

Your Voice

The Dialogue Box Magazine



Theme: Intersectionality

In this Edition:

My Intersectional Interstitial Identity

Who am I?

Attempt to Unlearn and Understand Intersectionality in "Private" and "Public" spheres

Containment and control of Bahujan women's bodies: The story of Bharatanatyam

Exploring the intersectional undertones of popular culture

And many more ...



Mission Statement & Editorial Process

We take pride in bringing various human rights and current affairs issues to the foray on a regular basis to our readers. The publication is a quarterly magazine which will be a compilation of essays, articles and artworks (including photo-essays and poems) written by practitioners, academics and students worldwide.

This is a thematic magazine and the entries are expected to critically reflect upon the individual themes concerned. This magazine will provide a platform to all ignited minds waiting to make their voices count through their writings and artwork.

Each entry will undergo a double-blind peer review on the content, style and originality by our experienced editorial team, comprising of academics, journalists, lawyers and students across the world. Contributions which do not meet the acceptable standards will be rejected and decisions of the editorial team will be final.



Editor in Chief:

Sandhya Kerketta,
PhD Scholar,
University of Sussex, United Kingdom.

Associate/Consulting Editor:

Ritabrata Roy
Doctoral Tutor,
University of Sussex, Law School.

Editors:

Siddharth Mathur
Partner, Lex Protector L.L.P.

Rakshit Shrivastava
Advocate, Delhi High Court,
Partner (The Dialogue Box)

Shahzeb Ahmed
Head, Ace Law Chambers, New Delhi
Partner (The Dialogue Box)

Sevki Karaduman
PhD Scholar,
University of Sussex, United Kingdom.



Table of Contents

Editor's Note

Sandhya Kerketta

Page III

My Intersectional Interstitial Identity

Lavanya Sekar

Page 1

Who am I?

Ritabrata Roy

Page 2

Attempt to Unlearn and Understand Intersectionality in “Private” and “Public” spheres

Nikhila Kalla

Page 3

Containment and control of Bahujan women's bodies: The story of Bharatanatyam

Avani Binish

Pages 4-5

Exploring the intersectional undertones of popular culture

Mannat Ahmed Khan

Pages 6-7

Intersections of Religion and Gender: A case of Domestic Violence

Sandhya Kerketta

Page 8

The passenger at the window seat: A memoir

Shikhar Khanna

Pages 9-10

Newsletter

Page 11

Poems

Short Articles

Stories



Editor's Note

I am delighted to be in the position of Editor in Chief of the freshly interesting magazine “Your Voice”. It is a collaborative effort of academicians, students, and early researchers to bring together various issues of human rights to our readers on a quarterly basis. The magazine was launched in the month of October 2022 with the powerfully buzzy theme of Sexuality and was a success at the ends of the readers. There was an enormously excited response to Volume 1 Issue 1 of the magazine.

Yet again, we are here with Volume 2 Issue 1 with a stimulating theme of Intersectionality. There was a thrill when the theme of this issue was decided. But sooner did we realize that the theme itself is a heavy topic to be dismantled and discussed in the public discourse. We were worried about whether we will receive entries for this issue. In response, we received incredibly wonderful thoughts igniting entries. Though intersectionality is a complex concept, this issue is going to offer a platform to bring the concept of intersectionality to our understanding in the forms of poems, articles, reflections, and memoirs.

Having an interest in the issue of violence against women, I have had an opportunity to work with the survivors of domestic violence at the collaborative project of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, and the National Commission for Women, India. It was a great learning which provided me with exposure to the complex realities and situations of women, particularly battered women in our society. This has instilled a passion in me to keep working towards it and hence, bring forth the discussion to the forum on human rights issues.

Here, I am grateful, particularly to the Associate Editors Ritabrata Roy and Siddharth Mathur for always being supportive and proactive in keeping things moving and encouraging everyone in the team. I am thankful to all the authors who showed interest and participated in our vision through their incredible pieces of work, without which this magazine would not have been a success. Last but not the least, I appreciate the presence and time of our other team members who are always there to shower their support in the process.

I wish more power to us!

Sandhya Amrita Kerketta

Editor in Chief, Your Voice Magazine

Ph.D. Scholar (Gender Studies)

School of Media, Arts, and Humanities

University of Sussex, United Kingdom



My Intersectional Interstitial Identity



Poem

—Lavanya Sekar

Citation information:

Lavanya Sekar, 'My Intersectional Interstitial Identity' (2023) 2(1) Your Voice Magazine 1.

Identity!!!!
Myriad markers
Merely contribute
To intensify
The prediscursive
Contradictions
Limitations
And of
Paramount
Intersections

Who are you?
Just a simple question
But what of the answer or
Should I say answers???

A single marker
Cannot define me completely
And this holds true universally

I am an intersection of
Many markers
A combination of
Many roles
Aren't we all??!

We become. . .
Oh Yes!!!
We become!!!!
No qualms about it

Of what we become?
Of what we are told
We are
Or
We are not
That is a point of contestation
In all aspects

Yes I am a girl!
Was not allowed
To compete with boys physically
And sometimes mentally
Now that I have become a woman

No glass ceiling has been broken then

A member of the fair-sex
Always taught to make sure of
The amiability of the opposite sex
Not to make them adversaries

I am a Tamilian
Hence judged
For my skin
For my accent
For my tradition

A Christian by religion
But not in the majority

The qualification of my parents
Were scrutinized heavily
During my school admissions
As we are middle class

Oh how I am cast because of my caste!!!
Oh boy!!!
You have no idea. . .

My papers were triple checked
Before I got declared as
The University Entrance Topper
Because I belong to a lower caste

My boyfriend did a double take
When he came to know the same

My husband had a tough time
Convincing my in-laws
To make them accept
The first lower caste member
Into their family

Expected to fail at my workplace
Because of the stereotypes
Attached to my caste

Am in the Teaching profession
That is now a dangerous vocation

The list goes on and on . . .

I am a woman
I am a Tamilian
I belong to a lower caste
I am married
I am a Christian
I am a Professor
. . . .

Are these enough
To say who I am
To others
Or
To myself???
It should be. . .
Right!!!!

Then why there
Is a lacking
Nagging my
Insides
Calling me out
For my
Interstitiality???

About the Author



Ms. S. Lavanya is an Assistant Professor of English in Sri Sarada College for Women, Salem, Tamil Nadu. She is an avid reader and an active learner with six years of teaching experience. She completed her M.A., M.Phil (English Literature), topped the University examinations, bagged two gold medals for the same. She is an alumnus of Bishop Heber College, Trichy, TN and Bharathidasan University, Trichy, TN. She has cleared NET in her first attempt and got placed in Sarada College, Salem, TN. She is pursuing her Doctoral Research on the works of Octavia Butler. Her areas of interest are speculative fiction, afrofuturism, gender studies, social contemporary issues and literary theories. She has to her credit several research articles published in reputed UGC listed national and international journals. She also dabbles in poetry and has published two books titled *My Musings* (2022) and *Far From The Stars* (2022).



Who am I?

_Ritabrata Roy

Citation information:

Ritabrata Roy, 'Who am I?' (2023) 2(1) Your Voice Magazine 2.

Who am I ?

Am I the skin that I wear?

Am I the food that I eat?

Am I the language that I speak?

Am I the attire that I cover myself with?

Am I the man whom you see?

Or am I the man who I want to be?

Am I the success that I show?

Or am I the failure that only I know?

Am I the way in which I pray?

Or am I the way you want me to pray?

Am I the way I make love?

Or am I the way you want me to make love?

Am I the virtues that you see?

Or am I the vices that I hide?

Am I a diversity?

Or am I indistinguishable?

Am I the reason for celebration?

Or am I the source of misery?

Am I my pride?

Or am I your disgrace?

Really .. who am I?



About the Author

Ritabrata Roy has graduated from the School of Law, KIIT University in Bhubaneswar in the year 2013. Then he moved to the United States of America to pursue his Masters in International and Comparative Laws from the George Washington University in Washington DC. He is also recipient of the prestigious Thomas Bergenthau Scholarship awarded by the University. After completing his Masters programme in USA he moved to the United Kingdom to pursue MA in International Politics in the year 2014 from the University of Manchester. Roy has also worked as a lawyer and an arbitrator in India since 2015 with many leading law firms in India. Before joining University of Sussex as a Research Student to pursue his PhD he had been working as an Assistant Professor in Lloyd Law College, in Uttar Pradesh, India.



Attempt to Unlearn and Understand Intersectionality in “Private” and “Public” spheres

—Nikhila Kalla

Short Articles

In an interview with Jay Prosser, Lauren Berlant stated that the:

“Public presumes private. Through this statement, she tries to build upon what we assume private is public. This essay starts with this quote to draw attention to what we perceive as “natural.”

In her book *Seeing like a Feminist*, Nivedita Menon questions several times about this natural. For instance, the sexual division of labour is extreme in most spaces of life. Female’s roles are perceived as “caregivers, loving, eternal affection.” The male has to be “strong, devoted, and the breadwinner of the family.” This naturally assigns women to private spheres of the home where they look after children, elderly, and do the chores like cooking, cleaning, and more. The man is assigned to the public sphere, where he goes out to earn money. The patriarchal familial rules gatekeep this idea.



Dr. Nivedita Menon



Seeing like a feminist: Cover

Menon quotes in her book, “The point is that the family we think of as natural is only one kind of family,” which is true. While we talk of citizenship identity as well, the child of a “heterosexual” couple often bears the father’s surname and caste. They are pushed into a patrilineal society right at birth. In this patriarchal setting, we believe that the natural family consists only of a father, mother, and children. It goes beyond erasing the existence of queer identities and re-establish the idea that queer individuals or queer couples cannot have (legal) children. They cannot make their own family.

Additionally, if we were to consider the case of children’s admission in school, the father (if alive) was required to be present during the admission process. This puts down the status of women as secondary, especially in the case of a single mother who has custody of her child. The country’s legal systems naturalised the patriarch as the head of the family because the existing legal system itself is a patriarchal one. We need to realise that what we consider natural is not natural; we are simply allowing a construct to exist because it has become a norm. A construct that exists is limiting. It limits the possibilities of ways we can live, the methods which can be better and allow all kinds of interests, groups, and ideas to exist. But patriarchy as an ideology is limiting us to believe that there is natural because it benefits it. It helps the gatekeepers of patriarchy by letting the current power structures survive.

It creates the hegemony where we believe that our mothers are not in the same footsteps as our fathers. We call ourselves progressive families where our daughters study, work and are even sent abroad. We call it empowerment and say, “oh, she is so independent!” in praise. But it also us who do not allow her love affairs with someone else. Forget someone from a foreign nation, but even someone within the country. And if she were to say, “I do not wish to marry. I live for my job.” The same patriarchal society that called her progressive will call her scandalous.

Citation information:

Nikhila Kalla 'Attempt to unlearn and understand intersectionality in "private" and "public" spheres' (2023) 2(1) Your Voice Magazine 3.

In Francesca Orsini’s chapter *Love Letters*, Orsini talks about how love letters are very private and intimate actions between – husband-wife, two lovers, or friends. It is a gesture and act of love. In the same essay, she describes one Parsi play between a man and woman. The man falls in “love at first sight” with a woman sitting at her window. She yearns for his love as well and writes him a letter. She later wishes to spend a night with him, and they do. When her parents find out about her affair, they marry her off to another man. And in this pain of not being with her beloved, she takes her own life while requesting the man to keep their affair a secret. The man has an unsuccessful suicide attempt and mourns her loss until his end. They reunite in the afterlife. This play was seen as scandalous. The reason – it was uncharacteristically for a girl to take the initiative in a love affair.

A woman must be pure, innocent, and caring. She must protect her chastity with her life. The concept of chastity also exists because we believe the woman belongs to her husband in normative patriarchal society. If she must be deflowered, it should be only by him. Chastity is held in high regard around the world, not just in India, to say. The whole story of the book *Chronicles of a Death Foretold* by Garcia Gabriel Marquez only takes place when Angela Vicario is found a non-virgin on her wedding night. Her brothers kill Santiago because he is “assumed” to have taken her virtue. All the killing in the novel happens over a fully functional woman’s broken hymen. Consensual adult relations or consensual heterosexual relations have been viewed as scandalous that, again, we wipe out the discourse about homosexual relations. Is it really scandalous for an individual (especially those from minorities – women, LGBTIQQ+, lower-class) to make decisions for themselves?

However, answering the question of how do we reconcile this gap is probably by questioning it. We need to look head-on with what exists as “natural” and “normal.” We need to question the ideological stances that we see around us, what we believe, and what people around us believe. The private is the public. There will exist inequity in our workspaces, classrooms, and even bedrooms until we do so. The eye and gazes of society lock us into this patriarchal system where we believe everyone cannot be equal. The key is only to question. We cannot overthrow patriarchy or normative idea on a day we choose, but rather challenge its position around us. We should stop taking these norms for granted and understand how our society limits our agency of thinking since we grow up under its influence. To begin by unlearning norms, we assumed as natural. There exists no natural, so we do not need to push ourselves to fit into it. The only way is to find better ways for all ideas, groups, and interests to coexist where power structures do not comply us with specific identities, labels, and roles.

Works Cited:

1. Berlant L and Prosser J, “Life Writing and Intimate Publics: A Conversation with Lauren Berlant” (2011).
2. Orsini F, “Love Letters,” *Love in South Asia: A cultural history* (Cambridge University Press 2007).
3. Menon, N, *Seeing Like A Feminist*. Pearson. 2012.

About the Author



Nikhila is a graduate of Literary Studies and an avid writer. With a passion for analysing and critiquing cultural phenomena, Nikhila enjoys exploring the complexities of society through her writing. In her free time, she can be found watching classic films or indulging in her love of painting. Nikhila’s passion for storytelling fuels her writing, as she believes that the stories we create at ILF are an integral part of the human experience. Through her work, Nikhila seeks to shed light on the intricacies of the world around us and encourage others to think critically about our world.



Containment and control of Bahujan women's bodies The story of Bharatanatyam



—Avani Binish

Citation information:

Avani Binish 'Containment and control of Bahujan women's bodies: The story of Bharatanatyam' (2023) 2(1) Your Voice Magazine 4-5.

I started my dance classes as early as I started school. The earliest memory of my dance class is wearing the white and maroon uniform to my dance class, fighting with my mom to give me a different drape with the shawl than it being tied on my waist and coming back home with excruciating pain in my legs. I have been a trained classical dancer for almost two decades now and Bharatanatyam is one of the art forms I have been learning for the longest time. I will always hear my dance teacher say that the theoretical pedagogy of Bharatanatyam or any other classical dance forms in India like Mohiniyattam, Kathakali, Manipuri, and Odissi can be traced back to Natya Shastra. I didn't question her teachings until my college days when a few of my progressive seniors started challenging the Brahminical hegemony and patriarchal values integrated into classical dance forms. It took a lot of unlearning to realize that dance - especially Bharatanatyam, is not just an aesthetic and synchronized movement of the body, but rather, it is an amalgamation of expression of emotions combined with rhythm and music that depicts the hegemonic social norms. Its convoluted history is essential to understand Bahujan women, the power structures that culturally govern and discipline their bodies, the sustenance of hierarchy and subordination in the caste system and the social conditioning of Brahminical values.

1. Sadir- A Ritualistic Practice

Bharatanatyam was an eminent part of the Devadasi community in Southern India, especially the parts of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra¹. The term 'Devadasi' means the "servants of god" and it is considered to be a form of religious prostitution. The Devadasi community is not a homogenous community as it housed several non-Brahminical castes including some Bahujan castes and Dalits². Dance was part of the quotidian life of a Devadasi whose roots are rooted in the ritualistic practices associated with becoming a devadasi. This included marriage to the deity known as kalyanam; dedication to the deity often referred to as muttirai; followed by the ritualistic first dance lesson and the presentation of ankle bells called gajje puja; the debut recital after the completion of dance training in front of an audience called arangetam; and finally, the selection of a patron which is often referred to as prayojanam³. Bharatanatyam, erstwhile Sadir, was a dance form which was primarily performed by the Devadasis- especially those belonging to the Isai Vellular caste⁴.



Pictorial depiction of Bharatanatyam

2. Colonialism, revivalist movement and the denial of lived experiences of Devadasis

With the advent of colonialism and the assimilation of Victorian values like the censorship of clothes and the controlling of the sexuality of women in Indian society, it deemed practices like the Devadasi system to be barbaric and detrimental to Indian society. Coupled with resistance within the community against the oppressive system for lower-caste women, the 19th century saw Anti-Nautch movements across the country resulting in an Anti-dance movement in 1892 and the subsequent banning of temple dancing in Madras Presidency by the year 1910. In an effort to remove the stigma of its origin from the Devadasi system, the name of the dance-form Sadir was replaced with Bharatanatyam around the start of the twentieth century⁵.



Sadir is a dance form

With the advent of Indian nationalism and independence movements, reclaiming culture and history became an important part of the nationalist narrative. This served as the catalyst for a radical shift in the pedagogy and practice of Bharatanatyam. The country saw the rise and popularity of upper-caste Bharatanatyam dancers like Rukmini Devi Arundale, and Balasaraswati reviving Bharatanatyam by bringing them into mainstream Indian society. As Bharatanatyam is believed to be an art form that evolved from the book - Natyashastra, the revivalists appropriated the art form as a symbol of its glorious Hindu past depicting the stories of Mahabharata and Ramayana. Thus with the establishment of Kalakshetra - a dance school which was founded by Rukmini Devi Arundale⁶, there was a comprehensible hegemony of upper castes and Brahminization of the curriculum - be it the depiction of stories from the ancient Hindu scriptures involving bhakti and devotion and limiting the practice of Srungara or erotic love in dance performances; altering the pedagogy by concealing the past of the dance form being associated with Devadasi system with upper caste and class communities appropriating the art form and disassociating the dance form from its history of being a religious ritual art-form performed by the women from the most marginalized and downtrodden sections of the society. Further, the state of Tamilnadu, in an attempt at revivalism of Indian history and culture, adopted Bharatanatyam as the state's official performing art - one that promoted Hinduism as its main religion and Sanskrit as its intellectual language⁷.

3. Why are we discussing it today?

The origin of Bharatanatyam is embedded in the caste system. BR Ambedkar notes caste being a system of graded inequalities rooted in the concept of purity and pollution⁸. The Devadasi system as an institution can only be addressed with the acknowledgement of the socio-economic position of the women who were dedicated to the temple as Devadasis and the social norms that govern them. This system also meant that the Devadasis cannot refuse to offer sexual services to any member of the village. Dalit and Bahujan Devadasis experience a tripartite division of oppression - class, caste and gender-wise marginalities which they experience from the social structures of state, economy and society. It is an institutionalized system formulated by the upper caste men under the pretense of religion to have sexual access to lower caste women leading to control over their bodies and their sexuality. Pushing lower-caste Bahujan women into practices like the Devadasi system is an example of how graded hierarchies and hierarchical dichotomies of pure and impure women are created to distinguish between upper-caste and lower-caste women respectively and how caste becomes an important criterion to decide who can be a Devadasi. Although the Devadasi system might seem like a progressive set of norms which gives sexual freedom as Devadasis are not bound by the shackles of patriarchy which imposes monogamy and marriage relations; the very fact that upper caste men have to have control over the bodies of lower caste women and there is no agency of women to get into the system by themselves but are forced to become Devadasis because they belong to a particular marginalized caste, is not emancipatory. The freedom to choose to engage in and monetise sex work is different from being forced to engage in it because of their disadvantaged class and caste position is not freeing oneself from the shackles of Brahminical patriarchy.

Why are these arguments important while considering the dance form - Bharatanatyam? Dance as an art form should not be distinguished from the body of the performer because they are sites of social constructions of hierarchy, and subjugation. What the revivalist movement did was emphasize the already existing hierarchised binaries of pure and impure which are embedded in the caste system. The nationalist movement and the revivalist leaders like Rukmini Devi pushed for the eradication of the history of an art form that is rooted in the subjugation of Bahujan women by upper caste men. Not only was there an alteration in the history of the dance form, but there was also consequent saffronisation and Hinduisation of the art form. Foucault while addressing the concept of discourse and how it imposes limits and controls views that authorship,⁹ or creation of the identity of the author often sets boundaries to the discourse - in limiting who has access and patronage to the discourse. The revivalist movement placed the authorship of Bharatanatyam to Bharata Muni and the Sanskrit text Natya Shastra, which can be seen as an attempt to limit the patronage, access and history under the aegis of Brahmins. Today, a female Bharatanatyam dancer's body is manifested as an upper-caste Hindu women's body which is considered pure. What we see here is a constant denial of agency of Bahujan-Dalit women, a recital of hierarchized dichotomies and Brahminization of the art form by deeming it to have originated from Natya Shastra. Through this whole process, what we observe is the exercise of power through existing social structures, the creation of a new discourse and the production of knowledge. The Revivalist Movement in Bharatanatyam did not just deny the agency and historicity of the Dalit-Bahujan women, but through institutional disciplinary methods, surveillance and control of the production of knowledge extended a similar form of external regulation, like it was there in the Devadasi system. As a Bahujan woman myself who has been studying this dance form for the last two decades, the erasure of the history comes with an effort of containment and control by the state, patriarchy and caste system to contain and control bodies of women for time immemorial. Foucault extends his idea of control to the concept of "docile bodies" created and maintained for political order¹⁰. Through this, it can be understood that even art forms were also created, revised, regulated and maintained to create "docile bodies" that are subjected to subjugation, oppression, and extortion to maintain the Brahminical political order in the Indian state.

Far from being "docile bodies", there was always resistance from the marginalised communities towards the hegemonic culture. There were movements exhibiting community consciousness of the Dalit-Bahujan communities for a change in the hegemonic narrative set by the upper castes in Bharatanatyam. That's when counter-hegemonic movements in Bharatanatyam become notable. Dancers like Nrithya Pillai have formed an entire discourse in spreading awareness about the subaltern history of the dance form followed by an attempt to "re-casteing"¹¹ Bharatanatyam that will further show the world the individual agency and nuanced form of resistance in the pedagogy of Bharatanatyam. Bodies can be contextualized as a site of (Pillai, 2022) politics and dissent which are shaped by social structures, institutions, power relations and agency. Dancers like Nrithya Pillai posit a way towards an emancipatory practice from the clutches of the convoluted history of casteism, classism and patriarchy entrenched in Bharatanatyam by restoring the power centre back to Bahujan and Dalit women in reclaiming their individual agency and their subjectivities, and the art form itself.

Works Cited:

1. Geetha, K. A. "Entrenched Fissures: Caste and Social Differences among the Devadasis." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 22, no. 4 (2021): 87-96. (page 4)
2. Gaston, Anne-Marie, and Tony Gaston. "Dance as a way of being religious." In *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts*, p. 182. Oxford University Press, 2014. Page - 193
3. Pillai, Nrithya. "Re-casteing the Narrative of Bharatanatyam". *EPW engage*. Vol 57. Issue No 9. February 26, 2022. <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/re-casteing-narrative-bharatanatyam>.
4. Blanchard, Marie-Josée. "(Not So Much) Dancing by the Book: Mapping a New Religious Discourse around the Practice of Indian Classical Dance." In *Symposia: The Journal of Religion*, vol. 9, pp. 14-30. 2018.
5. Gaston, Anne-Marie, and Tony Gaston. "Dance as a way of being religious." In *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts*, p. 182. Oxford University Press, 2014. Page - 195
6. Blanchard, Marie-Josée. "(Not So Much) Dancing by the Book: Mapping a New Religious Discourse around the Practice of Indian Classical Dance." In *Symposia: The Journal of Religion*, vol. 9, pp. 14-30. 2018 p. 19
7. Ambedkar, Bhimrao Ramji. *Castes in India: Their mechanism, genesis, and development*. DigiCat, 2022.
8. Blanchard, Marie-Josée. "(Not So Much) Dancing by the Book: Mapping a New Religious Discourse around the Practice of Indian Classical Dance." In *Symposia: The Journal of Religion*, vol. 9, pp. 14-30. 2018 p. 25
9. Turkel, Gerald. "Michel Foucault: Law, power, and knowledge." *Journal of law and Society* 17, no. 2 (1990): 170-193.

About the Author



Avani Binish is a passionate researcher with a Master's degree in Sociology from Jawaharlal Nehru University. Her research interests include Gender, Urban Spaces, Gentrification, and Religion. Though she initially found herself gravitating towards the topic of Religion, she has since decided to diversify her research interests.

In addition to her research pursuits, Avani is also an erratic writer and moody dancer. When she's not busy analyzing the world around her through a sociological lens, you can find her aimlessly wandering around the monuments of Delhi, raving about the latest food discovery, or meticulously scheduling her time.

With her diverse interests and unique perspective, Avani is poised to make significant contributions to the field of Sociology and beyond.



Exploring the intersectional undertones of popular culture



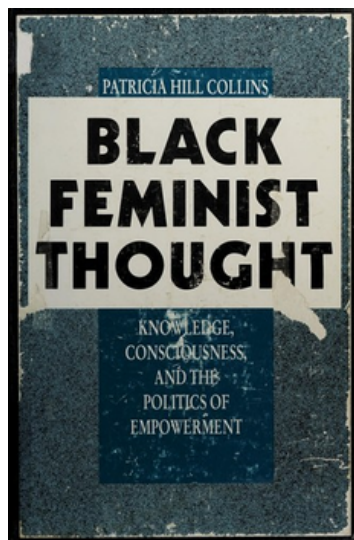
—Mannat Ahmed Khan

Citation information:

Mannat Ahmed Khan 'Exploring the intersectional undertones of popular culture' (2023) 2(1) Your Voice Magazine 6-7.

Have you ever been asked to introduce yourself in an academic, professional, or social situation? If yes, how many times do you start with your name, your age, and what you study or where you work? A majority of us will say every time. This ingrained habit in us to define ourselves through the identities we possess is universal despite where you situate yourself region-wise, ideology-wise, class-wise, or any other parameter or metric to outline identity. While the way we do may differ across communities, the act of utilizing our identity remains consistent.

A consideration of these identities in how we conduct ourselves in society always stands out either as a common coming-together point or as a contentious act that leads to conflicts and segregation of communities. A conscious study or the act of acknowledging the cross-cutting nature of these identities is what we call intersectionality.



While there is intense disagreement amongst academics in the application and study of intersectionality, the timeline of the introduction of the term in popular academia is not disputed. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins presented the paper “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex” to the University of Chicago Legal Forum.” The publication of the paper popularized the term and constructed an image of it as an analytical framework for mechanisms across academia and even the private sector along with policy making. But my analysis in this article does not concern itself with the political or economic connotation of it directly but with the intertwining of intersectionality within the field of arts, specifically, films in India. While it is simple to search for films on the internet that are self-proclaimed intersectional films, it is imperative to have an eye for the intersectionality present in most mainstream movies we watch.

Let's look into some popular movies that highlight intersectionality in regard to gender, race, and sexuality.

Everything Everywhere All At Once

Released in 2022, everything everywhere all at once is a seeming sci-fi film circling around the concept of multiple realities and conscientiously multiple identities. It revolves around an Asian family of a humble background navigating taxes and the IRS in the US.



It sets its foundation in describing the family as a conventional and close-knit Asian family where the mother is constantly stressed about finances, the daughter feels distant from her mother struggling to introduce her girlfriend to the family in fear of disdain from the grandparent and the father is a soft-spoken equalizer who wishes things were calmer than they are in relation to his marriage. The story unfolds in a way that communicates to the audience that the film is centered around funky colors, trippy editing, and pleasing aesthetics.

However, what stands out is the common and prominent theme of intersectionality and the struggle with finding a self in the chaos created by it. While the multiverse is extensively explored in the movie, it evidently stands as a metaphor for intersectionality. A minority race living in a predominantly white country along with struggling to come to terms with her daughter's sexuality, our protagonist, the mother, is dazed by the double burden of a working Asian woman. This is expressed in the way she and her daughter's multiple selves show up to challenge all that she knows. The impact of the layering of our identities is beautifully expressed through the metaphor of a multiverse. It is not just projected to enjoy aesthetically but to display the conflict that individuals face in realizing and understanding a sense of self when posed with the struggles of navigating their intersectional self.

Geeli Puchi



Released as part of the anthology series “Ajeeb Dastan” on Netflix, Geeli Puchi is a queer love story that centers around the intersection of gender, caste, sexuality, and capitalism. Following two women, both of starkly different economic backgrounds in relation to their castes and gender expressions, consequently resulting in different societal statuses. Bharti is a Dalit woman and butch presenting lesbian while Priya belongs to an upper caste family, destined to marry and hold a higher position in the factory that they both work in.

The story follows the love story of both these women as two people in love who are of different castes and two different ranks in their jobs due to their caste. It displays the experience of being a queer upper-caste woman and how it inadvertently differs from being a sexual, gender, and caste minority. In an attempt to show how caste and queerness intersect, they also display how in certain ways sensitivity towards both is exclusive and not necessarily inclusive. The film shows us that moral ambiguity doesn't discriminate and that the forces of caste and capitalism can overpower more humane emotions. This outright play-by-play of how intersectionality takes center stage in the unfolding of the story makes it the protagonist.

The story, unlike many queer movies that show a soul-soothing ending, portrays to us that queerness is deeply interlinked to other societal norms that cannot function without them affecting your queer experience.

Darlings



Dark comedies aren't usually the first genre that is suggested when an attempt to visually represent intersectionality is considered. Stepping into that realm of using discomfort as an instrument to realize complex ideas, the 2022 film Darlings explores the issue of domestic violence from a feminist lens inculcating the axes of finance, religion, and family.



The story follows a young Muslim woman who gets married to a man she loves and starts living only a few houses away from her mother. While the fairytale constructed in her mind about her young love does not turn out to be as colorful as she'd hoped, she continues to exist in an environment where her physical and emotional safety is exploited. As she confides in her mother, played by Shefali Shah, she is encouraged to leave her husband and end the marriage. However, the story takes an unpredictable turn when the young woman, played by Alia Bhatt, decides to hit her husband back and take him captive in their home. The rest of the movie outlines her literal and emotional journey of deciding her next move and contemplating when and whether she wants to kill him.

In the story's unfolding, we see the autonomy of a woman being taken back by her despite her financial constraints. In a way, the director makes it clear that her decision is heavily based on where she is socially and economically situated in society and how the story could have unfolded differently if it occurred in a different social bubble. The intersectionality displayed in the movie beautifully explains to the audience how the actions we take and the decisions we make to deal with a circumstance in our life, are dependent on our identities and the external factors around us. Our inability to go against the influence of these factors offers a deterministic perspective in understanding human actions, specifically human actions when making a moral decision. Intersectionality displays how all these factors work together in building an individualized perspective on life.

Conclusion:

It is not common practice for commercial high-budget films to concentrate on the nuances of intersectional identities in their plotlines, however, it is possible to utilize our critical and imaginative lens to pick up on hints of intersectionality or draw alternative storylines through an intersectional lens. The attempt of small filmmakers to explore these encompassing ideas is often gone unnoticed or unappreciated, and it is only when we choose to gift them our time and eyes to understand those stories, do we realize the strength of diverse stories left unrecognized. While encouraging audiences to allow themselves the pleasure of different types of cinema is crucial, the impact commercial movies leave on cultural practices and beliefs cannot be denied. Therefore, one can only urge audiences to look further than the surface, to dwell deeper, and to derive individualized meanings from what the director originally planned to deliver. Intersectionality in film is to be kept alive not just by filmmakers who are unafraid to tell unabashed stories but also by consumers of these films who absorb each element of what is displayed and reproduce meaning not just for themselves but also for the environment that surrounds them.

Works Cited:

1. Berlant L and Prosser J, "Life Writing and Intimate Publics: A Conversation with Lauren Berlant" (2011).
2. Orsini F, "Love Letters," Love in South Asia: A cultural history (Cambridge University Press 2007).
3. Menon, N, Seeing Like A Feminist. Pearson. 2012.

About the Author



Mannat is a student of Philosophy at Lady Shri Ram College for Women, Delhi University. She enjoys reading and discovering new ideas and ways of approaching her academic interests.

With a knack for being restless, often indecisive but at the same time, passionate, she is always ready to take up new endeavors to challenge herself. Shifting from Jstor articles to movies on her Chrome tabs, she hopes to write more and open new pathways for learning of all sorts.



Intersections of Religion and Gender: A case of Domestic Violence

—Sandhya Kerketta

Citation information:

Sandhya Kerketta 'Intersections of Religion and Gender: A case of Domestic Violence' (2023) 2(1) Your Voice Magazine 8.

Why do women succumb to violence?

Why, when women are educated and abled enough, still choose to be in an abusive relationship?

We have explored various reasons to answer this, be it financial dependency, the child being the reason, societal judgmental attitude, lack of support from natal family or friends, lack of awareness of support, etc.

Women, making up the other half of the total population, are abstained from the basic human rights of “life free of violence” and “life with dignity and respect”. Why is that? Have we forgotten that women are humans?! We see women in the role of mothers, daughters, wives, mother-in-law, sisters-in-law, and in multiple other relations. It’s like an intersection of roles and responsibilities, and there she is, a woman, standing in the center, who, nobody considers a human being. Recently, at one of the events of Women’s Day, I asked the gathering, “Who are women?”, or “What are women?”. Not even a single person answered that a woman is a human being. Not even the women! This allows me to ponder on how we are cultivating minds. How indifferent and gendered a process of socialization is.



According to WHO (2017), global data indicates that every 1 in 3 women worldwide experiences physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. National Family Health Survey V (2019-21) highlights that 70% of women from 11 major states in India faced domestic violence in silence. And the year 2021 amidst the pandemic recorded the highest number of domestic violence complaints with the National Commission for Women, India (Sen, 2021). Endeavoring to understand violence, it’s significant to view it from the lens of intersectionality to understand its aspects fully. The multiple identities of a person intersect with various social systems to create a social situation for a person including the experience of violence. That’s why it’s imperative to recognize the interplay of the systems with the identities.

It’s an attempt here, to discuss how the system of religion and gender function together to perpetuate the continuation of violence. Being a woman from a Christian religion (and not pointing fingers at any other religion for now), I intend to highlight how Christianity as a religion instills the acceptance of violence, especially domestic violence in women’s life. My reflection on this commenced from the time when I was assigned concurrent fieldwork in the Special Cell for Women and Children during my master’s degree at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. Subsequently, when I joined the project full-time after my studies; while working there, talking to several survivors of domestic violence on a daily basis, I hardly remember encountering survivors belonging to the Christianity religion.

In my opinion, religion teaches us the ways to live a life, influencing the worldview and actions of a person. Somehow, when it intersects with gender, it gets problematic. In Christianity, marriage is considered a sacrament. It’s a holy union of a man and a woman by the will of God. There’s a chapter in the Bible, in which St. Paul talks about marriage and says “*Wives submit to your own husband, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is the head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body (Ephesians 5: 22-23).*”

Further, he says that “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for her. Husbands’ ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh, of His bones. For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh (Ephesians 5:28-31).” There can be many interpretations of these verses as every individual perceives them differently or might have heard different interpretations (or similar) of these texts from a different preacher. If we go literally by the words that are mentioned here, we find instructions for both a man (husband) and a woman (wife).

How they must be towards each other in a marriage. But, in our society only the first half of the scripture is followed. Hardly, emphasis is given to the second half of the scripture, where a husband must love his wife. Even leave his father and mother and join his wife and become one flesh. It’s needless to mention who among husband and wife, leave their parents after marriage.



When a Christian woman suffers domestic violence and happens to share it with the priests or pastors or a preacher, they ask her to pray. Never do they call the husband and talk to him and remind him of what the scriptures say. The woman is reminded that she must submit herself to her husband. That she can’t stand against her husband. She must pray to God to end her suffering. This unfortunately reinforces violence. This is just one instance to reflect. There are many and prevail in other religions as well.

In Christianity, or in most religions, this is believed that prayers have answers to your sufferings. It has all the solutions. It’s all about faith. But it’s crucial here to understand that without any human actions or interventions, violent situations won’t change or come to an end. There are supports available to battered women. However, the interplay of religion and gender hinders women to access the provisions and settle for violence.

Works Cited:

1. WHO. (2017). Retrieved from [www.who.int: https://www.who.int/news-room/factsheets/detail/violence-against-women](https://www.who.int/news-room/factsheets/detail/violence-against-women)
2. National Family Health Survey. (2019-21). Retrieved from http://rchiips.org/nfhs/factsheet_NFHS-5.shtml
3. Sen, S. (2021). Domestic violence complaints received in the past five months reach a 21-year high.

About the Author



Sandhya Kerketta is a sociologist who graduated from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, India. Sandhya is currently a PhD candidate at University of Sussex, United Kingdom. Sandhya’s research interests are gender studies, intersectionality, domestic violence among many more. Prior to joining University of Sussex, Sandhya has worked as a Program Associate at Church’s Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA), New Delhi. She handled important roles such as fund monitoring for welfare projects, planning and allocation of budgeting among others. Sandhya also has enormous field experience as a support worker and has worked extensively with domestic violence survivors.



The passenger at the window seat: A memoir

_Shikhar Khanna

Stories/Memoirs

Citation information:

Shikhar Khanna "The passenger at the window seat: A memoir" (2023) 2(1) Your Voice Magazine 9-10.

The story

The story starts when I was travelling to my hometown for Holi. This is the story of a girl named Puja (pseudonym), a bar dancer by profession. In a crowded bus we were seated next to each other. After the first few hours of dilemma and awkwardness we finally struck a conversation.

After exchange of pleasantries I asked where she was going. She answered hesitantly that she is going to Kanpur as her father has lost his job during the pandemic and now she has become the sole breadwinner of her family. I had the impression of her being a student. Being curious I asked about her profession.

I could immediately notice her awkward hesitance. She fumbled and told "I am a bar dancer in Mumbai." Well ... I was taken aback! She ... doesn't look like a bar dancer! I know it's ridiculous to make judgments to stereotype someone's profession. But this realization came to me a bit late.

We carried on our conversation throughout the entire journey exploring different topics like hobbies, favorite food and similar things. But deep in my head I was deeply stigmatized. I don't know if my thoughts became apparent on my face after some time she asked me if I felt awkward.

I reluctantly said, "no ... but why did you feel like that?"

In a melancholy tone she replied, "I saw it on your face. Don't worry I get that all the time ... even from my parents."

Those were her last words ...

Pooja got off in the next stop and left me in a state of dismay. That was the moment I realized how judgmental I was. Stuck in my seat ... I was left with a lot of introspective thoughts which will form the rest of this blog.

The realisation ...

As I started thinking more about Pooja's story, a question became more and more prominent in my mind.

What's wrong in choosing the profession of 'bar dancing'? Pooja might not have chosen it out of her free will But what if she did? Is that wrong in anyway?

As I kept on thinking about all these, I felt sorry for the law student in me who have been struggling all these time to liberate himself from my stigmatized, judgmental self. After reaching home I started researching more about the profession and its fair share of legal battles.

Here is a snapshot of what I found ...

The Maharashtra Government banned bar dancing to protect girls from human trafficking, harassment, and rape. The government also introduced Sections 33A and 33B to the Maharashtra Police Law 1951 which prohibited any kind of dance performance in an eating-house permit room or beer bar. An exception was made in cases where such dance performances were to be held in 3-star hotels and not otherwise.

Challenging the measure, Bar dancing Indian Hotel and Restaurant Association (AHAR) filed the case sitting violation of fundamental rights under Article 19(1)(a) and 19(1)(g) before the Bombay High Court.[1]

But that is not what I want to talk about in this memoir.

Today, the story is not about these black letter provisions of law. The story is about Puja and many others like her who face different kinds of discriminations because of the interplay between their intersecting identities and the patriarchal mind-sets of our society.

Before I dwell further, I want to find "Who is Puja?"



Well ... the question seems to be a simple one. She is a bar dancer! Yes ofcourse! She is. But is that really the only identity that she possesses? The answer is no!

Let me recall my interaction with her and enumerate the various identities which makes the individual named Puja.

She is:

*A girl,
from a humble economic background,
Hindu (most likely) by religion,
well-educated,
bar-dancer by profession.*

Though these five identities are the ones I can presently think of from our brief interaction, there are several other identities that intersect with each other to create this individual named Puja. Ironically, as Kimberle Crenshaw mentions the reason for her discrimination in our society is also this very same intersection of her identities.[2] As an intersectional feminist, Crenshaw in her path-breaking research article, Mapping the Margins identified several layers of discrimination which a woman of colour goes through because of intersections of their identities.[3]

Similar to Crenshaw's arguments, Indian scholars of intersectionality including the likes of Chandra Mohanty and Nivedita Menon points out several such intersectionality-based discriminations which women in the 'third world' has to face in their daily lives.[4] I feel that Puja mortalises the insights of Mohanty and Menon in this context. I argue that it is not her profession only which is the reason for her discrimination. Rather it is the intersection of several of her identities (some of which I have mentioned above) which is at the root of it. In other words, the intersection of her identities as an individual creates a 'gender-based' role expectations to the patriarchal caretakers of the society.[5] The defiance of such expectations situates her at the cross-roads of several identities which is resulting at her present social positionality.

For how long?

Yes ... for how long will she be discriminated for being the individual she is?

For how long will she be facing this humiliation and ostracization for defying the red-eyed patriarchal bullies of our society?

For how long will we feel awkward even by the thought of interacting with her?

For how long will we merely have this realisation and not act upon it?

Works Cited:

1. Berlant L and Prosser J, "Life Writing and Intimate Publics: A Conversation with Lauren Berlant" (2011).
2. Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, Violence against women of Color", (1990) 43 Stanford Law Review 1241.
3. Menon, N, Seeing Like A Feminist. Pearson. 2012.
4. Ritabrata Roy and Shahzeb Ahmed, "From Parsons to Ethnomethodology: Analysing the Indian judicial position on the question of gender in the cases of honour crimes", (2021) Indian Journal of Law Management and Humanities 973.



About the Author

Shikhar is a fourth year student of Lloyd Law College in Noida. Shikhar's passion is to travel, watch movies and web series. He is also a prolific reader of novels and non fictions.



Newsletter

IPSA AISP

Our Consulting Editor, Ritabrata Roy is going to present his recent research paper titled, "The Love Jihad Law: A silent catalyst for perpetrating honour crimes in India" in an upcoming workshop on "The Nation as a Sacred Communion?" on 1st -2nd June 2023 in Belfast, United Kingdom. The workshop will be organised by Queen's University, Belfast. Information on the workshop can be accessed in <https://sites.google.com/view/ipsarc14/events/belfast-2022>



The University of Manchester

The University of Manchester, U.K. has mentioned about our flagship journal : Journal for Transnational Human Rights Research on their website.

Link: <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/news/journal-of-transnational-human-rights-research-jthrr-inaugural-edition-published/>



The Dialogue Box has published its flagship annual journal on human rights titled, "Journal of Transnational Human Rights Research" on 28th February 2023. The journal is spearheaded by Mr. Wayne Ramwell of The University of Manchester, United Kingdom as the Editor-in-Chief. The published issue of the journal can be accessed in <https://thediologuebox.com/journal-for-human-rights-research/>



Announcements

- We publish weekly blogs on various issues concerning human rights in India and abroad on our website: www.thediologuebox.com. To contribute please send your manuscripts at director@thediologuebox.com for review.
- Call for Papers regarding Volume 2 of Journal for Human Rights Research (February 2024) will be released in April 2023. Link: <https://thediologuebox.com/journal-for-human-rights-research/>

We thank:



The University of Manchester





2022 All rights reserved by The Dialogue Box. New Delhi.

Contact us:

Office: A - 51, Abul Fazal Enclave, Jamia Nagar, Okhla,
New Delhi, Delhi 110025, India.

website. www.thedialoguebox.com.

Email: hr@thedialoguebox.com/
director@thedialoguebox.com

Our Social Media handles:-

Instagram - @ihrr2022

Facebook - @thedialogueboxofficial

Twitter - @_tdbofficial

LinkedIn - @thedialogueboxofficial