cultural differences. A balanced enforcement of limitations could then ensure a better visual environment, and contribute to better psychological well-being.

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# 12 Black and White: The Two Sides of Colour

Author - Yash Deshpande

*This research article discusses the depiction and symbolisation of colour, and people of colour in the anime industry. It also highlights how the use of incorrect colour palettes can lead to unwanted racist undertones. Emphasising the importance of cultural context, the article attempts to present an argument as to how colour can impact the narrative of a story, from a sociological perspective. It explores the racial impact carried by depiction of colour, by examining two popular anime as case studies.*

In Japan, the most popular form of visual media is animation, known as anime, which is often based on Japanese comics called manga. Anime is characterised by stark colourful graphics, depicting vibrant characters in action-filled plots, often with fantastic or futuristic themes. Anime is known for its vivid colours, symbolisation, and the variety of complex themes it portrays through its frames. This research article explores the depiction and symbolisation of colour, and people of colour in the anime industry. It will also discuss the importance of cultural context in media and how it can impact the perception of a character. The article will discuss this by scrutinising the use of colour in two juggernauts of the anime industry: Dragon Ball Z (1989) and One Piece (1999).

Dragon Ball Z, based on the manga by Akira Toriyama, became one of the only anime to have a simultaneous broadcast in Japan and the USA (IMDb, 1996). Thus, it became one of the first sources of popular Japanese media for the Western world. The anime follows the journey of Goku, who comes from a race of warriors known as Saiyans, who can ascend to a higher form of the most powerful warrior. It is important to note here that Goku's original appearance is that of a man with unkempt black hair and black eyes. However, when Goku achieves his ultimate, superior form, he transforms into a taller

being with bright blond hair and sparkling greenish blue eyes (Fukunaga et al., 1989-2003). In the eyes of the Western audience, this superior being looked very much like a stereotypical white man.

This assumption can be further understood due to the fact that in the West, primarily in America, white culture is seen as normal or standard. A character who isn't textually stated to have a particular skin colour, or to be a specific race, is assumed to be white due to the dominant regional culture (Hudson, 2013). While this depiction of the superior being as 'white', was met with much outrage and confusion in the West, the Japanese audience merely thought of the colours as exotic and alluring (Lasseter, 2021). The altered features, instead of suggesting any racial supremacy, simply symbolised the character as being 'different' from the usual and perhaps attractive. Thus, the same portrayal of a character was received differently by various audiences. It is interesting to note that the author, Akira Toriyama, merely stopped painting Goku's hair in the black and white manga because it 'was too much work for him', intending neither of the interpretations (Toriyama, 2018). This difference in interpretation can be understood through the lens of hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics explores the process of human understanding and interpretation. The hermeneutic

method maintains that prejudices, personal experiences and the sociocultural background of an individual have the potential to colour their understanding of a particular phenomenon (Lee, 1991). The West's history of white supremacy and racial differences may have impacted their perception of Goku's character. Here, Toriyama's character of Goku is being distanced, geographically from its Japanese origin, and understood by American audiences through their lived realities. The social construction or the social context of the media is also being divorced from its interpretation (Lee, 1991). However, the Japanese audience, being unaware of such a racial dichotomy, merely thought of the character as exotic. Therefore, it is clear that how a viewer interprets a character is extremely important, as it can drastically change the context and content of the narrative the author is trying to weave. The audience internalised their interpretation, which led them to assume white supremacist undertones in a narrative that had no intention of propagating it.

Another failed attempt to positively use colour can be seen with the depiction of Mr Popo, who is a minor side character in the series. Mr Popo is yet another attempt to entice the audience with the use of an 'exotic' character. Depicted as a black man with red lips, wearing a Middle Eastern turban and vest, Mr Popo is nothing but a stereotypical cardboard character which has led to major fan backlash and controversy (Fukunaga et al., 1989-2003). Western fans have maintained that Mr Popo's character design is highly inappropriate, so much so that animators have begun to tone down his exaggerated features for the American broadcast. On the contrary, it has been argued that this is just a little artistic licence for an imaginary character, as Japanese animation has a history of exaggerating non-Japanese characters (Isler, 2012). Admittedly, one needs to consider that the Japanese population is not very diverse and lacks the racial sensitivities of the Western world (Kawai, 2015). Once again context plays a key role here. In the Japanese context, it is merely a form of expression, an exaggerated depiction of a children's cartoon character. However, for the West, it is an insensitive and tone-deaf portrayal of a character in a much-beloved series. This insensitive portrayal, regardless of its intent, can harm its audience, esp-

pecially impressionable children (Weatherford, 2000).

In both of the aforementioned characters in Dragon Ball Z, a clear pattern is established wherein the colour palette of the characters has little to do with their motivation, life choices, and goals. Instead, it merely acts as aesthetic or visual eye candy for the audience to latch onto. It is almost as if colour is an afterthought here, and is separate from the character itself. However, in reality, race plays an important part in an individual's life. The colour of an individual's skin or their race is integral to their lives, their motivations, and indeed goes as far as to define daily habits and aspirations. Thus, race plays a major role in determining one's present and future. Therefore, when the colour of characters is used nonchalantly or as an afterthought, it leads to half baked, controversial, and unintentionally racist storytelling. Colour, when used in tandem with character motivations, adds depth to both the characters and the narrative as can be seen in the second case study discussed in the article, Eiichiro Oda's One Piece.



*Relevance of colour in Japanese animation*

**Illustrated by Kyra Sparrow**

*Alt text- Illustration of characters from the anime 'Dragon Ball Z' in the upper half. In the lower half, there are characters from the anime 'One Piece' and a large red eye.*

One Piece, Eiichiro Oda's masterpiece, follows Luffy and his quest to conquer the sea. In one of his adventures, Luffy encounters an island that has been catapulted into the sky due to a natural disaster. The denizens of the sky quickly and violently manage to expel the island's original residents, the Shandians, and a character named God Eneru takes control. The Shandians are locked in a never-ending battle with the residents of the sky and God Eneru. The colour palette of Eneru, the god of sky island, is blonde hair and white skin while the Shandians are depicted as people of colour (Fukunaga et al., 1991). On the surface, it seems similar to Dragon Ball Z, yet it is abundantly clear that Eneru is the primary antagonist of the story. The narrative effectively uses colour and depicts a complex story of colonisation and genocide that one does not expect to see in a light-hearted animated show. The narrative is filled with a variety of cultures, authority systems and unique geographical locations that add depth to the characters and affect their motivations (Ramadhan, 2021).

The story of the Shandians and their generations-long battle against the sky dwellers can be understood through Marxian conflict theory (Sanderson, 2007). The conflict theory states that conflict or struggle between individuals and groups who have opposing interests or who are competing for scarce resources is the essence of social life. It further pinpoints power and economic resources as the principal sources of conflict and competition. Conflict and struggle typically result in some individuals and groups dominating and controlling others, and patterns of domination and subordination tend to be self-perpetuating. The Shandians are economically subjugated since being cast out of their homeland while God Eneru and his followers enjoy a lavish, technologically advanced life. Thus, the unending conflict between these unequal classes fits well into the Marxian theory.

However, taking a step ahead from the Marxist perspective, the conflict is not just between two economic classes, but also between two separate races. The Shandians are expelled from their home because their inherent identity is separate from the sky dwellers. It is clear that colour and ethnic identity is a marker of worth, along with

economic resources in this scenario. Thus, this stands as a complex tale of emotion, conflict and colonisation which simply would not exist without the nigh-perfect use of colour in the portrayal of the characters.

It is clear from the above case studies that when it comes to storytelling, colour acts as a double-edged sword. If used in the right context, it can enrich the narrative. However, if used mindlessly, it can lead to distasteful and racist portrayals. A recent example of this was seen in a fashion show hosted by the New York City-based, Fashion Institute of Technology (de Freytas-Tamura, 2020). They faced massive backlash for parading models with racist outfits; models were asked to wear exaggerated plastic ears and red lips. Regardless of the intention, such portrayal can be disrespectful to the audience.

An issue as serious as race cannot be an afterthought, or simply used as an aesthetic in art. Especially while exploring media like Anime, where a multicultural audience is present, it is important to understand the varied implications of colour. The complex themes and stories of Anime, along with the ease of manipulation of colour in an animated medium can lead to an impactful narrative. Thus, while exploring the use of race and colour in media, it is extremely important to understand the context of its creation, portrayal and interpretation.

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# 13 A Colourful Expression: The Impressionists Way.

Author - Varada Sathe

*Impressionism is an art movement characterised by the use of small, thin brushstrokes, the depiction of light in its movement and the use of bright colours. Impressionism originated among a group of Paris-based artists and rose to prominence from the 1860s to the 1890s. This article explores the subjectivity of colour and the emergence of a new colour palette among these artists'. It further looks at Impressionist colour and artists' relationship with it.*

The city of love, Paris, was once a horrendous place with narrow streets and rotting houses. During the Haussmannization of 19th century Paris, new boulevards and facades were built and the Paris we see today was born. It then became an artistic centre that fostered an existence of heightened mental stimulation (Towle, 2019) which led to the rise of new artistic movements. Towards the 1860s the artists from Paris decided to paint in luminescent hues of yellow, green, blue, and violet with amounts of white as opposed to the earthy colours of realism. They painted what they saw and paid more attention to colour. Claude Monet's Impression, "Soleil Levant" (Impression Sunrise) gave this revolutionary movement its name and set the ball rolling (Monet, 1872). As Monet puts it, "Colour is my daylong obsession, joy, and torment" (Clemenceau, 1926).

Apart from the artist's creativity, there are several factors which shape art and paintings. There was an emergence of consumer culture within European life, based on mass-produced goods, which soon became a way of life everywhere. Looking at the historical context, the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw a rise in industrialisation and consequently, mass production. This industrial growth accelerated due to the change in people's association with material goods. The relationship between the symbolic world and material resources started to be mediated

through the market which assumed a central role in socio-cultural reproduction (Magaudda, 2015). It was an ongoing process that reached its zenith with industrialisation and ended with mass consumption. The social theorist Walter Benjamin described the Parisian passages as "Landscapes Of Consumption" (Magaudda, 2015). This shows us how commodities became a quotidian visual scene.

This period also witnessed drastic changes like that of department stores and the display of commodities in an aesthetic way, colourful advertising posters, the pursuit of luxury goods and so on. In these ways, the bourgeois class, along with the nobles, engaged in a materialistic and individualistic attitude that led people to continuously try to display social status (Magaudda, 2015), social distinction or to achieve self-expression through these goods. Therefore, even common people were visually consuming the changes happening around them due to the new technologies and consumer goods, consequently, bright colours had become a central aspect of daily urban life (Kalba, 2017). Anthropologists have argued that colour is not universal, but a culture-specific construct (Young, 2018). Therefore, while acknowledging the artists' artistic ability, these social and cultural changes gave impetus to the creation of the Impressionist style that we know today.

During the premodern and modern periods, dyestuffs were in great demand, and with the growth of the synthetic dye industry, vibrant coloured fabrics became accessible to everyone. The printing industry and lithographers also started using more colour (Kalba, 2017). Along with this, synthetic tube pigments were produced which offered more vibrant shades of yellow, green, blue, and others. New colours like cobalt blue, cerulean blue, cadmium yellow, french ultramarine, and zinc white arose. These tubes of pre-mixed colour were far more convenient and less expensive to use. Such novel colours came into existence to cater to the increasing demand for industrially produced textiles, and not exactly for the artists, but nevertheless, it became a period of immense change for the Impressionists.

Scholar Ralph Kingston in his work ‘Capitalism in the streets’ writes about how the shopkeepers also created their own labels and street signs, laid down their own architectural markers, regulations and code of conduct (Kingston, 2012). The gallery owners, too, put all their energy into enhancing the aesthetic of their shops. They paid utmost attention to their window scapes, an innovative idea in itself that was implemented to lure the passerby and ensure loitering. They displayed their objects in beautiful lighting and tried to mimic the luxurious goods along with fine touches of marble or copper at the frontage. Now, these acts precisely aimed to attract the flaneurs or strollers to dawdle and enter their boutiques. With the advent of marketing of posters, lithographers as mentioned, made vibrant copies which were distributed to advertise. In this way, luminescent playful and vibrant hues shifted from the industry to household goods to build an environment (Kalba, 2017). Moreover, as the capitalist, shopkeepers at the local level played their roles, bright and shifting colours proliferated down to even the lowest classes in the hierarchies. This colour palette was specific to the time that was impacted to a great extent by capitalism. Every culture has a culture-specific aesthetic, as Sally Price states, and consumer culture made this colourful palette its aesthetic (Price, 1989).

Interestingly, through mass consumption and production in the industrial setting, impressionist art became a part of popular culture, or the mass culture (Maric, 2016). This constituted mainly of the lower



*The transition of colour seen in palettes due to impressionism.*

**Illustrated by Fiona Nazareth**

*Alt Text - Illustration of a painter next to his vibrant colour palette.*

classes who were trying to bring in the presence of colour in their life. Impressionists reflected everyday scenes in their paintings as an expression of belongingness to the lower bourgeois or working-class (Venturi, 1941). Impressionist art was initially seen by some as a rebellion against traditional art, and as a degradation of elite culture. It was viewed as being dominated by lower classes, but with the growing industrialised society, the lines between the elite and the lower class became blurred with much scope for individual expression and modernity. Such assimilation of classes led to the “rise of a new class to human consciousness” (Venturi, 1941, p. 41).

French artists such as Claude Monet, Pierre Auguste Renoir, Camille Pissarro, and Edgar Degas were some who formed the backbone of the movement. These Impressionists in their paintings captured bright colours and also depicted the presence of a Parisian culture of consumption. They painted to capture a particular fleeting moment and show the fast pace of urban life by using short and unfinished brushstrokes, however imperfect that may be. For example in Monet’s ‘Arrival Of The Normandy Train’, he combined emerald green, ultramarine,

cobalt blue, and even shades of yellow to create a vibration of colour (Scott, 2020). All of these artists even used darker shades of colour in shadows rather than the conventional use of black. The best example of this can be found in Monet's various paintings of water lilies. Impressionists also used complementary colours together to increase its vitality which is visible in Impression sunrise, where blue and orange are put together (Venturi, 1941). The same was also done with shadows. Whereas, Renoir depicted Parisian modernity and life that was dipped in colour which represents the engagement of the artist with the transforming culture. Each one in their unique way was reappraising this mass-produced colour to give it meaning. Around the 1860s department stores gradually developed and Monet painted 'Women In The Garden' wearing fashionable outfits. The impressionists evidently portrayed the environment and activities of consumption of that time. The Parisian culture of consumption is interlinked with industrially produced colour and both emerged simultaneously, therefore drawing a line becomes difficult. Sometimes the artists were not talking about the social reality directly but were expressing their individual relationship with society through their art (Baker Mohammed Al-Abbas, 2014).

This artistic change was aided by industries as we know it now. Karl Marx's theory of relationship between art and society states that industrial production during a specific time decides the style of art that society creates (Marx, 1859). Art is seen by Marxists as a social construct, and they argue that comprehension of artwork is possible when the conditions of its creation are studied. This perspective can be applied in the analysis of the Impressionist period because the dye industry mass-produced bright colours. These were mass then reproduced through consumer culture which inevitably challenged the already established dominant understandings of realism, abstraction and fantasy (Kalba, 2017). Production creates an objet d'art that creates public with artistic taste who are able to enjoy beauty. Thus, production not only produces an object for the individual but also an individual for the object. Production is at the same time consumption and vice versa. Production leads to consumption and consumption provides for its products and its subjects (Marx, 1859). Therefore the historical context of production may encourage a

better understanding of Impressionist art according to Marxists.

Paris, the leading artistic centre in the 19th century of Europe brought about many social and physical changes. The social environment became more varied, elegant and convenient, transforming it into a modern city (Sutcliffe, 1995). With a capitalist society, colour became more important than ever—for material hedonism, expression and for the generation of new demand for goods (Magaudda, 2015). Vibrant colour in goods was associated with the idea of beauty and expression for common people. But the artists took inspiration from the changing culture of Paris and rebelled against the prevalent dominant style of art, and therefore their art transformed into a movement. Some artists painted urban scenes, some landscapes using the new palette due to the transformation of society. A common attitude by a dozen or so artists towards their art came together and produced what we know as Impressionist art. Colour was central to everything, for expression and also for reflecting the changes of a visually vibrant atmosphere.

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## 14

PAINTING BEYOND  
BOUNDARIES

Author - Mihika Samant

*This paper considers artist Shilo Shiv Suleman and her organisation, the 'Fearless Collectives', artwork through metaphors of greyness, in order to explore how street art becomes an act of reclaiming public spaces and asserting belongingness. This greyness is applied in two primary capacities—the uncertainty of the belongingness of the people it represents and the popular perception of the spaces that they inhabit. Drawing from the connotations of diffusion that the shade carries, the paper assumes the position that it is the amalgamation of high and low culture that underlie its creation and reception that make (the) murals effective methods of retributive expression.*

Founder of the 'Fearless Collective' (an art collective dedicated to the creation of participatory public art), Shilo Shiv Suleman's work is based on liberation from the boundaries that fear instils through misplaced benevolence and threats to safety, and its colonisation of thoughts. Consideration of their art and its explicit activism becomes especially significant in today's context of increasing censorship of thoughts, speech and expression, and the rising fear of political persecution experienced disproportionately, depending on one's intersectional identity in India. While her personal artwork embodies the aesthetic demands of art-proper, and her commitment to magical realism bleeds into her murals, the primary commitment is to community participation. Both enterprises converge, in their purposiveness and commitment to art for social change.

The Collective's murals utilise physical and spatial transgressions to challenge the ideological exclusion of women from the public sphere. Further, considering that this artwork's focus is empowerment, it becomes transgressive in that it seeks individual permission through community involvement rather than legal sanctions from the authorities that deliberately otherise it (DLyima, 2021). This article is divided into three sections:

utilisation of the idea of greyness to outline the themes of belongingness that underlie the Collective's murals, a discussion on public art and its potential for inciting social change, and the classist implications of aestheticisation.

The Collective's work necessitates a discussion on greyness along three dimensions- the most apparent of which is the greyness of urban areas of the 'mainstream', where some of their art appears. Their work aims at change by provoking self-recognition and empathy (Suleman & Esapzai, 2017). This is observable in the 'Essential' series murals in Delhi. Painted collaboratively with the female waste-workers of Delhi, the mural covers a wall along one of the city's busiest streets with representations of four women from the community, one of whom declares, "My Life Matters". These murals draw from the interconnectedness of the ideas of disposability and value, creating space for the expression of the identities of 'non-essential' workers and the systemic oppression that they experience. The second greyness appears in terms of "grey spaces" as conceptualised by Yiftachel (2009), who discusses the intersectional marginalisation that arises from "lying in the shadow". These spaces occupy an elite-dependent (dis)approval, similar to that given to the residents

who inhabit them. Approval experienced, as such, can be considered through both, the ambiguous legality and an ideological otherness that is attributed to those whose contribution to the state is either unrecognised or disvalued. Suleman's evocation of, and challenge to this greyness is observable in the walls that she chooses to 'beautify'. For example, her artwork in Sion Koliwada displays the dichotomy of contamination and reclamation. The connotation of contamination that characterises these spaces as 'an illegal slum settlement' is analogous with the contamination of the status quo that the non-masculine is perceived to bring to the public. This is observable in trends of victim-blaming, wherein the non-masculine is considered to inject criminality into the public through their presence in it, as opposed to the inherent danger of established norms that the murals attempt to challenge.

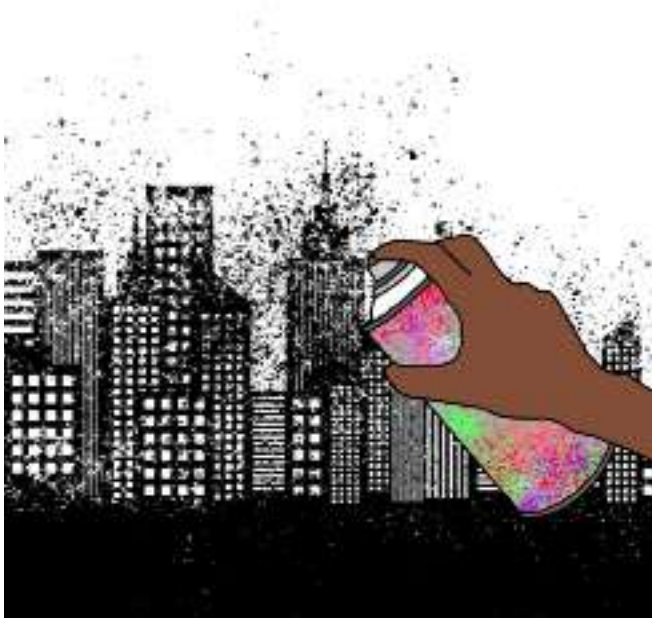
The figures in Suleman's murals are marginalised by their femininity, measured in terms of the degrees of their non-belongingness or non-recognition in public. Urban spaces, therefore, embody greyness not merely in the concrete structures that they house, or in their characteristic routinisation. They

are additionally distinguished by the boundaries of inclusion, privileging some over others, and creating, concurrently, individuals akin to the 'stranger' that Phelan (2001) theorises in their embodiment of inappropriateness. This inappropriate femininity is defined by a commitment to assertive self-expression (of thoughts and movement) and is contrasted against the non-embodiment of the ideal (docile, passive, and private). It arises out of an effort to delegitimise voices through a two-pronged attack of villainisation and infantilisation.

The third greyness challenged is that of the homogeneity of the voices that normally occupy the public sphere. Suleman's emphasis on an intersectional discourse and a participatory effort in the redefinition and reclamation of the public adds variation to this monochrome. By comparing her art to the political messaging and advertising that pervades the public, Suleman alludes to the boundaries that are inherent in the sphere. Such messaging, when juxtaposed with the invisibility of the (critical) feminine, highlights the idea of the feminine as private and non-political. Her intervention then becomes an assertion against both of those implications.

This is visible in the Collective's "Log Kya Kahenge" mural in Lahore, the "Mein Shaheen Hoon" mural painted in Shaheen Bagh during the CAA-NRC protests, and their work on queer masculinities. These artworks assert the non-stereotypically-masculine as public and political. Suleman's emphasis on activist art is based on the amalgamation of a demand for concrete rights and the idea of belongingness conforms to the exercise of cultural citizenship in its effort to expand through everyday 'bottom-up' processes (Rosaldo, 1994). Bolstering this is the fact that street art emerges from an attempt to be heard and to incite a conversation by being an assuming mass in unassuming spaces. The 'Essentials' series, for example, is based on the exclusionary consequences of any kind of formalisation. Situating this critical response on a public wall then proposes an alternate normal.

Suleman's art is participatory and transgressive, not just in that it makes the private public, but also because she involves locals in the process.



*A city skyline in graffiti*

**Illustrated by Britney Dharmai**

*Alt text: Illustration of a hand, using a colourful spray can, creating a city skyline in black.*

Moreover, the emergent vernacularism of the artwork conforms to the communitarianism that foundations public art (Hein, 1996). This is based on the disjuncture between the ideal inclusivity of the public sphere, and its fundamental exclusivity in reality (Mitchell, 1990). If the public is the space in which belongingness emerges, then the legitimacy of that identity is a function of its external recognition. Thus, by voicing complaints of non-belongingness in the public sphere, she engages in a process of reclamation. This challenges the definition of femininity as inherently private, by making femininity public and presenting it in a political format.

The Collective simultaneously creates a discourse through the very presence of their art. Further, by questioning the meaning of the space, it draws the public into that discourse and transforms that public debate into art (Hein, 1996). By virtue of there being a debate, there is then an encroachment into the parameters of belongingness. It leads to a shift from complete exclusion to the occupation of a liminal visibility- visible in her work on queer masculinities. Her art, therefore, becomes an indirect method of resistance, and its efficacy depends largely on its reception.

That is, it could be argued that Suleman's artwork is public in the artists' intentionality, whether that be spatial or ideological. However, its publicness is also dependent upon the readers' interpretation of the same, especially in consideration of whether it leads to a discussion. Here, the reception of the contention made is instrumental in the determination of the value of the murals. This particular feature of the artwork is analogous to conceptualisations of belongingness that provide primacy to the reception of voice in their determination of people's position in society.

It becomes important, with reference to receptivity, to consider that Suleman's art style, beyond its public manifestations in the 'Fearless' movement, falls comfortably in the realm of art-proper. Therefore, while her public art challenges and is collaborative, it is legitimised also by its subscription to standards of high culture (Bourdieu, 2002). This not only stems from her art style but also the general

consensus that her art adds value to the walls that it paints, rather than vandalising them, pointing to the separation between graffiti and its respectable subtype- the mural. Both seek to challenge, but the latter's connotations of aesthetic beautification gives this form of vocalisation and resistance greater legitimacy. These dichotomies of beautification and vandalism, safety and danger, cleanliness and dirt, are not different from those found in the construction of "grey spaces" (Yiftachel, 2009). By entering them and engaging with the 'dirtiness' and danger that is associated with them- the embodiment of all that is low, wrong and immoral- Suleman intervenes with the 'high' in these spaces.

Her murals go beyond stereotypically aestheticising these spaces, instead highlighting how these "blackened" (Ong et al., 1996) spaces and people are more vibrant than depicted by the word 'slum' (Anand, 2012; Echanove & Srivastava, 2009). This is in line with the feminism that underscores her art: bringing the feminine to the streets through a participatory artistic endeavour that highlights the pre-existing presence of women and violence on the streets. Thus, Suleman's conceptualisation of Art is not very different from Rivera's (1932) prescriptions of revolutionary art- reflected in her use of bourgeois techniques to create art that truly liberates, both, from physical violence and the resultant restrictions, and from ideological colonisation of imaginations and possibilities by the patriarchy. The reclamation is in terms of recognition of the existing, as much as it is about redefinition, for the latter (colonisation) cannot exist without referencing the former.

The Collective's murals employ colour as a mechanism to challenge homogeneity, both aesthetic and representative. While this activist effort is a result of its publicness, it is supplemented by the general connotations of aestheticisation that underlie murals and the specific style of Suleman's artwork. This, when considered with the participatory nature of her endeavour, further highlights how belongingness can be challenged from below, but demands of conformity with mainstream ideals hinder the capacity to be heard and considered. During a time of growing concerns regarding the expression and reception of critical voice in the country, these murals, embodying a marriage

between criticality and acceptability, become a powerful tool of challenging an establishment built on repression and exclusion.

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## 15

# Colourblind Casting: The Dangers of Seeing in Monochrome

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*Colour-blind casting, the practice of casting actors for media without consideration for race, has been around since the 1960s. After seeing a rise in popularity in recent years, it has witnessed some criticism due to the perception that it actually hurts the communities it seeks to uplift. This article attempts to examine the practice in tandem with issues such as ethnic and racial identity, intricate storytelling, and the hits and misses in the pieces of media that followed such casting. It also dissects the offered alternative to such casting, that is, Colour or Identity Conscious Casting.*

Colour-blind casting, or the practice of ignoring an actor's race or ethnicity while casting them for a certain character, came into practice a few decades ago in earnest. Recently, however, the idea has faced much censure for not being as progressive as was earlier suggested. This article attempts to revisit the idea, and find out if it is as progressive as it makes itself out to be. But before passing the verdict, one must look at the initial idea behind such casting. While the first documented instance of colour-blind casting was the 1961 'Tannhäuser', with Grace Bumbry becoming the first Black singer to perform at the Bayreuth Festival, it wasn't until 1986 that The Non-Traditional Casting Project was founded to examine problems of racial discrimination in theatre, film and television. The Actors' Equity Association was a co-founder for the same (Jensen, 2009). The motive behind this move was combatting a very real history of under-representation that coloured actors faced on the big and small screens, and on stage.

It is known that people of colour are used as token characters in movies and shows, with minimal, often given one-dimensional roles, with a study concluding that only 26.9% of roles across the top 100 films in 2014 were coded with an ethnicity other than white. This represented no marked change from the statistics of 2007 (Smith et al., 2014). As a solution to this problem, Colour-blind casting aimed

at giving them a wider selection of roles by giving access to characters that were written without regard for race, but were implicitly viewed as being white. It allowed actors to be chosen on the basis of merit and talent, rather than any physical characteristic. After all, race is not the only factor that governs us. Why then, should people of colour not get roles unless their ethnicity is a major part of the character? The Personal History of David Copperfield (2019) that was released recently was lauded for this very feature—if race wasn't written as integral to the character by Dickens, just about anyone could play the role.

The primary objective served by colour-blind casting is to increase employment opportunities for groups of actors who are historically under-represented among the characters of major stage works. When that can be accomplished without undermining the script, it is commendable, but this is more likely to be the case when the race of the original character is irrelevant to the story (Marshall, 2007). Examples of such works are Rodgers and Hammerstein's Cinderella (1997), or The Witcher (2019). What makes such casting possible in the aforementioned works, is that these are fictional characters, and that both the character and the narrative of the story does not centre on real-world race or ethnicity. Other issues are brought into the limelight, like class disparity in 'Cinderella',



*An audition using problematic racial casting.*

**Illustrated by Tanya D'souza**

*Alt Text - Illustration of an audition scene showing a camera projecting the various cast members of different races in front of an audience*

and species-discrimination, specific to the world of 'The Witcher'. Additionally, adapting stories and employing people of colour to play traditionally white roles can also open it to newer audiences from different communities, making the narratives more relevant to them, and reinforcing the universality of human experiences. Even so, not all attempts at this non-traditional casting were well received. *Bridgerton* (2020) was criticised for its flimsy handling of race (Armstead, 2021), and *Hamilton* (2016), for having Black actors portray the very people who once enslaved their ancestors (Reed, 2015). These two fail here because the ethnicity of their characters cannot be isolated from the larger narrative of their stories.

Over the years the practice has also been questioned due to a fundamental flaw in its very ideology: can anyone really leave behind their ethnicity or race, or not be impacted by it? If not, then how can characters be written in that way? When characters played by people of colour are devoid of the cultural aspects of the actor, it ultimately amounts to hollow representation, reinforcing white culture as the

normal, and making non-white ethnicities the exotic 'other'. Moreover, another major problem is that despite the mandate of colour-blind casting in theatre and its general encouragement in Hollywood, according to a study on 2015-16 Broadway, actors of colour were only cast in 9.6% of the roles where race was not germane to the production (Hunt et al., 2018). It means that people of colour are usually only hired to play roles specifically written for their race. On the big screen, only 1.4 out of 10 leads were people of colour. It seems as though, even for the makers of media, being blind to colour is a difficult task. Yet, the conflict between race and media representation does not stop here.

While characters played by people of colour are often culturally whitewashed, there are instances where they are removed from the equation entirely: namely, Hollywood's adaptations from other countries. This phenomenon of reverse colour-blind casting is particularly evident in Asian remakes, where such erasure is very widespread. An example is Scarlett Johansson's role as a Japanese cyborg in 'The Ghost In the Shell' (2017), as is the case with most other horror and thriller movies, the genres most favoured for adaptation. All-white casts replace the original characters, and the actors of the real culture do not get opportunities to be cast; traits of the culture are used only as plot devices or bastardised for humour. These movies often lose the cultural commentary of the original material, and end up watering down to action-packed horror-flicks only. Even the beloved *Godzilla* franchise is, ironically, based on a culturally-specific Japanese creature feature 'Gojira', which was a commentary on nuclear fears brought on by the U.S. dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Bui, 2017).

What then is the correct way for borrowing stories from other cultures? The answer, put in the simplest terms, is context. When the context and commentary of the original media can be preserved while still being able to give a fresh, nuanced perspective, Hollywood could create good adaptations. The most inventive adaptations are often electrifying precisely because of the way race, gender, and other interpersonal mechanisms are employed to force an audience to view a familiar work in a completely new social context (Marshall, 2007).

Interestingly, contextual cues also help us solve the dilemma of what kind of casting is most appropriate for a story. Whether or not the race of the character would impact the storyline, what people of different ethnicities and identities could bring to the table, all of these dimensions could be taken into account when viewing the bigger picture. This is what the newer school of thought suggests—also known as Colour or Identity Conscious Casting.

Here, the writing is not only done by the scriptwriters, but actors themselves are encouraged to bring in parts of their own identity to enrich the script. Jadhvani (2014) urges artists to find intersections and connect their personal, lived experiences to the role they play and the story they create. She further states, Asking three specific questions tends to clarify the storytelling and avoid potential pitfalls when considering casting, race, and the story of the play: 1) What story does this racially conscious casting tell? 2) Is the new story appropriately complex? 3) Do I have the right players to tell this story? (Jadhvani, 2014)

Like Lavina Jadhvani, many other directors and filmmakers have begun to call this “cast designing”, in recognition of how important the process is to media production, and the attention to detail it requires. Moreover, what is of greater importance than reprising traditionally white roles, is the creation of nuanced roles for people of colour, with their perspective taken into view from the beginning. Here, once again, the involvement of the actor in the creative process is fundamental for making narratives that fully explore the character’s identity without running the hazard of becoming stereotypical and offensive.

It is important to recognise even though colour or identity conscious casting is the longer route of the two, taking more effort, research, and creative fuel, helps creators make media that is both genuine and visionary. Its alternative, colour-blind casting, can also be a great vehicle of storytelling as seen through Noma Dumezweni’s portrayal of Hermione Granger in *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (2016), which gave the world a brilliant, intelligent, and Black representation of the beloved children’s character. Yet, dismissing or ‘not seeing’ race can often lead to

more erasure than support of communities of colour. Moreover, it is evident from the analysis above that the colour-blind approach, within itself, is not at all sufficient to be the future of racially inclusive casting.

Thus, at least until biases in writing and casting are removed enough that actors of colour are not at an automatic disadvantage for the majority of the available roles, one of the best solutions is a blend of colour-blind and colour-conscious casting. But presiding over both these methods is the readiness to include opinions of the cultures in question, and of the actors and other creative personnel involved in the process of media-creation. Of course, this transition will not be easy, and will require many candid conversations on race, appropriation, and freedom of expression to be able to fully hone the idea. The director of *The Personal History of David Copperfield*, Armando Iannucci commented on his decision of employing colour-blind casting for making the Dickens’ adaptation by stating that he wanted “the cast to be much more representative of what London looks like now” (Hackett, 2020). Similarly, diversity in casting, either colour-conscious or colour-blind, should not be simply seen as a way of making ‘politically correct’ stories, but narratives that truthfully represent the world around us and its teeming populace. .

Film-making, ultimately, is the art of storytelling, and the best stories can only be made when there is real collaboration and nurturing of creativity, and where voices everywhere are welcome to contribute. Rather than ethnicity being erased or made the only dimension to weigh actors and characters by, it can become the mode of enrichment to create narratives that truly reflect the complexity and vibrancy of the human experience.

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# 16 The (Fair)ness in what we see

Author - Lavanya Jain

*While India and its media raise support for the Black Lives Matter Movement, one's attention should be drawn to the hypocrisy prevalent within the country itself. Colourism and the presumed superiority of fair skin has been deep-rooted in Indian society and the same is reflected in media, particularly cinema. Through decades, protagonists in cinema and television have been portrayed with fair skin and antagonists or villains with dusky skin colour, a practice that continues till this day. The aim of this article is to make the reader realise the extent of Colourism propagated through modern-day cinema.*

“It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences” (Lorde & Clarke, 2007). These words sum up why we misinterpret diversity as a liability, instead of as an asset. India, a land that celebrates ‘Unity in Diversity’ ironically finds itself amidst discrimination on the very attribute it’s known for. Research conducted by the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad in 2018 concluded that there is a large variation in skin colour in India, genetic as well as environmental factors play a huge role in determining it (Prasad, 2018). Yet the dominant skin colour portrayed on the screens of Indian Cinema is fair skin, ignoring the racial diversity of society. India was never a homogenous nation but the British colonial rule had a huge impact in establishing the roots of Colourism in India. They discriminated amongst lighter and dusky-skinned Indians on the grounds of employment, social security benefits and basic civil rights (Mishra, 2015).

Obsession with fair skin has been evident in different aspects of society and it doesn’t cease, it repeatedly is reinforced by different agents. The Indian film industry is one of the largest in the world, producing

the most number of films in a year (Gill, 2018). It not only comprises of Bollywood (the Hindi film industry) but also regional cinema. Disregarding people with dusky skin colour, either by not employing such actors or casting them exclusively for comical and negative roles, has been a part and parcel of the industry for decades. However, why does the audience fail to recognize and point out this huge gap in the visual content that is consumed nearly everyday?

Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) by Katz, Blumer and Gurevitch (1974) can be useful in understanding the reason behind the same. This theory emphasises the active role that the audience plays in terms of their film choices and subsequent interpretations. It categorises the goals of media from the perspective of the audience into five uses: education, identifying with the character, entertainment, social interaction and escape from reality (Ruggiero, 2000). The most prominent is entertainment. Thus, the ethics of representation and authenticity is at the periphery of the audience’s attention. But films and their characters are extremely influential, often moulding the audience’s behaviours and attitudes. Therefore, the stories told and their

representation of characters have a significant role in shaping the judgement of the masses.

Nandita Das, a renowned actress and filmmaker, in a documentary titled ‘Shades’ by Mahesvari Autar, states that, despite 90% of women in India being dusky, they are represented exactly the opposite in films. Similarly, Nawazuddin Siddiqui in one of his interviews initiated a conversation by asking, “Name one dusky-skinned superstar in Bollywood” (Jha, 2020). He recollects the struggles he and many other actors have had to face because of their skin colour, in the film industry. Lack of employment opportunities is just one of the issues faced by such actors. Typecasting, abuse and workplace harassment are the concerns that rarely get any attention. In the cases where the victim makes an attempt to file a complaint against the injustice towards them, influential people leave no stone unturned in silencing their voice.

However, this is not an issue faced by the current generation alone; India has a long history of colourism on and off-screen. Komal Kaur Dhillon (2015) in ‘Brown Skin, White Dreams: Pigmentocracy in India’ states that, Indian cinema, especially Bollywood’s attempts to homogenise their storylines and faces of the film to that of Hollywood, robs them of the sensitivity to the geographical and racial differences. Scholars like Richard Dyer and Brian Winston trace back the origin of this discrimination to film technology, as the standard skin tone used by photographers didn’t accommodate any other skin tone but Caucasian. This and the subsequent lack of models of dusky skin tone resulted in an inherent hindrance to inclusion (Venkiteswaran, 2020). Furthermore, Peters (2021) in ‘Colourism, Casteism and Gentrification in Bollywood’ draws the reader’s attention to the fact that despite the mention of Gods, Goddesses and mythological characters of dusky skin in the scriptures and hymns, popular media including films and TV serials represent them contrarily. Filmmakers and producers in cinema are people with agency, and how they represent a certain group of society on-screen aids in framing the popular notion.

Often the only medium that provides knowledge about a cultural group to another, apart from literature, is media. They neither attempt nor are exposed to other secondary sources to confirm

their assumptions about the other group. Symbolic interactionism states that our social interactions are determined by the assumptions we tend to create regarding others. Therefore, more than the objective reality, our interpretation of the situation forms our opinions about a certain person, group, or event (Cole, 2019). Hence for the audience, the stereotyped image of the concerned group portrayed in media becomes popular, instead of an accurate version. The ability of the audience to differentiate between reality and false representation becomes negligible as they are exposed to only one aspect of a certain group. Derogatory remarks, bullying, and stereotypes directed at a section of society are considered part of everyday conversations; a subsequent behaviour proposed by the above theory is a result of the unchecked representations and assumptions. The exclusion of those from a medium that represents their stories gives rise to ignorance on the part of the ones who create and view such content. For example, the controversy last year around the racist lyrics of ‘Beyonce Sharma Jayegi’ (due to the backlash the title was changed later to ‘Duniya Sharma Jayegi’) from a mainstream Bollywood film made us question the casual discriminatory remarks we are served in the name of entertainment. The lyrics, like many



*Casting practices in cinema based on colour*

**Illustrated by Nirali Dalvi**

*Alt text- Illustration of a fair actress in black gown walking down the red carpet surrounded by fans and across her a dark skinned girl looking at herself in the mirror crying.*

other songs, glorified 'goriya', essentially a girl with fair skin, at the bargain of inferior treatment to girls with other skin tones. Such media content not only disrespects the character of the film but also introduces models of such problematic behaviour towards a person of colour.

One of the signs of awareness amongst the audience is the instances of them pointing out the issue of the 'brown face' in Bollywood. Instead of casting an actor with the skin tone that is required of the character, filmmakers cast famous actors with much lighter skin tones and use cosmetic products that are meant for darker skin tones, appropriating their skin tone to that of the character's. Recent examples of the same are Hrithik Roshan in *Super 30*, Samantha Prabhu in *Family Man* and Bhumi Pednekar in *Bala*. Though these films and series are much celebrated, they also faced backlash for their racist portrayal of darker-skinned people (Sarkar, 2020). When a few celebrities supported the Black Lives Matter movement, Twitter was flooded with comments on the hypocrisy of these actors, since they have endorsed skin lightening products in the past. Being a public figure, along with fame, an actor is also endowed with accountability and responsibility. The content of such advertisements indicates that success, a suitable partner, or respect in society can be achieved only by 'fairness'. These advertisements have created an opportunity for the beauty industry to be one of the most profitable, but they also have adversely affected the confidence of young minds. The unreal beauty standards advertised by actors the audience looks up to, persuade the masses that being fair is a necessity for success.

The question then remains, how far have we come in this battle against Colourism in Indian cinema? While conversations and confessions about personal experiences of Colourism have increased, they have not been heard enough. The assumed superiority of fair skin colour has been so deeply internalised through the generations that a new wave of change and inclusion is emerging and spreading, but at a rather slow pace. The following words of Nandita Das establish that change is plausible if attempts are being made towards it, "Just as stereotypes get formed because of images, they can also be broken by them" (Singh, 2019).

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## 17

# The Manifestation of Misogynoir in Body Image

Author - Salonee Kumar

*In a world of colour, our perception of colour sets us worlds apart. Social facts like Eurocentrism have whitewashed our belief systems by reinforcing Western beauty standards as the global norm. The systemic alienation of women of colour has muffled their voices and left their stories untold. This article lies at the intersection of sociology, psychology, and history to underscore the dichotomy between the treatment of fuller black and slimmer white bodies. Additionally, it draws on body neutrality and policy changes in the media to empower marginalised women to reclaim their bodily autonomy.*

In contemporary society, bodies have existed and been constructed within sociocultural contexts, practises, and discourses. They are politically crafted within fields of inequality; symbolic interactionism deduces why bodily features have become determinants of the status quo. However, this ideology often neglects intersectionality. Initially defined by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw as the oppression black women face (Asare, 2020), intersectionality has since become an umbrella term for overlapping identities: gender, sexual orientation, class, caste, and race. Moya Bailey coined the term misogynoir—historical anti-black misogyny (Bailey, 2018)—to focus on the maltreatment black women endure. Such devaluation can be traced back to slavery in the United States of America.

During the colonial period, the enslaved body in plantation communities was biddable and regulated by authoritarian mechanisms and controls. Enslaved women effectively had three bodies. Firstly, as a site of domination that could be acted upon by their masters, they were invariably victims of sexual and physical violence. Slaveholders applied principles of restraint and denied them dignity by weaponising their “inherent” physical strength and engaged them to work in farms, as agriculture was a profitable and taxable profession. Meanwhile, their white female counterparts who were homemakers remained untaxed (Camp, 2005). These power

dynamics make us cognisant of the second body: the subjective experiences of women of colour in a white world. Bondwomen resisted tyranny by making their bodies a source of gratification and not mortification. Thus, their rebellious third body equipped them to wear makeup and dresses to illicit parties (Camp, 2005).

Fashion frequently facilitates political development; an apt parallel could be African women wearing *kanga* and *kitenge* fabrics with motifs to raise awareness about educating girls, countering malnutrition, voting, and other impactful endeavours. Meanwhile, white abolitionists counterproductively employed graphic images of the exploited black female body to garner support for their antislavery cause (Hughes, 2020). Ethnocentrism was rampant, as indicated by European travellers’ journal entries. They dubbed African women’s exposed breasts as ‘dugs’: large and droopy “like the udder of a goat”. In doing so, they symbolised an entire continent’s presumed savagery and inferiority. A racialised-gendered body expectation emerged from American chattel slavery that typecast black women as mammies to nurture children from white families (Hughes, 2020). The white man painted a picture of mammies as emotional and physical care providers, which reeked of benevolent sexism and racism.

Even though cultural buffers exclude black women

from the thin ideal, the mammification of their bodies denies them the socioeconomic privileges that thinness warrants. Sociologists argue that ‘fat talk’ shapes fat people’s identities by providing them with social possibilities instead of the physical benefits of dieting. It is estimated that 4 in 5 African-American women are overweight or obese (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Clothing companies have exacerbated their quandaries by creating disparate line-ups for ‘plus-sized women’; this connotes that fatness is not ‘normal-sized’. Healthism is fatphobia disguised as concern, where the onus of fitness is on people and not the social systems that actively discriminate against them. Slenderness is directly associated with sexual desirability, employability, social approval, and access to medical services and public transportation. Therefore, women hold themselves to unviable beauty standards to avoid being labelled anomalies; they view editing applications, crash diets, corsets, appetite-curbng pills, foot-binding, whitening creams, and other value-rational actions as requisite behaviours.

Unfortunately, these activities could have detrimental costs like body dysmorphia or disordered eating. Sociologist Bryan Turner refers to this as “cultural indications of the problem of control” (Gremillion, 2005). Cross-cultural differences delay treatment, as indicated by the stereotype that eating disorders are a “white woman’s affliction” (Joshi, 2021). Black women consistently renegotiate the boundaries of the self and surveillance by manipulating food, whether consciously or unconsciously. They might be heavier because of emotional or compulsive eating to cope with the state-sanctioned discrimination against them (Hughes, 2020). It is noteworthy that African-American girls might refuse to diet, thus deviating from the dominant messages about smaller body sizes. Instead, they draw on family and ancestral traditions to create flexible styles of self-presentation that accommodate a range of sizes (Gremillion, 2005).

A study by Massara on Puerto Rican women understood weight in non-medical terms. Weight gain after marriage signalled “tranquillity, good appetite, and health”; this communicated that fat



*Women with different body types are often prisoners of a system perpetuating Eurocentric beauty standards.*

**Illustrated by Tanya D'souza**

*Alt text: Illustration of women of colour with different body types. They are standing on a large weighing scale, to which their ankles are chained.*

women were “good wives and mothers”. Like African women, they overate to manage stress, as it substituted for expressing negative feelings in the presence of family members (Gremillion, 2005). Since black communities supposedly accept larger bodies (BBC, 2021), there has been an erasure of black women’s pioneering efforts in feminist movements concerning the body. Moya Bailey, a queer African academic referenced earlier, expressed her disappointment at not being credited for coining the phrase ‘misogynoir’ (Bailey, 2018). Reconceptualising body image for black women could reinstate culturally appropriate standards. Benedict Anderson’s idea of a shared community—a mutual understanding based on similar backgrounds, interests, and history—could disseminate the message of unity.

Characteristics such as hair and skin tone could receive priority over traditional body shape concerns analogous with white women (Awad et al., 2014). Ironically, white women have been cosplaying as black women on social media (Karimi, 2021) through box braids and excessive

tanning. Infamously dubbed ‘blackfishing’, this implies the temporary appropriation of black culture without fearing its consequent bigotry. A modern form of blackface, blackfishing creates a paradox of voluntarily emulating aesthetics for oneself but villainising it for others. Kylie Jenner, Ariana Grande, and Iggy Azalea are celebrities who have been called out for furthering racial ambiguity. There is a need to eliminate the fetishisation of Afro-centric features. The ‘Black is Beautiful’ movement, introduced in 2016, celebrates these attributes; however, its premise has been derived from body positivity.

Since the 1960s, fat acceptance has aimed to eradicate anti-fat biases. The revolution has taken on a new form through body positivity; ‘all bodies are beautiful’ is a body positive slogan gleaned from particular propositions. Firstly, individuals are reduced solely to their looks. Secondly, beauty is the social currency to seek admiration. Despite the philosophy being a prominent hashtag on Instagram and routinely featuring in women’s magazines, it might not be as liberating as it sounds. Celebrating bodily aesthetics makes bodies a site of attraction or disapproval for others (Leboeuf, 2019) or oneself. Lastly, cisgender, heterosexual, and non-disabled slim women have claimed space in the body positivity movement. This occurs despite body confidence being created to aid their body image issues, as explained by Ambar Driscoll, an English model. Even thin women might face societal pressure and have bodily insecurities which require healing. However, they should acknowledge that they do not face systemic subjugation because of their body size and amplify the voices of those who do.

The aforementioned reform movements have continually shaped the theoretical epitome of perfection through a heuristic device called the ideal type (Dillon, 2014). Our physiques have become a trend, shifting from the Tumblr ‘thinspo’ in 2014 to ‘thicness’ in 2021. In a world where natural functions like menstruation or genetic predispositions such as hip dips are perceived negatively, women might experience bodily alienation—a term proposed by Simone de Beauvoir (Leboeuf, 2019). Judgments weigh more heavily

on women than the functions themselves, leading to estrangement from their bodies. They could benefit from body neutral affirmations and undertake a marked shift from body positivity to neutrality. Body neutrality stresses respect for oneself without focusing on appearances but rather acknowledging the body’s essential functions—breathing, moving, and so on. Though our bodies are closely tied to our emotions, developing a neutral stance—not loving or hating them—could repair the damage caused by toxic positivity and black-and-white messaging.

Negotiating a fat identity as a black woman often entails refusing body positivity and mainstream tropes of health and beauty (Gremillion, 2005). Anti-racism education must explore the manifestation and mitigation of misogynoir to dismantle it. Even within activist spaces, there is a need to lessen the unreasonable expectations of black women to know all, do all, and solve all; this is internalised misogynoir in action. The hashtag #SayHerName commenced in 2014 to highlight how stories of black women, including transgender women, go overlooked, unnoticed, and untold (Asare, 2020). Transmisogynoir—misogynoir against transgender women—underscores the hyperfeminisation and policing of black transgender women’s bodies, especially ones with masculine features. Despite it being a prevalent issue, little research has been conducted on transmisogynoir. Policy changes in various social spheres are the need of the hour.

The media could pave the way for an inclusive future by reducing, if not discontinuing, photo enhancing, harsh lighting, and other morphing techniques that portray imagined women as paragons (Abdul-Jabbar, 2015). Changes in multimedia corporations’ policies to market authenticity and represent full-figured and transgender women of colour in advertisements, movies, and music videos could prove beneficial. For instance, Fenty, the makeup brand by Rihanna, an American singer, includes 50 shades of skin tones in its makeup range. Alternatively, awareness of racial differences could start at the grassroots level. Children’s toys like Barbie personify femininity and consumerism through Barbie’s thin frame, straight hair, and clear skin. An Afro-Indigenous (African-American and Native American) activist, Amber Starks, stated that social



media conditions us to think of non-straight hair as unrepresentable, wild, and militant (Tedx Talks, 2015). The introduction of Barbie dolls with varied skin tones, hair textures, and body types could prevent the internalisation of Western beauty norms at a young age.

In this manner, it is critical to acknowledge and demolish hierarchies of power and exclusion. Progressive belief systems could aid in overhauling current public policies and social perceptions regarding the same. The annihilation of misogynoir necessitates the collapse of all oppressive strategies and promotes those that foster egalitarianism. Therefore, deconstructing the othering of ethnic minorities and empowering them to rewrite their narrative is pivotal in creating cross-cultural safe spaces that amplify their voices and destigmatise body sizes on a global scale.

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# 18 Toys R Us (Literally) - Exploring Racism and Race Conceptualisation Through Toys

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*Through the process of socialisation, children are initiated into understanding and engaging with the society around them. Parents' selection of toys assists in the development of a child's conception of the society they live in. Toys act as agents of socialisation by, more often than not, representing the attitudes and beliefs of the dominant group. This article aims to study the role of colours in toys on gender socialisation and race conceptualisation by inspecting toys and their relation to social behaviour.*

The development of a child as a person fit to live in society is done through the process of socialisation. Socialisation is a life process learnt through different upward stages (Pescaru, 2018). It is through socialisation that values, beliefs and norms are transmitted in a society (Thompson, 1994). By way of this social course, a child is taught much of how to understand the society that they are a part of. Being the main source of primary socialisation, the family unit teaches the norms of acceptable behaviour, which are then internalised. Primary socialisation sets most of the social framework in shaping children's perception of future interactions. Parents' toy selections assist in this process, as the child is generally in frequent contact with their toys.

Toys, the inanimate objects used by children to play with, are believed to reflect the reality of the world (Dostál, 2015). Acting as companions, these toys, much like people, have identities assigned to them, leading to them occupying an interactive role in the child's life (Ball, 1967). The imputed identity forms the basis of the kind of interaction and expectation from society the child has, similar to that from the toy. For adults, an inanimate object might be just that, but toys form a growing child's social environment. Therefore, this article will look at toys, especially dolls, as agents of socialisation, rather than passive articles.

Conventionally, toys have represented only a portion of the reality seen around, i.e., the everyday reality of the dominant group. At the very least, they represent the attitude of the hegemonic class. It is observed that 'non-white' dolls are underrepresented in comparison to their white counterparts; further, discrepancies arise with unrealistic representations of gender, disproportional representation of race and occupation (Ball, 1967). The factors that lead to underrepresentation of such dolls specifically are also the same socio-political factors that lead to exclusion of minority groups (Chin, 1999). In some cases, toys act as an expression of ethnic prejudice. To point out the offensive toys acceptable in the history of America, an exhibition was held at The Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies from April 17 to October 13, 1990. In trying to show the 150 year progress in American toys, mechanical toys and card games namely "Dapper Dan the Coon Jigger", "Hopping Nutty Mad Indian", "Paddy and the Pig", and "The New Game of Ah Sin the Heathen Chinese" represented the derogatory stereotypes propagated by White individuals. As the museum director of the exhibition, Gail Stern, attributed this to the understanding that the power of White men was threatened by the influx of immigration and end of slavery which materialised into racist imagery in form of toys (Stern, n.d., as cited in Dabney, 1990). Another good example is 'Always Did 'Spise a

Mule' where a grossly represented Black child riding a mule was thrown head first onto the ground. While a White child would play this violent game for fun, it ultimately created a tense environment for Black children, where violence against them was not only acceptable but considered humorous as well (Dabney, 1990). Accurate representations of ethnicity and race through toys have always been rare, thus playing into the prejudices and stereotypes that a White-dominated society propagates.

Children's perception of the world and their resultant relationship with its constituents can be accounted for through dolls. Which is why, for them to develop a positive attitude towards social groups other than their own, they need to be exposed to "experiences, information and images about each cultural group" so as to develop an understanding (Wakim et al., 1982, p. 139). Young children are susceptible to internalising stereotypes they learn in imagery transmitted through any form of media;

eventually toys result in a negative outlook towards a particular group (Wakim et al., 1982, p. 139). This is because children learn from various sources, even as seemingly vague as food packaging, even if these sources are not necessarily trying to teach them anything in particular. If most of these sources transmit a negative attitude towards a social group then naturally, children will acquire unfavourable and inaccurate stereotypes. It is safe to say in the Indian context as well, Western dolls tend to occupy a prominent place. They are not representative of the variety of brown skin tones found in the country. Further, Indian toy manufacturers comprise only 20% of all the manufactures in the Indian toy market (Economic Services Group National Productivity Council, 2017), which means a large portion of the demand is met by imports. In the absence of representative skin tones, the likelihood of considering white dolls superior to non-white dolls increases. The importance of representation in toys is best summed up by Yla Eason, the founder of Olmec Toys (formerly the largest minority owned company in the United States), mentions on the packaging of her products, "Our children gain a sense of self-importance through toys. So we make them look like them."

Furthermore, toys play a significant role in gender socialisation. Children's colour preferences are very much conducive to the gendered environment they grow up in. Babies are not only assigned gender at birth but also a colour that is considered appropriate for their sex. There is a clear gender binary in toys generally represented through the colours pink and blue, in the form of Barbie dolls and princesses in the former colour, and trucks and superheroes in the latter. Thus, it can be said that toys enhance the gendering of colours. Stereotypes based on gender values are assigned to the colours chosen to represent the two main sexes. Girls and boys are already in possession of different gendered toys even before they are old enough to show interest in material objects (Pomerleau et al., 1990, p. 361). Along with this, popular Western dolls, like Barbie, are influential in shaping the understanding of race and skin colours to children. Mattel Toys (India) Pvt Ltd occupies a leading position in toy production and distribution in the country. The Barbie brand alone contributes more than 80% of Mattel's profit



*The lack of representation of different ethnic identities in dolls.*

**Illustrated by Britney Dharmai**

*Alt Text - Illustration of dolls of different skin colours wearing different ethnic clothing are shown below a "dolls for sale" banner. A finger points towards the blonde-haired, blue eyed doll wearing a dress.*

(Economic Services Group National Productivity Council, 2017).

In 1968, Barbie released one of its first black dolls in support of equal rights, and many others since then. These dolls try to address the problem of representation by including racialized markers of facial features in its design, ignoring the larger social problem of racism at play (Chin, 1999). This is one reason why Mattel Inc. and its Barbie dolls have been the object of extensive critique in feminist studies. Using Weber's (1983) framework of ideal type to examine Barbie, one can look at the doll as a heuristic device. Almost all Barbie dolls have Eurocentric features that are conventionally pretty and attractive, with light skin, long legs, slim bodies and big eyes. Western notions of beauty and what is considered appealing are clearly reflected in this manufactured doll and they represent unrealistic ideals of female physique and beauty. It is true that recently there have been efforts to make Barbie more inclusive and representative of the diversity around the world with instances of incorporation of Shani dolls, the Maya Angelou doll, and a partnership with the non-profit organisation Black Girl Code. This point is further explained by Shu, who states that while Mattel has attempted to create more diversity in Barbie dolls, it is limited to different clothes and accessories that are associated with different occupations and skin colours (Seah, 2019).

The under-representation of Black, Indigenous, (and) People of Colour (BIPOC) dolls can lead to the feeling of Otherness, a concept furthered by Said in *Orientalism* (1978). Otherness refers to a hegemonic group constructing the image of the subordinated group in a way that portrays them as inferior and without agency. It is a power relationship which forms much of the social reality in favour of the not-other group. It is a cultural and political fact. This relationship can be seen through toys, for example Jim Crow's Museum of Racist Memorabilia at Ferris State University (Michigan, USA) holds many toys and games, which includes grossly caricatured imagery of African-Americans. When children play these games, its graphics act as effective vehicles in cementing stereotypes and prejudice. The text in these games promotes the idea of Black people being inherently deviant, lazy, etc. This leads to the

alienation of black children. Evidence for this came in through the famous 'Clark doll experiments' or 'doll studies' conducted by Clark and Clark from 1939 to 1940, which showed internalised 'self-hatred' and low self-esteem in Black children. When Clark asked African-American children to show dolls that looked most like them when having to choose between a white doll and a black doll, some children were emotionally distressed to choose the black doll (Clark & Clark, 1950). This demonstrates the prominent feeling of otherness.

One of the first gifts given to a child is a toy. Duplinský (1993) points out that in 40% of cases it is the parents buying the toys to keep the children entertained (Dostál, 2015). The prevailing beliefs of racism reflected through objects such as toys, ultimately contribute in reinforcing them for children, who are impressionable. Mass-produced toys sold across the world reveal a great deal on what is considered 'marketable', so naturally, it reflects the attitude of the dominant-hegemonic group which is further amplified by globalisation. While toy companies today are trying to be more inclusive in terms of representing different cultures and ethnicities through their dolls, it is done with a capitalistic view of the final motive to increase sales, rather than on the principle of inclusion. It is necessary to make representative toys that positively and accurately represent people from all sections of society, for children to have a more tolerant outlook.

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# 19 Whitewashing the rainbow

Author - Aryan Mahajan

*LGBTQIA+ is an ever-growing and evolving term, which includes people of all sexualities, sexual orientations and gender identities. The community is extremely diverse, with people belonging to different races and ethnicities. This article highlights the importance of acknowledging intersectionality between race and queerness and how it reflects American norms. It focuses on the Stonewall Riots of 1969 and the Orlando shooting of 2016, two significant events for the LGBTQIA+ community, which have been completely whitewashed. It also aims to study the intersectionality between caste and queerness in the context of India.*

“Notice what it’s all about. Being able to fit into the straight, white world and embody the American dream. We don’t have access to that dream, and it’s not because of ability, trust me.”

As a black transgender woman, Mother Blanca’s words from the Netflix show *Pose*, point at her experience with the exclusion that the LGBTQIA+ individuals of colour face in society (Falchuk et al., 2018). She points out that they cannot fulfil their dreams, not due to lack of ability, but because of the intersection of their identities, i.e., being black and queer.

The term queer, once considered a pejorative term, now reclaimed by members of the LGBTQIA+ community, is an adjective used by individuals whose sexual orientation is not exclusively heterosexual (GLAAD, 2021). Queer theory is “not a homogeneous or systematic school of thought, but a mixture of studies that focus critically on heteronormativity, i.e., those institutions, structures, relations and acts that support heterosexuality as a uniform, natural, and all-embracing primordial sexuality” (Rosenberg 2008). Another identity shaping the experience of individuals is race. Critical race theory, describes “the relationship between ostensibly race-neutral ideals, like ‘the rule of law’,

‘merit’, ‘equal protection’, and the structure of white supremacy and racism” (Parker, 1999).

To understand how the two identities interact with each other, and impact the everyday experiences of an individual in society, we need to understand the theory of intersectionality. According to this theory (Meyer, 2012), institutional power structures like race, gender identity, sexuality, and sexual orientation form an individual’s relationships with the rest of society and societal structures. This reinforces certain systems, like oppression.

While the LGBTQIA+ community is still fighting for inclusion and acceptance, a majority of the community is being overlooked. This includes LGBTQIA+ individuals of colour. Their very existence and active participation are subjected to ignorance and erasure. In 2017, the Philadelphia campaign group ‘More Color More Pride’ added two new stripes of black and brown to the Pride flag, to include people of colour (Deane, 2021). However, just the addition of the two stripes does not



*The whiteness of the LGBTQ+ community*

**Illustrated by Nirali Dalvi**

*Alt text- Illustration of the silhouette of Marsha P. Johnson on a rainbow background. In the lower right corner, a brush is covering the image in white paint.*

guarantee acceptance, inclusion, and equal rights. A third of LGBTQIA+ Americans identify as being a person of colour, and many live in states which do not recognise their families, leading to increased taxes and healthcare costs. 55% of Native American LGBTQIA+ people are living in poverty, along with 34% of black trans people. The percentage of black LGBTQIA+ people who are unemployed is nearly twice that of the general unemployed population. Half as many have a university education as the general population (Movement Advancement Project & Center for American Progress, 2015).

Despite the adverse conditions of queer people of colour in the USA, they have been misrepresented, and their role in the LGBTQIA+ rights movement is either completely ignored or simply whitewashed. This phenomenon was widely acknowledged when in 2019, Merriam Webster dictionary added whitewashing to the list of 'words we are watching'. Whitewashing was seen in a newer sense as 'the act of covering up or altering facts, information, and/or media in a way that favours, features, or caters to white people'. There have been numerous incidents of atrocities against LGBTQIA+ individuals of

colour which have completely been glossed over and altered.

In the 1950s and 60s, the LGBTQIA+ community did not have social acceptance; hence many members of the community were living a life that lacked respect and dignity. This ultimately culminated in the Stonewall Riots of 1969 which provided a grounding for what the queer movement has become today. The Stonewall Inn in New York, a safe space for members of the LGBTQIA+ community, was raided by the police which led to the beginning of the riots on June, 28th, 1969 (Stageman, 2017). One of the most prominent figures of the movement was Marsha P. Johnson, a black transgender drag queen. According to Stageman (2017), many sources say that it was Marsha who started the riots. Besides her, another prominent figure was Sylvia Rivera, an individual of strong Latinx heritage. Many like them, queer, transgender, people of colour were at the forefront of the riot. Their identities as transgender women of colour combined with their radical activism and low-income status led them to be ignored by the mainstream press and media representation (Terry, 2014). One example of this is in Roland Emmerich's film 'Stonewall' (Emmerich, 2015). The film faced criticism for depicting a white gay cisgender male at the forefront of the riots.

Since several people involved with the riots were People Of Colour (POC), ones going outside the gender norms, or both, it is important to discuss the intersectionality of race and gender, as race and gender are identities that cannot be separated (Stageman, 2017). According to queer theory, identities are not natural or normal but are performative i.e., an identity comes to be stable only after the repetition of certain tasks and actions (Taylor, 2013). Considering identities as being natural, confines people into certain boxes. Individuals who do not follow those parameters are treated differently. Stereotypes about certain groups go on to erase a person's identity; if they step out of these boundaries, they are shunned. In the context of race, we can take the example of black men, who are stereotyped as being heterosexual and hypermasculine. Hence if someone is black and gay, or portrays feminine traits, they would be shunned. This also gives us an understanding as to why there was an erasure of trans women as well as femme



individuals of colour from the mainstream press, as well as in the depiction and representation of the riots.

Similarly, 90 per cent of victims of the Orlando Shooting, a tragedy at a gay nightclub that killed 49 and wounded 53 in 2016, were of Latinx descent. While addressing the crime, politicians in the USA constantly refrained from mentioning the ethnicity of the victims. A study by Ramirez et al. (2017) investigated narratives from about 94 LGBTQIA+ people of colour about the tragedy. The responses collected revealed a few major themes. One was the commonness of violence against LGBTQIA+ individuals of colour. Many individuals within the LGBTQIA+ spectrum were more vulnerable to violence, especially if they were people of colour as compared to their white counterparts. Another theme in the study was the lack of intersectionality by the media and participants' own communities. Participants showed extreme frustration and agitation at the lack of intersectional focus of the event. In various media, even press releases by the US president's press secretary, acknowledgement of intersectional identities i.e., of race/ethnicity, sexuality, and gender were ignored. A very simplistic view of the event was portrayed by the media. Even white LGBTQIA+ individuals failed to acknowledge the presence of multiple identities. Participants felt isolated and excluded from their own crisis. Even though participants identified with the victims, they were able to acknowledge the intersectionality in their own community i.e., they recognised that the experiences of all LGBTQIA+ people of colour are different (Ramirez et al., 2017).

According to Bhopal (2020), there is little or no impetus in addressing racial inequalities in white-only spaces. In such spaces, white privilege and gender-based privilege are often witnessed together, as inequality cannot be perceived as single or universal. Within gender/sexuality-based communities like the LGBTQIA+ community, where it is more common to see a white person as LGBTQIA+, it is extremely important to emphasise the intersectionality between race, gender, and sexuality (Stageman, 2017). It is important because LGBTQIA+ individuals of colour face a "fluid and contextual sexualisation of race and a racialisation of sexuality, rather than with

each-ism individually" (Narváez et al., 2009, p. 65). One example of this 'sexualisation of race' is the fetishisation of black and brown queer bodies.

Drawing parallels to the USA, it is important we also talk about intersectionality and caste dynamics within India. According to Patil and Vikas (2020), the LGBTQIA+ movement in India is predominantly represented by the Savarna voices; and the saviour complex in Savarna queers appropriates Dalit queer voices. Therefore, Dalit LGBTQIA+ individuals are sidelined and their suppression continues. Queer spaces are not free from caste identities, which one can easily observe by simply looking at representation in mainstream media and culture. It is important to acknowledge and understand why Dalit Bahujan queer voices are suppressed (Patil & Vikas, 2020). Since these spaces are dominated by upper-caste queer individuals, the language used caters to upper-caste identity. Savarnas are more accepting of queer identities than caste identities. Therefore, many Dalit Bahujan queer individuals are able to embrace their queer identity but not their caste identity (Patil & Vikas, 2020). It is important to understand the intersection of caste and sexual orientation/gender identity, as it impacts the lives of many living in this country.

Thus, while exploring queer spaces across nations and societies, it is necessary to identify different minority identities like POC and queer, Dalit and queer, tribal and queer, Muslim and queer, differently-abled and queer, etc. along with the different types of discrimination and oppression against them. Intersectionality remains an important factor to consider while navigating different identities in the queer space. The community and its movements have been whitewashed on multiple occasions and are mostly represented by the more privileged individuals, causing the erasure of lesser privileged identities within the community. Hence it is necessary to understand and acknowledge the many layers of identity, their consequent privileges and how they impact individuals.

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# 20 The Whitewashed Nation

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*Discrimination based on skin tones within ethnic/racial groups is termed as colourism. This article discusses the characteristics and elements of colourism in the Indian context while primarily focusing on the relationship between the internalised white ideal and the influences of caste and colonialism. The article further explores the power and hegemony related to the notion of colourism in India, in the wake of a nationwide movement against colourism.*

India is a land of multitudes of cultures and the diversity it offers is unparalleled anywhere in the world. Hence, the diversity in skin tones does not come as a surprise. In many cases, skin tone is determined by geographical factors; however, geography is not the only contributing factor that governs a person's skin colour. It has been an apparent fact that occupation has a bi-directional relationship with skin tone, namely outdoor labour expresses darker tones than indoor occupations and historically division of labour was based on skin tones. Regardless of all these realities, the preference for lighter skin tones over darker ones has been a part of many societies, especially East and Southeast Asian countries, with India being no exception. The first extensive study of this phenomenon was conducted by Alice Walker on the African American communities in the US. In 1983, she first used the term colourism to imply "prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their colour" (Walker, 1983). Today, colourism is evident in many spheres of an individual's life, and what seems like a great stretch is that even familial relationships are not immune to it. This article attempts to understand the various factors leading to the present-day instances of colourism and the implications it poses.

In a paper published by the American Sociological Association, the influence of colonialism on colourism was explained as follows, "Whiteness became identified with all that is civilized, virtuous and beautiful" (Hill, 2002). The implications of this particular statement are visible as a result of various intersectionary occurrences in the course of the European colonisation of Asia and Africa. India too, has witnessed numerous instances of invasions and migrations into the Indian subcontinent. Perhaps the very first foreign interaction came with the advent of the Aryans into the northern part of India (Britannica, 2020). The Aryans were of a fairer complexion than the other races already present in the Indian subcontinent, giving rise to discrimination on the basis of skin colour, thus leading to the early development of colourism.

Another cause that can be attributed to the elevation of colourism in India is perhaps the invasion by the Mughals in A.D. 712 (Husain & Mehdi, 1978, p. 84) and then the British in the 18th century. The dawn of the Mughal rule in India is significant in studying the magnification of colourism in India. The Mughals who came from the Arabic and Persian belt had a lighter skin tone than most of India's

populace which unknowingly created a practice of attaching “greater societal superiority and power to the fairer skinned males and females” (Mishra, 2015). Similarly, European colonialism magnified the case of colourism in India with lighter-skinned Indians given considerably more preference for government jobs and administrative positions (Mishra, 2015). Hence, India’s long history of being colonised and conquered by light-skinned oppressors like the Persians, the Mughals, and the Europeans has led to a systemic belief that light skin is better, and is associated with power (Dhillon, 2015).

When discussing the concept of colourism, it is important to revisit its links with the caste system. The Indian caste system categorised people into systemic hierarchies based on their occupations which eventually transformed into something that one would be born into. However, the caste system, known for its discriminatory practices that put individuals from a certain caste on a higher pedestal than others, is also guilty of colourism. Historically, individuals from higher castes with more privilege and power had lighter skin tones as a result of their ancestry, than their lower caste counterparts. It was the result of extreme exposure to sunlight as their occupations required them to work outside in the fields, while the higher castes mostly spent their time indoors (Mishra, 2015). This reality eventually evolved to accommodate a preference for lighter skin tones in the modern Indian society at large as lighter skin became synonymous with better opportunities and success. Furthermore, as the British gained a monopoly over India, an intersection of the caste system and class system emerged. It placed the Europeans on the top followed by the Brahmins and/or the educated class and the landless labourers and/or the lower castes at the bottom of the hierarchy. Therefore, in most cases, dark skin is also associated with lower socioeconomic status, except in cases where geography determines one’s complexion and upward social mobility becomes extremely difficult (Rahman, 2020, p.7).

As a result of the above influences as well as because of the increased interaction with Western cultures, Indians have been going through decades of subliminal conditioning. The exchange of ideas led to the advent of western beauty standards

that most often favours fair skin over its darker counterparts. As a result, individuals with darker skin tones avail of various techniques to lighten their complexions. This phenomenon corresponds to, “a lived reality in which the social subject needs to part with aspects of themselves that are not considered socially acceptable, in order to gain acceptance into a particular social group” (Bowman, 2010). In the Indian sense, this narrative corresponds greatly with the concept of Sanskritisation. In his book, Religion and society among the Coorgs of South India, M.N. Srinivas talks about Sanskritisation which is an active decision taken by the lower castes, following the practises and customs of the higher castes in an attempt to ‘become’ like them, or in other words, move up the social ladder (Srinivas, 1952). This theory in the case of colourism can be interpreted as darker-skinned individuals making use of artificial skin lightening techniques to attain lighter complexions and subsequently achieving social mobility into a society that favours fair complexions over its dark or dusky counterparts.

As a result of an internalised belief that light skin is



*The shades of colourism*

**Illustrated by Fiona Nazareth**

*Alt text- Illustration of a dark skinned labourer; a light skinned brahmin priest, a fair mughal woman and a blonde and pale british woman, from left to right.*

good and dark skin is evil, many people still believe that skin colour determines a person's worth. Such binary thinking often leads to internalised low self-esteem and unbelievable cautionary statements for having dark skin like- "the electricity went out in the hospital when my mother was about to deliver me, and that's how I got my dark colour" (Beatty, 2018). Theorists have compared the instances of colourism to the internalised white ideal that often discerns women engaging in dangerous procedures like skin bleaching (Harper & Choma, 2019). The development of the fairness bias in the normal Indian psyche had been a disturbing yet uncontrolled phenomenon until a few years ago. While fairness cream advertisements were doing the rounds on every television channel and huge billboards that promised fairer skin were seen across major cities, the harm it was doing was carefully kept out of sight. Numerous girls and boys trying to improve their chances of success were falling prey to harmful and cruel market strategies that played with their insecurities. Until a few years ago, well-known celebrities would endorse skin-lightening products that proclaimed improved chances of getting jobs and success as well as better prospects of marriage (Bhatt, 2014).

In fact, colourism and marriage have a special connection that is both appalling and unbelievable in the 21st century. Indian matchmaking is notorious for promoting colourism. Advertisements featuring the ideal spouse are aplenty in Indian newspapers. However, more often than not, they mention a preferred skin tone which is always denoted with the words, 'fair and beautiful'. The association of fairness with beauty has created a ground for symbolic currency. A man's poor social status, determined by factors like his caste, class, education, and occupation is often elevated by lighter-skinned wives. Therefore, "lighter wives serve as a vehicle for transmitting prestige and value and are frequently coveted by men who are concerned with maintaining or attaining actual or perceived status" (Dhillon, 2015). The institutionalised colourism and the metanarratives that often surround it are enough to corrupt an entire society, dragging it into a downward spiral of colour bias.

Outsiders have always viewed India from a singular

perspective consisting of a collective, homogeneous, racial, and ethnic identity. However, India is experienced very differently by a lighter-skinned individual as opposed to someone who has a fairly darker complexion. The phenomenon of colourism is not independent of a variety of factors, some of which have been covered above and others like gender, religion, geography, and class. Hence, "colour discrimination in India is fluid and cannot be defined according to set parameters; rather it must be examined in conjunction with the relevant beliefs, practices, and norms of a given society, particularly caste and pigmentocracy" (Dhillon, 2015). While the lighter skin bias has prevailed in the Indian media for quite some time now, it has only recently faced flak for being a highly degrading reality. Campaigns such as #darkisbeautiful (Dark is beautiful) and #beautifulbrownbodies (Beautiful brown bodies) have made a significant change in helping people embrace their natural colours and the resulting diversity. However, the mere change of name from 'Fair and lovely' to 'Glow and lovely' does not completely rid people of a long-standing bias against darker skin tones. As we look to the future we can hope that this obsession with fairness, this skin-deep membrane covering our bodies, can be forgotten. And we can focus on creating a "fair" society, one that doesn't focus on outer appearances.

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## 21

# ‘Black Tax’- perpetuating racial wealth disparity

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*Racial injustices have created various economic imbalances in society, especially for the Black community and other people of colour. This has given rise to the phenomenon of the ‘Black Tax’, wherein well-off individuals provide for their family out of obligation, often at the cost of immense financial strain. This is the emerging reality of not only the black middle class but also many people of colour across the globe. This article examines the phenomenon, what happens in it, and the socio-economic factors causing it. It also dives into the implications of collectivist socialisation on other communities of colour.*

In the Black American community, it’s not unusual for well-off individuals to help family members financially. This can mean putting a sibling through college or supporting parents who are inching towards retirement. This is now being called the ‘Black Tax’, a term commonly used in South Africa, referring to the obligations of first-in-the-family college graduates, professionals, or others who “make it” to assist their family members (Magubane, 2017). As many as 28% of South Africans who live and work in metros are supporting their own children, as well as other dependents, with this statistic growing by 2% on average every year (Makotoko, 2019). This article aims to dive deeper into the various aspects that continue to sustain phenomena like the Black Tax and the ‘sandwich generation’ in a world where we are rapidly progressing towards highly individualistic lifestyles. The term Black Tax emerged in South Africa, with the phenomenon being deep rooted within the South African landscape due to its dark history of colonialism, apartheid and deeply uneven economic conditions (Makotoko, 2019). Nevertheless, one might argue that this understanding of the Black Tax, where supporting family or underprivileged families is anything but uncommon.

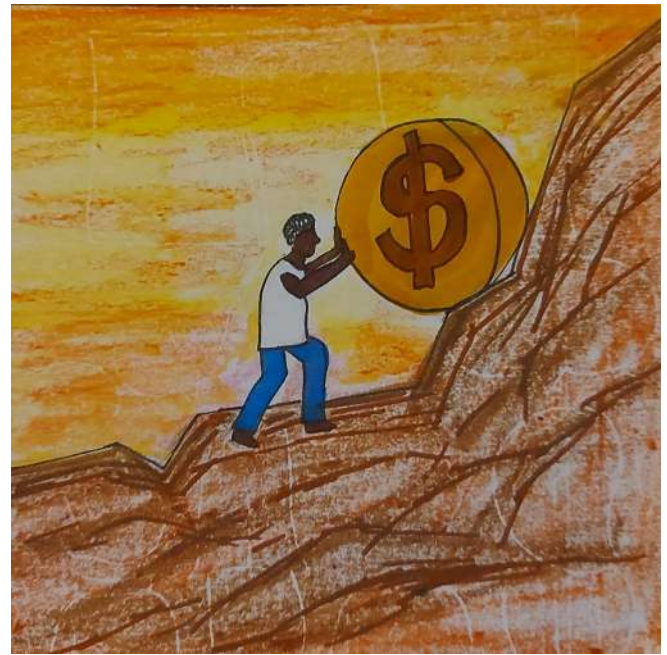
Juneteenth, the heralded Emancipation Day, 1865, was intended to kickstart a new epoch of Black wealth creation. After twelve generations of being subject to slavery’s institutionalised theft, millions of African Americans were now at liberty to generate incomes and degrees, own property, weather hard times and pass down wealth to the next generation. If not in a generation or two, then certainly in a few, they were projected to clamber up the economic ladder. However, generational wealth is but a rare phantasm for most Black families. Eight generations later, the racial wealth gap is not only gaping but also steadily mounting (Schermerhorn, 2019).

The average Black family owns just a fraction of the wealth of a typical white one. According to a report by The Washington Post, in 1863, Black Americans owned 0.5% of the national wealth. Today it’s just over 1.5 percent for approximately the same percentage of the total population. The source of that stagnation has mostly been imperceptible, veiled by the assumption of progress after the end of slavery and the achievements of civil rights. Lower incomes and correspondingly low savings rates prevented Blacks from transferring wealth to the next generation as whites in cities and suburbs do. In

fact, the costs of elder care are often like a negative inheritance. One-fifth of African American families have a net worth of \$0 or below; 75 percent have less than \$10,000 for retirement (Schermerhorn, 2019). The enduring barriers to Black economic equality are structural rather than individual. Disparities exist at the requisite stages of earning and building wealth like college programs and employment opportunities. Black people and other people of colour remain overrepresented in the lowest-paid agricultural, domestic, and service vocations whereas higher paying sectors are often gatekept. Occupational segregation and the persistent devaluation of workers of colour are a direct result of intentional government policy (Solomon et al., 2019). Instead of working to alleviate the structural inequalities, the party in power is rolling back civil rights protections, reviving the War on Drugs and expanding private prisons. Black aspirants to the American dream tend to face lending and real estate discrimination and “predatory inclusion” in higher education.

Black Tax exists because the Black community has the lowest end of the economic deal with continuing explicit and implicit racism, severely unjust economic policies working against them. According to Lesaoana Makotoko, real Black Tax is having to do everything twice as well as white people just to get the same things they do. It’s a fact that white counterparts of the Black workforce, who could be less qualified than them, earn five times more (Makotoko, 2019). For Black populations living marginalised realism, the dreadful truth is that no matter what the crisis is, the highest cost is shouldered by them due to the systemic disadvantages. Education and the student debt crisis are no exception. Research by The Cut proposes that Black students are more likely to borrow, borrow more, struggle with repayment, and default on their student loans than their peers (Gold, 2020).

Hence, two individuals of different races could have the same income but the implications and circumstances could be starkly different. These circumstances can be observed through the lens of pop culture and cultural appropriation. Black people seem to be punished for their cultural symbols while White populations can get away with not only appropriating them but also profiting off of them.



*A black man trying to make a dollar go a long way.*

**Illustrated by Tanya D’Souza**

*Alt text- Illustration of a rocky land at sunrise, where a black man pushes up a coin with the dollar sign up a steep slope.*

The African-American ‘Dawg’ vernacular that the community was often ridiculed for is now used by rappers and music artists of all races. Dance routines that were originally created by Black creators using cultural styles of dance were made popular on social media platforms like TikTok by White influencers without the credit being given where it was due. The same thing that was once a point of mockery, is now a source of great profit; but the revolution was led by White people, as is the often case with cultural treasures. Ironically, Black people seem to profit the least from them.

It is not uncommon for people of colour, especially Black Americans, to struggle to make ends meet. The median Black household has a net worth of only \$24,100, a fraction of the \$188,200 in net worth the median white household has according to the reports of the 2019 Federal Reserve data (Khalfani-Cox, 2021). This significant wealth gap can be attributed to many systemic injustices, racism and structural inequalities. With the odds so heavily stacked against them, Black individuals find it extremely hard to build



wealth, no matter their income or achievements. One could be investing their income, building a savings pool while the other could be paying for a family member's utilities or putting groceries on the table for an ageing parent.

The vicious cycle of making it to the middle class and remaining within it seems to be a common theme. However, what drives Black households to support their struggling secondary relations outside structural and inherent disadvantages? It could be blamed on certain socio-cultural frameworks. The emphasis that is placed on social support and upliftment of the community in collectivistic cultures can be a heavy contributor. Black families often seem to value loyalty, common goals and group welfare over individual pursuits. The phenomenon on Black Tax is only bolstered by systemic inequalities and injustices. This can also be attributed to the way Black communities are socialised early on. Ingrained societal expectations can affect young children's temperament and personality, critically contributing to the overall adjustment of the children (Chen, 2000).

It is crucial to note that such collectivism is also a common part of East Asian and Southeast Asian cultures. The difficulties of Black Tax manifests differently in other middle class, lower income households of collectivist cultures but the pattern remains universal. The critical discriminating factor between individualistic and collectivist cultures is the autonomy imparted to individuals and the goals that they pursue. One aspires to personal gain and individual accomplishment, while the other values cohesion and welfare of the group as a whole.

The loyalty and shared ambition fostered in such cultures has given birth to a phenomenon called the 'Sandwich Generation'. The reality of the 'sandwich generation' describes individuals who support two financially dependent generations, namely their parents and children, and is mutual among the Chinese, the Indians and many other communities of coloured populations (Cravey & Mitra, 2011). The sandwich generation is a result of a poor global economy and affects countries worldwide. It is observed to be seemingly commonplace in most middle-class Indian households.

India seems to be no stranger to the sandwich generation, with the majority of individuals providing for their own parents, as well as their grown children. With unprecedented inflation, job market crashes, and impossibly unaffordable housing situations, it has become unfeasible for countless young adults to move out. This inevitably places the liability of sustenance on the sandwiched generation that has managed to stay afloat during the pressing and tumultuous economic hardships. This burden of caregiving proves to be challenging in more ways than one. It effectively brings down the quality of life for the caregivers, as they are drained financially which in turn may affect their physical and mental wellbeing. In a country like India, individuals are often pressured into caring for extended family and shunned by society when they fail to do so. It is also not uncommon to be torn between prioritising one dependent generation over the other, having to sacrifice not only one's own needs but also the needs of other dependents to cover the most compelling requisites. It can be argued that governments continue to miss the mark when it comes to providing adequate care for their citizens. Uncharacteristically, our collectivist cultures take a sudden about-face and all blame becomes an individual burden to bear.

In comparison with individual-centric, capitalistic cultures, the Black middle class may be disadvantaged by their overcommitment to helping their families. But the actuality of the situation is that a cold for the white population of the global economy might as well be pneumonia for the coloured ones, especially the Black community. The Covid-19 pandemic has only highlighted and exacerbated the extent of the damage. As the world progresses towards a more self-centred way of life, the sociocultural contexts may not foster Black Tax anymore. That's because the problem never lay in the sociocultural contexts to begin with. The realities of Black Tax will continue to exist because of the inherently hostile economic systems and government policies while the scales are heavily tipped towards the white minority, away from the marginalised majority.

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# 22 The Bearer of Bad Blues

Author - Rashmi Ijari

*Blue flu is a bargaining tactic used by the police force because legal strikes are prohibited for them in the United States of America. Though these tactics initially came into being due to demands for increase in wage and better treatment of police officers in the 1920s, following the effects of World War I, these tactics are now being used for a different purpose altogether. This brings into question the democracy behind it, and the impact it has on the members of the society. To analyse this, the article uses the USA as a case study due to this tactic being used on several occasions by the police in an attempt to silence the racial minorities, especially Black people, when they raise voices against police brutality.*

**B**lue flu is a form of a collective bargaining tactic used by the police force, where many officers call in sick to get leave, due to legal restrictions against going on strikes (Bulen, 2011). Though this tactic is used in many countries like the UK and Ireland, this article will focus on blue flu in the United States, and evaluate this technique's effectiveness as an instrument of power to influence authorities, citizens, and the narrative in the media. The speculation about the underlying principle this technique builds on, is the fear of crime in people of the society (Grim, 2020). From a theoretical perspective, this implies that due to the strong association of the police with the role of maintenance of safety and enforcement of law, people may panic if they think about the police not working at all, and there may be assumptions or rumours about increase in crime on the days police officers do not work. The police use the anticipated dread of the public as a leverage against the authorities they are negotiating with.

More often than not, the negotiations put the Black community in a further disadvantageous position, which has worked to grow the divide of Black and Blue America, with the blue representing the blue colour of officer's uniforms. The particular phenomena of Black versus Blue America cannot be disregarded as it originates from racism of the

police officers in the "blue" uniform. Recent events in the black and blue divide of America can be seen in various instances associated with the ongoing protests of 'Black Lives Matter'. After a president of the police union compared these protests to terrorist movements (Scheiber et al., 2021), the police officers and their white supporters initiated the 'Blue Lives Matter' to contrastingly bring to light the 'oppression' white officers go through, and the 'freedom' and 'justice' they deserve. This is done in an attempt to overpower the narratives of Black citizens raising their voices against racial discrimination by the police. Similarly, they have also been using blue flu as a means to deflect the excessive scrutiny or criticism against the officers by the public.

Blue flu, alternatively known as "slowdown" or "work stoppage" (Sestanovich, 2015), was initially used as a substitute for a police strike as they were illegal in all the fifty states of America. The first documented blue flu in America was the Boston Police Strike of 1919, which ensued due to inflation, one of the after-effects of World War 1. As the cost of living rose by 76% during that time, the police wages rose only by 18%, and therefore officers were seeking to unionise to demand improvements in wages and working conditions (Foner, 1990). This

was followed by similar situations in Detroit in 1967, New York in 1971, Los Angeles in 1994, and so on. All of these protests centred around the main issue of increase in wages.

However, in the same year as the New York protests of 1971, the police officers in Pittsburgh made use of this method with a different motive altogether. As Flaherty, the mayor, granted the request of the black residents of the Pittsburgh North asking for more Black officers to be placed in their area, the white officers viewed it as discrimination against them. Thus, to object to this change, 425 out of 1600 police officers called in sick at work, as a means to protest (Grim, 2020). Here, clearly, blue flu had been used as a tactic to sway the decision of a superior, and it worked as Flaherty, the mayor, did end up “halting” the transfers, and the status quo of the white officers in a Black residential area was maintained. This may have worked as one of the contributors in strengthening the divide between the Black and white communities. The distrust might have increased due to the feelings of comfort and safety of Black citizens being overlooked, with a clear preference to white officers, which establishes and reinforces a relative value of importance to certain groups.

In contrast to the previous situations where unofficial strikes were a result of wage issues, the incident in Pittsburgh raises a few crucial questions with regards to how democratic blue flu is, as a tactic. The cause of the protests for the wage was rooted in a collective economic issue of well-being, whereas the Pittsburgh strike issue seems to have a motive in perpetuating white supremacy, and more specifically, concentration of power amongst few in the police force.

Numerous cases, somewhat similar to the Pittsburgh one, have been on a steady rise in the past few decades, especially in the context of racism. A few of the police departments have staged this work stoppage in order to exhibit their extreme dissatisfaction for being held accountable for police brutality (Firestone, 2015), especially for the violence against the Black community. Recently, in 2020, the cases of Rayshard Brooks (CNN, 2020), Ahmaud Arbery (The Washington Post, 2020) and more accounts of African-Americans who have met with similar mistreatment from the police over the years, corroborates the results of a poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. It states that a relative majority now believe police brutality to be a more serious concern which goes undisciplined and unequally targets Black Americans (WRDW, 2020; The Associated Press, 2020).

Consequently, this leads to the question of whether police unions are beneficial for the overall wellbeing of society. Although overall union membership rates have dropped nationally to 10 percent (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022), the higher rates of police union memberships continue to supplement them with necessary resources to “block reforms” (Scheiber et al., 2021). According to frequent reports over the years, the police unions have sometimes directly resisted a reform, or sometimes have influenced the “slow adoption of reforms” (Scheiber et al. 2021). This highlights the role of police unions in maintaining the status quo that is beneficial for the existing hierarchy and unsupervised police practises, rather than functioning from a welfare perspective which does not significantly harm the empowerment of various marginal groups, especially the African-Americans.



*A Blue Uniformed Officer*

Illustrated by Fiona Nazareth

*Alt text: Illustration of a blue uniformed officer wearing a tie.*

Moreover, the police unions, like the Police Benevolent Association (PBA), have been allegedly known to help officers to “get their stories straight” when discriminatory treatment comes to light (Firestone, 2015). In such situations, these associations give scope for safety nets to the corrupt or abusive cops, aid them to not be accountable for their actions, and thus deflect liability and consequences. Furthermore, there have been various instances, like that of Raymond Kelly and Mayor Bill de Blasio (Firestone, 2015), where PBA have called for resignations from commissioners and mayors, because they have supported the cops being questioned and reviewed for police brutality and fatal arrests. The unions have tried to influence public opinion by victimising their narrative and stating how patrol officers do not feel safe risking their lives everyday, knowing that they do not have the backing of their commissioner or mayor. This utilisation of the tactic of blue flu opens it up for evaluation as a tool to increase police power against minorities, and in general as well.

The fears are relevant not only with regards to killings, but also with regards to other aspects of daily life of minority communities. A research study shows that Black and Hispanic drivers are more likely to be stopped in the daytime, indicating a racial bias in policing on the streets as well. This is because, in the evening there is uncertainty regarding the skin colour of the driver due to darkness. (Pierson et al., 2020). Moreover, the study indicated that the bar was much lower for stopping racial minority drivers than white drivers, reflecting the structural racism influencing even the mundane activities of the minority communities. The results of another research study conducted by Edwards et al. (2019) showed that “African American men were about 2 1/2 times more likely than White men to be killed by police”, which further strengthens the argument of the existence of racial bias in policing which is disproportionately more harmful for the Black citizens. This indicates a possible requirement of systemic reform in the attitudes of the police officers, a majority of whom are white.

However, there has been very little research in the social sciences on how the blue flu impacts the minorities in the police force themselves.

There exists a gap in research on various socio-psychological and economic impacts on the minority communities, due to police brutality and extreme injustice. It has led to a drastic decrease of trust in the legal judicial system, which can already be seen through numerous discourses about the same on the internet today. However, due to activists being many in number, and the widespread public demand for reform, there may be hope for the police system through measures such as “sensitivity training for the officers, strengthening of early intervention systems, diversifying the police force, empowering civilian review boards” and so on (Dunham & Peterson, 2017). Some of the departments have already responded via socio-economical changes, i.e., by “enacting new policies and cutting police budgets” (Grim 2020); however, their effectiveness still remains uncertain since there has not been adequate research about the same and sufficient amount of time has not passed to analyse the repercussions by the workforce. The blue flu, however, is a tool that needs to be managed better for socio-beneficial factors of all races rather than using it as a mechanism to perpetuate the race hierarchy. The black and blue divide of the United States of America will be bridged when blue flu starts to encompass protests for more diversity and better treatment of their Black counterparts, which will consequently contribute towards a society that births equal opportunities and rights for people of colour.

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## 23

## Calling out the Collars: The Codification of Colour into Crime

Authors - Alancia Menezes & Maitreyee Sathe

*When we think of 'colour', crime isn't the first thing that comes to mind. Be that as it may, colours occupy substantial space in the criminal and legal structure. Colour isn't inherently meaningful but is rather assigned symbolic importance within a cultural sphere. And it's this collective colourisation that leads us to inspect colour in terms of identity, power and the justice system. Our socially-moulded perceptions of blue, white and khaki-collar crimes have heavy consequences on an entire social class. This article thus attempts to deconstruct and critically analyse the applicability of colour to crime and its subsequent social outcomes.*

The world around us is usually viewed in binaries—black or white. But, more often than not, we find ourselves in the 'grey'. It is inequitable, however, to assume that only these three shades paint our world. Colours have seamlessly made their way into human society and social structure. Even the colour of one's ensemble is attached to their position in the social system. The terms 'blue' and 'white' collars originated centuries ago to differentiate between the jobs people held and have now found their way into the legal system (Howells, 2021). Moreover, the most proximate access to the legal system in everyday life is the men in 'khaki', i.e. the police. The colourisation of these structures has painted our perception of the actors involved. Thus, this categorisation of colours into the criminal system reduces people to their typescripts and makes the justice system in fact unjust.

Our society, being the complex organism that it is, is made up of structures to combat any disorder. One cannot, however, ignore that the objective structures that shape society have subjective processes and meanings. This results in these structures being unfavourable to some. The fault lines in the systems are even harder to ignore when they do not in fact enable the structure to work

efficiently and smoothly. Since “the metaphor of structure implies stability” (Sewell, 1992, p.2), these systemic loopholes call to question the synthesis between the structure of crime and the role of agents, which are either constrained or enabled. To understand the implications of the categorisation of colour into the legal system, it is crucial first to understand their definition and nature. Broadly, the offender-led construct of a white-collar criminal defines it as, “a person with high socio-economic status who violates the laws designed to regulate his occupational activities” (Fletcher, 2015, p.3). Blue-collar crimes on the other hand are usually crimes committed by individuals of lower social class, causing injury or harm to persons or property. Adding into the mix, India also finds itself plagued with 'khaki crime'. Khaki-collar crime, which in the US stands for deviance on part of military personnel, takes on a different meaning in our country, owing to the uniform of our police force (Moore, 1981).

Brown (2001) rightfully points out, “Our operative conception of the street offender is of an atomistic, free-willed actor whose choices to commit crimes are her responsibility alone; the circumstances and influences that explain and predict her conduct





*The creation of division due to class.*

Illustrated by Kyra Sparrow

*Alt Text: Illustration of a businessman in a suit looking down at his phone and behind him, a labourer stands in a safety vest holding bricks on his shoulder.*

are morally, as well as doctrinally, irrelevant. In contrast, our moral-conceptual image of corporate wrongdoing builds on a premise of actors as social beings and acknowledges that culpability should properly be broader than the individual alone.”(p. 1320) The doctrine of corporate liability allows the firms to be held accountable for any illicit acts of the agents—a luxury that blue-collar criminals aren’t given. Thus, sociologically, the law looks at white-collar crimes as part of a structure, whereas blue-collar crimes are based solely on the agency of the individual. In this way, we create the perception of street offenders as more ‘culpable’ by discounting the social influence of the structure in place. However, blue-collar crimes are just as much a consequence of structure as white-collar crimes for “agency is implied by the existence of structures” (Sewell, 1992, p. 20). Murphy and Robinson (2008) add to the bargain, arguing that white-collar crimes are driven by opportunity as opposed to blue-collar crimes, often committed out of desperation.

While we are inherently gifted with the general ability to have and employ agency, over time it is

carefully constructed to act in accordance with the structure around it. The police forces are enabled to act by the structure in place and to do what is ‘necessary’. However, when it’s the policeman as an actor making the decision or having the digression to make a choice of what is necessary, it accounts for ‘agency’. When police brutality passes off as “I’m just doing my job” because they are protected by the colour of law, is it the indiscretion of the actor or the system? The structure in place often grants powers to actors to abuse their agency. “The deep structure not only provides incentives for agents to act in certain manners given their objectives, they create those objectives for them” (Dowding, 2008, p.27). For example, statutes such as ‘qualified immunity’ and ‘colour of law’ (USA) allow public servants to act beyond their authority and justify the same by manipulating narratives. A similar set of protective frameworks is at play in our country where the police fight crime through “all means necessary” (The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, p. 37). This idea is that the police are actors on behalf of the State, and the State, being an impartial entity, can do no harm based on personal discretions. This ‘the saviour can do no harm’ approach to the legal system gives a green light to khaki crimes. Thus, revealing the two-dimensional forces of ‘agency’ and ‘structure’ that play a role in criminal culpability.

Now, coming back to white-collar crimes; because it evolved as a concept, it also attached certain perceptions and cognitive frameworks with it. We derive certain thoughts, patterns and behaviours from conceptual frameworks (Shapiro, 1990). This in turn is perpetuated and reflected in our perception of these crimes themselves. For example, white-collar crimes, as noted earlier may have been observed as originating from a certain occupation and social class. However, ‘blue-collar crime’ was applied, as a whole, to violent crimes based on an agent’s discretion, nowhere symbolising the occupational space, but instead accommodating the several offences which couldn’t fit into white-collar. This somewhere spoon-fed the public to view these crimes differently and by default, the jobs attached with them. These public perceptions also lead to certain scripts about people. The resulting typescripts consist of socially approved behaviours

that are typically expected of a community of class (Testa, 1970). For example, white-collar crimes are viewed as ‘victimless’. This ‘no body no crime’ approach to white-collars lets the criminals sail under false colours. However, they are in fact substantially harmful in the long haul with their consequences being measured in socio-economic loss and emotional repercussions (Payne, 2016).

For instance, the Punjab National Bank’s fraud exposed in 2019 resulted in financial ruin worth \$2 billion in the Indian banking sector creating a black hole in the economy (Roy et al., 2018). Its impact extended beyond just the banking sector and permeated into people’s everyday lives. However, this white-collar crime granted dignity to the actor involved, in that, it allowed them to escape town and be perceived as an ‘economic fugitive’ instead of a ‘criminal’. In contrast, a blue collared criminal accused of robbery wouldn’t have the privilege to escape his fate, due to a lack of resources. Moreover, the white-collar population, owing to its wealth and status has the privilege of dominating policy-making and media outreach. Like Brown (2001, p. 1343) states, “power and wealth help to get one’s wrongdoing treated civilly”. This reflects the social standing of both white and khaki-collared criminals where their uniform colour acts as an asset. The hegemonic power held by the white-collar class doesn’t influence but rather constructs our script of violent crimes as being synonymous with the blue-collar class. In effect, even khaki-collared crimes are directed more towards the blue-collar population than the white. Our script for a typical run-of-the-mill crime is based on our conventional colouration of the criminal’s collar. Thus, much of how we structure the criminal system is based on our perception of the criminal (actor) instead of the crime (act).

The extension of colour into deviance has called for a reductive understanding of crime. Explicitly reducing crime to white-collar and blue-collar, doesn’t take away its implicit intricacies. The assignment of labels based on social identity doesn’t justify the nature of the crimes. More so, it can be counterproductive as it incapacitates a particular social class. When we add khaki to the dyad of white and blue, the resulting triad comes with its

own structural pitfalls. Thus, the colours that first symbolised law and defence have now evolved into symbols of injustice and defencelessness. This is evidence of how something as simple as colour, when interlaced with the functions of societal structures, can take upon a whole new shade. It raises the question- “Is colour a property of thing or mind?” (Rose-Greenland, 2016, p. 82) where once symbolically assigned to something, does it become an attribute of said object or does it just manage to paint our view a certain ‘coloured’ way? This not only brings to light the realisation that crime has been socially coloured, but also that some crimes seem to be a lesser evil than others due to the status of the perpetrator. Thus, our black-and-white understanding of crime throws us right into the ‘grey’.

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## 24

# Radcliff's tug of war: An interplay of nationalism, colour, and religion

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*India encompasses various identities which have different understandings of nationalism. These identities thrive on religion, along with colours as religious symbols. Colours such as saffron and red are equated to Hinduism, whereas green reflects Islam. This article aims to use this established relationship to examine the connection between nationalism, religion, and colour. It takes crucial events of the partition, the 1984 riots, the policies of CAA and NRC, and the 2021 Kabul crisis into account while asking the question- are the people of India patriotic to its tricolour, or just the saffron and the green that are a part of it, respectively?*

Colours act as media that enrich life; they are responsible for making the world more vibrant and adding depth to the environment as well. Similarly, they give a sense of gravity to situations. Their power as religious symbols has exacerbated the polarisation of the two major religious groups in the Indian Subcontinent- Hindus and Muslims, as colours are predominant in the form of flags, in religious processions, and in protests.

Throughout India's history, colours have been linked to religion in different ways. Saffron to celebrate the might of Hanuman, red to signify Durga's power, and green to symbolise the holiness of Allah. During the British rule in India, these religious identities further interacted with the nationalistic feelings that arose in people's hearts. Saffron and green no longer acted as only religious links but also as the colours in the tricoloured flag that Independent India would stand for. Values such as courage and sacrifice from the saffron, along with chivalry and faith from the green, inculcated themselves in the minds of the Indian population. At a macro level, this tricoloured symbol of nationalism stood as a means to liberate the country from British rule. However, it acted as a symbol to safeguard one's own religious identity at a grassroots level. These religious identities

resurfaced soon after in 1947 when the Two-Nation Theory, coined by Muhammad Ali Jinnah led to the country's partition (Verma, 2001). The theory was an ideology of religious nationalism that saw Indian Muslims and Indian Hindus belonging to two separate nations.

The partition came to be an event in Indian history that was marked by the colours of green and saffron, just not on the same flag, as they were separated by the Radcliffe Line. This line was devised by Sir Cyril Radcliffe, which divides 281635 km worth of territory between the people of India and Pakistan, becoming the border between the two nations (Loonker & Jain, 2010). This division of the two nations led to gruesome religion-based violence that is still remembered today (Butalia, 1998). Hence, the partition raised multiple questions on the previously known solidarity that existed between the Hindus and the Muslims of the country during colonial rule. These upcoming doubts can be backed by Jinnah's proclamation of Direct Action Day as well (Bates, 2011). However, an essential question that partition gave birth to was: ***Do colours as religious symbols influence the nationalistic feeling of an individual?***

The after-effects of the partition were long-lasting. Protests, violence, and mayhem took over the country. This turmoil-ridden situation only subsided in January 1948 (Iyer, 1973). However, this peace lasted for slightly more than a decade. Though often overlooked, communal violence between Hindus and Muslims was prominently high again in villages and other rural areas, during the 1960s-1980s (Rajeshwari, 2004, p. 2). This era saw an increase in protests based on religious grounds as well, especially during the 1984 Sikh riots followed by the assassination of late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (Wilkinson, 2006).

Colour as a medium has played an essential role in religious protests, as noticed in the 1984 riots where the colours of blue and yellow were at the forefront of leading the religiously inclined secessionist sentiments of the people belonging to both the Punjabs (Indian and Pakistani). On the other hand, when a Hindu-dominated protest occurs, the area is covered with saffron flags, as witnessed in the Ram Temple in Ayodhya protests (Baber, 1996). Correspondingly, protests carried out by Muslims in the nation are marked by green coloured flags (Choudhary, 2018).

Moreover, these colours represent the relational power in terms of their connection with religions and give a sacred meaning to the profane. Though saffron and green are colours that are visible in an individual's daily life, these colours further make up the profane element of religion, as given by Durkheim (Iteanu, 1990). Their simplicity and common nature combined with the sacred element leads to circumstances where religion is given more importance than nationalism (Baber, 1996). Though religion usually maintains itself by keeping distance between profane and sacred elements, in these situations, these two elements come together and exert pressure on the civil religion that exists in the form of nationalism in the country, with high stature given to the tricolour. Due to this added pressure exerted by both Hinduism and Islam, it is noticeable that religious sentiments are challenging the position of civil religion and nationalism in the country, hence diluting the role the latter plays in the lives of the people of the nation. It also decreases the value of the national flag as a collective totem

that Durkheim states as a “part of the civil status of each individual” (Durkheim, 1976, p. 116).

The two identities- religious and civic-nationalism that exist in India can be further explained by the work of Edward Shils (1957). He states that if the framework of these identities is disturbed, then there will be predictable conflict as one or the other nationalities might feel neglected objectively or subjectively. Presently, this conflict has changed from a cultural-nationalistic conflict to a religious-nationalistic one (Elgenius, 2005). This conflict can be understood by the example of the NRC and CAA policies as religious symbols. Introduced by BJP, a Hindu ideology-centric party with a saffron flag, these policies are said to favour Hindus and hence are often criticised, evidenced by the protests carried out during the passing of CAA and NRC (Palshikar, 2015). They are also responsible for creating a sense of contradiction in the minds of Muslims as there is a clash between their religion (Islam) and their civil religion of nationalism, where a subsequent tug of war between the public symbols of the cow and the mosque takes place (Fazalbhoy, 1997, p. 1549).



*Faces with a colourful background trying to deconstruct colours in Patriotism*

**Illustrated by Fiona Nazareth**

*Alt Text - Illustration of abstract outlines of faces on a colourful ink-stained background.*

Considering Anthony Cohen's (1995) work, it can be argued that these policies also further religious symbolism. While they concern nationalism through the issue of citizenship, they also consider the religious identity of immigrants while granting them citizenship status. Thus, by involving religion in nationalism, these political policies act as religious symbols. However, Cohen points out that since symbols can express meaning as well, they also give a chance to different communities to have different interpretations. Hence, where at one end of the spectrum, CAA and NRC were taken as means to provide citizenship to people in distress following certain religions, the other side argued that these bills restrict access to citizenship for Muslims.

The issue of religion and nationalism has taken another angle after the Kabul Crisis of 2021 when the government of India gave a preferred status for citizenship to the non-Muslim citizens of Afghanistan (Kapur, 2021). This intersection between nationalism and religion arises as both have their place as separate identities of civil religion and Hindu/Muslim, respectively. Time and again, Indian Muslims have had to give proof for their patriotic and nationalistic feelings towards the country due to the constant juxtaposition of civic and personal religion and the constant narrative of nationalism against Islam (Khan, 2021).

Along with political parties and policies, the media also plays an important role while negotiating the relationship between colour, nationalism and religion. Media often takes up a functionalist role, as given by McQuaill (2005), when it comes to polarising the masses towards a particular religion. However, it also serves as a platform for individuals to express their understanding of nationalism. These understandings of nationalism, which are diverse and varied, also take the aid of colour to explain ideological stands behind them. Recently, comedian Vir Das's poem 'I Come from Two Indias' mobilised people when he talked about the distinctions between an India that is proud to bleed blue (in the cricket field) but also turns saffron, indicating anger and a sense of nationalism, when playing against green to signify Pakistan (PTI, 2021). Another instance of media backing this tug of war between

nationalism and religion occurred when a veteran actor supported a statement that spoke of how India should not be turning 'green' but instead should make efforts to retain its 'saffron'. (Hindustan Times, 2021). This speaks about how the ideas of nationalism are portrayed by a particular colour, which in turn, symbolises an ideology.

The status of the relationship between colour, religion, and nationalism is still uncertain as the power dynamics in India are currently shifting. Due to this, it is challenging to pinpoint how the future will pan out. Furthermore, the role of media as a balancing force also dictates the relationship between colour, religion, and the civil religion of nationalism. However, after observing the current juxtaposition of religion against nationalism, which is further exacerbated by the use of colour, it is possible that certain religious groups might be alienated. This narrative, which excludes certain religious identities from the concept of shared national identity, which was also prevalent during the time of partition, can be traced to recent issues as well. As nationalism is a shared and imagined identity, a dynamic change can be observed in this concept.

In the present scenario, these religiously inclined symbols of saffron and green camouflage themselves as totems of nationalism and religious identities. Hence, the question asked during the partition can be answered in the affirmative, and the power of colours as religious symbols has to be acknowledged. It can also be concluded that the tug of war that started during the days of undivided India between religion and the civil religion of nationalism has taken a turn today, where the future of nationalism seems bleak due to an increase in communalistic feelings produced by, in part, over-sensitivity to religion.

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## 25

## Colours of Protest: The Colour Revolution as a Modern Socio-Political Phenomenon

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*A decade after the Soviet Union broke down, the early 2000s saw several communist nations attempting to expand their political footholds and declare independence. However, they were only partially successful and were stuck in an unhealthy balance of democracy and autocracy. With already corrupt societies and incidents of electoral fraud, these nations experienced democratic protests dubbed the 'Colour Revolutions'. This article explores the significance of these movements, and the apparent symbolism with different colours.*

Post the dismantling of the Soviet Union in 1991, several communist regimes in Eastern Europe and Central Asia tried to assert their independence (Thien, 2013). However, they were still stuck under the dominance of Soviet systems, and failed to become fully democratic. They were called 'hybrid regimes' as they were a mix of democracy and autocracy. With time, these nations, namely Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, witnessed democratic revolutions in the form of public street protests in which common citizens and civil society organisations demanded change in the existing regimes (Thien, 2013).

Popularly known as the Colour Revolutions, these breakthroughs were an outcome of electoral frauds, corrupt societies, and political instability. This umbrella consists of the Bulldozer Revolution in Serbia in September 2000, the Rose Revolution in Georgia in November 2003, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in November-December 2004, and the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan in March 2005 (Landry, 2011). This article attempts to examine the similarities between these revolutions, and analyses how it was a modern-day socio-political phenomenon. It reflects on how the common citizens contributed towards this wave of change.

Firstly, a clarification of what is meant by a 'Revolution' is in order. According to Samuel Huntington, 'Revolution' is a "rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activities and policies" (Huntington, 1969, p.264). In simpler terms, it can be conceptualised as an aspect of modernisation that imposes change on the political and social organisations in a society. Thus, the colour revolutions that unfolded in the early 2000s classify as a modern breakthrough that focused on restructuring the political and social systems in parts of Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Despite differences in the country of origin, these revolutions have several components that make them important to consider in tandem with each other. The first observation revolves around the primary cause of the colour revolutions: all these nations had a weak political figure in power who resorted to malpractice in parliamentary elections. This included ballot abuses, vote-stealing, defamation of the opposition, and unjust manipulation of the media. With Serbia being the first nation (in 2000) to lay the foundations of such an outbreak in post-communist nations, the other countries too were

victims to similar instances (Landry, 2011).

In Serbia, there was a total lockdown of institutions, and it prompted over half a million people to march in Belgrade and gain control of the Serbian parliament and television. The protestors broke through barricades, and ultimately, Milošević resigned and Kostunica finally gained power (Tucker, 2007). The Rose Revolution began with a series of small protests in Tbilisi (Georgia) on the grounds of election fraud, and eventually, the region of Ajaria had a significant increase in crowd sizes, almost up to over a lakh (Landry, 2011). The Ukrainian Orange Revolution saw the citizens condemn the election results on the streets of Kyiv. With the opposition protesting rigidly in the following days, the Supreme Court ordered re-election. Thus, the Orange Revolution was successful in helping Yashchenko gain a smooth victory with a total of 52 percent votes (Landry, 2011). Even though the Tulip Revolution originated on similar grounds, it was slightly different as it took a violent turn. The revolt intensified in the city of Jalalabad and spread to the whole nation. Within two weeks, around 30,000 protestors in the capital city demanded the resignation of Akayev (Tucker, 2007).

Another noticeable feature of these revolutions was the nature of their proceedings. These colour revolutions indicated that they all had a common socio-political goal. They were not necessarily triggered by ideology but aimed at the transformation of social systems and the induction of democracy from the grassroots level. The strategy was simple and consisted of mass protests that were under the purview of the guidelines of their respective constitutions. It followed a pattern of discrediting the existing regime along with motivating the people to engage in electoral polls to empower the opposition.

The unique aspect of these colour revolutions was that most of them utilised non-violent methods of protest, and civil resistance. The protestors collectively resorted to peaceful demonstrations, strikes, and interventions to create pressure on the ruling authorities and instigate the wave of change. Apart from this symbolic association with colours, the pillars of these revolutions have been non-



*The Colour Revolutions' countries steeped in election-related turmoil*

**Illustrated by Khushi Desai**

*Alt Text: Illustration of a globe, with Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan in Orange, Red, and Pink respectively, inside a grey box labelled 'Ballot Box'*

governmental organisations (NGOs) and student activists. With such a young population taking charge, the revolutions witnessed creative ways of nonviolent resistance that enforced a real desire for change. It stands true to the colourful opposition of authoritarian leaders where the students, the poor and the working class demanded a change in the political culture (Zherebkin, 2009).

According to Tilly, revolution is a forceful transfer of power between at least two groups of contenders (each supported by sizable segments of the population) with incompatible claims to control the country (Ruiz-Ramas & Sanz, 2016). Thus, Tilly (1973) characterises revolution as a political event aimed to achieve practical results through the processes of coups, civil wars and revolts. Every revolution is a confrontation between an elite and an opposition, where collective action is employed to disrupt the existing sovereignty and hegemony, and re-establish it in a new direction (Ruiz-Ramas & Sanz, 2016). The colour revolutions too experience such a confrontation, but in a rather innovative

fashion. It takes place amidst the election processes, where the opposition employs tools of civil disobedience and joins hands with civil societies and the masses to openly condemn the regime and its malpractices (Polese & Beachain, 2011).

One can infer that these movements looked at strengthening public participation to instil a greater sense of democracy. Apart from condemning the fraudulent electoral practices, these revolutions were specifically designed to overthrow the incompetent political leadership. With the dire need to eradicate rampant corruption, the colour revolutions were a mechanism for national integration and economic development. It was keen on laying the foundations of ideals like justice and equality. It strengthened the common man's understanding of free and fair elections and reinforced authentic democratic sentiments. Additionally, the regimes that brought the idea of colour revolutions into reality were united by a similar historical background. They were prone to wars and intrusions and were also a hub to frequent inter-regional migration from the Russian Federation and other members of the Soviet Union. Thus, these nations experienced political instability due to varying levels of control exerted by the Soviet Union.

Colour revolutions can also be characterised as a result of the frustration amongst citizens due to the existing corrupt regimes. As these nations were an undesirable mix of autocracy and democracy, they had failed to establish their roots. Thus, the society in these nations was in shambles and lacked a dedicated framework that would motivate nation-building. Sadly, in the years of 2000-2005s, when these revolutions occurred, these nations were ranked as one of the highest corrupt societies by the International Corruption Perception Index (Tucker, 2007).

What stands out is that these movements can be easily differentiated from traditional political uprisings, thus proving to be a modern phenomenon. The protestors in these revolutions actively employed modern media and technology. Mobile phones, the internet, and local and foreign media were highly instrumental in mobilising public opinion and championing the democratic spirit. Independent

media and journalists in these nations battled government control and censorship to demand accountability from the government. With civil societies thriving in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, these revolutions also received financial and technical support from the United States, Countries in Europe, and the National Endowment for Democracy. Furthermore, these political protests were also driven by cultural bindings and witnessed music as a pivotal factor in creating solidarity amongst the masses (Lane, 2009).

Despite originating in different forms, the key highlight is that these revolutions were united by the urge and frustration of the citizens to overthrow the existing regimes and demonstrate change. It was a distinctive characteristic of these public protests that they were associated with a particular colour, i.e., Orange in Ukraine, Rose in Georgia, and Tulip in Kyrgyzstan. This colour symbolism paved a way for supporters to identify themselves to a common cause and add character to the movement. This specific colour triggered a sense of togetherness and also inspired several breakthroughs in the future to be symbolised with colour names.

Indeed, most of these colour names were randomly characterised by popular media. However, in some cases, these colours did have an intellectual connection with the ongoing movements. This was witnessed in the Rose Revolution when amidst the protests, Saakashvili (the opposition leader) held a rose as a sign of being unarmed. Similarly, during the Orange Revolution, Bob Schaffer, a former member of the Colorado Senate commented, "The revolution has been dubbed "The Orange Revolution," orange being the campaign colour of Viktor Yushchenko" (National Review, 2004).

These colour revolutions were witnessed on similar grounds, the first of which was the existence of an incompetent political figure. The movements were triggered by a common cause, i.e. election malpractices and corruption, and were cradled by local and foreign influences. To ask whether these revolutions were truly revolutionary would be a matter of opinion, but one cannot deny the amends they infused. Even though these revolutions had varying impacts, the uprisings were successful in

initiating a democratic sentiment in these nations. It united the masses with a common goal of dissent and motivated them to establish a better way of governance. It was an awakening towards injustice and laid the stepping stones of several other movements that originated as an urge to secure an improved political and social life.

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## 26

## Beyond the Swastika

Author - Bani Sachar

*This research article examines the context and use of the Nazi symbolism ascribed to the swastika, and the interpretation and use of the Nazi flag both by the Nazi Party and in contemporary times. A flag is a potent political symbol, and Hitler's Nazi flag effectively subverted the pre-existing meaning of the swastika. This new meaning ascribed to it is now reinforced by Neo-Nazis, furthering its association with terror and violent racism. The reactions to the swastika vary- from it being viewed as a spiritual symbol to a tyrannical one.*

A flag is a symbol of group solidarity that derives power through social rituals created around it (Shanafelt, 2008). It is an ideological, political statement. It represents the will of the people supporting and sharing the attitudes underlying the flag. A flag also sets boundaries between groups of people, effectively denoting an 'us' and a 'them'. Additionally, positive or negative connotations are attached to a particular flag, based on a particular person or group's experiences with it. The decision of changing a flag signals a change in attitude, and that a new era has dawned. It is a type of propaganda that involves promoting a vision of something, for example, the Confederate flag symbolising the Southern States and their pro-slavery stance during the American Civil War (McPherson, 2008).

Colour is an immensely powerful tool of communication, and can often be used to signal action, influence mood, and even influence physiological reactions (Cherry, 2020). Over the centuries, many iconic propaganda posters were designed using as few as three colours, often black, white, and a warm shade like red. Hitler employed these colours in the Nazi flag because of their striking appearance, and the meaning that they held. For him, red indicated

the social thought of the movement, white stood for his creation of national thought, and the black swastika symbolised the Aryan race and "the ideal of creative work which is in itself and always will be anti-Semitic" (Hitler, 1925).

Hitler's placing of the swastika into the right visual framework enhanced its power. Red as a feature of the swastika was successful in attracting visual attention. Hitler claimed that the red on their posters drew people into the Nazi meetings in the early days. Red was also a connection to the Imperial Germany flag, which drew over those who rejected democracy and the Weimar Republic (Hitler, 1925).

Hitler "modernised" and put the swastika and Nazi flag into a political context, where it served as a unifying symbol, representative of the regime and the intense feelings of nationalism and fear, as felt by Nazis and outsiders respectively (Mundorf & Chen, 2006). He called it the 'hooked cross' and used it as the face of anti-semitism and the Holocaust (Hitler, 1925). In doing so, he subverted the original meaning of the Swastika for his own political purposes.

As Dafa (2003) mentions, the swastika has been

used by pretty much every group of people on earth for thousands of years. The Nazi swastika was taken from its ancient Indian roots as a symbol of good luck (Davis, 2000). In Germany, the Hakenkreuz (swastika) existed on religious and secular coats of arms long before the Nazi period, and in the ancient culture of Eurasian countries, the swastika represented divinity and spirituality (Campion, 2014). Heller (2000) discusses how Hitler was attracted to the Swastika because it was already being used by other racialist and nationalist groups.

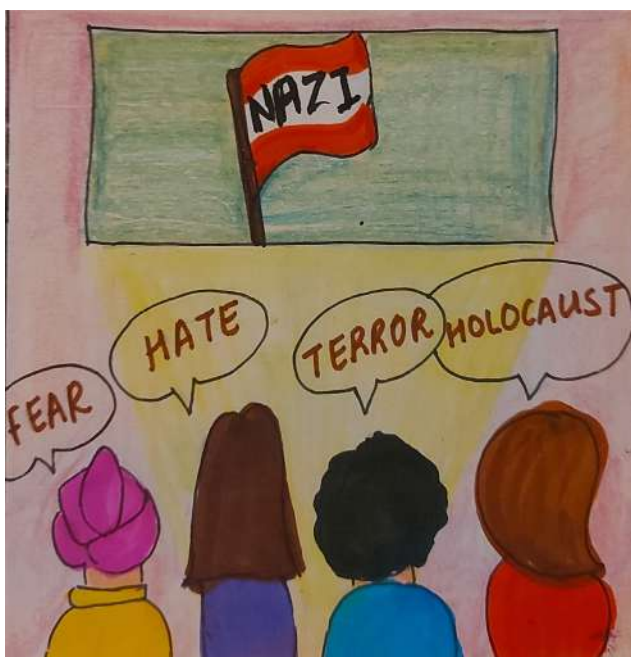
In order to signify a change in attitude, and get people to rally behind his vision, Adolf Hitler laid much emphasis on discarding the German tricolour and instituting the Nazi flag as soon as he was appointed Chancellor in 1933 (Rabbow, 2007). After the First World War, he believed that a flag would be a strong symbol that a group could coalesce around, and gain hope for a better future. That a “striking emblem may be the first cause of awakening interest in a movement” (Hitler, 1925). His background as an artist and propaganda manager helped him easily influence the masses with this symbolism

(Bekhor, 2021). He noted that a striking flag would be as effective as a poster, so the choice of colour was crucial. The symbol was plastered everywhere during the World War II era- it was on uniforms, flags, and even used as a marching formation at rallies (Bekhor, 2021).

Hitler wrote that the National Socialist party needed a flag that would be “a symbol of our own struggle” (Hitler, 1925, p.495). He also understood that there had to be a symbol as powerful as the hammer and sickle, which was their closest enemy (Hatzis, 2012). The communist symbol was well established and was synonymous with their ideology. Similarly, Hitler aimed to establish the swastika as a symbol synonymous with Nazism.

The Nazi flag had the power to inspire fear, but it also inspired exhilaration and patriotism within the Aryans and encouraged them to push their agenda onto the world (Hogeback, n.d.). To Jews and other enemies and victims of Nazi Germany, it became a symbol of anti-semitism and terror. By the time the Nazis had gained control of Germany, the connotations of the swastika were forever changed (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2017). As a symbol, it has become perpetually associated with the idea of a racially “pure” state.

At present, several extremist groups are reinforcing the same meaning that Hitler ascribed to the Swastika. Neo-Nazis ensure that the same threat of violence, xenophobia, racism, anti-semitism that Hitler wielded is a contemporary fear. Their use of the Nazi flag and the Swastika is deliberate: they seek to evoke the same reactions as Hitler did with this symbol. Additionally, they seek to proclaim the same message of white supremacy as the Nazis did (Willingham, 2019). For example, the flag of Kekistan, a made-up alt-right country, is based on the Nazi war flag (Kassie, 2021). The Iron Cross, which was a military medal in the Nazi regime, has been widely used by white supremacists and neo-Nazis (Willingham, 2019). Even organizations such as “Hitler’s Den”, situated in Nagpur, India, are composed of Indians who maintain anti-semitic and anti-Muslim beliefs, and openly display Nazi symbols and flags to further their agenda (Rao, 2017).



*A single flag evoking different feelings*

**Illustrated by Tanya D'Souza**

*Alt text- Illustration of a large screen displaying a red and white flag with the word Nazi in the middle. Four people with word bubbles saying “Holocaust”, “Hate”, “Fear”, and “Terror” are facing the screen.*

It is viewed in the western world as a vile symbol of hate (Carnes, 1999). The Anti-Defamation League in the United States of America notes that it is no longer just a symbol of hatred towards Jews, but of generalised hate towards non-white minorities (Dickter & Bartholow, 2010). Many governments, modern Germany in particular, ban the use of the Swastika. Germany's outlawing of such symbols except for "art or science, research or teaching" (Strafgesetzbuch, 2014) shows how the State wishes to obscure the effect of the anti-semitic symbol and inhibit its use by Neo-Nazis, yet does not seek to reclaim its original meaning. This indicates the sheer potency of Hitler's subversion of the symbol.

This leads us to an examination of how, in contemporary times, people interact with the Nazi flag. In Vox's Netflix show 'Explained' (2018), they asked people to state what came to mind upon seeing various flags. In 2021, the sight of the Nazi flag still seemed to draw answers such as "fear, hate, anger, genocide, barbarism, propaganda, and oppression" (Kassie, 2021). Clearly, the flag terrorizes and causes discomfort to people even today, just as it did during the World War II era. It is viewed as a hate symbol that represents intolerance, cruelty, and racism.

It is also important to note that the meaning and values associated with the Swastika differ, with geo-cultural contexts. Miscommunications run rampant when it comes to the interpretations of symbols because each culture, each nation, and even each individual interprets things in their own unique way. A symbol is a sign that has no logical relationship with its object; the link is learned and artificial (Kauppinen-Räsänen & Jauffret, 2018). The connotations attached to the symbol are not inherent but learned. This applies to the swastika symbol in Asian cultures, in contrast to the West's stigmatisation of the symbol, which has led to a multiplicity of misinterpretations and misunderstandings.

Many Indians feature the swastika on their possessions to ward off ill fortune. It is also an important religious symbol in religions of Indian origin such as Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. But in 2015, George Washington University took action against a student for posting about a symbol that he brought back from India—and the symbol

he posted was not a Nazi swastika, but something he had picked up on a trip to India to learn more about religions there, including some that used the swastika as a holy symbol for centuries before the Nazis adopted it (Jaschik, 2015).

It is clear that the visual component of the National Socialist Party flag was highly significant as a means of political and social control. The repercussions of the Nazi and Neo-Nazi use of the swastika still continues to be felt globally and affects the way people think and interact with the symbol. The colours, the symbols, and the story behind the same, all draw attention and can act as powerful propaganda tools to inspire, incite, and terrorise people. The fact that the Nazi flag can, even 77 years after the end of the Third Reich, elicit such a strong reaction from people is a testament to the power of the political symbolism of flags.

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# 27 The Grey Aftermath of the Green Revolution: Questioning the Contemporary Developmentality

Author - Titiksha Raushan

*This article examines the idea of development and its occidental influences through a critique of India's Green Revolution in 1960s. At the time, using a borrowed model of progress, India systematically industrialised its primary sector. In hindsight, this was a temporary remedy instead of a long-term developmental policy. It neither reduced the rural economic gap, nor provided sustainable growth to the agriculture sector. Thus, using Sen's Capabilities Approach, and given the mishaps of the Green Revolution, this article further assesses what a better developmental approach would have been.*

“It is not an investment if it is destroying the planet.”

-Vandana Shiva (2017)

In the post-colonial, capitalistic, globalised world of the 21st century, the developmental paradigm is more complex than ever. Emerging from biased global power dynamics, the generalised notion of development has always been created by and in favour of the Global North (Dietz, 1980). According to Frank (1966), most development policies and theories in the modernisation school of thought have been extracted from the historical experiences of the West, due to which there exists a lack of understanding of the problems faced by the Global South. In an attempt to capture the historical experience of the Third World countries, he formulates the concept of “the development of underdevelopment”. It argues that underdevelopment is not a natural state but a condition created by years of colonial domination and subjugation of the Third World countries (Frank, 1966). Consequently, the extraction of resources (natural and human) at cheaper prices takes place in “underdeveloped” nations, in the name of modernisation. This intentional construction of a never-ending dependency chain of third world nations on a ‘core’, developed nation is done to ensure the profitability of the Global North.

However, the undeveloped nations often have to bear the negative consequences of their uncritical imitation of the developmental model(s) presented to them. The Green Revolution in India is one of many such instances.

In the 1950s, India overlooked the existing potentials of its domestic resources and its impoverished population, to work extensively towards industrialisation. The largest budgetary allocations were for realising a borrowed and occidental paradigm of development, and setting up the manufacturing sector. This prolonged political neglect (a gradual decrease in funds with each Five-year plan) left the otherwise promising primary sector incapacitated, increasing states' dependency on international aid for food security. A significant source of aid during the agrarian crisis of the late 1950s-1960s was the United States of America. India bought chemical-based agro-additives, High Yielding Variety (HYV) seeds, and modern technology, etc. from the U.S. against the security of guaranteed imports of cheap wheat (Laxminarayan, 1960), thus bringing the Green



*A farmer dwarfed, overshadowed by a greedy corporate executive.*

**Illustrated by Britney Dharmai**

*Alt Text - Illustration of a farmer in a dhoti, carrying a spade, standing in front of a cow in grass who is dwarfed and overshadowed by a man in a suit with gold coins in his pockets.*

Revolution (henceforth GR) to the nation.

The introduction of the GR in the 1960s by the Indian government, under the guidance of M.S. Swaminathan, entailed the systematic industrialisation of the agriculture sector through chemically based pesticides, genetically modified seeds, and technology-intensive farming methods. This initiative was hailed to bring about unprecedented growth in the primary sector and empower the nation's rural regions. Responsible for making India the leading producer and exporter of grains, the GR accelerated the growth rate and modernisation of its targeted regions.

Nonetheless, one cannot afford to turn a blind eye to the other side of the coin: the GR also led (directly or indirectly) to multiple contemporary agrarian crises, such as the 2020 farmers protests for the continuation of Minimum Support Prices, rejection of Indian grains by international markets,

decreasing productivity of soil, increasing debt amongst farmers, increase in farmers' suicides and allied issues.

Stemming from a pro-rich bias (Glaeser, 2011), the targeted regions for GR were already rich in natural resources. For instance, the first phase of the GR was implemented in Punjab, Haryana, and parts of Uttar Pradesh: states well-endowed with fertile soil and a strong network of rivers. This selection deepened the already existing regional inequalities and wealth concentration in the nation. With higher polarisation and landlessness in drier and non-GR conducive regions and the falling wages compared with fertile areas (Dhanagare, 1987), the structure of society was also affected.

The attempts of the government of India to then bring about social equality across class and caste were countered by the economic strengthening of the gatekeepers of the hierarchical division of society, who worked to protect their privileges. Even amongst the targeted population, farmers with more extensive landholdings were given higher assistance in electricity subsidies, access to seeds, training, and loans for technological advancement from the government (Dhanagare, 1987). The understanding was that small plots of land could not make significant contributions to the sector, and thus were not worth investing in. Such a narrow, capitalistic notion of development not only widened the socio-economic gap between upper-class, upper caste owners of large tracts of land, and poor, lower caste farmers and agricultural labourers (Dhanagare, 1987), but also robbed the latter of a chance to develop their capabilities, and themselves.

The worst affected were landless labourers, who were compelled to choose between being unemployed in an inflationary economy (the late 60s and early 70s), or working in inhumane conditions. Victims of what Oasa (Glaeser, 2011) defines as rural proletarianisation, rural labourers lost significant bargaining power. Such adversities, coupled with an absence of proper training about the alien technology, and safety gear, resulted in tragedies such as the 841 cases of incapacitation and deaths between 1975-1978 in Punjab alone

(Dhanagare, 1987). Those fortunate enough to get by alive were constantly exposed to poisonous fumes from nitrogen-based fertilisers and agro-additives.

State policies failed to protect them as immediate relief packages fell victim to bureaucratic corruption, while the cooperatives designed to provide growth opportunities for the weaker section of society were monopolised by the upper caste landlords. Moreover, Shiva (2015) states that until the 1960s, Indian agriculture was moving towards the attainment of self-reliance; however, with the advent of GR, the focus of the primary sector shifted from variety to productivity, affecting the agrarian sector adversely. In the long term, the gradual chemicalisation of soil and water resulted in the boycott of Indian grains in international markets because of the increased toxin levels found in them, thus defeating the very goal of economic prosperity that GR aimed for (Chaba, 2021).

Six decades later, it is apparent that the GR was more of a temporary remedy than a long-term developmental policy. It neither reduced the rural economic gap, assisted the maintenance of rural social mobility, bridged the population-to-production gap (for mitigating the food deficiency in the nation), nor did it provide sustainable growth to the agricultural sector. Instead, the lives of people in the regions of the GR have been compromised because of the increased toxins in the natural resources and the neglected chemical waste disposal system (Singh, 2013). The government of Punjab officially claimed in 2018 that the agriculture sector of the region is saturated and therefore, farmers must accept alternatives to sustain their financial growth.

While the mainstream development framework is about the sustenance of 'development' and positionality of power players, Esteva (2010) believes it to be the nurturer of 'economic colonisation'. He argues that redevelopment in the Global South is often conceived as a way to 'sustain' the idea of Western-centric development, and not as a means to support the diverse natural and social life. Additionally, the Capabilities Approach (Sen, 1999) sees it as a choice of focus upon the socio-

cultural environment (through opportunities and arrangements made by agencies) for individuals to choose from in a society, so that they can be their most valued self (Ballet et al., 2013). Here, the focus of growth, empowerment, and acceleration is expanded from the economic realm, to the political, social, and ecological conditions of society.

Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2001) criticised the mainstream parameters of growth because they failed to present the differences amongst various social groups, and ignored crucial non-monetary factors such as health, political participation, etc. The nascent stage of the country when the GR was introduced, makes its evaluation along these lines more relevant. Here, along with economic growth, socio-political development becomes crucial for a country to open up opportunities for its citizens to choose the kind of lives they value. The Capabilities Approach provides a paradigm for this. It posits that the freedom to achieve well-being is of primary importance, and that this well-being should be understood as a function of people's capabilities. With regards to the Green Revolution, and reflections on development drawn from it, it considers whether people have the agency to convert resources and opportunities to enjoy a good life, and therefore have the capability or real freedom (structurally and environmentally) to fulfill this function.

When assessed against the conditions laid by the Capabilities Approach, the after-effects of the GR, such as Punjab and Haryana becoming the 'cancer capital of the country', their skewed rural social equality, decreasing quality of life in the states, and a sex ratio significantly below the national average, indicate that the GR failed as a long-term development policy. Moreover, the large-scale desertification and the depletion of indigenous crops post the implementation of the GR (Nelson et al., 2019) impede its success. This is especially significant as the Capabilities Approach recognises environmental sustainability as a key determinant of development (Sen, 2006). This unsustainable nature restricted its effectiveness: it was a remedy for a symptom, not the root ailment.

Given the nature of the challenge, the indiscriminate introduction of advanced technology is not the

panacea it was perceived to be. Instead, a socio-political rearrangement of the current farming style and culture was and is required. Through this case study, it is apparent that the need to broaden the State-level understanding of development beyond the predominant linear notion of increased technological dependence is crucial. The GR is testament to the need for a wider accounting of socio-political and ecological paradigms, which is specific to the particular and unique needs and context of the country. Development approached through a discerned application of scientific rationality, with the tools of modernisation, would be more fruitful. Sen's and Shiva's criticisms of development, especially in the field of agriculture, when understood from the perspective of the Global South, highlight the dangers of implementing policy models without realistically discerning its consequences in the long run.

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## 28

# India's Blue Gold: A Tale of Conflict, Turmoil and Struggle

Author - Susan Anna Abraham

*Indigo has had a long and complicated history in India. During colonial rule, oppressive farming practises were imposed on peasants in areas of Eastern India. The 'Indigo Revolt' (Nil Vidroha) of 1859-1860 was the result of British planters' excessive exploitation and mistreatment of farmers. Today, indigo has acquired a new socio-cultural meaning in India. Indigo dye has become extremely valuable in current fashion, particularly in the context of Indian ethnic and Indo-Western clothing. The art of indigo dyeing has been passed down over generations of artisans and for every group of people that engage with the shade, Indigo holds a new meaning. This article seeks to explore the various meanings of Indigo in India's socio-cultural space.*

The indigo colour holds significant cultural, social and religious meanings. Colour symbolism postulates that indigo represents wisdom, fairness and integrity (Braam, 2019). The significance of the shade also stems from religious roots. In Christianity, blue represents divinity and transcendence (Kosloski, 2017) whereas, in Hinduism, indigo often represents the infinite or the immeasurable. Apart from its significance in religion and culture, indigo is also an important element in the contemporary Indian fashion industry. Block-painted or *ajrak*-style indigo kurtis, sarees, shirts, and ethnic dresses are a signature look among the Indian demographic. Several key players in the fashion industry often launch exclusive, indigo-centric ethnic clothing collections. Apart from featuring in ethnic clothing, indigo is also used to make denim jeans, a staple article of clothing in all wardrobes. Pannabecker (1997) argues that historical studies of fashion risk focusing on the specific, failing to contribute to a broader understanding of human experience without the stimulation that comes from the theoretical inquiry. Thus, there is a need for fresh theoretical study into the historical conditions of fashion. She further discusses the symbolic interactionist theory of fashion (Kaiser et al., 1991) and its contribution to the deconstruction and reconstruction of new

cultural categories. Thus, in order to explore the contemporary significance of indigo used in the Indian fashion industry, it is important to examine its historical roots.

Indigo dye and textiles have long played a vital role in shaping history. Prior to its democratisation into ordinary denim, indigo, often known as “blue gold”, was eagerly sought after. Indigo textiles were so valuable that in some regions such as West Africa, they were exchanged as currency. Around the 1780s, supply of Indigo from Western sources was scarce due to existing hostilities as a result of the American Revolutionary War, which served to disrupt British production of indigo in America (Sharrer, 1971). However, the demand for Indigo was rising in Europe. Therefore, for the British, cultivation and export of Indigo from India was the most commercially feasible option (Sah, 1980). Indigo production in India by British colonial powers began in the 19th century in Bengal and parts of what is now Bihar, and soon became the finest indigo available in the Western market (Prasad, 2018).

Under the Zamindari land settlement system, a multitude of oppressive farming practises were

imposed on peasants, who were often forced to take loans or advance payments called 'dadon' at high-interest rates, leaving them in crippling, lifelong debt (Prasad, 2018). Moreover, indigo cultivation had negative ramifications on soil fertility and nutrition, leaving the land subsequently barren and the farmers incapable of producing other crops. The extreme exploitation and oppression of the farmers by British planters eventually culminated into the 'Indigo Revolt' (*Nil Vidroha*) of 1859-1860. Resentment against the oppressive practises of the British led to mass riots, burning, looting, boycotts and the deaths of numerous peasants and planters (Sutro, 2005). The revolt signified a refusal to passively accept suffering and oppression at the hands of the British and is viewed by some as one of the preliminary acts of agitation that paved the way for India's freedom struggle. What began as an economic struggle against indigo planters soon evolved into an anti-imperialist movement against the British administration, according to Pramode Sengupta (Bhattacharya, 1977). The movement also influenced the art and culture of Bengal as portrayed by the 1860 play, *Nil Darpan*, written by Dinabandhu Mitra. It was hailed as a remarkably bold representation of British oppression and forced cultivation of indigo (Nandi, 2016). It has been argued that the play was written and formulated in an effort to integrate the urban elite into the suffering of the peasants to strengthen the resistance front.

It is important to explore the cultural and economic significance of Indigo in the context of colonialism in India. Despite the fact that indigo cultivation and dyeing had a long history in India, it was only in the late 16th century that it began to be brought to Europe, notably by the Dutch East India Company. Imported dye from the *Indigofera* plant was soon recognized to be far superior to the indigenous European woad dye that held a monopoly in the European market at the time. Due to the imminent threat that the imported indigo posed to indigenous woad-growers in Europe, Indigo that was manufactured in India was soon forbidden in France and Germany, with the threat of the death penalty for anyone found using it (Asiaticus, 1912). Although indigo farming subsequently shifted to America as a result of the restrictions on trade from India, the American indigo industry was impermanent and

attention soon began to shift to other profitable products such as coffee and sugar. At the same time, the Indian indigo industry was slowly reviving and the East India Company began to take gradual steps to successfully set up cultivation once more in Bengal and Bihar. The industry began to flourish and soon became a staple industry in Bengal.

For the British, the blue hue symbolised wealth and success as European capital and skill continued to pour into Bengal (Asiaticus, 1912). Bourdieu (1986) talks of social capital as an aggregate of actual or potential resources relating to membership of a group or to a network of institutionalised relationships. As indigo began to rapidly gain commercial importance, the British began to utilise the accruing profits that emerged out of indigo as social capital. This social capital, in turn, fed into and began to function as symbolic capital (Ihlen, 2018) in the context of indigo production. Power dynamics, in combination with the commercial success that indigo cultivation afforded, interacted to create a system that functioned on the exploitation of indigo farmers.



*The fabrics of Indigo.*

**Illustrated by Tanya D'souza**

*Alt text- Illustration of the back of a person wearing jeans and an indigo shirt with paisley print. There are some flowers kept inside the back pocket of the jeans.*



The Indigo Ryots of 1859-60 ultimately led to the closure of the East India Company in Bengal and the appointment of an Indigo Commission by the British government to inquire into the matter (Bhattacharya, 1977). In 1917, Mahatma Gandhi arrived at the Champaran district in response to requests from local leaders to understand the disputes over indigo cultivation, ultimately sparking the Champaran Satyagraha and giving direction to India's Civil Disobedience Movement (Henningham, 1976). Fast forward to present-day India, where the art of indigo dyeing is one that has been passed down over generations. Indigo has taken on a new sociocultural meaning for the various characters that interact with it. Gilon (2020) sheds light on the lives of a community of indigo dyers and harvesters from Tamil Nadu and the central importance of indigo in their day-to-day lives. Balachander, who runs KMA Exports, India's largest indigo harvesting and production company, narrates how the harvesting and dyeing of indigo holds religious and cultural symbolism for the villagers. The labourers present offerings and pray to *Neel Atha* (Blue Mother) before beginning the indigo extraction. Indigo is a major cash crop in the region and supports the livelihood of the community and surrounding families (Gilon, 2020).

Indigo dye now holds immense value in contemporary fashion, under the aegis of Indian ethnic and Indo-Western apparel. Natural fabrics and dyeing techniques are slowly regaining their popularity, particularly in light of the shift towards sustainable, eco-friendly fashion (Kulranjan, 2018). According to Mansi Gupta, founder and CEO of Tjori, this newfound shift in consumer preferences can be largely attributed to a newer generation of eco-conscious fashion connoisseurs. In addition to the changing landscape of the fashion industry, designers have begun to incorporate indigo's historical roots in contemporary fashion, often making use of the historical significance of indigo to create exclusive, niche fashion collections. Sproles (1981) discusses the principle of historical continuity of fashion and the proposition that each new style of fashion is an extension or elaboration of previous fashions as opposed to dramatic changes. Incorporating indigo into contemporary fashion is a nod to its prominent role as a textile agent as well as

its historical roots. Sunaina Suneja, a Delhi-based designer, recounts how she was inspired to launch her own Indo-Western, indigo-based clothing line after visiting an old indigo factory in Champaran (Hindustan Times, 2007).

The art of creating natural indigo dye and its importance for local harvesters and artisans is another aspect that designers incorporate when launching indigo collections. It is not uncommon to see popular fashion brands such as BIBA, Fabindia and Global Desi launch Indo-Western fashion collections that emphasise the 'handmade', 'hand-crafted' aspect of indigo garments while incorporating elements of the intergenerational nature of the indigo dye and the rawness of the process. A vast proportion of these natural indigo garments are usually placed at higher price points and marketed towards a specific consumer demographic that can afford the exclusive, natural Indo-Western collections (Tankha, 2017). It can be argued that there is an extent of capitalisation of indigo within the fashion industry to establish the presence of a hybrid fashion identity that captures the various meanings behind the shade.

Indigo holds a unique position in India's socio-cultural space, given the various layers of symbolism that amalgamate together to portray it as a shade that is 'authentically Indian' while simultaneously representative of colonial oppression. It takes on a new meaning for each person that may engage with the shade in their day-to-day lives. For the dyers and harvesters, it is a source of livelihood, a dying craft that has been handed down from one generation to the next. For the designers, it provides a channel of artistic expression that embodies a fusion of traditions and modernity, creating a hybrid Indo-Western fashion identity. And for the new generation of eco-conscious consumers, it is a sustainable alternative that lends them a link to the past.

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**Art  
Review  
Competition**

## 01

## Reimagining Muslim Masculinities, Gay Love & Islamicate Culture: Amir Khusro's 'Rang'

Author - Simran Mendon

*Islamicate culture, by prominent scholars, is understood as an amalgamation of traditions and customs prevalent in the Muslim community that may not necessarily ground themselves in the religious text. In this article, the author is attempting to deconstruct key elements of this culture primarily pertaining to racialised Muslim masculinities and homosexuality whilst revealing the missing position of critical nuance to be in the parallel Sufi tradition. The medium to do so is through a deep analysis of colour in the 14th-century Sufi poem, 'Rang' by Amir Khusro written as an ode to his spiritual master, Nizamuddin Auliya.*

In the most popular rendition of the qawwali available on the internet Ustad Rahat Fateh Ali Khan and Ustad Amjad Sabri belt couplets upon couplets at a pace that leaves even the listeners weary and breathless. This is a traditional qawwal composition – the men playing with it, be it the band, lead singers, or the chorus, are masters in their field with exquisite knowledge of the tradition's history. At the core of the opulent production however, is Amir Khusro's poem, 'Rang'. Written around the late 13th century as an ecstatic proclamation addressed to his mother, 'Rang' was meant to lay bare before the world the glorious union between Khusro, a Sufi poet and mystic, and his beloved, his spiritual master, Nizamuddin Auliya.

Albeit the title, 'Rang' throughout its course does not allude to any particular shade or hue. There is jubilant colour of course, as the chorus goes, but there is no mention of what exactly that colour might be. This resounding **ambiguity** in the song coupled with its multitude of deeper, sociologically sound meanings and reimaginings shall form the crux of the paper's analysis.

Ambiguity in Sufi poetry is not a particularly uncommon theme given the many allegories

employed so as to enhance the overall experience of it being performed in a *mehfil* (gathering). However, this quality of ambiguity—with special emphasis on Khusro's 'Rang'—is the answer to a larger, Said's (1979) Orientalism-pertaining cultural irregularity. The Islamic culture is observed to be phono-centric, i.e., reliant more on words, sounds and speech as opposed to the Western world's ocular-centrism: reliant on vision or imagery (Abuali, 2020). The phono-centrism append stems, for instance, primarily from the heavy significance of certain religious practises like *zikr*—a ritualistic chanting, recitation or remembrance of Allah or for performing Sufis, the spiritual master (Abuali, 2020). Islamic belief, with its strong aversion to idolatry, does not prescribe any visual description of either Allah or his Messenger. Islamicate culture has even deemed visual depiction of the latter blasphemous, justified of punishment, and sometimes even violence. Therefore, for Sufis and most Muslims, repetitive chanting is a deliberate process of **evoking** the spiritual; the realm beyond what can be seen, observed and legitimised.

That there is colour today – 'Aaj Rang Hai Ri, Maa' – is repetitively proclaimed so as to **induce** the idea of colour itself, irrespective of the content. The content itself, therefore, is allowed to embody a multitude of

meanings; it imbues a certain imaginative freedom. For instance, while the song begins with celebrating the colour that prevails today (other translations of the lyrics also view it as meaning ‘colour of the day’), it moves on to celebrate the colour of the spiritual master (‘*Tora Rang Mann Bhayo, Nijamuddin*’), to finally the disciple being bathed in the colour of the beloved master (‘*Main Toh Aiso Rang, Mahboob-i-Ilahi*’). Colour is everywhere, is **of** the master, and is therefore, also **of** the beloved. One might argue here the allusion to the biblical Word – which was at once with God, was God and had existed before all else (NIV Holy Bible, 2011, John 1:1).

One can also argue here that perhaps the lack of reference to a particular shade of colour in *Rang* alludes to a larger ambiguity that shrouds the nature of relationship between the Sufi disciple and his spiritual master. That this is a man professing his exponential love for another man—imagining himself to be his beloved (‘*Mere Mehboob*’) and sharing the marital bed with him (‘*Khusro rain suhag ki, toh main jaagi pi ke sang*’), praising his beauty (‘*Des bides main dhoond phiri... Par tosa na koi rang dekha*’) and celebrating while in awe of it (‘*Aaj rang hai re*’)—is only a superficial disguise of an inner consciousness’ reimagining. For Sufis, gender consciousness, as is commonly believed, is fissured by their mystic consciousness. They are Master-Disciple first – heiring a long, sacred tradition of attempting to transcend current imaginings and into the realm of God. The process of doing so, however, unwittingly involves deliberating in gendered roles and subsuming them under mystical interpretations (Malamud, 1996). This, the author argues, is perhaps Islamicate culture’s most significant intersection with the Sufi tradition and one that is evident in glimpses from ‘*Rang*’ as well.

For instance, racialised Muslim masculinities foundationally position the men as hegemonic, accompanied with compulsory heterosexuality, as well as emotional distance and vested in sustaining the community through kinship (Britton, 2018). And this, of course, finds itself in the Sufi tradition as well – the master **is** all-powerful; his knowledge if questioned by the disciple may elicit a quasi-violent response of abandonment. He has absolute authority over the body of the disciple – neither an action nor

a thought must be entertained without the consent of the master. In ‘*Rang*’, the Nizam ‘*lights up the world*’ and ‘*whatever he asks, is given to him*’. Perhaps, the most potent is: ‘*Wherever I see, o mother, his colour is with me*’.

The continuation of the Sufi lineage, or *silsila*, is shouldered by the Master and like the Islamicate culture, is largely patrilineal. This is primarily because every Sufi line claims to trace itself back to the Prophet, who in turn traces Himself back to God (Allah). The Master, like God, possesses the metaphorical power to reproduce progeny who are as diligent as the Prophet (Malamud, 2020). The process of producing this progeny inhabits perhaps a subversively sexual connotation as well – an epiphany, an idea of enlightenment, a seed that desires to diminish the ego and be one with God is gardened within the disciple’s consciousness. Then the disciple through submission, and incessant learning—a process of *fertilisation*, one can argue—births a new identity as one part of the lineage. In ‘*Rang*’, this process is evident through the mention of colour – ‘*The colour of the prophet is the blessed dye, God’s hand does the dyeing; whoever’s veil is dyed in this colour, happiness is their fortune!*’

But unlike in Islamicate society where the father is a towering, patriarchal figure of hegemonic masculinity, in the Sufi tradition, the Master is also nurturing (a conventionally feminine attribute) – as he is duly involved and present for the disciple’s intellectual and emotional growth. The power to procreate is *complemented* by the rhetoric of authority (Malamud, 2020).

These ambiguities in gender identity are, as mentioned in the beginning of the paper, often accompanied by a romantic (and sometimes, sexual) underlining of the Master-Disciple relationship. But within the Sufi tradition, these elude public scorn, embarrassment or even charges of blasphemy unlike the larger Islamicate society that views homosexuality as *haraam* (sin). Sufi tradition fully **embraces** the crucial nuance that missed the Islamicate understanding of homosexuality. The **ambiguity** that emboldens the distance between societal inacceptance and private relationships between men – that homoeroticism was natural, a homosexual act impermissible (Schmidtke,

1999).

Therefore, Rang—and in a larger sense, the Sufi tradition—is as revolutionary as it is love-struck. But the inherent ambiguities are what simultaneously transform and define the Sufi tradition as well as the larger Islamicate society and intricately connect the two together, despite obvious attempts by the latter at denying the said connection. The element of submission, of course, is foundational to both; with the Sufis, it is primarily to the beloved who at once could be God (Allah), or the beloved Master, but with the Islamicate society, it is primarily to God (Allah). Strict adherence to conventions, puritanical notions of honour, and a fundamentally unequal relationship between Master-Disciple and God-Believer are common characteristics (Malamud, 1996). However, one could argue that it is the mystic consciousness' impact on the interpretation of gender that serves as a turning point for these two parallel lineages. While racialised Muslim masculinities, as a result of intense patriarchy, embed notions of compulsory heterosexuality, negative emotionality amongst men, and a fear of over-assertive women (Britton, 2018), the Sufi traditions subverts these notions to reveal critical nuance. They embrace feminine imagery, mutual attraction and an intense companionship between men.

It is the ambiguous nature of discipleship itself that lends to this stripping of gendered roles and identities and paves the way for critical nuance to prosper. It is through submission, obedience, intense love and attachment as well as strict adherence to rules that spiritual authority is achieved. The medium for it all, of course, is art. Art that is imbued with the potential to mould meanings, to transform boundaries and to reimagine social realities whilst retaining its core of love and perhaps, the mystery that nourishes love is truly one that may stand the test of time, changing cultural norms and an ever-rising wave of toxic masculinities.

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# **Seminar Papers**

## 01

# “The Darker the Night, the Brighter the Stars”

Author - Jean Crasto

Humans, as social beings, learn forms of socialisation as we grow and then learn to nurture relationships made through socialisation. One could say that the social image of an individual is formed by the relationships they make. These relationships are set in circles around the individual, with some being closer to the individual than others. While these relationships maintain a dynamic nature, an onlooker notices that they are formed between mortal beings. Hence the duration of the fruitful era of these relationships lasts till the two ends are well and breathing. While death is infamous for coming upon an individual unannounced, it brings a different dynamic to the relationships that the individual has formed with several others. Death, though an end to an individual's journey in the physical world, is a beginning for the people around them. The beginning of a task to preserve the memory of the lost loved one. How does one hold onto memories of someone out of sight? Grief has several variations which are brought about with the traumatic experience that gives birth to it. Though sources of grief have dynamics of their own, I would like to focus on a more pronounced and universal version of grief i.e. grief experienced when a loved one passes away. While looking at hope through the context of the pandemic and the several struggles emerging through it, one realises that hope arises as a consequence of tragic times. It emerges as a flipside to grief. Creating a concrete path towards propagation of hope by religion requires me to first narrate an analysis of grief.

In this paper, while looking at Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's stages of grief that have been established on an individualistic level along with cultural relativity occurring in the expression of individual grief, I would like to elaborate and discuss how grief occurs as a communal emotion. Lastly, after having

established how grief prompts a need for hope in a community, I would like to bring in the ways in which organised religion plays a part in the process of bereavement, providing solidarity and hope.

### Grief as categorised by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross:

In an attempt to understand the basis of the nature of reactions to grief, many psychologists have researched and created several structural models for grief and loss. While grief occurs as a personal emotion, it extends into the environment of that individual. In an attempt to prove grief as a social emotion, I want to look at previous studies of grief, especially one by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. By establishing the 5 stages theory, she gave a probable universality to the personal expression of grief. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in her book “On death and dying” (1969), introduced the Kübler-Ross model also known as the DABDA model. While studying patients diagnosed with terminal illnesses, she theorised sequential stages of emotions that the patient went through. Kübler-Ross suggested that one goes through five distinct stages of grief after learning about terminal illness: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally acceptance.

**Denial** would be the first reaction to loss. In this stage the individual, unable to cope with the sudden change in their reality will cling onto a false, preferable reality. Instead of believing in an unfavourable reporting of events, they will choose not to believe them all together. This, I believe, stems from the sudden realisation of the cold vacuum left by the future absence of the deceased individual. The initial shock makes them deny the event altogether so as to deflect the hard consequences. When the individual moves past the stage wherein they can no longer deny the sudden turn of events, they are likely to feel



frustrated with their involvement in them. This is the **anger** stage. While questioning why they're being subjected to the tragedy, they could possibly express anger to individuals in their proximity. The idea of expression of anger due to the shock is quite relative and not always culturally accepted.

I believe that the hope aspect to the entire situation comes in at the third stage which is **bargaining**, wherein the individual feels that maybe they have a way out and they won't have to settle for the worst end of the deal. While one can see the swooping in of several forms of support for the grieving individual, I shall focus on the application of organised religion as a way to promote and support the grief-stricken. The idea behind this third stage finds basis in concepts of trust issues against the delivery source of information, confidence in technological advancement of this generation, and also craving for a silver lining in this dark cloud of despair. The fourth stage comes in as a realisation of an individual's mortality. This stage termed **depression** becomes a period within which the individual becomes silent and introspective or just detached from their surroundings to spend much of their time mourning. The conflict of emotions is attempted to be dealt with internally. In the last stage of **acceptance** the individual embraces the mortality of their loved ones and the inevitable future. Though initially designed around studying terminally ill patients and their acceptance of their diagnosis, Kübler-Ross later expanded her DABDA model so as to include any form of personal loss, especially the loss of a loved one.

I understand the first four stages of this model as the negative part whereas the last stage is presented as the preferable stage. Though the time period of these stages aren't particularly specified, with subjectivity being considered in every case, one does understand that Kübler-Ross narrates it in a way that the first four stages are understood to be quick and acceptance to be long term. The Kübler-Ross model wants to present the narrative of the fleeting manner of the emotions we mostly experience after a tragic event. It reminds us that whatever we are feeling now isn't permanent. I believe that the stages are established as consequential reactions to loss and death. But as the emotions experienced by the grieving are varied and subjective, one can never generalise their

reaction in these five stages. A year after Kübler-Ross' own death in 2004, a new book by her and David Kessler, was published. Kübler-Ross, in this book, stated that the previous 5 stages model was not a linear timeline with each stage as a momentary stop in grief. While the 5 stage theory appears to not be universal in encapsulating the individualistic expression of grief, what caught my attention was how personal grief spreads within a community for it to become a communal emotion. So how exactly does this happen?

### **Grief, a social emotion?**

We grieve in order to recognise the loss of the safe and familiar. When a loved one is lost, it triggers the emotion of grief due to separation and the loss of a future progression of events wherein they won't be a part of this world. The Cambridge dictionary simplistically describes grief as "*a very great sadness, especially at the death of someone.*" This is quite a biased and individualistic outlook at the emotion of grief. In fact, most of the research conducted on grief and its consequences have been drawn with an individualistic and psychological perspective in mind. In wanting to bring about a communal dimension to the expression of grief, I feel it's necessary to refer to the work of psychologist John Bowlby's attachment theory (Bowlby, 1980). This theory fuels the individualistically perceived nature of grief, it describes grief to be induced by a "psychological connection between humans". So while studying grief in an individual, the theory studies the intimate bonds one makes during the course of their life. Though this theory specifically focuses on the parent-child relation, it shows that close attachments bring depth to personal grief. Thus, grief can be understood as a reflection of the individual, their relationship with the person who died, the circumstances of the death, coping skills, and many other factors.

The social constructivist theory states that "*people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and by reflecting on those experiences*" (Olorode and Jimoh, 2016). By exchanging important information about their lives, they form bonds. These bonds then act as channels of information that create narratives around individuals, often meaning, "*we are active creators*

*of our own knowledge*” (Akpan et al., 2020). Death of any individual means a constant effort to preserve the biographical narrative of that individual by their family and acquaintances. While trying to accept the sudden change that the loss of that individual has caused, one strives to not forget that individual. The story of an individual’s life is intertwined with the story of their loved ones/community members. When an individual’s story ends, especially in untimely death, there is a vacuum created that the community tries to fill through religious/cultural beliefs (eg. belief in an afterlife/heaven/spirit world).

An interesting tradition that my community, the *Kupari Christians of Vasai*, upholds is that 14 days after the death of an individual, the community gathers to share anecdotes, memories and feelings about the deceased. That, I feel, is the main element that brings forth a social dimension to the expression of grief in my community. The practising of these remembrances and memorial rituals and ceremonies make grief more community-based than it is usually believed to be. Further in this paper, I would be looking at the cultural differences in the expression of grief where the different communal traditions would, in a way, solidify the hypothesis of grief occurring as a social emotion.

#### **A cultural understanding of grief:**

While we look at the expression of grief being widely varied and nuanced in individuals, one wonders how different cultures around the world express grief and mourn differently. Communities react to and make attempts to move on from grief and loss induced by tragic events. While seeking an understanding of the cultural expression around the world, anthropology attempts to look outwards but also inwards, since understanding the culture of others can enrich the understanding of our own culture. Since we are beings of society, shaped by culture, our responses to certain events are very relative to our cultural learning. Grief, as a human expression, can then be understood as a product of culture like marriage and other customs.

The religious institutions in any culture majorly influence the cultural beliefs and norms. While many cultures live without a concrete religious belief, the rituals are determined by their belief in the

supernatural. For example, in a culture that majorly practises a monotheistic religion, the believers are required to follow doctrines and live in good faith of one true almighty God. On the other hand, cultures that practise polytheistic religions tend to the desires of their gods, as directed in the texts in order to receive the promised fruits. One sees the practice of rituals in both types of religions and a devout faith in the redemption from problems through spiritual means. Whilst holding the knowledge that religions influence cultural traditions and practices and that cultures mould religions to fit it’s diverse nature, I want to look at the reaction certain cultures have to grief and mourning induced by death.

Shinto and Buddhism are the two most popular religions in Japan and each religion has had a significant effect on the way in which religious Japanese individuals think of or conceptualise death and react to it. I would say that ruling out the personal aspect to death, *the societal attitude towards grief and mourning are, in a way, formal*. Yet one observes that the formality attached to the attitude and practices gives some structure to the life events of the person in mourning and it allows an opportunity for personal grieving and a chance to confide and console one another (Applebury, 2019). Though death is considered as an inevitable experience in one’s mortal life, the family of the deceased is expected to have a high level of participation during the mourning period and in maintaining the belief in afterlife for their own consoling.

Elaborate rituals maintained within cultures help humans process the emotions of grief after having lost a loved one. The core beliefs of a culture are held by rituals and thus provide a sense of security and control in an otherwise vulnerable and hopeless situation. In Hindu philosophy, the belief that the soul of the deceased stays attached to the body despite it’s mortal demise has upheld the ritual of cremation. In wanting to set the soul free, as a final act, the burning corpse’s skull is forcefully struck and cracked with a stick, by a close family member, in an attempt to release the soul. Further, the followers of Hindu philosophy believe in the full liberation of the soul from it’s mortal attachments through the dispersion of the ashes and remaining bone fragments of the individual into a river or an

ocean, mostly a historically revered and holy place, like the bank of the river Ganges. Now somebody of another faith may wonder about the need for a ritual to be this brutal and require a faithful to crush the skull and burn the body of their loved one when instead the remains can be cared for. The Hindu doctrine of rebirth preaches the need for a soul to travel through several life circles in order to attain *moksha*. The journey to *moksha* is not an easy one since the soul has to endure a lot of pain and mortal agony. But knowing and believing that there is peace and glory at the end drives a faithful to do their duties for themselves and for others. In burning the body and purifying the soul of their loved one, one ensures a safe passage of that soul into the next life.

### **Public display of grief: illicit or implied?**

Mourning, understandably, accompanies grief. All cultures train their individuals in how they must display their emotions of grief. While some cultures promote the grieving to talk to the deceased, other cultures encourage not speaking the name of the dead again. One cross-cultural, anthropological study that fascinated me was one directed by Anthropologist Unni Wikan where she sought to compare the rules about the emotional expression of grief. While comparing the cultural rules in Bali and Egypt, she found that the cultures in Bali dissuaded women from crying. While between Egyptian women, expression of grief in a socially accepted manner was loud crying and demonstrative weeping (Wikan, 1988). The West seems to be a bit reserved about the expression of grief in a way that it places a time stamp on the process of moving on. In accordance with the understanding of Kubler-Ross' stages, there is no particular time period for each stage and an individual can choose to remain in whichever stage they prefer or choose to move through them quickly and seek support to heal. The concept of placing a time stamp on the grieving period seemingly wrecks the entire community wherein the individual can't seek help in the prolonged period of grief.

### **Hope, a flipside to grief?**

While believing that there exists an antithesis to every concept, one could argue for a flipside to grief. Does hope stand as a worthy opponent to balance out the negativity that grief perpetuates? I would say that though hope is presented as strong enough to ward

off grief, the channel through which hope comes in, is very important. Support systems are of different types. These forms of support come in when an individual is at their weakest after suffering a loss. While it presents the colourful image of moving on, it is important to know the results that the support system promises through the model of hope it offers. While some support systems like counselling groups ask for one's presence and time in exchange for finding a purpose that tries to go beyond the loss experienced, other support systems like organised religions ask for your loyalty and faith in the philosophy they preach in order to reap the benefits it promises. I will look at the hope propagated by religion further on but I would like to first address the silver lining that hope appears as, due to the general understanding of better times after times of struggle and loss.

The idea that the troubled period won't last for long and there will be happy times in the future is a philosophy that has been passed down through generations of stories and myths. It certainly did succeed in being strong enough of a belief to get people to start believing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hope, thus, is seen as a natural response in times of turmoil. Then how does religion infiltrate the domain of emotions that people experience? Religion has been known to preach its ideologies by targeting the people who feel that they lack something in this world. While promising to fulfil the void that people have within themselves, religion turns vulnerable people into faithful followers. In doing so, not only do they hope to amass a huge following of that idol of ideology but rather benefit by propagating that the promises can only be reaped if certain rituals and ceremonies are performed in the name of the religion. One is left to wonder if the hope given by religion fulfils the individual or that it remains as false hope while the individual is shrouded/distracted with various rituals and texts. So when can hope be classified as false? Does false hope seem more appealing than no hope at all? I believe that true hope is based in reality while false hope comes from a more distorted version of reality.

### **False hope and the moral dilemma around it:**

There arises a very philosophical question to this: is having false hope morally wrong? I believe that the

occurrence of false hope can have several variations and contexts. While some people are rendered more susceptible and vulnerable to false hope than others, no one remains immune. One can choose to rely on a seemingly suspicious silver lining in times of turmoil or not believe and succumb to the grave situation. One can morally evaluate false hope by looking at the positive and negative effects of it where one can see if the well-being of the individual is promoted through the belief in this false hope. If looked from the consequentialist perspective, one can determine the continuation of promotion of false hope if the positive effects exceed the negative ones.

In order to build a strong connection between the role of organised religion and the propagation of hope one needs to show the depth of the relation between faith and hope. So how deep does the relation between faith and hope go? On the first glance, the relationship seems obvious. People hope because they have faith. But, according to me, faith is not sufficient for hope. Though it stands as an essential element in the rise of hope among individuals, what drives individuals more is the need for a meaning and that is often what organised religion offers. Taking the grave situation of the pandemic as a concrete and relatable example, one observed that people needed a purpose to thrive in life. Religion, through online mass services and religious statements of affirmation, provided a perfect distraction from all the turmoil in one's life. Religion, while doing so, ensured that its doctrines suffice that the supernatural they believe in will manage and take care of all our problems. I come from a family of Christians who aren't particularly devout but would prefer not missing their Sunday mass service. Now keeping such a family as an example, one realises that workplaces weren't the only ones that had to adapt to the sudden transition to virtual space due to the pandemic. Religious institutions adapted too and didn't fail to deliver their "services" to its believers.

#### **Religious institutions, merchants of false hope:**

Knowing that the preaching of a religion makes the believer think of their reality as not that bad and that the fruits of God await them if they live in good faith, is it too far-fetched to claim that religion promotes false hope? Does presenting the ideology of life after death as objective facts make religion a propagator of false hope to its believers? Religion has always

played a role as a saviour of people with no hope. Religion, for its believers is an institution to fall back on during hopeless times and for non-believers it has the power to give something to rely upon hence convincing them in their religious doctrines. Loss makes us more vulnerable and leaves us in a complete state of dependence and helplessness upon something greater than ourselves. The coping process that is needed for the perpetuation of acceptance and hope comes for many in the form of religion. There is a very probable uncertainty that accompanies hope. One may believe that the possibility of not receiving a favourable outcome stands with the same odds as receiving a favourable one but the individual exists as an intellectual being distracted by nothing but religion. Religion brings the individual to comfort by making him feel safe in the presence of a greater being who understands and will take care of their problems.

The doctrine of afterlife brings about the sense of security that the souls of one's loved ones will continue to survive even after mortal deaths. In the Hindu philosophy, the doctrine of rebirth and the belief in the journey to moksha perpetuates a certain safeness and acceptance around death. There are quite a few rituals that celebrate and wish upon the safe journey of the soul from the body to the next life and body. While these rituals keep the individuals shrouded in security, they also require the individual to put in effort to strive towards preserving the memory of the lost one by donating in the name of the deceased to the structural institutions of these organised religions.

#### **Pain demands to be felt:**

This paper has been a revelation towards the many dimensions of both grief and hope. Through the analysis of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' 5 stages theory on grief, the subjectivity that revolves around the experience of grief, as an individual and social emotion, becomes pertinent. On the note of concluding, though widely accepted, the DABDA model does not stand as an universal model for the measuring of grief. Though this model seems linear with a quick progression from shock to acceptance, I want to emphasise on the infinite amount of time people need and should be allowed to recover from their loss. Grief, though believed to be quite

individualistic, is a social emotion that has different expressions in different cultures. A by-product of cultural evolution, grief and mourning rituals have importance in every culture as it celebrates the departure of a member of that culture. While looking at the importance of support systems in times of grief, organised religion appeared in prominent light with all of its doctrines preaching fruitful joy upon faithful ritualization. The argument on false hope was quick to slide in while talking about the promotion of after-life by many religions. Since the propagation of false hope seemed quite easy whilst holding bereaved as vulnerable targets, I had to make an ethical analysis of the need for false hope. My title finds its source in the quote: “*The darker the night, the brighter the stars; the deeper the grief, the closer to God.*” (Dostoevsky, 2001). Though this does not solely justify the reason why people turn to religion in times of turmoil, it does create a basis to understand the positionality that religion operates from while choosing to “console” the bereaved.

Grief can be emotionally, physically and spiritually agonising. Most of the time the agony feels unbearable. The entire period is characterised by combinations of emotions that seem fleeting and hurtful. The length of this period is subjective and can stretch for even years. My research for this paper had me stumble across several ‘coping with grief’ pamphlets. Though they all were empathetic and understanding, I remember only a single quote from one of them that stayed lodged like an arrow in my heart. It went: “Grief was love sustaining itself even after the loved one had passed on.” The words were simple, the message simpler even but the context from which they emerged was laden with devastation wherein the giver of emotions was faced with a wall instead of the warm, beating heart of their loved one. Though the spiritual journey of the deceased has many religious explanations, the mortal realm remains powerless against the wheel of time. Grief, understandably, does not follow a universal timetable but, based on personal experience, I would attest that it does ease over time. Hope comes in as an element shaped by various contexts. After a strenuous analysis of hope and its prevalence in everyday life and across cultures, I have realised that pain demands to be felt. Hope demands effort towards daydreaming in what could be, regardless of the loss incurred.

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# 02 Fandoms and Fanfiction as Support Systems

Author - Joanne Sequeira

Not every book or movie ends in a way that is entirely satisfactory. More often than not the fans are left with myriad different unanswered questions and unexplored possibilities. It is from this desire to explore and sometimes fix the original work that fanfiction came to be created. Fanfiction could be defined as a non-commercial, non-professional genre of literary fiction based on another original story (Lorente, 2020). Today fanfiction is published on various internet platforms where fans can coalesce and form communities known as fandoms. The power held by a fandom is so strong that if a plot or ending is unsatisfactory, fandoms can just decide that the offending events never happened. This is known as Fanon Discontinuity, whereby the fans eliminate from reality the details that bring them discomfort (Goodman, 2015).

Fanfiction might also be written by fans who wish to further develop characters or plotlines they feel were neglected by the original media's creator (Bamman & Milli, 2016). One of the biggest driving forces behind fanfiction is the "shipper" (Estes, 2010). A shipper is a fan who feels that certain fictional characters belong together and will either write fanfiction or create fanart that features their favoured pairing or OTP (one true pairing). Writing, reading and rewriting romance are key discursive practices where norms for gendered and sexualised behaviour are created and maintained but can also be challenged and reimagined (Tapionkaski, 2015).

The desire to create fanfiction can also stem from the inability to let go of a series that brought them comfort. Some fanfiction authors need to feel connected to the stories and characters they love, rather than embrace the end, these writers take it upon themselves to continue the story. The reason

fans are so bent on a perfect ending, or certain series not ending may stem from the relationship they have with the fictional characters.

### Parasocial relationships

Despite not being real, a well-written character is a relatable character. Fans find elements that are common in their lives and the lives of a fictional character. This makes them feel closer to the character as they relate to their struggles. The nature of this relationship can be both beneficial and detrimental. Fans can be inspired to persevere, despite trauma, because their favourite character managed to do so, but they can also be tempted to give up. In 2017, the Netflix series '13 Reasons Why' was released. The show's glamorized depiction of suicide as an act of revenge caused an upward trend in the number of suicides in the following months. This often proves that these fictional characters function as role models for the masses that relate to them.

Fans of a work can relate to their favourite characters so much that they project their own identity onto them, creating a sense of kinship, which has spawned the phenomenon of 'Kinning.' In some of the more extreme cases, fans believe that they are actually a reincarnation of their kin; citing the multiverse theory to back their claims. When the author makes a decision regarding the kin character that the fan views as unjust, they feel compelled to change it. Fans are so entwined with the character, that for them to believe that their goal is attainable, this character has to attain it first. And if that character is unable to, then neither are they. The nature of these goals can vary from anything between self-healing to succeeding in a romantic relationship.

In accordance with the idea of fanfiction being written

primarily to explore and expand on existing media, it has been proposed that fanfiction is used to help fans create a sense of agency or take control over their relationships with fictional characters (Lansang, 2019). These relationships are also referred to as parasocial relationships. It has been hypothesised that lonely individuals in particular, may resort to parasocial relations to fulfill their social needs (Wang, 2008). When they are unable to fulfill their needs in society, they turn to online communities and fictional universes. Parasocial relations have the capacity to alleviate certain social and psychological stressors. It also benefits individuals with low self-esteem, thus reducing their self-discrepancies i.e. the difference between their actual and their ideal selves by helping them grow closer to the characteristics of the media figures they admire (Derrick, 2014).

### **Self-insert characters**

Fanfiction is looked down upon by the literary community because most fanfics feature Mary Sue characters i.e., a fictional original character that can usually be identified as the alter ego of the author (Tapionkaski, 2015). These stories are often called self-inserts because a version of the writer's self, either real or idealised, is inserted in the text. Self-inserts can be of two forms. The fanfiction author can attribute personal characteristics to a character that already exists in the fictional universe. Or alternatively, the writer can create a fresh character, also known as an OC (own character), that is fashioned after themselves or their ideal. Fanfiction offers its writers a semiotic practice where they can experiment with their romantic desires, hopes, and fears and experiment with their gendered identities through writing a speculative life mixing real-life elements and fiction (Tapionkaski, 2015). Self-insertion fanfiction stories are a form of life writing where authors play with their identities in a virtual context in texts that mix reality and fiction.

The liberal mentality of the fanfiction community lets people explore identities that may be scrutinised in a conservative society. Since fanfiction forums are virtual, anonymous spaces where almost everyone uses pseudonyms, authors can experiment with their identities in ways that are not necessarily possible offline where the individual can be judged in face to face interactions. When people write self-insert

fiction, they are actively exploring and experimenting with different personalities and interests in order to find what fits. Most online fanfiction writers are not writing their full lives in fictional form, but often in rather short narratives, exploring certain aspects of their lives and identities, such as gender, sexuality, or ethnicity. Of the different aspects of identity, gender and sexuality are the most prominent on fanfiction sites. The most popular story types on these sites involve various types of romantic pairings, whether heterosexual or queer.

Writing, reading and rewriting romance are key discursive practices where norms for gendered and sexualised behaviour are created and maintained but can also be challenged and reimagined (Tapionkaski, 2015). A key example of this would be Slash fiction. Slash fiction is a genre of fan fiction featuring homosexual relations between the characters. Slash fiction fights heteronormative scripts to create spaces where queer youth can use their favorite characters and stories in order to create scenarios that allow them to explore their feelings, thoughts, and selves (Hu, 2016). But these stories are not limited to being created by and for queer fans. Stories featuring male homosexual characters are becoming increasingly more popular among female writers. Sociologist, Lindsay Mixer suggests that one of the reasons for this is the lack of power imbalances inherent to heterosexual relationships (Mixer, 2018). Much of the media we consume features women in more subservient roles. Slash fiction gives women the opportunity to explore relationships between gendered equals. Since both parties are of the same gender, there is a lesser chance of even internalised gender bias displayed in the story.

Fanfiction forums provide the writers with virtual rooms of their own where they can investigate the questions, challenges and troubles they face in their real lives (Tapionkaski, 2015). It is essentially a rehearsal of who they want to become, and in role-playing that ideal self, they can grow closer to achieving it. This is because the exploration does not happen in a void. The presence of others is necessary to understand how the experimental personality fits into society.

In *The Social Construction of Sexuality*, Seidman



explains how it is impossible to have a complete understanding of ourselves as an identity, without first having the language by which we can describe ourselves (Seidman, 2015). Humans construct their personality to fit the schemas that are available. For example, if an individual finds themselves experiencing attraction to someone of the same gender, they would label themselves as homosexual. However, if an individual experiences attraction to both genders but is unaware that bisexuality exists, then they are confused about their identity, unable to slot it as heterosexual or homosexual. Queer identities are not adequately represented in the media. Especially the trans, gender-fluid and aro/ace identities that barely get mentioned. Therefore, the only place members of these communities can find themselves represented is in fanfiction. “Fanfiction, as a creative outlet based in language, gives those who read and write it a means to define themselves in ways they may not have in their lived environments” (Mixer, 2018). On the Internet, communication is not hindered by geographical or social borders. The interactions that take place on these platforms lead to the development of a language that explains their perception of self. Fanfiction essentially gives them the required jargon to piece together and discover themselves.

On the other hand, fan fiction sites have their own norms and practices, and the author’s freedom to experiment with their writing is limited if they want to attract devoted readers who read and review their stories. Fanfiction is also used as a medium to vent out frustrations. Some writers claim that just knowing that there were readers that read and understood their problems brought them comfort. The anonymity provided by the internet guarantees confidentiality while confiding in strangers on the internet.

### **Cultural drawbacks of fanfiction**

These created personas have certain repercussions. Koehm (2018) states that “Media fandom engages in structural whiteness through participation in mainstream American culture’s default to whiteness and through engagement with default-white media.” Most of the English media we consume is geared towards an American audience whose social norms vary from our own. Because a certain set of traits are always ascribed to attractive characters, the fans

also try to copy them in order to feel closer to the character. While writers are comfortable exploring different aspects of their identity in their fanfics, there remains the socially conditioned desire to fit in. This is visible with the western pseudonyms used by members in a fandom regardless of ethnicity.

Some fanfiction writers also pick American culture as the default since they assume that it’s the culture most of their readers would be most familiar with. For example, a French writer in Lycee will refer to themselves as a high school student when talking about their education even though the French education system does not have a concept of high school. Emulating traits that differ drastically from their own cultures can lead to alienation from their own cultures. This indicates that even though fanfiction might present itself as a utopian space for marginalised voices, it is still not free of prejudice and institutionalised racism.

### **A temporary support system**

Just like the main series comes to an end at some point so does fanfiction. Fanfiction authors chose to discontinue their work for different reasons including loss of interest, no spare time, switching to a different coping mechanism or resolution of the event/problem that led them to write. In 2018, fanfiction author Furiyan decided to quit writing his famous series: *Of Ghosts and Valkyries*. His reasoning was that he started the story to cope with his then undiagnosed depression and now that he was taking antidepressants, he no longer felt the need to vocalise his experience through the fanfic.

During the years when the story was being written, it amassed a following of readers who not just enjoyed the plot but resonated with the emotions prevalent in the series. Even though these readers felt a sense of emptiness at the loss of their psychological safety nets or comfort stories, they did not react negatively to the fanfiction author choosing to discontinue his work. One of the reviews states: “I fully understand being in a better place and not wanting to go back to that old place in fear of returning to that mental and emotional state. So whatever happens, I’m rooting for you and I wish you the absolute best in life.” We can see that the similarity in the lived realities of the members of a fandom and the fandom culture that

emphasises empathy makes fandoms better equipped as a society to react appropriately to mental health issues.

However, the same fans are not as understanding with published authors. For example, A song of Ice and Fire fans are always pressing George RR Martin about the publication of the next book in the fear that he may not live to complete it. When fans spend money to read a book, fans feel that the authors owe them the story. This indicates how our consumption of fiction, just like any other commodity, is influenced by the presence of monetary exchanges.

### **Community and support**

Writing fanfiction may also enable individuals to feel a greater sense of community and comfort within a particular fandom or a collective group of fans (O'Donovan, 2016). Because, while writing tends to be a solitary act, fanfiction is not. It has a more participatory culture maintained through author's notes which are paratextual remarks made by the writer featuring insights about their writing process and/or details about their personal lives. These go a long way in helping readers develop a relationship with the writer as an individual rather than merely a producer of the fiction they consume. And reviews by which the readers interact with the authors by commenting on their work. In an interview, Allen Lau, the co-founder and CEO of Wattpad, mentioned that "For most people the motivation to write is having someone to appreciate their creation" (TLP team, 2019). The fanfiction community is usually very supportive when leaving comments on someone else's work. It's a norm for readers to leave a comment or like when finishing a fanfic or a chapter to show their support to the author.

Most reviews are positive comments letting the writer know that they are doing a good job, commenting on the elements they enjoy and requesting for updates. The more experienced writers give constructive criticism about their writing styles and suggestions about what they feel could be improved. The reviews provide the authors with positive validation and contribute significantly to their self-esteem. Negative reviews are rare due to the categorisation system that lets authors slot and readers find stories that meet their current mood and preferences. Most of the time,

they are not looking for a complex plot or surprising plot twists, because one of the appeals of fanfiction is the possibility to just indulge in what one likes to read (Lorente, 2020), even if that means reading fanfics with the same tropes and predictable endings again and again. This system has also made it easier for readers to avoid certain tags that would trigger them (like graphic descriptions of violence or major character death) and overall make it a safer space for everyone. Unlike commercial publications, fans don't need to make prior investments like buying a book or ticket to read fanfiction, therefore if a reader does not enjoy a particular fanfic, they just stop reading it because there is no loss. Criticism of this form contrasts the criticism received by commercial authors which is more harsh with the added sting of being public.

Because of this judgmental atmosphere prevalent in society, fans from marginalised sections of society (mainly females and queers), work to make sure that these communities function as support systems where writers can feel safe sharing their writing and gain more confidence while improving their writing skills. Several fans who identified as autistic said that fandom taught them more about interacting with other people than years of groups and classes. In fact, 'many women describe fandom as the first place where they truly created friendship ties with other women and found levels of intimacy otherwise foreclosed to them' (Busse, 2017). These ties manifest themselves through comments on one another's posts on blogging sites associated with fanfiction like Tumblr, Instagram, DeviantArt, direct messages, and participation in the gift economy of fanfiction, in which writers may write fanfiction inspired by or dedicated to another author (Koehm, 2018).

### **Representation and the power to change.**

For a long time, the fanfiction community has been dominated by women, as opposed to the canon literary scene where men have historically dominated (Lorente, 2020). Flegel and Roth (2016) argue that "The perception that fanfiction is primarily written by and for women reflects the genesis of media fandom as a haven for fans and writers who often found themselves marginalised from the traditionally male enclaves of speculative fiction" (Lorente, 2020).

In this regard, fanfiction is not only a platform for marginalised voices but also an outlet for voices that were marginalised in specific genres that were geared towards men, like science fiction or comics.

Women are no longer the only significant community on fanfiction sites. Over the last 20 years, there has been an increase in queer identities with respect to gender and sexuality, as well as neurodivergents. These identities bring new perspectives into the stories. The cultural value of fanfiction lies in the way it permits individuals from different backgrounds with varied lived realities, to write alternative versions of existing narratives. The characters they create speak more directly to readers from the same background as it acknowledges their own desires, investments and realities.

It's an unspoken rule that only marginalised individuals can write about marginalisation. But that does not mean that authors from a marginalised background cannot write marginalised characters. When it comes to the representation of marginalised communities, mainstream media indulges in two harmful practices- Queer baiting and token representation. The fanfiction community manages to circumvent these issues because of its community culture. The writers that publish their work on fanfiction sites also read stories by other fanfiction writers and interact with them. For example, a queer writer might write about being queer through their OC (own character), that fanfic is read by other cis authors. Using what they learnt from queer writers, cis authors can do a better job at representing queer characters in their own stories. The interactive interface also lets readers guide the author when they write about situations where they have no practical knowledge. For the readers, these fanfictions help them better understand the sections of society that the media fails to represent. This awareness is a necessity to transcend the issues prevalent in society.

In this manner, fanfiction creates a shared, mutually supportive subculture that exposes, subverts, and transgresses cultural norms and hierarchies (Lorente, 2020). However, to say that it plays a key role in inspiring change would be a stretch nonetheless it has a part. Especially with respect to representation it sets a base ideal for mainstream writers to emulate.

It is also a platform for marginalised individuals to write about marginalisation in a safe, non-judgmental environment but this contribution can not be considered as affirmative action. At best it provides suggestions on how to write marginalised characters that mainstream commercial writers could integrate in their own work.

### **Implications in the literary world.**

In fanfiction, the writer builds stories around characters and worlds that are already thoroughly developed by another person. The characters have a particular image, personality, and back story that exist and belong to the original creator. Therefore their usage in fanfiction is considered by many to be plagiarism. It's important to clarify that it is only copyright infringement if the inspired creation is substantially similar to the original. But when a fanfiction author takes a few elements from another's original work and creates something different, it can be considered as fair use, depending on the ratio of borrowed to new elements (Estes, 2010). The purpose of fair use is to defend works that build and transform original work into something new and different to the extent that it can stand on its own merit.

Some of the popular books published today once started as fanfiction. Fanfiction writers may begin to write to fuel their occupation with an original story. But over time, as they continue to write they deviate from the original while exploring their own interest. There are multiple fanfictions, especially in the AU (alternate universe) genre, that have nothing besides character names, in common with the work it claims to be based on. Dedicated fanfiction writers also spend a lot of time writing and editing their stories based on the constructive criticism they receive. This helps them improve their writing skills to publishing levels. Authors' opinion on fanfiction varies across the literary field. There are few like J.R.R. Tolkien who are against it, and those like C.S Lewis who are vocally supportive of it. 'Six of Crows' author Leigh Bardugo even considers it an honour that fans would write fanfiction about her characters. This sort of validation and encouragement from authors can inspire young fanfiction writers to pursue careers in the field.

Fanfiction writers should not be viewed as textual parasites - if anything, they live in symbiosis with their source, as they can also have their effect on the readings of source texts or open new viewpoints to it (Roine, 2015). Fanfiction sites can help drive interest in the original work (Estes, 2010). Crossovers and community relations encourage readers to explore fanfiction from different fandoms. If they like it, they end up purchasing the original work as well. It also helps authors create stories that fit the public demand, since the tags let authors know what tropes are popular in their fandoms. Some authors do not interact with their fandoms to avoid getting influenced by fan theories but there are also cases where interaction inspired positive change. In the Percy Jackson fandom, Ukrainian artist- Viria's art gained popularity through reposts on different social media fandom pages and its use as fanfiction cover art. The official art prior to 2017 did not match the cannon description of the characters in the series. When the author saw that Viria's fanart was closer to how he envisioned the characters and more visually appealing than the previous covers, he replaced her as the official artist for the series.

#### **Addressing the allegation of Escapism.**

It is often argued that the internet is not real life and that this can cause fanfiction writing to be labelled as a form of escapism. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines escapism as a "habitual diversion of the mind to purely imaginative activity or entertainment as an escape from reality or routine" (Merriam-Webster, 1997). Escapism can be extremely beneficial to people healing from mental trauma. It allows them to create distance between their trauma and triggers and focus on healing and personal growth. At the same time, psychologists warn people that escapism can have negative consequences. Over-indulgence in escapist fantasies can lead to dissociation from reality.

While most of the sciences consider only visible or tangible elements as reality, the concept of reality in sociology is less rigid. In 1928 William I. and Dorothy Thomas came up with the Thomas theorem which states, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Hoiland, 2020). This counters the claim that members of fandoms are wasting their lives in imagined fantasies . Because

as long as there is a community that considers it a part of reality, it can be considered real. "Not only do we construct our own society but we also accept it as it is because others have created it before us" (Hoiland, 2020).

In 1966 sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann wrote a book called 'The Social Construction of Reality'. Here they reasoned that society is created by humans and human interaction, which they call habitualization (Hoiland, 2020). The interaction between fans and fictional characters, fans in a particular fandom and between fandoms plays an active role in shaping the society we live in. Just like religions form cultures and traditions around supernatural beings, fandoms too create cultures that slip into our daily life. An example of this is Newt Day celebrated by the Maze runner fandom on 7th September. They picked the 250th day of the year to mark his death on page 250 of the final book.

Even fictional characters can be considered real, despite not being tangible beings because fans give them the agency to shape reality. These characters are as real as dead historical figures. Because after death or the destruction of the physical body, what remains of that individual is a group of people who acknowledge the memory and use it to shape the present. A Tumblr thread featuring lessons from fictional characters points out how fans of certain publications internalise the values of their favourite characters. For example, Grishaverse fans are more understanding of childhood trauma or Percy Jackson fans are more accommodating of the neurodivergent.

#### **Conclusion**

Fanfiction has been around since the release of Star Trek and has only grown in popularity since. The relatability and idolisation of fictional characters has led to the creation of parasocial relationships that gives them the hope to push past adversity and achieve their goals. Fandoms also build confidence and self-esteem and create a space where people can explore and grow more comfortable with their identity. Through self inserts, these stories and fandoms are workshops and training grounds where adolescents can explore aspects of themselves that society may not have permitted them to.

Majority of the people in a fandom come from a disadvantaged section of society. Because these people understand what it means to be pushed to the margins, they created a community that is more inclusive of diversity. Here, fans put aside differences that would normally prevent them from interacting in person, to create bonds that defy social norms. Fanfiction has been pushing the margins of social acceptability to create and wield discourses that challenge mainstream ideologies and beliefs. Fandoms have become platforms that inspire and revolutionise trends in the literary world. Particularly for those that can't find themselves in mainstream media, there is a desire to create characters that resemble the demographic they belong to. The representation in fanfiction does not stop at ethnicity. Fanfiction authors challenge social norms to introduce new ways of thinking, from power dynamics in relationships to expectations of, that broaden our definition of normal and attainable.

Fandoms may be niche online communities but they have the ability to influence spheres that are not clearly related to it. That is because we give the characters the agency to shape us. While it may seem irrational to give so much importance to fictional characters, the philosopher Schopenhauer, encourages us to look beyond it. According to him, "Human beings are not essentially rational but are desiring emotional animals whose rationality was developed to serve and maximise the will to live". And that is what fanfiction does, because the indulgence in the stories that bring us comfort gives us the will to go on.

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