Detail from Sudhir Patwardhan,'Tree', 1995

School of Media and Cultural Studies
Tata Institute of Social Sciences

RE-IMAGINING FUTURES
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Contents

Editorial Note

This issue of SubVersions brings together work presented at the three-day international seminar *DigiNaka: Where the Local Meets the Digital* organised by the School of Media and Cultural Studies in January 2016. The advent of the digital and growing access to the Internet in India, along with the availability of cheap devices such as mobile phones has brought about an explosion of user-mediated creativity across various platforms. Simultaneously, the digital divide reproduces and intensifies various social hierarchies of gender, caste, class and region. The papers in this issue explore these fractures in myriad ways – from a critical examination of the idea of *jugaad* ("pragmatic workaround" (Rai 2012))*,* to a subversive reading of the figure of the pirate; and the ways in which the spaces of social networking are deployed variously, to recreate tradition in the modern market, to negotiate an alternate understanding of women's bodies and allow complex articulations of selfhood.

Rai, A. (2012). On the Jugaad Image: Embodying the Mobile Phone in India. *Postmodern Culture*, Volume 23, No. 1, September 2012.

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Piratical Encounters:

The Pirate and Mass Mobilisation in the Popular Tamil Imagination

Bhargavi Narayanan

Abstract

This paper attempts to formulate the beginnings of a piratical paradigm that is attuned to particular local, and political contexts. It traces the figure of the pirate through popular Tamil magazines and movies from the mid-1950s and 60s to the present and highlights the changing nature of representation of the pirate. Each figuration of the pirate corresponds to and offers a nuanced insight into socio-economic and cultural anxieties of the time: of post-independent, modern India, the Dravidian politics of the 60s and the precarity of labour in a globalised world.

Through a close reading of local articulations of the figure of the pirate, this paper generates a non-western understanding of the pirate, not as a common enemy of all, as argued by Cicero, but as a mutable, plastic figure that can negotiate local contingencies. Piratical practices, by extension, lose their villainous connotation and become complex acts of negotiation that can help navigate the penumbra of the global.

Key Words: Piracy, Political Society, Subaltern-Popular.

The unique feature of a pirate culture, Ravi Sundaram argues, is its ability to "disrupt existing technologies of control" and mediate a parasitical relationship between media technologies and infrastructures (2009:12). As a result, pirate media forms have a life, even a second life, of their own (ibid: 2). More importantly, it fosters an urban everyday that no longer can be characterised as strictly modern. The strategies of negotiation this pirate culture enables depend on fluid movements

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between visibility and invisibility, between provincialism and cosmopolitanism, and between legitimacy and illegitimacy. These instances of legitimate extra-legal practices are what Partha Chatterjee defines as characteristic of "Political Society" – the realm that can effectively encompass the agential practices of the subaltern (2011: 14).

My interest in Sundaram's theorisation of pirate modernity is in its ability to locate the piratical as a set of practices that a/effect complex exchanges, circulations, and experiences of media assemblages. It expands the idea of media piracy from the use and circulation of media texts without legal permission of the 'owner' to think about a set of practices that animate urban life-worlds. In doing so, his work re-orients the idea of piracy from thinking about media use(r) to media publics, where models of social totality, questions of agency, and politics of the subaltern find no easy answers. While this is a compelling theorisation of the piratical and what it (the piratical) has become (and is becoming) in urban India, there is little exploration of what or who exactly is a pirate. Adrain Johns' seminal text *Piracy* is perhaps one of the few comprehensive texts that provide a historical engagement with the idea of piracy as it emerged in the western world. Until the seventeenth century, he argues, that "the misappropriation of intellectual creations were not deemed as acts of piracy as the combination of commercial and cultural ingredients that would produce a concept of piracy did not yet exist" (2009:19). It was not until the emergence of printing and literate publics who claimed a powerful position in the discussion of 'common good' that authorial transgressions were seen as consistent with acts of piracy (ibid:19,21,22); acts which were not in the interest of the common good – acts that in Daniel Heller-Roazan's words made them 'the enemy of all'. Johns' historical account is relevant because it establishes a) the emergence (or recognition) of piracy as seamlessly related to the emergence of a publics - their formation, mutation and mobilisation and b) the relationship between the acts of piracy and the dawn of modernity heralded by the technological innovations and cultural use (ibid: 2009:329). His argument is a *tour de force* in developing a piratical paradigm that can be attuned to the popular and their engagement with modernity. However, in focusing largely on the evolution and coming into being of piracy in the western world, his account enables a theorisation of Modernity (and a popular) that does not take into account the different experiences of modernities across the globe. This paper seeks to expand Jones' theorisation of a piratical paradigm by tailoring it to particular experiences of modernity and its becoming in urban centres of the third world, or in Sundaram's words, of pirate modernities. It begins by asking what or who the pirate was in a particular local context; in this case the Tamil context. In other words,

what is the relationship between the Tamil popular imagination of the sea faring pirate and the range of practices that we identify as piratical today? Is there a way to unentangle this seamless transition from pirates at sea to the piratical of our urban everyday that Sundaram theorises? At stake in such a question is the potential for the formulation of a modernity that is rooted in the local while also aware of larger global exchanges.

Thus, this paper begins a re-mapping of the piratical paradigm by focussing on the figure of the pirate. While this is by no means as exhaustive an approach undertaken by Adrian Jones in his text, this paper, in highlighting the sheer potentiality that is invested in the figure of the pirate in the popular Tamil imagination, makes a convincing case for more expansive work that would delve into the historical becoming of piracy in situated cultural and geo-political contexts. These particular accounts of the piratical, when taken together, would make for a much more nuanced paradigm that can account for unique experiences of modernities.

The project of repurposing the pirate to make legible complex socio-political interactions, is however, first and foremost, a problem of translation. In the Tamil context for example, the pirate translates to sea bandits (*kadal kollaikarargal*), who are in the same class as any other bandits. They do not quite fit Cicero's description of the pirate as the 'common enemy of all'. Media piracy automatically translates to theft, leaving no room to exploit the potentialities of the piratical. The repurposing of the pirate then, must begin with local representations and narratives of the piratical.

Therefore, I begin by tracing the ways in which the Tamil popular imagination has framed and fantasised about the pirate, and how these reflect particular socio-cultural anxieties of the time. My enquiries range from popular Tamil texts that deploy the figure of the pirate from mid 1950s and 1960s to the present. The first piratical figure I engage features in the serialised story of the Sea Queen (*Kadal Rani*) by Sandilyan. Here, the pirate is crucial in the fight against white colonisers in the western coast of India. Next, I discuss M.G. Ramachandran's portrayal of the pirate in the movie *Aayirathil Oruvan* (One in Thousand, B.R. Panthulu, 1965) wherein his brief stint aboard a pirate ship enables him to mobilise a small army against the dictatorial regime. Finally, I analyse *Maryan* (The Immortal, Bharat Bala, 2013) and its preoccupations with the piratical. These mutating images of the pirate, I will show, are a far cry from Cicero's definition of the pirate as "the common enemy of all". The pirate of the Tamil imagination can be used to expel white colonisers from India (as in the first instance), a mass mobiliser (as in the second instance) or can make precarious livelihood of migrant

labourers (as in the third instance). S/he is a malleable, plastic force, full of potential and fecund possibilities.

The relationship between Sundaram's theorisation of piratical practices and a local piratical imagination is precisely this idea of mutability that emerges as central to the idea of the pirate. The contingency that is afforded to the figure of the pirate is key to the formulation of a piratical paradigm that is invested in engaging the chaos of modern, everyday life in the city; it can be useful to think about two seemingly contradictory ideas – the subaltern and the popular. In particular, it can be useful to think about the nature of engagement between the subaltern and mass media – what are sites and conditions of these engagements? In what manner do they affect the urban everyday? What kinds of mobilisation do they enable and what are the politics of those mobilisations? Using the piratical as a crucial node in this discussion, I argue that a theorisation of the subaltern-popular is in order. I show that a piratical paradigm can draw these two seemingly disparate analytical categories into a generative discourse on the global, or more importantly, on the penumbra of the global.

The Pirate and Robin Hood

Before I launch into an in-depth analysis of the texts, I want to caution against a confusion between the figure of the pirate and Robin Hood. Each of these texts in the vigilante and emancipatory qualities they ascribe to the figure of the pirate make her/him closely resemble the characteristics of Robin Hood and his penchant to help the common people suffering from the reign of a ruthless dictator. G. Dhananjayan notes the frequent occurrence of this trope in Tamil cinema, sometimes within the Tamil nationalist context beginning with *Malaikkallan* (Thief of the Hills, S.M. Sriramulu Naidu, 1954). Based on a popular novel by the same name, penned by Nammakkal Ramalingam Pillai, a nationalist poet, this film starred M.G. Ramachandran (former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, MGR henceforth) and was a huge success. He identifies films even as recently as 2007 that feature protagonists who would steal from the rich to help the poor and further a particular social cause (2014:112). Each of the three protagonists however, while similar to this general trope, have striking differences that mark them as a pirate rather than Robin Hood. In the case of Sandilyan's *Kadal Rani*, the key piratical figure Ratna while working for a larger social cause of keeping the English off the Malwa waters (and plunders and loots to help her people), is granted legitimacy by

the State during this time; a strategic alliance with the Maratha administration that pardons her vigilante acts thus far. Interestingly, while she works with the Marathas for a brief period of time, once the alliance is over, she becomes the independent Sea Queen, once again plundering and looting and getting on the wrong side of the realm. This mutability of her relationship with the crown wherein she can sometimes be a valuable ally and at others be a wanted vigilante, makes her very unlike the Robin Hood narrative of always being at odds with the State/authority/dictator. In this she fulfills one of Daniel Heller-Roazen's key descriptions of the pirate – as a figure who is in a region beyond territorial jurisdiction (of the Maratha king in this case), who may not be identified with an established state and who collapses criminal and political categories (2009:10,11). Similarly, in *Aayirathil Oruvan* MGR as a pirate is outside the territorial administration of the *Neidhal Naadu* and its dictatorial leader, does not identify himself with a particular state (even till the very end when he is offered the crown!), and as an independent doctor, slave, and a pirate, defies being categorised in any one political category. These protagonists operate on a moral legitimacy that is quite different from the legal limitations and in doing so, fulfill the fourth and most important condition in Heller-Roazen's description of the pirate – they transform the concept of a war (ibid: 11); the battle in each of these cases is as much a moral struggle as it is an external conflict for power and supremacy.

Thus, while there are superficial similarities between the piratical figures I discuss and the general Robin Hood trope in that they all ultimately want to serve a social cause, it is counter productive to collapse the distinctions between the two. The confusion the pirate figure engenders, in its ability to transform and rise to the contingency of the socio-politics of the time, and its reliance on legitimacy rather than legality are precisely the strengths that heighten its potential to enable an intimate and nuanced encounter with the popular.

The Pirate and Colonial Threats

The first text I will discuss is the historical romance 'Sea Queen' (*Kadal Rani*) by Sandilyan. Serialised in the popular Tamil magazine *Kalki,* Sea Queen must have first been printed in the late 1950s to early 1960s[1]. Set in the early 18th Century, the story revolves around the historic Arabian sea wars

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[1] It is hard to arrive at an exact time frame for the story at this point because I was unable to access the original magazines they were serialized in. The 1983 edition of the complete text I read for this paper contained a preface where Sandilyan thanks editor and friend *Kalki* Rajendran, who took over from *Kalki* Krishnamurthy, the founder and

between the Marathas and the English under the Maratha general Kanhoji Angre. General Peshwa Bajirao is determined to rid the seas of both English Pirates and English Governors who raid and seek to establish political control over Maratha. He devices a complex plot wherein the Pirates and Governors are led to believe that they are each betrayed by the other and fight against each other. Our hero is Indrajit Ananth who, acting under Peshwa Bajirao's orders, convinces English pirates England and Taylor to participate in a battle between Captain Macrae (English Governor) and the Marathas. They are aided in these efforts by La Bouche the French Pirate and the legendary Long John Silver. The one complication in this elaborate plot is that the Malwa king does not necessarily control the Arabian sea waters. He is king in name only. The true control of the waters lies with Ratna, head of the Sindudurg and Vizayadurg forts. Her fleet controls all movement around the waters and since she is already successful in protecting her people against raids and foreign political control, she is hesitant to aid Ananth in his quest. The plot focuses on how Ananth seduces/convinces Ratna to aid his quest and successfully executes the General's plan.

Although the story is of questionable literary merit and is known more for its titillating seductions than historical accuracy, my interest in using it to map the trajectory of a piratical paradigm in the popular imagination lies in the range of piratical figures it introduces. Indeed, a lot of Sandilyan's historical romances feature the Arabian Sea wars and include a pirate or two in the narrative. This is however, one of those unique stories where Sandilyan features Long John Silver, the legendary pirate of R.L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island* with his large parrot and wooden leg to boot. In the preface to the edition I use for analysis, Sandilyan acknowledges his fascination with *Treasure Island* and his debt to Stevenson for enabling such a provocative piratical imagination. One of the key reasons why I chose this text for analysis over other novels, such as 'Lamp Lit with Water' (*Jala Deepam*) which also feature pirates, is this seamless import of Long John Silver into the popular Tamil imagination. The swashbuckling pirate with his romantic nature and dangerous lifestyle is made accessible. Because of his ability to speak many tongues (he switches between English and Marathi, all of which is written in Tamil) the white, English pirate, befitting Cicero's description as the 'common enemy of all' is brought to life in all his glory. Here, his ambiguous morality and unpredictability in interpersonal

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editor of *Kalki* magazine after 1954. Since most people I interviewed who had read Sandilyan said they remembered reading his novels in early 1960s, it is safe to assume the time period between mid 1950s and mid 1960s as the possible period of first print.

relationships have political consequences beyond sea faring adventures and treasure hunts. They play a crucial role in setting up the Pirates England and Taylor against the English Governors.

The first time we meet Long John Silver is at the Sailors' Inn at Sindudurg. Indrajit Ananth trounces Captain England in a skirmish and convinces him to accompany him to meet a 'mutual friend', who is of course Long John Silver. It is Ananth's relationship with Silver that eventually convinces Captain England to join his fight against the English Governors and Marathas (it is later revealed that Ananth's treason is a deliberate tactic to turn the Pirates against the Governors).

At this secret meeting at Sailors' Inn, we are introduced to yet another and arguably the most interesting pirate figure – Ratna herself. Until this meeting, Ratna is a sensual, attractive heroine who captures the interest of Ananth right away. Here however, Captain England introduces her as a pirate "of the same class as their Anne Bonny and Mary Read"[2]. The key characters and the alliances that they will eventually forge/betray are conditioned by Silver's presence. He lends credibility to Ananth's cover and adds intrigue to the budding romance between Ratna and Ananth.

The most fascinating part of this meeting at Sailors' Inn is however, the unveiling of Ratna's source of authority and leadership in Sindudurg and Vizayadurg. When England introduces her as a formidable pirate, she angrily denounces this description and declares that she "is not the same class as you (Silver and England) and does not plunder or raid for pleasure or gain". Her motive is to "prevent foreign ships from entering the waters of Sindudurg, Vizayadurg and other coastal towns so that they don't have the opportunity to raid the land or the resources"[3]. No ship shall pass by the coastal region or even approach the coast of Malwa without her permission. Even the mighty Cassandra led by dangerous pirates like England and Taylor is anchored 30 miles away from the coast, awaiting permission to enter.

Ratna's part in the larger scheme of the story becomes clear. Ananth clearly needs her co-operation to let Cassandra and other English ships enter the Malwa waters to execute his set up. What is interesting though, is the part where he tries to convince her to co-operate. Formulated with Sindudurg as the centre of action, the battle plan is definitely authorised by royal decree. Ratna however, hesitates because like she says, she is already doing a fine job of keeping the English off

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[2] My translation from text.

[3] Ibid

the waters of Malwa and does not see the need to be part of this plan. Ananth convinces her by saying that this is for the larger good of the entire territory and that if they take care of the English on water, General Peshwa Bajirao with his land army, is more than capable of vanquishing the English. Hailed thus to be part of the greater cause and because she is already half in love with Ananth, Ratna agrees.

What is evident from this interaction though, is that Ratna is the 'Queen' not by royal decree. She is not royalty nor waiting in line to ascend the throne. Her status is self made, based on the organic resistance she organised against the foreigners for self-preservation. The crown, recognising her clout, instead of flouting her authority in the waters, seek her help in establishing an 'English free' Malwa. Although what she does are piratical acts, as plainly described by England, they are granted legitimacy by the State. The rhetoric of self-preservation adds credence to this legitimacy, setting her actions above the invisible, shifting line of morality.

The female piratical figure, along with Ananth, is one of the principal protagonists of the story. Although debatable whether the story allows for a truly feminist piratical imagination, it is definitely more exciting in the spectrum of piratical figures it introduces[4] and its discussions of what or who a pirate is. England, Taylor and Silver are clearly on one end of the spectrum: white, male and philandering. Ratna, is at the other end: brown, female and driven by a cause. Right in the middle is Ananth: brown, male but of questionable allegiance.

In late 1950s, coming in the wake of other historical novels which spoke of the rich heritage of the country[5], it is not surprising that this novel chose to build on the glory of the nation and her triumphs against the English. But what is surprising is the heroic role the rogue/pirate played in restoring national honour. Not only were Ratna's vigilante acts seen as heroic and desirable (both morally and sexually) but were also crucial in defeating the English. The figure of the pirate was not

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[4] As opposed to *Jala Deepam* which revolves around one male protagonist and his trials at sea.

[5] I refer here to writer Kalki's novels, all of which were hugely popular historicals that revolved around the ancient kingdoms of South India, notably the Cholas. As a freedom fighter he was hugely nationalistic and his works evoked a Tamil Nationalistic sentiment in their retelling of the glorious days of Cholas. These novels were also published in the 1950s, serialized in the Tamil magazine *Kalki.* Sandilyan worked for *Kumudam* the rival magazine to *Kalki* and it was inevitable that he would also write historicals (though he did write other short stories, a biography and a book on the development of cinema).

equal to being amoral. As long as they served a common good, or prioritised the welfare of the people, they were even granted legitimacy by the State.

The pirate as a mass mobiliser

The role of the rogue brown pirate, who acts for the good of the smaller communities the State has no time to care for, without challenging the king's authority undergoes a radical change in the 1960s film *Aayirathil Oruvan* (One in a Thousand). Here, the pirate is not just a hero – but a mass mobiliser. Not only does he mobilise the subaltern (at the level of the story) into an organised revolution against the dictator of the State, but also literally mobilises the people of Tamil Nadu to vote for his political party during the state and central elections. In this film the pirate is imagined as part of the subaltern movement, as in fact, crucial to the liberation of the Dalits. And because the film was one of the important hits of MGR that mobilised fans as electoral publics, it is here that the idea of the subaltern-popular finds most purchase.

Released in 1965, *One in a Thousand* starred MGR and J. Jayalalitha (also formerly the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu). MGR is a humble doctor who spends his time helping the poor and underprivileged. He lives in *Neidhal Naadu* – a land ruled with an iron fist by a heartless dictator. One evening a grievously wounded rebel seeks his help and MGR helps him recover, knowing that the act can get him imprisoned. On cue, he is imprisoned and with the entire contingent of rebels, sold into slavery to the owner of a Virgin Island (*Kanni Theevu*). The rest of the film is about how he emancipates the slaves, mobilises an army, and rids *Neidhal Naadu* of its dictator.

This story of liberation from slavery and dictatorship is facilitated by a pirate ship. As MGR and his fellow rebels are working on Virgin Island, they are attacked by pirates and taken prisoners by them. MGR wins over the pirate leader and his crew and convinces them to fight against the dictator. The figurations of the pirate are drastically different from the earlier text. Although portrayed as sly and conniving, the pirates have their own code of conduct which is infinitely less selfish than that of the dictator. All treasure and loot are to be divided equally and the leader is shown to follow the law of the land, even when it is inconvenient to him[6]. But most importantly, it shows that the pirate does

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[6] This is shown in one of the many confrontations between the pirate leader and MGR. The pirate leader falls in love with the princess of Virgin Islands who is under MGR's protection. When he tries to take her to his palace, a sword fight ensues. The princess, to avoid anyone getting hurt admits that they are living as man and wife and by the law

not necessarily have to act without morals. Once MGR joins the pirates, he raids only other pirate ships, stating that that would provide them with the most bounty. The manoeuvre serves a dual purpose. Not only does it keep his hands clean (from the perspective of the viewer who knows MGR is being forced into piracy), but also wins over his pirate comrades. This pirate with morals uses the booty from his treasure hunts to fund the rebellion back home. Such a manoeuvre not only furthers the potentialities of the piratical, but embraces it and approves of it wholeheartedly. Nowhere is it clearer than in the last song sequence of the film aboard the pirate ship. Sung after the pirate chief is turned to benefit MGR's crusade against the dictator, during their voyage to meet the dictator at sea for the final showdown, the song is almost a victory march. The lyrics call for liberation and freedom for subalterns everywhere, that liberation is a right and entitlement. The visuals communicate this message. Everyone is singing happily, with all work equally distributed, without discrimination. It is important that this egalitarian life is made possible first aboard the pirate ship. The pirates with their community of brotherhood and non-tyrannical, non-discriminatory practices are the perfect champions. The revolution would begin here in this manner.

Although the entire song is iconic in the way it is visually and lyrically constructed, one of the most poignant scenes is when MGR is swinging from the ropes of the ship calling for liberation. In the background, you can see the pirate flag (red with skulls) billowing in the wind. This iconic image occurs more than once in the song and each time it appears, it pushes the idea that liberation and the piratical are not antithetical. In fact, the pirate can be an essential part of the liberation, perhaps even central to it. The entire song is thus also a celebration of the piratical possibilities. The pirate is no longer a philanderer, a common enemy. He is the hope of the subaltern, their salvation, their saving grace. In that brief moment aboard the pirate ship, the pirate is the ultimate aspiration. He is a mass mobiliser – one who can unite the subaltern into revolution.

As one of the long line of films that espoused the values of the Dravidian movement and served as propaganda for one of the most prominent political parties of South India (DMK), the film was also speaking to the electoral publics. The mobilisation that the film achieves is two fold – the pirate rallying his mates into battle and MGR charming his fans to vote for the DMK. The iconic pirate flag he appears against from time to time in the last song sequence discussed earlier is black and red

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of the land should be considered married. This admission though false, and clearly unwelcome for the pirate lord, makes him leave her alone.

– the official colours of the DMK party. If in the earlier text Ratna was granted legitimacy for her piratical acts by the State, in this, MGR, by virtue of this juxtaposition, becomes the State. The pirate leader, the mobiliser, and the icon of the DMK all merge and become identifiable with each other, and piracy and its potentiality are seen as central to the well being and functioning of the State. Indeed, in the final scene, MGR reinstates the now reformed dictator as head of the State and the pirate who held them prisoners as his right hand man. The entire film is thus an ode to revolution and mobilisation – and the potential of the pirate to aid in liberation.

Pirate and the Penumbra of the Global

Although the nature of the piratical engagement with the State is different in both these texts it is significant that the National is the dominant frame of reference in both. In 'Sea Queen' although the white pirates and governors invoke the global imbalances of power, it is still within the framework of the National. The victory of Ratna and Ananth reflect the victory of Marathas over the English, symbolising a victory of the National over the Imperial. Written in Tamil, with flagrant Sanskrit quotes from Kalidas and embedded in the context of historical romance, couched in lengthy prefaces that attest to the veracity of the historical facts by the author, these novels evoked in the mind of the readers, an image of India engaged in glorious battles with the West. In the MGR film, the global is barely hailed. Except perhaps in one line of the last song sequence discussed where MGR sings, "In all lands where there are slaves, we need freedom".[7] The piratical figure however fits within this national imagination in different ways. The differences are in who and what constitutes piratical practices and their place in the national imaginary. From aiding in national wars against the English, the pirate can now be relied on to fight local wars of liberation. He is truly now (from the 'national' framework) the inside outsider, flitting between legitimacy and illicit-ness.

Both these imaginations of the pirate are starkly different from the recent renditions. The film *Maryaan* (The Immortal), directed by Bharath Bala, starring Dhanush and Parvathy released in 2013. Set in a small fishing hamlet, the first half of the story is all about how Maryaan (Dhanush) and Panimalar (Parvathy) fall in love. However, because of the immense amount of money Panimalar's father owes a loan shark, Maryaan decides to work as a contract labourer in Sudan, Africa. After two

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[7] My translation.

years of hard work when he is on his way back, he and his friends are kidnapped by Sudanese mercenaries. The rest of the story is about if and how Maryaan makes it back to India. Although the only reference to pirates is the Somali pirates in passing, the Sudanese terrorists are projected as piratical. With ransom demands to the company Maryaan and his friends work for, an uninhibited life style and a pendant of skull and bones to mark the leader, these Sudanese mercenaries could well be the modern figuration of the pirate.

In one brief conversation with the hero, they even mention the Somali pirates and justify their cause saying what they do is not terrorism, but piracy – an act of survival in the face of exploitation by powerful first world countries. And their 'justification' or legitimising rhetoric for piracy is similar to that espoused by Ratna in 'Sea Queen'. The difference is that in Sea Queen, she is granted the legitimacy of the State. That such legitimacy is not granted to these "terrorists" exposes how and why, and in whose interests it is that they remain illegitimate. The frame of reference, first the Imperial and then the National, is now finally the Global. And the fantasy of the pirate is explicitly racial. The piratical practices, in the case of the Somali pirates, or in that of such "terrorists" emerge as the penumbral, as partially legible infra politics (to use a James Scottian term) that highlight the unequal processes of globalisation and their exploitation of a global subaltern.

The piratical is thus the hyphen holding the subaltern-popular together. The figure of the pirate is a plastic, malleable force who can engage reading publics and fans alike to convey particular political concerns. Understanding these figurations in the popular imagination is important to building a piratical paradigm – a paradigm that can be comfortable with ambiguity, liminality, and tenuous visibility. Investigating piratical practices to theorise urban circulations and publics could benefit with an examination of such textual encounters of the piratical – encounters that capture popular imaginations and circulate potentialities of the pirate.

Bhargavi Narayanan is a Ph.D. candidate in the Film and Media Studies Department at UC Santa Barbara. She has an M.A. in Media and Cultural Studies from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India. Her dissertation rethinks the process of mediation using ephemeral infrastructures that emerge around particular media events as apertures to understanding media publics.

SUB\versions

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Jugaad Phone

Shruthi Parthasarathy and Durgesh Solanki

Abstract

The use of technology and smart phones in particular, is rapidly growing. With an increase in smart phone usage there is also an increasing dependence on apps and app based services. These apps have become an everyday necessity for efficiency and often bridge the gap between the buyer and the seller. In this paper we will be examining a popular app, Uber, to explore their pervasive presence, the origin of this innovation and technology, its impact on the market, labour and the consumer, and explore what is so Jugaad about it. This app has become essential in providing the basic and important service of transportation to the consumer but on the other hand it also surpasses state norms with a subversive informality. There is a new form of technological Jugaad being produced and we examine its nature and implications in this paper.

Key Words: Jugaad, Informality, Creative Destruction, Sharing Economy, Innovation

Introduction

The term Jugaad has its roots in Punjabi and Hindi lexicon. It has a long list of adjectives that work as its definition. It could be a quick fix, a temporary-fix, ingenuity, a kludge, a tactic, a shortcut, an adjustment, a hack, an innovation, and finally as oft quoted a means of survival. The term held a special interest to us as it not only embodies the above terms but most importantly refers to informality. The informality manifests from the very act of Jugaad. To do or perform Jugaad is to find a solution that might not necessarily be available within the formal. This paper attempts to understand this concept of Jugaad in relation to the production and utilisation of contemporary technology.

The ideology of Jugaad and Disruption

Most often, the literature around Jugaad describes it as a strategy seen in rural India, utilised by the 'poor and illiterate' masses which can now be deployed in the world of corporate management. The curiosity towards Jugaad stems from the fact that it is seen as an act of survival which is also a stroke of ingenuity and the spark that is needed for innovation. We seek to frame it as an ideology as there has been a fervent peddling of Jugaad as a solution for technological innovation/invention. We will elucidate how a discourse has been built, particularly in the fields of management and business, on the revolutionary potential of Jugaad. This is however within the framework of capitalist globalisation where Jugaad seems to be theorised as a replicable ideology for profit creation through innovation.

One such paper mentions 'Jugaad' (a word taken from Hindi which captures the meaning of finding a low cost solution to any problem in an intelligent way) is a new way to think constructively about innovation and strategy… Jugaad is about extending our (Western) understanding of entrepreneurial spirit (in the traditional Schumpeterian style) (Bobel, 2012).

Another paper titled *Jugaad - From 'Making Do' and 'Quick Fix' to an Innovative, Sustainable and Low-Cost Survival Strategy at the Bottom of the Pyramid* defines it as an experience that an ambiguous 'bottom of the pyramid' goes through (Singh, Gupta & Mondal, 2012). The paper exclaims at the genius of the 'poor and illiterate' to come up with solutions for survival. It looks at Jugaad as a 'strategy to sustain a livelihood in society'. The authors examine it as a manifestation in the multiple spheres of existence of a 'bottom-of-pyramid' person's life. The term 'bottom of pyramid' has been borrowed from the works of C.K. Prahlad and Stuart L. Hart titled *The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid* (2002). The term refers particularly to the economically poor, based on purchasing power parity. It does not examine other critical systems of discrimination that create and compound with the economic one such as caste or gender. Our discomfort in the universal monolithic usage of the term Jugaad also stems from this fact, that oppression and discrimination are thought to be only on the basis of class.

The authors also mention how the rural poor, especially those who perform the jobs of construction work, hawking and house cleaning are the ones to use Jugaad in their everyday lives. A miniscule observation of their everyday life has been done to corroborate this by categorising every act of survival as Jugaad. Even acts such as storing water in earthenware as a reserve and to keep it cold is looked at as Jugaad. They inevitably end up exoticising the struggle against oppression and discrimination. There is a clear and vulgar appropriation of these struggles by

renaming them as a new approach to innovation. By looking at it as a new phenomenon rather than as a response to structural violence, it negates and silences these oppressions. As with any appropriation it takes on the good bits, the 'innovation', while conveniently ignoring caste and gender based biases. The authors of the paper go on to say "however, in business and management, such practices are evolving as innate, grass-root level innovations aroused due to limited access to capital, resources and infrastructure. Considering the overall concept, Jugaad can be broadly regarded as a low-cost innovation, a coping mechanism, a quick-fix solution and sometimes an unethical way of getting anything done" (ibid). The skeleton of centuries of oppression and dehumanisation remains hidden in this reinvention of struggles as Jugaad, or alternately named radical innovation. The danger here is that of romanticising poverty and thereby the caste, gender and sexuality based oppression causing it. This is not a reduction of the intent but a remark on the habit to automatically romanticise certain practices of survival as nouveau technology.

It is also pertinent to understand the background to the term 'bottom of pyramid'. C.K. Prahalad and Stuart L. Hart have used this term to elucidate how to fight poverty by creating profits. They suggest that an ideal solution for the eradication of poverty lies in producing for the poor and not the 'best customers'. They write, "the real source of market promise is not the wealthy few in the developing world, or even the emerging middle-income consumers: It is the billions of aspiring poor who are joining the market economy for the first time" (2002). They not only seek to eradicate poverty but make a profit, a fortune, while doing so. The important tool to achieve this is innovation. This innovation has a couple of prefixes attached to it. It is touted to be radical and disruptive.

Both the papers conflate the idea of poverty and innovation and the Frankenstein born out of this wedding is Jugaad. The claims of poverty alleviation are made by these theoreticians, however the onus of this is put on those at the 'bottom of the pyramid'. Those who are expected to eradicate poverty are the entrepreneurs and innovators from that location. However the marketability and the mass consumption of this idea will and has been performed by these very theoreticians whose locations are clearly not at the bottom of anything. An article in the *Economist* on disruptive innovation reiterates this contradiction as it tries to argue for this method while placing any emancipatory act on the shoulders of those who are performing this Jugaad. It says "but perhaps the most surprising disruptive innovations will come from 'bottom-of-the-pyramid' entrepreneurs who are inventing new ways of delivering education and health-care for a fraction of the cost of current market leaders" (The Economist, 2015).

Creative destruction and disruptive innovation

The popular proponent of the idea of disruptive innovation is Clayton M Christensen. In his book *The Innovator's Dilemma*, he introduces the idea of disruptive innovation as opposed to sustaining technology where there is constant evolution of a commodity so as to feed the customer with newer and better innovations constantly (1997). He observes this trend in various industries and has pointed out that the ability of a new entrant to the market to innovate is the reason for unimaginable success and profits. He writes, "disruptive technologies bring to a market a very different value proposition than had been available previously. Generally, disruptive technologies underperform established products in mainstream markets. But they have other features that a few fringe (and generally new) customers value. Products based on disruptive technologies are typically cheaper, simpler, smaller, and, frequently, more convenient to use" (ibid).

This idea of disruptive innovation that drastically alters existing systems borrows from the work done by Joseph Schumpeter on creative destruction. Schumpeter fashioned innovation as a chronological process of changes to the existing economic structure which could bring about creative destruction. He wrote that innovation is key to those who seek to make a profit. Karol Śledzik quotes Schumpeter to explain it as a "process of industrial mutation that incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure from within, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one" (2013). To achieve this, five types of innovation have been laid down by Schumpeter. The first innovation is to introduce a new product or a new version of an already existing commodity; next, to come up with new ways to produce and sell the commodity. This is followed by the creation and opening of new markets for the sales of these newly created products. The fourth step is the exploitation of newer sources of raw material. The final step is the creation of a new organisational structure by either the creation or the destruction of a monopoly (ibid).

These five steps take us to two related and critical paths. The first route will take us to the origin of the term 'creative destruction'. The other will take us to the contemporary moment of globalisation and Jugaad.

Karl Marx in his work on capitalism and industrialisation wrote about this very process of creative destruction. He deployed the term to describe the perverse manner by which capitalism grows and sustains by the act of destruction. He says,

When speaking of the destruction of capital through crises, one must distinguish between two factors. In so far as the reproduction process is checked and the labour-process is restricted or in some instances is completely stopped, real capital is destroyed... Secondly, however, the destruction of capital through crises means the depreciation of values which prevents them from later renewing their reproduction process as capital on the same scale. This is the ruinous effect of the fall in the prices of commodities. It does not cause the destruction of any use-values. What one loses, the other gains. Values used as capital are prevented from acting again as capital in the hands of the same person. The old capitalists go bankrupt...A large part of the nominal capital of the society, i.e., of the exchange-value of the existing capital, is once for all destroyed, although this very destruction, since it does not affect the use-value, may very much expedite the new reproduction. This is also the period during which moneyed interest enriches itself at the cost of industrial interest. (Marxists Internet Archive, 2015[1863])

Marx also writes, "in these crises, a great part not only of the existing products, but also of the previously created productive forces, are periodically destroyed. In these crises, there breaks out an epidemic that, in all earlier epochs, would have seemed an absurdity — the epidemic of over-production" (Marxists Internet Archive, 2015[1848]). However the contemporary usage of creative destruction has been rearticulated as disruptive innovation, which is a very strategic move that erases the history of the term. Just as with Jugaad, creative destruction is taken out of its context and used to the benefit of the wealthy.

This ahistorical usage of terms provides it a shine, a gleam that hides all the travesty it is newly built upon. It takes out the person from the equation. There is only the innovator and the consumer ('bottom of pyramid' or otherwise). It does not account for the labourer from 'Third World Countries' who is bound within caste, race, gender and class structures. These brown, blue collared, lower caste, class and gendered bodies become the site of exploitation once again. They are both the exploitable resource and the all-consuming market. Moreover the means by which this exploitation is arrayed is through the technological innovation. Technology becomes the new coloniser which takes this new system of capitalist exploitation to newer terrains. The curiosity and desire for this technology is maintained through constant over-production of the new. Marx writes, "The instrument of labour strikes down the labourer. This direct antagonism between the two comes out most strongly, whenever newly introduced machinery competes with handicrafts or manufactures, handed down from former times. But even in modern industry the continual improvement of machinery, and the development of the automatic system, has an analogous effect" (Marxists Internet Archive, 2015[1867]).

In the current era we are witnessing many such capitalist exploitations through constant over-production e.g. Uber. We are using Uber as it's assumed to be the next big thing in terms of innovation and has also had its fair share of criticism. There is some critical work done on third party providers such as Uber which work within the paradigm of disruptive innovation. One such blogger writes, "...but we must also take a critical view. The new social operating systems are demolishing established industries, and destroying jobs and lives in the process. While they create new jobs, these are not the same jobs in the same industries. Blue collar bodies litter the scenes of these acts of creative destruction" (Rayner, 2014). The next section of the paper will engage with the technology of apps and what their incursion through disruptive innovation into the market has led to.

The Third Party Providers

Uber started in 2009 as a small transportation start-up company in San Francisco, California, intended to connect the buyers to the sellers directly. Its tag-line "your ride on demand" signifies it. It uses a mobile app to connect cab drivers directly to consumers who request a trip using the Uber App. The customers pay directly to Uber by connecting his/her credit/debit card with the Uber account and Uber then transfers the money to the drivers account after deducting its commission. In India they have a different model. The rider has an option of paying by cash. In India the driver gets paid in two ways: one is to complete minimum number of rides per day irrespective of the distance and if a driver fails to complete the minimum number of rides then they get paid by the distance they have travelled. The payment system is very dynamic and it keeps changing. Sometimes the number of ride changes, some days there are incentives like complete four rides in next four hours and get Rs 1600. Since then it has grown leaps and bounds and spread across 66 countries and more than 632 cities. It has a large number of investors and has been projected as the next big thing. But it has its own share of controversies wherever it has introduced its app services. The major protests have been against its model of regulation. It has been banned from London in the UK and France and facing legality issues in many countries. In order to drive for Uber one has to register themselves with the company. The driver doesn't need a taxi permit or any kind of permit from the state. Based on their criteria they do a background check of the driver. The only two conditions that are applicable to be a registered driver at Uber are to own a vehicle with a driving license and a car which is insured. Once the driver is registered, Uber will provide a mobile device which has an Uber app and will help the driver locate customers and their destination. Uber regulates the fare which is not

decided by the cab driver, the union or the concerned government. The fare for the regular cab is regulated by the union of cab driver along with the government regulating body. Uber has formed its own governing mechanism and process. It doesn't own any of the vehicles and is not directly employing the cab drivers. It just remains a third party service provider.

Uber and other such apps which use the concept of shared economy are flaunted to be the next big thing and both were launched at the time of recession and high unemployment in USA. The supporters of such platforms have claimed that they have utopian outcomes such as empowerment of ordinary people, efficiency, and even lower carbon footprints (Schor, 2014). Lisa Gansky has argued that sharing economy is creating value through lesser waste (Gansky, 2015). There have been a range of products and services launched in the market which have used the concept of sharing economy to promote the products and services along with the idea of sustainability. The concept of sharing economy is defined as "a socio-economic ecosystem built around the sharing of human and physical resources. It includes the shared creation, production, distribution, trade and consumption of goods and services by different people and organisations" (Matofska, 2015). This is not a new concept; we always shared things with siblings, neighbours, friends and family members. In a sharing economy, sharing is not just limited to kinship ties but is a move away to sharing with strangers. Apps like Uber are not as much 'shared economy' as they are third party service providers who are charging for services. As Killick has rightly summarised, companies like Uber are not sharing anything with consumers and sellers (Killick, 2015). This model of economy fits with the current neo-liberal paradigm where labour rights and benefits are curtailed. In fact both the businesses have displaced small hotel owners and taxi drivers which we can see through the constant protests happening all over the country and the world. So they haven't created anything new.

The private capitalists use this space for investment and creative destruction which results in dehumanisation and alienation of labour. Both of these represent the idea of disruptive innovation where with new technology they shatter existing organisational systems, thereby shattering labour systems. It further alienates the labour as there is absolutely no possibility of interacting or collectivising. With the rise in people engaging in this individualised entrepreneurial economy, it is creating more independent workers who are highly vulnerable and insecure. Commenting on this, an article on sharing economy says, "the real winners in this process have been the 'pirate capitalists' who have moved in and used the technology to break up and disrupt existing industries. This has been and forever will be the story of capitalism:

creative destruction. The internet-driven changes are the latest phase of a centuries-old economic system, not the harbinger of a new one" (ibid).

Arguments which are commonly given by the pro-disruption camp are that the market will fix everything based on the ratings and there is no need for state regulations (Carr, 2015). As individuals we have our biases which are constantly shaping our views and thought processes. These biases will inform our rating of the driver. So the rating is never going to be just based on the ride, it goes beyond the ride to larger societal biases. The marginalised community will be further marginalised through this process. Though it has been argued that these jobs are highly flexible and a person can work according to his/her own needs and time, it comes with no benefits such as leave or pension. A loss or out-of-job in such cases can have a cascading effect on the individual as well as the economy. All these are clear signs of recession in the making.

As Marx has pointed out, alienation of the labourer is induced and exacerbated by technology with relation to creative destruction. Technology lives and is operated by the industrialist or the innovator. Andrew Feenberg explains this power relation,

> *The entire development of modern societies is thus marked by the paradigm of unqualified control over the labour process on which capitalist industrialism rests. It is this control which orients technical development toward disempowering workers and the massification of the public. I call this control "operational autonomy," the freedom of the owner or his representative to make independent decisions about how to carry on the business of the organisation, regardless of the views or interests of subordinate actors and the surrounding community* (2005: 53).

The knowledge, organisation and the idea of the product produced by innovation exists in the silos of certain knowledge circles. This entire articulation of innovation, creative destruction and Jugaad function as new tools of organisation building and destruction of existing systems.

Informality and Jugaad

Going back to Christensen via Schumpeter we land at the crux of the matter, the act of globalisation. Christensen writes,

> *First, disruptive products are simpler and cheaper; they generally promise lower margins, not greater profits. Second, disruptive technologies typically are first commercialised in emerging or insignificant markets. And third, leading firms' most profitable customers generally don't want, and indeed initially*

can't use, products based on disruptive technologies. By and large, a disruptive technology is initially embraced by the least profitable customers in a market (Christensen, 1997).

Technology and thereby innovation, regardless of where it was formulated, is still in the domain of the capitalist. They don the cap of radical innovation and the cloak of caste, race and gender superiority to churn out newer systems of discrimination using technology. It is therefore important to redefine Jugaad with regards to informality. The term has been depoliticised. It is important to imbue it with the politics from which it grows so as to not obliterate the lived experience of the concept.

Ananya Roy (2009) puts forth four propositions to understand informality. Firstly she writes that informality is not solely related to poverty. This assumption is also based on the imagination that informality practised by the poor is also illegal and that the formal is absolutely devoid of informality. Next she points out that informality is 'deregulated' which is different from 'unregulated', that is there is a system of regulation even within the seemingly regulation-less informal. Her third point is that the state too, in all its various capacities, is an informal entity. This she explains in relation to the extra-legal actions that are performed by the state. The final proposition is that there are many agitations and struggles that emerge from the 'informal' and 'illegal' against the legality of the formal. She emphasises the need to understand that insurgence need not create a just space. It is important to not morph these struggles as best practices of innovation and to understand that they are struggles against discrimination.

The examination of Jugaad within this framework throws light at its inherent exoticisation when redefined as only 'disruptive innovation'. It is an act of informality that is located within the formal, the informal and everything in-between and beyond while also being an act that exists because of deregulation. To set this act out of its context removes its inherent insurgence. It becomes a latent tool of oppression than an expression of agitation. Jeffrey has used Bourdieu's notion of Habitus to elucidate how people's social positioning is important in how they respond to changes and how we consequentially understand it (Jeffrey & Young, 2014). He uses the concept of Habitus to explain how people produce similar behaviour over the period of time which reflects their social positioning in society (ibid). He further quotes Bourdieu and says "People inventively reproduce their social position through their everyday practices" (ibid). Habitus is informing the innovation or the Jugaad that people do.

Jugaad and the technology spurred by it have to be understood with relation to the Jugaad of everyday life. It has to take into consideration the multiple contexts, scales, and hierarchies in which Jugaad functions. This then highlights that formality and informality are not binaries but

exist within and outside one another, where Jugaad is practised in different forms. An act of Jugaad in technology, especially as disruptive innovation, is a struggle to maximise profit. The Jugaad of everyday life embodies struggles against hegemonies, they are struggles of survival. This distinction is crucial in remembering and reiterating the varied histories, practices and interpretations of Jugaad that exist.

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Negotiating Online Spaces through Subversive Bodies

Shivani Satija

Abstract

There is a departure from an overwhelming focus on 'embodied experiences', and the body being the primary site of sexual and social transactions, to one where virtual spaces are becoming the 'new' or 'continued' spaces of consumption, production, expression and resistance. This departure is redefining and challenging the notion of the body, its meanings and its limitations. This paper will look at ways in which women's bodies are conceived in the post-modern context, where interactions and experiences are increasingly mediated by virtual technologies, and where notions of experience and body are being constantly renegotiated and reconfigured.

This paper will focus on women's experiences in expressing themselves online *through their* bodies, and the backlash they face, by focusing on selected women who are using online spaces to promote body positivity in India. Through this, the paper attempts to understand alternate knowledge on women's bodies, and how they are being 'rewritten' and are 're-writing' online spaces.

Keywords - Bodies, Online Technology, Subversion, Body Positivity.

For politics to take place, the body must appear (Judith Butler, 2011[1]).

Within culture and technological studies, there is a departure from the overwhelming focus on 'embodied experiences', which emphasises the body as the prime site for sexual, social or/and political transactions, to one where virtual spaces are emerging as arguably the 'new' or

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[1] This paper is based on my ongoing PhD research titled, 'Negotiating online space through embodied narratives: A study of online body positive campaigns in India', under Dr. Shilpa Phadke, School of Media Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

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'continued'[2] spaces for consumption, production, expression and resistance. These understandings are challenging and redefining the notion of the 'body', its meanings and its limitations. This paper looks at ways in which women's bodies[3] are conceived in the post-modern context, where interactions and experiences are increasingly mediated by virtual technologies, and where the notions of experience and the body are being constantly negotiated and reconfigured (Shilling, 2005).

Technology mediated identities have pushed for a social and political rethink about gender, sexuality and bodies, in profound ways. This paper attempts to understand the complex relationship between gendered bodies and online technologies/spaces, as continuous and connected, rather than as separate and dichotomous. Achuthan (2011) challenges the division between human-technological, mind-body, and that of technological and pre-technological cultures, which is increasingly complicated by the daily use of digital technologies, both by the individual and the State.

At the intersection of gender, online technology and bodies, bodies, particularly, women's bodies are being renegotiated in multiple ways, thus offering scope for fresh technological imaginings and avenues for self-representation. In what ways do these spaces offer an emancipatory potential to challenge hegemonic and patriarchal narratives of 'feminine bodies and practices' and produce counter narratives of women's bodies, sexuality, pleasure and experience? In what ways do they place them amidst new kinds of vulnerabilities to violence, censorship and moral policing? And in what ways do women resist and cope with these?

By focusing on online body positive campaigns by two selected activists, this paper explores their experiences in expressing themselves online *through their* bodies, thus creating awareness, affinity and community using online sharing platforms. This paper is fully cognisant of the fact that such online spaces are often located in neo-liberal contexts and the access to them is circumscribed by one's location, even in the context of the increasing use of online spaces via mobile phones which has to some extent, democratised online space and access. It also recognises that though these spaces offer platforms for self-expression and assertion that challenge mainstream notions

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[2] Post-colonial understandings situate the internet as a platform for knowledge production and sharing, as prior to the western and colonial. It is seen as localised forms and networks of knowledges, rather than a homogenous western conception (Achuthan, 2011).

[3] I have limited this paper to persons who identify themselves bodily and emotionally as 'women'

of beauty and bodily worth; cyber harassment, violence and sexual control still remain inscribed within gendered bodies, both online and in physical spaces.

This paper explores how despite this, activists are using these spaces to practice radical ways of (re)constructing their bodies and identities and challenging violent notions of women's bodies by focussing on the work of two Indian women who use online spaces to promote body positivity and reclaim ideas of 'healthy', 'acceptable', even 'desirable' bodies. I explored their personal struggles and experience of negotiating and reconstructing the notions of 'femininity' and 'beauty', through their bodies in interaction with online technologies. I decided to follow their work as I was influenced by their activism and their political and aesthetic positions on 'femininity', and 'beauty'. They both identify themselves bodily and emotionally as women and use their bodies and fashion to *refashion* normative beauty standards. Given that they have significant following, they are regarded as 'public' figures, thus I have used their names.

I explore the work of two body positive activists, Harnaam Kaur and Ragini Nag Rao. Harnaam Kaur is a body positive and confidence activist, plus size model, and an anti-bullying activist, and calls herself, "a fantastic bearded lady." (Channel 4 News). She is diagnosed with Polycystic Ovary Syndrome, which can cause acute facial hair growth. This resulted in serious bullying and body shaming. After many years of being shamed, she decided to embrace her body hair and now sports a full beard. She is active on Instagram and Youtube and has recently appeared in fashion shoots. Ragini Nag Rao is a plus size activist and fashion blogger and writes a blog called 'A Curious Fancy'. Much of her current work is around bodily assertions through fashion and photography. She is on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest. Both these activists use self-photography and fashion to promote body positivity. I followed their work from November 2015 to March 2016, and then revisited their work again in February 2017, during which their photographic work had proliferated. The reason I chose these two women besides my personal interest in their work, was their unabashed and unapologetic self expression, which is subverting dominant norms on beauty and femininity. Their work stood out in the Indian context where conversations on body positivity are beginning to take form.

Through their work, this paper discusses obesity and hirsutism, two conditions that are deeply gendered, stigmatised and pathologised in medical and socio-cultural discourse[4]. These bodily phenomena are considered to lie *outside* of the normative discourse of the 'feminine' and 'beautiful'. Through these subversive body activisms, these activists seek to *visibalise* themselves in online space, in the face of a culture that upholds heteronormative, patriarchal and misogynistic notions of bodies and beauty. A thematic analysis of the content, which includes photographs and writings, is conducted, to understand patterns, contradictions and contestation of emerging themes and meanings. The focus is on their work of self portrayal, through photography, writing and print and video interviews, through which an account of subversion emerges. Ragini's blog and Harnaam's Instagram account and YouTube videos served as the main sites for my research, while associated interviews (print and text) were used to get a more nuanced and personal understanding of these women's creative journeys. Online research poses unique ethical and methodological challenges. I am acutely aware of my position and have tried my best to use their material safely, ethically, and in a way that enhances the objective of my paper.

The word 'subversive bodies' is seen as an analytical as well as epistemological category in this paper, to interrogate online body performances that have been 'othered' and excluded in multiple ways by hegemonic regimes of health and beauty. It, like other works, tries to reconstruct the body, its agency and its experiences, through the interaction of bodies and technologies, using a feminist lens. By analysing these body positive activisms, this paper attempts to complicate and interrogate this constructed dichotomy between the technological and corporeal realities on one hand, and between 'masculinity' and 'femininity' on the other. These different kinds of subversive bodily acts and practices in online spaces, are enabling connections with each other, thus overhauling hegemonic discourses of bodies and beauty and enhancing their corporeal realities as well as the notion of agency that is inscribed in them. Additionally, given that there is very little theorisation around the nascent body positive movement in India, I hope this paper which is located in my doctoral research, will begin making an effort in this direction.

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[4] Malson (1997:228-229) cites Prior (1989) and Walkerdine (1986) to explain discourse, which is a social practice consisting of an assemblage of activities, events, objects, epistemological precepts, and that these have real material effects on embodied subjects.

Body

Since the eighties, the body has attracted much academic interest and has been approached from multiple theoretical positions. However, it is the feminist understanding of the body that has contributed significantly to an understanding of female corporeality (Shilling, 2005). What has emerged is that there is nothing called a 'universal', 'whole', 'organic', 'centred' body. According to Thompson (2003), enlightenment had carved out an 'ideal body', thus pathologising any 'other'. The philosophy of classical thought, viewed the subject as an organic whole, a rational being and as someone who consciously places mind over body, and thought over pleasure. In the sixteenth century context of rationalism and enlightenment, embodied perspectives were seen as unobjective, and full of desire (Bordo, 2003). In the Indian context, the mind body duality did and still continues to reiterate the logic of division of labour, particularly within the Hindu caste system. The 'labouring bodies' are thus separated from the 'thinking' bodies. The female body was (and still is) regarded as derivative and always relational to the 'ideal' man. Butler (1990) reiterates this mind-body duality by looking at how the Cartesian and Christian perspectives conceptualised bodies as 'profane, void, sinful', while also using female metaphors to deride and devalue. A Dalit feminist reading of bodies further exposes the power relations reflected in the separation of the Dalit woman's body from that of an upper caste woman's, devoid of respectability and available as a sexualised form of property for the entitled use of upper caste men (Irudayam, et al, 2011). A racialized reading of bodies exposes a similar perception and treatment of black bodies, particularly, black women's bodies, as the 'other's. Butler (1990) cites Kristeva's notion of 'abject', the process of excluding parts of the body (physical and metaphoric), which are considered unworthy and in the process, creating the 'other', the 'abject', thereby constructing boundaries within and between bodies. Similarly, medico-legal understandings also contribute to normative conceptualisations of the body, particularly the gendered body. Anything, whether bodies, knowledges, or experiences that fell outside of or opposed to these normative definitions and standards, were considered illegitimate.

Among various disagreements and debates regarding the body there is one that is particularly dominant; social constructivists feel that the body is discursively produced, and those leaning towards natural sciences like biologists, medical professionals and body and sex positive groups and disability theorists feel that dimensions of materiality and corporeality are being undermined. They have challenged discourses which seem to undermine the importance of the body and called for a political reclamation of the body. Similarly, Dalit scholars and feminists have spoken

about the need to visibalise the 'Dalit body', and the structures of oppression, violence, discrimination and sexualisation it embodies.

This paper draws from feminist and post-structuralist analysis[5] of bodies and technologies to engage with discursive as well as material realities (Malson, 1997), in order to make sense of how these interact and influence each other. A Foucauldian understanding of the body and its subversive potential to dismantle totalitarian and dualist understandings, has helped inform feminist thought on oppression and violence, even though he himself did not directly address body or power as gendered. Foucault, according to McNay (1991:127), says that the body is produced by power and bears on it "stigmata of past experiences upon its surface." Extending this to a feminist understanding of the body, we could say that the 'female' body is a product of power relations and on it are inscribed various kinds of socio-cultural and political practices that enables particular kinds of self-making.

Subversive Femininities: Rewriting Gendered Bodies

Is there something inherently 'feminine'? Does 'feminine' truly and solely belong to the woman? (Butler, 1990: 167). Malson cites Dorothy Smith (1990) who describes femininity as involving "whole sets of body management practices, purchasing skills and the like which are simultaneously material and discursive; they are worked out upon the corporeal body and are integral to late capitalist modes of production and consumption" (1997: 228).

"When does a human subject become a gendered subject?" (Butler, 1990: 151). Without the marker of gender, according to Butler, a human being is considered as lying outside of being 'human' (ibid). She writes of Monique Wittig's conceptualisation of biological sex as a political tool to divide and control bodies at birth to further the objectives of institutionalised heterosexuality and reproduction. She also talks of Wittig's notion of woman, as being a socio-cultural and political construction, an identity that is legitimated by the oppositional existence of masculinity and male bodies; and a lesbian, as an identity that interrogates and challenges this binary (ibid:151)[6]. Extending this to our argument of 'feminine' bodies, it can be said that

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[5] A post structuralist approach towards understanding the relationship between bodies and discourse is an effective way of understanding bodies, as it looks at both power relations and the corporeal dimension of the body and also renders this to a feminist reading of the body.

[6] Butler (1990) critiques some of Wittig's politics, on account of it being based on the very binaries that it attempts to dislodge. The binary of heterosexuality verses homosexuality, and the suggestion to overhaul the former in the discursive realm, does betray essentialist tendencies, and assumes that homosexuality lies

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notions of femininity are given credence by the existence of masculinity, and that 'fat', 'bearded', 'hairy bodies' thus become 'othered' or are produced materially and discursively in relation to the existence of 'mainstream' and 'ideal' femininities. In this rigid discourse these 'othered' embodied subjects are rendered as 'partial' and 'relative' subjectivities, rather than sovereign individuals (ibid: 158). However, the subversive potential of these 'othered' 'fat', 'hairy', 'bearded' bodies is ever present and interrogates these constructed binaries between hegemonic and singular notions of femininity and masculinity.

LeBosco (2004) attempts to historicise fat bodies. In the industrial and modern context as well as ascent of the Judeo-Christian religions, fat (and female) bodies began to be viewed as 'uneconomical', 'inefficient' and 'unproductive', as well as 'greedy' and 'sinful'. A bodily aesthetic began to emerge around the sixteenth century and alongside this, a negative perception towards corpulence began to be culturally constructed (Forth, 2013). This was reinforced during the post-world war world, where 'fat' bodies were regarded as revolting, unhealthy and unsightly (ibid). In resource poor contexts however, fat has been historically associated with wealth, prosperity and beauty, and a marker that is distinct from poor and labouring bodies[7]. Fat is also associated with cultural and racial norms of beauty. In the neo-liberal context, a market driven homogeneous campaign of thinness is being imposed across countries and cultures. Despite this, the current cultural discourse on bodies is emerging as highly nuanced and textural, thus defying any explanatory power of a singular narrative. Notions of 'fat' and 'thin' are embedded in social, political, economic and cultural contexts and vary in different geographies.

Randall cites Shaw (2006) who explores fatness in black bodies as forms of political resistance to the Western European and North American racialised and market driven obsession and promotion of 'thinness'. They also resist the tyranny of the medical community attacking fatness and associating it with race and poverty (2012). This was countered by Harris (2012) as a simplistic analysis which does not take into consideration the capitalistic and exclusive nature of the State. She explored the failure of the State in providing healthy and affordable food options or reasonably planned open spaces to exercise in poor neighbourhoods (many of which house poor black families). Similarly, Malson explores the western medical understanding of anorexia which often ignores the politics and agency of bodies experiencing these conditions. Malson cites

completely outside and disconnected with the heterosexual regime. Further, Wittig ends up homogenising the straight community. This paper is aware of the binaries and homogeneity that tend to get created in such analysis, and attempts to steer away from these.

[7] Regionally, these notions vary, and a more detailed and nuanced reading of the history of bodies in South Asia is needed, which I will be doing in my PhD.

various authors to understand contradictions within a capitalist society, such as between norms of mass consumption and feminine norms of being thin, between the controlled worker and the indulgent consumer, and between the norms of femininity and the politics of feminism (1997: 225). These contradictions and contestations are embodied in anorexic bodies. She suggests that these bodies have subversive potential which are reflected in ways that defy socio-cultural as well as medical notions of femininity through obstruction of female bodily functions such as menstruation and conception. Some of Malson's interviews reveal the self-destructive feeling respondents experience. "Anorexia is about not being in my body, not being a woman anymore, transcending one's sexuality, destroying the female body," (ibid: 240). Thus, these subversive bodies produce counter discourses which challenge the hegemonic discourse of femininity, although sometimes, with destructive bodily consequences (ibid). Malson analyses anorexic bodies as constituted and regulated by medical and cultural discourses, which pathologises and 'others' certain bodies, regarding them as opposed to "domains of objects and rituals of truth," (Foucault, 1977:194 cited by Malson, 1997:229). These hegemonic discourses of beauty and health have real material effects on bodies reflected in embodied practices such as dieting, binging and self-starvation. Malson's interviews with respondents who have been diagnosed with anorexia, reveals that thinness is valued as an accomplishment, as a victory of mind over matter. By extension, fat is seen as giving into the body and its desires (ibid). Fat is thus seen as 'excess', as abject. Both the sexual and the maternal body are seen as excess within the neo-liberal and patriarchal discourse. They are regarded as too much, needing to be contained and controlled (Malson, 1997). Krestiva's notion of 'abject' can be used to explain the repulsion, exclusion, exploitation and control that society creates around certain bodies based on caste, class, race or size, and the stability and coherence it seeks to gain through these processes. This thinking is sustained both by the beauty and the health lobbies that promote a certain weight for all, irrespective of their personal histories, needs and struggles, thus making these notions mainstream- the 'truth'.

LeBesco attempts to invert mainstream notions about obesity, by bringing out the subversive potential of 'fat' bodies, in overturning these mainstream notions, and reconstructing them. She looks at the political construction and regulation of 'fat' bodies and identities in order to visibalise them in the terrain of power (2004:7). She looks at micro behaviours and conversations among women and others in bringing about strategic changes in language and meanings regarding body image, which can overtime get institutionalised through innovative ways. She quotes Monique Wittig about the power of language, which through everyday use, produces

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'reality effects', that are gradually perceived as facts. She thus dedicates her resources and energies towards understanding the language which through everyday spoken words and practices constructs and institutionalises 'beautiful bodies' and 'ugly bodies'. She challenges the current thinking of justifying 'fatness' on account of health or hormonal dysfunctions, which pathologises fat bodies, instead of constructing a narrative of acceptance of all bodies as agential, irrespective of any reasons.

Plus size blogger and fashionista, Ragini Nag Rao uses her fatness as a political and subversive tool. She writes in her blog,

> *Fat bodies are political bodies - that isn't something we can just ignore. Standing out as a fatty, just being publicly visible as a fat person is a political act. When I wear my hotpants out, I get reactions ranging from lechy and creepy, to downright unnerving. I want to disturb the people I see around me everyday, I want to shock, horrify and disgust them. The space they inhabit is also mine and I am here to reclaim it by being as visible as I can.*[8]

Similarly, 'hirsute' female bodies are also considered unattractive and unfeminine, even threatening, and women all over the world spend considerable to drastic amounts of time and money to rid their bodies of unwanted hair.

Body hair is also rooted in religion, caste, culture and politics and like fat bodies, needs to be seen in its cultural and political context (Agarwal, 2015). Sherrow in her famous book, *Encyclopaedia of Hair: A Cultural History* explores the symbolic and cultural roots of hair (2006). In many African countries, hair was seen as a spiritual connector between the human body and spirits. Various styles denoted different stages of one's life like age, puberty, marriage, and mourning. In India, in many regions, men shave their hair during a death in the family, while widows in the eastern state of West Bengal, were expected to shave their heads and remain bald for the rest of their lives. In many regions, hair is also seen as attracting spirits among women, and tonsuring (among other violent measures) is a popular remedy or punishment that is meted out to women who are regarded as 'deviant' and branding them as witches (Silva, 2012). Hair also has a strong racial and religious connotation and is used to discriminate across the world. The tolerance for hairy bodies has been decreasing steadily. In India, practices of hair removal range from bleaching, waxing, shaving, threading, plucking and now laser treatments, which are

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[8] Quote taken from http://www.xojane.com/issues/do-this-dont-fatty-in-hotpants Accessed on 15 December 2015.

recommended and offered readily by dermatologists. The neoliberal regime has no space for 'messy bodies', whether hairy or fat.

Apart from socio-cultural, as well as neoliberal context of hair shaming, hairy and fat bodies are also being increasingly medicalised and attributed to imbalances in hormones. Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) is one such endocrine condition that seemingly affects a significant proportion of women and is attributed to 'excess' hair growth; irregular, absent or disrupted periods; and infertility. When analysed within a feminist perspective, PCOS emerges as a "deeply pathologised" and stigmatised condition that robs women of their 'femininity', owing to its 'masculinising symptoms' (Kitzinger and Willmott, 2002:349-350). There are unkind and untrue perceptions of PCOS such as 'lazy girl's disease', 'woman's journey towards manhood', and 'unfeminine'. All these push women and girls into following private practices of hair removal as well as invasive treatments for body transformation. Harnaam Kaur, who is diagnosed with PCOS, reported the extent she went to rid her body and face of the excessive hair. "*I waxed her, bleached her, shaved her*" (Channel4 News). She even tried waxing and shaving her beard twice a week. Studies reveal that a significant proportion of respondents felt like 'freaks', 'abnormal' and 'unfeminine'. Studies also show that women and girls with PCOS reportedly experience emotional stress due to their inability to conform to standard norms of femininity. Given this, there is still not much feminist research on PCOS bodies in general and the Indian and South Asian context in particular (ibid).

Though, conversations around these are increasing, the understanding of fat and hairy bodies needs to be culturally and regionally contextualised. A South Asian perspective is glaringly missing in academic, medical as well as a cultural understanding of bodies. Most literature is around health problems or aesthetics related to fat and hairy bodies. Even within movements and campaigns on YouTube, Instagram and Tumblr towards embracing body fat and hair such as 'effyourbeautystandards', 'torridfashion', 'alternativecurves', 'plusmodelmag' (mostly western), Plump Magazine Facebook Page (Philippines)[9], etc, there seems to be a lack of an understanding of the cultural and political roots of embodiment and there is a general lack of representation of women of colour (Haidari, 2015). "The body positivity movement in Asia has simply not taken off" (Wear Your Voice).

A feminist reading of bodies implies a pluralistic and grounded approach to understanding embodiment, while rejecting essentialist and dichotomous notions that exist in the mainstream

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[9] Refer to https://www.facebook.com/plump.ph/

discourse on health, bodies and beauty. This reading challenges and questions the patriarchal, heteronormative reading of the body, which produces the 'normal' and 'beautiful' along with the 'abnormal' and 'ugly'. It also questions a homogeneous and monolithic conception of the body, while recognising situated and embodied knowledges. This has caused a dent, if not a crisis[10] in mainstream knowledge of gendered bodies and practices, one that is brought about by the consistent and pluralistic resistance from various locations.

Gender, Bodies and Online Space

Dominant patriarchal and heteronormative notions are deeply embedded, reiterated and perpetuated in online spaces and technologies, thus enabling and perpetuating certain hegemonic perceptions of gender and bodies. However, these are also being used as sites to contest and challenge these, thus allowing the construction of alternate and multiple notions of 'self' through a range of subversive acts and expressions. This section attempts to understand the dynamics of online spaces and how these are designed to relate with users and how these varied users in turn, negotiate and reshape online spaces and interactions therein. In other words, it proposes to explore the (re)constructions and contestations of various bodies in online space, and the manner in which this process rewrites hegemonic gender, bodies and technologies (Achuthan, 2011).

Bartky (1988) says that women's spatialised experiences are far more restricted and disciplined than men. Does this apply to cyber space? What are these notions of boundaries in online space? These questions shed light on the connection between corporeal and technological realities. In the 1993 case of LambdaMOO, a text-based MUD programme, one of the users designed a programme through which he/she could control other characters and made them rape and mutilate another character. The flesh users felt deeply violated and suffered emotional damage, even though the violence was inscribed on their online characters which were text based. This incident sparked a debate regarding the need for social control, regulation and accountability in online space and problematised the relation between the online and the flesh user (Huff et al, 2003). Suchman (2007) speaks of the interactions and negotiations between the user and

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[10] Crisis in Kuhnian terms perhaps cannot be used here as it would assume that the existence of a paradigm and a shift in it (Achuthan, 2012). It also assumes that the existing narrative under threat is monolithic, which I am not suggesting. The mainstream notions of gendered bodies and practices is itself fragmented and disaggregated and so are the attempts to subvert it.

technology and the overlapping of the online and offline worlds in creating meanings. One cannot separate these realms (cited in Lundmark and Normark, n.d: 237).

Spatial signifiers that emerge in physical space are used to describe cyber space as well as computer programmes. Just like physical space and its associated disciplines such as geography and architecture, the designers and programmers of cyber space too have been guilty of not affording strategic spaces or roles to various gendered and embodied subjects. Kearney analyses design elements that facilitate various forms of self-representation in interactive online forums, in which regulated and disciplined productions of femininity and self emerge, which prescribe to gender, sexual and bodily norms (2015). Interactive online spaces and online spaces of interactive sociality are thus structured to make visible and uphold certain normative and disciplinary narratives of femininity.

The feminist sense of self and space then face similar kinds of challenges and exclusions in cyber space, just like physical space. Geographies of exclusion, colonisation and closures are thus very real in the virtual world (Lundmark and Normark, n.d). Similarly, these technologies affect social and cultural norms. Grindt and Gill (1995) talk about social shaping of various kinds of technological products along interests of gender, class, and nationality. Karpf (1987) says that technology is not only constituted by the existing culture and social relations, but also helps constitute this culture and these social relations, along with notions of masculinity, femininity and class (cited in Grindt and Gill, 1995:10).

Emerging Themes from the Study

I followed the work of these activists, mostly their photographs on Instagram and Ragini's writings on her blog titled 'A Curious Fancy'[11]. Their work on body positivity seeks to reshape online space along lines of body plurality, inclusion and self-love. Through a feminist reading and analysis of the work of these two body positive activists, five themes emerged.

1. *Gender and Body Performativity*

I feel more feminine with my beard.

- Harnaam Kaur in an interview with Mark Duell for the Guardian (2014).

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[11] Refer to http://curiousfancy.com/

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A body positive and confidence activist, plus size model, an anti-bullying activist, Harnaam Kaur calls herself, "a fantastic bearded lady." She has more than 1200 images on Instagram and regularly works on body positive campaigns, mostly through fashion. In most of the images on Instagram, Harnaam projects traditional femininity. Her bodily stance is feminine, she pouts, she smiles demurely, she dons latest fashion styles, all this while sporting a full beard. In some pictures she decorates her beard with flowers, and in most of her images, the hair on her chest can be seen. She has sported bridal attires, including for 'Urban Bridesmaids' in London (Cliff, 2015). She is seen wearing *mehndi* on her arms and legs in one picture and wearing *chura* (bangles worn by North Indian brides) in another one. She wears heels and stockings in many pictures. In many photos she is dressed like an Indian bride with jewellery. Recently, she walked in her first fashion show for Marianna Harutunian, a famous jeweller and also entered the Guinness World Records, as the youngest woman with a full beard (Khaleeli, 2016).

Ragini Nag Rao is a plus size activist, fashion blogger and writer of a blog called 'A Curious Fancy'. She asserts herself bodily through fashion, while sporting latest brands of clothing, shoes, bags and makeup such as MAC, Maybelline, Eyeko, Sephora collections, Joules, Twenty Fingers, Tabio and Madcloth. She is on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest. In all her pictures she embraces her femininity, by wearing fashionable clothing, makeup and accessories, while sporting unshaved/unwaxed legs. She wears shorts, dresses and hot pants, attire that does not easily welcome fat bodies. She thus negotiates fashionable attire on her own terms. Recently she wrote in her blog that she quit wearing bras. She said,

> *...Societal norms that are devised to control women's' bodies, to render them homogenous and acceptable. I didn't want to be controlled any longer. I didn't want to give in to those dictates that police women's bodies and ultimately, women's lives. If my boobs are saggy, I wanted to let them sag to their heart's content -- if they shocked a few people, good. If they disgusted some others, even better. I had been engaging in this public performance of shock, horror and disgust for the last 3 years by blatantly showing off my shapewear-less fat body in hotpants and minis without a care, and now my footloose and fancy-free boobs would be a part of that performance[12].*

Butler's analytical lens of performativity is utilised to analyse these activists' gender and bodily performance through text and image. What these activists are doing, produces a series of 'effects', which challenge the established norms and practices of femininity, and establishes

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[12] Refer to Ragini's blog http://www.xojane.com/issues/why-i-stopped-wearing-a-bra Accessed on 24 March 2017.

'newer', 'alternate' standards of femininity. For Butler, "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that gender is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (1990: 34). Butler's term 'performativity', that is a set of effects produced by the performance of gender identities in a deeply heterosexual context, sheds light on the socio-political construction of 'gendered identity', which challenges the prevalent assumption of the 'sex-gender' discourse. It refers to a 'forced reiteration of norms', over a period of time, to assure the maintenance of gender identity (Butler in McNay, 2000:33). This constant and repetitive performance reveals the deep instability and lack of permanence of heterosexual gender identity and practice (ibid:33). Thus, these online bodily assertions are deeply performative, resulting in *normalising* bodies that are usually 'othered', by negotiating with established gender norms, *within* the terrain of 'femininity' and fashion, thus creating a 'new normal'. The attempt is to refashion these bodies through fashion itself.

2. *Negotiations*

Harnaam Kaur was asked in an interview with the Guardian, "Wouldn't it be better to reject the beauty and fashion industries completely?" This, she thinks, is impossible and so she is, instead, "collaborating with as many magazines and doing as many TV appearances as I can, to show women that you don't have to look a certain way to be happy" (Khaleeli, 2016).

It might be argued that these bodily performances are constructed alongside what is regarded as beautiful and runs the risk of legitimising mainstream notions of beauty. Expressing oneself through their bodies mediated by online technologies is indeed a subversive act, but to what extent are these performances actually subverting hegemonic, patriarchal, and heteronormative norms of 'feminine' beauty? The construction of the 'other', the so called 'fat' women, 'hairy' women, 'masculine' women, is a process rendered possible *within* the existing regime of beauty and femininity, which exists and thrives, even in the face of these subversive acts. According to Butler (1993), discourse becomes oppressive when the only way that an oppressed subject can express herself, is by engaging with that very discourse of oppression. Thus 'othered' bodies that do not fit within the culturally constructed regime of beauty, find themselves negotiating and battling within and by the rules that have 'othered' them in the first place. According to her, subversion should question the very terms of a hegemonic system, through which a situation emerges where in the very rules 'turns against itself', undergoing various mutations. "The culturally constructed body, will then be liberated, neither to its 'natural' past, neither to its original pleasures, but to an open future of cultural possibilities" (1990:127).

However, countering and negotiating hegemonic discourses and knowledges and visibalising 'othered' perspectives are also a crucial component of subversion. Complex and variegated forms of resistance involving everyday resistance, accommodations, and negotiations with dominant norms and institutions are also integral to subversion and result in multiple possibilities and understandings. The work of these body positive activists does all of these. Harnaam, while employing traditional fashion styles, is still dealing with the fashion industry, that steers hegemonic discourses on femininity, but as a fashion icon, she is setting *her* terms of 'femininity'. Ragini is also constructing alternate standards of body size, by photographing herself wearing mainstream fashion brands. These activisms have ushered a feminist reimagination of fashion, thus denting normative beauty standards, and forcing the industry to sit up, take notice and cater to non-normative female bodies.

I've spent the past six years griping about the utter desolation of plus size fashion in India, and I'm finally seeing changes in the way brands perceive us fat women as a demographic, especially in the past year or so. Maybe, there'll soon be a time when I'll just be able to walk into a store with the expectation of finding a whole bunch of cute clothes in my size. I look forward to that.

- Ragini Nag Rao[13]

3. Visibalising Experience

My beard has 100% become a part of my body. It is the source of my strength and confidence. I keep my hair to show the world a different, confident, diverse and strong image of a woman…I look at it and is it a sign to me that we are all different and none of us are born the same.

- Harnaam Kaur[14]

Fat and hairy bodies, bodies that lie outside the realm of normative femininity, are largely invisibalised. Feminist historians and sociologists challenge male centric knowledges as the dominant source of knowledge, thus bringing women's experience back and giving them agency. The feminist construction of knowledge according to Thompson (2003) locates it historically, geographically and corporeally. Haraway insists on a post-modernist understanding based on the realisation that all differences need not be resolved and that there exists multiplicity of local and

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[13] Quote taken from http://curiousfancy.com/post/153345000411/little-black-dress Accessed 20 March 2017.

[14] Quote taken from http://cuntmuffffin.tumblr.com/post/124620567481/rejectedprincesses-yagazieemezi-harnaam-kaur Accessed 20 March 2017

located knowledges. She talks about feminist objectivity (and rationality) as being situated knowledges and that only partial perspectives promise objectivity. This makes us answerable and accountable, which dissolves the boundaries between the observer and the observed (1988:583). Haraway insists not just on epistemological rigour, but a deep understanding of political and ethical positions as well. Thus 'fat', 'hairy' and 'bearded bodies' in online space represent embodied knowledges and partial, located perspectives, which are otherwise undermined and invisibalised, and seek to challenge hegemonic discourses.

Though the importance of visibalising bodies and experiences through written form (and in this paper, visual form) is agreed upon, there are challenges. Scott (1991:776) reflects on the challenges of writing about and rendering visible, the experience of the 'other', the 'marginalised', invisible, even, 'stigmatised'. Experiences[15] are often taken as a given, ahistorical, apolitical and stable, rather than as something through which formation of subjectivities are produced within socio-economic and political relations. What happens in the process, says Scott, is that it renders a range of experiences as homogeneous, thus invisibalising other aspects of one's identity or other subjectivities such as race, gender and sexuality, and how contradictory and contesting processes of subject formation occur. This results in a sinister process of legitimising certain experiences over others, what she calls, "a particular way of doing history" (ibid: 785-787). Mohanty (1988) and Scott (1991) reiterate the heterogeneity of oppression and subversion, while warning against an ahistorical understanding of the oppressed subject as well as the oppressors in the context of the politics and histories that structure them. While analysing the subversive works of body positive activists online, as a researcher, I myself am mindful of the heterogeneity and nuances of their experiences, as well as the challenges in representing these.

Given the above, reconstructing the notion of 'fat' bodies and 'hairy and bearded' bodies that body positive activists are trying to achieve is fraught with challenges. Although their efforts are mostly based on personal experiences and political standpoints, they run the risk of representing others and their experiences as homogeneous. Locating oneself as an online activist, vis a vis their audience and power structures that operate is crucial. How these relate to different women of varying class and caste contexts needs to be explored. Here lie hints, as to why the body positive movement in India is still at its infancy, and not able to make a substantial case for itself. Here lies the urgent need to build a feminist and intersectional approach to this movement, so as

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[15] Scott challenges this overwhelming dependence on 'experience' to describe histories of difference which are juxtaposed with the referential point of existing histories. When one depends on experience as being the 'origin of knowledge', one ignores the processes and institutions behind the construction and maintenance of difference and politics of exclusion. This ends up naturalising and ahistoricising differences and binaries.

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to enable a powerful, nuanced, heterogeneous and inclusive movement to promote body positivity.

I would never tell a woman who has got a beard to keep it, I would never say if I can do it so can you, I would never say that to someone, For me, I am still growing as a person I am learning to live like a bearded lady 9 years on…

- Harnaam Kaur in an interview for Channel 4[16]

4. *Uneven and Gendered Architecture of Online Space*

Is the internet a safe space? Is it an unbiased space?

Looking at Facebook's 'Community Standards', one can make a quick assessment of what it regards as 'credible threats to physical safety'. While terrorist organisations and organised criminal activity are not tolerated by Facebook, the presence of misogynist spaces which promote and condone violence against women continue to exist. Hateful speech and threats of physical harm against persons or groups are not tolerated, yet we see misogynist and violent threats being made to women activists who speak out. Kavita Krishnan, Secretary of the All India Progressive Women's Association faced violent online vitriol for voicing her opinion about the Prime Minister of India on Twitter. The threats remained there for several days (Krishnan, 2015). It is clear that despite these safety standards, gendered threats and shaming remains in online space.

Online shaming is a very real and daily part of the life of online activists. Some of the comments on Harnaam's photographs and videos were along lines of hatred, misogyny, racism and body shaming. Some of the comments read, "You are ugly. Get rid of that. You are doing this to be popular. This bully thing is just a bullshit. You are so fucking fake...", "I know that cunt", "No asshole is here now to defend this Indian whore", "Shut up your god is satan bitch", "fucking beardo", "Do you have hairy chest hun?". A website called '…is a cunt.com' is a shaming website with obvious misogynistic characteristics, starting with the name itself. It is dedicated to 'naming' and 'calling' out people, mostly women whom they consider to be 'cunts', followed by virulent shaming. Harnaam Kaur is featured in this and there are 32 comments[17]. It has 'rules', a 'cunter's dictionary', and ironically, does not allow 'trolling'. This hateful website is at least one-year-old and somehow, continues to exist, which is reflective of the deeply gendered and

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[16] Refer to https://www.channel4.com/news/interview-with-harnaam-core Accessed on 24 March 2017.
[17] Refer to http://is-a-cunt.com/2016/10/harnaam-kaur/#comments Accessed on 24 March 2017.

misogynistic nature of online space. As I searched Harnaam's videos on YouTube, I noticed that her videos feature along with other videos titled 'Drastic bodies', 'Cosmetic surgery disasters', 'Abnormal sexual behaviours', etc.[18] This ordering of videos in YouTube and Google provide a glimpse of the ways that 'different' bodies are perceived in the online space, and reflect the hegemonic discourses that structure these spaces, thus enabling normative notions and discarding non-normative ones. Harnaam spoke about death threats online, ranging from beheading, being set on fire and being stoned. However, she said she needed to move beyond these as she has a lot of work to do. Harnaam in an interview with Channel 4 said, "If these bullies are allowed to live, then why can't I live?" Other cases of body shaming online, particularly where women have put photographs displaying body hair, have emerged. Suraiya Ali tweeted a photo of her torso with hair and received hateful tweets[19]. A young college student who clicked a picture of her unwaxed/unshaved legs went viral, inciting hundreds of hate comments.

Ragini Nag Rao faced a lot of body shaming when she put her pictures online. Tired of being body shamed online, she disabled the comments function on her blog. However, offline she continues to experience harassment. In an interview in 'Wear Your Voice', she expresses her love for fashion as well as the anxiety of harassment when she leaves her house in these clothes. She said,

> *Over the years I've developed different ways to cope like cultivating a determined lack of perception while remaining hypervigilant when I'm out of the house. Even as I force myself to tune out the catcalls and comments, I have to watch out for potential assaults. Whenever I wear shorts or miniskirts, I meticulously plan out my itinerary (including how long I'll actually have to walk from the cab to my destination.) Naturally, this is stifling when it comes to wearing my voice. But still I persist. For me, wearing my voice is an act of courage, else I wouldn't be able to venture outdoors, but it's also an act of love: my love for and commitment towards fashion and my individual style.*[20]

Thus, as a fat woman, she has reported several if not daily experiences of body shaming, moral policing and sexual harassment, both in her online and offline worlds.

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[18] Refer to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgQjfcpG7XY Accessed on 24 March 2017.

[19] Refer to http://www.browngirlmagazine.com/2016/01/suraiya-ali-body-hair-and-the-clap-back-heard-around-the-world/ Accessed on 24 March 2017.

[20] Quote taken from http://wearyourvoicemag.com/more/lifestyle/stylecrush/518-stylecrush-ragini-nag-rao (23 March 2017)

Fat shaming is one of the most prevalent forms of harassment online as well as offline and has the potential to hurt known people and strangers. There are numerous examples of this online, some of which are extremely serious, encouraging the person to kill herself as she is such a waste of space (D'Onfro, 2013). This kind of shaming is also deeply gendered. Despite this, there is not much conversation about this phenomenon in India. Nicole Arbour's[21] highly controversial video on fat people in which she has shamed and criticised fat people on both grounds of health and beauty went viral more than a year ago. This met with numerous response videos by body positive activists[22] and even cost Arbour her job as a choreographer for a movie, ironically about the issue of fat shaming. Sadly, some of the videos countering her also resorted to fat shaming and slut shaming Arbour and bringing out its deeply gendered nature and the circularity and continuity that exists in the discourse of female body shaming.

Thus, the architecture and design of many of these interactive online spaces is deeply gendered and enables these kinds of violence and shaming. It promotes disciplining of femininities and bodies along normative lines. Despite this, activists use image sharing platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and Tumblr to enable shared and collective contexts to those who face body shaming and harassment in their daily lives. Body positive activists have not only provided support through personal examples and struggles, they have helped reconstruct 'body image', reclaiming words such as 'fat', 'hairy' and 'bearded', which have been stigmatised in mainstream discourse. These spaces are being influenced and rewritten along lines of gender justice and inclusion; and body positivity is a powerful tool to do this. However, even here, the bodies that are being addressed are mostly white and the representation of bodies of colour is less.

5. *Contradictions, Contestations and Instability of Gender Identities and Bodies*

I don't think I believe in gender. I want to know who said a vagina is for a woman and a penis is for a man, or pink is for a girl and blue is for a boy. I am sitting here with a vagina and boobs – and a big beautiful beard - Harnaam Kaur in an interview for the Guardian (Khaleeli, 2016)

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[21] Refer to "Dear Fat People" video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CXFgNhyP4-A. Accessed 20 December 2015. It has now been removed. Refer to "My Response to Nicole Arbour's Dear Fat People Video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGzSk1u4-Y0. Accessed 20 December 2015. Refer to "Dear Fat People…My Response to Nicole Arbour". https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-G1ljDiB7hU Accessed 20 December 2015

[22] Refer to "My Response to Nicole Arbour's Dear Fat People Video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGzSk1u4-Y0. Accessed 20 December 2015. Refer to "Dear Fat People…My Response to Nicole Arbour". https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-G1ljDiB7hU Accessed 20 December 2015. Refer to "What I want to say to Fat People: Response to Nicole Arbour". https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2YYZBrPwwU Accessed 20 December 2015

When we speak of gendered bodies being constructed and contested in online space, we need to understand that they are multi-dimensional, fragmented, and exist simultaneously in various spaces and forms. Donna Haraway's curious entity the 'cyborg' [23] is a very useful analytical category to interrogate and problematise technologically mediated identities (1991). A cyborg is also an ironical construction as it contains both organic and inorganic elements, represents both social reality and fiction, imagination and material reality. It is a creature that belongs to a post-gender, post-body world, one which is devoid of binaries both socially defined and naturalised, and does not aspire to any kind of "organic wholeness"[24]. It troubles the assumptions of the organic whole, something that the post-feminist narrative pushed by market driven consumerism is trying to promote.

Post-feminist theorisation of self would have us believe that the construction of identity and the production of self is whole, complete, free and choice based, while it is in fact fragmented, incomplete, regulated, controlled and disciplined, based on adherence to normative ideals of femininity. Much work has been done on the production of the feminine self in online spaces. The branded post-feminist self as well as the 'contemporary interactive subject' is simultaneously produced, consumed and reproduced in an interactive space structured by constant surveillance and spectatorship. Kearney (2015) argues that this reading of women both in online spaces, as whole, independent, and agential beings does not take into consideration the implicit power relations that operate in these spaces regulating actions of people. It is hopelessly one dimensional as it does not take into consideration the complexities and politics that structure feminine identity and online space (ibid). Here I will bring in the point on 'precarity' of identity by Baer (2016) to suggest a rethink, and an expression of new subjectivities and politics. Butler (1990) speaks of the 'incompleteness' of a woman's identity, which renders the woman's identity, as a site to contest and challenge dominant understandings. This can be linked to what Baer says about the precarity and insecurity that is attributed to the female body, which renders it as a site

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[23] Donna Haraway refers to 'cyborg' as a post second World War hybrid entity composed of organic and machine-like components and function as "odd boundary creatures" mentioned along with women and simians, and all of which have the potential to challenge the conventional discourse in science, identity and politics, and are in turn highly contested (2001:2). The cyborg presents a simultaneous social reality and fiction and redefines women's experience in the late twentieth century (149). It is ambiguity, at once it is both a product of imagination and material reality (150).

[24] However, Landström (2007 citing Currier, 2003:16) suggests that it is not always used in the complex way that it is meant to, in fact in feminist constructivist technology studies, it can be said that the cyborg has been used simplistically as part human, part machine, rather than looking at it in terms of relations in terms of assemblage and the relations between different elements, meanings, signs and practices, which keep changing. This view enables going beyond the deterministic understandings of identity constructions.

of empowerment as well as a site for control and surveillance, revealing it as an embodied contradiction, and thus a political site for protest.

Harnaam and Ragini's bodily assertions through fashion and photography thus have subversive potential, and it is the incompleteness and contradictions that are embodied in their work, that allow space for subversions and contestations. Their body politics does not allow them to be categorised, located or labeled easily. These performances reveal a spectrum of subversions, displaying radical characteristics, as well as innovative negotiations within the system.

Concluding Thoughts: Rewriting Bodies and Technologies through 'Othered' Bodies

The bodies and technology, particularly the cyber technology debate, is usually polarised along two dominant narratives, one that focuses on the primacy of the body and the human agency, that is body as source of technology; and one that regards body as 'location', as a site on which technology is written and imposed (Shilling, 2005: 187). However, it is the interaction of the two that this paper explores. Internet technologies, gender and bodies are intersecting, and it is at this intersection, that opportunities for counter discourses and alternate understandings are seen to emerge.

These 'othered' bodies thus trouble the socially and culturally constructed boundaries between embodied femininities and masculinities, as well as bodies and technologies, thus enabling interactive and transformative spaces to emerge. Although, these subversive bodies and expressions operate within the power structures that they are fighting against, they have made a place for themselves within this mainstream discourse. They continue to produce counter knowledges in the face of violent backlash, and initiate and influence minds, bodies and technologies.

For Wittig language is the tool through which the signification of sexed bodies occurs, and she proposes to (re)appropriate language so as to resignify and remake meanings, through a plurality and multiplicity of sex (1990:240). Although Butler has problematised this, it does show some strength. This paper extends this to suggest that through a multiplicity of embodied difference (Shildrick, 2002:3), that is, through a plurality of embodied, subversive 'femininities' that body positive activists have employed in the online space, they challenge the linguistic and cultural construction of beauty and femininity. In this process, the 'body' is brought back, visibalised, or reclaimed. Haraway (1988) speaks about the engaging body, and 'activation' of objects of knowledge such as the body, that were previously regarded as passive and a mere resource. "The

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various contending bodies emerge at the intersection of biological research and writing, medical and other business practices, and technology" (ibid: 595).

The interactions between bodies and technologies are thus facilitating the creation of a new political language of beauty and bodies, one that challenges mainstream notions, and also at the same time, exposes the dominant sexual politics of the technologically mediated body. It attempts to articulate experiences of marginalised and suppressed bodies, thus allowing opportunities for new possibilities of embodiment. Technologies are being used for self-formation and these in turn are influencing the way these technologies are designed, perceived and used. Online technologies, which have been usually used to promote hegemonic bodies, are increasingly being reshaped to share knowledges about 'other' bodies. Body positive movements in online spaces have visibalised various kinds of bodies, thus shattering singular notions of 'normal' and 'beautiful'.

These counter knowledges and discourses have emerged in spite of or in the face of power hierarchies, harassment and abuse that structure these online spaces. These shared contexts enable connections between different people with different lived realities and have the potential to tear down divides that have been constructed between people across class, caste, gender, sexuality, religion, bodies and beliefs. Amidst the persistent right wing, patriarchal and homophobic backlash, these are not small victories.

Finally, this paper sheds light on the urgent need for a post-colonial feminist understanding of gender and bodies, and in particular, the need to build South Asian, Indian as well as regional narratives on femininities, bodies and beauty. There is also a need to understand the reasons why body positive campaigns in India are still a new phenomenon, and the role of structural constraints like caste, patriarchy and religion in shaping the Indian and South Asian body positive movement. A nuanced, pluralistic, heterogeneous and intersectional understanding on embodied femininities is an urgent academic task to take on and this paper hopes to have made some openings in this direction.

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Bharatanatyam in Lucknow:

The Role of Cultural Enterprise, Mobile Telephony, and SNS Networks in Reframing a *Parampara*

Aparna Srivastava

Abstract

This paper explores the growth of Bharatanatyam in Lucknow in the contemporary moment and how the art form uses Social Networking Service/Site (SNS) to recreate 'tradition' in the modern market. The paper identifies three cis-male Bharatanatyam dancers who are involved in recreating this tradition and bases the research on open-ended interviews conducted with them and with some of their students. The paper attempts to trace a very brief history of Bharatanatyam in Lucknow and also tries to chart the route it took post liberalisation. However, it is primarily concerned with how the use of SNS technologies have a) altered the aesthetics of performance, b) altered the class and gender-based identities of the dancers, and c) aided in cementing the tradition of Bharatanatyam within the framework of a *guru-shishya parampara[1]*.

Key words: Bharatanatyam, Lucknow, Facebook, Cultural Enterprise, Dancer, Identity

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[1] Please do note that this paper has been written in the absence of any previous primary data available on the number of dance classes, a history of Bharatanatyam in Lucknow, or any related writings on the same. In a sense, it is also the attempt of a dancer herself to understand how a professional Bharatanatyam dancer negotiates his/her art, socio-economic context, and digital engagements today in Lucknow - a city that was never a stronghold of Bharatanatyam. It hopes to provide a sense of some past engagement between the dancer and technologies that were available to them then, and how that relationship today enables their lives as artists.

"Stage ke baad, real life me vaapas aa jaana chahiye, Facebook pe nahi le jaana chahiye²," remarks Naved, a Bharatanatyam dancer from Lucknow. He says this in reference to 'emasculated' dancers who, in his opinion, have permanently 'feminised' their bodies through dance. He believes that the subsequent emasculation is also at times reflected in the selfies of the dancers on Facebook. He contends that such representations can slander the image of other, more *masculine* dancers. This paper attempts to understand how the dancers build their dance livelihoods (which the paper attempts to understand by referring to them as cultural enterprises), and their identity as Bharatanatyam dancers under the influence of digital interfaces, particularly Facebook.

Facebook is a Social Networking Service/Site (SNS). Critic Zenyep Tufecki (2008) ascribes two functions to such an online space, namely an i) expressive function wherein the 'profiles' of users have 'high levels of self-exposure,' framed by semi-public comments from fellow users, and secondly, an ii) instrumental function which tends towards commercial and efficiency based usage of the website. The first function, the 'expressive' function surely has historical offline antecedents.

By historical offline antecedents I mean attempts at expressing one's identity without resorting to the online medium. However, older technologies like photography have always been instrumental in furthering artistic identities. An example of this is the attempt of dancer Ram Gopal to cement his identity as a hybrid dancer of Bharatanatyam and Western dance forms via his photographs. Despite these attempts, popular culture seems to have an amnesia remembering him as compared to remembering his contemporaries like Uday Shankar or puritan dancers like Rukmini Devi Arundale (Abraham and Sinha, n.d.). This amnesia has been ascribed to his failure at institutionalising himself -

> *Ram Gopal's attempt to create and control an archive of himself reflects a conscious effort to define himself as a historical figure within the history of Indian Dance. It is ironic that despite his self-eulogising, he is one of India's less remembered modern dancers. This historical amnesia could have occurred for multiple reasons. Perhaps more traditional dancers were so dismissive of Ram Gopal's hybrid aesthetic and his defiance of a technique-based notion of virtuosity that they did not include him in their own histories. Or perhaps, because Ram Gopal, unlike his contemporaries, never managed to establish pedagogy, he failed to institutionalise himself. His archive, then, does not expand on a history we already know. Rather, it begs us to piece one together from our ignorance. As Ajay says, 'Ram Gopal's archive points to the fissures, the gaps in history, through which he fell'* (Abraham and Sinha, n.d.).

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² After performing on stage, one should get back to real life and not on Facebook.

I believe this paper is an attempt at understanding how Bharatanatyam dancers use the online space to not only express their artistic identities, but also as a medium to structure and maybe digitally institutionalise their artistic practice, choreography, and identity; each of them in their own ways.

Popular Culture and Dance

The influence of television on dance is an instance of how new technology has influenced a change in the economic set up of dance classes across India. This in turn has resulted in ways in which their institutionalisation has changed. I frame this argument within the idea of a cultural economy (Du Gay & Pryke, 2002) wherein a vast array of research[3] has claimed dance to have been largely influenced by television, especially reality T.V. culture. The latter emerged alongside the rise of globalisation. Within the dance economy, if one were to use such a term, the influence of reality television has definitely increased audience exposure to different dance forms. This has partly provided impetus for newer dance choreographies and a mushrooming of classes (Das, 2015) even before Shiamak Davar and Ashley Lobo institutionalised Western and Bollywood dance in India.

Thus, in one respect, 'cultural enterprise' refers to artists seeking independence in their engagement with art through choreographic imaginations which are materialised by changing economic set ups inspired by versions of dance more easily available, accessible, and 'teachable' than rigorous 'classical' dance. Amrit Sinha once made it to the opening rounds of the reality television series *Dance India Dance*, which gave him monetary incentive and popularity in the city, which helped him expand his dance school.

This paper addresses such local dance 'enterprises' of three Bharatanatyam dancers in Lucknow. In a way, this idea of a global, almost cosmopolitan context of cultural entrepreneurs stands against State support of artists, which earlier, was the only way for 'classical' dancers to move up their career and social ladders. Cultural enterprise in dance today, then, is a negotiation made increasingly possible by the disruptive technologies of the mobile phone and internet which

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[3] 'Culture' is accorded a privileged position in this endeavour because it is seen to play a crucial role in structuring the way people think, feel and act in organisations. The idea that culture and economics are essentially different is challenged in such an understanding.

makes dance a permanent livelihood in a manner that was never possible before[4] when Bhatkhande Music College, established in 1926, was the only space in Lucknow that offered training in the classical, and later, folk arts.

The Dance Patrons

Earlier, learning at Bhatkhande Music Institute and acquiring a degree from there was the only option for aspiring dancers to make art of value in the 'real' world, with the value coming from the degree earned at the end of five years. This would largely fit with the State supported model of dance that has come up in post-independence India. With the advent of liberalisation, a new age patronage system of sorts arose, at least in Lucknow. Here, the dancer fresh out of Bhatkhande would seek employment at a pre-existing dance class, whose owner would not be a practising dancer in most cases, but would rather be a middle class Indian with sufficient monetary and social capital. Even in an age of increasing digital technologies (like cassettes, CDs, recording studios), some dance schools wished to maintain the digital capital divide and for example, not record music to distribute to the students. Now, some of these classes have lost out to the newer forms of dance enterprises.

One such owner of a dance class is Neha Chandra[5]. A student recalls her saying, "I am a businesswoman. You must not discuss any details of the payment made to me with your dance teacher. It is a breach of trust!" This comment is recalled by a student from *Divyanjali*, a Bharatanatyam dance class in Lucknow established in 1990. At *Divyanjali,* music records were analogue, and while these analogue cassette copies were available, they were never given to students or even to the dancers who were employed to teach these dances. In rare cases these cassette copies were given to 'best' students for school performances. In terms of any technical resources required to commence an independent venture, the artist remained handicapped. The

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[4] While the paper acknowledges the looming context of entrepreneurship in India in present times, it does not frame these dancers within this framework, though they can be easily viewed as entrepreneurs. Gyanendra says, "I don't call myself an entrepreneur, but what I do is like that." This is not to suggest that the dancers are only second-hand versions of their metropolitan counterparts who often fashion themselves as pan-Indian, new age Mark Zuckerburgs and entrepreneurs. The paper also does not intend to suggest a metropolitan and second tier city divide. While the dancers do not adhere to the image of metropolitan cultural entrepreneurs selling high art to the public, they have changed the manner in which the structure of Bharatanatyam classes have functioned in Lucknow.

[5] Name changed.

school is in decline as compared to its relative popularity in Lucknow in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Such a system could be called a new age patronage of sorts, or to use a buzz word, an 'enterprise.' However, the artist never had any autonomy, which was held by the owner/patron of the institute, because of their ownership on wealth and 'cultural capital.' "If you have (in Pierre Bourdieu's useful term) the 'cultural capital' to gain a tenured professorship at a university, play regularly in a major symphony orchestra or write mega bestsellers, you can earn an excellent living doing what you love. Short of that, you must pursue your passion on the side" (Gutting, 2013). In other words, Bourdieu extended the idea of power coming from land ownership to other kinds of possessions like social taste, clothes, mannerisms, or belonging to a given social class. In Lucknow, people like Neha Chandra enjoyed massive cultural capital. With regards to the paper, it would be helpful to see her as a person who had the power to define what socially desirable art would look like. The artists did not wield this power. They were mostly pursuing their passion on the 'side.'

The dancers concerned do not take on their dance classes as part-time engagements but as full-time jobs This paper describes the process of how this happened over time, through the use of varied technologies, and the changes it has brought in the structure/institution of the dance class, the image of the artist, the nature of their art, and negotiations of gender.

The process of acquisition of cultural capital was different for the oldest dancer amongst the three, Gyanendra who claims that during his time, he was never sure of taking up dance full-time. His career evolved through events he could not foresee in a way that is possible today. While the other dancers described in the paper were still at the stage of building their careers and identities in their twenties; Gyanendra incorporated the changes into his existing identity as a lecturer of Bharatanatyam. Interestingly, when asked if their lives as dancers had changed over the last five years, and whether access to digital technologies had a major role in the same, all three dancers answered with a resounding yes. The question arises, how is the artistic identity defined?

Self-Fashioning the Artist: The Dancer and the Image

One of the nascent foundations of the present day dance enterprises and dance classes lies in the imaginations of the dancing self, articulated both through a passion for dance, and a digital substitution for images of dance. Naved's negotiations with dance illustrate this. Naved locates

himself as an upper caste Muslim cis-male, and mentions the stringent opposition to dance which he faced at his locality in Aishbagh, Old Lucknow. His inspiration to pursue dance professionally came through email exchanges on Yahoo Mail. Naved reminisces about the importance of having a male Bharatanatyam dancer in the city as an example to look up to, and gives an early instance of how he found a digital substitute for it, when the sole male Bharatanatyam dancer in the city, Gyanendra Bajpai left for Tokyo to teach Bharatanatyam on a Government of India Scholarship in 2007.

He recalls, "*Sir mujhe photos bhejte the apne dance ki. Mai dance ke inspiration ka poora credit sir ko deta hu[6]*". Naved then located Gyanendra's Guru, Saroja Vaidynathan through searches on Google which he says gave him the gumption to leave the Bachelors of Science in Physiotheraphy which he was pursuing from Sitapur, a town near Lucknow, to leave for Delhi to learn dance much to the horror of his family. When Amrit had started his dance academy Rhythm Divine, he was not a Bharatanatyam 'guru' yet. Until then – that is the time when the three dancers had already started engaging with Bharatanatyam albeit in different capacities and over varying periods of time – digital technology had not pervaded cities in the way that it now does. 2010 was an interesting year for the dancers; not only were android smartphones finding wider audiences in India along with data packs on the mobile phone, but all the dancers, had also received an opportunity to perform at the opening ceremony of the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi. For Amrit, this meant meeting the guru in Delhi for the first time. Naved had already conducted his arangetram under Guru Saroja Vaidyanathan.

Even post this success, their situation in Lucknow did not change drastically. However, along with such events, and a gradual percolation of mobile technologies and increased internet access, the digital divide was being bridged. Up until 2010, most dancers in Lucknow used a recording studio to edit songs, as access to software editing was not yet common. For example, even to merge two songs, one had to rush to the recording studio.

And this directly influenced the work of the dancers, since they needed to make a huge investment to set up a dance performance. Gyanendra - who happens to be one of the very few classical teachers who gave out classical music as MP3 files via email - notes how the analogue hardware was increasingly rendered unnecessary, and the cumbersome business of obtaining an orchestra, especially the *mridang* player from Chennai or Delhi, or the near impossibility of finding a Carnatic vocalist in Lucknow could be done away with. The easy availability of cheap

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[6] Sir would send me photographs of his dance. I give all the credit for my inspiration of dance to him.

mobile phones now sufficed to do the job of an esteemed orchestra, thus saving a lot of costs involved in procuring a traditional Bharatanatyam musical set-up. Now, in 2015, Naved comments, "I re-subscribe to my data pack 3-4 times a month. This (my profession) would be impossible without a mobile phone. *Ishtihaar se zyaada toh Facebook acha hai. Itna kharcha hota hai, aur classical dance ko Bollywood jaisi sponsorship bhi nahi milti hai[7]*".

However, while it makes their enterprise possible, there are some roadblocks which digital access does not help overcome. As Naved further comments, despite the presence of mobile telephony and data-packs, which dancers mostly use as opposed to Wi-Fi since they are always travelling, Bharatanatyam still requires a 60,000 rupees investment for a ten minute music piece on *Dashavataram* (10 avatars of Krishna). This is necessary to maintain oneself as a 'serious' dancer. Occasional visits by the benevolent guru from the metropolis, Delhi, are as important towards contributing to the dancer's cultural capital in the market, as is making that exorbitant monetary investment which Naved claims to bear out of his own pocket.

This brings into question the position of the artists on the kinds of choreographies dancers produce in the digital age, which is also co-terminus with late capitalism. Much has been theorised about it, including the prediction of post-modern, pastiche art, of mass production in art, its ability to defy ritual, to dissolve boundaries between high and low art. It is the innovations made in the musical score for Bharatanatyam that have brought about unprecedented change in Bharatanatyam in Lucknow. The choreographies are products of and respond to, a new kind of digital mash-up of music, which is unusual for dancers who claim to be serious, professional practitioners of Bharatanatyam. Proper Bharatanatyam comprises 'pure' classical music for many even today, and the existing gurus in the traditional centres of the dance form do not share music until senior disciples purchase it from them. Even their students refuse to share the music at times. As Anita recalls, one of the students of a famous guru in Delhi refused to share an MP3 file of a very common opening song, *Pushpanjali* which she procured later from a student in Lucknow.

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[7] Facebook is better than (regular) advertisements. Especially since classical dance does not get the same kind of sponsorship as Bollywood does.

New Choreographies?

Apart from digitally sharing puritan music, the repertoire in Lucknow is marked by how the dancers respond to a different digital mash-up of music, a kind of pastiche of different songs and therefore, differing choreographies to those songs. "We do not use the music as a program or instructional cue—we do not have an instrumental relation to it— for the music (situation) speaks to us directly and personally and to our bodies as a whole," writes Firth (2004). Interviews with the dancers suggested that the ability to create cheap, quick music online is reflected in the thematic choice of their dance, and the structure of their dance class; however, it does not uniformly correspond with their individual public personas as artists which they try to carefully craft on Facebook. The following discussions attempt to trace these assertions.

Gyanendra was initially not a part of this study since he is supported by the government and is a permanent lecturer in Bharatanatyam at Bhatkhande Institute, Lucknow. However, he has negotiated with changes in the dance economy the most. Since 2013, he has been choreographing ballets, using music procured through mobile internet. Earlier, he was against the notion that Bharatanatyam should be vilified by mixing it with other forms; semi-classical was an unforgivable realm. He narrates two important things in this regard, both of which would not have been possible in an age before SNS mobile telephony, namely that – i) via Facebook, he became cognisant of feminist issues, which he then incorporated into a modern-day Bharatanatyam routine because he saw these themes to be important and fashionable, and ii) the importance of the background score, the music which makes dance possible in the first place. Interestingly, he did not mention anything about the music or background score when I initially spoke to him.

This account resonates with a comment Maria Popova made on images that the Facebook algorithm barrages us with. "I recently witnessed a commenter on Facebook throw a rather unwholesome epithet at Sontag herself, in *reacting* solely to an auto-generated thumbnail image, rather than *responding* to the 2,000-word article about Sontag, which Facebook's mindless algorithm had chosen to 'interpret' by that thumbnail image — human and machine colluding in an especially violent modern form of 'interpretation'" (2015). This 'especially violent modern form of interpretation', the interpretation provoked by Facebook's mindless algorithm is seen in the thematic of the dancers' choreographies, which is not to suggest that the choreographies are mindless, but to suggest that social media, especially Facebook seems to be an important interface through which artists, here Gyanendra, derive a moral social responsibility to engage with socio-political issues by looking at images being circulated and not necessarily through

engaging with the larger more complex debates. A narration of Gyanendra's account of the thematic of his dance follows.

He recently choreographed a dance based on widow remarriage in Barabanki, where a Hindu child widow is rescued by a Muslim man. This was done to music played on the mobile phone. This ease of plugging in a mobile phone has increased the number of 'ballet,' 'dance-drama' like productions Gyanendra has done since 2010. Gyanendra posits that his presentation of the case of widows was taken up owing to the absence of this issue in feminist posts on media he sees through Facebook. While there are ample instances of child widow grievances online, there are very few instances such as the one he highlighted. Gyanendra claims he presents a fresh view.

This brings into question the artistic choreographic agency in face of technological determinism (Buckingham, 2008). Would these be very different artists if it were not for their online selves? The answer seems to be i) yes, dance as it is practised now is essentially a cybernetic one –it derives its theme from what seems viable and fashionable online and ii) artistic agency is enabled by the free availability of music online. What is easily available online, on new forms of technology is what drives new choreographies as opposed to existing modes of 'classical dance' choreographies which require a four person orchestra and an adherence to the rules of classical dance.

Nevertheless, about an hour after Gyanendra recounted the story of how he choreographed his Bharatanatyam ballet, his student and dancer Anuj entered the room, and spoke of his initiation into classical dance after a reality TV judge deemed him to be an incapable dancer since he did not know classical dance. Like Amrit, Anuj too started his professional dance career post rejection from a reality television show. However, Anuj is also known for mixing music for Bharatanatyam ballets and does so for Gyanendra.

This is the conversation which follows, on the uses of Western percussions to compose dance ballets. This is made possible by Gyanendra's collaboration with Anuj, who practises both Bharatanatyam and Western contemporary dances. Gyanendra points to Anuj, bowing his head in acknowledgement, and says, "Anuj was the master act behind my ballet production in Barabanki." Anuj elaborated upon this by saying that he used 'contemporary, Bharatanatyam, Hip-Hop, and Robotic' music to compose the background score. Mixing of songs easily available online can beguile listeners who lack musical knowledge. Gyanendra did not point out the use of Western music earlier, where he only emphasised on his Facebook-inspired social responsibility being transposed on his self-composed choreography.

However, it is argued that "when copies compete with originals, and when new works are produced with technology in mind, the old values of 'creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery' fall away" (Ross, Kirsch and Menand, 2014). The dancers though, do not view their works to be a copy, be it music or dance thematics and steps. Copying costume and jewellery design is acceptable. Naved remarks how browsing Facebook casually enables Gyanendra, Anuj, and Naved to encounter ideas which 'inspire' the thematics in dance.

When asked about their online browsing patterns and their Facebook use for choreography ideas, Anuj and Gyanendra, looked at each other, almost on the verge of taking offence it seemed, to assert vehemently in unison that "we only take inspiration, and never copy!" This foregrounds the importance that internet has in their lives. It opens up the idea that the Internet can be an object, a process, an imagination, and that each of these nuances adds to how we can study its techno-social existence.

The Dance without a Name

When asked, "Is there a name for your choreographies within the Bharatanatyam repertoire?" Gyanendra immediately replied, "This is not Bharatanatyam." "So is it contemporary?" I asked both Gyanendra and Anuj. They looked at each other, and said no, it was not contemporary either. The suggestion of the dance being contemporary was met by a sort of revulsion despite the fact that they actively use Western percussions. "*Iska koi naam nahi hai*,"[8] said Gyanendra.

His belief is reflected in the structure of his dance classes which offer all kinds of dances. As opposed to Amrit, Gyanendra and Anuj have a different dance set-up. Naved's dance school is different too. By day, he teaches Bharatanatyam in a government school. In conversation with me over the phone he said, "You must visit my class, I have done Western choreography with Bharatanatyam". The next day, even as he demonstrated his dances, which included *Bumbhro*[9] and Amitabh Bachchan's *Hanuman Chalisa*[10] amongst others, he insisted, "*Classical toh classical hi*

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[8] It has no name.

[9] Mahadevan, S., Noorani, E. and Mendonsa, L. (2000). B*umbro Mission Kashmir*. [Online] Mumbai: Tips. Available at: https://bit.ly/2KGqlQo [Accessed 6 May 2018].

[10] Sri Hanuman Chalisa. (2013). E Dharma. Available at: https://bit.ly/2jzpvIM [Accessed 6 May 2018].

hai. Steps me purity honi chahiye.[11]" In the evenings, he runs his own dance school which only teaches classical dance.

Amrit Sinha freely engages in mixing not only Bollywood music, but also music composed for the opening of national and international sports ceremonies, music from national dance festivals in India and with his students, performs Bharatanatyam to Bollywood songs like*Breathless*[12] and *Baaware* [13]. He now runs three branches of Rhythm Divine across Lucknow, with a total strength of six hundred students. Gyanendra, who uses mixed music but refuses to align himself with anything other than Bharatanatyam has taken to crowd funding online.

Gyanendra recounts his collaboration with Dream Wallets, an online crowd funding portal. Given that composing any music for a 'serious' classical dance concert requires a lot of investment, there is potential reason as to why Gyanendra has to work with Dream Wallets

unlike Amrit, who considers no difference between what is classical and what is not. "*Kuch farak nahi hota, dance me bas story zaroori hoti hai[14]*," says Amrit.

Gyanendra's tryst with Dream Wallets is intertwined with the concept of 'publicness' (Habermas, 1989) of the dancers in cyberspace. The internet thus becomes a catalyst for their choreographic dreams, and an able, much cheaper 'public relations officer' for their dancing selves. Gyanendra says, "Facebook is my public relations officer" because it enables him to connect with dancers and dance organisations he was not aware of previously.

Part of the publicity is ensuring visibility, for which massive self-promotion is undertaken by the all the dancers. Gyanendra says that with the mass use of Facebook, he has been able to reach out to dance communities in Assam and annually conducts month long workshops. He says, "I message new people constantly, exchange emails, and sometimes they revert, call me on my mobile and follow up with me." This is how Dream Wallets contacted him on Facebook, and the dance he had presented in Barabanki, transformed into a large-scale ballet production called

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[11] Classical dance is classical dance, steps need to have purity.

[12] Mahadevan, S. and Akhtar, J. (1998). *Breathless*. Saregama. Available at: https://bit.ly/2HVEfw3 [Accessed 6 May 2018].

[13] Mahadevan, S., Noorani, E. and Mendonsa, L. (2009). *Banware*. T-Series. Available at: https://bit.ly/2HUKf8l [Accessed 6 May 2018].

[14] It doesn't make a difference. Only the story is important in dance.

Komal Hu, Kamzor Nahi[15], a dance ballet on female empowerment. People who contribute to the production are offered awards in lieu of their payment.

The dancers embody many roles, with many publics across diverse spaces and in this event, Facebook profiles function as compressed geographies of the dancers' enterprises for they make possible a "social connection through spatial abstraction" which is initially "removed from physicality" (Gordon 2007: 890). For instance, the Facebook profiles of the dancers often best summarise their dance enterprise. Amrit posts a picture of his Rhythm Divine dance students, as he poses as Lord Shiva wearing a Mickey Mouse Jumper in New Jersey, USA where he was performing, all at the same time. Gyanendra's profile is even more complex as his ballet pictures, posts from Dream Wallets, pictures of his Bhatkhande Dance class, pictures of his workshops in Assam come together to define his engagements as a dancer. This only underscores the fact that sociality of dancers is largely networked online.

Then, this closed privileged group membership on Facebook is akin to being part of the dance elite which is the zenith for dancers in terms of social mobility through dance. Naved also proudly took me through a WhatsApp Group he was part of which also had his favourite dancer Rama Vaidyanathan. Despite these myriad socialities and compressed geographies (Papacharissi, 2009), the most important factor for the dancers is the self-fashioning of themselves as Bharatanatyam gurus. There is a constant hailing of them by their students on Facebook as 'Guru'. The idea of having a Bharatanatyam guru in Lucknow is not common as opposed to more landed, rooted dance forms like Kathak. Even Gyanendra initially did not use this appellation. Dance classes in Lucknow, unlike those in the metropolis or cities in parts of South India, never ever had the traditional *guru-shishya parampara*.

One of the first *arangetrams[16]* in the city after a haitus of 27 years, according to Gyanendra, was performed as recently as 2010 by Gyanendra. And as the artist says, one of the most important parts of such functions is to make them visible on Facebook. Amrit, who performed his *arangetram* in 2011 has already conducted a few *arangetrams* himself and pictures of the dancer performing are sparse. Not a single picture could be seen on his profile but his picture as a guru was very prominent.

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[15] I'm Tender, Not Weak.

[16] Maiden dance performance.

It can be said that the digital realm through such individuation enables the dancers to transpose a model of dance economy of exploitation that was essentially absent in the city; the cost of an *arangetram* is not hard to bear, the student performing the *arangetram* pays for everything herself/himself. Furthermore, as Naved says, most pictures he puts up are of dance, and he ensures that they are the best of pictures. The act of promoting themselves on Facebook is an assertion and affirmation of their identities and that of the guru, despite the disruptive technologies and the entry into informal economy of the dancers. Contrary to the fact that mass reproductions quell rituals, it seems to be promoting them.

However, despite the potential predetermination of independent artistic imaginations, the manipulation of the dancer as a pan-Indian traditional guru is an "experimentation with and development of new forms of bodily identity. New music whose kinetic power reflects and reinforces the new bodily identity can emerge; music and dance resonate with each other. What interests me here, in short, is the role of pleasure in fostering personal and social liberation" (Crease 2002: 106-120). The initial reasons given by both were that of their love for dance, and their fascination with how the body moves;. Naved, Amrit, and Gyanendra have successfully negotiated with religious, high art, and class boundaries respectively, adapting to changing media ecologies.

Naved's initial dance school had to be closed just a month after its inception in 2011. This was because of the opposition it faced – in the form of complaints and slanderous comments by the neighbours, for whom the practise of music and dance was viewed as an offensive – during the *Aazaan*. But the classes had to be continued for a month since the fees had been taken. Now, Naved has shifted his classes and does not practise from home. He teaches in Puraniya. He advertises his classes mostly through Facebook and Whatsapp. He showed me a list of groups he was on which were clearly very important to him, and served as a marker of his progress as a dancer. He claims, that the opposition he faces, both from his family and his locality, is absent on his life as a dancer on Facebook, where he feels accepted. "*Kehte hain India aage badh raha hai, badh raha hoga, par mentality sab vahi hai abhi*[17]," he says in face of the opposition he gets from his neighbourhood, his father's insistence of 'getting a proper job,' and the humiliation he faces as people slander him for performing a 'Hindu,' and '*ladkiyon vaala dance'.*[18]

[17] They say India is progressing. I am sure it is. But the mentality is the same.

[18] A girl's dance.

'Ladkiyon Vaala Dance'

An overarching, important, ubiquitous concern for all the four dancers – on stage, off stage, and on Facebook, is the representation of gender; an important component of self-fashioning for the artists. While their art does not always allow for a masculine assertion, their engagements online, on Facebook, reveal the emasculation anxieties. In his early career, one of the roles Gyanendra had to play most often was that of Draupadi from Mahabharata as part of a Shabdam choreographed by his guru. Some Bharatanatyam dancers argue for the transcendence of the gendered self in dance. Teaching Ardhanarishwara to students, Rama Vaidyanathan argues that dance is a way of transcending gender. This is not quite true when it comes to interviewing the dancers on this pertinent subject. Anuj says, "Yes, dancers, especially male dancers experience bodily changes, but that should not be left in the classroom. *Personality nahi change honi chahiye.*[19]" Moreover, he contends that even online, in digital spaces, this difference must be maintained. Naved adds, *"stage ke baad, real life me vaapas aa jaana chahiye."* He says, *"90% dancers apna haav bhaav badal lete hain.[20]"*

This anxiety is translated on Facebook. Essentially, they choose what is according to them the 'best of best' dance pictures so that their masculinity is never questioned. Anuj adds that it hurts to see adverse comments being posted on pictures of other male dancers, since it tarnishes the image of the male dancer. For Anuj – who dances both contemporary and Bharatanatyam – the difference is explicit when doing classical dance because it demands a lot of facial expressions. "While playing Radha on stage, *jo feel karte ho use stage pe rehne do, use apni personality nahi transform honi chahiye, aur aisi pictures Facebook to bilkul nahi daalni chahiye[21].*" There is this self-censorship against becoming like a woman, despite accepting that they experience moments of transcendence in dance. The transgression of gender binaries in dance remains in the moment of dance according to Naved, Anuj, and Gyanendra.

Towards a Cybernetic *Parampara*?

I have argued that the artistic enterprise of the traditional Bharatanatyam *parampara* in Lucknow is abetted by the possibilities of today's digital cybernetic culture which allows the artists to

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[19] The personality should not change.

[20] Ninety percent of dancers change the way they are.

[21] While performing Radha, one should leave the character on stage, and not feel it in real life.

perform online and offline. They perform their identities, and also source networks, advertise their dance in the market. This has given a specific characteristic to new age choreographies that use a digital mash-up of music and which often use popular feminism as a theme. These technologies have also allowed the artists to accrue not only wealth, but also cultural capital allowing them to pursue dance full-time, and thereby changing the prevailing market structure of Bharatanatyam. All of this, interestingly, aids the performance and economic possibility of making and shaping the very traditional *guru-shishya parampara* in Lucknow.

Innovation in music and easy access to video choreographies enables the dancers to use piracy to further their innovative streaks in lieu of traditional Carnatic orchestras. They would have been very different artists and professionals in the absence of digital technologies. Moreover, they dwell in the realm of the digital almost as much as they dance on stage, for they have created a niche public audience on Facebook, where every 'like' is an assertion of their success as artists, and being members of groups and communities like 'Indian Classical Dancers of the World' is a matter of pride for them, an achievement as great as one in the 'real' world. They have succeeded in pushing boundaries of religion and class, and are driven by narratives of social mobility through art which digital technologies make possible to some degree.

However, gender binaries remain stark in the images of themselves which they post on Facebook, which are carefully clicked, curated, screened to fashion themselves as masculine dancers; an attempt which only underscores how emasculation anxieties are transposed even on Facebook.. Dance is often considered to be rooted in the 'reality' of 'this world' since it is performed by the living body and not virtually created. However as is with other art forms in the digital age, so is the case with Bharatanatyam in Lucknow - "the online self is no longer a reflection of or departure from the off–line self (Wittkower, 2014)." The online persona of the dance and dancer is as important, sometimes more important that the offline persona especially when it comes to i) advertising for one's existence as a dancer/dance guru, ii) collaborating with fellow dancers and prospective students, and iii) finding the tools for both the content of the dance and material for its background score for free. This allows for a new kind of self-performance of classical Bharatanatyam, and consequently allows the dance form to re-form itself in a city where it was only a secondary cultural presence, free itself from the grip of owners of dance classes, and allow new-age practitioners of the dance form to take it forward in ways which would not have been possible without internet technology.

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The Limits of *Jugaad*:

Innovating and Occupational Identity in Khandeshi Cinema

Shiva Thorat

Abstract

This paper is based on fieldwork in the Khandesh region in Maharashtra on the idea of cinema and its production practices, the occupational identities resulting thereof and the struggle for the development of a 'screen' for the practice of cinema. In this context, the process of constituting a screen is itself valuable, culturally empowering and an instance of *Jugaad*. Invoking Rai's (2013) use of the term, I examine its relevance to the field in Khandesh Cinema. I argue that there is more to Jugaad than 'solving and fixing a problem'. Within the framework of a historiography of Khandeshi cinema, problems have inspired innovative responses even as new ways to hack the system emerged. The problem in this case is caste and its attendant set of issues. In spite of the innovations brought to Khandeshi cinema by the ex-untouchable castes, the caste practices and the caste status of these communities persists, begging the question. The innovative potential of Jugaad and its social relevance given that the (power) structure and the social relations of the society are perpetuated by people's occupations, is put to test. The innovators of Khandeshi cinema played important roles on and off screen. Dalit-Bahujans have been producing the 'screen' with the dint of their skills and innovations. That a Khandeshi cinema exists as an enterprise and a culture is due to them. Yet, their innovative and creative abilities have been negated. Ilaiah's (2004) idea of 'spiritual fascism' rings true, with the elite occluding the power that the innovators produced for the cultural enterprise called Khandeshi Cinema.[1]

Key Words: Cinema, Politics, Regional Studies, Music, Identity, Occupation, Jugaad, Caste, Folksongs, Entertainment, Innovations.

### Khandesh Region in State of Maharashtra

Any space to relocate its politics needs its historiography. The notion of region plays an important role in the construction of historiography of socio-cultural politics. In academic and administrative frameworks that have special interest to produce the history as well as documentation of land holding in the imagination of the Khandesh region, this paper examines the following.
As noted by Arvind Deshpande, in his book,

> On 3rd June 1818, Bajirao surrendered …and the war came to an end …But in Northern most district of Maharashtra, namely in Khandesh, desolatory war continued for a fairly long time. Khandesh, lying between the main seat of Maratha Confederacy at Pune and the principal Confederates in North India, occupied a unique strategic importance. Bounded on the North as it was by the Satpuda ranges, it also was subject to depredations by such tribes as Bhils and Koli who infested this range. It was to Khandesh and through Khandesh, that followers of Bajirao would flock and try to escape into the North. Undoubtedly, Khandesh was an important charge, and Elphinstone recommended the name of Captain John Briggs of the Madras Army for this Collectorate (1987).

Deshpande would go further and talk more about Khandesh. A collector man named John Briggs had reported to Elphinstone. In a report Briggs states: "Desolation is everywhere apparent in Candeish (Khandesh). Immense tracts are covered with jungle, in some parts of which there still remain forts entire, and mosques appearing through woods, the monuments of better times" (ibid). The Maratha conflict which lasted from 1802 to end of 1803 were blamed along with the famine of 1804, unjust land revenue patterns of Bajirao II as well as the general destruction of life and property caused by the Bhils, Pindaris and Arab mercenaries. This gives a picture of the possible history which has shaped the understanding of Khandesh in the contemporary history of Maharashtra. This laid the foundations for the cultural practices among castes tribes and religious groups.
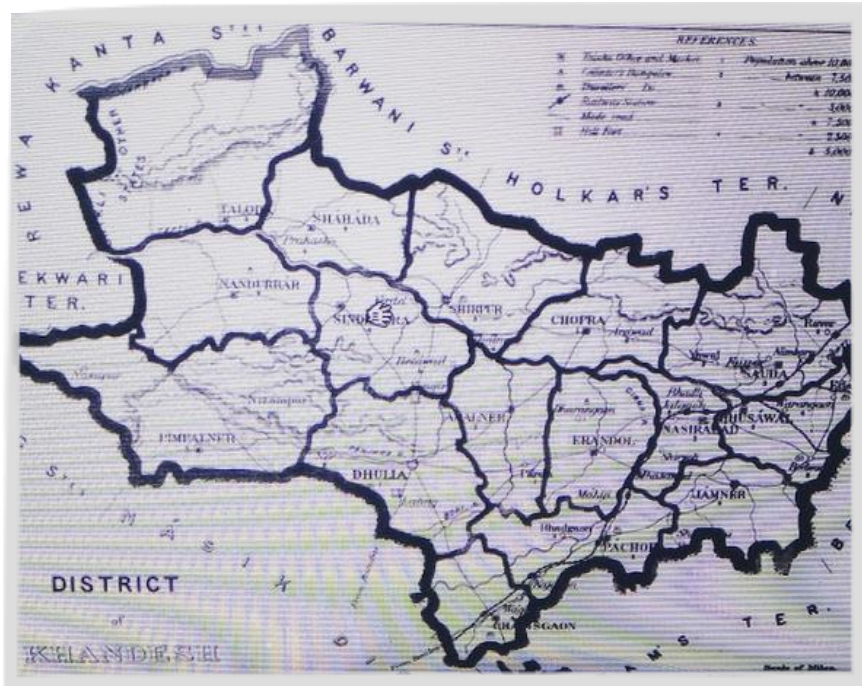
(Khandesh region in 1880, 'Gazette of Mumbai Presidency - Khandesh')

In 1880 the imperial government published a Gazette of the Bombay Presidency with a report on Khandesh and its exchange businesses. It exposed the relationships between the erstwhile Bombay Presidency and Khandesh. It explicitly shows that "Bhusaval railway and Bombay was the main bridge and the Agra highway was known to be the primary way of travel for the connection of Bombay and Khandesh. The chief connection of Khandesh to Bombay was the Narmada river which carried timber to the Bombay coast. Khandesh was one of the largest forests areas of Bombay presidency".

References to this region occur in new ways like popular electronic and print media to describe the Khandesh region. The borders here are more at the level of culture, in the form of day to day experiences of the locals. Nandurbar, Dhule, Jalgaon and North Nashik with the prominent town of Malegaon, Burhanpur District of Madhya Pradesh constitute what is known as Khandesh today. Among them Jalgaon, Shirpur, Pachora, Nasik, Dhule and Malegaon are major places which produce 'cinema' in Khandesh.

Khandeshi Cinema

A brief clarification is in order. There is no cinema in the traditional sense of the term in Khandeshi cinema. Most of the texts are videos and even albums of songs. A thriving practice of making these

'videos' has resulted in what constitutes Khandeshi cinema. In that sense this repurposing of technology resembles what Crick (2005) in the context of political doctrines calls "attempt(s) to find particular and workable solutions." Thorat notes that the origins of what came to be reckoned as Khandeshi Cinema began in 1995 with popular music videos which found favour with the locals. He says,

> *Enthused by the success of the music albums, this practice led to film-making. Among the themes addressed by these films are social issues such as superstition, honour killing and the dowry system. The phenomenal growth of this cinema has attracting the mainstream production companies like Venus, T-series, Wings, and Ultra and TV channels* (Thorat 2015).

To investigate the geographic politics, cinema has proven its role and importance. Khandesh is a region of Maharashtra where the understanding of mainstream print and electronic media begins and ends with deprivation of the region. The image of Khandesh is not that of profound cinema consciousness but production and reproduction contributes to the visual familiarity of screen and reality. In specific understanding of cinema, Khandesh region would not call its industry a cinema industry. It is the audience who make Khandeshi Cinema Industry visible.

Thorat (2014) has connected the peculiarity of the differences among the castes and their choice of language. He says that while the upper castes prefer the use of Hindi and Marathi, it is the population of over 19 lakhs of notably, scheduled castes, tribes and Muslims who speak Ahirani and Pawari languages. It is the use of this language, he argues, that makes Khandeshi Cinema what it is. In the area of Malegaon, Hindi exists but with a mixture of Ahirani. Khandeshi Cinema's use of these languages places it in an advantageous position to capture the issues and the imagination of the region. Thorat cites as an example the popularity of the song *'Dheere Dheere Gadi Chalani Va, Baya Bardoli La'* (Slowly rolls the wagon to Bardoli) that highlights the poverty induced migration (ibid). In the absence of attention in the mainstream media, such media artefacts help fashion the understanding in the region. It is in this detailing of the issues that the videos reach out in the manner of cinema. But for the people who are involved with the production of Khandeshi films, it is by default that they bring out the complexities of their lives on screen. Despite many constraints such as affordability and being judged as a low culture industry, they have transgressed to constitute a screen culture. It is in this act of transgression that the politics of Khandeshi Cinema needs to be viewed. Positing the notion of Jugaad in Khandeshi cinema to interpret passable means and

substituting technologies (video for film etc.) is to leave out the analysis of the true material conditions in which these 'innovations' take place.

But as is the nature of history, the attempts are invisibalised. The interface of the material world and the event is celebrated in the interpretations of affect and in turn repurposed in the service of the dominant, often capitalist formations. Khandeshi cinema received attention for its 'frugal innovations' (Rai, 2015) exemplified in the documentary 'The Supermen of Malegaon' and with it got drawn into the epistemological divisions of dominant cultures and little cultures, almost precluding any attention to the complexities of the event of its production. Of the various facets of this complexity, we look at caste and language for the sake of brevity. For phenomenon like Khandeshi cinema, the conditions for the oppression were preexisting in the form of caste practices. Nothing is more emblematic of this system of social organisation than the Marathi saying '*Bamnya ghari livan, Kunbya ghari daan, Mahara-manga ghari gaan'.* (To the Brahmin's house belongs writing, in the peasant's house the crops, and in the house of the Mahar and Matang (outcastes) performance of dance and music) This is essentially how the relations of production are organised typically on the screen in the mainstream. In the systematic hacking of technology, which is a crucial factor for the production of Khandeshi cinema, it is the lower castes and the untouchables that contribute to the essential labour and inputs and in the process, reproduces the caste system even while invisibalising the labour.

A useful example here would be the history behind the album *Dehati Lokgeete* (Rustic Folksongs) considered to be the first video made in Ahirani language. Most accounts identify the producer of the video to be Bapurav Mahajan (who belongs to the Kunbi community). But what gets invisibalised is the account provided by Ajit Ahire, whom I befriended on a social networking site (he identifies himself online as *Ahirani Bhashik* - Ahirani speaker). Ahire notes that it was Dhaka Ambore who is from *'Matang'* community and a '*Dhavandi*' (town-crier who beats the drum and declares notifications in the village) who composed and sang the songs that became the album. The music director of this video album owned a band that played at weddings and other occasions. A videographer who used to shoot weddings and events was the camera person and the editor for filmmaking. As these men were from lower castes, they chose to highlight the lives of the poor. It is not the first time that the productive contributions of Dalits-Bahujans have been overlooked.

Complications to construct the 'screen'

But the journey to constituting the 'screen' for Khandeshi Cinema was not an easy one. It is an account that falls in the realm of innovations when seen from the perspective that frames Jugaad. It is an account of innovations in spite of the caste structures and also because of it. Enterprises like Khandeshi Cinema have its own social life. The complete involvement of all the sources of occupational identities has its significance which built the screen. There is an intricate connection between identities on and off screen. The definition of *Jugaad* provided by (Radjou, Prabhu and Ahuja, 2012) is "an innovative fix; an improvised solution born from ingenuity and cleverness." They problematised Jugaad itself by saying "it carries a slightly negative connotation for some". Rai invoking Clark's (2008) idea of the 'process of Ecological Assembly' defines Jugaad as the, "…emergent machinic sensory-motor circuit of globalised digitality itself, in which any given obstacle in the way of a flow of desire through an ecology is pragmatically considered and worked around with whatever resources are to hand"(Rai, 2013). He goes on to note that it is "halfway between a representation" and what Bergson calls the idea of an 'image'. It is this image that "has an ontological status in people's perceptions, memories, and habituations…." Bergson says that "an image is half way between a thing and a representation. In other words, it is a sensory motor circuit" (1998 cited in Rai ibid). In this way, Jugaad is a sensory motor circuit of neural (brain) and spatial (material) plasticity (or potentiality).

The potentiality of '*halfway of Jugaad*' in the context here is actuated by the oppression of the caste system. The social implications from many years now have all the facets of dignity and guilt. Priyanka Kamble, a Khandeshi Cinema actress, achieved nothing but abuses from elders, colleagues and friends for doing her job. Coming from a family that had the benefit of education, she was not encouraged to appear on screen or even dance. This was because her family viewed screen performance as a low caste occupation. Late Bharat More, who was an autorickshaw driver, had played the role of the brother of five sisters in a movie called '*Satina Tak*' (The writ of the Goddess Sati, Aabha Chaudhari, undated). He recounted in 2013 that he always had to carry the shooting equipment as he was a driver.

Jugaad innovations in Khandeshi Cinema.

A Rai, A Sehgal and S Thorat argue that "the social practice of everyday hacking, digital and mobile workarounds, information piracy, illegal copying and sharing—in a word, jugaad culture— is an increasing feature of post-liberalisation India. But it has a history that must be understood as always involving repeatedly forgotten experiments in techno-perceptual assemblages"(2015). However, the social practices of India, dominated by the strict hierarchies of caste, maintained as social norms where, cinematic practices are also defined in alignment with caste hierarchies. Khandesh also practices the same hierarchies but the information piracy and workarounds of Khandeshi Cinema falls into the same category. Involved people of Khandeshi cinema can be found copying and sharing the jugaad culture. Sukhdeo Mali, videographer and editor, put into perspective his confrontation with Jugaad, He said that, "Do you remember the song *'Mumbai Gayi Mi Dilli Gayi'* (I went to Mumbai and Delhi), there is a top angle shot. For that I had to climb onto the tree nearby. That song is so beautiful. You can see all dancers and Pushpa (Star and actress) in one frame." Mali knew that he had to get the top angle. He had to make it happen. He makes use of something immediate, like a tree in this case.

> *Launch of new species that already know as product and industry structure such as the creation or destruction of a monopoly position and innovation is a process of industrial mutation, that incessantly revolutionises the economic structure from within, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one.* (Schumpeter, 1976)

This power of creation however is unwaged in every sense of the term. Spivak notes that a "theory of change" includes the "substantial subversion of subalterns" (1988). In Khandeshi cinema the appearance of the narratives and the bodies of the low castes onto the screen, produces the twin effects of the 'aura' of low or little culture and underdevelopment. The understanding of the culture of production through notions of Jugaad is serving this subversion. Coming together of castes (Dalit-Bahujan in this case) may seem positive, but the connotations of the product of this association as impure or low is bothersome. Filmmaker, actor and singer Aaba Chaudhari[2] said to me, "We are struggling a lot to make a movie. But we are making it. When I started making my first movie called *Vishwas Ghat* I didn't think of I would be a filmmaker. I just share my feelings with my friends through a movie and my friends come with their own ideas to make it." Aaba Chaudhari

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[2] Aaba Chaudhari gave interview to the researcher in 2013.

seems to take for granted the availability of talent that will serve well his idea of what ought to be a cultural product.

In this case, I find Rai's (2012) argument on Jugaad appropriate when he is disputing with the book *Jugaad Innovation* regarding which resources create space for representations. Sukhdeo Mali is an example of using lived experience and technical talent to complete his desire of taking a top shot from above in limited resources and making that shot happen. His climbing a tree is a reference to the politics of his memories and perceptions. The instability of this screen is about their own day to day struggles which those people don't claim as politics. Bharat Saindane[3], a filmmaker, actor and choreographer said,

> …*when I started thinking of a music album called 'Maale Mumbai tari Daav' (Please show me Mumbai), I never had any kind of money and sources and neither an idea. Some friends came together and started to converse randomly; that was the moment we decided to make it. Everybody amongst us has had their own specialty with needful sources.*

The film *Yedasana Bajar* (2007, The Market of Mad Peoples), was a collective and mass production from a place called Nardana in Dhule district. Many participants of the movie were from Nardana. My cousin Bhaiyya (also from Nardana) recounted,

> *Munna (comedian, filmmaker) from Nardana became famous in Khandesh due to his act as a comedian. People who saw him onscreen requested him to take them in his movie. His friend Kishore Shinde and he decided to make a movie and take only people from Nardana village. The local shopkeepers helped them create the location for the film Yedasana Bajar. The movie looked like a wedding video so he thanked everyone as in a wedding video.*

The fascinating innovation of this film is that it begins with the idea of a wedding video and ends in the story of an innocent man who becomes rich after beating a local elite. The desire to become rich and also to be featured on screen by the residents of Nardana resulted in the innovations that made this film see the light of the day. *Yedasna Bajar* started with a parody song, *Rup Tera Mastana* in Ahirani. In the song, Munna addresses a buffalo, calling her his queen. It is a story of a village idiot. He day-dreams through the images of popular Hindi films. There is more to the film than what comes across. It is almost like the parable of David-Goliath, as he takes on the local factory owner, who is an exploiter of labour. He therefore avenges the crimes of exploitation by tricking him. The contributions of the village in the making of this film point towards their collective desires. They

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[3] Bharat Saidane gave interview to the researcher in 2013.

made it possible to produce the film in spite of the complete structural erasure in the realm of media. Their participation in the process of filmmaking makes a dent (small) in the monopolies enjoyed by the extant structures.

Jugaad Politics is peculiar in Khandeshi Cinema

> *Politics is politics, to be valued as itself, not because it is 'like' or 'really is' something else more respectable or peculiar. Politics is politics* (Crick, 2005).

The Khandesh region is characterised by an economic culture that has seen monetisation recently. Their understanding of economics therefore is located in an almost barter like system. The fraternising of the communities is based on this notion of give and take. But we must note here that the feudal relations reproduced through caste also characterise economic relations. Some people are caste conscious about what is around them. Interactions play a major role to understand what has been happening with people. Eshwar Mali is a filmmaker and actor in Khandesh. He did a lot of audio-video albums in Khandeshi cinema. Among his albums *Dhongi Dhongi Nach Mana Dajiba* (My Grandfather dances bit by bit) is well known. He shows facets of realities to Khandeshi audience through the screen. For instance, he portrays domestic violence, introduces two dwarf identities and shows the differences between 'High Culture' and 'Low Culture'. Now he is planning to make a movie on his own life, which has lot of ups and downs. He is a full-time vegetable vendor for survival in the village of Gorane. In his life he has interacted with all kinds of people, so he knows 'society's politics'. He writes even though he has no academic qualifications. Rapid changes were ushered since the days of the release of the album *Dhongi Dhongi Nach Mana Dajiba* and the entry of Pushpa Thakur in Khandeshi cinema. Here, innovations played a major role to develop individuals.

Burden of Caste and Dignity

The conviction of making cinema is seen as a duty in the world. There are thousands of people dedicated to making cinema. People leave everything from their life to make cinema, they are living making cinema their life. In the case of Khandeshi cinema, it is different. The world-famous director of *Yeh Hai Malegaon Ka Superman* Nassir Sheikh has his own business of wedding videos. Choreographer Bharat Saindane has his own Rikshaw to make ends meet. Aaba Chaudhari, filmmaker and actor works in a Seeds shop in Shirpur. Still, they have a key contribution towards

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Khandeshi cinema. Iliah says, "The rural productive masses in their day-to-day struggles evolved their own symbols around their production processes" (2004). There is a relationship between occupational identities and innovation of Khandeshi cinema. The investment of people's locations and occupations is important in Khandeshi cinema but it does not have the dignity it should. The music director of the very famous album *Kasa Karu Shingar* (How do I adorn) has faced the problem of caste system's various facets, therefore his various levels of innovations in Khandeshi cinema underlines the presence of caste. Dilip Bashinge[4], shared his experience, saying,

> *One of my close friends was getting married and had contacted me to play and I joined the procession. I was happy because he was a friend. Interestingly, he and I had worked together for a video album. After marriage there was a dinner. One of his relative asked me to not sit with them, since it will be disrespectful to them if 'Matang' is seated with the upper castes in an event. I was not shocked when his relative told me this. But I was hurt when my friend remained silent.*

A similar incident is shared by Bharat Saindane, who is also an aspirant filmmaker, actor and choreographer from Khandesh. He was treated disrespectfully even when he won an award in Pune. People never admired him and instead suggested him not to perform to his own songs again. Only because he belongs to Khandesh, people judged him on the basis of his location and occupation. Sukhdeo Mali, a videographer, is known for his diverse ideas. Once when he was on a shoot, he was asked for the perfect shot with limited equipment. He told them the perfect shot is not possible at all; he was abused by the director. Priyanka Kamble[5], one of the actresses expresses,

> *I have been beaten by my father two times because I dance and my Atya (Paternal Aunt) has abused my mother many times. My family is well educated and has lawyers, teachers, doctors and some of them are in state services, so they want me to become like them.*

Shubhangi Shinde[6] also says,

> *My grandfather always abuses me because of my dancing in school and colleges. He doesn't like my dance at all. I continued my dance as well as acting here. My grandfather stopped abusing me but only said one thing before he died that I became a 'Lavani performer' nothing else. Did you get it?*

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[4] Dilip Bashinge gave interview to the researcher in 2013.

[5] Priyanka Kamble gave interview to the researcher in 2013.

[6] Shubhangi Shinde gave interview to the researcher in 2013.

When she asked me this question, I did not have an answer. It is a collective question of those who are working and belong to the community of Dalit-Bahujan. In my understanding, 'Lavani' performance is as an innovation of the lower caste community to some extent. It was evolved for entertainment and then social mobility. After some time all the 'Lavani' performers were exploited by the feudal lords and the Brahmins. This resulted in modern restrictions that prove Khandeshi cinema is biased in different notions. Guru calls it "Untouchability in modern times is forced to hide itself behind certain modern meanings and identities" (2009).

These experiences are nothing but telling the truth of society. These abuses, taunts, beatings and cruelties by relatives, friends and urban colleagues are so fragile at one side but dark and construct the caste system progressively. The vision of Jotiba Phule (1827-1890) to unite non-brahmins and untouchables is difficult to see in society. Omvedt exemplified, "Phule sought to unite the shudras (non Brahmans) and ati-sudra (dalits), he argued that the latter were not only more oppressed but have been downgraded because of their earlier heroism in fighting Brahman domination" (2011). All these come from the understanding of 'low culture' which undoubtedly belongs to the Dalit-Bahujans. Ilaiah talks about confronting the locals which is even more important in the context of Khandeshi cinema:

> In ancient times Sudras were made to kill Sudras and Chandalas were made to kill Chandalas, thus saving the upper castes the necessity of dirtying their hands. Injected with this ideology of cultural nationalism many Dalit-Bahuajans are now working in the ranks of Hindutva to kill their own Dalit-Bahujan brothers and sisters who have embraced religions like Islam and Christianity (2004: x-xix).

Innovations can be used to degrade, as mentioned above, an innovator. However, the Khandeshi screen is conflicting to the progressiveness and hypocrisy of upper castes. When the lower caste people's sentiments came into focus, a lot of opposition was ready to disgrace it. There is no censor board in Khandeshi cinema but the social tension surrounding it, played the role of a censor board.

Attitudes and Politics

I remember listening to audio cassettes like *Nachuyaat Taalvar* (Dance on Rhythm) by Milind Mohite and Sham Sandhanshive. The music on these cassettes was devoid of lyrics. It was music with minimal instruments like *Sambhal, Pipani* and *Dholki*. Each played for around sixty minutes.

Development of these songs gives dignity to mass development. When *Nachuyaat Taalvar* plays in ceremonies or events, people start dancing, especially women. It's not that people have never danced before, but Khandeshi cinema gives them familiarity with the 'digital world' of cassettes. Dancing women collectively signifies dignity, which to some extent affects attitude also. At the time of *Nachuyaat Taalvar,* I have never come across nor heard of any digital form of musical instrumentation, but only the physical instruments.

There are a lot of upper-caste social phrases degrading ex-untouchables' talent and culture in Khandesh. One of them is *'kay mara-manga sarkha dhol piti rayna'* (why are you playing drums like the Mahars and Mangs). Casteist sentiments manifest in 'functional culture'. It is a kind of invisible power and tends to degrade individuals and constructs occupational identities. Cinema propaganda has been, consciously or subconsciously, full of casteist attitude. It is a source to exploit the caste capital and make profit out of it. The connection of people engaged in Khandeshi cinema through their occupational identity is stronger on screen than in real life. The intellect of Khandeshi cinema and the produced films don't have connection in larger politics of including the act of realism but the filmmakers also don't believe in distributing their work freely to the masses, which comes from the priestly attitude of Brahmanism. Filmmakers primarily concentrate on profit, for sake of survival as filmmakers, but they have their own occupations. Peasants are peasants, cobbler does his/her chamari work, Kumbhar doing his/her pottery work. All are doing de-humanising work to survive. There is no difference in their socio-economical location.

Conclusion

In spite of having a connection to society with occupational identities, cinema has conservative norms with regard to caste and class practices. Innovations have helped to develop and progress Khandeshis to make films, but it's also used to degrade them. Bharat Saindane calls this kind of practice as "maintaining the classification of caste system". Priyanka Kamble, who worked as an actress in Khandeshi cinema expresses, "dance, the words and the life style of lower caste people is presumed as vulgarity by the upper-caste mindset". Dalit-Bahujan's creative and innovative abilities are negated. The barter system like India is constructed in a way where caste identities are the ones who are suffering a lot to survive itself.

The splendid work of Khandeshi filmmakers, stars and audience put their own recognition to each other's development. An innovation of the knowledge and *Jugaads* are useful to construct, protect and preserve Khandeshi cinema but the burdens of caste system cannot help them upsurge from their own strata. Iliah gave the name of spiritual fascism which has roots from the past. He provokingly says,

> *The fault lies with us because the Indian socio-spiritual elite has kept the country under the grip of a spiritual fascism that hates social and spiritual equality and modernity. As a result, our innovative and creative abilities have been negated* (2004).

It's nothing but *'Jugaad bhi ukhaad nahi paaya, jati imarat ka'* (Even Jugaad could not demolish the structures of caste.)

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The Truth-Speakers:

An Analysis of Tumblr's Self-harm Communities

Nayantara Nayar

Abstract

Tumblr is a short-blogging platform launched in 2007 by David Karp. It allows people to blog but in a way that is more multi-media efficient than blog websites like Wordpress or Blogspot. This paper analyses Tumblr as a site where certain processes of truth-telling take place within existing self-harm communities. The author's analysis of Tumblr is predicated upon 1) the problematic ways in which self-harm is pathologised (this extends to institutional understandings of online self-harm communities) and 2) a set of lectures Foucault delivered in Berkley in the 1980s where he discussed the Greek idea of parrhêsia or truth-telling and how it resulted in constructions of the subjective self. The study is based on the interactions between members of Tumblr who identify as being part of the self-harm community: That includes people who practice self-harm (i.e. cutting, burning etc), people who encourage it and people who might, but do not only have to be, ex-harmers who try to provide support and advice about how to stop self-harming. Foucault suggested that parrhêsia was experienced by the Greeks when "your own life is exposed (and) you are taking up a specific relationship to yourself: you risk death to tell the truth instead of reposing in the security of a life where the truth goes unspoken…" (Foucault, 1984) but he thought that such a relationship to truth no longer existed in modern societies. This paper suggests that through the digital space of Tumblr, conditions for the parrhêsiastic game are re-established and complex webs of selfhood are created. Further the author argues that looking at the practice of self-harm through such a lens would better enable attempts to guide harmers out of self-destructive behaviours.

Keywords: Blogging, Self-Harm.

Tumblr: An Introduction

Tumblr is a short-blogging platform launched in 2007 by David Karp that allows users to create blogs that are multi-media efficient, streamlined and easy to use. Users have one or many unique Tumblr web pages from where they can like, create and reblog content and, follow the activities of other Tumblr blogs. These blogs could be those of friends, celebrities, companies, artists etc. Users are allowed to share photographs, videos, audio, and internet links, create GIFs and conduct live chats. Tumblr blogs have privacy settings whereby users can allow and block followers. What makes Tumblr different from other social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter or Pintrest, and from other blogging platforms like WordPress or Blogspot is essentially design. Tumblr combines easy access to multi-media options and a streamlined homepage called a 'dashboard' that uses vertical lines to track comments and likes. Additionally word count and image sizes have high upper limits, users can queue their posts to be shared at specific dates and times, and posts contain tags that enable users to decide what areas their content will be contributing to/targeted towards.

In 2013 Yahoo! bought Tumblr for a little more than a billion dollars. As of 2017 there are approximately 357 million blogs on Tumblr. The nature of these blogs and the kind of content they generate are varied, both in terms of subject matter and form. For example one kind of common Tumblr posts are GIFS (a series of moving images that play on loop). The GIFS might be about celebrities, scenes from movies or television shows, from videos off YouTube etc. Content on Tumblr might also be in the form of memes, written posts, audio clips, vines and videos. Some users see Tumblr as a simple blogging platform where they can share their writing and practice journaling, others use it to create and share art, music, poetry, and design ideas[1]. The ability to follow other blogs and reblog content means that creating original content is not necessary- users could just follow, like and reblog, thus curating an online identity. This online identity could possibly have cultural currency, though the nature and value of that currency varies in terms of the areas users are interested in: for example bloggers who create an endless stream of content around popular television shows, movies and books hold a certain universal appeal and communities are often created around what is reblogged. At the same time, certain companies also have tumblogs- the New Yorker, Moth, McDonalds- use Tumblr to promote their brands. While they do not share the more obvious characteristics of what is classically

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[1] This is a single comprehensive description of the kinds of blogs found on Tumblr. The variety of content and the various ways in which users engage with content and each other make it a rich, complex environment.

understood as a community (a shared living space), communities on Tumblr do share cultural and digital space. In this way Tumblr is an online space that has a lot of variation in form, content and user base. The innovative design makes it possible for people to engage with their varied interests and with other people in ways that suit them personally while at the same time allowing for privacy if required.

Self-Harm

On Tumblr apart from the memes, GIFs and discussion threads about books, fashion or upcoming movies, there is a very active self-harm community. Self-harm or non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) refers to a large variety of body mutilation practises including pinching, scratching, cutting, burning, anorexia, bulimia and pulling hair out by the roots.

<u>Fig 1.</u> A Tumblr search page when the words self-harm are typed in
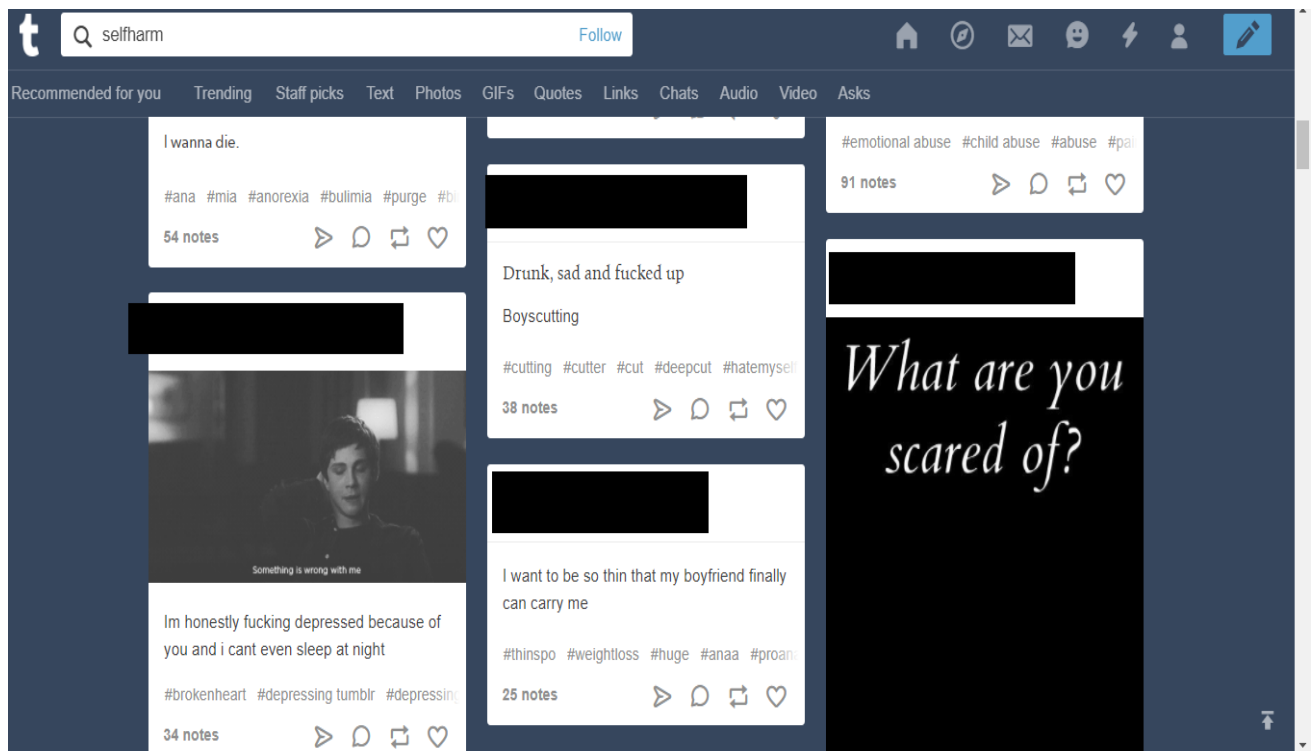
A study conducted by ACT for Youth Centre, a collaboration of the Cornell University, University of Rochester, and New York State Center for School Safety found that harmers cited the need to 'calm down' as their primary reason for doing what they do. The same study also found that individuals turned to self-harm when they were emotionally distressed or 'overwrought':

People who self-injure often have high sensitivity to emotion and difficulty handling negative feelings. Although the practice may dispel strong feelings in the short term, over time individuals with a history of self-injury are likely to experience intense shame or a sense of lack of control (Whitlock, Muehlenkamp, et al. 2009: 3).

The same study also points out that NSSI is also used to break through numbness, as 'self-control, punishment, or distraction', as a pick-me-up in terms of mood and energy, for attention or to feel a sense of belonging within a group. However, Chandler, Myers and Platt, in their paper *The Construction of Self-Injury in the Clinical Literature: A Sociological Exploration*, suggest that the ways in which self-harm is studied and researched are very problematic. They argue that the very term 'self-harm' is the result of a kind of unwillingness on the part of researchers to 'ascribe motives' to the harmers. They go on to say,

> *...their (the terms self-harm, NSSI) usefulness is limited by variations in usage. Self-harm and deliberate self-harm refer to a range of behaviours, including self-injury, but also encompass self-poisoning/overdose and sometimes also eating disorders, substance abuse, reckless behaviour, and other activities which either do or may result in harm to the self* (2011: 99).

Chandler, Myers and Platt use this as a starting point to argue that research around 'self-injury' had often been impatient (causation without correlation, such as "*all* people who self-injure are usually survivors of some kind of childhood abuse"), tending towards gross generalizations (such as the still often un-criticised assumption that "women might cut or injure themselves *because they are women*") and are unwilling to consider the issue holistically (arguments around psychiatric and psychological classifications of behaviour such as 'impulsivity'). The authors also suggest that regarding self-harm pathologically ignores the structural factors at play. These shortcomings are particularly linked to the fact that much self-harm is the result of poor self-conception. A study published in the *Journal of Adolescence* discovered that adolescents engaging in self-harm "frequently described themselves as less intelligent, emotionally stable, and physically attractive than" students who did not engage in similar behaviours (Claes, Houben et al., 2010: 777). There is however a failure to engage with this as a motivating factor of self-harm. For example in 2012, Tumblr took action against blogs that encouraged self-harm behaviour by revising its content policy and offering PSAs when certain keywords such as 'self-harm' or 'ano'(anorexia) were typed in. Criticism against Tumblr for allowing content that promotes self-harm has been strong, however in keeping with what Chandler et al. write about the pathologisation of self-harm there

is a real inability on the part of health institutions, governments and parents to understand how young adults engage with self-harm online. Engaging with the posts would show that behaviours such as cutting and anorexia are obviously linked to low self-conceptions that are a result of high stress school and peer environments, which are in turn very much a reflection of contemporary, goal-oriented societies where success is constantly quantified. In corollary the policies Tumblr put in place had some effect of websites that were pro-harm, but the same policies also censored both bloggers who were trying to help, and bloggers who were using their tumblogs as a place to express grief, rage, and depression, and/or as a place where they could ask for help.

Methodology and Positioning

This paper offers a reading of self-harm that veers away from 'mainstream' understandings by disrupting the discourse around self-harm and describing the ways in which members of the community on Tumblr engage with the issue. I was able to look at blogs and study bloggers as they posted content about their experiences with self-harm- in this way I was certainly 'in the field' however I have never officially interviewed or participated in their community, choosing instead to be an observer. The pitfalls of the observer-researcher are all too obvious to me, but I have a more pressing disadvantage: the blogs being anonymous, I have no access to information about the community as a whole. I do not know average ages, nationalities, gender or sexual preferences. With regards to self-harm, research and literature around the area suggests that self-harm is seen more in adolescent groups with individuals aged between 11 and 16[2]. While independent research organisations tell us that on average a little over thirty percent of Tumblr users are located in the United States of America[3] (Statista 2017) Tumblr claims to have a worldwide user base of approximately 357 million blogs running as of 2017. The number of blogs that post about self-harm, as of 2012, was thought to be approximately 200,000[4] and there was a mixture of languages seen. Therefore there is reason to believe that this paper applies quite widely within the community it concerns itself with. The paper lies somewhere between ethnography and qualitative analysis of the content, because while I engage with the field it is the posts themselves that have been the main focus of my study. I have tried to outline some basic

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[2] Self-Harm UK offers these statistics from 2014, but it should be said that this is merely the age that sees the highest concentration of harmers. Users well into their twenties are also known to practice self-harm.

[3] Other high usage countries include Britain, Brazil, Germany and Canada.

[4] A number arrived at through a study done by a research team at SimilarWeb which studied 1.6 million blogs and found that only 0.17 percent used obvious self-harm tags. They then took that number and approximated it.

patterns of posting and sub-groups within the community by reading through self-harm tags. From there I have tried to see how bloggers link questions of self-hood to self-harm.

In *Invisible Girls: Gender, Identity and Performativity in Self-Harm Tumblrs*, Jessie Hunt argues that the paradigm within which self-harm is studied lacks nuance. Hunt bases her paper on interactions she had with members of the self-harm community on Tumblr, all of whom turned out to be women. Using these women and their activities as a base, Hunt argues that self-harm blogs might be seen as acts of resistance against stereotypes about gender and sexuality and "the network of self-harm blogs on Tumblr can be understood as a kind of virtual safe space for young women" (Hunt nd: 1). Hunt's arguments are problematic, and she is working with what is essentially a limited sample size, but she acknowledges this by saying "young women's options for resistance are so slim on the ground that we take to the symbolic destruction of our corporeal bodies [to gain a sense of freedom]…" (ibid: 3). While the issue of what can be construed as resistance in such a situation is a complex one, the value of the research done by both Hunt and by Chandler, Myers and Platt is not whether or not they can offer 'cures' for self-harmers- and in keeping with that they do not suggest that self-harming is healthy behaviour, or that psychology and psychiatry are not capable of helping harmers- it is their decision to try to actively think about self-harm in different ways that is useful and interesting. They suggest that there is a need to look at the discourse around self-harmers and understand how clashes with systemic understandings of normality (whether in behaviour, body type, intelligence) lead to self-harm behaviours that are then seen by the subjects as part of some process of claiming certain kinds of subjective identities.

Theoretical Framework: Foucault and the Parrhêsiastic Game

To explore this idea further this paper turns to an ethical paradigm Foucault talked about in a series of lectures he delivered at Berkeley in the 1980s. Foucault concerned himself with the origin of the word 'parrhêsia'- a word that he traces back to the Ancient Greeks. The word itself can be broken down into the root words 'pan' which means *all* and 'rhema' meaning *utterance or speech*. The word translates as 'to say everything'. However, it is better understood if thought of as a kind of 'free-spokeness' (Foucault 1984). Foucault is concerned with tracing the evolution of this idea of truth-telling as a moral imperative, and with the ways in which it influences the construction of the subjective self. Foucault says, about his study,

My intention was not to deal with the problem of truth, but with the problem of the truth-teller, or of truth-telling as an activity …who is able to tell the truth, about what, with what consequences, and with what relations to power... (ibid)

The questions Foucault asked are particularly relevant to the question of self-harm bloggers and their presence on digital platforms such as Tumblr. The implications of self-harm for the harmer are also social: they are seen as 'undesirables' whose proper place is considered to be the margins of society. Foucault addresses this theme, exactly in his book *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* when he suggests that what is understood by 'madness' and how it is treated are heavily influenced by the economy, polity and ideas of morality at a given time. Today modern psychiatric and psychological approaches to self-harm are continuations of practises of separation and confinement that Foucault describes as having begun towards the end of the eighteenth century. The argument that this paper makes does not look at self-harm bloggers through the framework of modern understandings of madness (or rather through the framework that describes the subjugation of certain behaviours into such a discourse), but through the frameworks of truth-telling.

According to Foucault in ancient Greek society four kinds of people were known to speak the truth: (i) the oracle or prophet who spoke the truth of a divine, supernatural being and this truth was beyond his/her control; (ii) the wise man who offered what only he knew, and offered it only when asked; (iii) the teacher who spoke of what was well-known and accepted in society and helped integrate their students; (iv) and the parrhêsiast, who spoke for himself, who was obliged to speak the truth (he cannot stay silent) and who was courageous as his truth often caused conflict. Parrhêsia then is the relationship between a speaker and what they say, where everything they are saying is understood to be their own opinion, but it is also known to be the truth: especially to the interlocutor (the person or people being spoken to). The speaker does this not by using rhetoric, but by speaking plainly and directly to the interlocutor. So then the parrhêsiast is someone who says everything they are thinking and in their speech there is a coincidence of belief and truth that becomes a kind of knowledge. There is then also a lack of doubt around the parrhêsiast's speech, precisely because of their conviction. This does present a situation where truth-telling can be seen to have negative consequences where the truth speaker gives no consideration to what they are saying and thus their speech is actually an obstacle to

contemplation[5]. This is why Foucault adds that for parrhêsia to take place an element of duty is necessary. Thus the speaker is either inclined to speak the truth to the interlocutor who is unaware he/she is in the wrong, or the speaker is inclined to admit some truth about their own misdeeds.

Finally a person is only a parrhêsiast if there is a risk involved in telling the truth. For example, in a situation between a jeweller and a rich client, the jeweller tells the client that a certain kind of stone does not suit the client. This is a situation where the jeweller is a parrhêsiast because he risks offending the client and losing his/her patronage. However, while there is risk involved, parrhêsia is not merely exposing oneself to danger; instead it has the character of criticism. Parrhêsia requires that either the speaker talks critically of themselves to a person of a higher position (so they might punish the speaker for whatever action warranted the self-critique), or that the speaker criticizes the interlocutor herself/himself (where the interlocutor's anger at being the subject of criticism results in some risk for the parrhêsiast).

> *When you accept the parrhêsiastic game in which your own life is exposed, you are taking up a specific relationship to yourself: you risk death to tell the truth instead of reposing in the security of a life where the truth goes unspoken. Of course, the threat of death comes from the Other, and thereby requires a relationship to himself: he prefers himself as a truth-teller rather than as a living being who is false to himself* (Foucault, 1984).

Foucault's study of parrhêsia was aimed at understanding the role of truth speakers as they exist in modern societies. For him, in modern societies the oracle-esque figure was replaced by the revolutionary, the wise man by the philosopher and the teacher by the scientist. The parrhêsiast, Foucault said, was missing except for when they, briefly, lived through these three other modalities of discourse. That is to say in the modern world where the "coincidence between belief and truth" occurs in "certain (mental) evidential experiences", a Greek understanding of this same coincidence as only occurring "in a verbal activity" has no place. He aimed, instead, to "investigate how these four modalities are combined in different cultures, societies or civilisations, in different modes of discursivity" i.e. in the different regimes of truth found in

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[5] There is certainly an argument to be made that pro-harm bloggers might be seen as engaging in this kind of behavior, however it is not an idea I explore here as the functioning of pro-harm bloggers is, quite frankly, a paper all on its own.

different societies (ibid). However it might still be possible to look for purer instances of parrhêsia in the culture of confession and advice that forms part of the self-harm community on Tumblr.

Self-Harmers as Truth Speakers

On Tumblr the self-harm community is broadly made up of three different groups: People who practice self-harm, people who practice *and* encourage self-harm and people who might, but do not only have to be, ex-harmers who try to provide support and advice about how to stop self-harming. Within Tumblr the most common kinds of self-harm posts are about self-harm that either: a) creates an immediate impact such as cutting (cutting into the skin with a razor) and burning, or b) are extreme body regimes that have a visible impact over time (this would include anorexic and bulimic practices). Harmers who post about hurting themselves will write about it and/or post photographs of their bodies both before and after inflicting the harm.

Fig 2a&b. **Images taken off self-harm blogs depicting cutting and anorexia**

I'm so fucking sorry Mum.
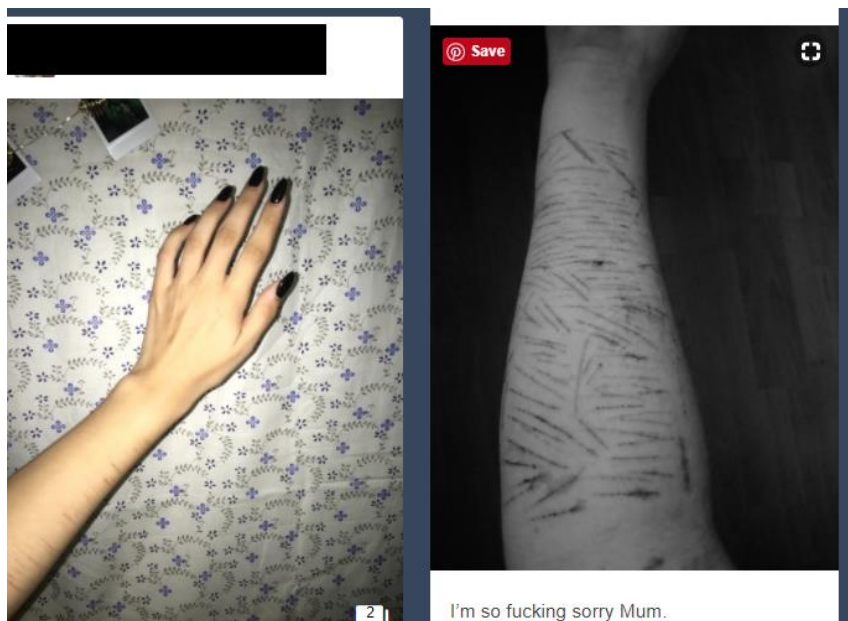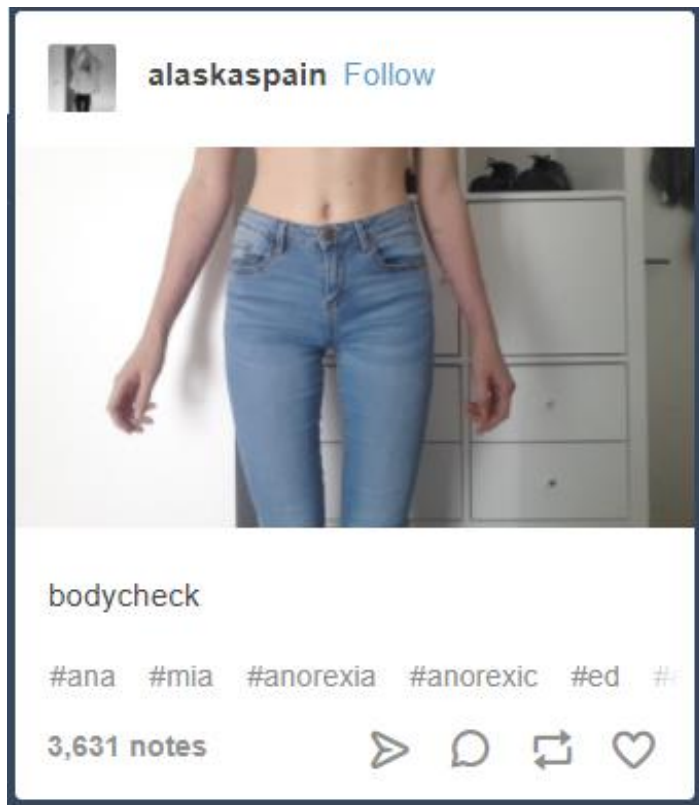
<u>**Fig2c**</u>. **Support blog**
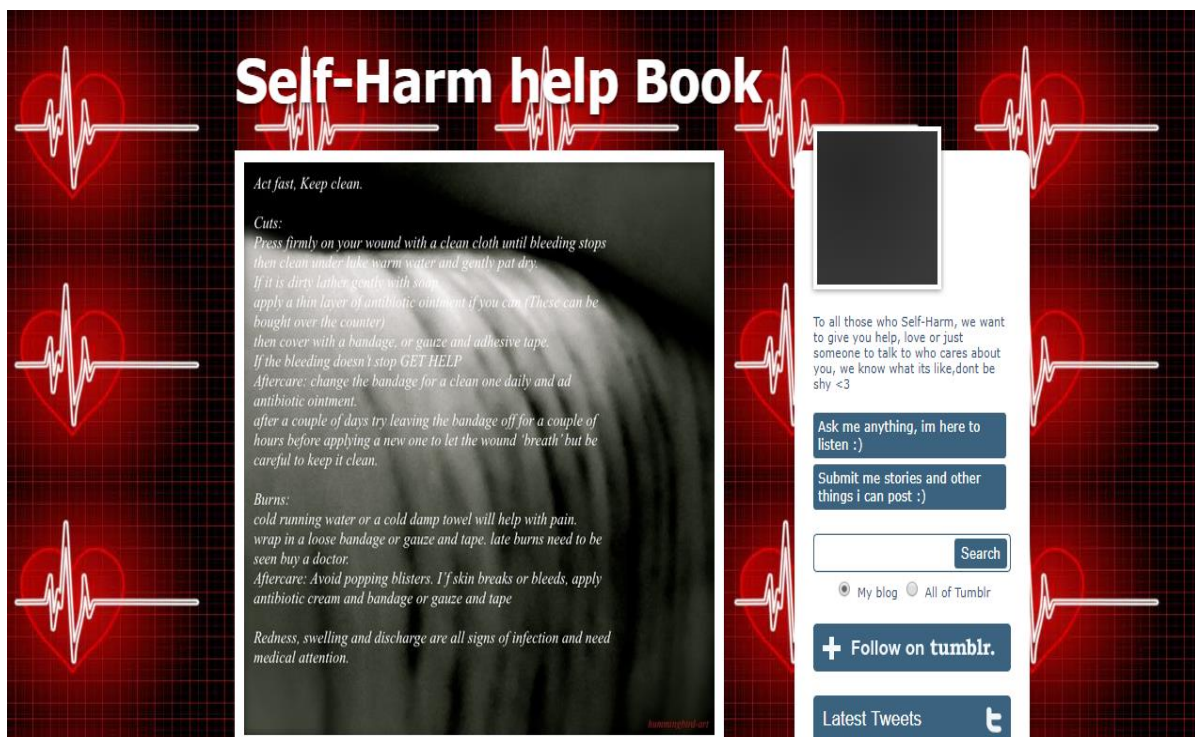
An attempt to merely match characteristics between the theory and an actual cultural space might be thought of as at best a shallow exercise and at worst a pointless one. And yet it could be argued that shallowness and a lack of 'point' are exactly what make it worth doing. This paper

is ultimately an exercise, not in 'curing' self-harmers, but in attempting to approach a set of difficult human behaviours from a perspective that might provide a better understanding of it and more empathy towards those engaging in it.

The actual objections that might arise from trying to link the ancient practise of parrhêsia to this modern one are: 1) there are more than two speakers in an online community, 2) that the anonymity of the digital world removes the problems of risk and 3) where do elements of duty or criticism enter the picture? First, according to Foucault parrhêsia does not require two players but a minimum of two players. Foucault provides an example of parrhêsia being practised amongst the people congregated at the Athenian agora. In the agora the speaker does not address every other citizen individually, but all his fellow citizens as the whole body politic or as one constituent being. In a similar way the users on Tumblr who are a part of the self-harm community- people that engage in self-harm behaviour, ex-harmers and people who simply wish to help and support self-harmers out of their situations- often talk to each other. Posts are created with specific tags like #selfharm #depression #cutting #anorexia etc, and the conversations around these posts (where reply posts are tagged similarly) function in a way that is similar to the Athenian agora. The amount of dialogue between the varied individuals within the community is extraordinary, as is the nature of that dialogue.

Fig3a&3b. A Support blog for harmers
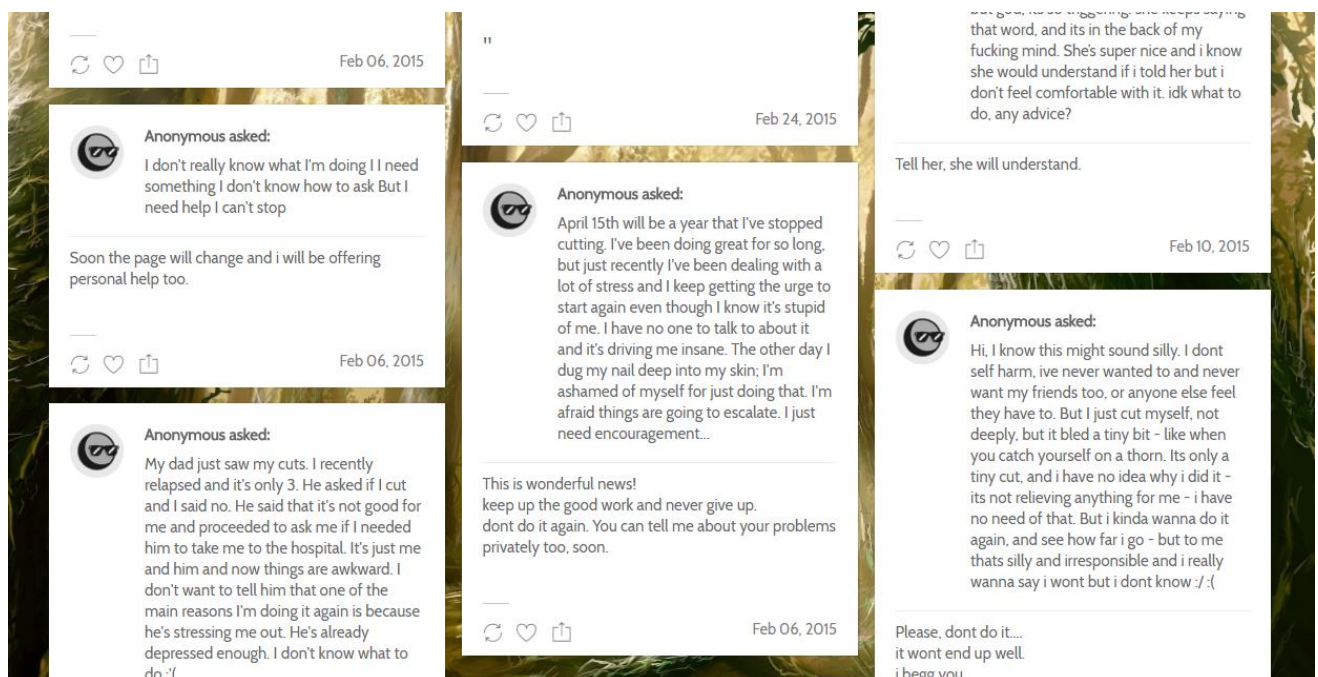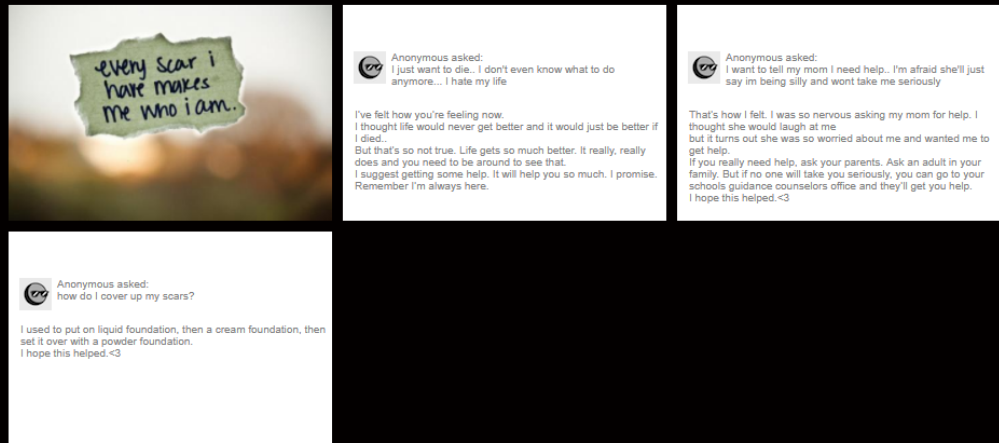
Second, on the requirement of risk: Tumblr allows and even encourages the anonymity of its users. However, it could be argued that within the world of Tumblr, a blogger once identified as possessing certain interests, characteristics etc, gains a Tumblr reputation amongst his/her followers- the cultural capital mentioned before. For a member to then admit to practicing self-harm would mean that they are opening themselves to the (possible) rebuke, hate and criticism of their followers. Even in the case of the members who join specifically to use Tumblr as a platform to discuss their issues, and so only cultivate followers who also practise or practised self-harm, the assurance of it being a safe and accepting community is not a given. Community members often receive criticism for back-sliding, or hurting themselves in new ways. For the ex-harmers the risk is two-fold: by saying what they are there is a genuine risk that the people they are speaking to will take offence or object to the advice and either stop asking for help or respond by harming themselves further. There is also a serious risk of the ex-harmer backsliding when offering advice by reliving their memories. In an article on Buzzfeed titled *Meet The Girl Behind One Of Tumblr's Biggest Self-Harm Blogs,* the 14 year old girl behind one of Tumblr's most popular self-harm blogs 'Depression and Disorders' (no longer available) had this to say:

> *Nobody knows I have this blog. It helps me. Tumblr is powerful because it shows that you're not alone. […] But it's bad too because my Tumblr dashboard can be really triggering sometimes with all the posts from others. Like if you self-harm and you see pictures of cuts/scars it can be very triggering. (Sharrock 2013)*

Third**,** we address the question of criticism and duty. Members who are currently practising self-harm write detailed posts about what they are feeling, why they think they are cutting themselves or why they are anorexic, how it feels to cut for the first time, the euphoria of it or the shame one feels afterwards.

<u>Fig 4.</u> Typical posts about self-harm
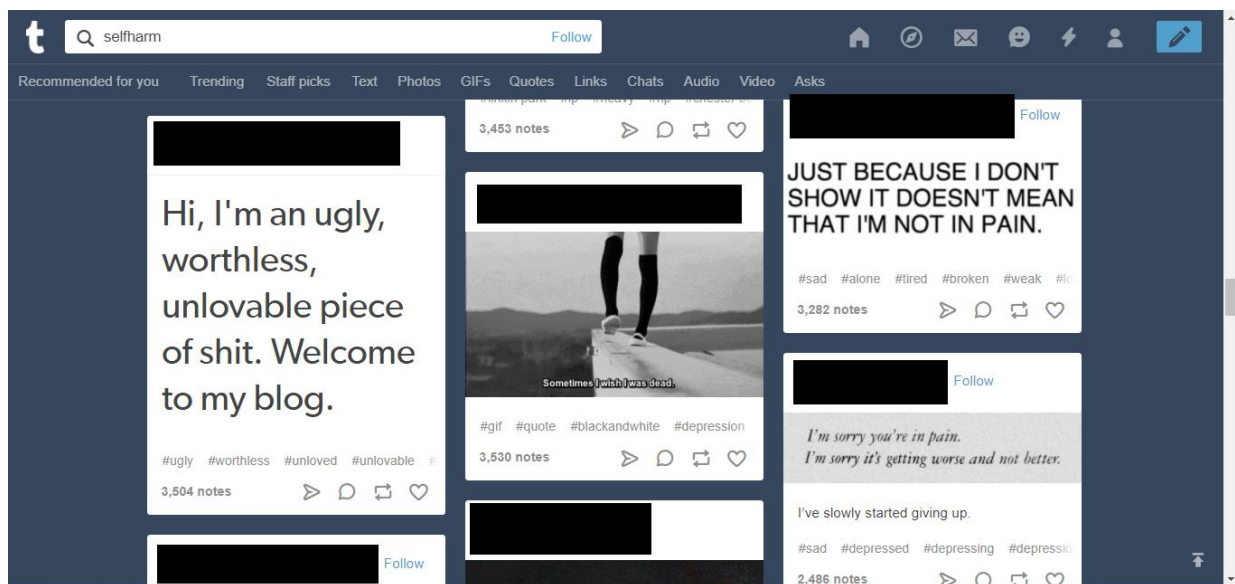
Ex-harmers or concerned members write back to people going through great difficulties, offering advice about how to deal with the depression or feelings of worthlessness that drove them to cut. There is thus obviously a speaker or set of speakers who talk directly about what he/she is feeling or thinking. The truth of their experience, be it practicing self-harmers or ex-harmers, is clear to all who read/see it. There is an absence of rhetoric- instead both harmers and ex-harmers depend on the truth of their experience to speak for itself. The element of criticism is very much present in this community: the criticism of oneself is obvious to see, but it also exists in the support and advice given by ex-harmers and concerned citizens. Take this post for example:

Fig 5a&5b. Post about Recovery
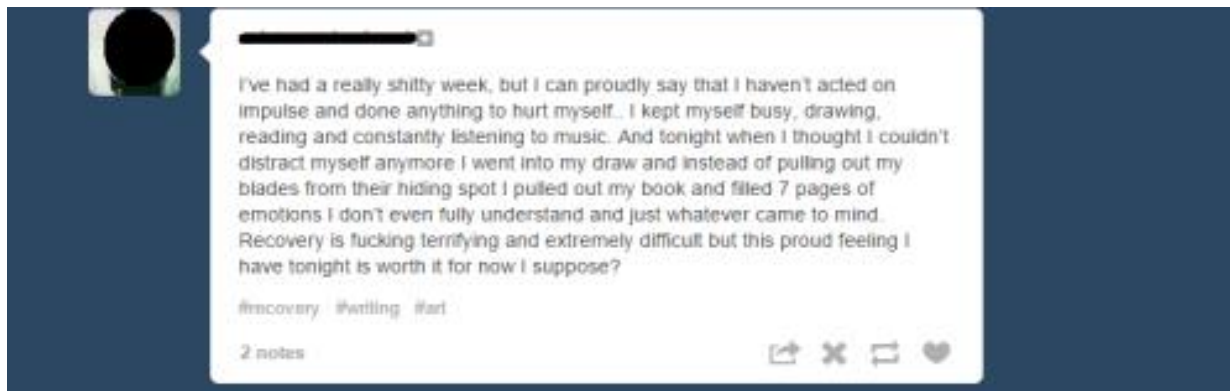
There is a need that drives these bloggers: a need to share the truth of their pain and of their destructive behaviours. For many of the members of the self-harm community, Tumblr is an indispensable space: their inability to confide in friends or family makes Tumblr the only space where they can speak their mind and also connect and talk with people going through similar problems. It is also a way for those who are recovering to be honest about the process and how far they have come, or whether they have backslid for some reason. This necessity is what partially separates this kind of truth-telling from what Foucault is talking about in 'Truth and Power'.

Alison Ross in her paper, *Why is 'speaking the truth' fearless? 'Danger' and 'truth' in Foucault's discussion of parrhêsia* speaks of Foucault's dealings with truth in *The History of Sexuality* and says, "In La volonté de savoir the critique of the idea that there is an exclusionary relation between truth and power is carried out in terms of how the subject itself makes itself the site of knowledge and inquiry" (Ross, 2008: 64). She explains that according to Foucault, the 'emancipatory' nature of speaking the truth, specifically about one's sexuality, is essentially a lie. This societal coaxing to tell the truth about oneself in fact plays right into what Foucault calls "biopower", which joins up the interest of the disciplines in managing individuals to the interest of the modern state in the management of its population (ibid). Self-harm blogs on Tumblr escape this trap even if partially because the act of self-harm is *necessarily* a rejection of modern understandings of normality and productivity. I say 'necessarily' for the same reason that I say 'partially'; because their rejection is often not conscious, even though that same rejection is a result of knowing that they, the self-harmers, will always be outsiders to such world-views. It is important to remember that the agency that Hunt allows her subjects is something that needs to be questioned and never taken for granted.

Conclusion

Almost at odds with his examination of truth in his other work, in his lectures on parrhêsia, Foucault talks of truth telling as having an ethical necessity or value: the parrhêsiast is in fact some kind of exemplar. But as Ross suggests, "What the exemplar chooses is primarily a relation to themselves, rather than the aspiration to shape practices" (Ross, 2008: 70). With regards to the self-harm bloggers this is doubly true: the bloggers who write or share images about their own experiences either as confession or as advice seek primarily not to persuade but to *tell*. Here, as in ancient Greece the coincidence between belief and truth lie in a verbal act- or in this case in a written one. Foucault sums this up well saying,

> *In parrhesia the speaker emphasises the fact that he is both the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the enunciandum — that he himself is the subject of the opinion to which he refers. The specific "speech activity" of the parrhesiastic enunciation thus takes the form: "I am the one who thinks this and that"* (Foucault, 1984).

Looking at self-harm 'bloggers' as exemplars is useful in several ways. It allows for a discourse around the self-harmers that does not begin and end with understandings of their subjective

identities that are purely pathologised. In an example Foucault gives, the advisor to a king has given his leader news that the king is not happy to hear, thereby fulfilling his parrhêsiastic duty. The king is now in the position to either accept this truth or punish his advisor for his speech. Foucault provides this example as a way to point out how parrhêsiastic speech leads to a situation that ideally extends beyond the speakers struggle with truth, even if this is not its primary purpose. The king, when deciding his reaction and the fate of his advisor is forced to consider on the one hand the nature of the subject being spoken and the impact of accepting it as truth, but he is also considering the nature of his advisor- is he a truth-speaker and does he, the king, have the ability to hear the truth, whatever it may be? Foucault explains that through the act of parrhêsia what is really being encouraged, what is being celebrated is the process of 'knowing oneself'. The speaker is expressing themselves purely, with no deceit and thus what they say is what is true about themselves and what they think. This, Foucault believes, is what gave rise to the development of what could be called a "culture of self in which a whole set of practices of self are formulated, developed, worked out, and transmitted" (Foucault, 1984). Self-harmers design practices and rituals that they see as essential towards their own identity (either as defining it, or as removing aspects that they dislike). However through blogging about it, another culture of self is created where the identity of the speaker is still mediated by his/her self-harming practices, but it is more mediated by the fact that he/she is talking about it and telling the truth about it.

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Michel_Discourse-and-Truth_1983_p831031.mp3.

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