EIDOS

The Department of Sociology and Anthropology
presents

EIDOS 2023-24

Identity

Construction, Contestation, Fluidity, Performance

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Acknowledgements

Eidos (2023-24) has been a journey, one that would not have been complete without the contribution, participation, and support of a number of people, who have made this edition of the journal possible. At the outset, I would like to thank Ms. Ankita Gujar, the faculty in-charge for Eidos, whose unwavering enthusiasm and consistent presence has made it possible for us to curate every aspect of the journal to the best of our ability. Her guidance, and her pursuit for precision, along with the creative freedom that she facilitated for the Eidos team, has been instrumental in bringing forth diverse perspectives through this journal. The department of Sociology and Anthropology has always been a space that has allowed for freedom of thought, and that culture has also extended to Eidos. I would thus like to thank Dr. Pranoti Chirmuley, the Head of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Ms. Radhika Rani, Dr, Sahana Sen, and Dr. Anupama Ramakrishnan for continually engaging with us, and providing their invaluable assistance and guidance throughout the journey of Eidos.

I also appreciate the writers who have contributed their articles to this journal. Their patience and willingness to engage with the rigorous editing process, has allowed us to bring to our readers, an array of articles exploring myriad facets of our theme. Through the course of our engagement with each other, we have not only been able to broaden our understanding of the topics at hand, but have also found spaces for conversation and exploration. Working with a dedicated and meticulous team of editors has been incredibly rewarding. Their commitment to devoting their time and effort to every aspect of the process, right from conceptualising the theme, to working with the writers has made this edition of Eidos possible. I thank the Eidos team - Tanishka, Shawn, Hiranya, Akriti, Dhiya, Geneive, Mohsina, and Srishti - for being there throughout the process, and for always being ready to go the extra mile to attempt to bring our vision of Eidos to life.

Our guests for the special features in this edition of Eidos have also played a special role in making sure that we are able to bring insights from different fields on the theme of Identity. I thank Chetan Vohra, for being so generous with his time in allowing us a sneak peek into the playful yet insightful world of Sochu, and for exploring childhood, storytelling, and identity formation with us. Aryan Somaiya and Sadaf Vidha, with their intriguing examples, and life experiences have also provided an interdisciplinary lens to look at identity from the perspective of mental health, and I thank them for making the time and space to engage in conversation with us. I would also like to thank Raconteur Tours, and La Bella Enterprises for their support in allowing us to print this edition of Eidos.

Lastly, a special thank you, to you, our reader, for picking up this edition of Eidos, and for continuing to participate in the never-ending, and dynamic exploration of the theme of Identity. A journal like Eidos represents a conversation, and it is only through your engagement, and responses to the articles, that we might be able to foster critical thought, and empathetic dialogue, to better understand ourselves, and the world we live in, through the lens of Identity.

- Ishika Khollam
Editor-in-Chief,
Eidos (2023-24)

Editorial Note

Who are you? Or, who am I?

There are probably many ways to answer this question, and in different contexts, the answers might vary. Each of the possible responses, however, lends us a peek into the identities we carry. The Oxford Dictionary defines Identity as "the fact of being who or what a person or thing is". At birth, we often have varied identities assigned to us, be it in terms of gender, religion, caste, class, region, etc. Along with these ascribed identities, we also carry achieved identities. These include the roles we occupy in our personal or professional lives, the likes and dislikes we carry, the choices we make, the ways in which we choose to express ourselves, etc.

And yet, this difference between ascribed and achieved identities is not a binary. Our identities are shaped in interactional and intersectional ways, by the consistent engagement between us, as individuals, and the varied structures, systems, institutions, and collectivities of different kinds, that we may be a part of. We then formulate different kinds of cultural practices, personal rituals, and communication devices, around these identities, and eventually, we pass them down to different people around us, as much as we take in their understandings of the identities we carry.

Our sense of identity allows us to find people and spaces that we might call our own, and at the same time, these very notions of identity, also enable the construction of the 'other'. As we continually engage in this creation of the "us" versus the "other", identities become loaded with value, and mediated through power. Identity then determines access to varied kinds of resources; and thus, the politics of identity, where different people from diverse identities struggle to gain, maintain, and retain power and control over resources, determine life chances, mobility, and opportunity for people. It is in these very realms that identity is then also politicised, and becomes a source for mobilisation, collective action, and at times, even violence.

These processes, of the constructions and reconstructions of identity, and its subsequent performance through varied identity markers, and actions, thus, embeds identity in a constant state of flux. It creates conceptions of selfhood that are often cohesive, as well as fragmented; deeply personal, yet heavily political; sentimental, but also structural; and convergent, as much as they are divergent and divisive. Identity, thus becomes more than just a "fact of being", but also becomes a site for contestation, and thus, a dynamic phenomenon that is deeply complex, layered, and nuanced.

The disciplines of Sociology and Anthropology have studied Identity in different ways. Starting from the micro frameworks of personal identity, the field of Identity Studies has also included social identity, its construction, and mobilisation on account of such Identities. Over the years, multiple theoretical strands, like primordialism, symbolic interactionism, social constructivism, instrumentalism, etc. have attempted to understand and theorise about the factors that influence Identities and the consequences that different intersections of Identities create for people from different backgrounds. Scholars have also studied the ways in which Identitarian qualities are ascribed to objects, spaces, rituals, traditions, and practices, to create complex structures of power that are then navigated and mediated differently, based

on Identities. This has also led to a study of the agents of socialisation that partake in reproducing or resisting the meanings ascribed to identities, as well as the potential for violence based on Identitarian parameters.

This year, Eidos (2023-24) explores Identity in its myriad forms. Through the sub-themes of Identity Construction, Contestation, Fluidity, and Performance, this theme attempts to understand the ways in which Identity influences the life course of individuals and groups, and the fascinating complexities that such a theme brings. Topics explored under this theme include meanings and symbolisms of various objects, spaces, and gestures, for people from different identities; linguistic, or cultural differences in value systems, and their contribution to the creation of identity; belongingness, and the ways in which we feel belonged to particular spaces; performances of gender, class, caste, religion, race, and other identities; neurodivergence or queerness and masking; appearance and the usage of clothing, accessories, and fashion devices to perform the self; art, performance, and meaning-making; the performance and meaning of emotions; our understandings of stereotypes, superstitions, and popular culture tropes; meaning-making, identity building, and mobilisation through the media; political performances, meaning-making by the state, and the role of optics, among others.

The special feature interview in this edition by Chetan Vohra explores the intersections between childhood, identity formation, self-concept, and the role of media in this process. Aryan Somaiya and Sadaf Vidha in their interview talk about mental health, and the consistent negotiations between the individual and the social structures that one inhabits, specifically in the context of gendered identities.

Thus, this edition of Eidos has a lot to offer. Through this journal, we hope to be able to pause, and to see how the most mundane actions that we perform everyday, or the things that slip by without us even noticing, might come from larger histories, and thus, foster a more critical, humanising, and empathetic approach towards each other, the self, and the world. Because at the end of the day, with all the identities we carry, we are only human.

- Team Eidos (2023-24)

Alumni connect:

The Department invited some of its alumni to interact with the students of SYBA. These sessions were intended to provide the students with an insight about the diversity of choices and career trajectories possible after graduating from Sociology and/or Anthropology. Following is a list of the alumni and themes covered by them:

Sefi George: Intersections between art, Sociology and Anthropology.
Suveera Venkatesh: Career opportunities in the social development sector.
Mannat Kaur Atwal: Career opportunities in new age media organisations.
Schwn Sabu: Crossing over to International Relations and career options thereafter.
Ronit Shah and Swapnagandha Bhogle: Opportunities and challenges in preparing for MA/PG courses after graduation.

Annual Seminar: Space and Spatiality:

This year's seminar was conducted on 16-17th February (2024) at Premanjali Counseling Centre at Nalasopara. 14 research papers were presented by students from FY, SY and TY. The activity provided the attendees with an opportunity to engage with sociological concepts and paradigms outside of the regular structured space and have an open dialogue on common concerns.

Faculty profiles:

Dr. Pranoti Chirmuley presented two papers titled: Choices Democratic, Freedoms Compromised and Leisure: as a joke and a survival kit at the World Congress in Sociology at Melbourne (Australia) on 26th June and 29th June, 2023 respectively. She also chaired a session at the Congress titled Authority and Leisure: A Symbiotic Dichotomy? Dr. Chirmuley was also invited by the Department of Sociology, Sophia College to present the learnings of and for NEP as an autonomous college at the RUSA sponsored one-day National Conference on Sociology in Changing Times: Reflections and Prospects in India on Monday 11th December, 2023. Dr Chirmuley is the convenor for the End Semester Examination committee along with the TEDxStXaviersMumbai committee which hosted its event titled Spectrums: Collaborate, Converse, Create; on 25th of February, 2024. She is also a member on the following committees: Course Attainment, Anti Ragging and the committee to study the shift system. Dr. Chirmuley delivered an online lecture on Bombay: A city of five senses for an Online course called - In Conversation with Globalization an International Collaboration between the Department of English, St Xavier's College and the American Literature and Culture, University of Stuttgart, Germany on 2nd February 2024.

Ms. Radhika Rani delivered an online lecture on *Social Structure of Tribes* for the coursework on Indian Knowledge Systems for undergraduate students in their first year under NEP. She attended a conference titled *Sociology in Changing Times: Reflections and Prospects in India* that was organised by the Department of Sociology, Sophia College (Mumbai) on 11th December, 2023. She was invited by

the DIRS (Department of Inter-Religious Studies), St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, to moderate a panel discussion on *Rejuvenation Remedies* as a part of their international symposium "Rejuvenation: Challenges and Remedies" held on 21st February, 2024.

Ms. Ankita Gujar conducted an Outreach Session with Universal High School, Dahisar on Careers in the Arts, Social Sciences, and Humanities in October, 2023. She also conducted a guest lecture on Caste and Globalisation with the Norwegian University of Life Sciences in November, 2023. She was a part of the organising committee for the Enabling Committee's conference in January, 2024 on Disability Studies and Inclusion.

Dr. Sahana Sen participated and presented a paper titled, 'In pursuit of Cultural Capital: Ethnographic Explorations of Tibetan Nuns' Oral Histories in Exile' in the 48th All India Sociological Conference on 29th December, 2023, hosted by the Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, Tamil Nadu. She also conducted Field Work for the course, Doing Sociological Research: Techniques and Applications, for Unit I: Doing Field Work, on 8th December, 2023. It was conducted in 'Girgaon Chowpatty' with a batch of 20 students. The Duration for the class was from 4pm to 6pm. The field work was aimed at exploring Participant Observation as a technique of data collection.

Dr. Anupama Ramakrishnan organised two guest lectures for the third year Anthropology cohort: one in September, 2023, by Jasmine Kalha (Centre for Mental Health, Law and Policy, Pune); and another, in December, 2023, by Dr. Sunetro Ghosal (Norwegian University of Life Sciences), which was conducted as part of a field trip to Sanjay Gandhi National Park. She also conducted lectures on anthropology's construction of the 'Other' as part of the diploma course of the Department of Inter-religious Studies (DIRS), St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Mumbai. On 29 December, 2023, she presented a paper titled 'After Settlement: Politics and Identity Among Migrants in the Andaman Islands, India' at the 48th All India Sociological Conference at the Vellore Institute of Technology. She has also been involved in the activities of the Green Club and the Gender Cell at St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Mumbai.

Special Feature Interview with Chetan Vohra

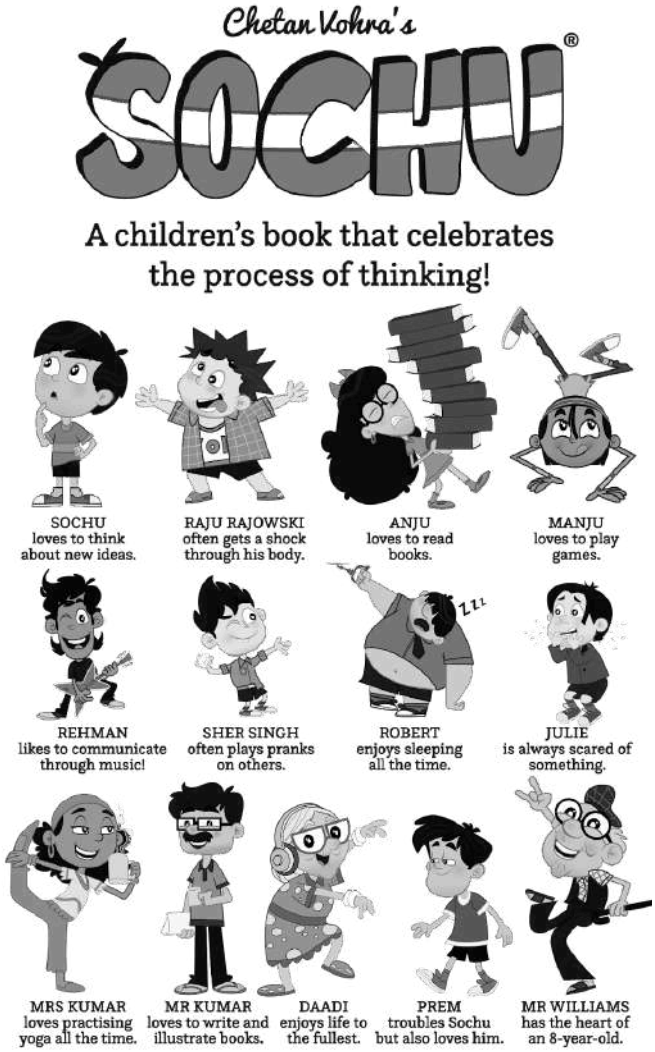
About Chetan Vohra: Chetan is the author of a children's book series called 'Sochu', which aims to foster independent thinking and emotional intelligence in children. Sochu is a series of children's books and a TV series that celebrates the process of thinking! Through Sochu, Chetan aims to spark the imaginations of children and provide the kind of entertainment that can open them up to newer perspectives, help them deal with varied pressures and expose them to the many diversities in society.

Interviewer - Childhood plays a vital role in forming, constructing, and solidifying identity. So, the thoughts that we introduce to our children play a crucial role in their socialisation and in how they see the world. So, by inviting children to think with you, rather than giving them rigid ideas of looking at the world, how do you see the role of Sochu in creating the self-image of the children who read your books?

Chetan - I want to disclaim that we are not scholars in this field. We come from an entertainment background, and just wanted to make better entertainment. So, much of the stuff [that goes into the Sochu books] comes from our experiences and how we see life. Life takes us through experiences, and we learn from these experiences – so we're experiential learners.

So, I think one of the most significant pieces of what helps build a child's self-image is what happens at home, and how we talk to our children at home. It's the smallest of things that can have such a huge impact. I know that every parent wants the best for their child. But in wanting the best for our children, we say things in a certain way, and we often push them to do what we believe is right without letting them explore and discover it for themselves; we (playfully) tease them about things, we call them names like "bad" when they do something we don't like, "dirty" when they don't clean themselves up and so much more. We also threaten to take our love away if they don't do what we want them to do. Among other things, I feel this destroys their self-image. And then, the child might be strong-willed enough and rebel to find [their own self-image], or they can succumb and live the rest of their lives with the same self-image, which has been destroyed, unknowingly, and without intent.

So, something that we do with Sochu is that in the books, we make sure that we do not make fun of anybody for being a certain way. Sometimes, somebody can give a silly answer, and it's like a joke, and everybody laughs together 'with' the person, but not 'at' them. In Sochu stories, there is no singular correct answer or a right way to do things. It's just something that the kids arrive at, by exploring different ideas, thoughts, and perspectives together. They find their answers by working with each other through a combination of their imaginations.



In every story, there is a particular thought or a quote that already exists in the world, but because they are seven years old, they do not know the meaning of that thought. So, through the journey of the story, they make up their own

new meaning of it. This tells children, "Hey, you can have your own ideas and thoughts, and that's okay. And it doesn't matter whether it's right or wrong or whether or not somebody else thinks it is valuable. You've got to find your answers." Some of our books can seem to have silly endings too (some, but not all), and we believe this works wonders for children because it makes it okay to make mistakes, not to get a concrete answer, yet continue exploring. So, I think subconsciously, it gives them this [assurance] that they are okay. It's cool to be however you are.

Again, we just wrote it how we thought it should be. It's not like we had devised all this before writing Sochu. It is now that we are realising what is coming out of it. So sometimes we say that this is just the universe doing its thing. We are just tools that the universe is using.

Interviewer - You started Sochu as an alternative to popular children's media that is often violent and has a "hero" that children aspire to be like. In offering this alternative through a school-going boy like Sochu, how do you seek to, if at all, give space to the thoughts and feelings of your readers while offering them a character whom they can look up to, and who is going through experiences that are very similar to their own?

Chetan - I think even when we're watching the "hero" kind of stories, we indirectly connect it back to ourselves and our lives. It's just that it is done in a fantasy framework that the hero is going through. But by the end of it, you're connecting it back to something innate within you. I think that is why we watch entertainment and why entertainment has value in our lives. So, with Sochu, we flip that around a little bit. The stories relate to their everyday lives (instead of fantasy). The actual experiences of their lives are way richer than what we can put in the books, but I think what we manage to do through the books is to see how the characters experience these situations in their lives, what they do with their experiences, and how they learn from them. Not directly like, "What did you learn from this?", What is the moral of this story?", etc. but in a subconscious way, so that whenever they go through something, and they don't understand it, they ponder over it, talk about it with each other, and then they find their own answers.

Sometimes, an adult might add a thought into the mix, and sometimes, they may not. Another reason I think children relate to Sochu stories is because, nowadays, kids have so much autonomy, that they don't want to be told what to do. That old-school way of telling moral stories does not work. It worked on us, but I don't think it works today. Because children today are exposed to so much more. They have a lot of their own thoughts. So, with Sochu, maybe they are just learning how to manage their thoughts.

When we were writing the books, we had a lot of ideas. We started with the thought that we wanted to make something non-violent and had some exciting things to make something that provided value to children's lives beyond the time they consumed our content. We had many ideas in the mix, and we needed to stop and boil it down to one thing. So, we figured that if there is only one gift that we want to give children, it would be the ability to have their own thoughts. And so, all of Sochu is based on the core idea that we want to help children have and manage their thoughts. Then, the second set of books extended into feelings, and now we're writing the third set, which extends into doing and behaviour. But again, it's still within us: our thoughts affect our feelings and vice versa, affecting our behaviour.

Interviewer - Since Sochu strives to encourage children to have their thoughts and perspectives, how do you maintain the balance of providing enough guidance while encouraging autonomous thinking?

Chetan - We've had lots of debates about this! There have been times when we have had a six-month-long ongoing discussion about whether or not to wrap it up with a nice monologue that explains the story in a nutshell. Because we were thinking about what happens if somebody doesn't get the message. If they spend all this time reading the book and don't get it, they're missing out on that moment. But one of our mentors pointed this out to us, stating that our cartoon's name is Sochu. Our tagline is 'Let's celebrate the process of thinking'. So, he said that if we give them that monologue in the end, that's it - the thinking stops there. It was clear then - we must not give out that monologue in the future because we want children to begin thinking after watching the Sochu cartoon or reading the Sochu book. Giving the monologue in the end made them stop thinking – since the answer was delivered on a platter.

Then we had another thought added to this process from somebody without an academic background. He believed that different children are brought up differently. So, some children might have been brought up in a way where their parents allowed them to have their thoughts. And for them to read this book, make up their thoughts with it, accept it, and believe it, might be easier than for some other children who may have never been allowed to have that. So, this person thought that we should explain the end. We realised that there was no ONE right way, and what we discovered eventually, is that there are some books where the answer is a little bit more spelt out, and there are some books where the answers are left vaguely in the end.

So, for example, the first book is 'Think Outside the Box', where the characters think that physical boxes surround them and to think outside the box, they need to go out into nature. This story is about not losing our connection with nature in this modern world where concrete boxes surround us. So, in the end, the characters discover nature, and their minds feel calm and alive. So maybe if they want to think outside the box, they must go out into the wilderness. They build that connection themselves in the book

through a whole bunch of twists in the story. The second book, ‘When I Grow Up’, is about retaining the child inside us as we grow up. In this story, we don’t spell it out. In the end, Sochu has just said, “You know what, when I grow up, I want to be a kid!” And we leave it there. Raju says, “Wait, really? We can do that?” and Mr Williams exclaims “, Oh my! You’ve found my secret!”. And it just ends there. We’re not telling you what that exactly means.

So, we discovered two things over time: one is, if the answers need to be found, they have to be discovered through the characters and be left with them only. The second thing is that we’ll mix it up by spelling out the answers a little bit more in the characters’ journey sometimes and sometimes leaving it a little vague so that when you look at the whole piece, the entire set of stories, you might connect with a few books first, and then with a few books much later. We figured that mixing it up and having various ways to bring out the stories might be better than just having one formula to follow in every book.

Interviewer - When we look at the format of Sochu as a book series, we see that it could encourage the habit of reading for children in a digital age. Extending that idea to identity, we find that the hobbies we pick up as children could become essential ways to construct our identities. So, in creating Sochu, why did you choose comic books as the medium?

Chetan - Oh, this is an exciting conversation. We didn’t choose books as a medium. We started Sochu to create a nonviolent TV show for children. We realised that most children’s entertainment is filled with violence and mindlessness - so that’s how the idea came about to create something nonviolent and wholesome, yet as entertaining as their current entertainment. We contacted all the TV channels in India - I’ve pitched Sochu to every track. All of them liked what we were doing back then, but it didn’t fit their mandate, so a channel never commissioned it. And then, we realised we didn’t have the money to make an animated children’s TV show. We figured that to make books, we didn’t need as much capital because I could design the books myself, and we already had the characters ready in the animation software. So, we could make the poses from the animation software, as if we were animating it, and use that to make the books. And that’s how we made the first two books. Whoever bought these two books over about a year or so liked them. But we didn’t know how to sell at scale back then, so we sold very few books. But whoever bought them kept asking for more.

Initially, I used to shoot ads and films as a cinematographer, and whatever money I made from there, I used to put into Sochu. However, I discovered that if I want to work on Sochu full time, then I have to make it substantial enough to make a decent living from it as well. And that’s when we launched the set of twelve books, and that took off. We learned how to do Facebook and Instagram ads and sell the books through our website. It’s been over two years, and I am entirely focused on Sochu and creating more Intellectual Properties. So that’s how Sochu became a book series.

In fact, I remember the first book I ever read myself was around the age of 17. [This was my] first book outside the school curriculum. It was The Doors of Perception by Aldous Huxley. It is a thin book, but it had such a significant influence on me. In fact, whatever we are doing today, I relate it back to that book. Because what he [the author] says in that book is that humanity is inside a room, and there are doors that we use to go outside, and everybody wants to go outside this room. Some of these doors are toxic, but they cannot be shut down or broken down. The only way to change is to make new doors that are less

toxic, and to lure people into these new doors. So, I believe that, what we are doing with Sochu is creating a new door that is healthier, more wholesome, nourishing, and less toxic. While we didn't intend to make books, it is something that the universe brought to us. But we're not going to remain with books. We aim to create content in all formats and make Sochu available in all ways possible – books, TV Series, eLearning Apps, Games, and more!

Interviewer - The illustrations in Sochu are also fascinating. As children, visual media tends to appeal to our senses, and we also identify with the kinds of characters we see in the media we consume. So, how do you think the visual appearance of characters in Sochu helps children identify with them?

Chetan - When we first created the characters, they looked different and they have now evolved with other formats. They were designed in a certain way for a specific form (Animation). But that software didn't allow us mass production since very few artists used that software. We realised that the earlier artistic way of doing it would not be conducive to making 100 episodes of Sochu in a year. So then, another artist had to tweak the characters and visual style to fit into that new software and the regular animation industry standard pipeline.

So, the design has evolved, but we have been conscious of some aspects from the beginning. One is different body shapes and different body sizes. There are different ways that people look. Like, there is a very physically moving, tall, and active girl. She loves to play and does a lot of physical activity. And then there is a girl who wears spectacles and loves to read a lot. There is a boy who is thin and calm, and then there is another boy who has a big build and loves to play the fool. So, similarly, we have tried to keep it as diverse as possible within that constraint of just eight characters. And even in terms of skin tones, we made sure to represent multiple skin tones (without associating any characteristics to the skin tones). I don't think we should mention this as a special effort made. It is just average, this is how life is, and this is just how it should be! In fact, if it is not done, we might want to question, why.

And then there's other stuff in the visuals as well. So, for instance, we never have eyebrows like that [pointed and angry eyebrows]. We don't do it because we are not showing any situations where they need to be that way unless we want them to be angry in a particular case. Whereas what happens in many other shows is that even if somebody runs somewhere, *toh woh run normal nahi hota* [that run is not usual]. They will run like [grunts angrily]. And I don't know why they animate characters in this way. Maybe somebody must have done it first, and then everybody just started copying that way of doing it. But I think it dramatically impacts what children take away from the animation. Even just that - even just how the characters emote themselves in the stories - I feel like children are looking at that, copying it, and emulating it. So, we are careful about those things in Sochu and always try to improve them. But it's also straightforward. It's not like we've discovered some great secret about how to make this more wholesome. It is plain, basic stuff. Our intention and attention was always to make it that way, which is why we manage to do it.

Another idea or thought about the visuals is that when we had initially designed it, the characters looked like they were created in oil pastels with a rough texture. And we liked that. We thought, "Ah! This looks so cool and organic!" But when we shifted to this new software because we had to go in the

regular 2D flash animation pipeline, many things started changing, and it started looking very crisp, with crisp outlines. But we figured that it was okay. The story still comes through, and it's not affecting the story in any way. There are still some things that we wanted to have in there, and we focused [on them], *ke haan yeh toh chahiye* [yes, we need this] – like our colour schemes, expressions, emotions, the vibrant, pop feel of the visuals, etc.

Then, after making the books, we discovered that many people liked the new crisp design. A lot of parents and grandparents really liked it. They said, "*Haan ekdum acche se dikhta hai* [we can see it clearly]", because it has big blue eyes and very crisp lines. And the grandparents are reading it to their grandchildren, so it's also a good experience for them as well. So, we discovered that something we may not have chosen earlier, actually is working now. The design has evolved by itself as well, and we're trying to control it where we think it needs to be controlled, and sometimes we let go and let whatever happens to it happen – we are free that way!

Interviewer - Since Sochu is an Indian brand aimed towards creating stories that are relevant to children within the Indian context, how do you ensure that Sochu is as inclusive as possible to children coming from different backgrounds?

Chetan - So, one thing is that we have always designed Sochu from an international or global perspective. In fact, earlier, the names were Sochu, Rajowski, Lee, and Sue, instead of Sochu, Anju, Raju, and Manju. So, when we're writing the books, we've always thought of it as a global IP and not an Indian IP. Now we're considering whether we should keep the names Sochu, Raju, Anju, Manju even when we go global. Because there's some cuteness to it, I feel like it might work. It might work better than Sochu, Rajowski, Lee, and Sue. But I don't know. That's something we are discovering with the publishers as well. We might do some focus groups abroad to understand what works better.

But, returning to the question, I think there's nothing very 'Indian' in there. I think the kind of stories we are writing, or the type of themes we pick, are universal, and those themes work for anybody and everybody. They work not just for children but for adults as well. Many parents call us and say, "*Are yaar, mujhe hi bohot accha laga* [I liked it very much, myself]". Because these are the inner dramas of our lives, especially for children, but also for adults. All our stories are about that internal drama, and we can take the same story and put a very Indian spin on it, or, a very European spin on it, and it would still work. But what we're doing in Sochu is that we are talking about the core, the very inside of us, that makes us human. And that, I think everybody relates to this, whether it is Indian kids from different backgrounds, or whether it is a kid in the UK, or Mexico, or wherever. I believe it'll work for any child, an adult, or an older adult. After all, if we are open to the wonders of life – we are all children!

Interviewer - We happened to go through a couple of your books, and we found that you convey complex and layered ideas of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, in straightforward ways without making them into "issues" that could intimidate or scare children. In doing so, what is the process behind making this nuanced view regarding the idea's content and vocabulary accessible to children?

Chetan - The most significant piece is that we don't know. Because we're not people who have studied these topics academically, when writing about a specific topic, we sit down as kids and try to discover it ourselves. Then, at that moment, we start researching and finding things. And we get to know that there's THIS thought out there, and there's THAT thought out there. [We think about] how we [want to] bring these ideas in the books. So, when we're writing, until now, it's been the three of us - me and two of my childhood friends, Deven and Vilas. Our process is that simple – we brew some coffee and start talking about a subject that we think is important, then research it as we discuss things, and we have our way of blending entertainment and education!

Sometimes, we also have "fights" (differences of opinion). Because sometimes Deven will say "*nahi nahi,* [no, no] but this is how it should be." And we might think differently, and then we maybe give it some thought and then come back after a couple of days and figure it out. But I think the critical aspect of bringing that simple way of looking at something is that we take a complex idea that we don't understand, or we don't fully understand yet - we might have our own ideas of it - but when we sit down to write, we're all guards down, trying to discover what it really is, and what we want to say about it and how we're going to say it. So, I think that the peace of the three of us discovering things and going through them together - that's what makes it the way it is, and simplifies it, in the process of making it.

Consider this. We are writing the seventh set of Sochu right now. We jumped four, five, and six and have gone to seven. The seventh one will be on sex education, and now we've got a few more people writing this with us. In that piece also, it's the same thing - somebody said, "But wait, are we equipped enough to talk about this? Maybe we should consult with somebody and figure out what needs to be said and what does not need to be said". But I think we'll do that after writing. After we've written it, we can determine whether we have missed out [on] something or not, or whether we've not said something in the right way. But if we start with that, then we're bound by that. And then there's no discovery. Whereas what is happening right now is that as we're writing stuff, we're figuring out, "Oh, what should happen in this scenario? What do we want to say here?". And then somebody finds a metaphor for it, and then they put that into the mix. In that whole process, I feel like as the characters in the books are discovering things for themselves; while we're writing it, we are finding it for ourselves too, and that's why I think the books are the way they are. This, I believe, is one of the reasons that Sochu works!

Interviewer - The platform you have created seems intriguing to initiate conversations and create spaces where children can think. How would you like parents/guardians/caregivers to engage with this space and the book series to allow their children to become autonomous thinking individuals?

Chetan - The first thing I will say is, don't tell your children, "*Dekho Sochu ne waisa kiya, toh aapko bhi karna chahiye* [Since Sochu did something, you must do it too]". I think that the best thing a parent can do is to be there, to sit and read these books with their kids, and [to] let them ask you questions; and if they ask, then you can say something. Please don't do anything because you want to do it; don't ask a question because you want to ask that question and bring the kid to a specific learning, and so on. Sometimes, I think parenting can be very simple if we let go. The only thing we need to do is set the boundary within which they can play. And the limit is only if it could hurt you, in an immediate physical danger sort of way, right. Those are the only boundaries we really need to set. And if we live that way, I feel, half of the stresses that we're going through as a parent might be gone. Because, in wanting to do

good for our children, we are trying to tell them so much, and we're stuck in language that sounds like, "This thing *has to* be that way, you *have to* eat this, you *have to* do that." My piece would be to let them be, because I believe that children are brilliant creatures. They figure their lives out and when they need help, the only thing [is] we need to be there. It's [the assurance] that we will be there when they need us. That's the only piece.

So even when you are reading a Sochu book with your child, enjoy the process with them. Be in it, read it with them, fall for the story with them - like really fall for it. We should learn how to fall for the story. Don't judge it or question it. Fall for it. And when you fall for it, your kid will have questions. They'll engage in conversation with you - "*Par woh aisa kyun? Anju ko woh waisa kyun laga? Accha, mujhe kabhi kabhi aisa lagta hain.* [But why is this like that? Why did Anju feel a certain way? Okay, I feel this way sometimes]. You know things like, "I was also scared to go to school on the first day". It's a great conversation to have with your child, right? But when our kid is about to go to school, we tend to say, "*Are, uss mein kya ho gaya? Darna nahi chahiye* [what's wrong in that? You shouldn't be scared]." I wonder why we do this. We will create a wonderful world if we acknowledge our children's feelings and emotions and help them talk, just let them deal with them instead of unconsciously teaching them to run away from their feelings and emotions.

While this sounds preachy, and I wouldn't put it in a book, I'm saying it here because we're conversing. But yes, my piece is just to be with them, just experience life with your kids, share these books, and try to have beautiful conversations with them. That's it. And they will come up with the discussions. We really don't need to do anything. We just need to make it okay for them to have a conversation with us.

Interviewer - Finally, we want to know your plans to take Sochu ahead.

Chetan - So, we plan to make seven sets of Sochu books. The first two are already out. The first is based on thinking (Sochu), and the second is based on feelings *(Feelu)*. We finished writing the third one, which is currently being designed. That one is based on doing and behaviour. So that one's *Karu.* Then, the fourth one will be about being playful and not becoming too serious *(Khelu)*. The fifth one is going to be about financial literacy. And the sixth one will be about the sixth sense that we often forget in this chaotic, distracted, world. Then, we switched to the seventh one, about sex education. So those are the seven sets that we currently have planned. We have just started making the animation as well. So, hopefully by next year, we'll have at least a few episodes of Sochu ready

We are also making an E-Learning app, which is going to be a curriculum in Social-Emotional Learning. So, that is something we want to offer to schools as a curriculum. Something that we want children to do from 4th standard, to 7th standard. So, they will go through all these seven sets, from fourth [grade] to seventh [grade]. And the app will take the experience much further because it includes reflective questions and activities. So, many of those conversations you can have after reading the books will also be touched upon through the app. We're making an enjoyable, gamified version of it, so it will be an app like Duolingo, where you do certain activities after reading the book, and then you move on to the next one. It's exciting, and I think we will have many exciting things coming out from Sochu in the next few months.


SOCHU
Let's celebrate the process of thinking!
BOX SET (12 Books)
SOCHU 2 FEELU
Feelings and Emotions are the SPICE of Life
BOX SET (12 Books)
HEY! HOW ARE YOU FEELING TODAY?
THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX
THE DISCOVERY OF FEELU

Special Feature Interview with Aryan Somaiya and Sadaf Vidha

About Aryan - Aryan Somaiya (he/him), is a transman, holds a Master's degree in Psychology with specialisation in Clinical Psychology, and is the co-founder of Guftagu Counselling and Therapy Practices. He is the winner of the FMES-IJME Ethics Awards for the year 2022-23 in Category 1 (Advocate/ champions with lived experience of mental health issues). He believes that symptoms are a representation of the suffering and not anything to cure. As much as oppressive systems exist, so is the personal and private experience of these systems. These experiences play in our relationships hence he believes the potential itself lies in the relationship as therapist and client to bring corrective experiences, build tolerance, make the unbearable, bearable and build the self by building bridges with the self as a whole. This, he believes, helps in developing a space where one can be aware of choice and agency while experiencing different structures as well as engaging in the wideness of self. He is also the co-creator of Queer Affirmative Counselling Practices Resources Manual (QACP).

About Sadaf - Sadaf is a psychologist by profession. She has a Masters in clinical psychology, has been practising as a therapist since 2015, and is the co-founder of Guftagu Counselling and Therapy Practices. She has done certificate courses in arts based therapy, queer affirmative counselling practice and couples and family therapy. In terms of clients' concerns, she has worked with anxiety, depression, self esteem issues, thought related issues, OCD, habit change, relationship concerns and trauma/abuse. She works with children as well as teens, along with adults. Her approach is a mixture of postmodern approaches, evidence based therapies and depth psychology. She attempts to envision a world where we are all respected and cared for, with our unique traits and struggles. Being from a conservative Muslim family and having experienced patriarchal pressures firsthand, she hopes that this makes her the right person to understand the ground realities of a lot of people. Thus, she envisions a world of socially just mental healthcare and attempts to make the field ethical and accessible for all.

Interviewer - Could you talk to us about your personal journey with gender, and the ways in which your experiences in exploring and understanding your gender identity might have shaped your ways of understanding the world?

Aryan - In talking about my journey to understand who I am, I think I always knew. There was no moment of discovery as such. There was never a time where I have seen myself as anything else, other than a man, or a boy. Even in school, when people segregate you based on gender, I used to go to the boys row. And relatives, friends, or teachers, always told me that I belonged with the girls. They used to say, "*Are tu idhar ayegi"* [You will stand here (with the girls)]. And I used to wonder, how come they are not seeing what I am seeing? I was very clear that I feel like I am a boy, so I used to wonder how did anything else matter. *Inko kyu nahi dikh raha hai?* [Why are they not seeing it?]. I used to wonder how they are so dumb, to not see what I can see so clearly. I knew who I was. I thought maybe it happened only in one place [at home]. So in school, when they gave me a pinafore, I wondered why. I wondered what it was, that was making them see what maybe I couldn't see. So, as a child I always thought that the problem was with other people. They didn't know better, and so they couldn't see what had always

been very clear to me. I always thought about how the world was surviving like this (laughs). I thought that the world was paranoid, that's how I thought.

Strangely, this made me realise that there was always going to be this gap. There was something that the world was not able to see, and so, this gap would remain. So, very early on, I knew that this was going to be my fight, and I would have to deal with it. So, I always prepared myself to navigate through things, no matter what came my way in life. So, in that way, I don't think I had any issues specifically as a trans person, because this was one area of my life about which I was absolutely sure. There was no confusion. I was born a man, I am a man, there was no question. So, I thought that if people are not seeing me the way I am seeing myself, then I will have to deal with them, and they will have to deal with me no matter what. So they don't have a choice, nor do I have a choice. I decided that whether or not they were there with me, I would not change. So, if girls wanted to play with me, I would play with them, and if boys wanted to play with me, I would go to them. I have played with all genders, as a child. For me playing was playing. I have enjoyed *Son Sakhali,* cricket, football, *ghar ghar* - all of it. Because I wanted to have fun in life. What I see myself as, should not be a reason to stop me from having fun, playing, and making friends in life. [It should not prevent me] from going out, going to picnics, going to swimming pools or retreats, and all of that. So, I have welcomed those who decided to come along in my journey. I have not been apologetic about who I was, or about how I saw myself.

Now-a-days, when I meet other trans people, there is this expectation that the world should be more affirming towards them. They keep talking about how people don't talk to them [because of their identity], or the ways in which they are treated poorly. But I think I have always been in touch with this reality, that the world does not see me as I see myself. And so, I never sought validation or affirmation from the world around me. *Reality to usi din samajh jani…thi jabhi tum teen saal ke the, aur tumhe bola ki tum ladkiyon ke line mein khade ho jao.* [I understood this reality right when I was three years old, and I was told to stand in the girls line.] I knew that other people did not understand what I was experiencing, so I expected being bashed in some way. So, I learned to build that resilience within myself, and I learned to not care about what everyone else was saying. I think we need to build that coping and resilience within ourselves, to know that no matter what anyone else says, we won't change who we are.

And perhaps, this attitude came to me because I survived violence in the first place. I have a history of violence at home, between my parents. So, that prepared me to take on the world very early on in life. I knew that life was tough, and it was challenging to survive. So, in a way, while violence gave me a lot of trauma, it also taught me a lot. When I saw so much fighting and verbal abuse at home, I felt like if I could survive this, I could survive anything. In all that chaos then, the fact that I am trans became a space of solace and certainty for me. There was no chaos, no confusion there. There was conflict all around, be it family or society. So, I used to feel very happy to know that I am trans. I used to wake up every morning dreaming that I would be a boy. I would dream of what shirt I would wear, of the things I would do when I became a man. Once I entered puberty, I used to think about the girls that I would want to date. I used to dream of having so many partners, of being the famous boy. Luckily I turned out to be attracted to women. So luckily, I was prepared, and I was living one version of my life as the child of my family, and there was this other trans version of me, who was living a happy, parallel life. So, I had my

own ways of dealing with life, and having fun. I never expected anything from my parents or my family. And I realised that if I did not have any hopes from those who were supposed to be my own people, there was no reason to have any hopes from anyone else. So I decided to create a life for myself.

Unfortunately, if you want to hear a sob story, I don't have one. Because for me, the only hope in the darkness was my longing that one day I will live life as a man. That hope kept me alive, and allowed me to survive all the violence. And interestingly, whenever we ask queer people about their journeys, we tend to associate it with having faced some "issues" because of their identity. But for me, that was my greatest solace. I never felt ashamed about who I was. I was very clear about it, and I felt like, if people asked me, they would see it clearly too. Nobody could shake off or question what I knew to be true about myself.

Interviewer - Do you think your identity as a transgender person influences how you see mental health?

Aryan - I think I see it with more nuance. Firstly, as a person, I am very feeling-oriented.
Sadaf - I think what might have happened, though this may not happen with every trans person, is that you (Aryan) don't see anything as permanent, or unchanging. Because usually, when someone is [socialised into the heteronormative context, and they are] cisgender, they consider the world to be cisgendered as well. They think that everyone is cisgendered and heterosexual. And when you are trans, you know that the world exists beyond binaries. And then you bring that lens to everything.
Aryan - Yes, that's true. I don't make a whole lot of assumptions.
Sadaf - And the gender binary and heteronormativity are two of the most important assumptions in people's lives. They are still relatively flexible about marriage, because there is [some degree of] acceptance in terms of there being people who might choose not to get married. But the [assumed] fact that there are only two genders, and one sexuality are beliefs that govern the lives of a lot of people.
Aryan - So, I think what I do in therapy sessions is that I can be frank with my clients, and they can be frank with me as well. So, we have a space where we can be more than just identities. Because my wholeness is not my identity. My identity and navigating it is a part of my life, not the whole of it. So, you have to learn to see people beyond just labels. It is their unique position and their internal responses to it that create their own life story. Because, if I only restrict my life to the fact that I am trans, and I continue to distress over the fact that no one understands me and my life story, then there is no way that I can use my resources and try to live a happy life. And that is what I try to do with my clients. You try to navigate and survive in some way.
And, because I've seen life in this way, I don't judge the choices that people make about their lives, and it widens my lens towards people's lives and choices. You learn to see newer possibilities, beyond what is told to you. And I think I am less rigid. I am open to multiple perspectives, and I try to take in whatever seems applicable to a particular context, and I ignore the rest. That gives me a kind of freedom that can only come from the self. So, I think I learnt to understand that whatever a person defines themselves as, that is the only "right" definition for them. An expectation to have one correct answer or definition fell apart. That's what I carry as a therapist as well. I don't attempt to take away the freedom to think, feel, and perceive for the self, from people.

Interviewer - Do you think that shared identities between a client and a therapist plays a role in creating safer spaces?

Aryan - No, I don't think so. Just because someone is a queer therapist, does not mean that they will automatically be able to create a safe space for a queer client. Because even queer therapists inhabit the [socialisation of] the heteronormative mentality. Just because one is queer, the mentality does not go away. I have seen so many queer or trans therapists uphold the oppressive structures of ethnocentrism, casteism, classism, sexism, and so much more. So, just inhabiting a queer identity, or any marginalised identity does not erase the years of socialisation that have sustained these structures.

I do believe that it is important that more queer and trans therapists come up, and have representation within the profession, so that as a field, we think about identities with more sensitivity and vulnerability. But I don't believe that identities in themselves are a problem. They may be overtly seen, and so they form the surface level. Till today, I have not spoken much to my own therapist about my trans identity. She always asks me about how it influences my life. Because, I think there is no issue there for me. But slowly and steadily, she probes me into thinking about it. And then I realise that it is my specific intersections that create my reality. My therapist is a cisgendered heterosexual woman. So, once I had spoken to her about the formation of masculinity. And she said that otherwise she might have not spoken about masculinity, but here, she wished to bring that up because I am trans. And so we probed into my own ideas about masculinity that my unique position creates.

So, in therapy, it is not the identity, but the experience. We try to figure out the ways in which your identity plays a role in the formation of your psyche. So, in the above instance, masculinity exists in everyone. But we then explored whether my masculinity looks different because of the experiences that I have had. So, if any therapist is able to inhabit this lens, [and be aware of their own positionality], then identity does not become a problem in that therapeutic relationship. In fact, it can be explored further. One does not need to go out of their way to then create safer spaces. So, if you are a person who is reflexive, and has done their own self-work, then you will know where, [in the therapeutic process] you need to bring in [conversations around] identity, and where that may not be required.

Sadaf - In fact, if both the people share a marginalised identity [within the therapeutic relationship], especially if it is queer-trans people; in our experience, it also might lead to shared rumination. So, that might foster a sense of shared helplessness.

Aryan - This does happen multiple times that another trans person coming to me for therapy might expect that I will agree with them on everything. And I think that is not possible. One shared identity cannot allow for absolute agreement. The entirety of one's experiences cannot be reduced into a single identity of being trans, for instance. It has a lot to do with your family system, your individual system, your peer system, and the social systems that you inhabit, and your internal system that has come up from your [experiences with your] primary caregivers. So, you cannot take one identity and hide behind it, or use it as a mechanism to escape accountability. Also, just because a person inhabits a privileged identity in one area does not mean that they don't have their own struggles.

Also, I think identity politics is very different from psychology, and even real social change is very different from [what is popularly known as] identity politics. Today, politics is about what is right and what is wrong. [Those binaries] cannot encompass the entirety of the human experience. Studying identity formation is a different [endeavour]. That is where dialogue is possible. That is where we can make the space for fluidity. There is no fluidity possible within political polarisation. I go by what Salman Akhtar [an American psychoanalyst] believes. He says that in case something is an absolutely individual issue, then it is for the person to figure out. If it is an issue of the whole group, then it might be addressed through policy. But if it is a relational issue, that is when therapy might be most effective. Whatever is a relational wound, might be able to be worked in therapy. And if you commit to doing self-work within therapy, then one needs to access and exercise their individual agency. One cannot claim absolute powerlessness. So, shared identities themselves are not the core of therapy.

Sadaf - And in fact, one lives within intersectionality. So, identity is your personality, it is your physical features, your own compromises, whether or not you have lived with disabilities, etc. Identity itself encompasses so many aspects of the self, one of which might be your gender identity, but often, identity is reduced to just one aspect of the person's being. So, we are in a culture of thin description. We tend to think that people can connect to each other, or be segregated from each other based on a single strand. But we live richer lives, and our experiences of the world come through these unique social and emotional locations that we inhabit. And if you see, most social change movements have also not come from the rigidity of a single identity. It is when people have been able to find points of connection through their differences, and when they don't know the classification of their identity. It is only when people find and rally around a shared cause, and connect through it that they might be able to demand social change. The shared problem, the shared suffering, the shared pain - all of this is enough for human connection. Singular identities cannot create connection.

And when the solidarity is based only on sameness, we have seen this in our queer-trans clients, that there is an elevation of the community, leading to an assumption that this community cannot harm you. We tend to think that communities based on sameness, our chosen families will never harm us. And then we are not prepared for the very human capacity for hate and aggression that everybody is capable of. [We need to understand that] even in chosen communities, there will be hurt, there will be times when miscommunication happens, or one feels the differences in power.

Interviewer - Through your journey in navigating social structures, and in understanding their impact on mental health, do you think that it is necessary for psychotherapy to align itself to a social justice perspective? And if yes, how do you envision this alignment?

Aryan - I think firstly one needs to question how they look at social justice. We obviously cannot say that psychology has nothing to do with social justice, or we also cannot attempt to see the two as separate categories that do not overlap. But often, we tend to think that social justice is only found in visible forms of activism, where one might go to a protest with a placard. But, social justice begins at home, in spaces where its performance might not always be visible. For instance, social justice is when you see someone being ill-treated around you, and you stand up for that person, and also empower them so that they can stand up for themselves.

If our association with social justice is only restricted to calling people out on social media, without reflecting upon the ways in which we hold power, or without attempting to make a difference, however small, in our own lived realities; then that is not true social justice in my reading. I was listening to a podcast, where the host, who is also a psychologist, was talking about how this idea of political correctness can quickly become a position of dissociation. We tend to lose out on the internal connection with the self, in this pursuit of social media wokeness.

Sadaf - Additionally, [it is important to] note that there are many components that are involved in creating social change. Sociology is going to look at group behaviours, and social structures that uphold or reinforce certain behaviours. Economics might look at how financial flows are enforcing or upholding certain systems. In this context then, our job within the field of Psychology is to try and understand what are the things that are preventing people from living the life they want, or from living a life that is in alignment with the world that they want to see. For instance, if I am talking about social justice outside, but I am in a toxic relationship with someone, then we would like to understand the reasons behind this discrepancy. We then try to identify what it is that might be stopping people from identifying and exercising their own agency. So the work of Psychology [within achieving social justice] is to look at the ways in which a person's internal ways of being interact with the locations they inhabit, that then might be preventing them from creating personal, or social change.

Aryan - And I think, there is no change socially, unless personal change happens. Unfortunately, today this bit has been neglected. No one really speaks about personal change.

Sadaf - Advocacy and rallying for rights of a group might have an impact on bigger issues. But for our everyday lives to [be aligned with] social justice, we need to address relational dynamics of power.

Aryan - We need to realise that systems are within us. They play in our relationships with each other. Even something as simple as a father-child relationship is a system. Why do we think that a system only indicates the government? Systems are also part of the here and now. At the root of it, systems are mentalities. And so, when we explore and question those mentalities within therapy, that is also social justice, in my understanding, only at an individual level, in a personal or a private space. So to believe that psychology can be absolved from the social justice discourse is to lie to oneself. It is also giving into that binary of the individual (the personal), and the social (the political). It is not necessary that everyone performs their allyship with social justice in the same way. A woman, staying at home, fighting for her daughters to be educated, is the biggest contribution to social justice from her position. Our idea of social justice is also very urban. In a rural space, even speaking about a sanitary napkin, is social justice.

Sadaf - And this is not the first time that people are navigating big social problems. But, [political performance] has become a way to measure each other, only recently. Because, for instance, India had a Women's Movement in the 70s and the 80s. Many women were part of it, but many were not. But one's identity as a woman, or one's worth as a woman was not decided based on whether or not one participated in the movement. We need to understand that everyone may not be in a position to perform their solidarity in the same way. Today, measuring each other, and each other's morality based on

political performance has become a new behavioural trend. And all through history we have found ways to create distinction and segregation among people. Initially it was about who is more sinful versus who is more pure. Then there has been segregation and discrimination on account of caste, in terms of who is more Brahminical in their ways. Then we used to grade each other based on who is more "womanly" as a woman. We have always used moral righteousness to justify power. Today, however, we have ironically made social justice a way to judge each other, and to create distinctions of power. But we have always judged each other. This is just a new thing. We need to understand that everyone is fighting their own battles. Just because someone is not posting about something [on their social media], does not mean that they don't care. We don't get to decide that. In talking about agency, we need to realise that not participating is also an exercising of agency. So, today, social justice has also become a lens to frame moral superiority.

Additionally, I think our frameworks of safety are also built around agreement. But once we understand that even in the most safe spaces, there will be normal levels of aggression, and boredom, we might be able to navigate relationships better. Because, if our framework for safe spaces is only restricted to someone agreeing with us entirely, then we leave a very narrow space for people to form meaningful relationships with us. And even in terms of identity, our own relationships to the identities we inhabit keep on changing as we go through the life course, and as we undergo self-exploration. For instance, in Aryan's case, his relationship to his masculinity has evolved over time. Or even for cisgender women for instance, they might sometimes feel the need to inhabit masculinity to cope with a patriarchal world. And then that comes out through body language, and other ways of expression. So, when we were watching *Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahani* for example, Ranveer Singh was shown to be a very "masculine" person, but he still had instances where he adapted stereotypically "feminine" ways of expression. For example, when he performed the dance sequence with his father-in-law, I think that representation made it okay for a lot of people, across genders, to explore different facets of their own gender identity, expression, and performance.

Aryan - And so, going by this, it becomes necessary to create safe spaces that go beyond identity. I cannot restrict myself only to trans people. I feel very safe among my cis-het friends as well. But I have created those spaces through conversations. Unfortunately, my reality is still not the norm, or is not as popular. So, at times, when they discuss something, I tell them to ask me about my life as well. That might not be ideal, but we have to make these connections, and go ahead with it. Because when we are talking about systems, we also have to realise what these structures and systems keep away from our consciousness. That is what makes other people not ask about me, because I am not the default. I cannot be constantly offended by it, if it is done unintentionally. I will still go out with my cousins, hang out with my friends. Because, they did not intend to exclude me, probably it might be an unconscious bias. Or maybe they did not know how. Because if the majority of the people in my circle are cis-het, then it is of course likely that they speak about their realities. In every situation where there is a majority, it is human tendency to focus on common experiences. So, this is something that every marginalised identity faces. That is why we definitely need more representation, for more experiences to come up. But we cannot keep blaming people or accusing them of malice when exclusion might take place hegemonically. We need to keep creating spaces for conversation, exchange, and dialogue.

Sadaf - Along with that, it is also important to connect across differences. When we attempt to induce shame in any majority population, the inclusion that might be created is also tokenistic and performative. But if we try to connect across shared struggles in our interpersonal interactions, and attempt to see the ways in which larger structures and systems create these binaries of the oppressor and the oppressed, without allowing us from truly connecting with each other and respecting each other's differences, we might find that we have so much more in common. But the system keeps polarising us. We have to understand that the oppressor-oppressed binary is also not absolute. It is more about understanding differences in power, and the ways in which power can cause harm, even in the hands of a person who inhabits one or more marginalised identities. We need to look at identities with nuance, because today, identities have also become capitalised products that exacerbate differences. We make up these obscure categories in our head, that tick some boxes, and we forget that people are not so simple and unidimensional.

Aryan - Yes, we just need to allow people to be. Systems might make us leave each other, but we need to keep returning to our humanity, so that our differences will never be a problem. You are you, I am me, and the fact that we are different is not a problem. So, one of us does not have to be [labelled as] "normal", and the other as "abnormal". We can both have our own "normal" within our own contexts. Our education sometimes might distance us from material reality. We occupy this position of moral superiority, but we need to keep understanding that we are human, and so is the other person.

Interviewer - When we look at the medicalisation of the body, and the binary socialisation of gender identity, what do you think are the psychosocial impacts of navigating one's sense of self, when one does not fit into these binaries?

Aryan - See, medicalisation has its own trajectory. We have to understand that the body, and our embodiment comes with history. For example, at this moment, I cannot say that I have not had the experiences of inhabiting a woman's body, and the consequences that come with it. So bodies have their own political experiences, that cannot be forgotten or ignored. As a therapist, and as a very sensorily oriented person, I understand a lot of my experiences from the body. So, for me, and in my work, the body is the reality. The mind might dissociate itself and create false perceptions of things. But the body still experiences realities, in the here and now. In today's contexts, when we are especially so dissociated from the present moment, we need to return to our bodies and connect with our own histories through them. Because today, the body has become a capitalist product, and the mind has also been taken over by the capitalist ideology. We have been separated from our own embodied experiences, and we need to reconnect with our realities, with what is happening in our bodies. It is only through connecting with the body, or now, in reconnecting with it, that we can connect with the present, with our experiences, with ourselves, and thus, with our political positions and material realities. And so, connecting with the body, when it is not usually allowed, socially, capitalistically, or in other ways, is also a form of resistance, for me.

Interviewer - Lastly, having experienced and understood gender as a spectrum, how do you now look at the role and necessity of gender based labels, and how do you engage with the idea of the possibility of a gender-free society?

Aryan - Firstly, we need to question whether we are looking towards a gender-free society, or a gender-bias free society. They are two different things. Gender-free society is not possible, in my opinion. Firstly because there is too much history. And also secondly, because, somewhere we do need those labels. But I think, gender is not even a spectrum. The way I see it, gender is a cloud. There are no boundaries, there are no main “end-points” like a man or a woman, and then everybody being in between these polarities. I think it is more like a cloud, in that, everyone can have their own interpretation of it, and there is space for everyone to be the way they want to. There are no pedestalised binary oppositions that form the “main” identities that everyone else derives from. There are as many identities, as there are people, and so, there are those many lived realities. What we need to attempt is not to be biased. And we might be able to achieve that. Gender-free societies cannot function in our bureaucratic and administrative capacities. Our problems are also coded by gender, among other identities. So, if we deceive ourselves to believe that there is no gender, then how do we continue with discourse on pink tax, for instance? So, those labels are definitely necessary. What we can hope to achieve is to let go of the biases and question the power dynamics underlying these identities, and the associations of superiority or inferiority imposed on them, to then hopefully have a more equitable society, not just in terms of gender, but in terms of all identities.

ARTICLES

What's in a Name?

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Being one of the first things we own, our names remain a claim to our humanity. They play a central role in how we define ourselves and are crucial as a form of identification. "The most important anchorage to our self-identity throughout life remains our own name" (Allport, 1961, p.117). They become the basis of an individual's self-concept and go on to determine what they think of and feel about themselves. Together, personal and social perceptions of one's name largely influence the individual's self esteem and degree of adjustment in society. Someone with a name that is perceived as undesirable would possibly suffer from poor self-esteem and maladjustment (Busse & Seraydarian, 1978). It thus becomes important to question which names are considered undesirable, and why.

Naming systems are almost always indicative of gender, religion, place of origin, class, caste, occupation, etc. Among the Sikh community, the Khalsas refer to all men as Singh (lion) and all women as Kaur (princess). Early naming practices in Sweden were based on patronymics where one's last name was one's father's name with the suffix son (son) or dotter (daughter). Similar practices existed all across Europe (Olsson, 1981). In India, caste surnames reveal the caste status of an individual. They can also reveal generational professions since an individual's work was determined by what varna they belonged to. For instance, Lohars were traditionally iron-smiths, or Chamars were leather workers. (Parmar, 2020).

Modern individualism naturally motivates us to think of names as a function of solely the individual. However, that is far from the truth, even in industrial and urban centres, where achieved status appears to be more valued than ascribed ones. It is impossible to view an individual's name without taking into consideration the larger set-up within which the individual exists. Our names speak louder than words and even actions, as they reveal the assigned spaces that an individual occupies within society. The transmission of such information happens without the intention and outside the awareness of the individual themselves. However, this unconscious transaction can often influence how they are perceived and treated by other members of society.

Social spaces are characterised by vertical hierarchies and horizontal categorisations, each of which have specific stereotypes associated with them, which in turn influence the assumptions and inferences made regarding an individual. As a social animal, humans are no strangers to labels. A person is assigned multiple labels at birth itself – their name being one of them. However, the value that is associated with these labels creates social privileges or vulnerabilities for a person. Studies on name bias have shown the discriminatory consequences of the spotlight that our names shine on us. This bias can affect people in a broad range of settings and can have several social, psychological, personal, intellectual, economic effects. Studies conducted in the USA show that there is a 50% gap in the number of callbacks to resumes with an African-American name as opposed to a Caucasian name (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2003). Parallely, in India, Muslim women can have a harder time getting recruited as compared to Hindu women (Shadab et al., 2022).

One of the very first identities that is given away by names is caste. Since caste names are extremely common in India, it becomes easy to identify which caste group a person belongs to.

This leads to discrimination even in areas which might appear to function independent of caste and are thus largely perceived to be unbiased and casteless, such as educational institutions, residential areas and workplaces. From 2014 to 2021, 56% of suicides in top institutions and central universities in India were students belonging to backward communities. In AIIMS, 72% of SC/ST students reported having faced caste-based discrimination in the classroom and on campus (Qureshi, 2023).

The manner in which names are selected also reveal much about a society. Naming can be done to commemorate deceased ancestors, indicate one's genealogy and social status or induce certain qualities in an infant (Seeman, 1983). There is a close association between lineage, inheritance and names. Family names have historically been considered an important means through which one can continue the line and pass down the prestige inherent to being a member of a particular family. Names thus have in-built social implications which are useful in uncovering the nature and functioning of specific societies and cultures. For instance, patronymic names are common in patriarchal, patrilineal societies.

Names are also reflective of the power dynamics that underlie cultures and social groups. In patriarchies, it is characteristic of women to be born under their father's name, and upon marriage, adopt their husband's last name. In Maharashtra, it is custom for individuals to have either their father or husband's name as their middle name (Junghare, 1975). Often in government and educational institutions, in the absence of a middle name, it is assumed to be either one's father's or husband's personal name. In this context, a married woman's identity is defined with reference to her husband. Her individuality as well as her past identity is completely forsaken for a new one associated solely with her husband and his family. In certain communities, the groom's family often changes the bride's first name upon marriage to one considered more auspicious. The bride herself traditionally had no power over this change, which was decided by a religious priest or the groom's family. This practice not only brings into question the human agency, but also the control a woman has over her own identity, and therefore is reflective of the overall power she holds in society itself.

In fact, names themselves hold power. In several tribes, names are believed to have totemic power. An individual has certain public names for functioning in society while also having a 'true name', which is secret to all but intimate ones (Seeman, 1980). Those born in 'lower' castes in India often find their names deformed while being referred to, with their meanings changed, often to something derogatory (Buswala, 2023). This intentional contortion of a person's name is again a display of power and status. In the action, the perpetrators not only debase and dishonour those in more vulnerable positions in society, but also reaffirm their own elevated status. The possession of Dalit names, due to their social undesirability, often become precursor to abuse and discrimination from upper castes.

Often, to escape this burden of undesirable names and avoid social disadvantage that their names expose them to, individuals as well as social groups change their names. Many have dropped Dalit surnames in favour of more neutral last names, such as Kumar, to escape the negative consequences of casteism (Parmar, 2020). However, many Dalit activists are now reclaiming their names, arguing that it is important to accept and take pride in one's identity to facilitate discussions on the very real problems of caste discrimination and abuse.

Immigrants also often face name-related difficulties in their country of residence. Children are bullied or ridiculed for having 'foreign-sounding' names. School admissions, economic opportunities and professional growth might be affected by one's name. As a response, many immigrant families name their children according to the country they are living in. Others shorten their names into anglicised

forms. Chinese immigrants often have two names - a traditional Chinese one which is used rarely and largely within the family, and a second name for formal functioning in society. Not only does this change facilitate assimilation into a new society, but it also helps reduce, to some extent, the discrimination that accompanies 'unusual' names (Khosravi, 2011).

Name change as a practice is not unusual. In North American tribes, people take on different names at different stages of their life, as a reflection of the changes they undergo with the passage of time and a tribute to important milestones such as first tooth, circumcision or menstruation (Seeman, 1983).

Accustomed to seemingly rigid naming systems, the flexibility that can be observed in tribal naming practices can strike those living in industrialised, urbanised societies as odd. Yet, we are not strangers to diversity when it comes to names. Nuns, kings, and popes often give up their old names for new ones upon accession to their title (Seeman, 1983), and so do actors, sportspersons and musicians. Authors assume pseudonyms, performers take on stage names while still retaining their legal name. Drag queens have separate drag personas, often with a different name than the one they use in everyday life. Individuals are often given nicknames - assigned at birth by family or at later stages of their life by friends and relatives - which are used as a symbol of affection and intimacy within the primary group. Each name serves a specific purpose, is used in certain areas of the individual's life, and represents one of the many facets of their identity.

There are other forms of contestation when it comes to conventional naming practices. Women are increasingly retaining their surnames after marriage. Many couples are taking up hyphenated or blended last names upon marriage. There has been a rise in people's preference for using gender-neutral names for their children. Many Dalit activists are emphasising on the positive value of their names and taking pride in them. In the transgender community, changing one's name becomes important for several reasons. Firstly, it helps overcome the dissonance an individual experiences due to the mismatch between their perceived gender identity and the one they have been labelled by others as. Secondly, they feel more comfortable in their own bodies rather than being self-conscious (VanderSchans, 2015). Finally, it becomes the first step towards reclaiming ownership over their own identity and asserting their idea of themselves.

In Shakespeare's renowned play 'Romeo and Juliet', we find Juliet say: "What's in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other word would smell as sweet" (Shakespeare, 1597/2016, 2.2.43-44) For the inhabitants of metropolitan spaces, this statement can often ring true. The heterogeneity of large, densely populated cities often allow individuals to live in anonymity, unburdened by the 'undesired' aspects of their social identity, which would have otherwise hindered their progress. However, our names, used in nearly every sphere of our lives, make this utopian escape far from possible, and instead create a two-pronged dilemma. Not only do they continue the cycle of discrimination and prejudice but also, and more dangerously, give the appearance of an 'equal' society. This mirage, in turn, makes it more difficult to create awareness about existing systemic injustices and work on correcting their vicious effects.

However, as we find ourselves on a glacial shift towards a society that gives achievement precedence over ascribed status, by and large, the flexible nature of names becomes a tool for the individual or the group to assert the value of the spaces they occupy, lay claim to spaces they might have been historically excluded from, or carve out new spaces for themselves.

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Masked

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Since I was a child, the phrase "Please introduce yourself" has always put me in a spot. I would somehow gather the courage and include my name, the school I go to, my village, nationality, and other such basic information in my introduction. People are taught from a very young age to know or manufacture their own "identity". There has always been an unspoken pressure to present oneself in a certain way to be perceived as interesting. Even though I would not read often, I would include "reading" as my favourite hobby in my introduction; it seemed like a safer option to have as it would help with "impression management". Reading is often associated with intellectual curiosity and the quest for knowledge, which are traits commonly found in "smart" people. The manner in which an individual introduces themselves often

establishes an impression of them. Thus, individuals make alterations in their likes and dislikes to be distinguished in a particular way. This made me curious about the present-day identity construction on Instagram, a social media platform, where millions of individuals are constantly trying to carve an identity for themselves online.

Anyone who uses Instagram is actively or passively creating an online/social identity whether they are aware of it or not (Frunzaru, 2016 as cited in Seibel, n.d). Social identity is closely connected to the performing self. Individuals perform a certain way to build identities online and even to navigate social situations by managing the impressions they create. 'Performance of the self' is the concept by a Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman (1959). He suggests that the concept of self is a social process rather than a fixed component of an individual. He further argues that there is no true self; instead, each mask an individual wears during certain scenarios is one's true self. Social identity is one of the masks that individuals wear. Instagram users are presumed to not showcase their offline identities online due to the online realities that one constructs. The offline realities or backstage of an individual's life as Goffman (1959) puts it metaphorically makes us understand the private self of an individual (Cole, 2019). But, the performance aspect of an individual online does not always imply insincerity or deception. Both realities-online and offline are extensions of self. A pleasing contrast to the 'idealised virtual representation of oneself' is that it is an 'extended real-life of oneself' (Ozan Can, 2021). An individual's identity is more fluid than static and is socially constructed in a given context. Individuals who may not have freedom in the offline space tend to create anonymous accounts to express themselves more freely without being restricted by their offline identity. Hence, the online space becomes a safe space for them to perform their identities. Instagram also helps individuals create and convey meanings out of the images, hashtags, captions, profile icons and usernames they use. The meanings conveyed through mediums like hashtags, captions, uploads help others understand and make meaning of the individual better. These are all forms of symbols which emphasise the impact of symbolic interactionism online. Instagram has also helped individuals create communities to get closer to individuals who share similar identity traits. There are a number of community accounts, one of which is @pcossocietyindia, self-defined as a multi-disciplinary society. It was made for the purpose of educating, supporting and helping women to make healthy lifestyle choices.

As the world's most valuable tool, the Internet has grown into a system of social relationships (Kemp, 2017 as cited in Taylor, 2017). Due to which there are positive as well as negative consequences in constructing an online identity. As digital culture and social media have become an integral part of everyone's lives, it is important to question *who* has the power to construct online identities. The digital divide is visible on social media, as cities have stronger technology infrastructure than rural areas, resulting in unequal access to technology and the internet. Individuals and communities with lower incomes may also struggle to afford both internet services and the devices required to access the digital world. Gender discrepancies in access to technology in some locations and limited opportunities for women may lead to a gender divide. These disparities have an impact on who can participate online. According to the Instagram demographics statistics (Zote, 2023), the platform sees the highest usage among individuals aged 18 to 34 belonging to the urban areas. Instagram tends to attract the younger demographic or 'digital natives' as Prensky (2001) labels them. On the other hand, the 'digital immigrants', individuals who learn to use computers at a stage during their adult life, are believed to have faced difficulty figuring out or accepting new technologies (Vodanovich et al., 2010 as cited in Qian Wang et al., 2013). However, irrespective of the generational gap between both, the digital natives and digital immigrants equally engage in identity construction online. One of the biggest

challenges on social media is whitewashing and colorism, which perpetuates beauty standards, favouring lighter skin tones and marginalising people with darker skin tones.This type of societal comparison leads to displeasure with one's own body and looks. The dominant cultural influence in society enforces values, behaviours, and aesthetics of the dominant group. In the context of Gramsci's theory of hegemony (1971), individuals and age groups are influenced by power dynamics to conform to specific performances in order to acquire acceptance. This dominance is achieved through a combination of coercion and consent, where the ruling class not only enforces its values and behaviours but also gains the consent of the majority to these cultural norms.

Online spaces reflect and promote societal power disparities. Marginalised groups may be more susceptible to online harassment and cyberbullying, limiting their freedom of expression. The Internet is regarded as a virtual hotbed for criminal activity (Aghatise, 2006 as cited in Taylor, 2017). Cyberbullying is regarded as one of the negative deviant conduct carried out online. Pranshu, a 16 year old, queer make-up artist committed suicide in their home in Ujjwain after receiving malicious comments under their post (2023). Cyberbullying is thought to have resulted in severe psychological and physical anguish among individuals. An inclusive online environment should, therefore, be encouraged. Richard Holt (2014) explains the lure of online identity, arguing that the Internet has reduced the relevance of the physical sphere, causing traditional concepts of time and space to undergo profound change.

This paradigm shift enables people to communicate with others and become 'online friends' with people they would never meet in person (Ozan Can, 2021). Researchers have determined that individuals with shy personalities may benefit a lot by maintaining online friendships (Zalk et al., 2014 as cited in Dreslin & Hedric, 2023). Maintaining online friendships allows some people to show their genuine selves online, which supports the incentives for coping with shyness and finding a helpful support network. The most frightening aspect of sustaining an online friendship is identity theft and inauthenticity. Some might prefer offline friendships to online as they believe that the former provides face to face exchange, which values personal interaction more. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the internet world saw an upsurge in people forming online friends. Since everyone was confined in their homes, the only way to socialise was through internet platforms like Instagram. As a result, many people made use of it to make acquaintances and establish identities online. If a person is cautious and negotiates deviant acts successfully, the online platform is an excellent environment for people to express themselves, share their thoughts, and mark their identities.

Jenkins (1996) describes identity as a process of becoming rather than being. Multifaceted identities are a way of understanding how individuals manage their interactions in a complex social world. Everything that an individual associates with and performs reflects on them, and it becomes their identity. In an increasingly digitised world, where identities are built and undergo various aspects in the online space, it is important to make sure that all identities are heard and represented. An alternative belief among people is that offline friendships provide face-to-face interactions and physical presence reveal the true essence of a person, as they allow for a deeper connection and a better understanding of their character. Others argue that online interactions can also be authentic, as they provide a platform for individuals to express their true selves without constraints of physical appearance or societal expectations. Additionally online spaces often allow for anonymity and the physical barriers enable individuals to be more vulnerable and authentic in expressing aspects of their identity that they may hesitate to reveal offline. Ultimately, both online and offline identities can be authentic expressions of oneself, depending on the person's comfort level with each mode of interaction.

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From Products to Personhood: A Capitalist Endeavour

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An individual’s identity is a complex amalgamation of different intersections and various labels of class, caste, gender, religion, hobbies, and other markers of identity but not limited to these categories. Identity cannot be composed into a single, structured, and overarching definition. It is made up of the ‘personal’ which includes what the individual thinks of themselves, what they hope to be in the future, and their perception of others; it is also the public manifestation which includes the roles that one is born into or takes upon through socialisation (Lawler, 2013). Capitalism has manipulated its customers and exploited these various identity markers to prosper in the economic market under the pretext of giving consumers the choice for self-expression. Through the analysis of the films, ‘The Devil Wears Prada’ (2006) and ‘Confessions of a Shopaholic’ (2009), we shall look at how individuals construct their identities via fashion and consumerism. The two films starring Meryl Streep, Anne Hathaway, and Isla Fisher, Hugh Dancy respectively have received huge applause from the viewers and made box office hits in their years of release. Along with the witty and entertaining plot of the films, their success is an insight to the resonance of the viewers with the characters in the movies. The credit card debt of Rebecca Bloomwood or the journey of Andrea Sachs fitting into the fashion industry, capitalism has seeped into nooks and corners of individual's lives. In the postmodern society, the symbolic meanings of products and consumer choices play a crucial role in creating and maintaining an individual’s social and personal identity; the self becomes an active symbolic project (Thompson, 1995, as cited in Elliot &

Wattanasuwan, 1988), wherein the symbolic meaning of products is used to construct both the public and the private realms which are the social world; 'social-symbolism' and self-identity; 'self-symbolism' (Elliot, 1997).

With the increase in digital media, consumers are reeled into the culture industry motivated by the choice of expressing their identities through customization and various brands. As Zepf (2010) states in his article, to be bought, the commodity must create the impression of not just its 'instrumentality' but of its aesthetic presentation. Advertising and media portrayals now pitch the experiential value of the commodity rather than its instrumental utility value that is, in the present day, materials emphasise the need to satisfy the experience of the product's consumption separate from its "usability, durability and technical perfection" (Zepf, 2010, p.145). In Baudrillardian words, commodities are more than what they signify (Baudrillard, 1998). Mediated by the media, the circumstances under which the commodity is advertised become unconsciously associated with certain desires of the consumer leading to the purchase. The hegemony of the economically and ideologically dominant is diffused through advertisements promoting the power of material wealth in bringing personal fulfilment and individual happiness. The need for an identity of oneself by immersing in the act of buying or consuming goods and services has been generated through capitalism in modern times. The book 'Manufacturing Consent' (Chomsky & Herman, 2008) explores how an elite few dominate the media industry in producing and distributing content in the pursuit of profit accumulation. As an ideological state apparatus, the media reinforces capitalist ideas of consumerism, which in turn have a significant impact on the construction of personal identity.

The abundance of consumer products has come to define modernity and life-styles (Harmanci, 2017). Chotiudompant (2013) highlights that we tend to judge people for their appearance, and emphasises how consumerism has played out significantly in generating this particular appearance of an individual's class, caste, or other markers in society. "Fashion isn't about utility. An accessory is a piece of iconography, used to express individuality" (Frenkel, 2006, 00:39:21). The above line from the movie 'The Devil Wears Prada', demonstrates how fashion, consumerism and identity interplay in defining the social class one wants to belong to. In the movie, "Confessions of a Shopaholic" (2009), Rebecca Bloomwood wallows in shopping clothes even though she doesn't require them because she views them as an investment (Pranistiasari, 2011). Thus conspicuous consumption becomes a solitary act beyond the personal to gain social acceptance and prestige – the end product of investing (Chotiudompant, 2013). These eventually manifest into personal tastes of individuals which profiles their identity (Campbell, 2004). This permutation and combination of various tastes assure the person of their assumed uniqueness and individuality. Rebecca describes her experience of buying a Vera Wang dress as equivalent to the poshness of a Hollywood actress, indicating the projection of financial power that comes along with consumerism. According to Baudrillard (1998) then, products become sign-values of one's social class and economic prowess in a consumer society, creating the performative identity of the individual as an economically self-reliant, upper-class woman which is opposite to the real-life Rebecca who is in deep debt (Lu, 2015).

The drive towards materialism and consumption has never been so omnipresent. Capitalism has invested in the production of desire for the increased profit-making benefits of businesses by exploiting the common man (Chotiudompant, 2013). A person's preference is monetised to provide the individual with both the experience and the satisfaction of enjoyment. Customisation and one-to-one marketing capitalise on this individual 'need', allowing individuals to gratify themselves by indulging in the consumption of the product (Chernev et al., 2011). Customisation has become ubiquitous, where you can set the

ringtone of your mobile phone or design your T-shirt, bags, keychains, or even the back of a phone or laptop allowing individuals to express themselves through their likes or dislikes (Chernev et al., 2011). Rebecca's shopping addiction is an exciting journey of desire and gratification of these desires. Her purchase of a Denny & George scarf on sale, on her way to an interview indicates her arousal for shopping and the advertising strategy of brands which lure the customers into buying things, deciding the consumer's buying choices and therefore her identity in the social world (Lu, 2015). “I shop, therefore, I am” (Benson, 2000 as cited in Zepf, 2010, p.144). The product consumed by the buyer becomes an extension of themself and their identity. Rebecca, in the movie, buys things not because she needs them but because she loves the act of shopping which is psychologically derived to gratify her desires. Indulging in a shopping spree becomes her highest form of leisure in a monotonous life which is implied in the dialogue, “When I shop the world gets better,....and then it's not. And I need to do it again” (Hogan, 2011, 00:76:40). Her shopping addiction becomes her identity as an independent working woman with purchasing power and breaking from the shackles of mundane corporate life through modern ways of consumption (Lu, 2015).

In today’s globalised world, an individual’s lifestyle has been shaped by the capitalistic culture industry in which the market decides how individuals perceive their concept of the self and the performance of their identity. Consumerism or mass consumption deceives consumers with the illusion of choice and construction of one’s identity solely by oneself. An individual’s leisure experience is capitalised on by advertising expensive gear and tools for the recreational activity to be fully satisfactory. This questions the concept of true leisure; does it become a space to identify one’s identity and ‘self’ or limit one’s creativity by subjecting oneself to commercially created choices eliminating personal choice and freedom (Wearing & Wearing, 1992). With modernization and the market of technology, time for leisure has been turned into time to make money thus paving the way for mass production and essentially mass consumption (Juniu, 2009). This in turn changes freedom of leisure to something which is bought due to its scarcity in daily life. Bored by the mundane life in the office, Rebecca finds her creative and expressive self in the shops of luxurious designer brands. Viewing the movie through a sociological lens provides us with examples of 9 to 5 jobs driven by capitalism, draining the individuals, mentally, emotionally and physically. Shopping, a leisure activity, thus becomes a venting system for Rebecca, allowing her to create an impression of herself in the society, as different from the lives of other 9 to 5 workers. The identity of Miranda is also created similarly due to her job which requires her to act up to her position in the company. Working closely with her, Andrea’s perception of Miranda’s perfectly organised life begins to change. The drama of a successful, career woman with a fashion sense is crucial for Miranda to assert her dominance and legitimacy in the industry, global community and over her employees. Although at first uninterested in the fashion industry, Andrea too, eventually engages in dressing up fashionably like Miranda in a pursuit to gain attention towards her hard work and thus obtain legitimacy in her workspace (Rana, 2023). The argument on viewing the capitalist system as the bestower of power of expression to the underprivileged sections of society inherently maintains the position that capitalism enables this expression and thus shapes their identity. The last few decades have seen a rise in self-expression through the display of consumer products and consumption behaviours to attain mobility in the social hierarchy (Hayward & Yar, 2006). By altering her appearance and sense of style, Andrea demonstrates to her boss and colleagues that she too, can fit into a particular class and social position. As her childhood was filled with products of “mum prices" (things of brown colour that lasted forever) rather than “real prices” (shiny but lasted three weeks), Rebecca envied other girls. Her parent’s inability to provide her with luxurious items instilled a

craze for expensive products, which was later fulfilled by her shopping addiction. The film portrays the transformation of her financial and socio-cultural identity. Here, the identities of the marginalised are commodified for the capitalist purpose of mass production and profit even though it might present itself as resistance towards capitalist high culture. The marginalisation of financially backward sections caused by capitalism instills the need to enter consumer culture to acquire a social position by the marginalised section. This masks the pervasiveness of consumerism created by the capitalist market. The crux of my argument, that an individual's identity is formed by capitalism, can be best explained through a dialogue that Miranda Priestly in 'The Devil Wears Prada' says to Andrea Sachs, her assistant. "It's sort of comical how you think that you made a choice that exempts you from the fashion industry, when in fact you're wearing a sweater selected for you, from the people, in this room" (Frenkel, 2006, 00:24:15).

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Food as a Medium of Identity Expression for Diasporic Communities

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Food plays an important role in our survival. While it is essential for the sustenance and nourishment of our bodies, it often partakes in the sustenance and nourishment of identities. Food is said to be culturally coded and thus, when it comes to diasporic communities, one of the ways that self and group identity expresses itself is through the recreation of the recipes from back from home. As Fischler (1988) beautifully puts it, "a cuisine transfers nutritional raw materials from the state of Nature to the state of Culture". This article aims to explore this relationship between food, culture, and identity, by employing an interdisciplinary approach. It looks at the psychological and anthropological perspectives of socialisation and acculturation, and also explores the value of building communities around food for diasporas.

When we talk about food, we cannot miss the name of the anthropologist Mary Douglas. Douglas' theory of symbolism emphasises the construction of social events through the ritualistic processes surrounding food (Tatti, 2019). Tatti (2019) brings together Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Douglas' symbolism to highlight why the reproduction of food rituals takes an important role in the lives of immigrants. According to Tatti (2019), meaning and symbolism attached to cultural artefacts, food in this example, has to be accepted and recognized in order to learn and preserve them. This symbolism is adopted and learnt through the family environment, especially through the role of the parents (Tatti, 2019). As Zalipour (2019) states, cooking and eating reinforces memories and establishes links with parent cultures. Thus, integrating the symbolism attached to native food, in practice, is an important facilitator in sustaining the connection with their cultural roots for diasporas. In this process of negotiating and acculturing identities in a diverse environment, the individual is able to strengthen and accept

different meanings of their identity and consequently, practise them self-consciously (Tatti, 2019).

There exists a strong effect of building cultural communities around food on the self-concept of immigrant individuals struggling with the alienation of foreign lands. Food carries the nostalgia of the comfort and emotions of a life that was. In postmodern diasporic literature, writings around food reveal various layers of displacement and dislocation (Zalipour, 2019). Authors like Jhumpa Lahiri strike such a chord with diasporas because they talk about the nostalgia of their homeland through the memories of food. For a lot of expatriates, the mechanism to cope with homesickness is by incorporating native cuisine into their lifestyle. In doing so, they incorporate themselves into a culinary system and the community that performs it (Fischler, 1988). For the Indian diaspora, getting together on festivals and recreating dishes from back home at diwali parties, for instance, builds communities and promotes intimacy through inter-dining (Appadurai, 1988). This in turn, might be one of the ways which strengthens the self-concept of diasporas to be more coherent and rooted in such social support systems. On one hand, there exist the WhatsApp groups created by middle aged desi women in foreign lands, to share the reinvention of traditional recipes and providing help to each other on what the next best alternative would be for a specific ingredient unavailable in foreign lands. Meanwhile, on the other hand, there are millennial food creators whose social media accounts centre around sharing stories of growing up in a foreign country and finding solace through food. This medium of identity expression does more than just provide an outlet for creativity but acts as a mechanism to build connections with people who share similarities with them in their experiences and identity struggles.

Khan (1994) found that, with respect to building communitarian connections based on food for immigrants, class or religion based identities are fragmented by an overarching ethnic identity. With common roots and familiar notes in their cuisines, inter-dining practices and food exchange become relatively more fluid as compared to the home countries. Thus, social hierarchies are challenged and negotiated on an individual level within diasporas (Khan, 1994).

For diasporic communities, one of the channels for identity expression is provided by social media platforms, where the performance and negotiation of identities on social media is conducted through food and recipes. Storytelling becomes an important component here, which highlights the memories of childhood while connecting them to the recipe at hand. In this globalised, multicultural world, one of the ways diasporas assume agency over their identity is by performing it on social media. They gain the control to manipulate and mould their version of identity on a micro-level. Social media also offers space to connect to a larger community around the world that shares life experiences without the limitations of territorial boundaries (Georgiou, 2010). This space gives them the opportunity to redefine themselves as belonging to different social realities and gaining multi-dimensional representation (Georgiou, 2010). Thus, for many immigrants, social media is a tool for the performance of their identity.

A lot of expatriates from India, especially those who spent their childhood in foreign countries, share the experiences of shame and ridicule faced from their classmates around the aromas or colours of Indian food packed in their lunchboxes. The protagonist Eddie from a popular show *Fresh Off The Boat* (N. Khan, 2015b) at the age of 10 says, “I need white-people food in my lunchbox. That is the only way I can get a seat at the table.” This one line resonates with the experience of a lot of Indian immigrants who had to change or suppress their identity to fit in with the Western ideals and make their voice heard. An Instagram content creator named Sahini states how she was often bullied as a student in the US for “smelling like curry”. But today, this power imbalance has been negotiated in one way by the same children who have grown up to embrace their ethnic identities by the same

medium that made them feel ashamed, i.e. food. This performance, sometimes even hyper-performance, of their ethnicity or "desi-ness" is a reassertion and a process of unlearning the shame.

Sahini Banerjee is one such content creator who shares her culture and stories through recipes. Originally from Bengal, Sahini shares her experiences of living on and off in India and the US and currently staying in Delhi. In a food series named *A to Z of Indian Food* (Sahini, 2022) she states that "Indian food is more than just curries". By sharing a recipe from different cultures and states in India, Sahini attempts to offer a counter-discourse to the popularised narrative of North Indian hegemony which limits Indian food to Butter chicken and Naan in the global imagination. Belonging to West Bengal, she also shares the stories and history behind the recipes and ingredients used in her dishes. She shares that after famines, colonialism, and partitions; the history of her culture is about evolution and adaptation which is represented in the simplicity and frugality of its recipes. By sharing these stories she reaffirms and embraces her regional identity which is not organically accepted or understood in a metropolitan city where she now resides.

A social media user Chaheti, known as *rootedinspice* on Instagram, posted a recipe that highlights her Indian heritage and her life growing up in New Mexico in the United States. She uses ingredients that she finds on hand that share some similarities and show the amalgamation of her life experiences of the feeling of not being fully accepted in either cultures. However, a lot of immigrants find that being a "hybrid product of multiple environments" (Chaheti, 2022) has its own advantages in building self identity, and for Chaheti, this comes from colliding her two distant and alienated worlds through food. According to Bellessia (2017), fusion of different cuisines provides an outlet for immigrants to express their different identities harmoniously.

For the world, Indian foods are often limited to curries. As Appadurai (1988), rightly puts it, there is an interplay of religious infliction and national standardisation in the popularisation of a national cuisine. In the process of the assertion of self-identity, it's also interesting to note which food is getting represented in global spaces or in other words, who gets the access to represent and assert their identity (in this case, through food) in global spaces. In this contestation of regional and religious identities, groups with greater access to resources push their "humbler neighbours" out of the global view (Appadurai, 1988). Moreover, the upper and affluent caste and class population from back home often possess the resources to make their stories heard in the global sphere while the disadvantaged populations get ignored. Perhaps, those groups who feel a disconnect from their home cultures due to the generational trauma faced due to their identities, might not fall into this category of individuals who use food as a source to stay connected with home roots.

Food tends to be labelled on the basis of ritualistic, religious, regional, and casteist notions. Parts of animals or types of ingredients, segregated in the context of abundance and scarcity find place in the kitchen of certain groups of people based on their access to social and economic resources. In this case, food of the minorities often becomes the rejects of the majority (Baviskar, 2019). These cuisines labelled on the grounds of purity/pollution carry a strong essence of the caste and religious segregations prevalent in India even today. In the global sphere then, the hyper performance of the "pure" eating cultures that carry the nostalgia of well-framed, well-documented, and glorified histories and rituals push the humbler, undocumented, and often considered polluted eating cultures out of vision (Baviskar, 2019).
The argument of authenticity also comes in here where assimilation often leads to dissolution of the variations, the nuances, and the roots of cultural symbols. In the process of reconstruction, especially when done by hegemonic powers (often to serve capitalistic interests), a watered down, and commodified

performance of the culture is represented, which is easier to consume and advertise. But, on an individual level for people like Chaheti, reconstruction is a reclamation and renarration of her identity by herself as opposed to something that has been imposed on her all her life. Although this cannot be denied that these individual creators are able to assert their identities in this manner because they have the cultural and social capital in the first place. To be able to gain validation for your experiences and attach emotional value to a symbol of your cultural identity is a privilege in its own sense. This reassertion and individual meaning making thus encompasses a nuanced space where the dynamics of culture and cultural symbols is highlighted. Culture does not always get passed down in a static format for diasporas; it's a constant process of modifying things as they fit them in their own lives.

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Marginality and Imposterism: Is it all in Your Head?

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Identity is something we inherit, grow into, make for ourselves, and change. There is a complex interplay of variables that go into this process, including external and internal influences. Early human development is a crucial period for identity formation, and it is neither solely influenced by nature or nurture as the debate often goes. Borrowing from Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1992), the interaction of a child with multiple systems of environmental influences affect their development. Comparatively, social constructivism describes identity as emerging from interaction between people and their environment, where the contingency of sociopolitical relations becomes important (Schwarz & Williams, 2020). The struggle for development of an "authentic identity" is faced by everyone. From religious ideas to theories like self actualisation, many have tried to set out paths for the same. But for many, this process is riddled with experiences of feeling inadequate or inauthentic. In psychological terms, this can be described as the imposter phenomenon. My initial introduction to the concept of the 'imposter syndrome' was through social media, most of which focussed on the gendered experience of it. Through this article, I attempt to bring into focus caste and race, exploring how the experience of marginality and imposterism manifests in areas like education and the medical system.

With the global rise of modernisation and centralised states came the homogenising sweep of peoples. Instead of accommodating diverse social identities, modernisation tried to construct an overall umbrella identity which sharpened the political edge of different identities (Singh, 2006). This resulted in heightening the conflict for representation among various groups. Thus, people who come from minoritized communities are especially under threat of being left behind. Gender and sexual orientation, race, caste, disability, class, religion and so on are just some of the lines on which the marginalisation of people occurs. When people from these marginalised communities enter spaces dominated by the majority after having to put in much more effort than those from relatively privileged communities, they are still disdained for daring to enter or are likely to be seen as undeserving. The principles of equality and fraternity, though enshrined in most constitutional documents, don't materialise the same way on the ground level. Especially in a modern and globalised nation-state, all areas from health and housing to education and employment opportunities, are shaped by one's identity (Singh, 2006). Wallerstein's Dependency theory, for instance, critiques the nature and process of Development as producing inequalities instead of ameliorating them. In an economised world, where competitive spirit is glorified, cultural and economic marginality go hand in hand to label

people as ‘lazy’. The interaction of external processes of marginalisation and the self's manufactured acceptance of this marginalisation (through imposterism) might lead to a stunted conception of one's identity. For example, heterogenous tribal populations or the ‘Adivasi’ of India are in constant conflict with the state to maintain their indigenous rights as they are deemed to be backward and the debates about inclusion, assimilation or isolation continue to plague their everyday lives (Guha, 1996). Similarly, arguments against affirmative action policies often portray its benefactors as incompetent people taking advantage of the system. But caste networks continue to limit one's occupational opportunities to ritually impure work.

Systemic oppression operates on multiple levels and starts from birth, with the institution of the family. Though members of a family may resist this maltreatment in their own way, the structure as it is built limits the degree of resistance possible. It is no surprise then, that early development experiences with one’s family have been implicated in the later development of imposterism. The normalisation of oppression occurs through the medium of policy decisions and everyday interactions alike. Media representation, stereotypes, and labelling all affect one's understanding of their identity and social group. Going back to the ecological systems theory, the systems one grows up in shape our development and ultimately our identity. Though discrimination has seemingly reduced in its explicit form, discriminatory treatment and microaggressions are a stark reality for marginalised groups. Microaggressions refer to subtle forms of discrimination or hostile behaviour towards historically marginalised groups (Nadal et al., 2021). Only through experience or reading about such experiences do other groups learn about this, and this too is heavily dependent on one’s positionality. Not only that, due to the internalisation of a discriminatory mindset, people are liable to not recognize when such discrimination occurs and even perpetuate implicit bias, that is, bias or prejudiced attitude one is not consciously aware of (Implicit Bias, n.d.).

When this internalisation results in a self-deprecatory mindset, many experience what is called the imposter syndrome. The imposter syndrome, or imposter phenomenon, has been described variously as feelings of fraudulence and inadequacy, experienced especially in the face of accomplishments. Nadal et al. (2021) have proposed an interactional model suggesting that people from marginalised communities go through a whole different process of identity formation. To reiterate, the imposter phenomenon has been theorised to develop due to early childhood experiences and can spike with external influences like microaggressions and stereotyping. Not only is imposter syndrome more likely to be experienced by people from underrepresented backgrounds, but this idea of imposterism can become complicit in the process of marginalisation. This relatively depoliticised concept of the imposter phenomenon ties into how marginalisation occurs at the social psychological level. In the next section, I have examined and delineated race and caste as identity markers associated with imposterism.

‘Double consciousness’ as an idea was introduced by Dubois to refer to the experiences of Black Americans wherein they experience two versions of themselves, one from the perspective of their own marginalised positionality and the other from the white perspective (Dillon, 2014). The critical race theory which borrows from Dubois' double consciousness and Marx's critical tradition focuses on how racial socialisation affects Black people's identity. It has propounded an understanding of race as a socially constructed identity with associations of inferiority in various dimensions. It emphasises the need to acknowledge that race had been arbitrarily constructed for the benefit of a certain section of society, that is, colonisers and how it continues to support white supremacist ideals (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2023). The idea of the imposter syndrome individualises these experiences as psychological misconceptions

one has about themselves. If one's sense of racial identity is strong with exposure to positive messages regarding one's social group, one is hypothesized to have better self esteem which can act as a protective factor (Nadal et al., 2021).

Many activists and academicians have highlighted the similarities between race (as it operates in the U.S.) and caste (as it operates in India and its diaspora). The rise of the 'Dalit consciousness' against the centuries of oppression, faced by people once categorised as 'untouchables' can accordingly be compared to race consciousness. Drawing from the idea of Double consciousness, activist-writers like Manohar N. Wankhade, have highlighted how Dalit people also face this dissonance (or 'dvandv' as he calls it in Marathi) of seeing themselves from two lenses, one from the Bahujan positionality and the other from the middle-class lens of pity (Desai, 2015). This subaltern subjectivity has been written about and dissected extensively. Casteism and racism both act as invisibilising agents. Fanon had written about how the colonisers don't "see" the colonised as human and see them only as racialized bodies (Rao, 2010). Similarly, Ambedkar has written about how casteism is akin to a visceral experience of "social nausea" of one group against the other (Rao, 2010). The graded inequality that casteism promotes helps the upper castes to maintain their sociopolitical privileges, while people from oppressed castes are denied access to resources on the basis of scriptures like the Manu Smriti that stipulate strict rules of interaction. Accordingly, Dalit people are expected and compelled to be submissive right from childhood.

It is not surprising that people with lower caste identities are more likely to face mental health issues like depression but are less likely to seek treatment for it. There is often a denial of the influence of caste on mental health outcomes, which can lead to decrease in access to mental health care (Valake, 2022). The way the medical structure is built is a larger issue to be considered, as people from marginalised backgrounds frequently face higher levels of negligent medical treatment. This disparity in poor health outcomes among marginalised peoples is likely to be turned on its head and weaponized as a sign of weakness or cultural inertia under a capitalistic framework. The history of maltreatment of Black people's bodies by medical institutions is far from unknown. As the Black Lives Matter movement tried to bring attention to police brutality and other forms of systemic discrimination, so have many Dalit led movements highlighted systemic marginalisation.

At the intersection of health and education is a prominent example of the links between marginality and imposter syndrome. Dalit medical students face a high amount of imposterism (Valake, 2022). Similarly, the higher likelihood of imposterism among Black Americans leads to discrepancy in educational goals for them (Nadal et al., 2021). Most academic institutions have long been a space of distress for people from marginalised communities. Dalit students and staff alike face discrimination on a daily basis due to the propaganda against the reservation system as conflicting the meritocracy model. Meritocracy in education is just as much defined by social capital as any other status. From admission interviews to examinations, Dalit students are expected to prove their 'merit' every single time. These structures are inherently biassed towards the upper castes due to their historical capital accumulation. Many universities have been implicated in "institutional murders" of exemplary students like Rohith Vemula and Anil Kumar Meena, as they neglect students' concerns regarding academic stress and harassment by fellow students (Sukumar, 2022). Even food preferences have come to be weaponized by right-wing student organisations to deepen existing faultlines and polarise students against each other; case in point the recent incident in IIT Bombay (Majumdar, 2018). Unfortunately this seems to increase as one climbs up the rungs of the higher education ladder. Rohit Vemula, a PhD student whose death by suicide in 2016 triggered a Dalit-led student movement in several universities, wrote

in his searing last letter, "My birth is my fatal accident." highlighting the stark realities of casteism (The Wire Staff, 2019). The number of Dalit student suicides, especially recently, is exceedingly large. And it is important to highlight the high proportion of these cases in premier institutes like the IITs. These can be characterised as fatalistic suicides under the Durkheimian framework, as they are largely driven by systemic oppression through microaggressions and denial of opportunities (Sukumar, 2022).

The statistical likelihood of imposter syndrome among people occupying certain identities is symptomatic of larger issues. Marginalisation is an ongoing process and not a historical legacy, and it is both a deeply psychological phenomenon and a sociological one. This is further complicated as one considers multiple identities coexisting within an individual. People have multiple identities and may perform their identity according to different circumstances. Taking an intersectional lens, one's experience of occupying an identity might differ drastically from someone who shares the same identity. The complexities increase when considering intersections of race, caste, gender and other political identities. Each comes with its own expectations, stereotypes and ideals. Thus, even marginality is experienced differently according to the intersections of various social identity markers. Accordingly, a Black woman's experience of misogyny is very different from that of a white woman. Similarly, a Dalit woman's experience of casteism would be different from a Dalit man's experience of the same. This could compound one's sense of imposterism as they are likely to individualise their problems instead of seeing it as marginality arising out of the intersections of factors.

Imposter phenomenon, it can be argued, has led to pathologization of social experiences of marginality. The quest for perceived authenticity of identity is thus hindered for people from marginalised backgrounds, as they are stuck in the web of psychological imposterism and systemic marginalisation. Authenticity after all is defined by those in power.

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Virginia Woolf's Artistic Rebellion: Going Beyond the "Angel in the House"

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"Always (it was in her nature, or in her sex, she did not know which) before she exchanged the fluidity of life for the concentration of painting she had a few moments of nakedness when she seemed like an unborn soul, a soul reft of body, hesitating on some windy pinnacle and exposed without protection to all the blasts of doubt." (Woolf, 2000, p. 226)

Lily loses consciousness of the world around her, "outer things, her personality, her appearance" (Woolf, 2000, p. 226) every time she paints. Her dissociation from her corporeality is also a transcendence of her "femininity". The world around Lily is one which doubts her ability to create, and it is her severance from her body that allows her to tune in to this thinking 'I'. Before they are able to create art, women are forced to overcome the assertion that "women can't paint, women can't write" (Woolf, 2000, p. 106). Lily's spacing out of the world around her, the world in which this assertion lies, might be her way to overcome what constrains her ability to create in the first place. The obstacles, therefore, that impede the female writer seem to be situated in the body, which can never be good enough and is always subjected to external regulation. The poignant moment before she starts painting, the feeling of 'nakedness' and the brief, almost ethereal state when she feels like an 'unborn soul', is where she is detached from her physicality and exposed to the uncertainties that the creative

process brings for a woman. When a woman carries this feeling of insufficiency in her body itself, the feeling that her voice is not valuable or sensible enough becomes pervasive. The loneliness, alienation, culturally imposed timidity, which are all embodied, constantly haunt every woman and thwart every attempt to break through this barrier and be true to herself.
Through the narrative technique of stream of consciousness, Virginia Woolf truly speaks to the reader. Her lyrical prose and free discourse enrich characterisation. Detailed constructions of the narrator's thought process express materiality through a modernist approach and allow her to express individuality as not distinctly personal, but socially conditioned, and reveal prejudices prevalent in 20th century Britain. In 'Professions For Women', Woolf builds on the concept of the angel in the house, depicted in Coventry Patmore's poem of the same name. 'A Room Of One's Own', and 'To The Lighthouse', expatiate on the woman as both mother and artist. Mrs. Ramsey in To The Lighthouse is almost a perfect illustration of what it means to be the "angel in the house", much like Woolf's own mother. She cares for those around her, constantly reassures and nurtures them, and her presence brings them together. Lily Briscoe, on the other hand, seems to mirror Woolf herself. When Woolf said in 'A Room Of One's Own' that "we think back through our mothers if we are women" (Woolf & Snaith, 2015, p. 124), what did it mean for her to have a mother who resembled this "angel"? Her description of the "angel in the house" parallels the role of Mrs. Ramsey and Julia Stephen (her mother) in their husbands' lives:
"She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily." (Woolf, 2002)

Professions For Women places this angel in stark contrast to what it means to be a female artist, portraying the two figures as antagonistic. Virginia Woolf's feminism often plays around with this mother/artist binary, emphasising patriarchal constraints and roles prescribed for women that impede their success as independent artists or writers who speak their own mind. Woolf had her first breakdown after her mother died, and in her autobiographical essay 'A Sketch Of The Past', she mentions how the memory of her mother always haunted her, surveilling everything that she did. Writing To The Lighthouse, was for Woolf, a laying down of her parents (Schulkind & Woolf, 1985). Mrs. Ramsey's death in the novel, and the completion of Lily's painting mark how she also symbolically kills the "angel", therefore being able to finish the painting. "Thus, whenever I felt the shadow of her wing or the radiance of her halo upon my page, I took up the inkpot and flung it at her." (Woolf, 2002). Her literary dominance over the angel was a sort of liberation and breakthrough for Woolf herself.

Lily Briscoe's character lacks the maternal instinct and surrender of Mrs. Ramsey. The figure of the artist is in opposition to that of the mother. Ten years after Mrs. Ramsey's death when Lily sets up her easel to finish her painting, Mr. Ramsey turns to her to "give him what he wanted: sympathy" (Woolf, 2000, p. 218). Lily, who is an "independent little creature" (Woolf, 2000, p. 72) refuses to mimic Mrs. Ramsey's and so many other women's self-surrender. The "angel" in 'Professions For Women' emphasises how the young woman writer must "be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own. Above all, be pure." (Woolf, 2002). So, when a woman chooses to write, be independent, express herself without censoring her thoughts, work for herself and not sacrifice her entire life for her family, does she become a 'devil'? When a man can be intelligent as well as "attractive", why can't a woman offer the same combination?

There are instances where Lily, though she wants to subvert feminine ideals, conforms to them. She is emotionally aware, and while she attempts to challenge the reigning ideal, she also at times submits to it. She is nice to Mr. Tansley at the dinner party, when Mrs. Ramsey gives her a pleading look, as if to say "unless you apply

some balm to the anguish of this hour and say something nice to that young man there, life will run upon the rocks…". (Woolf, 2000, p. 153). At the same time, she also admires Mrs. Ramsey's strength, beauty, and the ability to "bring things together" into a "work of art" (Woolf, 2000, p. 228). The docile, regulated body and her experience of it make it difficult for a woman to successfully break these rules and completely move away from her "femininity".

The negotiation between a "sort of caged bird life" and pursuing one's intellectual and creative interests is therefore a complex one. The question of how womanhood shapes creative expression is far from yielding straightforward, simple answers because the experience of womanhood itself is fraught with multiple 'ghosts' ranging from the fear of reception by male audiences, the apprehensions of not being 'womanly' enough, or critical enough in their writing and therefore not being taken seriously. These struggles are deeply ingrained in their lived experiences, and part of what unites female writers and readers across time and space is just this feeling which is rooted in the body. The lack of autonomy over one's own body, and the enduring existence of a phallocentric structure that systematically excludes women underscores every facet of their existence and shapes every action and decision that they make.

Throughout her writing, Woolf maintains an awareness of normative gender roles and pervasive gendered identities. The gendered binary of 'the angel of the house' and 'the artist' then seems to be bridged through an androgynous figure which she also sets forth in 'A Room of One's Own'.

Her oscillation between acknowledging gender differences and envisioning their transcendence, and the idea of androgyny, encapsulated in the figure of a man and woman getting into a taxi, reflects a nuanced but utopian understanding of gender complexities because she takes 'androgyny' to mean a harmonious integration and balance of masculine and feminine traits which allows individuals to transcend societal constraints. She has it both ways: she also acknowledges the history of women's exclusion, while calling for a man-womanly or woman-manly ideal. Characters like Lily Briscoe and Orlando embody the mother/artist binary and also reveal a liminal space of the "androgynous mind" (Woolf & Snaith, 2015, p. 144). The focus here is on Woolf's exploration of societal expectations and patriarchal constraints within the context of a conventional gender binary. An understanding of how these ideas extend to gender non-conforming individuals is beyond the scope of this article. The intent here is to delve into Woolf's reflections on femininity and artistic expression within a binary conception of gender prevalent in her time.

Beauvoir, in The Second Sex elaborates on how a woman is never defined as herself but in relation to man (Beauvoir, 2011). When the "angel of the house" is killed, it is easy to imagine that a woman can then just be "herself", but what is that self? Women have always strived to carve out spaces of subversion, push the boundaries of societal expectations, and assert their agency. However, the circular presumption that women are not intelligent because they are women, along with the pressure to serve the virility of a man in both personal and professional spaces train women in self-doubt and censorship.

The experience of writing and asserting one's voice itself can be daunting when there is a ceaseless hammering inside one's head, reminding her how she can never be "as good as a man". Virginia Woolf's writing liberates the text and demands that liberty for oneself, particularly women. Her works, and even particular characters like Lily, Orlando and Mrs. Dalloway seek the freedom to continue 'becoming', not to pin something down but to embrace its fluidity and uncertainty. She acknowledges the impossibility of reaching rigid conclusions when it comes to questions of gender, privilege, and expression. Characterised by nuanced exploration of these themes rather

than moral absolutes or simplistic answers, her texts emphasise that human experience is resistant to categorisation and simple reductions. Through her characters, she dismantles societal expectations and patriarchal constraints placed on women, and verbalises the penetrating experience of having one's voice denied that every woman lives through, therefore also uniting female readers and writers across space and time.

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Nari Shakti: Exploring the Evolving Ideal of the Indian Woman in Contemporary Society

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Indian society has been characterised by deeply ingrained ideals surrounding the roles of women. Phrases like "Nari sab pe bhari (translation: women overpower all)," "Mother India," and the spirited cry of "Bharat Mata Ki Jai (translation: Long Live Mother India)" have contributed to a collective perception of women as not only powerful but also as nurturing figures who hold a central role in the sustenance and future of the nation. The archetype of the "ideal woman", encompassing beauty, intelligence, gentleness, and her role as nourishing support to the household, has been a prominent fixture in the cultural tapestry of India for centuries. Women were unequivocally expected to conform to these traditional roles and ideals, alongside taking up whatever role they are required to perform and uphold, regardless of the stress of multiple roles (Lewis and Cooper, 1988). However, the 21st century has ushered in a remarkable transformation in how Indian society perceives and idealises women. The overarching concept of women's empowerment has taken root in the collective mindset, fundamentally reshaping the roles and expectations for women in India. This transformation has been driven by various factors, including progressive legal reforms, increased access to education and economic opportunities, and a gradual shift in societal attitudes towards gender equality. The question arises, how have these changes actually impacted the women of this generation?

A View Into the Past

In the pre-colonial era, Indian women played an array of diverse and influential roles, deeply entrenched in the rich tapestry of regional, religious, and cultural traditions. Drawing from the Early Vedic period, there was no monolithic archetype of the Indian woman; instead, she occupied a broad spectrum of roles (De, 2020). Their identities were shaped by the specificities

of their regions and communities. As time progressed, a significant decline in the role of women was observed, owing to the tight limitations placed on women by the caste and joint family systems, and the imposition of Brahmanical restraints on the entire society. This was evident through the wide circulation of texts like the Manusmriti, which propagated misogynistic ideals such as that women are meant to be dependants, seducers and that they should be dehumanised. These ideals led to the rampant rise of practices such as Sati, and child marriage (Goswami, 2021), and women were forced into cultural subjugation at the hands of the social forces at the time. This did not entirely hamper women, stellar examples are evident throughout history. From powerful queens, such as Velu Nachiyar and Ahilyabai Holkar, who ruled over their domains with strength and wisdom, women were actively engaged in various spheres, shaping the socio-cultural landscape and challenging the stereotype of passive obedience.

The colonial era introduced significant changes to the roles and identities of Indian women. The Western ideals, particularly those of the Victorian era, were imposed on Indian society, significantly influencing the perception of women. The colonial authorities often portrayed Indian women as oppressed and backward, in need of Western-style education and liberation (Sinha, 2000). While the British did introduce some positive changes, such as the promotion of women's education and the initial stirrings of the feminist movement, their intervention often disregarded the immense diversity of roles and identities that women held in different parts of India. This period witnessed a negotiation between the preservation of traditional roles and the adoption of Western ideals, leaving Indian women at a crossroads of identities.

After India’s independence (1947), a new phase in the evolution of Indian women's identities began. The nation aimed to strike a balance between tradition and modernity, recognizing the need to acknowledge and respect the diversity of roles and identities that women held. Post-independence India embarked on a path of redefining women's roles, acknowledging their contributions in diverse fields and their potential as agents of social change. The post-colonial and contemporary era has seen remarkable transformations in the roles of Indian women. An example of this would include the socio-political measures inculcated by the state for women's safety and improvement, including reservations, equality, and education. The journey of Indian women's identities has been marked by diversity, conflict, and transformation.

Theorising the Nari

"She is always represented as the mediator between past and present, while man sees himself as the mediator between the present and the future. While she is meant to conserve what is best in the past, he must build for the future." Sullerot (1971) succinctly describes the constant plight of women within the walls that hold contemporary society together.

From a functionalist perspective, society is viewed as a system with interdependent parts, each contributing to the overall stability and functioning of the whole. In this context, the evolving roles of women can be seen as a response to the changing needs and demands of society. For instance, in Talcott Parsons, functionally based notion of a society, the existence of a ‘female role’ is to fulfil the maintenance of the familial system (Parsons, 1942), a key tenet of Indian communal culture. The identity of the Indian woman has been very deeply entrenched within the ethos of Indian society, shaping the actors that play their various parts around them. This identity, corroborated under the lens of other perspectives and theorists, such as Pierre Bourdieu’s perspective, all point to it being one of the crucial interacting parts that contribute to social reproduction.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, when considered alongside his ideas about gender and the family, offers a framework of terms that enables the analysis of behaviours associated with esteemed femininity within the

context of class hierarchy and national culture. The very idea of gender becomes paramount, where women of all classes are tied to the "Big Indian Family", which prides itself on being the cornerstone of Indian society, where community ties hold immense significance. Traditionally, women played key roles as caregivers, nurturers, and homemakers.

However, the evolving role of women in modern times has led to significant changes. Women now balance their traditional roles with careers and personal aspirations. While this shift can lead to greater independence and personal fulfilment, it can also create challenges in balancing family and work responsibilities. This balance and aim to achieve social capital in a woman's lifetime is all-consuming, and the benefits one can achieve from adhering to these social, cultural, and economic structures are directly proportional to the level of adherence. The trajectory of change from these structures is staggeringly slow, and one deigns to question if it truly serves women. One implication of this change is the reconfiguration of family structures and dynamics. The joint family system, which was prevalent in India, is gradually giving way to nuclear families. This change can affect the traditional support systems within the family and community. Women may find themselves navigating a complex terrain of expectations, trying to fulfil their traditional roles while also pursuing their ambitions.

The Impact

As women take on more diverse roles in modern India, they contribute significantly to the economy, politics, and society. This shift is functional in the sense that it allows for the harnessing of previously underutilised human resources, leading to greater productivity and innovation (Lagarde & Ostry, 2018). It can also enhance social mobility and reduce gender-based inequalities, which can contribute to the overall stability and prosperity of society. Comprising 48.4% of the Indian population (World Bank Open Data, 2023), women require the autonomy to advance for reasons that do not depend on the benefits of others. This can be achieved through taking a step away from both the traditional frameworks of the patriarchy, and the one-size-fits-all approach of Western feminism. Ensuring empowerment through measures to improve education and employment, and other benefits are in place for women to utilise.

However, data shows that while the general mindsets of society have grown to be increasingly flexible regarding the role of women, true change and empowerment are still a long, and difficult path to tread. India, being one of the world's fastest-growing economies still observes an abysmal rate of formal employment of women within workspaces, especially in recent years, dropping from a meagre 32% in 2005 to an even worse statistic, 19% in 2001 (World Bank Open Data, 2023).

This startling statistic shines a mirror to the true realities of all that has been promised for women, and in effect, they are not benefiting from it. A deeper understanding of the complexities lying within the layers that hinder the growth and empowerment of women needs to be desperately achieved through an intersectional approach to explore why the contribution of our women very rarely makes it to the forefront, and how we can clear the way for the benefits of the contemporary era to reach each and every woman. The path towards this, as always, will be steep and yet necessary, to facilitate the true empowerment of our women, to realise the true strength of our Naris.

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Behind the veils - Exploration of the Image of the Woman in Rajasthani Ghoomar Songs and Rajput Women's Identity in relation to it

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What lies behind the veil? A space of privacy and domesticity, beyond which every action is trodden with unsure footing. A single sound of clanking bangles or clinking anklets is burdened with the consequences of public visibility. The *purdah* (veil) and the *zananas* (women's quarters) create a private world of women within the Rajput community (Aitken, 2002). For the elite Rajput women, the concept of *laaj*, that is the essence of their veil, becomes the central governing force of their caste and gender identity. Rajput women, bound by the expectations of *laaj*, are expected to embody virtues such chastity, modesty and loyalty, to which the honour of the family is believed to be intricately linked. Any transgression of this *laaj*,

whether real or imagined, brings disgrace to the entire clan. The fear of besmirching the family honour has led to the imposition of strict codes of conduct, affecting everything from deportment to social interactions.

The notion of *laaj* thus becomes the principle of gendered segregation of spaces in the Rajput community. This concept of *laaj* is cemented by the distance of spaces within a household as well as within public spaces. The *mardanas* (masculinised public arenas) and the *zananas* (women's quarters) create an interrelationship of cultural complementarity grounded in patriarchal domination and women's subordination. This means that a clear distinction of categorically male and female culture cannot be drawn just based on the segregation of spaces. Even though spheres of activity are separated on the basis of sexual difference, women's folk performances draw references heavily from the "male or public" spaces owing to patriarchal sexual domination (Mills & Radnet, 1997). The Rajput women's confinement to the *zananas* and the everyday use of the veil to cover themselves becomes the central factor in creating an exclusively women's folk culture. This consists of a wide range of nurtured traditions, customs, and artistic manifestations that have been handed down over the years. However, the narrative in these gendered performances comes from an understanding of their male dependency, where material benefits are acquired by adhering to a deferential status. These cultural expressions frequently have their origins in the everyday experiences, convictions, and inventiveness of women.

The understanding of women's folk culture begins from a private domestic space in collaboration with a community of women from that particular culture. The Ghoomar folk tradition in the Rajput community traces its origin in the confines of the *zananas*, where women used to come together and sing songs and dance, describing and commenting on their everyday experiences (Aitken, 2002). This article will focus on analysing Rajasthani Ghoomar songs as "texts", exploring the image of the woman in it and the construction of Rajput women's identity in relation to it. Women become the storytellers, hence, the songs here become an expression of the "self", representing the vocality of and subversion by women in specific contexts. The songs function as a medium for coded messaging that is used by women to express themselves under strict male scrutiny (Mills & Radnet, 1997). The songs become a tool to communicate their life episodes, subordination and further ambiguously negotiate gendered identities in the space of marriage, family and caste-based community. The very production of this coded messaging reflects gendered oppression and censorship (Mills & Radnet, 1997).

The lyrics of these songs are often based on imagined spousal dialogues, everyday negotiations, popular beliefs and symbolic motifs set in a regional cultural setting. The shifting boundaries of everyday negotiations impact the kinship ties of women. The coding of the songs reflects these negotiations, where women display a critical consciousness of their subordination and its everyday manifestations in the form of material circumstances.

Song 1 :
एजी हाँ सा, म्हारी,
म्हारो नानों देवरियो ऊबो झांके सा,
पड़ोसन झाला देवे में कैया आऊं सा
किंकर आऊं सा
नैणा रा लोभी किकर आऊं सा,
नैणा रा लोभी किकर आऊं सा।

In this song, the wife, addressing her husband, expresses her desire to meet him. However her little brother-in-law and the neighbour who is looking over are stopping her from boldly crossing boundaries and coming to meet him. As mentioned above, the distance in the gendered spaces is evident in these lines, where the crossing over by either of the parties is considered shameful. The idea is that spousal contact should be established categorically only in the most private bedroom space ("*mehela*"). In the lines, she addresses her husband

indirectly as "*baisa ra beera*", i.e., my sister-in-law's brother which shows another restriction on the part of the woman where she is not allowed to verbalise the name of her husband. Another layer to this is shaming or tabooing of any open display of affection among married couples or mention of romantic intentions in public spaces, as these oppose the construction of the *laaj* in the larger Rajput community. The *payal* that she is wearing becomes a symbolic representation of her role as a custodian of family honour. The jewellery being an important social and cultural capital for Rajput women, the specific mention of payal (which are worn in the feet), shows social and cultural surveillance on the women in the family (Monahan, 2011).

As we progress towards the specific content of the lyrics of the songs, the image making of this submissive and voiceless woman finds an alteration in some aspects. The shy, young bride becomes the demanding wife who makes explicits demands from her husband.

Song 2:
बाईसा रा बीरा नणद हटीली जी
बाईसा रा बीरा नणद हटीली जी
बाईसा रा बीरा जयपुर जइज्यो जी
आता तो लाइज्यो तारा री चुनड़ी

Song 3:
म्हारे महळां निचे सा
झरोखा निचे सा
लगा दो हरिया बाग

In the second song, the wife demands her husband to get her an expensive, embroidered *chunari* from Jaipur, after stating that her stubborn sister in law won't lend her one. While in the third song, the wife asks her husband to build a garden (*baag*) right under her chamber's window (*jharokha*). This demanding wife of the folklore contrasts the "real wife" who adheres to the notion of *laaj* and normative gendered behaviour in the Rajput community. The transition from the submissive, voiceless Rajput woman to the bold, demanding folkloric wife shows a perceived duality in female identity. On one hand there is a submissive, docile young bride not daring to step outside the private space to even meet her husband, while on the other hand, there is a bold, vocal wife making elaborate demands to her husband. Here, the public versus private dichotomy forms the core of the construction of women's relationships and the expression of these relationships. The romantic idealisation of a "happy marriage" in these songs allow that assertion of desires on women's part. It gives women a "safe space" to reimagine a married life where they can boldly express their desires and imagine a husband who willingly surrenders to those demands. This reimagining of gendered relationships allows women to create their own narrative imaginative world, which becomes a platform for their voice of everyday resistance.

Song 4 :
Mahara sasura ji toh, Delhi; ra raja ji sa,
Mhara sasu ji toh gadh ra malak sa
Mhara jeth ji toh, ghar ra pathvi sa
Mhari jethani toh ghar ra malak sa
Inee lehariya ra, No so rupya rokada sa
Mahane lyaydyo, lyaydyo, lyaydyo dhola lehariya sa

In this song, a young bride describes her conjugal ties, subtly mentioning the power they hold. She says that her father in law and brother in law are the rulers of the entire estate, while her mother in law and sister in law are decision makers inside the household. Here, the lines reflect the bride's perception of her kinship ties and the power hierarchy embedded in it. By invoking these ties, there is an attempt to create allies and reconfigure power-based kinship relationships. By negotiating these power relations through folk performances, the woman can "safely" express her perspectives on the oppressiveness of these relationships.

The exploration of Ghoomar songs as a cultural artefact provides profound insights into the nuanced negotiation of gendered identities by Rajput women. In the context of the Rajput community, absolute loyalty is expected from a married woman towards her husband's family.

The marginality of her position in the conjugal family becomes an obstacle to directly speak out the oppressive nature of her kinship relations and gendered power relations in the marriage. The epitomising of marriage as the most crucial social institution in a Rajput woman's life intensifies the gender roles within the familial space.

As delineated in the songs above, even though there is an explicit vocality in the imagery of the woman, the image of the husband is of the "male provider", whose goodwill will decide the status and capital acquisition for the wife. The material capital (in the songs - *payal, chunari, baag, leheriya*) demanded or mentioned by the wife comes from a very specific caste and class capital.

Through the songs, women thus navigate the constraints of tradition, forging a space of resistance and implicitly coded agency.

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Queerness in Flux: An Exploration of the Construction and Fluidity of Queer Identities and Labels Across Cultures

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The struggle for legal and political rights for the queer Indian citizen is susceptible to face immense opposition from the right-wing individual, who is more than enthusiastic to term the movement ‘an urban, elite, and foremost, a western notion alien to Indian culture’ (not necessarily in that order) as if it is a social fact. The struggle is evidently endless, with the Supreme Court of India rejecting an appeal to legalise same-sex marriage in the country in October, 2023. Nevertheless, the hearing itself is reflective of developing sensitivity and attention to the LGTBQIA+ identities. They are increasingly being brought up to the fore-front of discussions, and often lending alternative perspectives to ecological, political, and social deliberations. However it must be noted that more often than not, discourses in India are tainted by colonial imagery. Western queer theory dictates our perception of queer identities in India; it also fails to accommodate the nuanced complexities of queer experiences in different cultures.

This article engages in a comparative exploration across various communities and perspectives, highlighting the struggles faced by queer Indian citizens. The rejection of an appeal for same-sex marriage legalisation by the Supreme Court of India in October, 2023 serves as a poignant backdrop, highlighting the ongoing battle and evolving sensitivity to queer identities in the country. Furthermore, emphasising the influence of colonial imagery and Western queer theory on discourses in India, this article argues for a nuanced understanding of queer experiences beyond Western constructs.

The queer experience is universally relevant, exhibited in practices and behaviour, as documented through local histories and folk culture: consider sufi poetry and its homoerotic references and the Kamasutra and its mention of male unions. Women in the *Kikuyu* community married other women for ‘social, political, economic and personal interests’ in Kenya as noted by Njambi and O’Brien (2000). *Nanshoku* (pederasty) constituted two major practices, first, the same-sex relationships between older and younger samurai, and second, *kabuki* (a traditional theatre form in Japan) performers who engaged in prostitution (Makoto and Lockyer, 1994). In India, you would encounter the *Hijra* community, whose presence is deeply rooted in the culture of the country. Their categorisation proved to be a difficult task for the enumerators employing orientalist sociology during the colonial period, and still continues to be, despite developing queer theory.

But the mere fact that their classification in accordance with labels constructed in the west, such as ‘trans’ remains contested, is a telling fact. Perhaps, only the term queer can begin to define them. Historical exploration of the social construction of ‘sex’ has seen medical professionals and researchers enforcing the idea of the male and female binary as inherently ‘natural’, invalidating and excluding intersex, gender-fluid, transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. In addition, homosexuality was considered not only

unnatural but also a crime against the state and an outrage against God, in various countries. Additionally, queer theory evolved as a response to the lesbian and gay rights movement (Motschenbacher and Stegu, 2013) in the last few decades, which were largely concentrated in parts of Europe and America. Society and culture define our understanding of the queer individual, with institutions of religion, politics, and academia influencing and reinforcing our notions. It is an injustice to define queer individuals from nations that have been colonised, using a system that invalidated their existence.

Researchers have made attempts at defining queer communities from Asia. Vinay Lal (2014) summarises the various labels associated with the hijra community, and their case is the epitome of orientalist sociology. They have been labelled in academic literature and popular culture as 'eunuchs, transvestites, homosexuals, bisexuals, hermaphrodites, androgynes, transsexuals, and gynemimetics, intersexed, emasculated, impotent, transgendered, castrated, effeminate, or somehow sexually anomalous or dysfunction.' Considering the number of categories, it should be no surprise that their compartmentalisation began with the British Empire's imperialism in Asia. The documentation of the citizens of their colonies were of utmost importance, itemising their habits and characteristics were considered crucial to better 'governance'. Their treatment of the indigenous population is reflective of their intolerance, which was dictated by their institutions. Unsurprisingly, the hijra community was the focus of British prosecution, which was further reinforced by the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871. They were compartmentalised using the term 'eunuch', which was an ambiguous term. The definition kept changing as colonial officials contested each definition's validity (Hinchy, 2014).

In the 1860s and 1870s, colonial officials took on the task to 'rescue' children from prostitutes and eunuchs, who allegedly kidnapped the said children, and led them onto a "dishonourable path". According to government policy, cross-dressing or performing in public was used to prove a "reasonable suspicion" of kidnapping, castration, and sodomy against a eunuch rather than criminal convictions (Hinchy, 2014). The *guru-chela* practice in the *Hijra* community, a system where senior members of the community form a parental-like relationship with younger members, could easily make them targets (though, it must be noted that newer generations of community are pushing back against the system, and some have equated it to bonded labour). This crusade against the dreadful transgressions of a gender minority was labelled as a step towards social reform and protection of citizens, but it worked more so as an agent of surveillance, closely regulating the conduct of eunuchs, and ultimately their extermination. This erasure has ramifications in the modern period, with the same draconian laws used to isolate the community further, and labels still contested. Some communities label themselves as the 'third gender', activists, equipped with western queer knowledge are quick to label them trans.

There is a dissonance here between the larger queer movement and the identity revolution in modern times, where knowledge related to queerness available to the average person is dominated by western rhetoric. Solidarity is only found after one adheres to the western discourse on gender and sexuality. It was imperative for indigenous queer people to learn the settler's language to weave that notion of solidarity, where social negotiation is made difficult by the fact that they find themselves 'nameless', in a situation where western ideology does not allow their identity and selfhood to be realised (McNeil-Seymour, 2014).

Cohler and Hammack (2007) have highlighted that classifications pertaining to sexual identity and orientation are influenced by historical and cultural factors. But, it should also be noted that the assumptions and language used to discuss gender and sexuality are not fixed or universal because they are a result of active social

negotiation. While the queer person has existed throughout the history of mankind, though LGBTQIA+ initialism only emerged after the eighteenth century, emphasising an essentialist distinct, social and personal identity.

One expansion of the acronym LGBTQQIP2SAA, represents lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, pansexual, two-spirit, asexual, and ally identities. Other sources omit the ally and add androgynous. It is not far-fetched to say identities are produced and reproduced through language; changing interpretations of the initials are defined by conflicting claims to power and truth. Queer itself used to be a derogatory term, until its reclamation very recently. This indicates the process of developing discourse has the ability to bring forth more accurate representations of community, which is exemplified in the addition of the term ‘two-spirit- in the initialism.

The umbrella term "two-spirit," which recognises the diversity of gender identities among Native Americans, refers to intersex, androgynous people, feminine individuals who are AMAB (assigned male at birth) and masculine individuals AFAB (assigned female at birth) (Williams, 2010). ‘Two-spirit’ is the english translation of the *Ojibwe* (an indigenous language of North America) term *niizh manidoowag*, and has replaced the previously used term *‘berdache’*. The latter has Arabic roots, adopted by French colonists, and means ‘kept boy’ associating the queer Natives with the practice of sodomy (Medicine, 2002). Native Americans rejected the term as it reduced the existence of such persons to their sexual preference; and since they give more importance to a person’s spirit and character rather than the physical, they felt it more appropriate to recognise them as people who adopt a gender status that differs from both men and women rather than viewing them as transsexuals who attempt to pass for "the opposite sex" (Williams, 2010).

The inclusion of the two-spirit label in the LGBTQIA+ acronym subverts the idea that labels are fixed, and queer individuals not belonging to the west need to understand and negotiate their identity based on labels that were created not less than 200 years ago. The queer identity is eternally in flux; societies are essentially evolving and interacting with power relations, which affects knowledge creation, and social codes, constructing identities. With the development of structures and discourses over time, new labels are developed, and terms which were earlier used as slurs, reclaimed.

The existence of labels, however, entails certain organisational identities and individual identities are being created. While an organisational identity of labelling oneself as ‘queer’ reflects the formation of a collective experience that emerges out of a power imbalance and existing binary formed based on sex and gender, labels often limit experiences, and are not only subject to language, history and political climate, and the only constant is the fact that the queer community is a gender and sexual minority, actively denied equitable representation and resources in the contemporary world. Labels, and the greater queer identity forms a counter-discourse to the heterosexual norm, validating the experience of gender and sexual minorities who have been marginalised and misinterpreted for centuries, while also continuing to have internal power dynamics that are constantly negotiated.

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Reflection and Reconstruction of Queerness: The Story of The Hijra Community

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"*Vikriti Evam Prakriti*"

The verse quoted from the Rigveda holds special meaning when it refers to things which are considered to be deviant from the usual discourse. It means 'What seems unnatural, is natural'. This verse provides us with a new lens through which queerness can be deconstructed. As per my findings and interpretation, the literal meaning of 'queer' means something unnatural, yet, in a cultural context, not unnatural. Queerness today is always associated with something being unnatural due to the binary discourse employed around gender roles and expression. Historically, the word 'queer' was used as a slur against people who deviated from heteronormativity. However, over the past five decades, the word 'queer' has been reclaimed into a positive notion of gender and sexual variations, shedding its historical connotations of transphobia, homophobia, and queerphobia. The term 'queer' is an umbrella term including diverse gender identities and sexualities. It is representative of the LGBTQIA+ community (Wilson, 2019). As observed, queerness

encapsulates different meanings within itself and from one of these meanings emerges the ‘T’, representing the transgender identity. Vedic literature exclusively references the transgender identity, which categorises gender into three categories, of which the third category is called the “*Tritiya Prakriti*”, transcending gender binaries (Goel, 2019).

In the literary discourse, people from the Hijra community are referred to as ‘They’ or ‘The other’ to clearly distinguish between the person who writes the piece and the one on whom the piece is written. In the following article as well the Hijra community is referred to as ‘They’ keeping in mind the positionality of the writer as a third person and does not aim at the purposeful othering of the community.

The transgender identity encompasses multiple facets of gender non-conforming people. Transgender people do not identify with the gender which is assigned to them at birth and might experience feelings of unhappiness, anger and frustration associated with their bodies which is commonly termed gender dysphoria. Though this experience has been routinely pathologized, the distress associated with gender dysphoria may be viewed as a consequence of the heavily gendered society that we inhabit. This implies a misalignment between one's gender identity and their physiological sex. Transgender people do not align with the conventional gender roles which are imposed upon them by society (Gender Education and Advocacy, Inc., 2001). ‘Hijras’ are a community classified as one section of the transgender population who have their own distinct identity. Transgender people may identify themselves to be either male, female, both, or neither, challenging the binary system and self-identifying as the ‘Third Gender’. Similarly, people identifying with the Hijra community may not conform to gender norms, but instead maintain a fluid gender identity that may embody male and female characteristics (Gender Education and Advocacy, Inc., 2001).

As per a descriptive research study conducted from 2011 to 2014 on 51 people from the Hijra community, residing in Kharagpur, West Bengal, a categorisation into five distinct gender sub-categories emerged. (Mal, 2018). However, this classification may now be perceived as dated, insufficiently encapsulating the diverse array of experiences prevalent within the Hijra community. The embodiment of the Hijra identity might change with every geographical location, cultural context, and other intersecting identities. Some of the distinguishing features of the Hijra community might include their unique styles of dressing and distinctive behaviour patterns. These may encompass a range of expressions. For instance, the adoption of a distinctive hand clap serves as one of the methods by which they express their identity in public. It should be noted that not only are all transgender women not recognized as Hijra, but also, not all transgender women identify with the Hijra community. This community constitutes specific groups of transgender women who have their way of living, bound by certain rules and regulations (Mal, 2018).

Before delving further into the trajectory of how the Hijra community has evolved as a collective, it is necessary to know the social standing and position of people from this community in Indian society. Traditionally, “Hijras” were considered to be demigods who would bring luck and prosperity to the household where they give their blessings, as depicted in the Ramayana. Numerous instances in Hindu mythology deify the Hijra community (Harvard Divinity School, 2018). The transgender population in India have regional and cultural differences which leads to linguistic diversity in referring to the different communities within this umbrella category. These regional variations of communities include the ‘aravani’ from Tamilnadu, ‘kinnar’ from the north of India, ‘jogappa’ from Maharashtra, Karnataka, etc, with the hijra community being one of these cultural communities. However, these cultural variations have been homogenised due to the colonial gaze and the communities have been labelled as ‘Eunuchs’ (Mal, 2018).

This community has been segregated from mainstream society since ancient times but there

has been no evidence of them being marginalised (Mamun, 2022). Even if there was a stigma attached to their gender identity which did not conform to the binary norms, their mobility was not restricted and they were accepted within society. They were the trusted confidants of Mughal rulers during the mediaeval times and even held positions of power in courts. However, a transformative shift occurred with the British colonisation of India by the British. The heteronormative beliefs and the lack of cultural sensitisation led to all the people from the Hijra Community being criminalised and they were also arrested at first sight by British authorities. The two centuries of stigmatisation by the British led to the marginalisation of "the Hijras" to a great extent (Harvard Divinity School, 2018). Even after British rule, India carried its colonial legacy of stigma against this community. They were always treated with contempt and excluded from educational and employment opportunities. This has forced the community to pursue means such as begging, dancing and singing at ceremonies and sex work to make ends meet. They have been victims of violence and abuse by their own families, relatives, the police, and bureaucrats and are even refused healthcare and housing facilities. They had been denied voting rights till 1994 and were even forced by officials to identify as either male or female during their voter registration (Mal, 2018).

Even today, people from the Hijra community are subject to discrimination in every sphere of public life and are sometimes forced to lead dual lives to feel accepted in their respective social spaces. However, they are forced to fit into heteronormative gender norms which leads to a gender identity conflict (Mal, 2018). Their latent identity is eventually realised through certain social experiences at various stages of life. As per my observation from Woltmann's reading of Rushdie's book it soon dawns on oneself that their behaviour does not fit into the normative gender roles defined by the patriarchal Indian society. Their behaviour is stigmatised by society due to which they are forced to leave their homes at a young age and join the Hijra community. Salman Rushdie's "The Golden House" rightly encapsulates the Hijra culture and the struggle for identity and its continued reassertion via the community which is necessary for the consolidation of this identity (Woltmann, 2019).

Few hijras settle in their place of origin. Family rejection and disapproval probably account for the uprooting. Having re-created themselves as beings whom their original families often reject, hijras usually take those new identities to new places, where new families form around them and take them in (Rushdie, 2017, as cited in Woltmann, 2019, p. 8).

The above description by Rushdie depicts the alienation, ostracization and stigmatisation that "the Hijras" face daily. This has led them to create their own subculture and ghettoised communities which give them a sense of security as well as an identity within the community. This identity of being a 'Hijra' refers to not just one person but the entire community as each individual in the community is said to have a strong affinity with each other (Gettleman, 2018). A group of people from the Hijra community are said to live in a household which is known as a 'Gharana' and it is run by a head known as the 'Guru Ma' who is obeyed by several disciples known as the 'Chelas'. This is known as the Guru-chela system through which the household functions. There is a hierarchy within the community and they are strictly governed by the rules and customs of the community and non-conformity to it can have certain repercussions (Mal, 2018).

The becoming of a hijra involves multiple processes and habituation to how the collective lives, behaves and asserts their identity. They are also subject to pressures within the community which creates a constant tussle between the gender identity which they are assigned by birth versus the gender they identify with. Amidst these struggles, they also face multiple strands of complexity due to intersections of gender roles, class, caste, religion and sexuality which again adds to the struggle of identity assertion within as well as

outside the community (Woltmann, 2019). In such circumstances, they might go through forced castrations to assert their identity to be closer to what is perceived as being a woman. (Harvard Divinity School, 2018). This may facilitate them to pursue a more feminine form of gender expression through certain gestures and verbal cues. All this may either be due to possible discomfort with regards to accepting their own body as different from the rest but still attempting to be able to come to terms with the identity about themselves and the one which is ascribed to them. It is to be duly noted here that gender norms are produced and controlled by structures of power within society which are set within a hegemonic cultural discourse which limits gendered identity expression (Woltmann, 2019).

The "Hijras" in India are revered and feared at the same time. There is a two-sided reason for the same. They are revered because of their sanctified role in certain rituals in Hinduism such as bestowing their blessings on special occasions like the naming ceremony, weddings are believed to bring good fortune to the family. On the other hand, if they are ill-treated in any way they may even curse which is believed to bring grave misfortune. The cultural beliefs and the stigma due to the colonial hangover to have a tussle with each other. Societal perception has often been conditioned to think in binaries. However, in India, traditional beliefs have been passed down through generations, and among them is the reverence, along with the otherised fetishisation of 'the Hijra'. This reverence is accompanied by a certain degree of aloofness and disengagement which shows years of influence of colonial powers in history (Harvard Divinity School, 2018).

'Stigma' has been the root cause of the marginalisation and the lack of social mobility for the community. A 2018 Harvard University paper by Matthew Clair on 'Stigma' talks about Erving Goffman's theory of spoiled identity. As per Clair, stigma is an attribute which makes general acceptance in society difficult and may even lead to inequalities on many levels. However, he says that the discreditable attribute is not present within the stigmatised individual, or even in the audience who are considered "normal" about societal presumptions. The stigma is in the relationship between the stigmatised individual or group and the audience which views their behaviour to be potentially deviant from the norm. In this case, the stigma lies in the relationship which the Hijra community share with the heteronormative structured society where the performance of non-binary gendered behaviour makes them discreditable and devalued in the social order (Clair, 2018).

Goffman gives three discreditable attributes when it comes to defining stigma. These include tribal stigma (race, religion, ethnicity), physical deformities (leprosy, blindness) and character-related stigma (homosexuality, drug addiction) (Clair, 2018). The Hijras are discriminated against on all these stigmatised attributes in Indian society due to a variety of interplaying factors like caste, class, religion, and the society's discomfort towards transgender bodies which may include intersex people or a biological male dressing as a woman. These factors may be embroiled down to the character-related stigma which shows the effects of the colonial legacy of discriminating against Hijras who are considered deviant from gender norms and expression and a potent threat to the social system. As per psychological studies, one of the coping mechanisms for dealing with the stigma at various micro and macro levels is identity development. This phenomenon can be observed in the Hijras who have their own separate identity as a community which provides them with some amount of self-esteem with regards to their self-identity.

Stigma is the root cause which has led to the othering of the Hijra community in society. This is done through the deliberate socio-economic and political exclusion of the community which leads to inequality within the structured, gendered hierarchy of society. The stigma justifies the exclusion of the community and as a result, the exclusion reinforces the stereotypes

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or the devalued characteristics. The constant 'othering' of the community is due to the construction of their identity in the heteronormative society. The continued experience of the 'othering' makes the community experience the stigma of not fitting into gender norms. As a consequence of this discrimination, they lack access to material resources which affects their economic condition and leads to further marginalisation of the Hijras. Thus, the stigmatisation leading to othering results in social inequality being reproduced in society at multiple levels which demeans the socio-economic status of the community (Clair, 2018).

The 2014 NALSA judgement, which is also known as the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) vs. The Union Of India case, gave recognition and due importance to gender identity based on self-identification. The judgement gave recognition to the rights of transgender people and even organised social welfare schemes for them. It directed the government to reserve seats in government sectors for the transgender community due to the extreme marginalisation they face in society. The decision given by the court showed that legal measures and efforts by civil society organisations can, to an extent, help fight the stigma faced by the Hijras and provide them with a strong legal identity in society (Woltmann, 2019).

Mass media plays a huge role in how transgender identities are portrayed and constructed for objectified commercialization and sexualization of transgender bodies justifying the Orientalist mindset of the coloniser. Since the 17th century, the expression of one's sexuality was repressed by the Victorian bourgeoisie and restricted to a particular social space. The behaviour of discussing sexual practices openly was labelled as abnormal and enforced through conditioning within power structures. This sexual repression may have been manufactured into the imposition of gender-specific behaviour where deviant gender expression may be seen as a transgression which may distort one's identity. However, transgender rights activists like Shri. Gauri Sawant and Lakshmi Narayan Tripathi, through the effective use of media channels, are breaking the stereotypes through which Hijras are generally perceived and reconstructing a new Hijra identity. Another notable media piece, "The Pink Mirror" by Shridhar Rangayan, is one of the classic examples of the sensitive portrayal of the Hijras. We always view the Hijra community as the 'Other' who challenge the existing normative structures of gender identity. The community demands to be recognized as an equal 'Other' rather than the portrayal of the exoticized, objectified 'Other'. The suggestion here is to recognise their voice and create a space where they have the agency to put forth their narrative not based on the hegemonic gender binaries which would eventually lead to personal self-construction of their identity and even have scope for further exploration (Woltmann, 2019).

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Family and its Impact on Creation of Identity: Analysing the Lenses of Rural Urban Continuum

Ashi Vaidya & Diya Rastogi, SYBA

The Indian family as a strong, cohesive, integral and fundamental unit is a solid foundation of the Indian social structure. It has survived the test of time during several phases of social growth and transition such as industrialisation, modernization and globalisation. Regardless of one's status and background (caste/class) in the society, an Indian has always been treated as part of a family and their existence as a member of the society has always been referred to the family they belonged to. For the individual, the family is the first place where one can look for everything that is needed for their growth and development (Chekki, 1988a). Family in India has been generally of two kinds, joint or extended family comprising more than two generations of members such as a married couple, their children, married or unmarried and one or both parents. The other type of family is the nuclear family consisting of a husband, wife and unmarried children.

A sociological examination of rural and urban families in India reveals distinctive features influenced by diverse socio-economic, cultural, and environmental contexts. M.N. Srinivas employs functionalist perspectives to scrutinise the roles played by the Indian joint family system within the broader social structure. He underscores the stabilising function of joint families, portraying them as cohesive units that uphold social order, and cultural values, and provide essential support networks. According to Srinivas, the intricate relationships and interdependencies within joint families contribute significantly to social integration and continuity. While acknowledging the impact of modernisation and evolving dynamics, he emphasises the persistent functional relevance

of the joint family, particularly in specific segments of Indian society. Srinivas's exploration of Sanskritisation sheds light on Indian culture and behaviour, especially through the lens of this phenomenon that has unfolded since the last century. This process becomes particularly evident as migration to cities creates a more level playing field for people. This trend resonates with Western functionalism, which, post the Industrial Revolution, focused on the transformation of families from joint to nuclear, a shift also observed in India.

In rural areas, families are commonly larger and often extend to joint family structures, fostering close connections. Agriculture plays a significant role, leading to high economic interdependence. Educational access may be limited, impacting career choices and traditional values heavily influence daily life.

In contrast, urban families tend to be smaller nuclear units, reflecting modernisation. Diverse occupational opportunities and economic independence characterise urban life. Higher educational opportunities influence career aspirations, and cultural traditions, while still present, maybe more dynamically influenced by diverse communities. Urban social networks are often cosmopolitan, reflecting a blend of professional and activity-based connections. While the nuclear family system has been widespread, in the majority of cases, it gives way to joint families when children marry and opt to live with their parents. In pre-industrial societies, kinship ties connect individuals to both the family they are born into (family of orientation) and the family formed through marriage (family of procreation), often encompassing the relatives of one's spouse (The Indian Family System, n.d.). Challenges in rural settings include limited access to resources and fluctuations in agricultural economies. In urban areas, challenges encompass fast-paced lifestyles, increased competition, and potential social isolation. The sociological comparison emphasises the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity, socio-economic factors, and cultural influences shaping the unique characteristics of rural and urban families in India.

India's familial frameworks therefore have altered due to numerous socio-political and economic trends. The rural-urban continuum highlighted the presence of the monopolising phase. Although a wide range of variables has driven this gap ranging from education, demographics, language, culture, employment opportunity, the expansion of infrastructure, etc., it has led to a significant disparity in the social structural patterns in these areas. A transient disintegration of joint family structures was noted in the metropolitan areas. This change was also a primary result of the industrialisation and modernisation that occurred in India, clearly visible and reflected in the familial structures in India. Nuclear family systems replaced many joint family systems. The importance of joint family structures has decreased substantially in urban settings; this exhibits itself in the discrepancies between rural and urban locations. In urban setups, the nuclear family is the mainstay of the family system. Even today, the rural population upholds a contradictory social system by sticking to joint family systems. 'Community' has precedence here over 'individuality'. The primary domain for expansion has been identified to be the community's objectives, notions, beliefs, and advancement. Rural society continues to be primarily centred on upholding the historical foundations of Indian culture and the joint family system and is seen as "traditional" and unencumbered. Individuals dwelling within such socialisation units typically combine their characteristics with the multigenerational upbringings of the guardians they are raised by to construct their identity. Their observations and wide range of instructions induced upon them combine to build their concept of what is and isn't socially permissible as well. Their identity also develops strongly coloured by their parent's social standing in the community, ethnicity, race, religion, and generational identification. However, when the individuals reared in such systems of society migrate to urban areas, they frequently uncover that their social environments have substantially changed

and that they have been drastically carved into another being. In the Indian context, the “Indian identity is built up from the constitutive elements of separate identities” and “internal separation of communities" (Sen, 2006, p. 298, 348). It suggests an individual's social identity is a culmination of a multitude of distinguishing identities that come together to form a cohesive group. Due to the rich diversity of Indian culture, the identity in this country is moulded by an extensive array of ethnic variations resulting from extensively generational familial ethnicity.

The foundation of personality in this case is identifying, incorporating, and integrating community attitudes and traits. Furthermore, one's concept of self, or personal identity, is the most crucial component of individuality created by internalising these socially cohesive traits rather than simply replicating them. Ultimately, adolescents develop a conscience by identifying with both the parental upbringing as well as the community interests. Typically, when their young ones are toddlers, the household starts to set norms for their conduct. As ideas of goodness and malice are gradually assimilated, integrated into who they are, and they start to guide their behaviour naturally, individuals grow up with prudence. Community models play an integral part in steering the procedure of forming an autonomous system of norms regarding conduct and convictions, another aspect of a rural individual's unique identity. That indicates that adolescents extensively absorb their community consciences while constructing their identity.

It could be understood in the sociological configuration of Symbolic interactionism which is a notable aspect in Indian societies, prominently observed in the dynamics of gender and language. The dialogues occurring within the confines of a joint family structure consistently influence the perspectives held by each member. Individuals often encounter challenges when transitioning into metropolitan environments of this kind, as the portrayals of themselves and the identities they have cultivated over the years do not align with the expectations of these social contexts. Consequently, there emerges a conflict between social identity and personal identity, a phenomenon particularly notable in the migration of people from the northeast to urban areas. These migrants carry a distinctive identity developed through years of learning and upbringing.Explaining via a case study, prevalent family structure in Himachal Pradesh is the joint family, yet despite its significance, it has not been thoroughly studied from a sociological perspective. Similar to other regions, societal shifts are occurring in Himachal Pradesh due to influences such as Westernization, modernization, and political transformation. Multidirectional forces such as urbanisation, educational progress, rational thinking, and women's liberation, are giving rise to new norms and values while challenging traditional ones. Amidst these changes, particularly among the youth, adherence to traditions is waning.

The evolving dynamics, propelled by these transformative pressures, are leading to a reorientation of relationships within families. It becomes crucial to explore how the future generation perceives the longstanding institution of the joint family in this context. Utilising random sampling encompassing factors like gender, upbringing type, residence (rural or urban), and education revealed distinct differences in the results. Analysing rural-urban disparities, it was evident that students raised in villages exhibited a more positive attitude compared to their counterparts from towns and cities. Similar trends were noted regarding the place of residence; specifically, graduates residing in rural areas showed a greater inclination toward joint family preferences than those residing in urban areas. Parents with an education are more inclined to socialise their children democratically, aligning with the requirements of modern society and instilling new life values. Consequently, children tend to adopt their parents' preferences, making it likely for students with educated parents to favour a nuclear family lifestyle. Taking into consideration all of the variables which have been analysed, it may occur for one to observe

how the rural-urban continuum has influenced family structures and contributed to the construction of a person's social and personal identity. This disparity produces a major distinction and wall, which leads to the whole dilemma of questioning one's identity. The influence is increasing noticeably as times and circumstances evolve and is going to persist to do accordingly.

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The Manifestation of the Other through Dissent - Rap and Hip Hop as a Political Tool in the U.S

Saptadha Sengupta, TYBA

Origin of Rap and Hip-Hop in American Society

Rap and hip-hop culture, originating in the socio-politically charged mid-1960s, have emerged as vehicles for marginalised communities to articulate their lived experiences of poverty, racial discrimination, and societal violence (Alridge & Stewart, 2005). In this context, these genres have become emblematic of disenfranchised groups, serving as the tools through which minorities can express their dissent within the context of systemic inequities. This article delves into the multifaceted role of rap and hip-hop in transcending their musical origins, reshaping dominant narratives, interrogating representations, and providing an analytical lens to critically assess prevailing economic, political, and social paradigms within the American context.

The evolution of rap music within the broader context of hip-hop culture signifies a complex

narrative reflecting the multifaceted realities inherent in the lives of urban youth. Originating from the South Bronx and permeating throughout the northeastern United States, hip-hop, extending beyond mere musical expression, embodies a cultural mosaic encompassing distinct elements such as disc jockeying (DJing), break dancing, graffiti art, and rapping (emceeing). This cultural phenomenon extends beyond a mere musical genre to embody a lifestyle inclusive of distinct elements of fashion, language, and an all-encompassing worldview that resonates deeply with the social context of its originators (Chang, 2007).

Identity Politics

Grounded in the crucible of African-American communities' struggle to articulate their predicaments, rap and hip-hop have emerged as unparalleled mediums for conveying the harsh realities endemic to their milieu, which are irrevocably intertwined with communitarian histories of poverty, racism, and violence. A major contribution of rap and hip-hop culture lies in its capacity to interrogate and subvert prevailing social narratives and representations pertaining to marginalised demographics. This leads to a ‘taking back’ of prevailing narratives of marginalised youth, countering the stereotype of Black youth as delinquent and criminal (Smitherman, 1973). Through the medium of rap, practitioners emerge as not just artists but as storytellers and historians, leveraging lyrical prowess to deconstruct the complexities inherent in African-American life (Alridge & Stewart, 2005).

Identity construction and the expression of dissent emerge as the major undercurrents of rap and hip-hop. These genres furnish marginalised individuals with an avenue for the cultivation of their unique identities and a vehicle through which to vocalise their grievances, often rooted in deeply entrenched systems of oppression, where conformity to mainstream norms often stifles authentic expression, rap and hip-hop serve as crucibles for the production of subcultures characterised by their active resistance to prevailing social norms (Patterson, 2014). This cultural divergence represents a shift in power dynamics, endowing disenfranchised youth with a mechanism for advocating change, thereby underscoring the genres' socio-political significance (Morgan and Bennett, 2011).

Emerging Patterns of Dissent

The politically heated rap album "It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back" by Public Enemy is a classic example, tackling topics of social injustice, structural racism, and politics that impact the African American community (Grierson, 2015).

Rap and hip-hop, as artistic genres, proffer sanctuaries for the authentic expression of 'blackness,' as they constitute platforms for the unapologetic celebration of cultural identity and fortitude in the face of adversity (Chang, 2011). This ethos fosters a profound sense of pride and solidarity within the community, engendering a collective identity that transcends the restrictive confines of societal expectations. However, rap and hip-hop have confronted their fair share of challenges, most notably in the form of the criminalization of rap lyrics. Law enforcement agencies and political entities have scrutinised these genres on allegations of fomenting violence and criminality, engendering robust debates regarding First Amendment rights and the intersection of artistic expression and societal responsibility (Rose, 1991). Racial justice advocates and champions of free speech contend that the enduring persecution of predominantly African-American and Latin-American male rappers represents, in effect, a proxy war against the pioneers of this cultural movement. This assertion spotlights the broader socio-political underpinnings of the rap and hip-hop discourse, casting them as critical agents in the delineation of social justice and free speech paradigms (Kubrin and Nielson, 2014).

However, despite rap's meteoric rise as a dominant genre in popular music, its artistic credibility faces incessant challenges. It grapples with moral and aesthetic criticisms,

manifesting through organised censorships, blacklisting, arrests, and instances of concert disruptions enforced by law enforcement agencies. This cultural struggle is further exacerbated by a systematic dilution of its ethnic and political roots, favouring sanitised, appropriated, and commercially exploitable versions of the genre. Originating from the black underclass of American society, rap's overt celebration of Black pride and unapologetic exploration of the ghetto experience inherently challenge established societal norms.

Rappers and hip-hop artists originating from the African-American community have constantly struggled with censorship and sanitisation of their songs. Given that it criticised law enforcement, N.W.A.'s song "F*** tha Police" sparked intense criticism and suppression, leading to discussions about free speech rights and how African Americans are treated by the government (Annelise, 2018). The song details a story of a courtroom scene through the lyrics of F*** Tha Police. N. W. A. members represent the prosecution in a case involving a police officer. The rappers' testimonials detailing instances in which they were harmed by police officers are detailed in the stanzas. The police officer is found guilty and convicted in the last scene. The artists expressed their harsh reality via music. They were able to use singing as a nonviolent form of protest. Ice Cube in an interview with Rolling Stone. In reaction to the LAPD, one of the N. W. A. members remember saying, "Our music was our only weapon." The intentionally provocative lyrics aim to draw attention to the injustice of police abuse (Annelise, 2018).

Rap as Rebel: In Lyrics and Expression

From an artistic perspective, rap music stands as a symbol of postmodern popular art, disrupting established aesthetic norms and challenging the philosophical tenets of modernity while blurring traditional cultural boundaries (Chang, 2007). Its African heritage is unmistakably woven into both its lyrical content and rhythmic beats. The lyrical craftsmanship, entrenched in Afro-American English, employs intricate tropes, stylistic nuances, and semantic complexities that serve as a coded dialect intended to obfuscate true meanings from uninitiated white audiences. Simultaneously, the dominant funky beats trace their origins to African rhythms, initially embraced by rock and disco genres before being reimagined by rap DJs.

Rap music transcends the limitations of conventional artistic paradigms by amalgamating practical functionality with artistic significance and value (Baker and Rose, 1995). Its unambiguous dedication to elevating Black political consciousness, fostering pride, and igniting revolutionary fervour sets it apart (Morgan and Bennett, 2011). Furthermore, rap's assertion of itself as an artistic form raises profound questions about the definition and legitimization of art, embedding itself deeply within ongoing social struggles and political legitimization debates. Rap music serves as a clandestine communication channel within society, employing coded language and obscured cultural references to examine and challenge existing political disparities. It operates within a discursive space engaged in symbolic and ideological battles against institutions and groups that oppress African-Americans both materially and symbolically. Considered a platform for the marginalised, rap stages scenarios where conventional social hierarchies are inverted, presenting alternative narratives of interactions with authorities such as the police or educational systems that counter mainstream stories (Rose, 1994).

In its societal commentary, rap embodies a form of ideological resistance by rappers who disrupt dominant discourses and validate counter-hegemonic interpretations. However, this attempt to challenge prevailing social discourses often contains internal contradictions (Shusterman, 1991). While rap critiques prevalent forms of social oppression, it also perpetuates certain power imbalances, notably in reinforcing male dominance over Black

women, depicting them as objects or symbols of status. Some argue that rap's depiction of sexism could be a way for young Black males to confront their diminished sense of patriarchal privilege. However, this rationale does not justify or excuse the aggression directed at black women, which is regressive and fails to challenge social oppression. Rap's critique of alienating and biased educational structures opposes dominant ideologies concerning public education crises. Yet, elements like the objectification of Black women and instances of homophobia within rap music aren't progressive or resistant (Roberts, 1994). This aligns with the broader narrative of Black culture being seen as a threat to prevailing American cultural norms.

Conclusion – Until the end of time

Despite its limitations, rap, as an expressive medium for the critical voice of urban, young Black communities, holds potential as a liberating language. Ongoing debates on the interpretation and importance of rap within Black cultural politics are crucial. The lyrical voice of rap remains inherently political in both its content and style. The struggle within rap extends beyond mere lyrics, encompassing a battle for access to public cultural spaces, community resources, and the interpretation of black expression. Understanding rap's explosive and resistant lyrics through a political lens is crucial in comprehending contemporary Black politics, as dominant narratives often obscure systemic aspects of Black cultural politics.

Rap music is an excellent way to investigate how power dynamics are established and contested through social narratives, consequently shedding light on the dynamics of cultural and political dominance and opposition. These social transcripts can be classified as either "public" or "hidden," with the dominant "public" transcript acting as an umbrella for the candid interactions that occur between the subordinates and those who dominate. On the other hand, the discourse that occurs "offstage," or in a disguised form, and criticises and opposes different facets of social dominance is contained in the "hidden" transcripts. The emergence of rap and hip-hop culture as a form of protest has indelibly transformed the American sociocultural landscape. These genres have facilitated the articulation of marginalised communities' grievances, the challenging of prevailing narratives, and the creation of spaces for both resistance and expression. Despite enduring criticism and criminalization, rap and hip-hop endure as indispensable tools for catalysing social change, underscoring the enduring potency of dissent articulated through art and music.

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The Ambiguity of Caste Identity

Christina Miranda, SYBA

Since childhood, for various documentation processes, I had to fill a form asking for my details and it always had this section of category which had options such as SC/ST, OBC and open. I was told to tick the option of the Open Category. Being a small child, I never really understood the significance of that question but until I grew up and became aware of caste and various nuances around it. The curiosity of human beings, categorized and the exact basis of it put me into a deep thought about my Caste Identity. Christianity is a “foreign religion” and yet caste holds such power in the Indian context, that irrespective of its origin, it has established its existence in every single religion. Being an Indian Christian led to creation of a diaspora amongst the community and has made my positionality in the society different. Through this article I have tried to trace the ambiguity that has developed in my positionality because of my unidentified caste identity.

Caste has been a relevant social institution and stratifier in India since ages. One can call it an existential stratifier as it has been the basis for and against upliftment. The most unique feature of the caste system is its own identity being uniquely Indian, earlier being limited to Indian boundaries. But it's not true in today's context, since the caste system has been co-opted, propagated, and has travelled with the diaspora - so, it influences the life course of a lot of the South Asian population around the world. The most early mentions of caste can be seen in the Rig-veda when the caste system was as yet unknown, though the elements out of which it developed were evidently in existence (Macdonell, 1914). Caste is unique but one cannot deny the fact that there exist other social systems of discrimination in other parts of the world and one of the prominent examples would be Racism in the USA. However, even though they might have caused similar types of social

marginalisation, one cannot confuse caste with racism. As discrimination falls at the base of the socio-cultural-political classificatory system, caste is not to be confused with the racial segregation system. Both of them have their historical trajectory of oppression, identity contestation, identification and reclamation.

Caste was previously a four-fold varna system where communities were believed to have been created from the mouth, arms, thighs, and feet of the primeval person, Brahma. Historical theories claim that according to the social historical theory, the origin of the caste system finds its roots in the arrival of Aryans in India (Gupta, 1980). The Aryans arrived in India in around 1500 BC. The Aryans disregarded local cultures. They began conquering and taking control over regions in North India and at the same time pushed the local people southwards or towards the jungles and mountains in north India.The Aryans organized themselves in three groups. The first group was of the warriors and they were called Rajanya, later they changed its name to Kshatriyas. The second group was of the priests and they were called Brahmanas. These two groups struggled politically for leadership among the Aryans. In this struggle the Brahmanas emerged victorious (Gupta, 1980). This resulted in a clear establishment of 4 varnas Brahmins , Kshtriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. According to André Béteille, in the classical literature of India, caste was represented as varna and for two thousand years, when Hindus wrote about it, they did so characteristically in the idiom of varna. This is no longer the case and caste is now represented much more typically as jati, or its equivalent in the regional language. This displacement of varna by jati indicates much more than a simple linguistic shift. It indicates a change of perception, a change in the meaning and legitimacy of caste even among those who continue to abide by the constraints imposed by its morphology on marriage and other matters (Beteille, 1996). Even before any invasion, the varna system existed and there was discrimination, oppression and stratification. Colonial invasion though changed the dynamics as along with oppression, robbery, slavery it also brought foreign religions to India .

The Varna turned into a rigid jati system when Britishers, in an effort to control population introduced the idea of caste based census and categorisation which eventually led to concretisation and solidification of the caste system in India. The jati system which became relevant in India because many people were unaware about their Jati identity and this highly impacted the other minority religions such as Christianity and Islam creating caste identity ambiguity (Robinson, 2005).

Christianity in India dates back as early as 52 AD when St. Thomas Apostle of Jesus arrived in India in Kodungallur in the present day India state of Kerala. This was followed by the arrival of St. Francis Xavier in the 5th century and the arrival of colonialism accompanied by the wave of missionaries (Fuller, 1976). Their influence spread mainly in the western parts of India. The influence even spread in the south to such an extent that today it has a population of 33 million Christians (Mitchell, 2023). Significance of caste is still relevant in Kerala as caste remains a prominent stratifier. This state is also the state where caste remains a prominent stratifier among Christians, and the notion that there exists no caste in Christianity is disregarded by this state itself. In Kerala itself those who profess the Christian faith are divided into three broad groupings-Syrian Christians, Latin Christians and New Christians-which are distinguished according to two main criteria: to which caste the original converts from whom the members of each grouping claim descent belonged, and the date of these original conversions. (Alexander (1972) refers to the New Christians as 'Neo-Christians'; in Malayalam they are known as ‘Puthiya Kristyani' - ‘Neo-Christian' or as Avasa Kraistava' - ‘Backward Christian'). Amongst these three sects Syrian Christians are claimed to be the descendants of Nambudiri which is the highest upper caste in Kerala while the Latin are known to have belonged from the merchants family background and the New Christians are

said to be the Dalit Christians (Fuller, 1976). This shows the intersectionality of sect and caste as both the medium of marginalisation and dehumanisation. A sect based on one religion has divided people again on the basis of their caste and class. Hence there is a hegemony visible in Kerala and the influence and power of Syrian Christians because of the economic and cultural capital they possessed even before the conversion.

To understand the caste identity that exists today it is first necessary to understand the various underlying factors determining conversion later resulting in caste identity ambiguity. It was to escape this horror of discrimination that millions of Hindu Dalits converted to more egalitarian religions including Christianity, in the hope of escaping the clutches of casteism and experiencing the equality promised by such religions (Fuller, 1976). The fascination from foreign religions, their fancy institutions and traditional practices, education provided in convent schools, and most importantly a dignified life, contributed to the mass conversion of Hindus into Christianity.

The basic argument of this article is that the fundamental hope of equality — the reason why Hindu Dalits converted to Christianity — has not been realized to a large extent. This has resulted in contradictions and ambiguities with regard to their identity, and has not led to their expected upward social mobility. This is also because of the unwillingness of their co-religionists, non-Dalit converts to Christianity, to shed their age-old practice of untouchability in society and bring this into the church. (Arockiasamy, 2023). Considering the above mentioned factors, the proselytizing nature of Christianity and reports by Pew Research Centre it can be said that former hindus found Christianity to be a viable option for conversions they contributes to the 4% converted population to christianity (*8 Key Findings About Christians in India | Pew Research Center*, 2021). This phenomena of caste and christianity is described by A.S. Woodburne as Indianisation of Christianity. (Woodburne, 1921)

The above reasons explain the conversion but there is still ambiguity when it comes to the caste identity of the community. The first aspect would be the aspect of dual identity. This arose because many Hindu Dalits converted to christianity hoping for an egalitarian life and later after reservation was introduced for the Hindu Scheduled Caste and tribes the converted christians went back to their actual religion (*Dalit Christians — Exclusion by Society, Church, State*, 2023). This caused them to have dual identity resulting in skewed census. This is explained by Fuller as he states that The question of 'forgetting' caste is problematic and not so simply explained as, for instance, 'forgetting' genealogies, given the importance of caste membership in India. The social conditions of the New Christians may have promoted this amnesia. In converting to Christianity, members of the lowest Hindu castes were motivated primarily by a wish to escape the indignities imposed on them by the caste system, but they then found that their condition was little changed in the Christian community. But her status is polarized-Syrians at the top (Fuller, 1976). Another major factor would be lack of resistance from the Dalit Christians and little to no protests or demand from the church or the people to the government as compared to the other communities. This could be because of the fact that the community is already considered into the list of minorities and hence due to lack of support and governments favoritism, they themselves and the government have failed to acknowledge their identity (Woodburne, 1921). The next aspect is what I call the effect of excess privilege, it highly implies to those christians who after conversion received the accessibility, social capital and the dignity they demanded. Their ascribed status is inclined to such an extent that they deny the existence of caste and say that it existed in the past. Their privilege allowed them to focus on merit and class over caste. The Christian community of Vasai is the best example; as this community because of the

social, economic, cultural and symbolic capital they possess, detest caste and highly deny its existence but accept the conversion. Christian community will for a long time in my opinion remain ambiguous about its caste identity as it feels underrepresented and less prioritised in Indian Democracy. Even though it has its strengths such as Jesuits institutes, old age homes, medical institutes it won't acknowledge its caste identity unless and until it gets the right and respectful attention, representation and validation from the government.

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Historical Fragmentation of Identities and their Media Representation

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Cultural representation in media has grown increasingly powerful in reinforcing cultural norms associated with a specific identity. However, the ability to depict a 'true' representation within media is dependent on the community's ability to rightfully claim allegiance to a cultural descent, which can become difficult when the community has been cut off from 'their roots'.

But how does a connection to one's roots grant a community a stronger sense of belonging, when compared to communities who, due to immigration or displacement, are unable to make a clear association with an identity? Identity affiliation can affect how they represent themselves in media, which has long seen an overwhelming number of the Indian diaspora and African American voices silenced in mainstream narratives, partly due to the lack of diversity in writer rooms and production houses across the world.
Although the two cultures have a skewed media portrayal as a result of historical fragmentation, it is essential to acknowledge the ascendancies associated with the Indian Diasporic population, which is largely constituted of those with an upper-socioeconomic class and caste background, thus are granted a smidge of privilege when compared to the African American population in the same context. Additionally, while racism mediates both identities, African American generational experience with slavery is one which cannot be equated to the Indian Diaspora, and this distinction is consciously not explored within this essay.

Culture is a complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by humans as members of a society (Tylor, 1873). This represents humanity's inherent social nature, and the overwhelming need to form communal ties which shape our very understanding of the world. When analysed through the lens of two prominent identities in recent times, the Indian Diaspora and African American communities can connect to the idea of 'disconnectedness.'

The association of one's identity to the overarching narrative in media can be attributed to the *Cultivation Analysis Theory*, first proposed by George Gerbner in 1973 (Mosharafa, 2015). *Cultivation Analysis Theory* constitutes a paradigm for understanding mass communication, within which cultivation analysis theory suggests that those who spend more time with media, particularly television, tend to internalise and reflect those values in daily life (Mosharafa, 2015). It focuses on the idea that social reality is shaped by the values internalised by carefully crafted depictions on television, forming a base of the individual's moral value system.

A fractured depiction of 'self' and 'belonging' in media, is evidenced by the adverse reaction to Netflix's Docu-Drama *Queen Cleopatra* (Butler, 2023), in which Shelley Haley, a retired professor of Classics and Africana studies makes a statement in the start of the show.

"*I don't care what they tell you in school, Cleopatra was Black*" (Gharavi, 2023)

This ruffled the feathers of the Egyptian Community and stoked a fire which had long been brewing over the anachronistic application

of modern racial constructs onto the ancient world. However, the problem isn't the depiction of Cleopatra, which has seen a plethora of depictions ranging from Elizabeth Taylor's 1963 portrayal to Adele James in 2023; it is when a community faces the inability to draw clear lines of descent and thus will superimpose an ideal onto a historical figure to gain a sense of agency. The historical figure thus functions as a mould, burdened with the need to represent the collective identity of a community that is unable to accurately find themselves culturally. This grants them a skewed sense of agency over the figure's portrayal in media, as it allows for representation of a historically distorted line of descent, one has been denied the chance to 'pinpoint' their origins.

Lev Vygotsky's *Theory of Sociocultural Cognitive Development* (Medical College of Wisconsin, 2022) asserts the idea that a child's cognitive development and learning ability are greatly impacted by their social interactions, and learning cannot be an independent process. Parents, caregivers, peers and culture at large play a crucial role in developing a brain's higher-order functions. Thus learning can vastly differ from culture to culture, and Vygotsky also contends that each culture has "tools of intellectual adaptation" which are built to help a child survive within those cultural constraints.

When Vygotsky's theory is applied to the idea of fragmented identities, the "More Knowledgeable Other" would be unable to provide a clear understanding of their cultural processes, such as if the individual has been lumped into a monolith of the African American identity. In the book *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing,* Leary (2005) defines the idea of 'vacant self-esteem' which is exacerbated by the societal pronouncement of inferiority, aided by factors which stripped African Americans of their culture, identity, religion and history (Hicks, 2015). This translates into many second-generation African Americans having very little knowledge of the generational trauma faced by their descendants.

Leary (2005) expands on a hypothesis first proposed by psychiatrist Alvin Poussaint and journalist Amy Alexander in their book *Lay My Burden Down* (2005) which explores "*Post Traumatic Slavery Syndrome*" as a condition affecting millions of African Americans, exploring the bedevilling paradox which has caused a boom in the economic status for African Americans, yet has been accompanied by an equivalent increase in suicide rates. (Kaplan, 2000)

In recent years, though African American representation in media, both in front of the camera and behind the scenes has significantly improved, it is often hollow and indicative of a failure to compound cultural nuances onto the big screen, a result of a lack of African American leadership in media and creatives being 'pigeonholed' into a genre. In a study it was found that Black Talent was twice as likely to be funnelled into race-related films, and this imposes creative limitations both on and off-screen (McKinsey & Company, 2021).
Race-specific films, such as biographies and documentaries make up 15% of all films, with an average production budget of $22 million (McKinsey & Company, 2021). In essence, content centring around the African American experience is pigeonholed into stories depicting a skewed outlook of the African identity-ranging from Wakanda to Poverty Stricken populations. What is left out is the mosaic of emotions, life experiences and cultural nuances that have evolved and grown through time (McKinsey & Company, 2021).

However, with the presence of films such as *Black Panther* (2018) and directors like Jordan Peele and Ryan Coogler, African-American populations find far more representation within the media. *Black Panther* presents a groundbreaking shift away from race-specific films into a realm which celebrates African identities and its future. Black Panther is a love letter to the often skewed portrayal of African culture in media, departing from the 'backward savage' image that has persisted in media, and towards an Afrocentric perspective that

showcases African and African American political struggle, power dynamics in a collectivist society and the preservation of identity (Johnson, 2018).

Wakanda acts as a cultural oasis, linking the aspirations of millions of African Americans to a reel-based reality, and is emphasised by Ruth Carter, the Head Costume Designer who aimed to evoke a sense of belonging and pride for a place that had never fallen prey to colonisation. *Black Panther* then acts as a path towards a 'normal' portrayal of African Americans in media, one which emphasises the future while acknowledging the past as a vehicle towards development.

The African-American experience and the fight for their identity can also be seen in parallel to the Indian Diaspora, which faces a unique phenomenon. The community as a whole exists due to the idealisation of the "perfect modern lifestyle" which the developed West offered to millions, often choosing to discard their citizenship to embed themselves within a culture of rationalised thought systems and individuality as a core of Western nodes of thought.

Yet the diaspora as a whole faces disconnectedness in a unique form. In a study conducted by CEIP, titled *The Social Realities of Indian Americans*, only 4 in 10 respondents believed that the term 'Indian American' best represented their background. (Badrinathan et al., 2021) How does an individual from the Indian Diaspora then represent themselves? The vast-reaching effects of Indian media industries abroad in the representation of the Indian Diaspora constructs an interesting paradox - The Hyper-Indian image representing and being used for a community which has been on a tangent away from the perception of what constitutes the traditional Indian system. Bollywood acts as a unique visual repository of India's public imaginings, and its films, songs and characters serve as guides for how India and its globally scattered population see its past, present and future.

In shows such as "*Never Have I Ever*" the audience is presented with the titular character of Devi, whose overarching conflict is with the idea of identifying as Indian when coming of age in a Hyper-American cultural setting. Her tumultuous journey towards adulthood is underscored by her 'Indianness' intersecting at crucial points, often acting as roadblocks in her attempts to live out the idealised teenagehood. The disconnect that Devi's character encounters is best seen in Season 1 Episode 4 "*felt super Indian*' when the narrator points out a crucial thought process associated with Devi's character development.

"*Even though Devi was Indian, she didn't think of herself as Indian Indian like these girls, which is a whole other thing"* (Kaling & Fisher, 2020-2023)

This exemplifies the disconnect from culturally authentic- referring to traits, symbols and characteristics seen in a culture and reinforced through traditions, beliefs and myths; and cultural truths, which derive their traits, symbols and characteristics from easily identifiable roots, and thus are not easily subject to the evolving train of thought which defines what is culturally authentic.

Capturing the Indian Diasporic experience in media cannot only be relegated to the realm of movies and television but increasingly with the number of video games, such as *Venba* (2023) which explores assimilation and the immigrant experience, a crucial aspect of the formation of the Indian Diasporic Experience. The game explores a crucial element of the idea of culturally authentic recipes, allowing gamers to construct an elaborate kaleidoscope of Indian culture through Venba's recipes (Ahmed, 2023). But between the push and pull to assimilate into a culture seamlessly and the need to hold onto aspects of your own culture to maintain identifiable roots in one's homeland, there is the resultant media portrayal of such stories.
However, media does not function within a vacuum of thought, and as indicated by the phrase "*Manufacture of Consent*". First coined

in 1922 by American journalist Walter Lippmann it refers to the management of public opinion. The engineering of consent is a notion associated with the functionalism of society and the legitimisation of nodes of thought, norms and ethical ideals. (Chomsky & Herman, 1988) This, when associated with Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's book, *Manufacturing Consent*, shows that mass media acts as a system to communicate messages and symbols to the general populace, often in favour of those in power. Within this theory, media acts as a carrier of messages, which in the case of historically fragmented populations acts as a foundation meant to shape their experience as a population cut off from cultural authenticity.

A historically fragmented community, when in power may portray a skewed image of themselves, often able to marginalise 'deviant storylines' not fitting within the larger cultural space, causing further cracks within what can be considered culturally authentic. This phenomenon could be attributed to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom - Rishi Sunak, and his constant attempts to model himself as a shining example of success within the Indian Diaspora in the United Kingdom. Rishi Sunak's attempts to appease a politically influential and burgeoning Indian diaspora translates into efforts to navigate inter-generational negotiations on nationalism and mediate a link between the transnational Indian identities and assimilation into British society. (Mukherjee et al., 2021). The film *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002) perfectly presents this idea of how identity acts as a fledgling mask, representing the constant kaleidoscope of cultural norms which make up one's identity, particularly when it challenges traditional norms of a patriarchal Indian family.

The titular character Jess faces the biggest challenge from within her own family, who at various comically timed sections of the film attempt to mould her into the 'Good Indian Wife', Jess's ambitions are subject to several hurdles, her family's conservatism and societally embedded sexist values surrounding her participation in sports. Although the film is centred around Jess's ambition within football, the heart of the story lies in her persistence to shed light on an equally important part of her identity, one in direct conflict with her Traditional Indian mould imposed by her family. Yet films and their depiction of the Indian diaspora have evolved since the release of "*Bend it like Beckham"*, and this is best represented by recent examples of depiction which move away from the overwhelming need to assimilate seamlessly into Western society to embracing their own identity and leaving a cultural mark onto the dominant nodes of thought. *"It Lives Inside"* (2023) depicts the horrors of self-acceptance during adolescence, exploring the immigrant experience intertwined with horrifying images of a demon ripped straight out of Hindu mythology, but represents an important roadblock in Samidha's journey towards self-acceptance towards being Indian and American.

Media acts as a catalyst in negotiating aspects of identity that arise from immigration and the intense desire to fit in with society, as well as in solidifying the push and pull of identities creating foundations within ever-evolving environments, punctuated by the desire to assimilate seamlessly into societies while holding onto their cultural roots. The Indian Diasporic Experience and African American struggle to find a foothold as communities with clear cultural descent find similarity in the idea that as cultural experiences, they cannot claim 'authenticity', because they form unique identities in and of themselves, acting as an entirely separate node of thought amongst the hundreds of cultural amalgamations across the world.

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Beyond Locks and Layers: Decoding Hair as a Symbol of Identity and Defiance, Strand by Strand

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In the 2020 film "Bulbbul," directed by Anvita Dutt, (Dutt, 2020), hair plays a crucial role in portraying the complexities of women's lives under patriarchy. The protagonist, Bulbbul, characterised by her curly hair, symbolises the complexity within her mind. In contrast, her sister-in-law, Binodini, with tied oiled hair, reflects a manipulative nature adept at navigating societal restrictions.

As the story unfolds, Bulbbul undergoes severe emotional, physical, and sexual abuse at the hands of male characters, prompting a rapid transformation in her character. Villagers label her a Chudail (demon woman) due to her unconventional clothing, unbound hair, and backward feet. This portrayal aligns with cultural beliefs associating supernatural figures, such as Yakshis in Kerala or Chudails in North India, with similar traits and unkempt “wild” hair.

The intricate use of hair as a symbol in "Bulbbul" opens the door to a broader exploration of its significance in shaping ascribed identities and serving as a tool of resistance. This essay delves into the representation of hair in media in particular, connecting it to broader aspects of identities stemming through hair in general, and subsequently, examining how current representations contribute to shaping and challenging societal perceptions of hair as a symbol of identity and resistance.

As previously highlighted, Bulbul’s shift in character is marked by the shift in her hairstyle. She is perceived as a Chudail (demon woman) by villagers due to her inadequate clothing, unbound hair, and backward feet, aligning with cultural beliefs of supernatural figures, like Yakshis in Kerala or Chudails in North India.

An example of this notion is seen in the viral 'Ganji chudail' videos online, where a bald witch, who terrorises villagers by entering their houses, ransacking rations, and trapping them under pits as prey. One gradually uncovers layers of misogyny under the absurdist humour; evident through the backstory of the witch being a townswoman with long hair and a subject of mass envy. A repeated pattern is also observed in Chudail’s defeat by men, who are the reason for her identity being defined by her hair initially, and now the lack of it. Her hair is cut off by the husband (Birju) of a villager (Hema, who had the most beautiful hair before Malini arrived in the village) who is jealous of her hair. Malini’s identity dies thereafter, from the ashes of which rises the witch.

This also reflects a pattern observed in media, where hair serves as a transformative element for female characters, as seen in mainstream Bollywood films like "Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani" and "Cocktail." These films perpetuate societal perceptions associating straight hair with meekness and 'femininity,' contrasting it with the wildness often linked to curly hair.

This interplay between media representations and cultural significance provides a rich context for exploring the broader theme of hair as a symbol of identity in India, from cinematic narratives shaping perceptions to cultural practices inscribed in rituals, reflecting personal and societal transformations.

Beyond the screen, human hair has been of interest to anthropologists, biologists, and forensic scientists after revelations that hair evidence can provide useful clues about race, sex, and site of the body, particularly due to its better chemical stability and resistance to decomposition as compared to other body tissues. In the Indian context, the decoding of an individual's identity throughout their life is intricately connected to rituals and rules concerning hair. Practices such as mundhans, involving the shaving off of an infant's hair, and the tradition of shaving one's head bald upon the loss of a direct family member, serve as cultural markers delineating various life stages. These rituals reflect a deep cultural connection to the symbolism and ascriptive identities associated with hair.

Interestingly, India is one of the largest and fastest-growing exporters of human hair, with sales quadrupling between 2018-19 and 2022-23, as quoted in the Rajya Sabha by Anupriya Patel, Union Minister of State for Commerce and Industry, citing the Human Hair and Hair Products Association and Plexconcil (Plastics Export Promotion Council) as the source of the Government information. (BL Mangaluru Bureau, 2023).

This surge in exports is driven by the high demand for Indian hair, recognized as the 'most in-demand hair type.' The unique dynamics of this trade underscore the powerful flow of influence through hair. The majority of the exported hair comes from donations made at temples in the South. Interestingly, this donated hair is then auctioned off to the highest bidder (Sunder, 2020), revealing a complex relationship where selfless devotees contribute to divine blessings, while temples benefit materially.

This scenario unveils the role of hair as a powerful negotiator of identity. The same hair, initially a symbol of devotion and sacrifice, transforms into a commodity that empowers other women to achieve their ideals of beauty, i.e. the hair is utilised to craft wigs and women, as an exercise of their agency, purchase these wigs to redefine their own identities and feel empowered. This exchange highlights how hair serves as a medium for negotiating and exchanging identities, reflecting a nuanced interplay between religious practices, commerce, and individual empowerment.

There is a dichotomised perception of hair that manifests in observed variables within the heteronormative gender binary structure. For men, identities and positionalities are defined by facial and body hair, the grooming of which is symbolic of ‘masculinity’ and socio-religious status. For women, tresses are emphasised as a marker of femininity. The strict dichotomisation reflects in only the head being adorned by hair as feminine, frowning upon women having any form of body hair. Moreover, media representations and elitist structures in India have reinforced the narrative of equating beautiful hair with women possessing long, luscious silky strands of straight black hair, homogenising the image of Indian hair. Within India, hair holds in it the constructed, ascribed, perceived, and aspirational identities of women and serves as an indicator of community, religion, caste, and historic-cultural/tribal background.

In general, hair holds in it generations of privilege or oppression, having been historically used as a tool of cultural as well as self-preservation. *"Each ethnic group in Africa has its own ‘African braid’ style,"* Flaure said. For example, Fulani tribe women used to braid five long lines down as a symbol of heritage. These traditional styles would be passed down from generation to generation through the matriarchs and became a part of African cultures. (Keskin, 2022)

Similarly, within Indian tribal communities, layers of hair have layered roles and functions. The women of the Dongria community exhibit a unique hairstyle adorned with deer horn clips and natural offerings like flowers. Due to the role of hair as an identity marker, for tribal women, it becomes a double-edged sword of

their oppression and resistance to oppression, as reflected by the 2019 case of sisters- Salo Devi and Lalo Devi, from a Ranchi tribal community, who endured a mob assault resulting in the forced removal of their hair.

Religion links hair with sexuality and purity, attaching the value of practising modesty to hair, via head coverings as observed in Islam, Christianity,Sikhism and various versions of Hinduism, which are prominent religious communities within India.

Verghese (2022) reflects on St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11.14-16), "Doth not nature itself teach you, that if a man has long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given to her for a covering. But if any man seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God."

Similarly, in Hinduism, *"*Ancient epics reflect that hair's symbolism extends to chastity, defiance, and rebellion, as seen in Draupadi's vow to wash her hair in the blood of Duryodhana in response to humiliation in the Mahabharata. In the Ramayana, when Sita is abducted by Ravana, Sita gives her only hairpin that is left to Hanuman as a message for Ram which symbolises her chastity. Through this hairpin, she informs that her honour stands in a precarious position.*"* (Trüeb, 2017)

Thus one can observe that hair is not merely a bodily extension under the religious lens, but a sexual feature which needs to be covered to avert untoward gazes, depicting the notion of purity intricately linked with hair. Religion also governs hair maintenance, as seen in *Sikhism* which views *Kesha* (hair) as an integral part of the human body created by God and calls for its preservation, establishing it as one of the five sacred Sikh symbols, *Panj Kakars* or the 'Five Ks'. The unshorn hair is to be covered at all times by the *dastar* (turban) as a sign of respect for God, as well as acceptance of the belief in the equality of men and women. (The Five K's, n.d.)

Understanding the entanglement of hair and religion with women's identities in the Indian subcontinent requires acknowledgement of the caste and gender implications of hair.

A study conducted by Gaur et al. (2007) examining Punjabi Banias and Brahmins, found caste-specific variations in hair micro-morphology. Brahmins had larger hair diameters and lower medullation than Banias, indicating unique caste-related scalp hair traits. Age-related trends showed specific increases in diameter and medullation, revealing the intersection of caste dynamics with anthropological aspects of hair characteristics. This emphasises hair as a marker reflecting individual traits and socio-cultural distinctions within the caste system.

Upper-caste women historically enjoyed privileges such as house help for hair care, but these privileges are linked to Brahmanical patriarchy, as seen in the head-shaving ritual for Brahmin widows, not applied to widowers. The gendered division in hair practices finds its roots in the depictions of Hindu goddesses. For instance, Kali, symbolising wildness, is portrayed with unbound hair, while Durga's well-combed hair reflects her civilised nature. Women are culturally expected to embody the qualities of Parvati, being devoted wives and mothers. However, the potential for transformation into Kali arises if mistreated. This dual representation emphasises that while hair reflects their identity, women derive agency within the confines of the patriarchal framework.

Tanya Sandhu, an anthropology professor at Panjab University, Chandigarh, in her book, "*Hair: Its power and meaning in the Indian culture,*" describes how the ancient Indian scriptures view a blunt bob or cascading waves as indicative of a woman's marital and moral status. (Chhabra, 2021)

The enforcement of these moral standards through hair is evident in the historical ostracisation of women with short hair, specifically sharp blunt bobs or 'boy cuts,'

depicted as aggressive, masculine, and lacking femininity. Expanding on the initial discussion about media portrayals, mainstream films and shows often present characters with short hair, particularly 'tomboys,' reinforcing the stereotype that associates short hair with diminished femininity. A notable example is found in "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai," where the male protagonist perceives the female lead, Anjali, as beautiful only after she grows out her previously short hair. Additionally, coloured hair continues to carry a stigma, being viewed as both immoral and rebellious, serving as a significant aspect of personal identity.

After examining the societal norms and archetypes associated with the female body, a noteworthy distinction arises concerning the narrative surrounding hair modifications. Despite lacking intrinsic value, shaping hair to conform to socially appreciated standards doesn't carry the same stigma as cosmetic modifications through plastic surgery. The media has capitalised on this perceived lack of intrinsic value in hair, turning it into a billion-dollar industry. This profit-driven sector caters to both deviations from the standard and strategically embraces social change as part of its marketing strategy. For instance, in the Kerastase brand advertisement featuring the Oleo Curl product in the October 2007 edition of Cosmopolitan, L'Oréal intentionally showcases a model with curly hair (Muhtar et al., 2017, p. 6-7) [9].

As evident from this exploration of the intricate nuances of representation, and resistance through hair, whether in cinematic narratives or scientific studies, underscore its potential to challenge or reinforce prevailing norms. Hair acts as a cultural marker, reflecting societal perceptions, gender norms, and caste dynamics. Thus, the concept of hair extends beyond its biological function, becoming a powerful tool through which individuals navigate, resist, and shape their identities within the complex tapestry of societal expectations.

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Crossroads of Academia : An Intersection of Sociology and Literature in the Exploration of the Blurring of Identities in *Jane Eyre* and *Oliver Twist*

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Introduction

Apropos to the complex interplay between literature and society, it is frequently maintained that literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society (Ngugi, 1990). Societal structures and institutions become both a source and an audience to these literary themes that navigate through the several intertwined concepts to produce a corpus of work heavily influenced by the society of its times. And which in turn, influences the society of its times.

Sociological explorations particularly that of the fabrication and erasure of identity has gained a constant representation in the Victorian Literature of the 19th century. This paper attempts to highlight the hegemonies in the creation of individual and group identities. Connecting Bourdieu's theory of symbolic domination with its reflection in Victorian literature, especially that of Brontë and Dickens, this paper attempts to highlight the interdisciplinary existence of *sociology* and literature, which in turn facilitates the link between *society* and literature as well. The paper thus explores these concepts of identity that found their way from the general society to the realms of literature, reflecting in words what was felt in the mind.

Exploring The Blurring Of Identities

Victorian literature was embedded with the era's anxieties and complexities in the understanding of gender and social class in its economic spaces. Brontë brings about this desire of a unique separated identity for the classes through the minute details in *Jane Eyre,* while Dickens' shows it through his narrative crux in *Oliver Twist.*

An analysis of Mr. Brocklehurst's ideologies in *Jane Eyre* brings forth the idea that the middle class desired a separation from the lower class through a creation of an androgynous working

class, stripping the notions of masculinity and femininity from the workers in order to access such a privilege to the upper and middle class. The expression of gender through natural feminine physical appearance like those of long hair in curls were rubbished in a key episode in *Jane Eyre.* "Naturally! We do not conform to nature…why that abundance…(my mission is) to teach them to clothe themselves with shamefacedness and sobriety." (Brontë, 1847/2002, 71). The curtailment towards the performance of gender through the controlling of culturally intrinsic factors, like those of clothing and appearance, administers a wider distance between the identities of the two classes - who has the 'right' and 'privilege' to partake in their own gendered culture and the one whose participation must be controlled in order to differentiate between the middle and lower class identity. In such a scenario, the developments at Lowood School serve not only for storytelling dramatics but also to highlight societal realisms. Godfrey (2005), in her essay, brings forth the evidence of societal hegemonic structures that gave the middle and upper class the power to blur the identity of the lower class. Such instances of attested domination towards the labour class during the era is accounted for by Godfrey and other academics. "These gendered realms of labour were inextricably bound with class economics; rather than experiencing a dramatic division of a masculine workplace and feminine domesticity, working-class labourers witnessed an increased blurring of gender division by the mid- 1840s." (Godfrey, 2005, p.854). Mr. Brocklehurst's demands to force the Lowood girls to give up their natural feminine appearances to salvage their souls were in direct contrast to his own daughter's appearance with a more pronounced femininity. Brocklehurst's bureaucratic power to suppress the girls' gender expressions, thereby creating an androgynous learning space, is similar to Dickens' world of crime and violence in *Oliver Twist* inhabited by the lower class, which in turn creates an androgynous occupational space. Where Brontë underlines the ambiguity in clothing, Dickens' world building accentuates the ambiguity in spaces that subsequently brings about the ambiguity of identity in the novel. Eichenlaub comments on Dickens' representation of the suburbia as the "deeply flawed system of classed spaces and their ambiguous mutable interrelations" (Eichenlaub, 2013, p.1).

Middle class Rose Maylie's dwelling consists of a tranquil lodging that escapes the aggression and violence that is witnessed in the abode of lower class Nancy. Although Nancy's profession is linked essentially to her femininity, her dwelling space is filled with brutality, torture, ruthlessness and savagery that was believed to be an unfit professional and personal environment for women in Victorian England. And yet the pauper class women were not only forced to survive but also shamed for their circumstances, which was a result of a poor criminal and justice system that worked predominantly for the ones 'identified' as upper class. In her discussion with Rose Maylie, Nancy points out the only traditional womanly possession she is left with - her emotional devotion towards her love - "Pity us for having only one feeling of the woman left, and for having that turned, by heavy judgement, from comfort and pride, into a new means of violence and suffering." (Dickens, 1838/2002, p.397).
Dickens goes on to describe her disparate upbringing as compared to Rose's "that you had friends to care for and keep you in your childhood, and you were never in the midst of cold and hunger, and riot and drunkenness." (Dickens 1838/2002, p.392). The place she inhabited stripped her for her feminine expression and projection, moulding her to an androgynous state becoming "a miserable companion of the thieves and ruffians, the fallen outcast of low haunts…even this degraded being felt too proud to betray a feeble gleam of the womanly feeling." (Dickens, 1828/2002, p.390). Brontë and Dickens highlight this forced androgyny as a stripping of the very apparel that makes us human - a clear identity and the individual control over it. Engels (1845) in his essay highlighting the conditions of working class in England underscores these conditions of the lower class in the epoch as the increasing

imposition of androgyny "unsexes the man and takes from the woman her womanliness without being able to bestow upon the man true womanliness or the woman true manliness - the condition that degrades, in the most shameful way, both sexes" (Engels, 184).

The aversion to such an androgyny was felt by the middle classes which manifested through reinscribing rigid gender norms - "they (middle-class Victorians) began to push masculine and feminine constructions to extremes, reinforcing the divisions between male and female spheres of power and influence" (Godfrey, 2005, p.855). An intact and stable identity thus becomes a marker for the upper and middle classes, as "only the middle and upper classes can afford the costly performance of gender." (Godfrey, 2005, p.856). While the lower class, along with the inequalities of achieving wealth, status and respect, also suffered the inequalities in achieving a "clear" identity, as conceptualised and idealised by the upper class . An underlying sociological exploration sticks to the core of the aforementioned conditions, that of Bourdieu's theory on Symbolic Domination.

Symbolic Domination to Control the Labels of Identity

Radhimska (2002) in the essay *Pierre Bourdieu: Sociologist of Dominance and of the Dominated,* highlights Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power dominance that seeks to control the other class through the soft means of culture, education, architectural and intellectual spaces (Radimska, 2002, p.395). The violence through which power is exercised is not physical in nature but symbolic, invisible to the eyes of the dominated who often themselves actively participate in their own subjugation, through hegemonic consent (Bourdieu, 2005). In the readings of *Jane Eyre* and *Oliver Twist,* such a symbolic domination is created to control the labels of identity of a group creating a successful divide between the middle and lower class. The domination through such soft powers builds a "middle-class ideal built explicitly on a class system in which political and economic differences were rewritten as differences of nature." (Lagland, 1992, p.295). Lagland also points to such symbolic restrictions through demarcation of spaces and gendered clothing for the middle class, and the skewed power dynamics between the middle class and the lower class women. Such control of the cultural capital or symbolic power is also alluded by Bourdieu, and Lagland in her essay provides instances such as -

> "The clothes, like the customs, were constructed to distinguish the middle-class woman from her social inferiors. Her apparel, physically inhibiting as it may have been, was also a sign of her class power because it precluded physical labor and displayed her managerial status." (Lagland, 1992, p.294).

Reflecting concurrently to Bourdieu's theoretical framework, *Jane Eyre* tries to highlight such societal hegemonies by painting them in the background of her subject. Her story ceases to be regarded only as a piece of literary academia, but also starts to achieve a sense of a sociological narrative woven into it. Sociology and literature intersect to produce a work of literature rooted in realism and understood through fiction. Pitting Rose Maylie and Nancy as the representatives of the middle and lower class respectively, *Oliver Twist* also provides a glimpse into their life of wealth and criminality that ultimately culminates into a happy ending for one, and a painful death for another. The life and events portrayed are a realistic representation of the power structures that rewards one while punishes the other not only with a life of torture but also with a life barren of identity, resources and expression.

Concluding With The Intersection Of Society And Literature

Bourdieu in his book *The Social Structures of the Economy,* highlights the value of written pieces in the recognition of such sociological concepts. He calls it as :

> "the product of a collaboration between the writers, who draw on their inherited cultural fund of words and images capable of awakening unique experiences in their readers, and the readers, who contribute to conferring on the inductive text the symbolic power it exerts on them… The readers, armed with their previous experiences, both of the ordinary, and also the literary world, project onto the text/pretext the aura of correspondences, resonances and analogies which make it possible for them to recognize themselves in it." (Bourdieu and Turner, 2005, p.24).

The sociology of literature, while attempting to explore the symbiotic correlation of society and literature, also highlights such concepts of the backdrop that birth these stories of society. *Jane Eyre* and *Oliver Twist* and other examples of Victorian Literature bring forth the idea that literature branches out of these societal realities to reflect their cultural and normative practices. In the case of the blurring of identities and the structural power to bestow an identity on the other, it plays an integral role in demonstrating such a canvas through its devices, narrative and storytelling power. Such sociological explorations find its audience in the *society* that had borne and nurtured them. Such texts then go on to connect with the society by reflecting their existing identities back to them, and being understood by the identity that they presently bear. Literature exists to connect the society to its eidos, and also its own eidos to the society.

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Shutterbug: Being Mindful of the Power of Wielding the Camera

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I have embraced several identities in a short lifespan and will no doubt continue to unravel more of them as times move ahead. With all of these identities, I have been able to seamlessly navigate simply by being comfortable in my skin and having a social position that affords me stability and endless possibilities to look forward to. Yet, the only identities that I have difficulty making sense of are the ones I choose in the course of my professional career. Dreams, aspirations and ambitions come and go and one is left wondering what they will wind up doing with their career, while also taking it upon themselves to determine that their work needs to contribute to society in meaningful ways. Storytelling, especially through the visual medium has always been an area of interest. But as I begin to call myself a photographer, it becomes increasingly pertinent that I make conscious choices about what I put out into the world as my work.

It is no discovery that our brains are wired to respond emotionally to visual cues more so than written words. Photography and filmmaking have existed for ages to engage and stimulate this very response. As a photographer, what one chooses to publish as their work, can be analysed either as their artistic eye, their unique persona, or, their ideology- in a more realistic, documentary style of photography. This ideology inexorably will stand in relation to their own position in society. It is worth studying, how and why one extracts inspiration from their surroundings and what they want to profess as their stand with the same. This not only refers to the raw image that is captured but also the specific creative choices taken in composing an image. What stands in the foreground and what is in the background, who or what is established as the subject, how it is edited, and in what context it is published. All of these aspects determine how a photograph meets the eye and what it means to imply about the artist and what or who is depicted in it. This relationship between the one behind the camera and the one in front of it is arguably one that involves a certain element of power dynamics.

The issue of consent is brought up quite frequently in the age of widespread media coverage and reach. It becomes questionable when photographers decide that their content and their freedom of expression override their social responsibility to not violate the people around them or add signifiers that depict only one's own perspective, modifying it to expose perhaps only half a story, a fraction of truth.

Thus, a battle of morals and ethics ensues where there aren't any winning answers to questions about how one can do the "right" thing while attempting to represent stories and which of them they can take complete ownership of. For example, it isn't unheard of that a photographer with an urban, upper-class, almost first-world upbringing chooses to enter spaces that they might understand very little about, looking for a "story". Plenty of times, this curiosity to remove oneself from their own surrounding to explore new places is an attempt to look for inspiration that is ultimately watered down to its aesthetic appeal. When they do look beyond that, they find aspects of diverse cultures that can one day become dinner table conversations in their circles.

Of course, perceiving truth from one's positionality is unavoidable, and may even help bring nuance to it. In this aspect, the method of Photo Elicitation (Kyololo et al., 2023) used during certain types of psychological interviews and research work is also worth mentioning. The objective of the method is to provide visual material to the participants and have them interpret it depending on their personal experiences with the world. Such an exercise is conducted to direct the topic of discussion to an intended route. It is intentionally organised to see whether the participants respond predictably. Thus, when we choose to tell a story with a very specific intention, we are looking to drive a narrative that more often than not, is a projection of our own gaze. Progressive discourse of inclusivity takes a backseat when we choose to not interact with the subject more thoroughly, to understand every perspective. What must be acknowledged is that choosing to use one's privilege to tell stories of the marginalised, places the photographer in a position of controlling somebody else's representation and puts the onus of flipping the camera on the marginalised one.

It is also just as easy for the perception to be tainted by an almost voyeuristic tendency. This aspect of photography is explored in depth in American photographer and writer Susan Sontag's collection of essays called "On Photography" (Sontag, 1977). Her much appreciated as well as criticised work discusses at length about photography fostering a voyeuristic relationship between the world and the meaning of events. She also talks about the notion of "anti-intervention" that has been normalised in photography and most forms of journalistic media, wherein the one with the camera is not supposed to intervene in what they are recording and one who intervenes cannot faithfully record as the two aims contradict each other. Here she introduces how photography is thus political.

A recent instance that comes to mind is the controversy surrounding the 2023 Academy Award-winning documentary *The Elephant Whisperers*. While the film is visually breathtaking, documents a very important part of India's wildlife conservation efforts in partnership with locals and tribes along with the forest ministry, and raises awareness about the pertinent need for climate action, the aftermath of its popularity also raised questions about the nature of the relationship between the makers of the film and those featured in it. The compensation owed the mahouts featured in the film, a couple belonging to one of the Kaatunayakan tribes in Tamil Nadu became a debated matter. On one hand, the makers claimed that no extra compensation was promised to the couple while on the other, several believed that the makers owed them any assistance possible considering the success of the film. The ethical guidelines of documentary filmmaking, which advise that paying individuals to appear in a film raises questions about the authenticity of their participation, were brought up. But the idea that upper-caste filmmakers could hugely profit by telling tribal stories while claiming that their work helped raise awareness and provided exposition (but no real help otherwise) doesn't quite sit right as a fair deal. To quote an article on The Conversation, a research based news publisher, on this issue: "Market-driven motives of documentary storytelling reduce people to attention-holding characters and their lives to the service of dramaturgy. This extractive approach is characterized by transactional terms. Filmmakers and producers should acknowledge subjects as co-creative partners in production and distribution processes. For that, documentary storytelling needs to change first." (Mallik, n.d.)

Media, as an industry has catapulted at an unprecedented speed from what it used to be. With the help of technology and social media, the world seems to have shrunk into a tangible expanse that can be accessed very easily. Perhaps this is why media producers tend to get caught up in believing in a phenomenon reminiscent of Harold Lasswell's Magic Bullet, or Hypodermic Needle theory (Lasswell, 1927) where he proposes that any piece of information

broadcasted on mass communication channels works as a bullet that is released from a hypothetical "media gun" and reaches the audience as is, as intended by the producer. This theory fails to recognise that the consumer, as mentioned before is another individual with lived experiences and cultural contexts and will never be able to receive a message as is.

And thus I come to the central conundrum- is there an ideal ethical guideline to be considerate of as a photographer, while choosing and curating the story one tells? And what other ways of manoeuvring the lens can be chosen to deliver the same points? Perhaps the clue remains in developing a wide consciousness of one's own position and understanding the history of how these differences were created in the first place, and then attempting to dismantle them from within oneself first before loading the film in.

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Spotlights Or Searchlights? : A Fine Way Surveillance Disguises itself to Shape our Identities

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When George Orwell terrorized society with *1984*, the government wasn't the only 'Big Brother' insinuated to be watching us. Society itself becomes a two-way binocular that lets one scour what's in the distance while being subject to unsuspecting surveillance of the self during the process. Identity formation and contestation are heavily dependent on the consequences brought about by surveillance, which is often disguised in glorified manifestations of 'fame' and 'success'.

The very title of this essay suggests the play of Foucault's panopticon in its essence. The omnipresent 'searchlight' he elucidated on ages ago continues to coerce, restrict and operate in an individual's daily life. One might assume that this invasive gaze is solely trained on those who are societally underprivileged, for instance, a menial wage worker engaging in shoplifting who is then subject to censure for immoral behaviour. The worker may then be subject to harsh punishment to keep them 'toeing the lines' of morality dictated by society. It's clear that here, it's the searchlight that's shone upon the person. However, what would the repercussions be if the same scenario replaced the worker with a renowned celebrity who made headlines for impulsively doing the same? Would the amount of censure and punishment received remain the same or not? While the popular notion may say that the celebrity in question has considerable leeway to manipulate their deed owing to societal prowess, realities like the phenomenon of cancel culture say otherwise. Does this hypothetical example insinuate that the glorious 'spotlight' trained on the celebrity has always been rays of a panopticon in the first place? Are fame and success by-products of gift-wrapping surveillance into a commodity? Surveillance operates everywhere, unsympathetic to class, creed and gender— although the magnitudes and consequences of it may vary owing to context.

Moving onto a more nuanced understanding of the difference— or lack thereof— between searchlights and spotlights can be illustrated through the concept of biopower that Foucault elaborates on (Arvanitakis, 2009). The gradation of biopower affecting identity formation, contestation and performance has a visible lean towards women, in a heteronormative world, where their bodies become sites of politics and unsolicited censures. Margaret Atwood's quote from *The Robber Bride* is one that haunts every walking woman, aptly fitting into the context of biopower, "You are a woman with a man inside watching a woman. You are your own voyeur." (Atwood, 1993, p. 392). Media and patriarchy have been selling the image of the 'ideal' woman for centuries. One rarely sees a celebrity on screen who looks 'real' instead of perfect porcelain dolls that women's bodies are curated into being. These standards then get imbibed unconsciously into the minds of women who start scouring their own identities as being not feminine enough or being hyper-feminine depending on the context, instigating conflict and dissonance in their identity formation and performance. The searchlights of biopower burn into their conscience.

Going back to the example of celebrities, one assumes that the pedestal they're put upon is a given, when in reality, the raised welt on the ground is built upon the foundations of surveillance as well. None of our ears have gone unscathed by comments made on a female celebrity's body when it goes through changes brought naturally by age. A female child actress is instantly sexualized the moment she touches the early hours of puberty, Emma Watson's narrative of her eighteenth birthday is something that stays in the minds of most people who have watched the particular interview: "I remember on my 18th birthday, I came out of my 18th birthday party, and photographers lay down on the pavement and took photographs up my skirt, which were then published on the front page of the English tabloids the next morning. If they published the photographs 24 hours earlier, they would have been illegal. But because I had turned 18, they were legal." (Bailey, 2016). The instance is a perfectly horrifying instance of the male gaze manipulating biopower. Examples of female celebrities being body-shamed postpartum or simply, for natural bodily fluctuations, are endless. Such scenarios reinforce the question this essay seeks to ask— are these spotlights trained on pedestalize people mere invasive rays that deceive the public into thinking it is wanted attention when it's just surveillance disguised as abuse?

The image sold by the media about the 'ideal' also touches on the realm of culture industry established by Adorno and Horkheimer (Koshar, 2002). At the end of the day, the person under the spotlight is just a commodity that's sold to the public— a 'mass deception' of sorts that tricks an individual into developing identities that conform with the mainstream, under the illusion of fame and success. Surveillance, thus, almost creates a vicious cycle of tainted identity formation: the celebrities who are monitored end up creating prototypes of the 'ideal', which are then consumed by the general public, reinforcing that particular model. This then goes on to create a new era of individuals who keep the cycle running.

The glamour associated with stardom has also developed a paradoxical demand for 'normalcy' or 'humbleness' from public figures today, in contrast to earlier perceptions of them as impeccably perfect, distinguishable individuals. There is an apparent shift from "viewing stars as ideals into detainees within the panoptic view" which "can be retributed to their function of providing available points of references in an altered structuring of sociality" (Schulz, 2010, p. 32). Such modern representations of public figures as "monitored objects rather than authoritative subjects" (Schulz, 2010, p. 37) who actively reinforce norms and ideals that originate from the expectations of the public, is yet another manifestation of the culture industry (Koshar, 2002). There is a commodification of identity through surveillance which gets disguised as the spotlights of stardom.

Hence, the chase for success that's synonymous with fame is most often, the unconventional imagery of a prisoner running *after* the policing searchlights instead of away from them— unaware of its disguise as glorious spotlights. The complexities that plague this discourse on public figures is a labyrinth of its own, with mechanisms used by celebrities to navigate this willing invasion of privacy ranging from conforming to it or deviating from expected norms to an interesting mix of manipulating this attention trained on them. Instances of people going from a 'nobody' to a 'somebody' who appears in the frontline of news overnight are not uncommon— especially owing to how efficiently the individuals manoeuvre the push offered by media to contribute to their growth, whether personal or that of their career. 'Clout chasing' is a fairly recent addition to the dictionary of popular culture, wherein there's a paradoxical, deep understanding of the patterns that gain an individual attention and at the same time, a blinding oblivion to the fact that the 'chase' still pertains to that of amoral surveillance.

The adversities that arise with the interlacing of surveillance and culture industry culminate in a detrimental homogeneity. Everyone looks like

everyone else. Everybody behaves like everybody else. Identity performance develops a similitude based on the expectations and ideals of a particular society when surveillance itself runs out of control. It is important to understand the incertitude between the analogies of spotlights and searchlights discussed in this essay to detect the impersonation of 'glory' and 'fame' by surveillance— its phantom presence in the diurnal to be held accountable for its undisputable influence on identity formation, the way it contests and performs.

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Memoirs from the Afterlife: Death's Whisper Amid WWII's Chaos

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In the midst of World War II, Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief (2005)* stands as a powerful testament to Nazi Germany's horrible truths. The narrative is set in Nazi Germany during World War II and presented through the eyes of Death, an unorthodox narrator who provides a unique perspective on the horrible events of the time. The plot revolves around Liesel Meminger, a tiny child navigating the hazards of war who finds solace in books that she takes and shares with her neighbours, as well as a Jewish man in hiding. Through Death's narration, the story delves into the profound impacts of war, loss, and the transformative power of words, with Liesel's journey serving as a testament to resiliency and the enduring spirit of compassion in the face of adversity. This article delves into Death's character and function in the midst of this unstable time's extreme suffering. Examining Durkheim's views on trauma studies, collective awareness, and societal reactions (Chon & Fisher, 1898) to tragic occurrences broadens our understanding of Death's role in *The Book Thief*, going beyond basic storytelling. Death becomes more than just a metaphor of imminent death in *The Book Thief*, taking on the persona of an intelligent observer who is profoundly connected with the plot. Seeing events through Death's sharp vision adds unprecedented complexity to the narrative and inspires readers to consider mortality and the human condition from unconventional literary perspectives. Death's narrative role highlights deeper societal processes shaping people's reactions to death, especially in the harsh atmosphere of wartime necessity.

Durkheim's views, particularly his beliefs on collective consciousness and social integration, provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how communities and individuals deal with mortality during turbulent times (Durkheim, 1973). These theories simplify the connections between social institutions and

personal responses, giving a comprehensive framework for examining Death's role as an observer in *The Book Thief.*

Death's emotional observations about the Himmel Street bombing serve as powerful canvases for Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence. The collective sorrow of the community is captured with the uncanny narrator's grief, matching social practices around group grieving following calamity. Death's observations on Liesel's acts of compassion also fit with themes of altruism and societal cohesiveness, emphasising the necessity of resilience and humanity in the face of adversity and demonstrating how individual actions affect society as a whole.

Durkheim's thesis on the role of collective rituals in forging social bonds is also represented in the characters' participation in group grieving rituals following tragic events. The act of grieving together acts as a reminder of the collective psychological approach of finding solace and solidarity in one another's pain, which symbolises society's attempt to cope with great loss in the midst of conflict.

Death's perspectives on people's resiliency and difficulties with mortality are also aligned with sociological conceptions of adaptive coping mechanisms. The individuals' efforts to maintain some semblance of normalcy in the midst of wartime chaos serve as an example of how civilizations might recover from the psychological toll that protracted fighting imposes on the collective psyche.

The historical background of Nazi Germany and the tragic aftermath of World War II play a poignant role in the understanding of the narrator, Death. Humanity suffered enormously during harsh and tyrannical dictatorships, which left a lasting mark on a nation's collective conscience. Death's function as a witness of human suffering takes on immense significance in such a crucible, with the atrocities of this time casting a long, gloomy shadow.

The depiction of death first corresponds with trauma theories (Barnwell, 2017), showing the impact of war-induced upheaval on individual and social awareness. Death's progress throughout the novel exhibits resiliency and demonstrates how it has evolved to see awful events and intense human experiences. This transformation corresponds to views about adaptive coping methods, revealing Death's ability to overcome suffering and recast its understanding of death and humanity.

Analysing Death's development through the lens of trauma theory elucidates how exposure to the horrors of battle shapes Death's perspective. By reflecting the impacts of collective trauma, the figure symbolises how society reacts to protracted conflict. This illustrates how Death's perceptions and experiences reflect larger societal trauma and is compatible with sociological understanding on the enormous impact of trauma on individual and societal identities.

Death's interactions with characters such as Liesel, Hans, and Max produce a shift in perspective and symbolise the human spirit's persistence in the face of tragedy. The character's identity transformation becomes a strong depiction of human ability to survive, adjust, and find meaning in the face of terrible hardship by integrating sociological notions on trauma, resilience, and coping mechanisms with Death's plot arc.

The metamorphosis of death exemplifies perseverance in the face of adversity, which is consistent with resilience theory. Sociological perspectives on resilience emphasise how dynamic people and communities are and how they may weather and rise from adversity. The evolution of death and its ability to find meaning in the midst of chaos are similar to resilience theory's emphasis on growth and adaptability in the face of adversity.

Death expands on his function as an impartial assessor of mortality in *The Book Thief,* becoming an observant bystander intensely

aware of human misery in the midst of World War II mayhem. This revelation discloses Death's emotional reflections on real-life sorrow, which are central to the plot. Significant indications into the emotional undertones underpinning Death's narration are given during critical passages in which Death thinks on the protagonists' suffering. Death's subtle storytelling style delves into societal concerns while highlighting Death's unique point of view. It's akin to balancing empathy, objectivity, and thoughtfulness on a tightrope.

The story gets more complex when it is linked to subjects such as cultural values, societal conventions, and empathy, all of which are influenced by Death's observations in *The Book Thief.* Death's changing identity reflects empathy and societal standards that emphasise emotional bonds during times of suffering. Death's ties also alter social norms and views about resilience and death. Furthermore, its story resonates with shifting societal conventions amid wartime, showing eternal traits such as fortitude and compassion.

Death’s metamorphosis, as the novel progresses, and the tragedies of war have a profound effect on him. Individual interactions and terrible situations change Death's perspective on mortality and mankind. Momentous events such as the Himmel Street explosion and Liesel's gesture of compassion serve as catalysts for Death's growing awareness, providing a dramatic battle to reconcile humanity's duality between terrible cruelty and magnificent compassion.

Identity transition is a key issue that investigates how people's identities change as a result of experiences and external causes. This concept is illustrated in how Death's story evolves, demonstrating how its contacts with humanity, particularly those involving Liesel and Max, induce a tremendous metamorphosis. This is compatible with the idea that traumatic events can create identity alterations that alter one's perspectives and values.

By connecting Death's evolution with these theoretical notions, the novel offers a profound exploration of how pain affects identity, resilience aids in adaptation, and transformative experiences modify one's worldview. This gives viewers a multi-layered understanding of Death's representation of the human condition amid times of war and strife.

The Book Thief is a testament to the human spirit's tenacity in the face of insurmountable adversity. Death's one-sided story perspective gives a severe lens through which to observe the extreme anguish endured by people in Nazi Germany. It highlights the intricate relationship between individual experiences and larger social situations through the sociology of death by functioning as both an observer and a storyteller.

The story's depiction of Death's transformation from an observer to a figure profoundly influenced by human events exemplifies the complexities of trauma, resiliency, and identity development. We see how trauma affects viewpoints, resilience increases adaptability, and transformative experiences change identities by incorporating sociological ideas into the plot.

Death's journey through *The Book Thief's* narrative, guided by Durkheim’s theories, represents a greater societal journey dealing with death and the human condition in the aftermath of war. It highlights the evolutionary potential of social processes and human experiences, culminating in Death's stirring admission, "I am haunted by humans" (Zusak, 2007).

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Folk Rhythms and "Outsider" Melodies: Unveiling Authenticity in Art

Sheersha Roy, TYBA

In the contemporary art landscape, the boundaries of authenticity and identity are continually redefined, often brought to the forefront by compelling examples that challenge conventional perceptions. One such example is a recent video capturing a folk artist playing the sarangi while seated on a pavement, intriguingly filmed by a renowned classical vocalist (Staff, 2022). This visual representation was a deliberate effort to draw attention to a form of local art considered to be 'authentic' and 'Indian.' However, instead of simply reinforcing the notion of authentic art, this video raises profound questions about the roots of authenticity and how it evolves over time.

Outsider art is a category of artistic creations and their creators traditionally defined by the identity of the artist. It is often associated with a lack of formal artistic training and is perceived as isolated from the 'mainstream' cultural milieu (Wojcik, 2008). While mainstream art is defined by its commercial viability or popular appeal, outsider art hovers at the dynamic boundary, challenging the established norms. Notions of individual expression and detachment from societal traditions are also deeply linked with outsider art. By existing

outside the “conventional art scene”, outsider artists are perceived to bring a fresh perspective that challenges the boundaries of what is considered "legitimate" or "authentic."
When examining folk art through the lens of outsider art, a complex web of identity and authenticity emerges. Folk art, rooted in community and cultural traditions, might initially appear to be at odds with the outsider art concept, which often emphasises individuality and separation from mainstream culture. However, folk art embodies a distinctive duality. On one hand, it could be seen as a communal form of artistic expression, seemingly incompatible with the individualistic characteristics typically associated with outsider art. Yet, folk art itself can be viewed as a unique community defined by its exclusion from broader cultural ties, all while maintaining elements of both individuality and communality.

As an audience, we tend to adopt two very antithetical positions to experiencing folk art regarding it as deviant or romanticising it. Such a binary can often be effective and institutionalised , for the purpose of legitimising the creation of those who lack as opposed to those who have formal credentials. This is reflective in the very subtle ways we try to naturalise the production of folk art by associating it with historical narratives of origin and future heritage, the absence of an urge to market or intellectualise and the gift of ‘natural-born instincts’ (Fine, 2003). Consider the itinerant Baul musicians, originating from the rural landscapes of Bengal, whose soul-stirring melodies draw from spiritual and mystical themes. The deliberate dichotomy between the theoretical complexities of classical music and the association of folk music with themes around religion or the soul serves as a subtle manoeuvre, relegating Baul musicians and their art to the periphery of esteemed music circles, embodying the outsider ethos.

The perception of Indian Folk Music is intricately intertwined with notions of what is deemed 'Indian' enough. Recognition hinges not only on the music's intrinsic qualities but also on the collective identity derived from spatial dynamics and the choices individuals make in identifying with that space. This dynamic is evident in the diverse folk music traditions thriving in the remote and culturally rich North-Eastern regions of India, such as the vibrant Bihu songs of Assam, soulful tunes of Meghalaya, and rhythmic beats of Nagaland. Despite their cultural richness, these traditions often remain overshadowed on the national stage due to geographical remoteness and limited commercialization. The visibility and appreciation of regional folk music frequently rely on the interplay of commercial ventures, spatial proximity to urban centres, and the collective identity constructed around these musical expressions.

Within the ever-evolving realm of contemporary art, the very essence of authenticity finds itself continually reshaped by captivating instances that challenge our conventional perceptions. The recent upsurge in enthusiasm for North-Eastern folk music and the acknowledgment of Rajasthani folk traditions exemplify how spatial dynamics and commercialization play pivotal roles in enhancing the visibility and reinterpretation of these artistic expressions. This trend mirrors the intricate discussions surrounding identity and authenticity, echoing the complex interplay of individuality and communal expression evident in Bāul-Fakir art (Krakauer, 2015). The Bāul-Fakirs, with their apparently “anti-structural” views on society and religion, share intriguing parallels with outsider artists, challenging established norms and providing a distinctive perspective. Purposefully setting Bāul-Fakir music alongside classical compositions or commercialised folk traditions triggers a reevaluation of authenticity, underscoring the nuanced positionality of these artists within evolving cultural landscapes.

The terms used by both Bāul-Fakirs and laypeople, such as "crazy," carry layers of meaning, encompassing both derogatory connotations and a profound alternative worldview. As these musicians employ terms like "pāgal" (crazy) and "khyāpā" (lunatic) in

their songs (Krakauer, 2015, p.361), they not only embrace counter-hegemonic views of society and religion but also embody a distinctive perspective on the world. Renowned for critiquing religious norms, dismantling caste hierarchies, and challenging materialistic values, Bāul-Fakirs are hailed by Bengali intellectuals as purveyors of a vernacular social critique akin to Marxist and postmodern scholarship (Dutta & Dutta, 2019). The appropriation of Bāul-Fakir culture by affluent Bengali musicians mirrors the urban folk revival in North America, blurring the boundaries between aesthetic homage and political expression. The adoption of Bāul-Fakir personas, characterised by long hair and countercultural attire, becomes a symbolic journey seeking cultural roots and a medium for uninhibited social critique. However, this nuanced process of appropriation raises critical questions about authenticity, societal privilege, and the dilution of genuine cultural meaning amid the intricate interplay between tradition and modernity (Young, 2006). Within this interplay, we find an interesting figure emerging- that of Parvathy Baul.

Parvathy Bāul's authenticity as an artist is a captivating study that challenges preconceptions within the realm of Bāul-Fakir music. Despite her middle-class background and art education, she has seamlessly adopted a Bāul-Fakir identity, undergoing esoteric training and utilising traditional solo instruments like ghuṅur, ektārā, and ḍugi. This departure from the conventional path of a Bāul-Fakir artist is highlighted by her flamboyant appearance and the bold inclusion of ecstatic dance, presenting a unique and exceptional facet to her performances. In the eyes of her affluent audiences, her performances transcend the commercial frame, offering an intimate and as it were, an authentic experience of Bāul-Fakir traditions. While commercialization can be seen as contributing to this dilution of folk traditions, it is also a catalyst for its reinterpretation with changing times in a neoliberal economy. Being filmed by a renowned classical vocalist and the subsequent sharing of the video brings visibility to a form of local art that might have otherwise remained overlooked. It demonstrates the artist's ability to navigate and utilise commercial mediums for the purpose of expression and cultural representation. In such a scenario, what are we supposed to consider as authentic? Bringing back the video mentioned in the beginning, the positionality of the artist, their lived experience and the context in which they create determine the creation of “authenticity” within negotiated contexts. Folk artists are not monolithic; their identities, experiences, and expressions are deeply woven into their work. Whether manifested through the contemporary sounds of Raghu Dixit or the traditional compositions of Teejan Bai, authenticity hinges on what they choose to reveal or, perhaps, what is revealed through them.

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Dastaan-e-Identity

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"The foe mightily strong, I very weak, with no means of making terms, no strength to oppose. In the presence of such power and potency, we had to think of some place for ourselves…. That choice lay between Badakhshan and Hindustan and that decision must now be made." (Z. B. Babur, 2017)

And a choice was indeed made in 1525 C.E, one that would forever change the history of an entire subcontinent and its people, as Zahir-uddin Mohammed Babur, ruler of Kabul and former ruler of Ferghana and Samarkand, turned towards Hindustan seeking conquest and glory, but above all a home.

Before we dive into it we must establish something that is critical to the core of this article, the difference between 'India' and 'Hindustan'. When it comes to this research article the word 'India', though ancient in its own right, will refer to the geographical boundaries and the socio-political identity of what constitutes the modern state of India and Pakistan while the word 'Hindustan' denotes the geographical area of the Punjab, the Ganga-Yamuna doab region, Bihar and parts of Gujarat, with the Indus marking it's boundary to the west, Bengal to the east, the river Narmada in the south and the Himalayas in the north. This differs to the general understanding of the word Hindustan which colloquially refers to the entirety of the modern Indian state and is oftentimes used as a like for like replacement of the word India when speaking in Hindi.

Having established the difference between the two, we now move to the question that this article aims to answer: what is the identity of the Mughals? An ever raging debate that blows hot

and cold, questions have been raised over the 'Indianness' of the Mughals who exist in limbo. On one hand the Mughals ruled India for over three hundred years and at their zenith boasted the largest empire to rule over India since Ashoka, on the other there seems to be little to no acceptance of the Mughals as 'Indian Rulers', while other invaders such as the Kushanas have been granted that status. The article aims to recognize the identity of the Mughals in the history of India by looking at a variety of historical sources as well as the sociological theory of identity construction.

Identity is often introduced as a concept which assumes both sameness and difference, in that it categorizes people on the basis of their commonalities but ultimately references personal uniqueness (Taylor, 2015). We can further look at identity as a personal and social role. Herein, lies the key to unlocking the identity of the Mughals as the article attempts to formulate the personal and social identity of the Mughals by asking two questions:

A. What did the Mughals consider their identity to be?
B. Did the contemporary Indian rulers and people consider Mughals to be one of them?

Therefore, we can divide the article into two sections, personal identity and national social identity.

Personal Identity of the Mughals

Personal identity as a concept was pioneered by American social psychologists, in particular Sheldon Stryker, and emphasized how demographic, social, and cultural factors affect human social interaction. Personal identity is what makes every person unique, defining them through their specific biographies (e.g., name, birthplace), unique characteristics (e.g., intelligent, athletic), role identities (e.g., daughter, employee), and a particular combination of private and public experiences. (Andriot, 2012, April 24).

The personal identity of the Mughals can be explored extensively with the help of the countless contemporary sources of the time, including autobiographies which reveal a considerable deal of what the eclectic rulers thought of themselves as. In this section we shall look at the progression of the Mughal identity over generations from Babur to Aurangzeb and onward till the end of the dynasty with Bahadur Shah Zafar the Second.

Now we jump back to the beginning of this article, where Babur has decided to move his army to Hindustan. Chased by the Uzbegs out of his homeland and into Kabul, it was because he seeked a home that Babur turned towards Delhi and Hindustan (Babur, 2017)
For a king, however, seeking home does not mean seeking refuge, it means conquest and invasion and that is exactly what would play out as Babur would defeat Ibrahim Lodhi, on 21st April 1526 and take charge of Delhi, ruling over Hindustan for the next four years. Through the Tuzuk-i-Baburi or as it is known in Persian, the Baburnama we gain valuable insight about Babur's identity and what he thought of Hindustan. Though critical of the land's climate and unaware of the people's ways, there is no doubt about the fact that he considered it his sanctuary. However, his soldiers and amirs failed to see past the same and wanted to return to Kabul, in fact one of his intimates, Khwaja Kalan while leaving for Kabul composed the following couplet:
If safe and sound I cross the Sind,
Blacken my face ere I wish for Hind.
Babur, himself, was quick to call out their folly and asked them to stay in Hindustan (Babur, 2017)

This solidification of Hindustan as a potential home was further entrenched when he offered sanctuary to all exiled nobles belonging to the Timurid clan to come to Hindustan. However, Babur and the power of his court continued to be derived from his association with Timur, a distinctly foreign invader who had ravaged Delhi not more than a century ago. His identity was that of a Timurid ruler of Hindustan, but the

foundations of both the Mughal empire and their change in identity were laid during his time and by his hand when he chose Hindustan over all else, Delhi and Agra over Kabul.

The change in identity of the Mughals occurred during the time of Jalaluddin Akbar, the grandson of Babur. He not only expanded the empire drastically but also adopted traditional Indian practices which diverted from the established Timurid tradition which formed their identity before. It was his rule that marked the shift of the Mughal identity.

“The manners and customs of India, and…their ways became pleasing to him,” said Abul Fazl about the emperor. (Eraly, 2015)

This change was also further influenced by Akbar’s practice of marrying into Rajput and other Hindu noble families which led to the propagation of Hindu practices, festivals and customs such as the rakhi and worship of the Sun were adopted in the Mughal court. This extended to the other significant religions and communities of the time as Jains, Sufis, Jesuits among others exerted significant influence over the court. Akbar even took to wearing the traditional Parsee shirt and performed Parsee fire worship multiple times in his court. According to Badauni, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, philosophy, poetry were encouraged, with Hindus, particularly Brahmins being installed in important revenue positions (Eraly, 2015)

The Mughals no longer looked to draw power from their Timurid identity, instead they leaned in willingly into the customs of the ‘Indian’ royalty: the Hindu Rajas. This trend continued with the successors of Akbar with varying degrees of intensity, however there was no turning back. After the time of Akbar, the Mughal foothold was established in India and was near unshakeable, similarly the region's traditions, customs and practices established themselves in the Mughal ethos. The best example of the progression of the identity of Mughals, the ‘Indianization’of it' can be seen in an incident in the rule of Aurangzeb in 1689. After the defeat of Sambhaji, Asad Khan, Aurangzeb’s Vizier had this to say:

> “Praise be to God! That through grace……two great kingdoms have been conquered, it is now good policy that the imperial standards should return to Paradise like Hindustan, so that the world may know that nothing more remains for the Emperor to do” (Eraly, 2015).

This conversation mirrors the incident between Babur and Khwaja Kalan, except the Vizier is asking for the return of the Emperor to Hindustan, to Delhi and not Kabul. It encapsulates the transition of Mughals into Hindustani, if not Indian rulers at the very least in the minds of the rulers and the courtiers themselves. Their lives had become entrenched in the Indian lifestyle, the court etiquette carried Turkish and Persian influences but carved out its own identity adopting many Hindustani practices and customs and above all the ruling class, the Emperor and his amirs had come to consider India their home. Their personal identity and imperial identity had shifted from that of invaders and alien rulers to almost endemic rulers such that the banner the rebels rallied around in 1857 for the cause of an independent India against the British was that of Bahadur Shah Zafar, the Mughal Emperor.

All of the Mughal Emperors, with the exception of Babur and Humayun, were born in India or Pakistan, geographically tying their identity to the region and firmly establishing their biographies as Indian. Their role identity, that is their identity as rulers shifted drastically from Timurid rulers to Mughal Emperors of India, no longer looking at their past outside of the region for legitimacy. Their private and public experiences, as we have seen with the practices established by Akbar too changed to accommodate the customs of India and its people. Their personal identity could no longer be considered purely Timurid as the forefathers of Babur’s could have been.

National and Social Identity of the Mughals

Social identity refers to people's self-categorizations in relation to their group memberships (the "we"). These categorizations are often assigned to us or something we are born into.(*Day 3: Social Identity | SUNY Oswego*. (n.d.).

The social identity of the Mughals as one of the ruling classes of Hindustan has been under constant scrutiny in the modern era however the contemporaneous perceptions of the Mughals were quite different to as they are today. Prior to Babur, India had seen countless invasions such as the Greeks, Bactrians, Huns, Kushanas and more recently that of Mohammed Ghori which led to the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, the first Islamic state in India. However, though it was a highly aggressive and foreign state since the concept of India did not exist and it was just a geographical region. For Indian kings, Ghazni and by extension the Delhi Sultanate was just another kingdom, though more threatening and culturally divergent, nevertheless merely another element in the normal political milieu. (Eraly, 2015a).

Similarly, the Mughals were treated simply as political rivals and new players in the region by the contemporary Rajas and the crumbling Delhi Sultanate. However, what separated the two 'foreign'empires was how they progressed and their social identity changed. The rule of the Delhi Sultans was similara military occupied state rather than a cohesive kingdom, however the Mughal Empire was quite united under the imperial banner. This was because of the consolidatory nature of the Mughals and their ability to assimilate different groups into their fold. The hostile Rajputs became indispensable allies after the many marriages of Akbar.Once again it was the merging of the social identities of the two political rivals that led to this state. The formation of the social and national identity of the Mughal Empire was directly connected to the Indianization of their court and customs as mentioned above. A similar sentiment has been expressed by Inzi Azrein while discussing the identities of the Malay Islamic Monarchy:

> "In our attempt of studying identity, one has to go broader beyond the understanding of what identity is. The construction of national identity is not only a product of nationalism but also it is a cultural project. When applied to national identity, it can be summarized that the formation of national identity may be deeply rooted in, firstly… and thirdly, through the institutionalization of the so-called common, shared or collective identity using what Stuart Hall would refer to as state apparatuses." (Azrein, 2011)

As mentioned above, the formation of the national identity, in this case the identity of an empire is the sum of its political, economic, cultural and administrative practices and how they manifest themselves in the spaces of governance. Concerning the Mughals, all of these factors point to an identity that is distinctly Indian. The nearly four hundred year long reign of the Mughals assimilated them into the local canon and vice versa. One can say that it would be incorrect to not consider the identity of the Mughals following Akbar as native to the subcontinent. The article is perfectly summed up by Lokmanya Tilak who captures this change of identity and elaborates on why the Mughals cannot be considered alien rulers perfectly when he refers to them as one of the *swarajyas* of India albeit a culturally different rule:

> "Alienness is certainly not concerned with white or black skin. Alienness is not concerned with religion. Alienness is not concerned with trade or profession. I do not consider him an alien who wishes to make arrangement whereby that country he has to live, his children have to live, may see good days and be benefited. He who does what is beneficial to the people of this country, be he a Mohammedan or Englishman, is not alien." (Hasan, 2019).

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Can the Subaltern be Heard?: Dehumanisation in the Medical Field

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Power announces the truth. Truths are constructed based on knowledge, but this does not relate to knowledge about a collection of facts, but rather to what may be called methods of knowing. This implies that there is no fixed objective reality but rather a negotiation between the individual and the validated collective reality. The field of medical science prides itself on its objectivity and has advanced significantly in many areas since the Enlightenment, which can be observed in the development of medicines for various illnesses, advanced diagnostic tools, and sophisticated methods to diagnose people or bodies

Haslam (2006) discusses the mechanical character of diagnosis, which considers patients' mechanical systems to be composed of interacting elements. This approach frequently leads to a specific type of dehumanisation known as objectification, in which people are perceived as just their bodies, devoid of emotional reaction or interpersonal warmth, leading to deindividuation where one is deprived of their personhood, autonomy, and the value of their individual experiences as the patient's reality is overlooked for the assertion of objective science. In the field of medicine, individuals are often reduced to passive patients who are merely looked upon as bodies that need to be diagnosed and treated. Foucault (1963) discusses this aspect of medical science in his book, 'The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception. Although dehumanisation is common within medical institutions, it intensifies for individuals belonging to certain identities that are considered to be the subaltern. However, the following question arises: Who is the subaltern and how do we define it? We see the subaltern as a group that has been marginalised and oppressed historically. They have been ignored in dominant narratives because their perspectives and experiences have been erased or have not been considered while forming a narrative. The subaltern exists among us but is

always missed in dominant narratives. Thus, the subaltern for this article would include those who have been ignored within the dominant medical discourse. How do we identify if someone is ignored in dominant medical narratives? This is an important question to ask because the medical field as a scientific field emphasises objectivity and value-neutrality, thus setting forth an assumption that it has an unbiased approach while studying bodies and treating patients. However, this does not seem to be the case, making it important to understand how bodies are looked upon by medical institutions. Medical facilities generally look upon bodies of people with a fixed gaze, that Foucault describes as the 'clinical gaze' (Foucault, 1963). He defines clinical gaze as

> "…a perceptual act sustained by a logic of operations; it is analytic because it restores the genesis of composition; but it is pure of all intervention insofar as this genesis is only the syntax of the language spoken by things themselves in an original silence." (Foucault, 1963).

The clinical gaze aims to look at bodies objectively. Thus, the medical practitioner looks only at the biological symptoms or causes while diagnosing the illness. The practitioner does not consider subjective influences such as social, environmental, or cultural influences while diagnosing bodies. This objectivity can only be practised when all bodies are viewed in the same way. However, it is not possible to view all bodies in the same way when all bodies are not the same. Bodies are more than their biologics; they are also a product of social and cultural interpretations. In other words, apart from a biological identity, the body also has social and cultural identities. Thus, the aspiration for an objective gaze is very difficult to achieve, especially when one looks at subaltern bodies. This is because subaltern bodies are seen as 'Other' bodies. Thus, if bodies that are part of the dominant narrative, that is, bodies that are not the Other, come under the objective standard (which here, is the clinical gaze), then the subaltern bodies will not make their way under that objective standard. This can be observed within the context of race. The Western medical field predominantly studies symptoms and markers of diseases on white bodies, which leads to black bodies being underdiagnosed. This is just one aspect of bias within the Western medical field. A study on the treatment of pain showed that people of colour were underrated compared with White patients (Green et al., 2003). Concerning clinical pain, the results suggested that "ethnicity might influence ED pain management" where out of the four factors, pain assessment by the health care provider seemed to be the "most likely mediator of medical decision making." (Green et al., 2003, p. 279). Another national study in the USA showed that out of 1,300 racially and ethnically diverse outpatients with metastatic or recurring cancer, 42% of the patients with pain "were prescribed analgesics that were less potent than those recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines for cancer pain treatment." (Green et al., 2003, p. 280). In addition, it was also found that in settings where black people and Hispanics were predominant, 62% of the patients were "underrated by WHO standards, and they were three times more likely to be undermedicated than patients seen in non-minority settings." (Green et al., 2003, p. 280). Thus, a bias against people of colour in the medical field shows that the clinical gaze is not applied equally across all bodies. This proves that the aspect of objectivity that is aspired to be achieved through the clinical gaze is not practised or even seen on subaltern bodies.

The disregard for a patient's life can also be attributed to the systematic attitude of focusing on the results rather than the process. In the mechanised era of producing results, hospital culture tends to train staff to view people as bodies rather than autonomous individuals. We do not view people who are different from us as individuals, but rather as representations of 'their kind', devoid of their agency and experiences. People become objectified when they are attached to certain identities; they become subjects, but they are also subjected to

the rules and norms created by a set of knowledge about these identities. Haque and Waytz (2012) identified dissimilarity as one of the primary causes of these instances of dehumanisation, which operates under three conditions: from the very nature of being ill, the patient is removed from the physician's physicality, and the condition further worsens when they are labelled and identified as their illness. Moreover, in the Indian context, individuals are encouraged to view doctors as 'Gods', which establishes a hierarchy where questioning the decisions of theirs is labelled as a breach and a challenge to authority making participative treatment a challenge to achieve.

However, research on these health disparities frequently focuses on 'health disadvantage' or the 'disadvantaged health of poor people' which may be caused by geographic location (e.g., living in an isolated or overcrowded region), household characteristics (e.g., low-income families, migrant households), or individual characteristics (e.g., a teenage mother, a person with a disability). The problem with this approach is that the 'disadvantage' becomes a personal attribute that one is born with, and a structural factor such as socioeconomic inequality is transferred into a 'condition' that affects only those at the bottom of the rung and is used to create an 'other' to the dominant 'us'. This perspective overlooks the aforementioned social value of diseases. The primary cause of disparities in healthcare services at several levels can be argued to be a case of economic and social inequity which are significantly connected to their total deprivation, which stems from the social and economic ties of the caste system, which are formed and repeated in all aspects of life. Similarly, remoteness, underdevelopment, and isolation continue to have a significant impact on Adivasi community health outcomes. Studies conducted in the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala and Assam indicated that scheduled tribe (ST) women have a life expectancy of 40.0 years, which is fifteen years less than that of upper-caste Hindu women. They also contribute disproportionately to maternal mortality (Borooah,2013). A study of tribal districts in Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh found a high incidence of sickle cell anaemia, with the Baigas having the highest prevalence. Furthermore, nutritional anaemia ranged from 30% to 100% across the tribal groups polled. As a result, individuals from Scheduled Castes and Tribes experience multiple health problems (Chakma,2009). This correlation can be fairly identified in the context of the prevalent uneven social and economic conditions. Casteism permeates medical colleges, hostels, and workplaces, adversely affecting students and professionals. Instances of discrimination, which often lead to depression, are underreported, and gathering evidence is challenging. The NSSO (National Sample Survey Office) data reveal the underrepresentation of Dalits and Adivasis in the healthcare sector, particularly in roles such as radiologists and lab technicians (Sobin George, 2015). Caste discrimination extends beyond healthcare and affects various premier institutes. Despite sporadic news coverage, numerous cases of caste-related frustration and depression persist in higher education.

It is critical to redirect medical education away from inflexible biases to create a balanced approach between empathy and cognitive problem-solving in medical practice. Recognizing the contextual significance of identities and applying a 'social gaze' helps make healthcare accessible and effective. Training should emphasise educating physicians on how to switch between different attitudes depending on the nature of the patient's care. Individuals are frequently reduced to numbers in authoritarian social systems. Instead of simply depending on administrative identifiers such as dates of birth or medical record numbers in healthcare, clinicians may add person-centric characteristics such as personal history, birthplace, employment, interests, and family life during patient talks. This simple addition, helps to humanise patients during rounds and surgical operations, thus building a connection between the medical staff and the people under their care. It reminds professionals of their

patients' humanity and aids in the prevention of dehumanisation in medical settings.

Using such methods in the medical field can help make the field more inclusive but we believe that one cannot stop here. Despite the introduction of various methods, we need to realise and accept that some narratives will always be left out, which in turn creates the subaltern. The point is to constantly question and find missing narratives. Such an approach thus forces one to take a radically intersectional perspective to engage with the multiple realities of the population. The interweaving of numerous axes of stratification, difference, and oppression provides a unique and distinct experience that transcends the influence of any one category in isolation while accounting for the systemic and the individual. The point of a radical intersectional approach is to hear the subaltern because the subaltern does speak but is often unheard and ignored within the medical space due various factors like the language barrier (the language here being the supposed objective facts the medical personnel function with and the inability of it to incorporate the subjective experiences of individuals) and the social structure designed to actively create the Other. Thus, we can say that the subaltern within the medical field is not heard. But for that to happen, a radical restructuring of the system becomes a necessity which allows for more expression from all sections of the society.

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Who is a Survivor?

Deconstructing the identity of sexual assault survivors.

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There exists a “perfect” victim: the survivor of a “real” incident of sexual assault. She ticks all the boxes of an invisible checklist. She’s a cis woman; she doesn’t drink or dress skimpily. Her assaulter is a stranger, of course. Before the assault, she doesn’t smile at him or lead him on in any way. During her assault, she has her wits about her— she fights, has wounds as witness of her struggle, and she can clearly recount the incident. After the incident, she is distraught. She hasn’t been seen smiling since the incident; she was sobbing at the police station and the court. Anyone who encounters her can tell that she is not behaving ‘normally.’ Lastly, the perfect victim is a crusader. She will stop at nothing for justice. The checklist outlined above is called a “rape script” (Sasson & Paul, 2014). Why is it called a script? Because there exist parameters of permissible speech that are defined by the dominant discourse, and these parameters lend authenticity and comprehensibility to a victim and their experiences. These scripts govern the boundaries of how rape and rape-trauma occur and are articulated. These scripts explain why being a victim and being seen as a victim are separate. More importantly, they throw into dust the dominant perceptions of what perpetrators or victims look like—what rape looks like.

Thus, to proceed with this examination of identity, one must clearly define and categorize sexual violence. Using the classification by United States’ National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), one reaches four broad labels on the forms of sexual violence: non-contact unwanted sexual experiences (e.g., exposure to sexually explicit material), unwanted sexual contact (e.g., kissing,fondling), sexual coercion (e.g., unwanted sex after being pressured in a nonphysical way), and attempted and completed rape (i.e., completed or attempted unwanted vaginal, oral, or anal penetration through the use of force or threat of physical harm, or when the victim is unable to consent because they are drunk, high or unconscious) (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, USA, 2022). These classifications help us apply the rape script described above to non-rape sexual assault. For example, experiences of non-contact unwanted sexual experiences may not be termed as sexual assault in the assault scripts of the dominant masses. As a result, while someone who has been flashed in a bus has experienced sexual harassment as per the definition, they might not term themselves as a victim.

This is especially relevant given that most people assigned female at birth (AFAB) have had exposure to some form of non-consensual sexual experiences but in spite of fitting the technical definition of a victim, many choose not to identify with labels like victim or survivor. The question arises: why do some people adopt the tag of victim or survivor while others don’t? Why do some people choose the term ‘victim’ while others choose ‘survivor’? Academic literature uses the term ‘unacknowledged victims’ for those who could qualify as victims but who are not comfortable terming their experiences as “assault” and their identity as that of a “victim” (Kahn et al., 1994).

Researchers in 2011 formulated the match-and-motivation model to understand why some victims do not acknowledge their experience to be termed as “assault” (Muehlenhard & Peterson, 2011). While their study focused on rape victims, the same reasoning can apply to non-rape sexual assault as well.

The match component of the model tries to match the individual's responses with that individual's scripts for various possible labels. Because different people interact with societal norms differently, they consequently have varying rape scripts in their minds that they compare with their experiences to make meaning of their experience. A lot of unacknowledged rape victims have a more violent conception of rape and associate it with strangers. Thus, they do not refer to themselves as rape victims, in spite of their sexual experience being non-consensual. In Kahn's study, women tended to not qualify their experience as rape because they were intoxicated or had engaged in flirtatious behavior with the perpetrator prior to the incident (Kahn et al., 1994). This lapse of match between an incident and its label also arises from a lack of understanding of the legal definition of rape. This becomes even more complex when addressing sexual assault other than rape, as the definition becomes broader and varies slightly from one jurisdiction to another.

The motivation part of the model tries to examine an individual's motivations to not adopt a label based on the consequences they expect from it. Many victims, when they know the perpetrator, find the term "rapist" too harsh for the person concerned. Here we see that the words 'rape' and 'sexual assault' have emotive appraisals associated with them which create a contested view of the concept of assault among different people (Reitan, 2001). Similarly, some victims did not choose to term it rape because accepting it would mean having to take action and report the incident. Unlabeled victims also explained that the term "rape" tended to make them feel more traumatised and less in control than if they termed the experience as a mistake that they were also partially to blame for (Muehlenhard & Peterson, 2011). Thus, while the lack of acknowledgement is a protective response sometimes, in other occasions it is a result of mismatch in scripts. Thus if an individual's rape script changes over time, then the way they label the incident can change and lead to eventual adoption of the tag of victim or survivor.

To explain what happens when this shift in self-identity takes place, one can use the Affect Control Theory. The Affect Control Theory(ACT) is a mathematical way of calculating the *deflection* between default cultural meanings for identities and behaviours and situational impressions from interactants and their behaviour (Indiana University, 2016). Enacting any identity has cultural expectations of how the person should behave and how they should be treated. ACT measures these expectations along three dimensions– evaluation (nice/awful), potency (powerful/powerless) and activity (active/inactive). An unusual and disturbing event–like sexual assault–reflects a high magnitude of deflection. The disturbed person will attempt to reframe this abnormal event such that they can make better sense of themselves and their worlds. The greater the magnitude of deflection, the greater is the likelihood that the person will re-identify themselves as a victim or survivor. This re-identification helps them restore order to their worldviews as the labels used in a victim's narrative (though negative) makes the person's experience consistent with cultural expectations. In simple words, it makes more sense for a 'victim' to be assaulted than for a 'girlfriend' or 'classmate.'

This paper has largely used 'victims' and 'survivors' interchangeably for reasons of convenience. However, while talking about re-identification, one must discuss why some people identify as survivors and some identify as victims. The very act of identity deflection increases the odds of a person identifying with either identity – victim or survivor. As any discourse on these two terms will explain, the label 'survivor' depicts a relative sense of strength or resilience. Using the three dimensions of ACT, it is foreseeable that a person who has been assaulted will report feeling awful (evaluation), powerless (potency), and quiet (activity) about the event. The more awful or powerless a person feels, the greater

are the chances of them identifying with victimhood; and similarly, a person feeling relatively in control would tend to identify with survivorship. For example, physical resistance during the assault increases the likelihood of identifying with survivorship. Similarly, re-identification as a survivor is likelier when an event occurred further back in the past. Victimisation history is also important in re-identification. People who are assaulted repeatedly are more inclined to identify with 'victim.' Survivors of child sexual abuse (i.e abuse below the age of 14) are 4 times more likely to identify as victims (Boyle, 2017). These variations in re-identification have implications on the posttraumatic stress experiences. Victims experience more post-traumatic stress after re-identification because of both the stigmatisation and the greater feeling of powerlessness. Survivors face lesser flak from society and their sense of worth is more intact, and hence have established no direct relation with posttraumatic stress. In either case, the very act of re-identification has been seen as a key step to recovery and better psychosocial adjustment. (Botta & Pingree, 1997)

The very basis of these identities are that they aren't the primary identity that the person started out with. They used to be 'employee', 'friend', 'niece' or 'stranger.' Re-identification here becomes a means to mediate distress. *How* the person re-identifies is shaped by the details or characteristics of the event as well as the cultural context that it is placed within. The identities of victim and survivor are central to making sense of non-consensual sexual interactions by adjusting one's worldview. Understanding this also helps us appreciate that despite the more positive associations with the word 'survivor' that make it more appealing than the tag of 'victim', neither identity is morally superior or inferior. Thus, trauma is not only capable of transforming the way a person identifies themselves, but this re-identification can be an active part of recovery.

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Bureaucratic Sabotage, and its Impact on the Aarey Warli Tribal Identity

Ramprasad Mahurkar, SYBA

Introduction

The Aarey Warli tribal identity is an amalgamation of three combined identities: tribal identity, identity from a tribal form of religion, and the Aarey forest-based identity. The identity of this tribe comes anew after finding fault lines in the society and specific gaps in theories regarding the highly contested and controversial notion of tribal identity. A theory of identity concerning India decodes the idea from various angles.

It was implied that the 'tribes' could only be identified based on their separate religion. The tribes recognised themselves as belonging to a supposedly different lifestyle group. Here, the criterion of remoteness does not seem to apply in the case of tribes existing today. In modern Indian society, the concept of tribes has continuously evolved. Some scholars have adopted the evolutionary viewpoint of tribes. Further, occupational relations seem to explain the existence of tribes in the first place. There is also the dimension of space. Specifically, in the case of a constantly urbanising Mumbai, the sense of belonging to a caste or occupation does not suffice to explain the term 'tribe'. In popular culture, the city is considered a melting pot of cultures and the epitome of a poly-segmentary society where social solidarity is seen despite all the community-based distinctions (Béteille, 1986).

Governmental takeover

Over the years, the government has encroached on the land with their legitimacy and the laws which govern the forest, land use, and define the rights of the indigenous forest dwellers. There is another trend of arbitrary control of the land without any detailed explanation. This mostly happens when the opinions of others on the government's side are considered legitimate. In most cases, consent is not taken, and the tribals remain alienated when an extractive project needs to be executed. (Savyasaachi, 2011)

Bureaucratic sabotage

The indigenous support free, prior, informed consent (FPIC) to include their opinion on stopping unethical encroachment. Earlier, such a mechanism was out of the purview of the forest laws in place. With advancements in legislation, the Forest Rights Act came into force in 2006. This bill, in itself, was an action of a neo-liberal government that tried to bolster the country's economic condition. In 2002, forest dwellers were considered 'land encroachers' or criminals, and the State had to prosecute them. The bill contradicted the neo-liberal interventions, but it was understood that it could grant some fundamental rights to the forest dwellers concerning the forest lands where they lived. As the bill was passed, the Ministry of Environment suggested a bureaucratic procedure to consider the opinion of forest-dwelling communities.

Here, it is observed that though the assigned structure was efficient, it still needs to solve the problem. It is said that the problem worsened when one clause of the bill was not implemented as intended. In other words, such a breach expresses the urgent necessities and assumptions that the State has against the will of the forest dwellers.

Sabotage

In the case of the mining project in Keonjhar district, the Odisha Mining Corporation gave a green signal to illegal mining in the district with the most bauxite ore. Here, the fringes of conservation and resource extraction clashed with each other. OMC sabotaged the livelihood and lives of the inhabitants in the district. In this case, the matters of the mining corporation ruled over the interests of the indigenous society. This model of socio-economic marginalisation of the indigenous paves the way for the elites to have the power to access the mineral-rich geographies. Further, this has become a precedent of the eventual breaking down of the rights provided by the Forest Rights Act of 2006. (Choudhury & Aga, 2019) In the context of the Aarey forest, the Mumbai metro project has given the government access to the felling of trees and environmental destruction. In 2019, this trend of the State State was criticised, but it failed to protect the Aarey Warli tribe.

The political scene in Mumbai is such that Aarey has become a space where forest dwellers are evicted or compensated equally. It can be understood as expressing only the State's opinion and knowledge prevails. In this case, often in the Environmental Impact Assessment by the government, the State somehow manages to divert the forest land without any objection. Though there might not be mobilisation to a great extent, the tribe's rights over land are still taken away. Indirectly, the State, by violating the provisions, gets control over the lives of the indigenous. In addition, through this, the State has gained legitimacy over the 'right to kill' the forest-dwelling Warlis.

The dichotomy of two "conservations" and human-animal conflict

It seems that the dichotomy about conservatism is one of the factors responsible for the increased legitimacy of the right to kill the tribes. First, the elites and the middle class serving them have a different notion of conservation, where human intervention appears to be responsible for the destruction of the environment. Meanwhile, conservation is understood to be the communion of man and nature for the indigenous. Here, human intervention and participation are essential for co-existence. In contrast, the elite notion of conservation creates upheaval in the city; thus, the situation has already gone out of control.

Human conflict arises from ideological disputes, particularly regarding conservation practices among elites. They advocate for pristine conservation, excluding humans from forests, and exert control by categorising them as public or private. The Sanjay Gandhi National Park, managed by elites, prohibits commercial activity. Aarey forest's status is ambiguous, compromising tribal ownership while legitimising elite and middle-class control. In 2017, the State proposed a rehabilitation plan for Aarey's Warli tribals but rejected it due to its impact on their way of life and dependence on the forest. Despite bureaucratic oppression, the community remains anti-hegemonic in resisting state-driven decisions (Meshram & Rawat, 2023).

Two significant simultaneous developments in human-animal conflict stem from the Aarey forest. Firstly, governmental actions have disproportionately affected both the middle class and the indigenous. Despite Sanjay Gandhi Park being a notified forest, Aarey is not. While elites may argue that SGNP is adequate for wildlife, Aarey serves as a crucial link between the city and the core forest.

Failure of the State to mitigate human-animal conflict

The propagated story of Jim Corbett hunting down man-eaters has become the popular

opinion, and the bureaucracy has unwittingly passed it down the bureaucracy. The tale of Jim Corbett goes around pronouncing a leopard hunter as a saviour to the people and British bureaucracy. Even today, even if an animal has to be killed or tranquilised, society fears questioning the bureaucracy. One solution for conflict mitigation was leopard trapping. In this method, the leopard is trapped by a net and taken away to another forest. Here, the locals need to be consulted to solve the problem; instead, they acquire legitimacy by force.

In other cases, the leopard(s) are relocated to another forest, but the outcomes are unfavourable. Through the lens of the bureaucracy, relocation has given rise to this conflict, as leopards are pretty territorial and become man-eaters. This becomes a problem for ordinary citizens as they are not adjusted to having a leopard in their surroundings. Even with this, it is clear that the bureaucracy sidelines its efficiency by blaming it on the leopard (Vikas et al., 2022)

Multi-actor remedies

The bureaucracy and ordinary citizens debate on the issue of human-animal conflict. The State exercised its opinion during the EIA in 2018, which paved the way for the Aarey metro car shed. Authorities declared that no biodiversity or leopards are found in the forest. This was one issue with high social solidarity between conservationists and ordinary people. A joint action plan is enacted to tackle this issue. (Arora-Desai, MMRDA seeks green nod for Metro project in Aarey, department defers proposal, 2021)

Instead, the government plans to revitalise Aarey as a tourist spot (Lewis, 2023). On the other hand, the media and environmentalists have expressed their concerns about conserving Aarey as it is (Arora-Desai, 2023). Solutions to this are yet to be developed, even after scientific research. Ordinary people now understand that the Aarey Warli tribe considers the leopard as their religious deity (Bose, 2022).

It is also believed that the knowledge of the indigenous can be put to use in order to combat human-leopard conflicts in Mumbai. It is understood that the tribe has the knowledge and experience of managing leopards. Moreover, this information is not given to the non-tribal majority. Some sections of society recommend collective action with the government and bureaucracy. (Chandramouli & Tandon, 2018)

Summing up, the Aarey Warli identity comes from several factors. With acquiring discriminatory control over forests, the bureaucracy has evolved and has resulted in bureaucratic sabotage and legitimacy over the necropolitical 'right to kill'. (Shakhsari, 2013) However, it is noteworthy that the bureaucracy has tried to normalise the evictions of the tribe, and the issue of human-leopard conflicts emerges. Here, it is seen that the tribe has a successful method of managing leopards as they are their deity. Ultimately, it is understood that this knowledge still needs to be made available to the masses, and the lack of knowledge directs the state bureaucracy not to solve the crisis.

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Exploring Postcolonial Identities in the Global South

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Emergence of the idea of 'Global South'

The term 'Global South' has been doing the rounds recently in political,diplomatic circles and in news rooms around the world (Firstpost, 2023). The concept of the "Global South" was introduced relatively recently in 1969 by Carl Oglesby (Yan, 2023). It suggests that the world is not only divided into East and West but also into North and South. While many are familiar with the East-West divide due to the Cold War (Jfklibrary.org, n.d.), the North-South divide is a newer idea that highlights global inequalities in development and power. The idea of the global south may be new but what it represents is centuries old - the idea that the world has been divided into regions of the rich and on the other hand economically and financially weak nation states. Here, rich would mean economically powerful nations that have a large share in the global economy. This division is not random but it has a geographic pattern, most 'Western' nations are the 'ideal' while Global South

nations are deemed to be 'less ideal'. These divisions have been created by colonialism and imperialism but today continue to oppress us through the colonial legacy of these colonial masters in the form of biased educational systems, cultural hegemony and even media and popular culture. Many have tried to raise these issues and concerns through various arguments like the 'Brandt line' (Lees, 2023), the 'Dependency Theory' (Hidayat, 2023), the 'World Systems Theory' (Martínez, 2021) and are therefore not supported by these institutions and structures and is probably why many of us haven't heard about these theories and ideas. The Brandt line is a concept that categorises the world into richer countries mainly in the northern hemisphere and poorer countries mostly in the southern hemisphere.

Identities of Former British Administered Nations

Most of the nations that belong to the Global South are former colonies that have been subject to Western colonial rule, or we can even say the rule of the Global North. These nations have been able to plunge these economically wealthy Global South nations into poverty through generations of exploitation. The identity of these nations during the colonial years was that of the colonial rulers, the colonised were associated with the ruling empire and were seen as subjects to the larger colonial empire. For Example, prior to 1947 we Indians were not only subjects of the Princely states or the British Raj but we were also subjects of the British Empire which meant that we were under the British Crown (UK Parliament, n.d.), Even though the crown did not play any role in our day to day administration, we were associated with them and with the local cultural identities that we may have held which were also often interfered with and misused to benefit the coloniser (Chakravorty, 2019). The former colony of Gold Coast that later became the Dominion of Ghana was the first African nation to gain independence from the British (Embassy of France in Accra, 2022). The transition from the colonial identity to the post colonial identity included changing the name from Gold Coast to Ghana (Ghana Embassy to the Holy See, n.d.) and it also included reincorporating the traditional and linguistic identities that were held by the Ghanaian people. When we see this transition from the colonial identity to the postcolonial identity there have always been challenges to doing it. These challenges emerge due to structures and institutions that have been created by the Global North to maintain their 'status quo' where they remain dominant. We have seen several instances such as The Fijian coup d'état of 1987 (Qounadovu, 2016) which saw the ouster of the democratically elected government and the disposition of Queen Elizabeth the second as the Queen of Fiji. This action saw several sanctions on Fiji in a synchronised pattern by the UK, Canada and Australia (Wyeth, 2017). Fiji was expelled from the Commonwealth, a way to punish Fiji for self determination and reclaiming their identity (Campbell, 2006).

Identities of Former French Administered Nations

The former French Colony of West Africa was initially a unified colonial administration that governed diverse populations with distinct cultural and traditional identities. Prior to gaining independence, the people of the region engaged in a struggle to assert their unique identities. Following independence, the territory was subsequently divided into several independent states, including Senegal, Mali, Niger, and others. (Huillery, 2023). The fight for the identity and freedom of these nations has been long and hard fought, and there have been several reforms in most of these nations including name change, cultural revival, changes in official language usage and changes in the education systems. These changes are bringing out the true identity of these nations and they are freeing themselves from the identity set by the French. Though now most of these nations have been politically independent for some decades they are still not economically independent when it comes to domestic finance and the economy as compared to the colonisers. The French granted political independence to these states, yet most of them continued the

implementation of the CFA Franc system that had been created by the decree of General de Gaulle under which all French colonies agreed to peg their currencies to the French Franc at a fixed exchange rate (London School of Economics, 2017). Till today these nations are demanding economic self determination and this entire system has been termed as the 'The Franco-African neocolonial alliance' (Pérez, 2022). We are able to witness the shift from postcolonial identity of these African nations into national identities and also their demand for economic identities and freedoms. We have seen this with the military coups in Africa. Since 2020, there have been nine coups in West and Central Africa and the Sahel region (Mensah, 2023). These coups are widely supported by the population and are seen as the nations rising up to take on French Neo-Colonial power and also get rid of corruption and misuse of political power. The UN Secretary-General António Guterres said that "military coups are back," adding that "geo-political divisions are undermining international co-operation and...a sense of impunity is taking hold," (Mwai, 2023). This statement clearly shows the UN failing to understand that proxy democratic governments established by neo-colonial forces have been rejected by the people of Africa and even though military rule is not desired the nations are at least able to decide their path on their own, free from external interference. There was also a situation where after the successful military coup the military junta gave a 48 hour warning to the French ambassador to leave the nation while there were widespread protests outside the French embassy. The French President said that they would not adhere to this deadline and that the ambassador would continue to stay in Niger (Krishnasai, 2023). The French have used the prior agreements and a sizable military presence to continue controlling the region. Most democratic governments in Western Africa have been accused of being hand in glove with the French. The recent Niger coup's justification was done on the fact that President Mohamed Bazoum was a puppet for French interests. The French military support in the region has helped dictators like Chad's former President Idriss Déby and former Burkinabe Président Blaise Compaoré, creating additional challenges for the struggle for democracy. (Mbulle & Cheeseman, 2023) Therefore the EU and the French continue to provide extensive military support to these nations. The EU has said that they would be providing an extensive 616 million euros package to strengthen defence and security of the four coastal countries of the Gulf of Guinea (Africa News, 2023). There have been some who try to justify the French military presence by just stating that if the French continues to withdraw its presence in the region it will lead to these nations allying with Russia and China (Haroche, 2023).

Newly Independent Nations Reclaiming their National and Post Colonial identities

The dissent against the French, British and other colonial governments shows that the fight for identity is not done yet and these nations are desperately trying to rise up and fight for their place in the global order. The recent inclusion of the African Union in the G20 has been done to give these nations a place at the high table. The expansion of BRICS has been done to include more nations from the Global South. The Chinese initiative of the BRI (Blanchard, 2023), India's BIMSTEC (Asia News International, 2023), SAARC (SAARC secretariat, n.d.) are all multilateral organisations aiming to further growth and development in the region. The expansion of the UNSC is something that has long been overdue, and reducing the powers of a few select nations that have the 'veto' power is necessary (The Hindu, 2023). There have also been efforts to create an alternative ideological, political, and economic global order around the Global South which is not centred around the West. The colonial era, dominated by European powers, brought untold suffering and exploitation to many parts of the world, while the West and North prospered through colonial power and rapid industrialization. As Shashi Tharoor said while speaking at Oxford University, "Britain's Industrial Revolution was actually premised upon the deindustrialisation of India" (Sengupta & Marx, 2023). Even today,

some nations rich in resources, like Western African countries, remain among the world's poorest, as colonial legacies persist. For instance, Burkina Faso's gold largely benefits France due to the remnants of colonial-era monetary systems (BBC News, 2023). Structures like the United Nations Security Council, Commonwealth, Lusofonia Games, World Bank, IMF, International Court of Justice maintain colonial influences, with a handful of powerful nations wielding disproportionate control (NCERT, 2022). India, once a British dominion, has participated in these structures, shedding some colonial ties in 1950 when it became a republic (The Commonwealth, 1949). Yet, colonial symbols persist in everyday life, as seen in the BCCI logo's Imperial Star of India or even the 'VT' that we see on our airlines which means Viceroy Territory reflecting the enduring legacy of colonialism in modern society (TOI, 2022).

Conclusion

Nations of the Global South must rise up and take back their identities that existed prior to colonial rule, no nation should be forced to only keep their colonial identity but every nation should get it's national identities by invoking their pre-colonial and postcolonial identities, integrating it with some colonial aspects that are advantageous to them into their national identities. They must work towards national goals and objectives. When we think of ourselves as living in a 'modern' world we are not really, because our world is nowhere close to 'modern', even though the idea of 'modernity' has now become standardised because of western influence. Every nation aims to achieve the standard definition of modernity which would be an industrialised capitalist system because that is what the Global South has seen as working in the Global North. We may have people and leaders who say this is a 'new' or 'modern' world but is it really? because just about a few decades back African nations were fighting for independence, wars are being fought on a daily basis, terrorism, suppression of freedom of speech and expression, rise of authoritative regimes, all of this is happening in front of our eyes. We are at a phase in human history where we have barely moved out of the colonial era identity and are attempting to move slowly into a postcolonial identity in a multilateral world, through multiple negotiations of power.

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From Land to the Sea: The Environment as a Site of Contesting Identity in Israel-Palestine Conflict

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Erik Isberg in an article titled “A New Earth rises” traces the evolution of planetary monitoring to planetary governance reflecting the metamorphosis of the planet as a political category in itself. This “transcultural discourse” (Milton, 1995) has allowed us to uncover the ways in which governments, corporations and scientific institutions work to appropriate public concern and reconfigure the “environment” according to particular political settings (Harper, 2001). The power dynamics operating within social structures tend to replicate and shape the experience of ecological forces and spaces for stakeholders from different positionalities.

Dalits being unable to access water, Environmental Racism in the USA, Tribals being dispossessed of their land etc. are all examples of this process. This article aims to demonstrate how the environment can become a site for contesting identity by analyzing the Israel-Palestine conflict.

To offer historical context for the current state of the conflict, it becomes essential to understand the trajectories of the ideologies of Anti-Semitism, and Zionism. Peter Schäfer (1997) has identified Egypt, Greek and Roman empires as the places where different varieties of hostility towards Jews gained expression in the Ancient World. In the Middle ages Crusades and legislations to prevent landowning ability in a primarily feudalistic society became tools to sustain the hatred (Deutsch, 1945). Brustein & King (2004) opine that Jewish immigration, declining GDP and Jewish support for the Left were some factors responsible for the religious, racial, economic and political strains of Anti Semitism (which varied according to temporal and spatial contexts) before the Holocaust. Consequently, a nationalist movement demanding a separate state for Jews in their "homeland" of Jerusalem called Zionism was birthed with Theoder Herzel being the Founding Father responsible for its proliferation. The task before Zionists was complex - acquiring land from the Ottoman Empire and gaining recognition from colonial powers. Therefore, navigating the intricacies of politics demanded the mobilization of Jews through the use of ideology instead of force.

While a colonial narrative imagines a return to the motherland after a permanent subordination of the Native population, a settler colonial narrative imagines "progress" as displacing the Native population and its "ultimate erasure" (Veracini, 2010, p.101). The idea of this "progressive movement" can be traced back to Herzl's book Altenueland (1902) which conceived the transformation of "desertified [Palestinian] land" into a superior civilization from the future. Although the elements of "technological utopianism" such as modern infrastructure, underground pipelines and railways stemmed from the initial discomfort with the natural environment (Tal, 2008), Herzl's vision became essential to construct the idea of the future of an Israeli State. The realization of this political mandate had to largely depend upon economic resources (Weissbrod, 1981) which can be attributed as one of the reasons for the rise of Labour Zionism. Derived from Hehalutz movement and A.D.Gordon's teachings, Labour Zionism focused on Jewish emigration to Palestine, engagement in physical agricultural labour and a lifestyle of asceticism and self sacrifice eventually leading to a "revival of Jewish culture and Hebrew language in Palestine" (Weissbrod, 1981). Thus the ideological hegemony assumed by Labour Zionism in the 1920s resulted in a significant increase in the number of Palestinian Jewish farmers instead of providing employment to Arab farmers, leading to an intensified association between their Jewish identity and Palestinian land (Tal, 2008). A new Jewish identity emerging in the settler colonial context culminated in systematic attempts to reject the traditional practices of the Indigenous population. In "Jewish Colonisation and the Fellah" , Moshe Smilansky recounts how the Native peasants were portrayed as inexperienced, irresponsible and archaic who could be transformed into "real" farmers with the help of Jewish settlers. The most prominent leader of the Labour party Ben Gurion said "...we do not recognize their [Arabs] right to rule the country to the extent that it has not been built by them and is still awaiting its cultivators" (Ben Gurion in Gorny, 1987; Atran, 1989). A similar rhetoric was employed by the ruling British empire reflected in the statement made by Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill, "left to themselves the Arabs would never in 1,000 years take effective steps toward the irrigation and electrification of Palestine" (Jeffries, 1939, p.443; LeVine, 1995, p. 109). Thus concepts of "Hebrew Land" and "Hebrew Labour" became tools for "monopolising" the Palestinian Labour market as well as excluding Arabs from it by denying them employment (LeVine 1995, p.109) demonstrating the corporatist nature of

settler colonialism (Veracini, 2010). Even though Arab scholars like George Mansour (1937) documented several important facts regarding the labour markets in Palestine at the time, they still subscribed to the supremacy of the Ottoman Empire rendering their counter claims weak compared to the Zionist propaganda. The ideological stances of this early initial phase not only shaped policy attitudes and rhetoric of Jewish leaders but they also continue to shape how Israelis perceive Palestinians to this day (LeVine, 1995).

Lorenzo Veracini in his work "Settler Colonialism : A Theoretical Overview" explains how settler colonies' denial of violence to present an optic of "peaceful settlement" along with the "narcissistic idealisation of the ego and identification with the parents ("the motherland") come together in representations of the settler entity as both an ideal society and as truer and uncorrupted version of the original social body" (p.77). The Israeli environment policy can be seen as a by-product of this consciousness. Known for its modern drip irrigation methods and afforestation policy, it claims to have "made the desert bloom". However the policy of adopting climate change mitigation and green development stances in its diplomatic relations are strategies to advance "settler colonialism, dispossession and de-development" through dissemination of settler knowledge (Hughes et al., 2023). This process of appropriating "eco-friendly" actions to conceal human rights abuses against the Native population is known as greenwashing.

The Jewish National Fund (JNF) was established as a land acquisition agency for settlement of Jews before Israel was created in 1948. Today it claims to have planted more than 250 million trees since its inception in 1901. It continues to be persistently perceived as a "tree planting" organization by Jewish communities worldwide oblivious to its founding objectives of dispossessing Natives of their land (Pappé, 2006, p.228). The JNF engages in greenwashing primarily through two methods - using legal frameworks to expropriate land and displace Indigenous populations (Fields, 2010) as well as omission of local flora and fauna with the aim of Europeanisation and dehistoricization resulting in erasure of Palestinian identity (Sasa, 2022). The planting of Eucalyptus and Aleppo pine trees cause damage to ground nesting birds and local species of shrubs and grasses necessary for sustaining sheep. The Aleppo pines were the reason behind the widespread forest fires of 2010 because the thorns, trunks and acorns burn at rapid rates, destroying the root system and in turn the overall productivity of the land. The devaluing of desert systems underscores the Western colonial understanding of the environment which is imbued with the power of deciding what constitutes Life and Non-Life (Salih & Corry, 2020). Elizabeth Povinelli terms this as "geontopower" (applying Focualt's Biopwer to ecological settings). According to her, Western liberal colonialism tends to conceptualize the "Desert" as "all things perceived and conceived as denuded of life" (p.16). Such interpretations allow Israel to co-opt its afforestation, agricultural and irrigation policies that actively cause the "disappearance of a human landscape" (Benevisti, 2002) into attempts aimed at preserving Nature.

A United Nations report titled "Environmental Conditions, Resources, and Conflicts" has laid out the complexity of interactions between major stakeholders (Israeli Government and Palestine Liberation organization) based on social, economic and political factors that drive conflicts in Jordan and Gaza. The most immediate material consequences of these conflicts pose financial challenges to Palestinian farmers. In recent times, this frustration with economic conditions has been capitalized by an extremist group Hamas. The clashes between Hamas and Palestine Liberation Organization along with other factors such as inadequate water supply infrastructure, limitations on import of resources like pumps and construction materials, decreased energy supply have intensified the water crisis in Gaza (Efron et al., 2019). Amidst this, Israel continues to encourage its citizens to migrate to these

borders which are heavily militarised due to persistent instability, again leading to an expansion of Illegally Occupied Areas, especially after 2010s (United Nations Conference On Trade And Development, 2015).

Foregrounding Israeli greenwashing practices through analysing ideology and material backgrounds allows us to recognize the nuances in functioning of settler colonialism as a system. Patrick Wolfe's work "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native" regards invasion as a structure instead of an event. His use of the term "logic of elimination" which is the rationale justifying "dissolution of native societies" becomes the organising principle for this structure (p. 388). The "grammar of race" which delves into exploring the racialization of Africans in America ties in perfectly with Fannonian arguments regarding colonisation. According to Frantz Fanon (1968) "it is the settler who has brought the native into existence and perpetuates his existence" in a phenomenological sense that homogenises the type of colonisers while maximising the differences between colonised. Although I believe we must be conscious of the varying strains of colonialism, Fanon's conceptualization provides valuable insights into the process of identification between "settler" and "native" experiences (Krautwurst, 2003). The coloniser's desire to occupy the position of Other and prove their indigeneity consequently leads to appropriation of the original Native identity, practices and landscapes which Wolfe (2006) considers as a positive outcome as it ensures the reproduction and permanence of Indigenous identity even in creation of new structures. Thus I argue that bridging the interpretations of Wolfe and Fannon, we can chart the "continuities, discontinuities, adjustments and departures" (p.402) from the organizing principle of "logic of elimination" that usually manifests as "structural genocide" could transmute into different mechanisms based on ideology and identity like Israeli greenwashing. Additionally, placing the settler colonial system in the overarching dominant political and economic systems, could prove to be an effective window to deconstruct the routinisation of White Supremacy and its discourses in the world we inhabit.

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