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LETTER ^{FROM THE} EDITOR

In the fall of 2010, over 20 authors from Singapore to Pakistan, from the U.K. to the U.S., entered an incredible body of work to the editorial board here at the Columbia Undergraduate Journal of South Asian Studies. Topics ranged from analyses of Tamil literature to policy papers on India and Pakistan; of these, we chose merely four to represent the vast and crucial field that is South Asia in academia.

These selected papers share some similarities, certainly: three focus on female empowerment, and every one displays a concern for socially or legally crippled populations. But the comparisons stop here, as each paper unfolds as an original ambassador of its specific discipline, whether it falls under literary theory, development, anthropology and environmentalism, or public health studies. Both immigrant and indigenous populations are covered, as Adam Payne explains the issues affecting locals in Himachal Pradesh and Tehreem Rehman analyzes the situation of Pakistani women in the United States. Sanjena Sathian's paper extends into the fascinating liminal space that is the immigrant existence in Bollywood films; juxtaposed against this are Esther Nai's thoughtfully researched predictions about microcredit and women's advancement in Bangladesh.

Each paper was chosen on the additional merit that it strives to be much more than an irrevocably pigeonholed text: each reaches beyond its immediate categorization to truly embody the spirit of interdisciplinary study. As such, we hope that readers enjoy perusing this issue, and are mindful of the mastery each paper displays on both formal and intellectual levels, as well as of the impetus to action that each initiates in its own unique manner.

Mallika Narain
February 2011

ABOUT ^{THE} AUTHORS

TEHREEM REHMAN is a sophomore at Columbia University majoring in Women's & Gender Studies with a concentration in Biological Sciences. She is a certified medical interpreter for the Hindi and Urdu languages as well as a New York State certified crisis counselor for survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence. Through her experience as the National Junior Coordinator for the American Medical Student Association's Health Equity Leadership Institute, she has become increasingly interested in health policy and looking at access to healthcare services in urban communities.

SANJENA SATHIAN is a sophomore English major at Yale University. She is interested in studying literature and its development in the face of increasing globalization. Originally from the much warmer city of Atlanta, GA, Sanjena has nonetheless managed to survive one Northeast winter in New Haven, mainly by watching a lot of Bollywood movies. At Yale, she is a tour guide, writes and edits for the Yale Globalist, dances in Anjali—an Indian classical-fusion dance team—and is involved with the South Asian Society. This paper was written during her freshman fall at Yale.

ESTHER NAI graduated in May 2010 from the National University of Singapore, with honors in political science. She has traveled extensively throughout Asia. After graduation, she spent three months at the Institute of South Asian Studies as a research intern. During her stint at ISAS, Esther conducted a brief field trip to Dhaka, Bangladesh, to undertake research into the field of microcredit. She currently resides in Singapore and enjoys traveling and reading up on current affairs.

ADAM PAYNE graduated from the School of Oriental and African Studies in 2010 with a BA in Social Anthropology. Prior to that, he spent two and a half years living and studying in India where he had many formative experiences and formed great friendships. Much of his research draws from the ideas and struggles he encountered there. He now lives in London working on issues of migration, neo-liberalism and sustainable agriculture.

SOCIAL STIGMA, CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS, OR POOR POLICIES: EXAMINING THE PAKISTANI MUSLIM FEMALE POPULATION IN THE UNITED STATES AND UNEQUAL ACCESS TO PROFESSIONAL MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES¹

TEHREEM REHMAN

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT:

This study involved the dissemination of a cross-sectional community survey to a convenience sample of 113 Pakistani Muslim women through either an online website or in-person at mosques and Pakistani American organizations. The purpose of this study was to determine whether there are any discrepancies between the rates of diagnosable mental health illnesses and the percentage of people who have sought professional help among Pakistani Muslim women ages 18 and older who are residing in the United States. Then, within this context, the study identified existing barriers that prevent these women from getting equal access to professional mental health services. Emphasis was placed on ascertaining what percentage of the sample population were victims of domestic violence, as intimate partner abuse is pervasive in the Pakistani Muslim community - it is both a stressor and a potential barrier to receiving mental health services. An ultimate assessment is taken of what policy changes can be implemented in order to reduce these barriers. This research project culminated in the first study to date that examined accessibility to mental health services within the Pakistani Muslim female population in the United States.

¹ Faculty Sponsor: Rafia Hamid, Ph.D., Adjunct Assistant Professor at Queens College.

This study will examine unequal access to mental health services and how women are disproportionately affected by existing disparities in the health care system.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The purpose of this study is to determine whether there are any discrepancies between the rates of diagnosable mental health illnesses and the percentage of people who have sought professional help among Pakistani Muslim women ages 18 and older who are residing in the United States. Then, within this context, the study aims to identify existing barriers that prevent these women from getting equal access to professional mental health services. Emphasis will be placed on ascertaining what percentage of the sample population is a victim of domestic violence as intimate partner abuse is pervasive in the Pakistani Muslim community - it is both a stressor and a potential barrier to receiving mental health services. An ultimate assessment will be taken of what policy changes can be implemented in order to reduce these barriers.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

South Asians as a group - including Pakistanis, Indians, Bengalis, and Sri Lankans - are typically viewed by American society as the “model minority”.² This stereotype upholds South Asians to unrealistically high standards of social success and personal morality. The subsequent homogenizing view of South Asians creates and sustains barriers to services, such as educational or health services. Although there is a possibility that South Asian Americans may internalize such an identity, the greater influence on the hurdles to services arises from the perceptions of the practitioners. Consequently, not enough attention is placed on addressing mental health and emotional problems among South Asian Americans.

Recent studies indicate that as South Asian female adolescents grow older, they are much more likely to engage in acts of self-harm, with the rate of self-harm for women between the ages of 16 and 24 being two-and-a-half times that of Caucasian women

² Ng, Jennifer S. et al. “Chapter 4 Contesting the Model Minority and Perpetual Foreigner Stereotypes: A Critical Review of Literature on Asian Americans in Education,” *Review of Research in Education* 31 (2007): 95-130.

and seven times the rate for South Asian men.^{3 4} The act of self-harm in this paper will be defined as “Any deliberate act with a non-fatal outcome that attempts or causes self-harm or that consists of ingesting a substance in excess of its generally recognized or prescribed therapeutic dose”.⁵ Attempted suicide among young women of South Asian origin has become a major issue in the United Kingdom for instance, where the national mental health target to reduce the suicide rate by 20% by the year 2010 had placed an emphasis on South Asian women.⁶ The prevalence of eating-related psychopathology among South Asian women in the UK has also become a major concern, with rates of clinical bulimia being, for example, much higher among South Asian females than Caucasian females.^{7 8 9}

An increasing amount of research is demonstrating that a subset of the South Asian population, the Pakistani Muslim female population, is particularly vulnerable to psychological illnesses. For instance, one large-scale community led by researcher Francis Creed indicated that Pakistani Muslim women had the highest rates of anxiety and depression among a sample of British South Asian women and a sibling sample in India.¹⁰ Researchers Edmund Sonuga-Barke and Mistry examined the mental health of three generations of Indian Hindu and Pakistani Muslim women using three versions (English, Gujarati and Urdu) of the Hospital Anxiety & Depression scale and found higher levels of depression and anxiety among the Pakistani Muslim women.¹¹ In another study, researchers Fazil and Cochrane found that British Pakistani women scored higher on severe depression, anxiety and insomnia in comparison to white

³ Bhugra, Dinesh and Desai, Manisha. "Attempted suicide in South Asian women," *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*. 8(6) (2002): 418-423.

⁴ Cooper, J. et al. "Self-harm in the UK: differences between South Asians and Whites in rates, characteristics, provision of service and repetition," *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*. 41(10) (2006).

⁵ Rutter, Michael and Taylor, Eric A. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 1224.

⁶ Jenkins, Rachel. "The Health of the Nation: Recent government policy and legislation," *The Psychiatrist*. 18 (1994): 324-327.

⁷ Dolan, B. et al. "Eating behavior and attitudes to weight and shape in British women from three ethnic groups," *British Journal of Psychiatry*. 157 (1990): 523-528.

⁸ McCourt, J. and Waller, G. "The influence of sociocultural factors on the eating psychopathology of Asian women in British society," *European Eating Disorders Review*. 4(2) (1996): 73-83.

⁹ D. Bhugra and K. Bhui, "Eating disorders in teenagers in east London: a survey," *European Eating Disorders Review*. 11 (2003): 46-57.

¹⁰ Creed, F. et al. "Preliminary study of non-psychotic disorders in people from the Indian subcontinent living in the UK and India," *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*. 99 (1999): 257-260.

¹¹ Sonuga-Barke, Edmund J. S. and Mistry, M. "The effect of extended family living on the mental health of three generations within two Asian families," *British Journal of Clinical Psychology* 39 (2000): 129-141.

native women using the General Health Questionnaire.¹²

The rate of suicide within the Pakistani Muslim female population is particularly troubling. In Islam, suicide is considered “haraam” or forbidden, and an act that can never be forgiven.¹³ Yet, Creed also found rates of suicidal ideas to be substantially more common among Muslim women relative to other Hindu and Sikh South Asian women.¹⁴ These findings suggest that Pakistani Muslim women are subject to major stress factors that are causing them to mentally suffer and consequently, directly violate major religious principles with regard to taking one’s own life.

The majority of the stress factors for Pakistani women appear to stem from their South Asian cultural background. One major source of stress is cultural conflict. For instance, one study conducted by researchers McCourt and Waller found that South Asian women from the most traditional homes - and thus the least integrated into British society - had greater prevalence of eating disturbances which was attributed to low levels of acculturation.¹⁵ Culture conflict is particularly prominent for South Asian females versus South Asian males, due to the critical nature of South Asian society towards the behavior of women and whether or not it can be deemed as “good”. While the nature of what constitutes as “good” is in fact arbitrary, it mainly rests upon adhering to socially mandated constraints on one’s liberties such as practicing abstinence until formal marriage.^{16 17} Other similar stress factors include pressure for arranged marriage, rejection of marriage proposals, gender role expectations, living with an extended family, inter-generational conflicts, racism, social isolation, and marital problems.^{18 19 20}

While no separate studies were found on the prevalence of

¹² Fazil, Q. and Cochrane, R. “The prevalence of depression in Pakistani women living in the West Midlands,” *Pakistani Journal of Women’s Studies: Alam-e-Nizwan*. 10. 1 (2003): 21-30.

¹³ “Suicide: according to quran and sunnah,” *Muttaqun Online*, accessed at <http://muttaqun.com/suicide.html>.

¹⁴ Creed et al., “Preliminary study of non-psychotic disorders,” 257-260.

¹⁵ McCourt and Waller, “The influence of sociocultural factors,” 73-83.

¹⁶ Bhugra, B. and Jones, P. “Migration and mental illness,” *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*. 7 (2001): 216-223.

¹⁷ Chew-Graham, C. et al. “South Asian women, psychological distress and self-harm: lessons for primary care trusts,” *Health and Social Care in the Community*. 10(5) (2002): 339-347.

¹⁸ Hussain, F. and Cochrane, R. “Depression in south asian women living in the UK: a review of the literature with implications for service provision,” *Transcultural Psychiatry*. 41. 2 (2004): 253-270.

¹⁹ Ineichen, B. “The influence of religion on the suicide rate: Islam and Hinduism compared,” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*. 1(1) (1998): 31-36.

²⁰ Thompson, N. and D. Bhugra, “Rates of deliberate self-harm in Asians: Findings and models,” *International Review of Psychiatry*. 12(1) (2000): 37-43.

intimate partner abuse among the Pakistani Muslim female population in particular, numerous studies have indicated that another major source of stress for South Asian females in general is intimate partner abuse.^{21 22} Rates of domestic abuse among South Asian women residing in the United States are significantly high, with there apparently being no significant deviation between arranged and non-arranged marriages.²³ According to a recent cross-sectional survey disseminated among South Asian women living in Boston, nearly 35% of the participants claimed that they had experienced physical abuse with their husbands and 32.5% stated that the abuse was as recent as in the past year.²⁴ In comparison, 24.8% of all American women have reported to be victims of physical abuse or rape from their spouses.²⁵ It may be tempting to deduce that domestic violence can be designated as a “cultural” issue due to the speciously significant difference of approximately 10 percent for the rates of domestic violence between South Asian women and American women overall. However, upon considering that numerous incidences of domestic abuse go unreported and that the percentage for South Asians was ascertained from a small subsample that voluntarily admitted to being victims of intimate partner abuse, such a generalization would clearly be unsubstantiated.

Research has consistently shown that battered women are at a much higher risk than non-battered women of developing psychological illnesses later on in life. For instance, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and insomnia are much more prevalent among battered women than non-battered women, with studies indicating that victims of intimate partner abuse are more likely to suffer from post-traumatic disorder and depression even compared to victims of childhood sexual assault.^{26 27}

Unfortunately, there are numerous barriers that currently

²¹ Hicks, M.H.R. and Bhugra, D. “Perceived causes of suicide attempts by UK South Asian women,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. 27(4) (2003): 455–462.

²² Silva, C. et al. “Symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder in abused women in a primary care setting,” *Journal of Womens Health*. 6 (1997): 543-52.

²³ Abraham, M. “Ethnicity, gender, and marital violence: south asian women's organizations in the united states,” *Gender & Society*. 9(4) (1995): 450-468.

²⁴ Dasgupta, S.D. “Charting the course: an overview of domestic violence in the south asian community in the United States,” *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*. 9. 3 (2000): 173-185.

²⁵ Tjaden, P. and Thoennes, N. “Full report of the prevalence, incidence, and consequences of violence against women.” A special report prepared at the request of the Department of Justice. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2000.

²⁶ Golding, J.M, “Intimate partner violence as a risk factor for mental disorders: a meta-analysis,” *Journal of Family Violence*. 14 (1999): 99-132.

²⁷ Ratner, P.A. “The incidence of wife abuse and mental health status in abused wives in Edmonton, Alberta,” *Canadian Journal of Public Health*. 84 (1993): 246-49.

prevent South Asian women in particular from accessing professional mental health services. For the purposes of this proposal, “professional” mental service providers would include psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, clinical social workers, marriage and family therapists, and psychiatric nurse specialists who meet the designation criteria set by the US Department of Health and Human Services. The barriers can be divided into two main categories: first, the ability and willingness to seek help, and second, receiving effective treatment. For instance, while domestic violence would clearly cause significant stress to South Asian women, the controlling husband can also act as a barrier to seeking help.

Another potential obstacle for South Asian women would be the lack of permission or approval from extended family members. It is a common practice among South Asians to live with multiple generations in the same household, and this often compels these women to take their family members’ views and opinions into consideration before making decisions.²⁸ Furthermore, family members might be offended by even the mention of seeking outside formal help as talking about personal or intimate problems with someone outside the family is considered a cultural taboo.^{29 30} The need to protect one’s “izzat,” or honor, constructs another barrier for South Asian females; the burden of “izzat” is disproportionately placed on women who might fear that seeking professional mental health services would ruin both their individual and family’s reputations.^{31 32}

Fear of being stereotyped by mental health professionals is another issue that prevents South Asian women from seeking help. Researcher Carolyn Chew-Graham found that South Asian women felt that they would be judged by the service providers who were usually white, and, in their eyes, had fixed views about the Asian

²⁸ Ibrahim, F.A. and Ohnishi, H. “Asian American identity development: a culture specific model for South Asian Americans,” *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*. 25 (1997): 34–51.

²⁹ Randhawa, G. and Stein, S. “An exploratory study examining attitudes toward mental health and mental health services among young south asians in the United Kingdom,” *Journal of Muslim Mental Health*. 2(1) (2007): 21–37.

³⁰ Tabassum, R. et al. “Attitudes towards mental health in an urban pakistani community in the united kingdom,” *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*. 46. (2000): 170–181.

³¹ Cinnirella, M. and Loewenthal, K.M. “Religious and ethnic group influences on beliefs about mental illness: A qualitative interview study,” *British Journal of Medical Psychology*. 72 (1999): 505–524.

³² Gilbert, P. et al. “A focus group exploration of the impact of izzat, shame, subordination and entrapment on mental health and service use in South Asian women living in Derby,” *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*. 7. 2. (2004): 109–130

community.³³ Another major barrier that prevents South Asian women from seeking professional mental health services is the fact that their somatization of psychological distress hinders their primary physicians' recognition of any mental illnesses they may be suffering from.^{34 35} For instance, South Asians who claimed that they were suffering from a "sinking heart" were in fact exhibiting some of the main symptoms that are associated with the Western concept of "depression".^{36 37} Even though South Asian women have relatively high consultation rates with their primary physicians in comparison to other populations, they are not being adequately treated for their underlying mental conditions as only their physical symptoms end up being addressed.^{38 39} Subsequently, South Asians are less likely than their Caucasian counterparts to receive mental health referrals.

Some Pakistani Muslim women might claim to already be receiving help for their psychological distress through avenues other than professional mental health services, yet current statistics of self-harm and suicide among this population make it glaringly obvious that these alternative measures are not sufficient. Some of these methods might include speaking with a family member or friend, seeking the advice of a religious leader in the community, or making an appointment with a "hakeem," someone who practices herbal medicine.^{40 41} Researchers Shaheen Sheikh and Adrian Furnham found that among all South Asians, Muslims were the least likely to seek help from a mental health professional, which could have possibly been due to their preference of utilizing Islamic prayer to deal with mental distress.

³³ Chew-Graham, C., "South Asian women, psychological distress and self-harm," *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 339-347.

³⁴ Department of Health. Ethnic differences in the context and experience of psychiatric illness: a qualitative analysis. United Kingdom: The Stationary Office, 2002.

³⁵ Wilson, M. and MacCarthy, B. "GP consultation as a factor in the low rate of mental health service use by Asians," *Psychological Medicine*. 24 (1994): 113-119.

³⁶ Fenton, S. and Sadiq-Sangster, A., "Culture, relativism and the expression of mental distress: South Asian women in Britain," *Sociology of Health and Illness*. 18 (1996): 66-85.

³⁷ Krause, I.B. "Sinking heart: A Punjabi communication of distress," *Social Science & Medicine*. 29(4) (1989): 563-575.

³⁸ Gillam, S.J. et al. "Ethnic differences in consultation rates in general practice," *British Medical Journal*. 299 (1989): 953-957.

³⁹ Husain, M.I. et al. "Self-harm in British South Asian women: psychosocial correlates and strategies for prevention," *Annals of General Psychiatry*. 5(7) (2006).

⁴⁰ Ali, Osman M. et al. "The Imam's role in meeting the counseling needs of Muslim communities in the United States," *Psychiatric Services*. 56 (2005): 202-205.

⁴¹ Sheikh, Shaheen and Furnham, Adrian. "A cross-cultural study of mental health beliefs and attitudes towards seeking professional help," *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*. 35 (2000): 326-334.

Even if South Asian women eventually decide to seek the help of a mental health professional, they are also less likely than their Caucasian peers to return for follow-up treatment.⁴² There are several underlying reasons for this phenomenon that involves barriers to the actual receipt of effective mental health treatment. First, extended family members often insist in accompanying the individual with the mental illness to the psychiatric appointments. Not only does the presence of the family members obscure full disclosure of the individual's problems, but it also compromises patient confidentiality.⁴³ Another prominent barrier is language mismatch.⁴⁴ According to a recent US Census, English is not spoken in 16% of Pakistani households and 32% of Pakistanis have limited English proficiency.⁴⁵ Yet, studies have indicated that even when translators were present at appointments with mental health professionals, the problem of expressing and discussing subtle mental health issues persisted due to cultural variations in the interpretation of psychological distress symptoms.^{46 47}

A lack of comprehension of the patient's cultural values is another underlying factor that prevents South Asian women from receiving effective psychological treatment. Mental health professionals adhere to certain assumptions such as what constitutes proper parenting styles, gender roles, and normal family life that may not be shared with the patient.⁴⁸ A clash of cultural values becomes particularly evident when South Asian women feel uncomfortable going to a psychiatric appointment that employs Western practices such as psychotherapy, which places emphasis on the individual self, and consequently, goes against South Asian values of putting the family's wishes and needs before one's own.^{49 50}

Finally, another potential obstacle that might prevent South Asian women from receiving effective mental health treatment is resistance or reluctance to opening up with a mental health

⁴² Cooper et al. "Self-harm in the UK," 782-788.

⁴³ Hussain and Cochrane, "Depression in south asian women," 253-270.

⁴⁴ Minnis, H. et al. "Cultural and language mismatch: clinical complications," *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*. 8(2) (2003): 179-186.

⁴⁵ Reeves, Terrance J. and Bennette, Claudette E. "We the People: Asians in the United States." *Census 2000 Special Reports*, CENSR-17 (Dec. 2004). Accessed at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/censr-17.pdf>

⁴⁶ Green, G. et al. "Equity and culture: Is the NHS failing to meet the needs of mentally distressed Chinese origin women?" *Journal of Health Services Research and Policy*. (2002).

⁴⁷ Hussain and Cochrane, "Depression in South Asian women," 285-311.

⁴⁸ Minnis et al. "Cultural and language mismatch," 179-186.

⁴⁹ Green, G. "Equity and culture."

⁵⁰ Hussain and Cochrane, "Depression in South Asian women," 285-311.

professional of a different ethnic background.⁵¹ For instance, researchers Fenton and Sadiq-Sangster found that South Asian women were more open to discussing their mental distress when talking to researchers whom they say as “one of us”.⁵² In the US, it has been shown that Asian American psychiatrists exhibit a different style of mental health assessment of their Asian American patients in comparison to non-Asian American psychiatrists.⁵³ A psychiatrist’s style determines how he or she approaches the achievement of specific clinical tasks or goals, such as for instance, by offering direct advice to patients. The difference in styles between Asian American and non-Asian American psychiatrists might explain why Asians who attended ethnicity-specific mental health programs in the US had a higher return rate and stayed in treatment longer than those using mainstream services.⁵⁴

South Asians mainly consist of Pakistanis, Indians, Bengalis, and Sri Lankans.⁵⁵ Although the aforementioned barriers to accessing professional mental health services are applicable to South Asian women as a whole, it is still important to focus on population subgroups in mental health studies - Pakistani Muslims in this case. For instance, through a large-scale community survey, researcher James Nazroo found that South Asian women as one group had lower rates of anxiety and depression than their Caucasian peers.⁵⁶ However, when analyses were conducted of the individual South Asian subgroups, Nazroo noticed subtle differences in the prevalence rates of the mental illnesses. Indian and Bengali women had in fact the lowest rates of anxiety and depression, while Pakistani women had similar rates as Caucasian women. These results highlighted the significance of distinguishing between subgroups of the South Asian population in mental health studies since there are indeed major differences of language, religion, and economic circumstances among the subgroups; yet mental health studies continue to clump all South Asians or even Asians together.

⁵¹ Conrad, M.M. and Pacquiao, D.F. “Manifestation, attribution, and coping with depression among asian indians from the perspectives of health care practitioners,” *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*. 16(1) (2005): 32-40.

⁵² Fenton and Sadiq-Sangster, “Culture, relativism and the expression of mental distress: South Asian women in Britain,” *Sociology of Health and Illness*. 18 (1996): 66-85.

⁵³ Lu, Y.E. Underutilization of mental health services by Asian American clients: The impact of language and culture in clinical assessment and intervention. *Psychotherapy in Private Practice*. 15 (1996): 43-61.

⁵⁴ Takauchi, D.T. et al. “Return rates and outcomes from ethnicity-specific mental health programs in Los Angeles,” *American Journal of Public Health*. 85. (1995): 638-643.

⁵⁵ Leonard, Karen I. *The South Asian Americans*. (Greenwood Press: 1997).

⁵⁶ Nazroo, James Y. Ethnicity and mental health: findings from a national community survey. (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1997).

This study ultimately explored different policy changes that can be implemented in order to ensure that Pakistani Muslim females in distress are getting professional mental health treatment by striking a balance between enabling Pakistani Muslims to become more aware about mental health services and incorporating unconventional but more culturally sensitive practices such as prayer into treatment. For instance, the UK has already initiated the use of “hakeems” in the clinical setting for Pakistani Muslims, but we do not know how applicable this would be for Pakistani Muslims residing in the United States.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, mounting evidence is denoting the significance of including a discussion of cultural and religious issues in the mental health professional’s case notes.⁵⁸

One alternative to psychotherapy for Pakistani women could be family therapy. Another alternative method of psychiatric treatment relies on allowing the counselor and patient to explore their values and beliefs together. Not only would this increase the patient’s trust of the counselor, but it would also prevent the counselor from judging the patient based on stereotypes generated through book knowledge or personal experience with only a few Pakistani Muslims.⁵⁹

Several mechanisms for enabling Pakistani women to view professional mental health services in a more positive light have been identified. In Carolyn Chew-Graham’s study, the South Asian female participants themselves gave some advice on how to increase South Asian women’s access to mental health services. These suggestions included availability of counselors of the same background as them, public presentations on what exactly is meant by the terms “psychology”, “counseling”, or “mental health” and the dissemination of translated informational brochures among the South Asian community.⁶⁰ Surprisingly though, only one published study to date has explored the effects of an educational pamphlet written in Urdu on depression and suicidal behavior on the willingness of South Asian women to seek help for mental distress. The results of this study demonstrated that the women who read the pamphlet were more likely to seek help, and subsequently, illustrated the significant

⁵⁷ “Ethnic differences in the context and experience of psychiatric illness: a qualitative analysis.” Department of Health. (United Kingdom: The Stationary Office, 2002).

⁵⁸ Altareb, B.Y. “Islamic spirituality in America: A middle path to unity,” *Counseling and Values*. 41 (1996): 29–38.

⁵⁹ Ibrahim and Ohnishi, “Asian American identity development,” 34–51.

⁶⁰ Chew-Graham et al., “South Asian women, psychological distress and self-harm,” 339–347.

benefits that simply raising awareness could have.⁶¹

Most studies on South Asian women and mental health have been conducted in the UK. In spite of the fact that a few studies conducted in the US are now indicating similar rates of psychological illnesses among South Asian women, the research conducted in the UK cannot be directly applied to Pakistani American women due to a couple of reasons. First, there are major differences in immigration patterns between South Asians immigrants in the UK and those residing in the US.⁶² Second, as aforementioned, studies that group all South Asians or Asians together do an inadequate job of identifying specific barriers to accessing professional mental health services that are particularly relevant to Pakistani Americans.

Even though Pakistanis, Indians, Bengalis, and Sri Lankans are all considered South Asians, the differences in religion, for instance, result in substantial variations of values. Pakistani Americans represent the eighth largest group of Asian Americans in the United States.⁶³ This study will assess the mental health needs of this growing population to ensure that they are not being neglected from mainstream psychological services and will strive to identify various policy changes that can be pursued to eliminate any potential obstacles. This research project culminated in the first mental health study to date focusing on the Pakistani Muslim female population in the US.

EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURE

This study involved collecting survey data from a convenience sampling of 113 women. The survey consisted of questions on demographics, identification of potential stress factors that especially pertain to the Pakistani Muslim female population, mental state, recent (if any) history of seeking professional mental health services, identification of potential barriers to seeking and receiving effective professional mental health treatment, and assessment of what steps can be taken to increase Pakistani Muslim women's access to mental health services. The questions assessing the participant's mental state and whether or not she is a victim of domestic violence were based on previous questionnaires circulated by the New York State Department of Health. The rest of the questions in the survey were developed after extensive research. An

⁶¹ Bhugra and Hicks, "Effect of an educational pamphlet," 827-9.

⁶² Patel, S.P. and Gaw, A.C. "Suicide among immigrants from the Indian subcontinent: a review," *Psychiatric Services*. 47 (1996): 517-521.

⁶³ "We the People: Asians in the United States." *Census 2000 Special Reports*.

Urdu-translated version of the survey was also made available to study participants.

Print survey copies were directly distributed at Masjid Noor, the Islamic Association of Long Island, the Muslim Center of New York and at the Domestic Harmony Foundation office, which is where they were completed. The online surveys were disseminated through the help of Counselors Helping (South) Asians, Inc.

When meeting a woman, the study coordinator initially asked her if she was Pakistani, Muslim, at least 18 years old, and whether she currently feels that she is in a safe position to complete the survey. The print surveys were only given out in all-female classes held at the different organizations. Subsequently, a woman's husband was not present while she was completing the survey. However, to ensure the safety of the study participants, the study coordinator informed the women that the survey contains sensitive questions about family relationships and that she should in no case attempt to participate in the study if doing so would increase the risk of discovery by an abusive partner. She was also asked if she felt safe with completing the survey even if another family member would happen to be nearby. The study coordinator then sat down and went through the verbal consent process with the women, assuring them that all information is confidential and that participation is completely voluntary. They should not hesitate to withdraw early from the study at any point if they feel uncomfortable. After that, the study participants were asked if they prefer an English or Urdu survey so they could provide information in the language that they felt most comfortable in.

Upon completion of the survey, the study coordinator provided the participant with a Mental Health Resources for South Asian Women document and advised the woman to keep it in a secure place. If it became apparent that possession of such a document would jeopardize the study participant, a hard copy was not provided and verbal descriptions of the services and respective locations were given instead. For the online survey, the Mental Health Resources for South Asian Women document was displayed on the last page and should have been viewed by the participant before she could click on the link to finish the survey.

DATA ANALYSIS

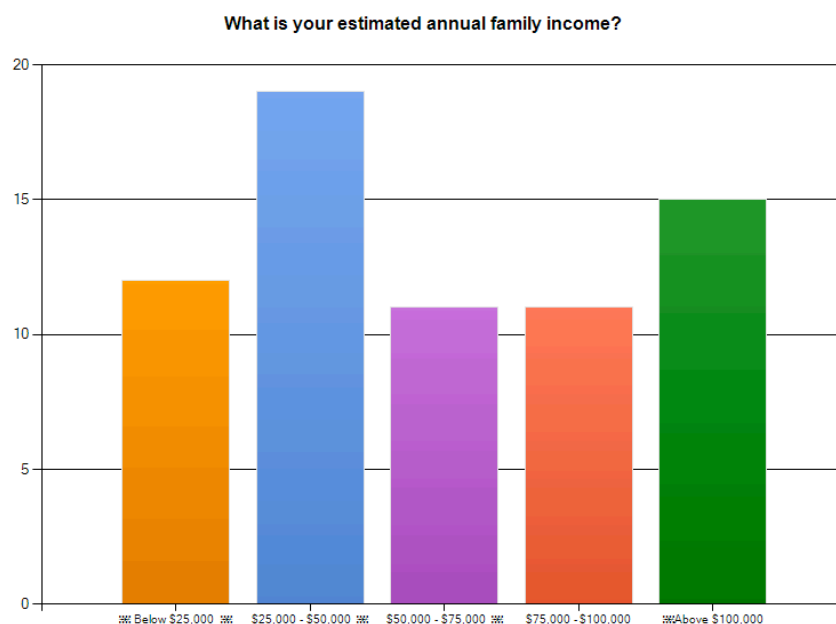
The scoring procedures for the survey questions on mental health and domestic violence were based on previously established guidelines. If the participant answered "yes" to any of the questions

pertaining to domestic violence, there is a high chance that she is a victim.⁶⁴ The survey questions assessing the mental state of the study participants emphasized depression and anxiety. One point was given for checking “None of the time”, 2 points were given for checking “A little of the time”, 3 points were given for checking “Some of the time”, 4 points were given for checking “Most of the time” and 5 points were given for checking “All of the time”. The sum of the points from all of these questions were used to gauge the level of psychological distress due to depression and anxiety. A score of less than 15 indicated minimal distress; a score of 16-30 indicated moderate distress, and a score of over 30 indicated a high level of distress.⁶⁵ This study relied on self-reported psychological distress since other available measures required the presence of clinical psychologists or psychiatrists.

For the rest of the survey questions, a score of 0 was given to the response “Not At All”, 1 for the responses “Somewhat Relevant” or “Somewhat Important”, 2 for the responses “Relevant” or “Important”, and 3 for the responses “Very Relevant” or “Very Important”.

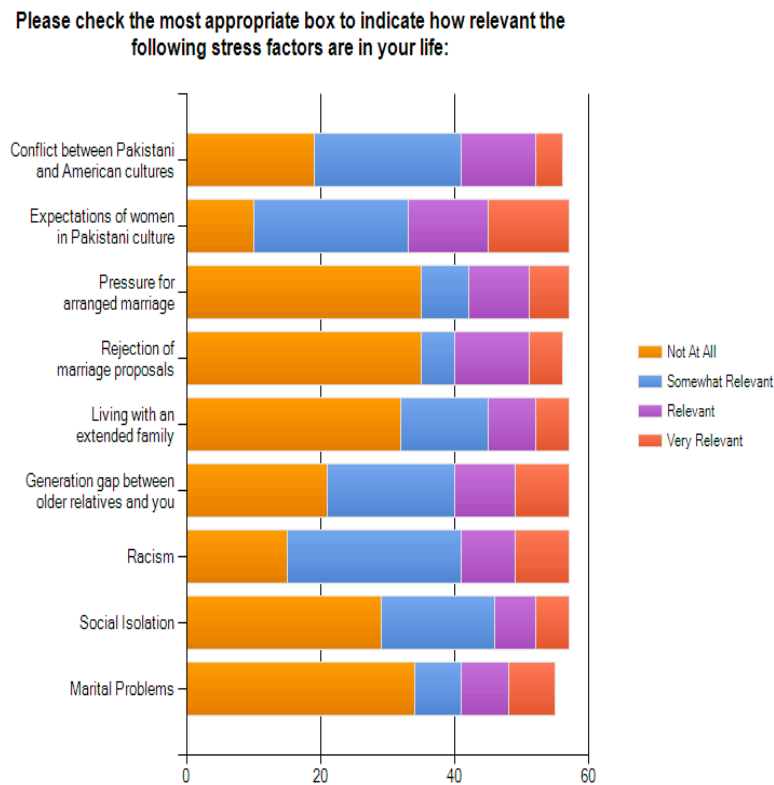
Ultimately 113 surveys were collected. Both married and unmarried women participated in this study, and consequently, certain stress factors might be disproportionately relevant for a given age group. All graphical depictions of the study results only represent participants that answered the particular question under consideration.

Figure 1



As seen in Figure 1, the study participants came from households with a wide range of annual incomes. This was an ideal outcome since socioeconomic class could have potentially acted as a confounding variable when ascertaining barriers to seeking or continuing professional mental health services. Most of the participants primarily spoke Urdu and were not born in the United States (see Charts 1 and 2 in the Appendix). Over 72% of the participants held at least a Bachelor's Degree (see Chart 3 in the Appendix).

Figure 2



Stress factors were self-identified by research participants on a scale of 0 to 3, with 3 being the highest value for relevance. According to Figure 2, gender role expectations were by far the greatest self-identified stress factor for the study participants, with an average rating of 1.46. Racism, a generation gap between older relatives and the participants, and conflict between Pakistani and American cultures fell closely behind, with average rates of 1.16, 1.07, and 1.00 respectively. However, factors such as marital problems or living with an extended family did not seem to be a major source of distress for married study participants as was originally expected for members of a collectivist culture, with average rates of only .62 and .60. Pressure for arranged marriage and rejection of marriage

proposals might not appear to be significant stress factors when taking all study participants into consideration, with an average rating of .75 each. Yet, when focusing on participants between the ages of 18-25, who were predominantly single, the average rating greatly increased to 1.12 and 1.06, respectively.

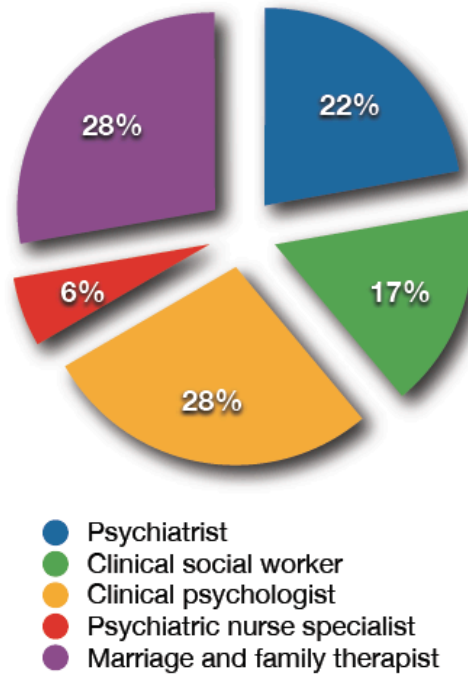
48.44% of all participants were identified as suffering from moderate or high levels of depression/anxiety. From that group, only 35.48% of the women self-reported to having sought some sort of professional mental help. In addition, out of the participants who were suffering from moderate or high levels of depression/anxiety but had no history of utilizing professional mental health services, 80% of the women self-reported to have never even thought about getting professional mental health treatment.

The percentage of participants who self-identified as being victims of domestic violence was approximately 16.5%, which is actually below the US national average of 24.8%. However, 63.6% of the participants who were victims of domestic violence identified as suffering from moderate or high levels of depression/anxiety, in contrast to the prior determined percentage of 48.44% for all participants.

The majority of participants who did in fact utilize professional mental health services saw either a marriage and family therapist or a clinical psychologist, as shown below in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Types of Mental Health Services Utilized By Participants



Please check the most appropriate box to indicate how relevant the following categories would be in preventing you from seeking help from a mental health professional:

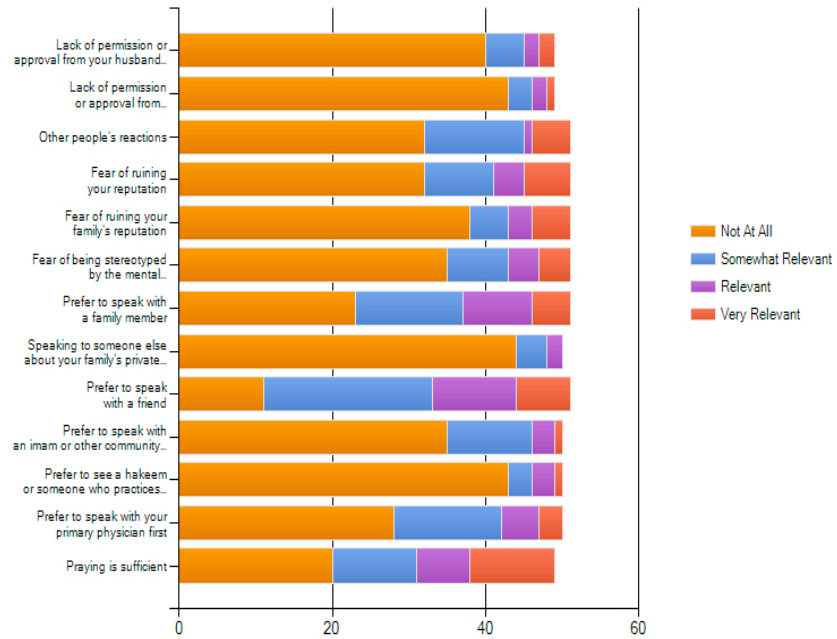


Figure 4

Barriers to seeking professional mental health services specifically pertaining to the Pakistani female population in the UK as identified by past studies did not seem to be as relevant for the Pakistani female population in the US, on a scale of 0 to 3. According to Figure 4, the vast majority of participants preferred to speak with a friend before deciding to go see a mental health professional, with an average rating of 1.27. The belief that praying is sufficient was a close second barrier to seeking mental health services, with an average rating of 1.18. Yet, factors such as preferring to see a “hakeem” or someone who practices herbal medicine, a lack of permission or approval from extended family members, and the belief that speaking to someone else about your family’s private problems is “un-Islamic”, had minimal relevance on the participants’ lives, with average ratings of only .24, .20, and .16 respectively.

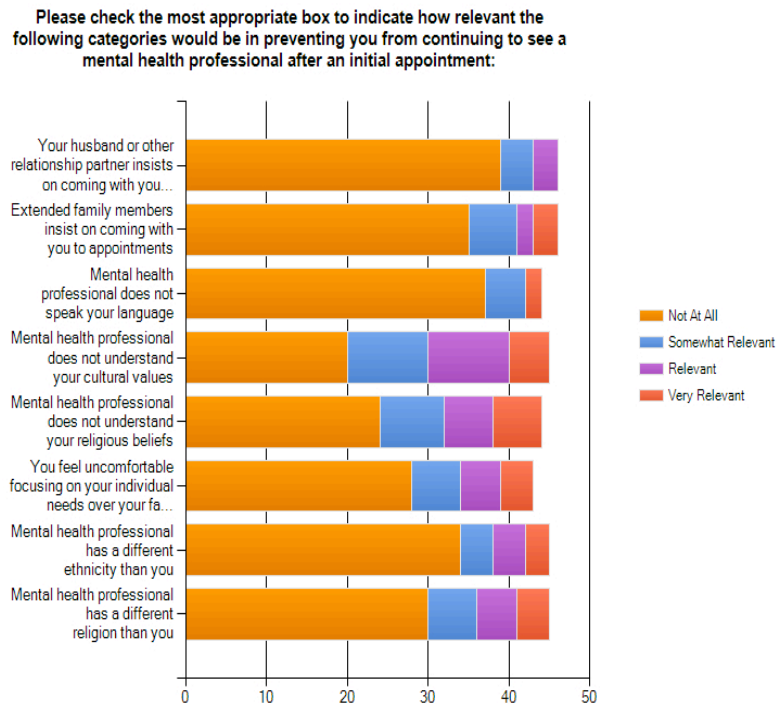


Figure 5

As seen in Figure 5, a mental health professional’s lack of understanding of Pakistani cultural values and religious beliefs contributed the most to the participants’ resistance towards continuing professional mental health treatment, with average ratings of 1.00 and .86. One participant observed that “my little sister went through the ‘system’ a lot and my parents didn’t understand her problems and depression. There was a language/culture barrier. They even gave us a Muslim psychiatrist but she was horrible.” However,

barriers to continuing treatment that were prevalent among Pakistani women in studies conducted in the UK, such as a husband who insists on coming to appointments with the woman or a mental health professional that does not speak the same language as the woman had minimal relevance for these participants, with average ratings of only .22 and .25.

Subsequently, when asked to identify activities that would help make other Pakistani Muslim women more open to seeking professional mental health services on a scale of 0 to 3, with 3 being Very Important, choices such as an option of family therapy instead of individual therapy and free access to a translator during appointments did not receive the highest ratings. Rather, choices that were deemed to be most important by the participants were an availability of mental health professionals who are more sensitive to Pakistani cultural values, having an initial discussion with your mental health professional in which both of you explore your values together, and presentations in the Pakistani community on what exactly is meant by the terms “mental health”, “psychology”, “counseling” and “therapy”, with average ratings of 2.11, 2.13, and 2.18 respectively.

Yet, simply finding a psychiatrist with the same ethnicity did not seem to solve the problem of a clash of cultural values for the participants. As one participant wrote, “I would personally not want to talk with a Pakistani psychiatrist for the fear of who she or he may know that I know. I hate to say this about my own people, but we gossip a lot and there's a def lack of ethics amongst our community.” Another participant similarly commented, “I am a Pakistani Muslim Woman who happens to be a psychiatrist and I would like to emphasize that some patients avoid me because I'm too similar and they are afraid of mingling in social circles.” Membership to tightly knit ethnic communities may in fact serve as a greater barrier to accessing health services that involve the discussion of sensitive and private matters, than the lack of culturally competent clinicians. Whereas psychiatrists can be mandated to attend cultural sensitivity trainings, it would not be as simple to guarantee confidentiality within a relatively small network of social relations.

CONCLUSION

Stress factors especially pertaining to the Pakistani American population became more or less apparent depending on what ages were being focused on. Barriers to seeking and continuing professional mental health services clearly cannot be directly applied from studies conducted in the UK Pakistani population on Pakistani women residing in the United States. One potential reason for this

discrepancy could be the difference in immigration patterns, with different provinces in Pakistan having greater representation in the UK than in the US, and consequently, differences in the educational background of the two populations. These findings highlight the need for more mental health studies specifically on the Pakistani American population.

As evident from the experimental results, Pakistani women suffering from moderate or high distress are not seeking the help they need. The fact that the vast majority of women, suffering from moderate or high levels of depression/anxiety and no history of utilizing professional mental health services, did not even consider getting treatment is truly alarming. This is the most vulnerable population that should serve as the target of considerable outreach efforts. Merely hiring more Pakistani psychiatrists is not going to resolve the issue of Pakistani women being hesitant to seeing a mental health professional. Rather, providing cultural competency training to mental health professionals as well as allocating funding for community presentations and campaigns on discussing mental health issues might serve as better tools of increasing accessibility to mental health services within the Pakistani Muslim female population in the US.

The percentage of participants who self-identified as victims of domestic violence was in fact lower than the national average rate of domestic violence in the US. In addition to an inherent sampling error, the likelihood that study participants might not all have been equally honest in their responses due to the sensitive nature of the questions could have contributed to this discrepancy in the rates. Yet, as expected, victims of domestic violence were more likely to suffer from moderate or high distress. While some domestic violence agencies have already recognized the need for incorporating emotional support and other counseling services into their services, there is currently unfortunately not enough funding specifically allocated for this need.

This study helped elucidate distinctions between the Pakistani female populations in the United States and the United Kingdom in the types of barriers these women face when striving to access professional mental health services. The survey responses provided insight into the nature of the stigma against seeing a mental health professional among Pakistani Americans, and confirmed the notions that many Pakistani women are going untreated and become more susceptible to becoming inflicted by moderate or high levels of anxiety/depression if they are victims of domestic violence. However, in order to ascertain what specific guidelines the cultural competency training for mental health professionals should entail and better assess the types of campaigns and presentations that should be

conducted within the Pakistani female population in the US, more research still needs to be conducted.

APPENDIX

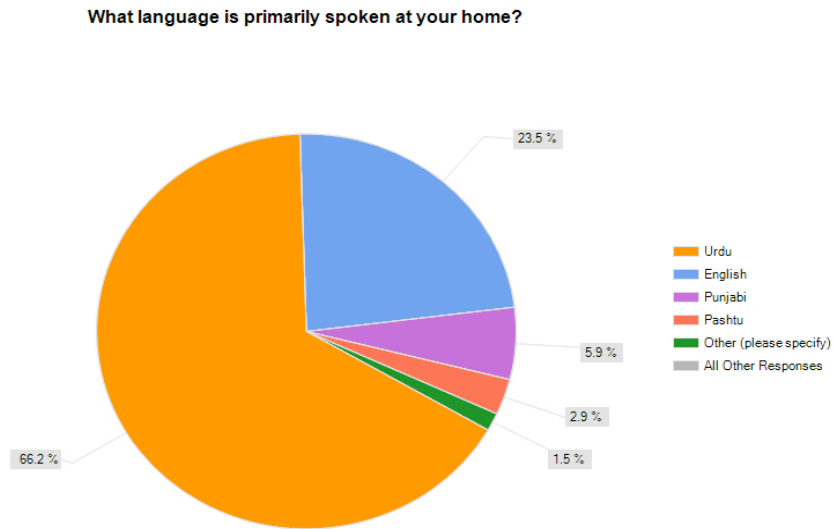


Chart 1

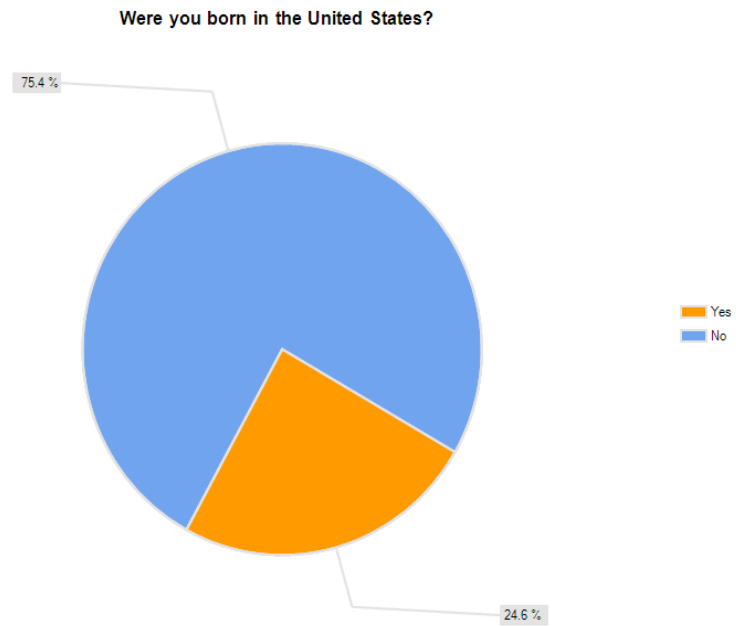


Chart 2

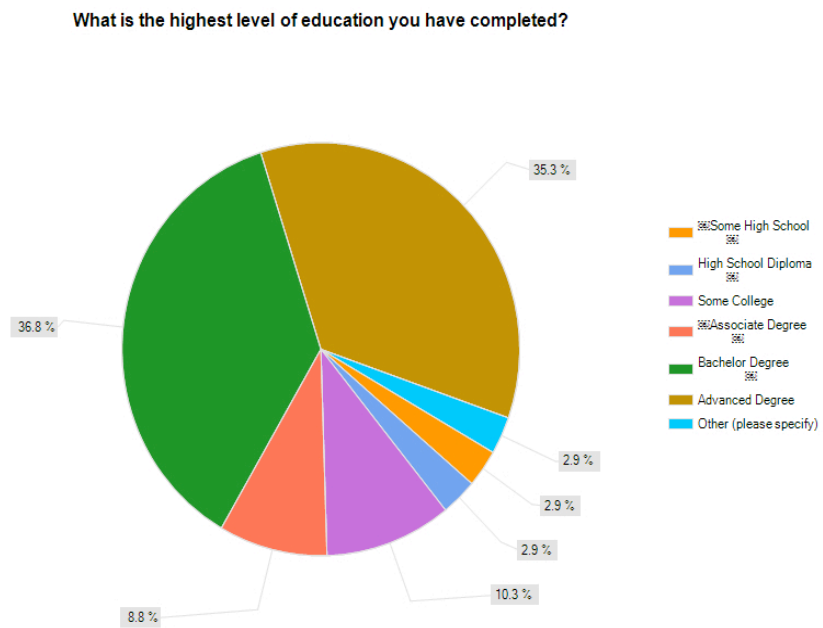


Chart 3

**GENDER AND NATION IN THE SOUTH ASIAN
DIASPORA: TRANSNATIONAL CULTURAL
SPACES IN BOLLYWOOD CINEMA**

SANJENA SATHIAN, YALE UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT:

In the last three decades, Bollywood cinema has shifted from projecting anti-colonial understandings of moral and sexual female boundaries to emphasizing a more liberated, diasporic female figure. The genre has traditionally found ways to restrict feminine sexuality within the confines of a nation-state, and only in a post-nation-state world, within transnational cultural spaces, can the female figure achieve some degree of liberation. This paper chronologically explores the development of depictions of females in the Indian diaspora in five major Bollywood films: *Pardes*, *Dilwale Dulhania le Jayenge*, *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gam*, *Salaam Namaste* and *Love Aaj Kal*.

Modern Hindi popular cinema has undergone distinctive shifts as India increasingly finds its place in a globalized world. Mass migrations and economic integration in the global economy produce a confused cultural space in cinema; now Bollywood filmmakers must cater not only to audiences in Mumbai and Delhi but also to Indians scattered across the diaspora, from Singapore to Australia, from the United Kingdom to the United States. The result is a creation of a new genre within Bollywood: the diasporic film, which includes films catering to a non-resident Indian or “NRI” audience. But a category of Bollywood cinema is rapidly emerging which goes beyond merely creating a story those in the diaspora can relate to: films which use the diaspora for more than mere spectacle. These films are set in the diaspora and portray the lives of Indians living abroad, creating a new, dynamic cultural space in which the South Asian diaspora is ascribed specific characteristics. These characteristics are problematized, however, by their source: the diaspora is imagined through a uniquely Indian lens.

This paper will explore the representation of the diasporic woman figure in Bollywood films, following the progression of the representation of women in five films made between 1995 and 2009. Using a combination of theories of gender traditionally applied to the analysis of Bollywood cinema as well as sociological and anthropological arguments about the creation of “cultures of imagination” in a globalized world, I will argue that Bollywood has moved from an anti-colonial interpretation of morality and sexuality to a post-colonial acceptance of the diaspora as a new cultural sphere, which thereby allows women in Bollywood to move marginally away from representing explicitly patriarchal values.¹ The readings of these films are not specifically feminist but simply attempt to approach criticism of the films' representations from an unattached standpoint, so as to avoid the pitfalls of putting too much emphasis on a single-perspective ideology. I will investigate these portrayals in a chronological order, attempting to understand whether Bollywood cinema has developed enough in the past fourteen years to allow for a diasporic woman to exist as a cosmopolitan figure similar to her male NRI counterpart.

Before delving into a filmic analysis, however, it is imperative to understand the context through which these films should be understood. Popular cinema is an element of mass media that is particularly insidious in creating culture between the homeland and the diaspora; these “texts-in-motion” are some of the most volatile

¹ Based on Arjun Appadurai's thesis of cultural globalization as outlined in *Modernity at Large*, 1996, and off various responses to this thesis.

sites in a battle waged between the traditionalism of the homeland and the modernity of the West.² Too many issues are involved in this fight to fully understand Bollywood's representations of the diaspora, but gender can be seen as emblematic of the problem at large. The woman in Bollywood cinema is a projected space onto which the anxieties of the masculine NRI, lost in modernity, aims to rediscover tradition.

The first major Bollywood film involving an NRI figure was *Purab Aur Paschim* (1970), which portrayed the NRI as morally depraved and in need of a "Mother India" to reinstate him with his Hindustani values.³ This was the pattern of depiction that most older films involving NRI characters followed: the NRI was either the Indian who had traveled West and grown rich, but sought the values and love of the homeland, or the NRI who had disowned the homeland and become depraved by Western society.⁴ Distinct changes in the functioning of the global economy have changed the East/West dichotomy since the production of these films, however. Beginning in the early 1990s, India saw the beginnings of the effects of economic globalization, the results of liberalization that began in the 1970s.⁵ The NRI figure, who re-emerged in Indian cultural narratives in the 1990s, therefore became much more complex.

This new NRI is an identity undergoing a constant process of re-negotiation, and much of this renegotiation occurs within the filmic space.⁶ Physical place and space are important in constructing identity, but in the absence of a state to propagate an identity across a physical space, the cultural element of the state, the "nation" must de-couple from the state; the political alone can no longer unite a scattered nation.⁷ Instead, "cultural spheres" of ethnicity become the foundation for identity and the texts through which we can examine ethnography.⁸ In true Deleuzian fashion, the reality of identity becomes changeable, and the site for this constant mutation is the media of diaspora.⁹ The identities created within Bollywood are merely constructions of diaspora, however, and the Spivakian

² Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 9.

³ Brosius, Christian and Yazgi, Nicolas. "Is there no place like home?: Contesting cinematographic constructions of Indian diasporic experiences." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 41 (2007): 353.

⁴ Desai, Jigna. "Bollywood Abroad: South Asian Diasporic Cosmopolitanism and Indian Cinema." In *New Cosmopolitanisms*, edited by Gita Rajan and Shailja Sharma (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 24.

⁵ Oza, Rupal. "Showcasing India: Gender, Geography, and Globalization." *Signs* 26 (2006): 1071.

⁶ Mishra, Vijay. *Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire*. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 238.

⁷ Bhattacharjee, Anannya. "The habit of ex-nomination: Nation, Woman, and the Indian Immigrant Bourgeoisie." *Public Culture* 5 (1992): 34-35.

⁸ Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 54.

⁹ Karim, Karim Haiderali. *The Media of Diaspora*. (London: Routledge, 2003), 9.

subaltern, in this case the female NRI, has no space to speak within Bollywood's frameworks of anti-colonialism.¹⁰

This is similarly the case within the actuality of the diaspora: such cultural spaces encounter enormous troubles in attempting to maintain ideals of tradition and the feminine. Scholar of modernity Arjun Appadurai notes this:

Because both work and leisure have lost none of their gendered qualities in this new global order but have acquired ever subtler fetishized representations, the honor of women becomes increasingly a surrogate for the embattled communities of males, while their women in reality have to negotiate increasingly harsh conditions of work ... deterritorialized communities ... may enjoy the fruits of ... capital and technology, [but] have to play out the desires and fantasies of these new ethnoscapings, while striving to reproduce the family as microcosm of culture.¹¹

This argument notes a constant tension between ideals of femininity and the reality of a constantly modernizing woman; such a discursive tension epitomizes the conflict between Bollywood's representations of female figures and the actuality of modern South Asian women.

However, before invoking Appadurai in his entirety, I must respond to his overarching argument that diasporas are cultural spaces in which transnationalism can arise. This argument may be too simplistic to account for the interactions between Bollywood and the diaspora. Jigna Desai's interpretation of cultural globalization is more focused on the politics of the Indian nation and therefore a preferable framework for understanding Bollywood.¹² He argues that critiques and studies of post-colonial nations are characterized by a tension between creating identity through anti-colonial or post-colonial lenses; Desai defends a post-colonial critique as preferable because it allows for a deconstruction of colonial Eurocentric logic, and abandons the "binary logic...of elite nationalisms."¹³ Such a simplistic logic is visible in Bollywood's early construction of the diaspora, and this anti-colonialism prevents the Indian diaspora from truly engaging or creating new cultural spaces. In particular, anti-colonial conceptions of gender prevent women from becoming effective citizens of such new cultural spaces.

The anti-colonial Indian identity that Bollywood exports

¹⁰ Spivak, Gayatri. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. (Champaign: University of Illinois, 1988), 275.

¹¹ Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 45.

¹² Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*; Desai, *Beyond Bollywood*.

¹³ Desai, Jigna. *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film*. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 10.

ensures certain patriarchal or traditional gender constructs are perpetuated.¹⁴ South Asian diasporic identity is constructed based not on tangible elements of shared histories but rather on essentialist conceptions of “some shared South Asianness...based on an Orientalist and anti-colonial nationalist formulation of Indian or South Asian difference.”¹⁵ This essentialism manifests itself in an over-fetishization by Bollywood of certain things deemed “Indian” or characteristic of “Indian-ness”—these include notions of tradition, of the value of the physicality of the nation-state (which, for the case of South Asian identity, must remain hyphenated until true transnational cultural spaces can be formed), and familial loyalty. Each of these elements of supposed “Indian culture” projects itself onto gender in a distinct way, and in the context of Bollywood film, shackles South Asian diasporic females to such notions. This paper aims to determine whether cinematic representations of the female NRI figure have allowed Bollywood to evolve into a transnational cultural space, by reaching a post-national, post-colonial discourse, or rather if they simply re-inscribe notions of an essentialist and simultaneously patriarchal Indian society.

A BRIEF DISCUSSION: CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE FEMININE IN HINDI CINEMA

Before attempting to deconstruct representations of the female NRI in the diaspora it is necessary to outline basic characteristics of Bollywood’s historical representation of women. Shoma Chatterji identifies four characteristics of what she considers to be the central characteristics of the traditional cinematic woman.¹⁶ First and most importantly comes the value of female chastity; secondly, if the woman suffers, it must serve a metaphorical purpose to create a resultant new reality; third, her sons must fight for her, and in the absence of sons, characters who play surrogate sons must fight for her; lastly, a fight for justice usually translates to a defense of her honor and chastity.¹⁷ Mythological conceptions of the woman also inform Bollywood’s representation of “ideal woman” figures; these conceptions extend to interpretations of not only benign figures like Sita, Ram’s obedient and docile wife, but also the

¹⁴ This paper is not large enough in scope to delve into differences between post-colonialist and anti-colonialist discourses. I will rely on Desai’s assertions that post-colonialism is a social condition and intellectual movement seeking to critique anti-colonialist notions of nationalism; while anti-colonialism re-engages the specter of the colonial, post-colonialism seeks to create a fully new identity. Desai, *Beyond Bollywood*, 10.

¹⁵ Desai, *Beyond Bollywood*, 19.

¹⁶ Roots can be traced to goddesses or goddess-like women: ex. Sita in the Ramayana.

¹⁷ Chatterji, Shoma. Subject: *Cinema, Object: Woman—A Study of the Portrayal of Women in Indian Cinema*. (Calcutta: Parumita, 1998), 29-30.

powerful (Kali; Shakti). These two extremes in Hindu notions of femininity create an uncomfortable dichotomy for women: since women are either passive or excessively powerful, meaning they have to either be worshiped or tamed.¹⁸

Stuart Hall's ideas about conceptions of cultural identity through film are important to this understanding of the feminine as well: he argues that identity is the product of multiple representations, each of which are formed by unique contexts, and that these cultural identities can be thought of in two distinct ways: first, that there is "one true self" residing as a common spirit among all members of the same ethnicity, and second, that cultural identity is not a question of "are" but rather of "becoming."¹⁹ The latter mode of understanding cultural identity negates essentialist theories of identity, and is the conception Appadurai demands from participants in a transnational cultural space; however, Bollywood's inherent essentialism, particularly in the context of not only South Asian identity but especially South Asian *female* identity, has traditionally placed it in the first camp.

Such an essentialist interpretation of South Asian femininity imagines the ideal woman adorned in a sari, her forehead dotted with a red bindi and hair pulled back in a plait—beautiful but sexually constrained.²⁰ This repressed sexuality is the crux on which constructions of women in Indian cinema operate. Violation of the woman's chastity is a violation of her honor—which implicates the male in control of her, her husband or father, rather than the woman herself.²¹

Such repressions of sexuality mirror real-life suppressions of aspects of many women's experiences in the diaspora. It is important to compare the reality of these women's lives to their filmic counterparts; because the subaltern is given no place to speak in Bollywood cinema, the true voice of the diasporic woman must, and has come, from external sources.²² Some scholars have noted that providing a voice to women in cinema can rupture the dominant narrative of patriarchy.²³ But it must be understood that the voice Bollywood gives to the diasporic woman does *not* do this; this voice is instead a construction of so-called "essential" Indian identity.

¹⁸ Rayaprol, Aparna. *Negotiating Identities: Women in the Indian Diaspora*. (Delhi: Oxford University, 1997), 123-125.

¹⁹ Harindranath, Ramaswami. *Perspectives on Global Cultures*. (New York: Open University Press, 2006), 44-45.

²⁰ Chatterji, *Subject: Cinema, Object: Woman*, 65.

²¹ Chatterji, *Subject: Cinema, Object: Woman*, 136.

²² This paper does not attempt to provide an exhaustive understanding of these other sources, but film examples include Deepa Mehta's *Fire*, Mira Nair's *Mississippi Masala* and Gurinder Chadha's *Bend It Like Beckham* and *Bhaji on the Beach*.

²³ Datta, Sangeeta. "Globalisation and Representations of Women in Indian Cinema." *Social Scientist* 28 (2000): 71-82.

The true female NRI creates her own ideas of womanhood through “private spaces” and ultimately abandons the nation-state’s definition of Indian femininity.²⁴ Prema Kurien notes in the results of a sociology study of migrated Indian graduate students that the modern diasporic woman (if she has chosen to migrate on her own, without a male counterpart) in reality is often quite transgressive and hails from a more progressive family.²⁵ However, Bollywood’s traditional representation of women relies on depictions of diasporic women in marriages, as opposed to such independent NRI women. Marriage in Indian culture is traditionally disempowering for the women, particularly in the case of arranged marriages.²⁶ For most Indian women it means leaving home to serve a new family—but with the advent of migration it goes even further to imply migrating across continents for a new husband in hope of a new life.²⁷ Brides “imported” from India are brought abroad in hopes that they can serve as vessels for the transportation of Indian values.

Therefore in reality we see two diasporic women: one who travels independently and is therefore fiercely non-conformist, and the other who travels to follow and is subordinate to her husband. Bollywood traditionally prefers to represent the latter as the desirable diasporic woman, but in more recent films has allowed the first type to play the protagonist, perhaps indicating a slow acceptance of female autonomy in the diaspora.

ESSENTIALISM IN THE 1990S: THE (RE)-BIRTH OF THE DIASPORIC FILM IN *DDLJ* AND *PARDES*

Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (1995) is perhaps the foundational text for modern diasporic films. The film is a clear departure from original monolithic classifications of the NRI as either longing for the homeland or morally depraved: Shah Rukh Khan as Raj represents an NRI figure who has, to a degree, negotiated the straddle of being both Indian and English. Raj has adopted some “immoral” Western traits—which we first see when he tricks Amrish Puri’s character Baldev, the main character’s father and a migrant from India to London, into selling him beer; he flirts with Simran (Kajol), Baldev’s daughter, and flaunts his sexual exploits to his friends. But Raj

²⁴ Bhattacharjee, “The Habit of Ex-Nomination,” 38-40; Lessinger, Johanna. “Indian Immigrants in the United States: the emergence of a transnational population.” In *Culture and Economy in the Indian Diaspora*, edited by Bhikhu Parekh. (London: Routledge, 2003).

²⁵ Prema Kurien’s argument is based off of a small sociological study with a sample size of only 30 people, many of whom are graduate students, so this should not be taken as a sweeping generalization. Kurien, Prema. “Gendered ethnicity: creating a Hindu Indian identity in the United States.” *The American Behavioral Scientist*. 42 (1999): 648-673.

²⁶ Palriwala, Rajni and Patricia Uberoi. “Marriage and Migration in Asia: Gender Issues.” *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 12 (2005): vi-ix.

²⁷ Palriwala and Uberoi, “Marriage and Migration in Asia,” ix.

reasserts his Indian-ness to the audience in a scene when a drunk Simran falls asleep in his bed and awakens wearing his clothes. Terrified, she asks what happened the night before. Raj reminds her that he is *Hindustani* and understands the value of an Indian girl's honor.

Raj assures Simran, and more importantly an audience concerned about the translation of values across oceans, that he remains morally "Indian," and in doing so, immediately changes the story from an innocent love story to a love story infused with the traditional values of the homeland. In doing so, Raj inscribes what Patricia Uberoi calls the "tyranny of tradition" into the story.²⁸ Though he was fully in control of Simran's body the night before, he benevolently spared her—solely because he understands what an *Indian* girl's *honor* means. These are the two central elements of womanhood as defined by Bollywood—the nation and feminine sexuality—and Raj, in recognizing their inviolability, reinforces Bollywood's essentialist interpretation of the woman. He protects Simran, yes, but by protecting Simran's sexual purity, he robs her of the ability to protect herself.²⁹

Two scenes in the film between Simran and her mother further illustrate the re-inscription of patriarchy in the film. The first occurs once Simran is engaged to an Indian man whom she has never met. The match is arranged by her father and she blithely accepts the practice, even defending it to a baffled Raj. In order to take her trip to Europe (where she and Raj meet) with friends after graduation, she prepares her home with elements of the homeland, dresses in Indian garb, and asks her father for permission to take this month-long trip so she can have one month of "her own life" between being a daughter and becoming a wife to this unknown man. But in Europe, Simran meets Raj and falls in love—and despite this, Simran returns home to continue with the preparations for the wedding, though she cannot rid herself of the memory of her love. Raj, who loves her as well, accompanies her to India where she is to be married, but refuses to elope with her. Simran's mother tells her to give up on the hope of being with Raj:

When I was a little girl, my grandfather used to tell me that there is no difference between a man and a woman. Both have the same rights. But once I grew up, I understood that it was not the case. My education was stopped....I sacrificed my life; first as a daughter and then as a daughter-in-law. But when you

²⁸ Uberoi, Patricia. "The diaspora comes home: Disciplining desire in DDLJ." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 32 (1998): 322.

²⁹ Mankekar, Purnima. "Brides who travel: gender, transnationalism, and nationalism in Hindi film" *Positions* 7 (1999): 739.

were born I took a vow that you would never have to make the same sacrifices as I did. I wanted you to live your own life....Women are born to make sacrifices for men, but not the other way round. I beg you, give up your happiness and forget him [the boy]. Your father will never allow it.

This is one of the only places in the film when we are permitted to hear the voice of a woman; but though she speaks up against tradition, she silences herself and begs Simran to re-submit herself to the order of patriarchy. Some scholars argue that this scene suggests a transgression of traditional lines of morality in Bollywood, but its transgression is barely noticeable.³⁰ The woman barely has time to speak against patriarchy before she immediately re-submits not only herself but also her daughter to its authority.

In a second scene, Simran's mother changes her mind and grants permission for Raj to take her daughter away, hoping to give her daughter the kind of freedom she never had. Raj is humbled by her gesture but pointedly ignores it, holding out for Simran's father, Baldev, to provide his blessing. Again, *DDLJ* reinforces the patriarchal authority of the Indian diasporic family. Though women in *DDLJ* are allowed a voice with which to criticize patriarchal power structures, they are robbed of their agency—in giving up their dreams they acquiesce to a system within which they have no other options.³¹

Raj, on the other hand, can be seen simply as self-sacrificing, and not as the victim of tradition, because as a male he holds the rein to that system of traditions. In making his choice to respect tradition he is a hero-figure, the NRI who has not only found prosperity in the diaspora but has maintained the essence of India within him abroad. Simran, in contrast, is continually defined as a character only in relation to the men to whom she "belongs"—in London, despite having grown up abroad, she and her sister speak perfect, unaccented Hindi, and are thoroughly Indian down to their very body language.³² She knows well enough to turn off the British pop music and replace it with Indian songs when her father enters the home, and even remains faithful to her arranged engagement when defending it to Raj. And yet—Simran is the one who desires to elope with Raj, indicating that a woman's sexual impulses, when let free, have the ability to run wild if not checked by a male counterpart; this demonstrates a severe lack of autonomy for her character as she is pulled between father and husband-to-be with little to no space for her own life.

³⁰ Uberoi, "The diaspora comes home," 324.

³¹ Uberoi, "The diaspora comes home," 325.

³² Mishra, *Bollywood Cinema*, 251.

The NRI, central in negotiating the unidentified cultural space spanning the diaspora and India, is defined in terms of two distinct gender roles: the male NRI is wealthy, an archetypal knight-in-shining-armor, and most importantly, he protects female sexuality from the moral gropings of the Western world—his female counterpart is simply chaste and often lacking personality.³³ Though Simran's sexuality is not eliminated—instead, it is veritably flaunted in scenes where she dons a short skirt and dances sexually in the rain—it is acceptable only because it exists beneath the authority of men.

Most critics have treated *DDLJ* as a film somewhat radical for its time, arguing that it treated the diaspora not as a place of total moral depravation where the Indian spirit goes to die, but as a potentially new cultural space in which Indian values can be transported and negotiated by a willing NRI.³⁴ However, this negotiation is only possible for the male NRI—not only does *DDLJ* disallow a space for the female NRI to negotiate this new cultural space, but in fact indicates that the *only* reason the male NRI can exist as this cosmopolitan figure is because of the suppression of the woman and the overt “protection” of her sexual purity.³⁵ Robina Mohammad argues this with dexterity:

Bollywood reinforces the notion that Indian men's cultural authenticity remains predicated on their ability to control their women....Baldev's control is central to his mission to keep Hindustan alive in London, which has depended on and is manifested in his ability to control his daughters. At the core of Raj's Indian values lies the notion that Indian women remain the property of men, demonstrated by his insistence that irrespective of Simran's own desires he will accept her only if and when her father places her hand in his.³⁶

On a metaphorical level, this need for female chastity in the diaspora speaks to the metaphor of woman as a site for the valorization of the Indian nation—a concept that dates back cinematically to the iconic *Mother India* (1957). Threats to the Indian woman are threats to the nation itself; Indian womanhood represents

³³ Mankekar, “Brides who travel,” 750-51; 754.

³⁴ Mankekar, “Brides who travel,” 742; Mohammad, 1033; Rajan and Sharma, “New Cosmopolitanisms,” 129; Uberoi, “The diaspora comes home,” 326.

³⁵ Mankekar, “Brides who travel,” 749; Sharpe, Jenny. “Gender, Nation and Globalization in Monsoon Wedding and Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge.” *Meridians* 6 (2006): 66; Uberoi, “The diaspora comes home,” 322, 332.

³⁶ Mohammad, Robina. “Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani (Yet the heart remains Indian): Bollywood, the ‘homeland’ nation-state, and the diaspora.” *Environment and Planning D* 25 (2007): 1035.

the “nation, religion, God, the Spirit of India, culture, tradition, family.”³⁷ The essence of India must remain alive away from the homeland, and the male NRI is the soldier protecting it. This interpretation of Indian femininity can be seen clearest in *Pardes* (1997), a film made two years after *DDLJ* and starring two of the same actors: Amrish Puri as the father and Shah Rukh Khan as the good male NRI figure.

Pardes, meaning “Foreign Land,” lacks whatever subtlety *DDLJ* managed to include in its narrative. The film hearkens back to the 70s era portrayal of the diaspora in some ways, wherein its central conflict is between the nation and the West.³⁸ The cultural space negotiated by *DDLJ* for the male NRI to easily exist economically and physically in the West but morally in the East is strained and threatened. The storyline revolves around Kishorilal (Amrish Puri), an immigrant Indian who has made a fortune in the States but whose heart yearns for India. His yearning is painfully obvious and drilled into the viewer’s mind in an early set of conversations where he lauds the beauty of India, down to her very soil, and in the song sequence “I Love My India,” in which he declaims, “I saw London, I saw Paris, I saw Japan...there isn’t another India in the whole world.”

As in *DDLJ*, the site for negotiating the interaction between East and West is through male-female relationships. Kishorilal asks for the hand of his Indian friend’s daughter, Ganga, on behalf of his NRI son, Rajiv. “We NRIs need girls like her very badly,” he says, “we’ve pushed our kids so deeply in English books and manners that somewhere or the other even after seeing so much success we feel as if we’re failures.” This comment swiftly negates the economic value of traveling out of India to find one’s fortune and instead berates the NRI for abandoning the moral center of the nation. Kishorilal is hardly an NRI—simply a businessman away from his country—so the true male NRI narrative occurs through Rajiv and his foster brother Arjun (Shah Rukh Khan).

Pardes represents a clearly patriarchal logic—Ganga is given away in arranged marriage to a man she does not love, who sexually assaults her before they are married, and is “saved” by the man who genuinely loves her, Arjun. Like in *DDLJ*, the possibility that Ganga and Arjun had an affair behind Kishorilal’s back implicates Kishorilal more than Ganga herself.³⁹ Ganga’s character is undeniably an allegorical one, representative of the purity and holiness of the nation—represented by her name, which she shares with the holy and pure Indian river Ganges. When Rajiv takes Ganga to a Vegas hotel room and attempts to have sex with her before marriage, this

³⁷ Bhattacharjee, “The Habit of Ex-Nomination,” 31.

³⁸ Uberoi, “The diaspora comes home,” 326.

³⁹ Uberoi, “The diaspora comes home,” 320.

potential violation of her purity threatens the purity of the nation. As in *Mother India*, in order for the woman to be the nation, she must be explicitly de-sexualized; the woman can only be represented as a metaphorical and allegorical figure, as the nation in *Pardes* or as representative of the ideals of Indian femininity in *DDLJ*.⁴⁰ Ganga is even described as India herself in the film: “you wished to nestle an Indian girl; India itself—in America?”

According to Mankekar, the narratives of “essentialist conceptions of nation and Indian culture converge with discourses of gender and female sexuality.”⁴¹ The implication for such allegorical representations of the diasporic woman as a holding space for the nation abroad is that diasporic Bollywood is still haunted by both essentialist notions of Indian “culture.”⁴² Bollywood, then, remains trapped within a discourse of anti-colonial nationalism, even its diasporic representations, and this anti-colonialism is inherently limited by the specter of the colonial.⁴³

But within a diegetic space so wedded to nationalism, is there space for transnationalism? More fundamentally, is there space for the creation of new imagined cultural spaces, for the political entity of the state to de-hyphenate from the cultural entity of the nation?⁴⁴ In the case of India, some scholars have found that internationalism manifests itself not in intermingling or integration of cultural spaces but rather in a re-entrenchment of nationalism through seeking distinct recognition of the state on an international scale.⁴⁵ If this re-entrenchment of nationalism is truly occurring, it gives rise to another question: is there space for a female figure to escape the bounds of nationalist allegory and to become a cosmopolitan figure herself?

The male NRI figure is genuinely Indian—Raj in *DDLJ* is the epitome of the mantra “phir bi dil hai Hindustani,”⁴⁶ and Arjun in *Pardes* is essentially Indian in values (preserving Ganga’s chastity until he can truly call her “his”) and actions (composing the “I Love My India” song). But, significantly, these characters are also *wealthy*. They have joined the West in one of the most noteworthy ways: through the elimination of Hindu hierarchy (the caste system) and its

⁴⁰ Chatterji, *Subject: Cinema, Object: Woman*, 36-37; Oza, “Showcasing India,” 1081.

⁴¹ Mankekar, “Brides who travel,” 739.

⁴² Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 12-15. I use the noun “culture” in quotes here in reference to Arjun Appadurai’s notion of “cultural” in the adjectival form as preferable (Appadurai 1996). He argues that the noun “culture” implies an essentialist substance of culture whereas “cultural” denotes a more changeable element, more appropriate to the new imagined spaces created by globalization.

⁴³ Desai, *Beyond Bollywood*, 11.

⁴⁴ Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 39. These questions are emblematic of Appadurai’s central struggle between primordial identity and modernity, outlined in Appadurai, 139-40.

⁴⁵ Oza, “Showcasing India,” 1076.

⁴⁶ “His heart is still Indian.”

replacement with socioeconomic rankings (where they comfortably reside in the upper-middle class). At the end of the 1990s, with *DDLJ* and *Pardes* in perspective, neither Bollywood's male nor female NRI had negotiated the expanded world of cultural globalization—both, in the imagination of Bollywood, remained beholden to anti-colonial representations. The distinction, however, is that the male NRI was evolving to become a transitionally cosmopolitan figure while the female NRI figure maintained her purely allegorical persona, as the nation, as ideal woman, and as the vessel through which India could remain with the male NRI as he embraced the diaspora.

THE NEW MILLENNIUM RUNG IN: *K3G* APPROACHES CULTURAL COSMOPOLITANISM

Four years after *Pardes*, Karan Johar's film *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gam* (2001) brought prominence to the translation of the family drama genre into the diaspora. *K3G*, as it was nicknamed, marks a turning point in diasporic film because its storyline is not entirely dependent on the use of the diaspora—rather, the world outside India seems a natural continuation of the lives of the rich, cosmopolitan Raichand family. This new cosmopolitanism makes way for two new female figures to appear on screen. While the characters of Simran in *DDLJ* and Ganga in *Pardes* both lack autonomy, the two central female characters in *K3G*'s diaspora have distinctive personalities. Importantly, however, this change does not divorce either Anjali (Kajol) or Pooja (Kareena Kapoor) from the realm of patriarchy. Though some argue that *K3G* is a change from *Pardes* and *DDLJ*, its shift is limited, as it ultimately re-entrenches the same values of the 1990s films.⁴⁷

Rahul Raichand (Shah Rukh Khan), the adopted son of Yash Raichand (Amitabh Bachchan), falls in love with Anjali, a girl from the less-than-wealthy Delhi district of Chandni Chowk. Furious that Rahul could transgress his carefully drawn class lines, Yash refuses to give his blessing to the couple. The home, a sacred space in Hindi cinema and in Indian society, is broken, as Rahul and Anjali take their leave. The scene in which the two leave is particularly melodramatic—Yash's wife Nandini (Jaya Bachchan) is left staring longingly after her son while Anjali hysterically begs for Rahul not to leave until Yash gives his blessing.

Rohan (Hrithik Roshan), Rahul's much younger brother, is

⁴⁷ The scholarship I refer to here is that of Aswin Punathambekar, who calls *K3G* "the co-existence of tradition and modernity." Punathambekar, Aswin. "Bollywood in the Indian-American diaspora: Mediating a transitive logic of culture citizenship." *International Journal of Cultural Studies*. 8 (2005): 151-173.

unaware of this family drama until he finishes boarding school. Upon discovering the schism, Rohan convinces his father to let him go to England under the guise of attaining an MBA. Rohan's arrival in England lacks the intensity of the female NRI's arrival in the diaspora as seen in *Parde*; Ganga watches the sights and sounds of New York City unfold around her, noticeably brighter, louder, and busier than the fields of Punjab she has grown up in. She seems overwhelmed, above all—but there is no trace of such emotion in Rohan as he arrives. “Vande Mataram” plays as the camera pans shots of London, first focusing on tourist attractions like the Eye and Big Ben and then on the sheer wealth of the city by showing shots of designer stores. In the middle of London, Bharatanatyam dancers appear behind Rohan as he smiles jauntily, and he dances in front of white women wearing the green and orange hues of the Indian flag. The message here is not entirely subtle: Rohan is the “super-Indian” who is genuinely Indian but can easily find his way through the diaspora.⁴⁸

The two diasporic female NRIs are introduced when Rohan finds his way to Rahul's house by revealing himself to Anjali's younger sister, Pooja. Rahul's English home is enormous, sleek, and clearly lacking the true essence of a home: the elders. In the absence of parental blessings, Rahul and Anjali have placed on their wall an enormous photo of Yash and Nandini, who smile benevolently on the younger generation's unfulfilled life abroad.

The home space, however, is carefully tended to by our first female NRI figure: Anjali, or the faithful wife, whose only purpose is to *be* India in England. Anjali only wears saris and even shoots nasty words at their white English neighbor in Hindi right in front of her face; she bemoans the “English” nature of the son she and Rahul have raised in England. In one particular scene, Krishna, their son, is due to sing a British song at a concert put on by his school but instead bursts into the Indian national anthem. As Anjali weeps with joy at seeing her son in his Indian skin, the British parents rise and put their hands on their hearts in recognition of the Indian nation. The scene contains all the absurdities common to family melodramas in Bollywood but is further complicated by the convergence of nation and woman. Though Anjali is colorful and spunky in ways that neither Simran nor Ganga are allowed to be, she remains simply a vessel for the nation in the diaspora.

Ashish Rajadhyaksha's arguments about the exportation of “Indian nationalism, now commodified and globalized into a ‘feel good’ version of ‘our culture’” and Aswin Punathambekar's revisions of the argument to account for a “transitive logic” of “complex interactions between a) the diaspora, b) Bollywood, and c) India” are

⁴⁸ Punathambekar, “Bollywood in the Indian-American diaspora,” 162.

both valid theories in an analysis of *K3G*.⁴⁹ To some degree, Kajol is representative of Indian nationalism as Rajadhyaksha says, but Punathambekar's arguments account for the increasingly transnational and multicultural nature of cultural spaces, which contribute to "diasporic public spheres" as new cultural spaces in themselves.⁵⁰ *K3G* is not simply an example of transporting "Indian culture" to the diaspora; the interaction is subtler—the film uses Indian national sentiment not for explicitly political reasons, but rather for moral and familial reasons.⁵¹ Anjali is concerned with providing her son with Indian "values" and translating the cultural *spaces* of the nation to the diaspora, not translating "culture" itself.⁵² This distinction is not liberating to the female NRI, however; *K3G*'s use of Anjali as a vessel for Indian cultural elements still hampers her to anti-colonial interpretations of the feminine and the nation.

Though Anjali's sexuality is not explicitly implicated in the same way Simran's and Ganga's are, her sister Pooja's entire character is dependent on sexuality. The first time we are introduced to an adult Pooja we see her dancing in skintight, revealing clothes to the song "It's Rainin' Men." She is perpetually the butt of jokes and of Rahul's disdain on account of her risqué clothing, and we see that she leads boys on and manipulates her sexuality. This is a new diasporic female protagonist—but her sexuality is soon disciplined. The cosmopolitan male easily imposes tradition, pushes out the modern and saves Pooja's sexuality. When Pooja falls for Rohan, he immediately begins pulling her towards his cultural space, having her sing "Om Jai Jagdish" in morning prayer with him and encouraging her to dress in a more modest salwar-kameez; she additionally fasts for him on the Karva Chauth festival. Pooja, like Simran, is simply tugged between cultural spaces, unable to command them both the way the male NRI can. While certainly Pooja enjoys more autonomy and is not treated as a singular possession the way Simran and Ganga are, she is still not afforded the humanity to exist in multiple cultural spaces.

K3G is the logical continuation of *DDLJ*'s suggestion that Indian values can find a home in the diaspora; while *DDLJ* implies this through Raj's character (and *Pardes* negates it), *K3G* outlines what exactly must be done for this translation to comfortably occur. This is the major shift between *DDLJ* and *Pardes* in *K3G*: we begin to see some acceptance by Bollywood that globalization is not merely economic. *K3G* includes at least an acknowledgement by

⁴⁹ Punathambekar, "Bollywood in the Indian-American diaspora," 164.

⁵⁰ Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 147.

⁵¹ Brosius and Yazgi, "Is there no place like home?" 373.

⁵² Again, I refer to Appadurai's distinction of "culture" as essentialist and "cultural" as moveable. While *Pardes* and *DDLJ* treat India within essentialist framings; Indian "culture" is a certain way but in *K3G*, a new space becomes available for trans-cultural flows to create their own diasporic public sphere.

Bollywood of the female NRI's *desire* to be cosmopolitan—she is given some agency, and indeed, some personality in the characters of Anjali and Pooja; ultimately, in reiterating the traditional values of familial relations, Johar simply reinforces patriarchy in a manner that is perhaps more insidious than previously. *K3G* allows the female NRI to not only go to the diaspora but also to test her lifestyle limits within it—and then reinstates her into her “rightful” place in the family, grounding this in tradition.

K3G lies somewhere between an anti-colonial and a post-colonial text: though it still recognizes elements of inherent “Indianness” and translates them to the diaspora, two major changes occur here. First, though this “culture” is essentialist and projects itself onto female sexuality, the act of projecting it into a diasporic space inherently makes the film more transnational. *DDLJ* fixes the East and West with specific characteristics and, though it suggests the possibility of a conciliatory existence of the two through Raj, indicates that Simran has to lose herself in order for such a reconciliation to occur. *K3G*, on the other hand, allows Pooja to adopt some elements of Western society—though her sexuality is ultimately re-subjugated to the same notion of “culture” as Simran, the fact she is afforded some integration of East and West at all is a change from the essentialism of *DDLJ* and *Pardes*. Whereas *DDLJ* and *Pardes* demanded that broken families return to India to become truly whole once more, *K3G* brings the homeland to the diaspora, allowing the Raichands to unite in England.⁵³ *K3G* does not yet reach post-colonialism—such a narrative is only recognizable through its liberation of femininity, since female sexuality is the object onto which anti-colonial discourse is projected.

TRANSNATIONAL SPACES IN PERSPECTIVE IN *SALAAM NAMASTE*, *LOVE AAI KAL*

In the past decade, the number of Bollywood films set in the diaspora is increasing. The setting of these films is not coincidental; though more recent diasporic films do not often make use of the diaspora to explicitly contrast East and West, such contrasts subtly persist and are still indispensable parts of any diasporic film. In addition, the diaspora has become the site for untouchable issues in India to find a narrative voice—extra-marital affairs, pre-marital sex, casual dating, drinking, and homosexuality. Though in recent Bollywood films even set in India (such as *Fashion* (2008) and *Wake Up Sid!* (2009)), independent female characters are becoming more

⁵³ Punathambekar elaborates this concept as a movement of homelands as well: *DDLJ* and *Pardes* are the diaspora seeking the homeland, while *K3G* is the homeland seeking the diaspora. Punathambekar, “Bollywood in the Indian-American diaspora,” 162.

prevalent, these female characters are more significant when placed in the diaspora, because it means making a concession that the very vessel of the nation abroad has come to espouse different values than those “essential” Indian ones.

In order to interpret these films through the same lens as those discussed earlier, it is important to note the representation of three central elements: the presence of the substantive “culture” of the nation in influencing characters’ actions and the values of the film, the presence and importance of “cultural” elements of the nation, and the portrayal of female sexuality as the subject onto which both “culture” and “cultural” characteristics are explicated.

In many modern films, especially *Salaam Namaste* (2005) and *Love Aaj Kal* (2009), sexuality manifests itself in the development of a more equal male-female relationship as opposed to within the hierarchy of a patriarchal system.⁵⁴ In these two films, which follow a popular Western genre of romantic comedies, the female NRI figure at last achieves autonomy from the nation as an oppressive force; these films are post-colonial by nature because they ignore the existence of a colonial past—even of the motherland in some instances—and therefore the woman is no longer the subject of essentialist interpretations of the nation or cultural elements. This is not to say that these films are female-empowering, nor do they reject patriarchal norms altogether: that would be inaccurate and a sweeping argument to make—however, they do help sculpt Appadurai’s new cultural space, in which the diaspora can exist for its own sake, with this cinema as a site for negotiation of the diaspora’s own problems.

Salaam Namaste and *Love Aaj Kal* share elements of multiculturalism and recognize transnationalism. In place of an ideology of overt Indian nationalism we see a multicultural logic beginning to take hold, through an endorsement of an entirely separate diasporic cultural space. However, this cultural space is not fully transnational in that it exists as an “Indian bubble” within the diaspora. In *Salaam Namaste*, Ambar (Preity Zinta) works her way through medical school by DJ-ing on a radio program called “Salaam Namaste,” where she speaks only in Hindi to a presumably Indian audience in Australia. She speaks to her romantic counterpart Nikhil Arora (Saif Ali Khan)—who goes by “Nick” in an attempt to westernize himself—in Hindi, even yelling at him about how he should identify more with his Indian culture. Despite the fact that the film operates almost entirely in Hindi, ignoring the English that would presumably be spoken all around this Hindi bubble, Nick and

⁵⁴ These two films were chosen because of their particular awareness of their diasporic nature – five other films from between 2003 and 2009 were studied in writing this paper and all of them displayed subtler versions of the same trends observed in these two films.

Ambar are allowed to move in and out of the bubble, almost picking and choosing what aspects of the West and of the East they would like in their lives. They have white friends (who they often still speak Hindi around, inexplicably) – but most importantly, they are explicitly progressive characters.

Despite remaining culturally Indian, Nick and Ambar make moral choices that are distinctly Western, but the film does not operate as a source of discipline, and the consequences are substantially less dire than they would be in the homeland. Ambar is alone in Australia, having left her family (and been subsequently disowned by them) for refusing to marry. Without the institution of the family ready to contain the female sexually and morally, Ambar is able to act more freely. She and Nick move in together and have premarital sex, a rarity even for modern Bollywood, but when Ambar becomes pregnant, Nick breaks up with her. But because they are still living together, they continue encountering one another and eventually come together just in time for the baby. The institution of family concludes the film, but not through the logic of the nation-state: because *Salaam Namaste* is allowed to exist in a multicultural space, and more importantly, because Ambar is a character, and not an allegory, because she breaks with traditional institutions that contain female sexuality within the bounds of national morality, she is a freer character than her historical counterparts.

In *Salaam Namaste*, elements of the homeland are still transported to the diaspora, and these are reminiscent of aforementioned private spaces, the spheres used by diasporic Indians to form their own communities abroad.⁵⁵ These spaces are not transnational; they are distinctly reminiscent of the nation, however, they have achieved the de-coupling of the nation-state. Through these constructions, Bollywood recognizes both a logic of post-colonialism and elements of cultural globalization because, though the new diasporic spheres of Indians are not fully integrated with the rest of society, they are cultural spaces that exist in fluidity, truly as “cultural” rather than “culture,” and simply as a recognition of love for the homeland rather than the imposition of morality by the homeland.

In *Love Aaj Kal* (significantly translating to “Love These Days”), Jai (Saif Ali Khan) and Meera (Deepika Padukone) live a modern life together in London; their relationship is portrayed as casual and they easily break up when they decide the time has simply come for it to end. Like *Salaam Namaste*, the characters are placed in a multicultural setting where the Hindi bubble can continue to exist (Jai and Meera come together by flirting in Hindi in an ostensibly English

⁵⁵ Bhattacharjee, “the Habit of Ex-Nomination,” 38-40; Lessinger, “Indian Immigrants,” 170.

nightclub), but their “Indian-ness” is not essentialized. Instead, it is restricted to cultural elements of their everyday life choices -- namely, speaking in Hindi to each other. Though the two break up, they continue talking to each other and remain, we assume, in love, as they move all around the world. Finally, risking Meera’s engagement to another man and Jai’s relationship with a Swiss girl, they come together – but in order to do so, Meera must break an engagement and violate the rules of the familial and marriage institution. The ease with which she leaves her fiancé represents an enormous change from what Simran and Ganga saw in the 1990s – but, like *Salaam Namaste*, the film must conclude with Indian cultural elements tying it together: they come together only and finally on Indian soil. All the while that Jai and Meera’s story is being told, Khan plays a double-role as a young Punjabi man, Veer Singh, decades earlier, fighting for his love, a girl named Harleen, against her family and a rival fiancé. The contrast is clear: in the past, men and women had to win the right to be together, reaching across long distances and dealing with moral and social codes, but today, Jai and Meera have only their own stubbornness and the troubles of modern communication in a too-big world to blame for their problems.

The film is not judgmental about Jai and Meera’s modern lifestyles. Still, the double storyline reminds the audience that some cultural elements of India should be transported to the diaspora to be integrated into modern life. *Love Aaj Kal* recognizes Meera’s independence to live a free lifestyle, just as Jai does, but still ends the relationship on Indian soil. This is not a logic of nationalism nor does it represent the tyranny of tradition; though Jai and Meera give up their free lifestyle for the sake of being together, they do so based on mutual personal choice. The two travel the world and enjoy their own lives before coming together—the fact that it occurs on Indian soil does not necessarily link the nation with the state but rather implies that the nation in essence—though fragmented—can survive globalization. The traditional story of Veer Singh is a backdrop to the trials and tribulations of modern love, but its terminal purpose is ultimately to compare love across the ages, and to show its essence is the same, not to extract morality from the traditional and impose it onto a transnational modern space.

CONCLUSION

Bollywood’s construction of the diaspora has evolved since its original conceptions of a strict dichotomy between East and West. Originally, anti-colonial notions of nationality projected themselves onto the female figures in these films and prevented the diasporic films from being true texts of transnationalism. However, as Bollywood has evolved in modern times, newer films have treated the

diaspora as an acceptable space—and traditional notions of morality and sexuality attached to anti-colonial nationalism have been abandoned in these spaces. More recent texts have achieved a degree of post-colonial transnationalism. This is not to say that these texts are integrative or accept the intermingling between India and the diaspora itself—only the existence of Indians in the diaspora. The move away from endorsement of particularly patriarchal values does not mean Bollywood is free from the shadow of a male-dominated society, however; the films continue to objectify women's bodies as sex objects, and often only deal with the female subject through the lens of a relationship rather than as an independent subject. This paper does not attempt to deal with the gaze of the audience, only the morality within the diegetic space of the film. Nor can we assume that, because women have enjoyed more sexual freedom in newer Bollywood films, the diasporic woman's voice is now adequately heard or represented here. These constructions are still from the perspective of the "East" and include distinct elements of love for the nation, if not overt nationalism. The subaltern has not yet found her voice in the space of Hindi popular cinema—but the growing transnational nature of these films has created awareness and grudging acceptance within Bollywood that a separate cultural space exists, in which elements of India can be integrated with elements of the West in a conciliatory, rather than combative fashion.

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**THE FREEDOM TO FEMALE EMPOWERMENT:
EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
MICROCREDIT AND EDUCATION IN
BANGLADESH**

ESTHER NAI

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

ABSTRACT:

Since microcredit's introduction into Bangladesh, its successes and its specific focus on women have both been well documented and justified. To a large extent, microcredit has achieved measurable success in freeing many Bangladeshi women from the shackles of economic poverty and destitution. While voices of skepticism have been raised against female empowerment, strong cases have also been advanced for the success of this agenda thus far. There are three main issues addressed in this paper. First, I will explore the relationship between microcredit and education. Second, I will examine the impact of this relationship to female empowerment and posit a stronger emphasis on non-formal education. Finally, I will reflect on possible future trends and challenges for this evolving relationship.

The introduction of microcredit and its subsequent palpable presence in Bangladesh serve as a clear testament to its success in the alleviation of poverty for many. As the base of borrowers expands, most—if not all—microfinance institutions (MFIs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the country have gradually shifted their focus to target female borrowers. As women advance to the forefront of the national rural economy, the invisibility cloak is shed and the exponential increase in the number of loans made out to female borrowers has translated into a plethora of economic opportunities. With access to credit, they are now able to engage proactively in businesses and generate a sustainable level of income for their households. As a result of these changes, this new breadwinner role for women has resulted in a pronounced improvement of their economic status within the family unit and society at large.

This paper seeks to address an argument that the case made for female empowerment attained through microcredit programs should venture beyond practical financial success for the borrowers. On this basis, I posit that the definition of female empowerment “is a process by which women are able to attain the ability and freedom to make strategic choices for themselves.”¹ Assuming that a lack of choice is ‘disempowering’ as argued by Kabeer, this notion of female empowerment is captured in her definition, and refers to it as “the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability.” It is therefore prudent to acknowledge that microcredit “does not guarantee an automatic route to empowerment”² and that an increased focus on education will provide a more holistic strategy to attain this goal.

I focus on non-formal education in particular, as it appears to be the most reliable and relevant form of education that helps boost development initiatives such as microcredit programs. I argue that education is a salient tool that is able to supplement and complement the needs of microcredit programs as they evolve and female empowerment can be made more sustainable and holistic by ensuring that both education and microcredit are engaged in a parallel and simultaneous development trajectory, with a stronger focus on the former in addressing the specific needs of women. In order to sustain the viability and consistency of microcredit programs and its agenda of female empowerment, measures to promote education for women have to be further stepped up.

¹ Simeen Mahmud, “How Empowering is Microcredit?” *Development & Change* 34(4) (2003): 585.

² Umashankar, Deepti, “Women’s Empowerment: Effect of Participation In Self Help Groups,” (PhD diss., Indian Institute of Management Bangalore).

METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of this research paper, I undertook a field research trip to Dhaka for a brief period of ten days. The duration of the trip should be noted, as it poses a certain limitation to my research findings; and the small sample size of interviewees is a second constraint. It should be qualified that as a result of these limitations, the nature of this paper will not include a large amount of original research. The field trip involved three separate visits to villages outside of Dhaka, with three different organizations. In a bid to create a more balanced perspective on the impact of microcredit and education, I decided to balance my visits between established and well-funded microfinance institutions like BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee)⁴ and Grameen Bank, with small-scale NGOs. My primary data includes personal interviews with practitioners of microcredit from MFIs and NGOs in Dhaka and the academic staff from the Independent University and North-South University in Dhaka. I also had the opportunity to interview a number of female microcredit borrowers of the Grameen Bank and the CDIP (Centre for Development Innovation and Practices). This research is largely based on a review of journals and academic articles. On this note, I seek to highlight that the field research findings presented in this paper should be taken into perspective, subjected to the constraints and conditions that this paper was written under.

MICROCREDIT

One of the major reasons for widespread poverty in Bangladesh is the lack of access to credit by the poor. Out of the small income they own, they can hardly put aside any money to generate any form of capital. Due to the gender prejudice that exists in the society, the financial capacity for women is further compromised. Traditional bank loans are denied to them, as financial control is off limits to them. Given their lack of physical collateral and low savings rate, it is extremely difficult for them to find “a sustainable and viable method to invest in any small enterprises and improve their socio-economic conditions.”⁵

This is the crucial junction where microcredit extends a lifeline and creates a turning point for these women in Bangladesh. Microcredit provides them with the necessary financial startup capital and creates new channels for them to save and invest in income-

⁴ BRAC is a non-governmental development organization that was founded in early 1972.

⁵ Momen, MD. Nurul and Begum, Mst. Marzina. “Impact of Micro Credit Program for Women Development in Bangladesh: A Case Study of BRAC,” *Asian Journal of Information Technology* 5(11) (2006): 1269.

generating activities, paving the way for more opportunities in entrepreneurship. At its fundamental level, it is simply termed as the provision of small amounts of capital to groups within a society, who are too poor to qualify as candidates for mainstream bank loans. This form of unconventional credit is ideal for the poor, as it does not require “the borrower to possess any collateral in tangible and physical assets.”⁶ It essentially functions on a group liability basis.

In Bangladesh, women have grown to form at least ninety percent of the borrowers.⁷ The situation looks even more optimistic with the high repayment rates of over ninety percent, and correspondingly low default rates of less than one percent in almost every microfinance institution.⁸ As a result, this great demand for loans and their successful repayment rates have often been taken as “the most convenient indicator of women’s control of loans and their apparent level of empowerment.”⁹ With this reportedly positive level of tangible and visible economic returns, it has been widely assumed that there is a clear and direct relationship between access to credit and an increase in the status of women within their households and communities.

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION¹⁰

Bangladesh has currently put in place many non-formal education (NFE) programs, with strong support from the government for further expansion in combating the literacy problem in the country.¹¹ Such a system is beneficial for a developing nation like Bangladesh as it is versatile and multidimensional in terms of its syllabus and organization, delivering a variety of educational programs to cover basic and pragmatic learning goals. This loosely bundled package of learning objectives offers a spectrum of choices, which ranges from literacy and basic education for adults and young people, programs for school dropouts, political education and rights awareness, to the different educational work related to development initiatives. In terms of financing these projects, both the government in Bangladesh and the active NGOs play a huge part. The long-term

⁶ Rahman, Aminur. “Micro-credit Initiative for Equitable and Sustainable Development: Who Pays?” *World Development* 27(1) (1999): 67.

⁷ Kelkar, Govind, et. al. “Redefining Women’s ‘Samman’: Microcredit and Gender Relations in Rural Bangladesh,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, (August 7, 2004): 3627.

⁸ Islam, Tarikul. Interview by Esther Nai. Dhaka, Bangladesh. 15th July 2010.

⁹ Goetz, Anne Marie and Gupta, Rina Sen. “Who Takes the Credit? Gender, Power, and Control Over Loan Use in Rural Credit Programs in Bangladesh,” *World Development* 24(1) (1996): 45.

¹⁰ Non-formal education will be used interchangeably with education in this paper.

¹¹ Govinda, R. *Non-formal Education & Poverty Alleviation: Exploring Experiences for Asia*, UNESCO, Bangkok, (2003): 24.

goals of such an education facilitate lifelong learning and accentuate capacity-building of the poorer sections of society, including female microcredit borrowers, by catering to their contextual needs in the long run.

SUPPORTERS AND CRITICS OF FEMALE EMPOWERMENT THROUGH MICROCREDIT

Proponents of female empowerment through microcredit contend that women have been empowered economically. Perceived as a good credit risk,¹² they comprise the bulk of credit borrowers in most microfinance institutions in Bangladesh. Women have certainly come a long way from the extensive and blatant neglect they had experienced before microcredit was introduced. The focus of microcredit loans on females has gradually shifted the spotlight onto their gender grouping and created more economic opportunities for them. In the household, women have become a permanent fixture and substantial contributor to family income through their entrepreneurship activities, allowing them to redefine their terms of engagement within society.

Before microcredit programs were introduced in Bangladesh, women had also lacked mobility. Women typically faced specific limitations in terms of cultural and traditional taboos (such as purdah) they were forced to adhere to,¹³ “emerging from patrilineal and patrilocal marriage, kinship and inheritance systems.”¹⁴ This had a direct repercussion on their lack of freedom, access to capital, technological knowledge and necessary resources. However, as women are now relatively more involved in the market economy, this allows them a greater opportunity to move beyond the household and participate as “buyers and sellers in a traditionally male domain, such as the marketplace.”¹⁵

Skeptics of the microcredit success stories have summoned their own set of opinions. Many posit that the engrained patriarchal social structure of rural Bangladesh inherently impedes achievement of true success. In this case, microcredit does not necessarily translate into the form of empowerment we have often witnessed. In some cases that were cited, these microcredit programs did not manage to “reach the poorest of the poor in society.”¹⁶ Second, the female

¹² Goetz and Gupta, “Who Takes the Credit?” 45.

¹³ Sultana, A.M. et al. “Influence of Purdah (Veil) on Education and Employment of Women in Rural Communities,” *European Journal of Social Sciences* 11(2) (2009): 268.

¹⁴ Rao, Nitya. “Review: Researching Empowerment: A Grassroots Women’s Perspective,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 33(6) (Feb 7-13, 1998): 273.

¹⁵ Kelkar et al., “Redefining Women’s ‘Sammam’”, 3635.

¹⁶ Banu, Dilruba, et al. “Empowering Women in Rural Bangladesh: Impact of Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee’s (BRAC’s) Programme.”: 30.

borrowers' lack of control of the loans also seem to suggest that their husbands still retain most of the decision-making power in the family, which to a certain extent, makes it difficult for microcredit to address women's empowerment issues effectively.¹⁷

In addition, there is contention that home-based production units, set up with the help of microcredit and microenterprises, may hinder the socialization of women – “stealing the time allotted for public interaction, political meetings, and even the attempts for switching over to the formal employment in the case of qualified and educated women.”¹⁸ Women generally seem to have to bear a heavier burden, as the scope of responsibilities widens and intensifies. With no respite from the burden and domestic responsibilities, which easily far outweigh that of the males, women are increasingly worn out.

In summing up these criticisms, credit- and income-generating programs need to progress beyond the framework of viewing women as passive recipients of credit. Many have propounded the case that women merely function as a superficial and expedient conduit for the access to loans. In fact, they reportedly do not have control over these loans. I believe that the scope of credit programs has to be increased from self-reliance to helping women achieve broader social development goals such as enabling an increased literacy level. As it stands, the linkage between microcredit and empowerment is “far from automatic and given.”¹⁸

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EDUCATION AND MICROCREDIT

According to Khan et al., “education is a useful and prevalent tool in the achievement of any sustainable developmental goal.”²⁰ It provides a reinforcing infrastructure for the success and sustainability of microcredit initiatives in Bangladesh. Some organizations have increasingly supplemented their microcredit programs with skills-equipping, financial literacy and health education programs. Many proponents of female empowerment have also emphasized this connection between education and microcredit, advocating for expansion of possibilities on this frontier.

¹⁷ MacIsaac, Norman. “The Role of Microcredit in Poverty Reduction & Promoting Gender Equity,” Strategic Policy and Planning Division Asia Branch CIDA (June 12 1997): 13.

¹⁸ Muralledharan, K. “Measuring empowerment: Conceptual Cobwebs & Empirical Evidences from a Comparative Inter-State Perspective,” accessed at www.siyanda.org/.../_measuring_empowerment_conceptual_cobwebs_abd_empirical_evidence_from_and_inter_state_perspective_07101102

¹⁹ Deepti, “Women’s Empowerment,” 5.

²⁰ Khan, S.R., et al. “Women’s Education and Employment: Matlab Experience,” *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, 11(1) (1996): 45.

This paper seeks to probe deeper into the significance of this relationship in Bangladesh. Amartya Sen highlights interesting differences and similarities between the human capital versus human capability approaches²¹ in his book ‘Development As Freedom’ and I seek to incorporate this particular framework into my analysis. His comparisons underline some constructive standpoints in the manner development should be perceived and pursued; I will extrapolate this thread of thinking in relation to microcredit programs and non-formal education.

Education has much to offer in Bangladesh, especially in providing adult literacy skills and specific financial skills in augmenting the productivity of women in terms of their income-generating activities. On the international level, the World Bank’s instrumentalist approach seeks to promote women’s education as an important contribution towards human capital. In addition, the “common consensus within development economics sees women’s education as an investment with a great payoff.”²² With the constant need for women to ensure that repayments are met continuously and on time, female adult literacy programs are commonly managed and encouraged by the MFIs and their partner organizations. The human capital approach tends to value the effect of education on economic production, microcredit sustainability and income generation. Undoubtedly, such necessity and salience should not be undermined, as this leads to direct economic empowerment for women when they lift themselves out of abject poverty using these measures. On the other hand, despite their congruent outcomes, the capability method approaches development from a different dimension; it instead focuses on the ‘ability or the substantive freedom of people to lead the lives they have reason to value and to enhance the real choices they have.’²³

In many ways, education can be used to promote more and better healthcare benefits for women and their children, and not just exclusively for the purpose of microcredit complementation. For instance, human rights and legal education courses, which are a key component of BRAC’s program, seek to educate and empower women to be aware of their legal rights and the mechanisms they can use to address the discrimination that they face. Social empowerment objectives run the risk of being sidelined as microcredit finance institutions escalate their borrowers’ quota in competition with other

²¹ Sen, Amartya. *Development as Freedom*, (Oxford University Press): 293.

²² Arends-Kuenning, Mary and Amin, Sajeda. “Women’s Capabilities and the Right to Education in Bangladesh,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 15(1) (September 2001): 125.

²³ Sen, *Development As Freedom*, 293. Arends-Kuenning and Amin also made mention of this analytical framework in their journal article.

MFI, and the capability approach thus provides a more comprehensive framework and perspective as it emphasizes widening the scope of choices and decisions that women can make, empowering them and society in the long run. More importantly, education should strive to change norms and conditions that are detrimental to the interests and welfare of women. Such development will reap positive dividends for social empowerment in Bangladesh. Both approaches converge on what empowerment should entail – the expansion of one’s freedoms – but the difference lies in their respective focus. According to David A. Clark in a working paper for Global Poverty Research Group entitled *The Capability Approach: Its Development, Critiques & Recent Advances*, “where the human capital approach hinges on economic freedom, the capability approach seeks to encompass not only this aspect, but as well as the other intangible gains such as having a personal freedom of choice without any restrictions.”

*A. MICROCREDIT PROVIDES A PLATFORM AND
CONTINUOUS MOTIVATION FOR WOMEN TO EQUIP
THEMSELVES THROUGH NON-FORMAL EDUCATION
STRUCTURES*

Seen through the human capital approach where education is essentially a factor of economic production, microcredit provides a launching pad for women and a consistent impetus to equip themselves because of the evolving requirements to participate innovatively in microcredit schemes. “The nature of microcredit pushes women to think of various ways to scale up their businesses from minimum survival enterprise levels to small enterprise and other entrepreneurial activities,”²⁴ according to the Shakti Foundation. On many fronts, it provides the necessary resources and competitiveness for women to stay relevant in the microcredit field. Excluded from the formal schooling system where knowledge can be made easily accessible, non-formal education through microcredit programs therefore presents a more viable channel for microcredit borrowers to obtain the necessary knowledge such as financial literacy and accounting skills to manage their daily enterprises.

For instance, national NGOs have started programs like the Shakti Foundation for Disadvantaged Women’s Business Development Services. This program equips its members with enhanced business skills and knowledge, and helps the entrepreneurs to manage and expand their businesses in a more efficient manner. Lending credence to the human capital approach, microcredit has evidently motivated women to pick up the necessary knowledge.

²⁴ “Business Development Service,” The Shakti Foundation, accessed at http://www.sfdw.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=43&Itemid=61

Other capacity building measures under Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) include vocational training, followed by the required support for it to be used in a productive manner.

*B. MICROCREDIT ENABLES WOMEN TO PROVIDE
EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT FOR THE NEXT
GENERATION*

When microcredit provides a consistent income to sustain a family by providing for basic necessities and survival, these borrowers are then able to direct time and attention to achieving social goals in her community. Many are given the ability to choose to send their daughters to school and are now doing so because they recognize the importance of education in helping to break this vicious cycle of poverty. Provision of education for the next generation acts as a possible indicator for assessing the social impact of microcredit. This contribution to social empowerment of the next generation, especially in terms of education for female youths, is significant, because in the long run, this will help in bolstering the overall female literacy rates in the country. I argue that women do play a crucial role when it comes to acting as a conduit for education in Bangladesh.

From the observations carried out, many children of microcredit borrowers have been given the opportunity to receive non-formal education. The girl to boy ratio in classes has also gone up significantly. For instance, all the schools I visited under Grameen Bank, BRAC and CDIP had either an equal boy-girl ratio, or a slightly higher proportion of girls. The need for continuous learning and knowledge transfer to manage their income-generating activities, help many Bangladeshi women realize that it is important to educate their children in order to break out of the vicious poverty cycle. The MFIs play their part by encouraging female students when they set aside a fixed amount of monetary rewards or scholarships to motivate them to pursue higher education. As evidence of this, some of the borrowers I spoke to (at Grameen Bank) had children who pursued tertiary education with a scholarship from their organization.

Second, women are also performing the function of education service providers. It is widely acknowledged that all the teachers in the non-formal education program under BRAC are females. Most of the female teachers hired by BRAC are married housewives who could spare the time to educate the village children.

In addition, studies have shown that women's education results in children's schooling and an improvement in children's health.²⁵

²⁵ Arends-Kuenning and Amin, "Women's Capabilities and the Right to Education in Bangladesh," 125.

According to a case study of BRAC by Momen and Begum, the visits made to the BRAC Education program schools in Chak Protha and Goshaibari exemplified the high standard of learning, the dedication of the teachers and the confidence and intelligence of the young students. For instance, the Dhunat Pilot Girls High School is one of the sites of the innovative Female Secondary Schools Stipends program, “which has successfully scaled up girls’ secondary education drawing millions of girls into secondary schools and more than doubling female enrollment in these schools.”²⁶

Smaller NGOS like CDIP also provide additional social support for children of microcredit borrowers, along with their own microcredit programs. Since 1995, CDIP has been running an education support program, working with the objective to eliminate the number of school dropout children. CDIP has decided to focus on the micro issues faced by children in less than ideal classroom settings, and non-conducive environment where both parents are illiterate. As of February 2010, there were 550 of such schools running and a total of 13,000 poor children who had been given additional support that they badly needed.²⁷

Also, Grameen’s Bank example of ‘Sixteen Decisions’ illustrates that literacy benefits the entire family. Without any prior literacy capability, female microcredit borrowers had a tough time navigating the rules and regulations of microcredit, as they simply did not understand and were unable to read the ‘Sixteen Decisions’ of Grameen Bank. Taught to them by the Grameen workers as a prerequisite to obtaining the loans, a small leap in literacy rates is reflected in the literacy ability of borrowers and their family members, as they are now able to read and understand the conditions of the Sixteen Decisions. Though this might be a small leap in the general literacy levels, this undeniably implies a pertinent point: that there is huge potential in using microcredit as an empowerment tool, because of its ability to deliver not only economic benefits, but social benefits on a large scale. It offers a process for borrowers to enrich themselves beyond harsh economic conditions, by ensuring that self-esteem and confidence are built up through empowering others.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR FEMALE EMPOWERMENT?

A. ABILITY TO CHOOSE AND DECIDE

²⁶ Momen and Begum, “Impact of Micro Credit Program for Women Development in Bangladesh: A Case Study of BRAC,” 1269.

²⁷ “Education Support Program (An innovative social program).” Centre for Development Innovation & Practices (CDIP), accessed February 5, 2011 at <http://cdipbd.com/Education.html>

With the ability to generate a consistent flow of income, female microcredit borrowers are given a chance to break out of their traditional social and cultural roles. According to Mr. Tarikul Islam, Manager of the Special Programs at the CDIP, women did not possess the capability and freedom to control any aspect of household finances before microcredit was introduced. As a result, women could hardly exercise choice in going to public places like marketplaces, much less exercise their freedom to purchase items for themselves. Considering it taboo, women in a pre-microcredit situation did generally refrain from going to the market.²⁸ This was largely due to a fear of losing their social value.²⁹ However, enrollment in microcredit programs gradually enabled them to secure a stronger economic role for themselves and a closer linkage to the market. As a result, more women can be seen going to the market to purchase items such as clothing for themselves, a simple personal choice that they did not once possess.

B. PRESENCE OF LEADERSHIP AND VISIBILITY IN SOCIETY

A notable and positive social trend is reflected in how women are generally placed in leadership positions when it comes to the operations and daily management of microcredit. This is a clear signal that, to a certain extent, women have been able to surpass and defeat the rigid social, cultural and religious norms that have always restricted their freedom. For one, during a weekly center meeting held in one of the villages under the ambit of Grameen's microcredit programs, I witnessed the proceedings that the Center Chief undertook with the rest of the microcredit borrowers. The meetings included the congregation of the borrowers of a village in one particular designated venue. The Center Chief then reported the necessary updates and handed over the payments to the bank representative. This role is always occupied and rotated among the female borrowers of a village and the weekly sessions at the Center are co-chaired by the Center Chief and a representative from the Grameen Bank. At the management level at Grameen, nine out of thirteen Board Members are borrowers who sit on the Board of Directors by rotation. As Mr. Harun, a coordinator at Grameen Bank mentioned, all borrowers at Grameen Bank are seen as shareholders of the bank.³⁰

As an example of community involvement, Ms Obaida

²⁸ Kelkar and Jahan, "Redefining Women's 'Samman,'" 3635.

²⁹ Sultanam, Bilkish et al. "Women's Empowerment Through the Development of Micro Entrepreneurship in Rural Bangladesh," *The Social Sciences*, 5(1) (2010): 1.

³⁰ Rashid, Harun. Interview by Esther Nai. Written interview. Dhaka, Bangladesh (16th July 2010).

Haque from the Shakti Foundation informed me that women in their community are taking on active roles to try and solve the issues in their own community. They are in the best position to relate to and understand the situation and context, and therefore are more able to relate and provide solutions to any problems that arise in their village. This facilitates the work of the organization, as this interaction becomes a two-way street, whereby these women become empowered to take problems into their own hands, with the economic support of microcredit from the organization. Consequently, there is a fundamental transition in the perception of women's roles. This boost in confidence and self-esteem of women propels them to take a more active role in their own community through leadership positions and joint collective actions with other women.

EXISTING AND FUTURE TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

Viewed through a social empowerment paradigm, there should be additional emphasis on education to shore up the efficacy of microcredit programs. This change in mindset has to be one that views microcredit as a process for achieving greater social participation and stakeholdership for the women in Bangladesh, rather one that sees it as a mere end of profit regeneration in itself. With this agenda driving microcredit in Bangladesh, I am of the opinion that the scope of education has to widen and deepen its outreach. This should extend beyond equipping them with bookkeeping, accounting and banking knowledge. More importantly, knowledge transfer and non-formal education should also look at enhancing the capacity and social well-being of these women. As of now, certain NGOs like the Shakti Foundation have set a tried and tested health program in place, which provides antenatal care and primary health care for members and their families. The continuity and relevance of knowledge transfer has to consider the merits of social empowerment through health programs, gender-institutionalization and digital empowerment. These are some of the exploratory areas that more microfinance institutions and NGOs in Bangladesh should consider tackling more intensively. Furthermore, as globalization continues, microcredit has to evolve effectively to keep up with it. Simply put, the engines of empowerment cannot be propelled forward based on the fuel of microcredit alone.

A. DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT FOR WOMEN

In tandem with the Vision 2021 and ‘Digital Bangladesh’³¹ slogans exhorted by the incumbent government, a renewed and more vital emphasis on the concept of digital empowerment should be placed on the female microcredit borrowers too. Development strategists have strongly supported information technology as a way to prevent further economic and social marginalization, at the same time presenting a larger scope for diversification opportunities. Although women have now risen up the ranks in society from the microcredit earnings they generate, they cannot afford to allow these improvements to stagnate. According to a paper presented for the 10th General Assembly of CODESRIA, Kampala, Uganda, on December 8-12, 2002, entitled "Globalization, ICTS and the New Imperialism: Perspectives on Africa in the Global Electronic Village": “A lack of technological knowledge as society progresses may potentially place women at a disadvantage in the future, because globalization privileges people who are equipped with a minimum standard of technological literacy and knowledge.”

In facilitating the development of female entrepreneurship, the familiarity with technological know-how will help women to build their capacity to assess risk more astutely.³² Extrapolating from this, it is evident that information technology is a tool that will be critical in the economic and social transformations of the Bangladeshi society and may also provide opportunities for business growth and diversification.³³ Presently, there are already some positive examples in place, as seen in the village phone schemes operating under the Grameen Bank. This project has allowed women to provide a source of communication to their villages, as well as a source of sustainable income for themselves. These women have taken a loan from the Bank to start up this kind of business in their own community, and they reportedly earn an income that is often more than twice the national average.³⁴ This is an apt illustration of how technology can be a lucrative form of small investment in Bangladesh, in a market that is currently not saturated by mobile phones. The Shakti Foundation is one example of an NGO in the country that has fully computerized branches.

The uneven distribution of technologies within societies as well as across the world has been termed “the digital divide.”³⁵ Women are put at a greater disadvantage as compared to their male

³¹ “Realizing the Vision of Digital Bangladesh through E-Government.” Report by the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, July 2010.

³² Nawaz, Faraha. “Critical Factors of Women Entrepreneurship Development in Rural Bangladesh.” Bangladesh Development Research Working Paper Series, May 2009.

³³ Ahmed, Alauddin et al. “Measuring The Impact of ICT on Women In Bangladesh.” Independent University, Bangladesh. Accessed at <ftp://amd64gcc.dyndns.org/WORLDCOMP06/EEE4168.pdf>

³⁴ “Mobile Phone Scheme Empowers Bangladeshi Women.” Global Ideas Bank. Accessed at <http://www.globalideasbank.org/site/bank/idea.php?ideaId=4346>

³⁵ Ahmed et al., “Measuring The Impact of ICT On Women In Bangladesh.”

counterparts as a result of this. This is especially true since women possess a comparatively low literacy level as well. Therefore, if access to and use of these technologies is directly linked to social and economic development, then it is imperative to ensure that women in developing countries understand the significance of these technologies and use them. The investments into digital empowerment of women will bring about long-term dividends in female empowerment because digital empowerment will be able to help microcredit borrowers keep up better with the changing challenges, both nationally and globally.

B. CHANGES IN THE MINDSET OF MEN

In order to sustain the empowerment agenda, I argue that microcredit institutions have to ensure that men share the burden and obligations of upholding microcredit-borrowing responsibilities. With the increased capacity to generate income, there is also a growing burden on women for repayments. At the same time, they are still held responsible for household chores like cooking, cleaning, rearing and caring for the well-being of the family. This means that, although women might now see a more active role within the household, the added obligations of income-generation and their daily duties might end up becoming a heavier burden for them, especially if their spouses do not offer assistance of any sort. This will not be beneficial for their welfare as a whole.

In a bid to entrust more obligations to the men and to offset the load of women, CDIP has put in place, measures where men are made to accompany their wives when borrowing money. Tarikul from CDIP offered the explanation that this will help women to secure prior acknowledgement of responsibility from the men. Husbands used to deny that their wives had taken prior loans, especially during repayment time and in feigning ignorance of the matter, they left their wives to shoulder the burden of the repayment alone. Behind this borrowing of credit lies a social obligation of trust and integrity on the behalf of both parties. This practice will arguably elevate the status of women by leading husbands to see women as more than mere credit borrowers.

In sum, I posit that changing the mindset of men will be a slow process. However, there is sufficient reason to believe that, as microcredit programs continue their successful run in Bangladesh, the equality gap between men and women within the family unit will gradually, but surely, close.

C. DIVERSIFICATION AND UPSCALING OF MICROCREDIT PRACTICES

The oft-cited criticism leveled against microcredit is that its

outreach is not sufficient and effective in reaching the most impoverished sector of society. As microcredit advances to accommodate a burgeoning number of borrowers who are making a better living, it is also prudent to keep the lower rungs of society in view and ensure that microcredit reaches them. Microfinance institutions should look at diversifying into different target segments, so as to accommodate the evolving stages of poverty and its related needs at every level. This diversification method will enable NGOs and MFIs to provide better and more efficiently, for the ultra poor, the moderate poor, small and marginal farmers and other microentrepreneurs. Lastly, it is crucial to bear in mind that the needs of the rural poor and the urban poor are different as well, given their respective living and physical circumstances.

To address this situation, the Grameen Bank started the Struggling Beggar Program in 2003, which seeks to target beggars in particular. It is a new initiative undertaken to ensure that the poorest sectors are reached by the Grameen Bank. It does not operate according to the same rules that govern the workings of mainstream microcredit programs. The operating premise of this program is that the ultra poor have to be given extra preparations and more provision to embark on these microcredit programs, and therefore more flexibility and imagination has to be incorporated into the programs designed for them. Mr. Harun, one of the senior coordinators at the Grameen Bank Headquarters, made mention of the fact that the borrowers of the Struggling Bank Program do retain a choice at the end of the day, where they could eventually decide if they would prefer to continue begging or to continue with the program after some progress has been made. This form of flexibility is also extended to the length of repayment for the borrowers in this particular program. Other examples include BRAC's 'Income Generation for Vulnerable Groups Development' (IGVGD) program, which works with women who are receiving relief rations of wheat provided by the Government. This aspect complements the food handout with employment options in BRAC's sericulture program, and they are then offered concessional loans with a monthly repayment requirement after one year.³⁶ These borrowers will then gradually transit into the mainstream Rural Development Program (RDP) and are offered bigger loans. On a whole, this facilitates the transition of the ultra poor to longer-term programs. Other such programs include 'Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction' (CFPR) Program and PKSF's 'Hardcore Poor Program'.³⁷

In addition, the moderate poor seek broader investment opportunities after they have attained a minimum survival standard.

³⁶ Zaman, Hasan. "Questioning the critics: the case of BRAC and other credit programs in Bangladesh." *Development in Practice*, 7(1) (February 1997): 82.

³⁷ Islam, Sirajul. "Microfinance in Bangladesh." *Context and Experiences*: 10.

Most women who started out with domestic and small-scale activities like rearing poultry eventually advanced and transformed these activities into commercial ones. There is a separate set of information needed to make the shift from production for domestic consumption on a small scale to production for commercial purposes. For instance, women who started out with small-scale poultry-rearing might eventually decide to increase the scale and scope of their operations, by venturing into other enterprises like setting up village stores. To achieve this, there needs to be an enhancement of knowledge and business management skills. In a bid to accelerate the present Micro-Enterprise Program, PKSf has taken up a project since 2008, titled “Finance for Enterprise Development and Employment Creation (FEDEC). Approximately 94% of the total project cost is funneled into the funding of microenterprises, value chain development, project management, and monitoring. FEDEC seeks to improve access to complementary business development and value chain services, and to increase lending by the partner organizations of PKSf to microenterprises.³⁸ In this case, NGOs or MFIs should step in to strengthen their knowledge front by pushing for stronger entrepreneurship abilities, capacity-building opportunities and business ownership. Workshops, seminars and conferences should be conducted for these women to be exposed to more networking options or business collaboration plans, so as to take their individual businesses further. I believe this would help sustain their financial viability in the long run. Currently, a sense of optimism is felt as the female entrepreneurship level is seemingly rising in the country. However, there is still ample room for expansion and improvement.

D. FOCUS ON GENDER MAINSTREAMING PRACTICES

Functioning on the assumption that microcredit is not an automatic solution to gender inequality, gender mainstreaming has become a pertinent facet to the process of poverty alleviation measures. As defined by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1997, “this concept serves to act as a strategy to enable both genders’ concerns to be well integrated into the political, economic and societal dimensions, so that equality is present for all.”³⁹ Success and validity of microcredit aside, one of the potential pitfalls of empowerment lies in the over-dependence on the supposedly inherent empowerment potential of credit and savings.⁴⁰

³⁸ PKSf Annual Report 2008: 21.

³⁹ “Women’s Empowerment.” United Nations Development Program. Accessed at <http://www.undp.org/women/mainstream/whatis.shtml>

⁴⁰ Mayoux, Linda. “Micro-finance and the Empowerment of Women: A Review of the Key Issues.” *Social Finance Working Paper No. 23* (International Labour Organization: 2000).

In fact, tension has invariably existed between the focus on mainstreaming microcredit and emphasizing the need to reach the poor. Some MFIs and their partner organizations would be more inclined to concentrate their effort on generally widening their microcredit programs rather than placing more focus on supporting more gender- and empowerment-focused interventions for women. I posit that a greater focus on education might be the solution for reconciling the underlying tensions between the outreach and sustainability goals.

Attempts to mainstream gender within the microfinance industry have to move beyond the number of loans given to women. This idea requires a more well-rounded approach, and this calls for putting women's accessibility at the core of policies, structures and programs. This will help to tailor these poverty alleviation methods to promote women's empowerment, ensuring its sustainability. The institutionalization of a gender focus is more of a process than an outcome and it is a most helpful tool to keep the agenda in line.

Gender equality is pertinent to the achievement of poverty reduction, economic growth and social development outcomes. The international support behind such an agenda is evident in the fact that almost all countries in Asia and the Pacific, including Bangladesh, have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and adopted the Beijing Platform for Action at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. The salience of this concept is again highlighted in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), which is endorsed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) as well. Under the Beijing Platform for Action, all governments commit to the adoption of gender mainstreaming across all policy and program functions, requiring gender equality to become the goal for gender mainstreaming. It also requires that processes be put in place to inform how gender-sensitive policies and programs link to positive change in women's lives and to achievement of national development goals (e.g., women's political and economic empowerment and respect for women's basic rights, such as access to health care and freedom from violence). In addition, United Nation Development Program (UNDP) Gender in Development Policy (GIDP) has interpreted empowerment in a more precise and comprehensive manner. The policy aims at a three-fold outcome which includes providing women with access to education and training, and promoting their presence and ability in policy and decision making processes.

In support of this gender mainstreaming agenda, INAFI Bangladesh has organized a conference termed "Women Empowerment Mainstreaming through Networking", a program

supported by Oxfam Novib. The program helps the client take stock of her present situation, helping her calculate the opportunities and risks involved in any potential ventures she might seek to undertake. In a study conducted by INAFI on the Empowerment Situation of the Microfinance Borrower of INAFI Bangladesh Members Organizations Using Gender Checklist, some of the positive trends have been documented in this research report. This is an assessment of the clients that are served by INAFI Bangladesh members, to know and gauge their gender empowerment situation.⁴¹ On top of that, INAFI has spearheaded the path for gender mainstreaming by organizing a national conference on gender mainstreaming in microfinance. The conference was an attempt to establish dialogue among the microcredit practitioners, and bring about a viable method to effectively mainstream gender into INAFI's organization mandate and within the broader community as a whole.⁴² As illustrated in the above examples, it is evident that in order to ensure that microfinance programs fulfill their promise to support women's empowerment, development workers and researchers need to divert more energy towards strategies that support the transformation of gender relations.⁴³

CONCLUSION

Microcredit is widely perceived as an effective tool for empowering women globally and it is an acclaimed form of developmental intervention for poverty alleviation. However, the provision of credit at favorable terms is hardly a panacea for solving either the empowerment or poverty conundrum. Dr. Muhammad Yunus has made this clear too, in his statement that "it is not microcredit alone which will end poverty. Many more doors and windows can be created to facilitate an easy exit."⁴⁴ Therefore, while the improvement of women's access to credit is a positive step towards empowerment, social mobilization and awareness of rights through education have to be used in tandem with microcredit to enhance greater chances for female empowerment in the long run. I believe that fostering and ensuring an enhanced and consistent relationship between education and microcredit can expedite the continuous process of empowering women in Bangladesh.

⁴¹ "Empowerment Situation of the Microfinance Borrower of INAFI Bangladesh Member Organizations Using Gender Checklist." International Network of Alternative Financial Institutions (INAFI). Accessed at <http://inafi.org/data-a-publications/55-gender-mainstreaming>

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Hunt, Juliet and Kasynathan, Nalini. "Pathways to empowerment? Reflections on microfinance and transformation in gender relations in South Asia." *Gender & Development* 9(1): 2001.

⁴⁴ Yunus, Muhammad. "Preface, *Banker to the Poor*." Grameen Bank. Accessed at http://www.grameen-info.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=211&Itemid=380

As stated by Goetz and Gupta, credit does represent a form of economic empowerment, which can elevate women's economic status within the family, as independent producers and providers of a valuable financial resource to the household economy.⁴⁵ Just as an improved economic status is crucial, I posit that the ability and freedom to make individual choices need to be considered as part of the framework of empowerment.

Therefore, non-formal education, or education in all other respects, should factor the social needs of women into equation. Measures that will speed up the agenda of empowerment include further investment into the future potential of women, by helping them to harness the power of digital development and to learn skills for expansion of businesses. More holistically, there should be a stronger push for gender mainstreaming practices, so as to keep the gender relations agenda in sight. In sum, a mutually reinforcing relationship between education and microcredit is crucial for Bangladeshi women to attain the freedom to empower themselves in the long run.

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⁴⁵ Goetz and Gupta, "Who Takes the Credit?" 47

**RIVERS OF POWER, FORESTS OF BEAUTY:
NEO-LIBERALISM, CONSERVATION AND THE
GOVERNMENTAL USE OF TERROR IN
STRUGGLES OVER NATURAL RESOURCES**

ADAM PAYNE

SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES

ABSTRACT:

This paper discusses the relationship between conservation, neo-liberalism and government in Himachal Pradesh, India. I bring together different scales of reference to highlight the convergences between neo-liberalism and conservation, along with the ways in which these have become governance techniques for both the Indian state and international environmental movements. The argument is based on a series of discussions I had with activists involved in the opposition to hydro-electric dams in the areas surrounding the Great Himalayan National Park. The activists took a clear stance that both conservation and neo-liberalism correspond in their exclusion of local communities from natural resources. I build on this perspective with the intention of understanding how state-led terror, directed against those opposing 'development' projects, is a further aspect of the techniques of governing emerging alongside neo-liberalism in India. This paper also explores the role of international environmentalism in creating a typology of 'legitimate' environmental resistance through which oppositional movements can attain a degree of protection from state violence, at the cost of depoliticized representations.

Why bother with naivety? Is it because we are heading into the strangest zone of all, the zone of the obvious, where things only become obvious once they have been spelled out? I need to slow down the process of purchase and put it into slow motion. I need a way to spell it out so that it sinks in as a physical sensation like being in an elevator that stops too fast, leaving our stomach behind.¹

Taussig, M.

Ecology isn't simply the logic of a total economy; it's the new morality of capitalism.²

The Invisible Committee

This paper describes the events surrounding a legal battle over the installation of privately owned hydro-electric dams on the Tirthan River, Himachal Pradesh, India. The court case and the various responses it attracted provide interesting examples of the intricate relationships between neo-liberalism, conservation and governmental repression in struggles over natural resources in the Indian Himalayas.

In 2006 a consortium of activists won a drawn out legal case against companies who planned to build nine private hydro-electric dams (hydels) on the Tirthan River. These dams were intended to power a cigarette factory and a clothing manufacturing unit in Haryana, a state hundreds of miles to the South. Activists argued that the construction of the dams would have destroyed the eco-system of the valley, filled the main source of drinking water with silt, rendered the irrigation systems and flour mills useless and caused the sacred pools along the river to dry up. However it was not the destruction of local livelihoods that convinced the courts, but the potential for the hydel projects to interfere with the conservation efforts undertaken in the recently designated Great Himalayan National Park. With this move the locals managed to save their river from privatization but, in doing so, were forced to rely on the logic of an edifice that had already caused their exclusion from 765 sq. km of common lands. Meanwhile, in valleys all around, where people do not live in the shadow of a conservation area, the construction of dams crawls on.

To people opposing the slow creep of enclosure and environmental degradation, the juridical decision indicated clearly that the discourse of legitimacy lay not in people's ability to protect

¹ Taussig, Michael. *My Cocaine Museum*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 11.

² The Invisible Committee. *The Coming Insurrection*. (Los Angeles : Semiotext(e), 2009), 78.

and maintain their livelihoods but in the domains of conservation and national development. Negotiating the abusive sovereignty of companies and government, the destruction of livelihoods and ecologies, and the enclosure of things common are networks of 'activists'. They are people who struggle to inscribe different social and ecological futures by challenging government and corporate actions, by mobilizing people into resistance movements, and by creating different patterns of living. These activists can offer important lessons about the relationship linking government, neo-liberalism, and the international circulation of ideas about environmentalism - all of which affect the possibilities for those in the Himalayas who are struggling to protect local livelihoods, ecologies and cosmologies.

The account I draw in this article has three main thresholds of argument, each of which is addressed to different points in an expanding frame of reference, but which are crucially interconnected and manifested themselves in the opposition to dams on the Tirthan. It is important to articulate these three points in the same space because there are crucial interrelations between them that are often overlooked in a single scale analysis.

The first argument I make is drawn from the relationship between conservation and neo-liberal development that emerged from the events in the Tirthan valley. Here I want to add some subtlety, and therefore more explanatory potential, to accounts that see a simple hierarchy between development, conservation and local livelihoods in the logic of governing. I argue that the relationship between them is significantly more fluid than a hierarchy would suggest, and they often correspond in complex but important ways. Conservation and neo-liberalism share a fundamental homology; both see natural resources as separated from intimate human use. They eliminate local people from spheres of authority and seek to wrest resources from their control. Natural resources are constructed as either semi-mythic in conservation or open to exploitation as potential capital in neo-liberalism. Through their interaction, these two discourses signify a segmented approach to natural resources that works to justify their simultaneous enclosure and privatization.

The second point concerns aspects of the relationship between the state and neo-liberalism that became elucidated by the experiences of activists. The relationships between the state and the companies building the dams contradict the majority of theoretical accounts of neo-liberalism which conceptualize it as a situation in which the state withdraws to a regulative and administrative position, leaving people to interact directly with the forces of the market. From the activists' positions it was clear that the Indian state plays an enormous role as the producer and distributor of legitimizing ideas

about the benefits of neo-liberalism, as the creator and director of legislative authority, and as a force of coercive discipline with which resistance movements must engage. I argue that by categorizing certain projects as ‘developmental,’ and therefore in the service of the public good, whilst simultaneously labeling activists as anti-national left wing extremists, the Indian government has created a space for the use of legally sanctioned violence in which opposition to projects can be publicly decimated. This mobile category of left-wing extremist has been legislatively conflated with the similarly slippery idea of the ‘terrorist’ and used to justify a state of exception; a quasi-judicial situation in which the coercive power of law is exercised against certain groups without the safeguards usually accorded to citizens. The threat of violent repression is something activists constantly face, and it haunts movements that try to resist the enclosure of land for development and conservation. To understand processes of neo-liberalization we need to engage with the centrality of governmentally-legitimized violence to its success.

The third point is that this violence is not local to India but is engaged with, directed and sustained by ideas that flow throughout the world. The processes of privatization are funded and supported by international companies that present themselves as environmentally conscious businesses to customers in the West and to the cities of India. For many people ecology is becoming the new morality of capitalism and the effect of this movement has been to create an idea of environmentalism that does not view the environment as a political-economic issue but rather one of abstract ecology. This conceptual creation comes back to haunt those fighting the enclosure of their land on a political basis by establishing a typology of ‘legitimate’ resistance movements designating those who are eligible for international support, and hence spared the full brutality of state repression, and those who are not.

In struggling against enclosure and privatization, activists are forced to navigate between the potential repression of the state and the restrictive typologies created by international environmental movements. These two apparently contradictory discourses converge in the effacement of local livelihoods from the concerns of authoritative debates about the future of Himachal Pradesh’s rivers and forests. Only by exploring the issues can we hope to democratize access to the resources upon which people rely.

CONSERVATION AND NEO-LIBERALISM

The integral position of politics in conservation projects worldwide is well documented in studies of conflicts over natural resources. Many accounts depict repressive governments, focused on the exploitation

of nature and labor.³ However, the conception of a pervasive government, capable of exerting its domination over disparate communities has been criticized in ethnographic studies of struggles over resources. A budding literature is increasingly focused on writing more nuanced descriptions of the means by which access to resources is negotiated and contested from the perspective of both community and the state.⁴ The critique that has been raised against this movement is that the shift towards studies of the distribution of power within communities has instigated a reduction in focus on the politics of state formation and the functioning of government in relation to natural resources.⁵ In this article I bring together different scales of reference to highlight the relationships between neo-liberalism and conservation, and the ways in which these have become techniques of governing for both the nation-state and international movements.

Neo-liberal development has often been understood in frames of analysis separate from studies of conservation. Yet despite the seemingly contradictory logics of these two processes, they are closely connected and inform one another in intimate ways. I argue that neo-liberalism and conservation are two powerful discursive logics that share convergences in their treatment of natural resources and their perspectives on resident populations. In making this argument I want to add a shade of subtlety to the oft-repeated assertion that development is prioritized over conservation, which is itself positioned above local livelihoods in a simple hierarchy.⁶ The events on the Tirthan clearly indicate that there is a high degree of mutual interaction and concession between neo-liberalism and conservation; they come to justify and sustain each other. This is a much more powerful formation than a simple hierarchy and has major implications for those trying to oppose neo-liberal development and exclusionary conservation.

THE GREAT HIMALAYAN NATIONAL PARK

³ See for example: Guha, Ramachandra. *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989a) / Peluso, Nancy L. *Rich Forests, Poor People: Resource Control and Resistance in Java*. (Berkeley: California University Press, 1992).

⁴ See for example: Sivaramakrishnan, K. *Modern Forests: Statemaking and Environmental Change in Colonial Eastern India*. (Stamford: Stamford University Press, 1999) / Baviskar, Amita. *In the Belly of the River: Tribal Conflicts over Development in the Narmada Valley*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995) / Mosse, David. [The Rule of Water: Statecraft, Ecology and Collective Action in South India](#). (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003) / Baviskar, Amita [ed]. *Contested Grounds: Essays on Nature, Culture, and Power*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁵ Chhatre, Ashwini and Saberwal, V. *Democratising Nature: Politics, Conservation and Development in India*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) / Li, Tania M. *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics*. (London: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁶ Chhatre and Saberwal, *Democratising Nature*.

The Tirthan, Sainj and Jibhi valleys are formed by rivers springing from vanishing glaciers. High above human settlement the waters jump from frozen mountainsides, flowing through villages and small towns, meeting at Aut - where they are churned through the turbines of a hydro-electric dam to flow southwards. The shrinking glaciers rest in rugged mountains, covered in deep snow. Many of these peaks have never been touched by human hands and exist as the sole territory of wild animals. Below the snow line are fertile meadows and thick forests of birch, fir, oak and conifers. Living on this land are various endangered species, including Musk Deer, Brown Bears, Snow Leopards, Blue Sheep, Himalayan Tahr, Western Tragopan, and Cheer and Monal Pheasants; mythologized in local medicines and by tourists for their beauty and proximity to extinction.

In the last five years I have been to the Tirthan valley on four separate trips. Each time, the bounty of the hills has been a recurring topic of conversation with many people. I was told that over fifty species of medicinal herbs and the lucrative gucci mushrooms grow in the high altitude pastures. Those who spend their summer days roaming the forests can get 10,000 rupees for a kilo of dried mushroom, and similar amounts can be made by cutting, drying and selling medicinal herbs. In the past, over 23,000 sheep and goats would migrate to the pastures in the summer under the guidance of a few shepherds who would take control of village flocks for months at a time.⁷ However, the story of access to these fruitful mountains is fraught with struggles and exclusion.

In 1984, an area of this land was identified as potential grounds for conservation. Ecologists were impressed that the upper Sainj and Tirthan valleys contained “exceptional forest and a remarkable and complete array of the larger, more ecologically sensitive species typical of the western Himalayas.”⁸ Furthermore, the area is a habitat for the critically endangered Western Tragopan pheasant⁹. Ecologists were worried that grazing by domestic animals was causing ‘severe alteration of the natural forest flora,’ which reduces the sustainability of the habitat for wildlife, and they blamed local use of the land for grazing and fuel collection as the major culprit.¹⁰

⁷ Baviskar, Amita. “States, Communities and Conservation: The Practice of Eco-development in the Great Himalayan National Park.” *Battles over Nature: Science and the Politics of Conservation*, eds. Saberwal, Vasant K. and Rangarajan, Mahesh. (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), 267.

⁸ Gaston quoted in *ibid*, 269.

⁹ The Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) now holds one of only two protected populations in the world. Chhatre and Saberwal, *Democratizing Nature*, 2.

¹⁰ Gaston, Anthony J. et al. ‘The Status and Conservation of Forest Wildlife in Himachal Pradesh, Western Himalayas.’ *Biological Conservation*, 27 (1983): 311.

The Great Himalayan National Park; Photos courtesy of Adam Payne and Asia Bocjczewska





The identification of potential parklands and the initial legal demarcations came at a time when conservation was high on Indira Gandhi's political agenda. Under her supervision, the Indian Wildlife Protection Act was legislated in 1972 and the vast majority of India's protected areas were established.¹¹ Many commentators have linked Gandhi's conservationist agenda with an attempt to win international

¹¹ Chhatre and Saberwal, *Democratising Nature*, 22.

political support.¹² Political tension with the United States following India's support for Bangladesh in the 1971 war with Pakistan led Gandhi to seek support from a variety of sources. It was during this time that she became known as an outspoken conservationist.¹³ Gandhi's perspectives on conservation were influenced by the emerging American model of hands-off management in national parks,¹⁴ which called for halting all consumptive use of resources, and, if necessary, forcibly depopulating areas.¹⁵ Although the threat of depopulation has been carried out in a few circumstances,¹⁶ the potentially unpopular legislation that was passed under Gandhi was rarely enforced. Laws were written and a fiery environmentalist agenda espoused, but relatively little trickled down to the GHNP area for many years.

The decision for the notification of the park came in 1999 following an order issued by the Supreme Court in 1997 to end all resource extraction in protected areas and close the GHNP to unauthorized human access. The order was catalyzed by petitioning from the World Wildlife Fund and the potential for eco-development loans from the World Bank.¹⁷ Local resistance to the closure of the parks was fierce. People objected to the terms of the settlement, which were drawn up using a report compiled in 1897. The report recognized only 314 houses from a current population of approximately 15,000 people, and did not include the now lucrative gucci mushroom as a source of income in its compensation calculations.¹⁸ Furthermore, locals objected to what were—from their perspective—patronizing and completely misleading ideas of exclusionary conservation. A local man, Jai Ram said:

...there is a bird, *tutru*, which toils in the forest to build a nest for its young. But when the time comes, another bird, *juraun*, forces *tutru* out and takes over the nests that *tutru* have built with such effort and skill. The *sarkar* [government] is doing the same to us. We have raised these forests. We have nurtured the birds and animals. Now the *sarkar* comes and throws

¹² Mahesh, Rangarajan, *India's Wildlife History: An Introduction*. (New Delhi: Perminant Black, 2001) / Lewis, Michael. *Inventing Global Ecology: Tracking the Bio-Diversity Ideal in India 1947-97*. (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2003).

¹³ Chhatre and Saberwal, *Democratizing Nature*, 22

¹⁴ Lewis, *Inventing Global Ecology*.

¹⁵ Guha, R. "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique." *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 11 (1989): 71-83 / Merchant, Caroline. *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture*. (New York: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁶ The cases of the Kanha and Gir National Parks are perhaps the most prominent examples of the forced depopulation of conservation areas. See Chhatre and Saberwal, *Democratizing Nature* for more information.

¹⁷ Chhatre and Saberwal, *Democratizing Nature*, 5-6.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 54

us out of our forests.¹⁹

The controversy over the notification of the national park was further complicated by the last minute deletion of 10.5km of land from the park area. Officials argued that the land was ecologically insignificant, but conversationalists denounced the logic of insignificant and said that the thick bamboo groves contained some of the best habitat for the Tragopan in the park.²⁰ They linked the denotification of the land to the proposed Parbati hydro-electric project, a program which envisaged three stages on the Jiwanal and Sainj River. One of these stages involved building equipment to generate 800 megawatts from the stretches of the river that had just been deleted from the park.

The editing of GHNP borders for the benefit of business development has been linked to government privileging economic development over conservation, which is, in turn, seen as privileged above local livelihoods. Chhatre and Saberwal echo a common perspective in the literature about the conflicts between development and conservation. They argue that “while local livelihoods can be sacrificed for the sake of bio-diversity, bio-diversity must make way for national development.”²¹ It is tempting to draw such a conclusion from the literature on conservation and neo-liberal development projects in Himachal Pradesh. However, the story is complicated by a court case in which activists fought against smaller private hydel dams on the Tirthan River. By following these events we can reach more subtle and useful understandings of the relationship between conservation, neo-liberalism and livelihoods than that proposed by Chhatre and Saberwal.

In 2002, some local activists discovered that several panchayats (local councils) had given permission for nine dams to be built on the Tirthan River. This was under a new government policy called the ‘build-operate-transfer’ program. Under the terms of the program, private companies receive subsidies to construct hydro-electric dams, export the electricity to their industries and use it as they wish. The contract holds for forty years after which the government takes responsibility for clearing away remnants of rusty machinery and remedying the damage done to the local ecology, if there is any water left running down from the glaciers.

The dams were to be built using a technology beguilingly referred to as run-of-the-river projects. The run-of-the-river system involves diverting water into pipes and tunnels, which are kept above

¹⁹ Ibid, 1.

²⁰ Ibid, 79 / Baviskar, “States, Communities and Conservation,” 295.

²¹ Chhatre and Saberwal, *Democratising Nature*, 9.

the main river stream until a sufficient head²² has developed for the water to be dropped down near vertical pipes into turbines below. This system of creating hydroelectric power is increasingly preferred to large dam technology (in which the head is created by the height of the dam wall) because it does not involve the displacement of people and the associated criticisms caused by the reservoirs of large dams. Run-of-the-river systems are often proclaimed as modern alternatives to the archaic large dams; however, there are problems associated with the systems and few evaluations of their environmental and human impacts have been carried out²³. The technology has become popular in Himachal Pradesh, where all large hydel projects, with the exception of the Kol dam, are built as run-of-the-river systems.²⁴

The Tirthan was to be dammed to supply a cigarette factory and clothing manufacturing unit in Haryana state. With the contract, the companies received rights to use the river water as they wished. They told the locals that they would only use 90% of it, but many who have witnessed the decreasing water levels and experienced the dishonesty of dam building companies did not believe them. Projects like this are blooming all over Himachal Pradesh. Corporations take ownership of river after river. They import laborers, who cut down trees to feed and warm themselves, and bring in cash, which locals use for a number of activities. After a few years the construction stops, laborers move on and the valleys are left devastated.

The dams on the Tirthan, like other private hydel projects in Himachal Pradesh, are partly subsidized by the German organization *Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit* (GTZ), a federally contracted company that supports the German government in its development policy objectives. Through the Indian Bureau of Energy Efficiency, GTZ finances private renewable energy projects in Himachal Pradesh with up to 30% of their set up costs. The grant from GTZ is dependent on an Environmental Impact Assessment, and paves the way for further subsidies from the Indian state. The support of international companies is an important part of privatized hydroelectric projects in Himachal Pradesh.

²² 'Head' refers to the vertical distance that water will drop from the intake pipe to the turbines below. The power a hydroelectric system is calculated by head (in meters) multiplied by flow rate (litres per second) multiplied by the gravitational constant (m/m^2) minus a degree of conversion inefficiency. Artificially elevating the head is the simplest way to increase the power capacity of run of the river projects.

Kerridge, Duncan. *Off the Grid: Managing Independent Renewable Electricity Systems*. (Machynlleth: Center for Alternative Energy Publications, 54).

²³ A brief summary of criticisms can be found in Watershed Watch Salmon Society. (2007). *Run-Of-River Hydropower in BC: A Citizens' Guide to Understanding Approvals, Impacts and Sustainability of Independent Power Projects*. Accessible from http://www.rivershed.com/documents/Guide_to_RunRiver.pdf

²⁴ Government of Himachal Pradesh. *Ninth Five Year Plan 1997-2002*. (Shimla: Government of Himachal Pradesh, 1997).

There is little information about the number of dams being built in Himachal Pradesh but Himurja, the modal agency for small dams, lists 145 implementation agreements signed, and 331 projects allotted.²⁵ This does not include projects being sub contracted from the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC), which is building eleven large dams on in addition to the thirteen it already operates.²⁶ In the Sainj valley immediately to the north of the Tirthan, construction is happening on a huge scale. NHPC and its sub-contractors are building the biggest hydro-electric dam in the state. Already the mountain springs above the valley have dried up because tunnel blasting has caused the rock strata to shift. In the valley immediately south, Jibhi, activists are trying to revoke permission granted for more small dams.

Initially, the dams seemed like a good idea to some people. The prospect of jobs and cash tends to encourage belief and blunts critical questioning. Meanwhile, the companies involved actually have contracts with migrant workers, who they prefer to use because they are more skilled, can be paid less, and are much less able to organize against their employers. Companies go to great lengths to select the right workers, and weed out any who look like they have the potential to resist.²⁷

In 2002 a group of people from the valley challenged the permission given for the hydel companies to dam the Tirthan. The case went to the state court in Shimla where it was eventually won by the activists fighting to keep the Tirthan free from dams. One company, a Calcutta-based group called 'Swastika Projects,' argued that they were situated on the Palachan tributary and not the Tirthan; they tried to persuade the courts to revoke the decision against them but were defeated in a second case. The issues taken up in the court, and the location of authority by the judges reveals much about the locus of legitimacy amid the flying dust and money of dam construction. During the case it became clear that there was a correlation between the logic of conservation, supported by many environmentalists, and the logic of privatization advocated by neo-liberalists and the government. Both arguments excluded the local people from any authority and sought to wrest the resources upon which their livelihoods depended from their control.

In the case against the dams, activists made complex arguments about the social, ecological and spiritual impacts that the

²⁵ Himurja (Himachal Pradesh Energy Development Agency) website, <http://himurja.nic.in/mousigned.html>

²⁶ National Hydroelectric Project Corporation (NHPC) website, http://www.nhpcindia.com/English/Scripts/project_introduction.aspx

²⁷ Rajalakshmi, T.K. "In Cold Blood." *Frontline*, Vol. 23 no.15 (Jul. 29-Aug, 2006): 11 <http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl2315/stories/20060811002004400.htm>

hydro-electric dams would have on the valley. They knew that systems for controlling the flows and uses of water are forms of power that inscribe new relationships between state and society and wanted to assert the importance of the river in local livelihoods and cosmologies.²⁸ Their arguments covered a huge array of opinions and positions and reflected a pool of academic and policy level literature that highlights the negative social and ecological impacts of hydro-electric dams.²⁹

The courts heard the arguments and eventually decided to protect the Tirthan from damming. However, it was not the devastating impacts the hydels would have on people's material and spiritual life, the damage to the river ecology, or the hydels' inefficiency that convinced the courts. Instead, they emphasized the proximity of the proposed dams to the GHNP and the potential disruption the hydels could cause to conservation there.

²⁸ Mosse, *The Rule of Water*, 7.

²⁹ McCully, Patrick. *Silenced Rivers: The Ecology and Politics of Large Dams*. (London: Zed Books, 2001) / Hildyard, Nicholas. "Dams Don't Build Themselves." The Corner House (2000) <http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/subject/dams/> ECA-Watch. / "A Trojan Horse of Large Dams: How Export Credit Agencies are Offering New Subsidies for Destructive Projects Under the Guise of Environmental Protection." The Corner House (2005) <http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/subject/dams/>

Dams on the Sainj River; photos courtesy of Adam Payne





In their final decision, the judges wrote:

[the decision was made to uphold the] government of Himachal Pradesh's commitment to preserve and protect Himalayan ecology, environment and respecting the sentiments of local communities, their traditions, values, cultures and to save the serene Tirthan river and above all the trout fish and habitat of the critically endangered Western Tragopan and Cheer pheasant and musk deer and rare bio-diversity

of the Tirthan valley.³⁰

The Tirthan River was saved from damming, but the arguments in which the courts saw legitimacy hold little hope for local movements for sustainability, autonomy and access to traditional sources of food and fuels. Even in the careful language of the courts, livelihoods are not considered important - they were not even mentioned. Nothing in the decision pointed to the relationships between local communities and the rivers or the forests. The legal discourse saw conservation as more important than local economies and livelihoods and, by implication, committed to desolation the rivers and people that do not have a national park around them. The logic that saved the river from privatization reinforced and justified local exclusion from the once common lands of the National Park.

There is an important homology here between the neo-liberal discourses advocating the enclosure of common resources for private profit making, and the conservation idea of enclosing common resources to protect the wilderness from human interference. Both discourses separate people from the world in which they exist and, in so doing, subordinate the considerations of peoples' livelihoods to the more pressing needs of conservation and national development. As such, both interventions establish the conditions for the dispossession of parts of the rural population. For those who rely on the land and the forests as the source of their income and as the prime alimentary resources in times of scarcity, this dispossession can be devastating.

The logics of conservation and privatization constitute nature as an entity separated from the human realm. Furthermore, they divide it into separate zones, which are either reified as conservation space, or open to exploitation in the free market. Conservation programs corner off a section of the land for protection whilst remaining complicit in the exploitation of non-conservation areas. Neo-liberal development devastates certain spaces whilst funding wildlife conservation and the bio-diversity programs in other places. This correlation explains why many nature reserves are supported and funded by companies involved in resource extraction,³¹ and how NHPC can be awarded corporate environmental awards whilst being accused of dumping waste into rivers and abusing local ecologies.³²

³⁰ Legal papers. "Swastik Projects Private Limited and Others vs State of HP and Others and Indian Fish and Wildlife Conservancy and SAHARA." Hearing stated 04/13/2006. (Unpublished papers, 2006).

³¹ Tsing, Anna. "Natural resources and Capitalist Frontiers." In *Contested Grounds: Essays on Nature, Culture, and Power* [ed], Amita Baviskar (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 15.

³² "NHPC Does not Deserve Award for Environmental Excellence". Indian Environmental Portal (2009).

[Http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/files/Environment%20Excellence.pdf](http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/files/Environment%20Excellence.pdf) / National Hydroelectric Project Corporation on Winning Corporate Environmental Award.

Amid the discourses of conservation and privatization, natural resources are constituted as semi-mythical things, positioned between the realms of the sacred and the profane, both subject to romanticization and open to violence. They may be exploited with little justification beyond their potential as capital, whilst at the same time being held as a mythic or sacred entity in the eyes of conservationists. The ambiguous position of a thing that is both detached from the human community enough to be sacred but included enough to be exploited is precisely where 'nature' is located in the discourse of the courts, and, as I go on to argue, in the ideology of green capitalism. It is separated from the people who live with it. Through its detachment from the community it loses its intelligibility and is opened to both enclosure by conservation and exploitation by privatization.

The case of the Tirthan teaches us to be more cautious about drawing clear distinctions between neo-liberalism and conservation in the actions of government. Both neo-liberalism and conservation are powerful lobbies, and the histories of their interaction are complicated. At local levels people have a degree of power in lobbying politicians for access to park resources and transgressing prohibitions on access to the GHNP.³³ However, from the position of the state, reflected in the decisions of the judiciary, the borders between neo-liberalism and conservation are fluid and the two are more complimentary than often imagined. Neo-liberalism and conservation are thus not necessarily problems for government. In many instances the two ideas are useful and productive ways of achieving certain ends. It is to this discussion that I now turn.

GOVERNMENT AND NEO-LIBERALISM

In the fight against the hydels, activists were faced with questions about the relationship between government, hydel companies, the electoral body and the resistance to the construction. Where does the support for hydro-electric dams come from, and how can it be opposed? The dams on the Tirthan were authorized under the 'build-operate-transfer program', a government project to increase the privatization of energy production. This program and the idea of energy privatization are advertised heavily in the towns and villages of Himachal Pradesh. It is no secret that the government goes to great lengths to facilitate the construction of privatized hydro-electric dams.³⁴ Many theoretical advocates of neo-liberalism describe it as an

Accessed at <http://www.nhpcindia.com/English/Scripts/PressRelease.aspx?Vid=154>

³³ Chhatre and Saberwal, *Democratizing Nature* / Baviskar, "States, Communities and Conservation."

³⁴ Government of Himachal Pradesh. *Approach Paper for Eleventh Five Year Plan 2007-2012*. (Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2007).

economic discourse in which the state withdraws to a regulative and administrative position.³⁵ However, the experiences of activists in the Tirthan valley show that this interpretive paradigm is not an empirical truth.

From the position of the activists it is clear that the state occupies a substantial role as the producer and distributor of legitimizing ideas about benefits of neo-liberalism, as the creator and director of legislative authority, and as a force of discipline with which resistance movements must engage. As such it is at the heart of the legal and coercive maneuvers necessary to make neo-liberalism an economic reality and cannot be described as being in a simple 'retreat'.³⁶ The extensive work done to facilitate the construction of dams is indicative of a reformation of governing techniques, rather than a deconstruction of government itself.³⁷

Foucault's notion of 'governmentality' is useful here to engage with how the 'retreat of the state' represents a reformation in techniques of governing rather than a reduction of government itself. Foucault defines governmentality as 'the ensemble of institutions, procedures, analyses [and] tactics that allow the exercise of state power over its populations'³⁸. His argument is that we are currently experiencing a change in sovereign power from the exclusive and repressive control of territory towards methods of discipline and management more immanent to populations. The focus of modern governments is 'life' and its power is based around principles of 'regularization' whereby for most people most of the time, forms of power are normalized rather than repressively enforced³⁹. Foucault sees 'civil society' as the productive site of modern power because it produces desires, needs, goods, individual and collective identities. As such, civil society and the political cannot be held apart as separate realms. Instead, the possibility of thinking of such a separation and the subjectivities produced through its creation are identified as primary sites in the changing discourses of power. I argue that

<http://hpplanning.nic.in/APPROACH%20PAPER%20TO%20ELEVENTH%20FIVE-YEAR%20PLAN%20FOR%20HIMACHAL%20PRADESH.pdf>

³⁵ Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2 / Saad-Filho, Alfredo [ed]. *Anti-capitalism: A Marxist Introduction*. (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 12.

³⁶Sud, Nikita. *The Indian State in a Liberalising Landscape*. Working Paper number 155, (2007) <http://ideas.repec.org/p/qeh/qehwps/qehwps155.html>, 15.

³⁷Ibid / Ong, Aihwa. *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*. (Duke University: Duke University Press, 2007) / Lemke, Thomas. "The Birth of Bio-Politics: Michel Foucault's Lecture at the Collège de France on Neo-Liberal Governmentality." In: *Economy and Society*, vol.30 no.2 (2001): 190-207 / Brown, Wendy. "Neoliberalism and the End of Democracy". *Project Muse*, vol.7 no.1 (2003) http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v007/7.1brown.html

³⁸ Foucault, Michael. "Governmentality." *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* [eds] Graham Burchill, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994): 219

³⁹ Foucault, Michael. *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France 1975-76*. (London: Allen Lane, 2003): 26

Foucault's theory must be further complicated and repressive state interventions are a substantial part of state sovereignty in certain contexts. Nevertheless, the theory is productive in comprehending how neo-liberalism and the state interact in India today.

A good example of neo-liberal governmentality is the separation of electoral politics from market conditions through the processes of privatization. This division allows governments to influence peoples' lives whilst dramatically reducing its accountability for economic changes. The withdrawal or retreat of the state is not an abandonment of government but rather it signifies a partial transfer of the operations of government (to non-state entities).⁴⁰ This is achieved through the creation of methods, such as the privatization of basic services and the internationally sponsored eco-development programs around the GHNP, by which entities of government can be given a degree of autonomy from the state.⁴¹ Some of the regulatory operations of government are 'de-statized' and taken over by a proliferation of 'quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations'.⁴² This is clearly evident in role of companies such as Himurja and GTZ in the Tirthan valley. What is important to take from this theory is the observation that these changes constitute a reformation of governance techniques and a manipulation of the terrain of the state rather than a withdrawal. As Gupta and Ferguson write:

This [the retreat] is not a matter of less government, as the usual ideological formulations would have it. Rather it indicates a new modality of government which works by creating mechanisms that work all by themselves to bring about governmental results through the devolution of risk onto the enterprise or the individual.⁴³

If we are to take full note of their argument then we must extend our thinking away from the idea of territorially sovereign nation-states and expand the discussion of governmentality to discourses of government that are becoming established on a global scale.⁴⁴ This is evidenced again in the international reach of GTZ and the involvement of the World Bank and the World Wildlife Fund in the area around the GHNP. The changing of scales in the discourses of governmentality holds significant implication for the possibilities of resistance to state projects and the international circulation of ideas

⁴⁰ Gupta, Akhil and Ferguson, James. "Spatializing States: Toward an Ethnography of Neoliberal Governmentality." *American Ethnologist*, vol. 29 no.4 (2002): 989.

⁴¹ Barry, Andrew et al. [eds]. *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-liberalism and Rationalities of Government*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 11-12.

⁴² Rose in *ibid*, 56.

⁴³ Gupta and Ferguson, "Spatializing States," 989.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 990.

about both conservation and neo-liberalism.

This discussion points to the observation that governments are constructed entities, which are shaped and made effective by particular symbolic devices and imaginative channels. These devices give states their rationality and direct their interpretations, even as those interpretations contribute to that very construction.⁴⁵ Neo-liberalism and ideas of retreat are changes in the symbolic and social construction of government as much as they are a reformatting of the economy. The expansion of techniques of government and the proliferation of concerns with managing individual life are all parts of the imagination in which the state is conceptualized as ‘dismantling’. But to take full measure of the relationship between government, neo-liberalism and subjecthood we have to investigate the situation of those opposing the state. It is from their perspectives that we can see the role of governmentally-led coercion in the success of neo-liberalism.

Giorgio Agamben locates the violence against certain communities as a fundamental component of the constitution of government. He argues that ‘the inclusion of bare life⁴⁶ into the political realm constitutes the original - if concealed - nucleus of sovereign power’.⁴⁷ His perspective is that political systems are built upon the inclusion of the possibility of excluding certain people from the realm of legitimacy. For Agamben, the ban of certain ways of existing is the primary political relationship. This can be seen in the treatment of those designated as terrorists all around the world: by assigning people to a category, they can be stripped of the rights accorded to citizens. Their lives are reduced to something no longer considered worth safeguarding.⁴⁸

The situation in which certain forms of life can be banned for the political community is described by Agamben as the state of exception. He argues that it is a form of constitutional dictatorship that is becoming a paradigm of governmentality all over the world.⁴⁹ The state of exception is neither inside nor outside ordinary law, but

⁴⁵ Ibid / Taussig, Michael. *The Nervous System*. (New York: Routledge, 1992) / Taussig, Michael. *The Magic of the State*. (London: Routledge, 1997)

⁴⁶ Agamben’s theory of *Homo Sacer* designates people who exist as ‘bare life’. It corresponds to people for whom *zoe* (the living body) has been separated from the socio-cultural aspects of *bios* (forms or ways of living). The *Homo Sacer* are people who have been stripped of their identity and occupy an ambiguous space of detachment from the community who hold *bios*. They become ‘human life...included in the juridical order solely in the form of its exclusion (that is, of its capacity to be killed)’ (Agamben 1998: 15). Their lives are rendered worthless beyond the simple living body; social, political and cultural connections are severed.

⁴⁷ Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer; Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 11.

⁴⁸ Butler, Judith. “Sexual Politics, Torture, and Secular Time.” *The British Journal of Sociology*, 59(1) (2008): 1-23.

⁴⁹ Agamben, Giorgio. *State of Exception*. (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 2005), 2.

rather traces a threshold where ‘inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other’.⁵⁰ Law and the absence of law are two corresponding forms of government that are enacted in the same political system. In this scenario the exception and the juridical system do not stand opposed by definitive boundaries but blur into one another in a state of permeability and mutual constitution. The state of exception signifies the extension of military powers into the civil sphere, and the corresponding suspension of the constitutional norms that protect individual liberties. For those accorded the position of being ‘outside’ the political community, law emerges from events; it does not precede them in a regulatory way.

Agamben’s analysis blurs the distinctions between authoritarianism and democracy by showing how in ‘democratic’ systems it is possible for the state to identify specific communities as threatening and open them to violent repression at the very borders of the legal. The Indian government has created a space for just this by describing many activists as anti-national, left wing extremists, and treating them under the juridical category of ‘terrorist’.⁵¹

People who resist the enclosure of their lands for private projects are subject to state-sponsored violence, legalized by a tradition of repressive anti-terror laws that stem from the colonial legal system.⁵² The most extreme of these was the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), which was passed in 2002 to counter the threats to national security posed by “left-wing extremism” and “Islamic radicalism,” categories of such elusive content and enormous elasticity that they can be stretched to include almost anyone. The POTA defines terrorist activity as:

An activity that questions, disrupts, or attempts to disrupt, whether directly or indirectly, the sovereignty or territorial integrity of India... [or] is intended to bring about or support any claim that questions, disrupts, or attempts to disrupt, whether directly or indirectly, the sovereignty or territorial integrity of India...by any action taken, whether by act or by speech or through any other media or in any manner whatsoever.⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid, 20.

⁵¹ Baviskar, *In the Belly of the River* / Baviskar, Amita. “Written on the Body, Written on the Land: Violence and Environmental Struggles in Central India,” in *Violent Environments*, [eds.] Michael Watts and Nancy Peluso (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001) / Roy, Arundhati. *The Algebra of Infinite Justice*. (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2001) / Roy, Arundhati. *Listening to Grasshoppers: Field Notes on Democracy*. (St Ives: Penguin Books, 2009).

⁵² Kalhan, Anil [ed]. “Colonial Continuities: Human Rights, Terrorism and Security Laws in India.” *Columbia Journal of Asian Law*, 20 (2007)

http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=970503, 96.

⁵³ Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA). Chapter II; order 3(b) (2002).

<http://www.satp.org/satporgrp/countries/india/document/actandordinances/POTA.htm>

In this act, a domain was created which grants exceptional powers to the sovereign by putting people in the category of ‘terrorist’. These powers strip the individual of their rights as a citizen in situations where they slip over into the position of ‘terrorist’. POTA has been used to clamp down on those protesting against the alienation of their land and livelihood rights all over India. Under its auspices, people opposing ‘development projects’ have been convicted as terrorists. The conditions of the act stipulate that they face up to three years of detention, without the right to trial, and their property and assets are seized by the state.⁵⁴ In Jharkhand, for example, 3200 people have been arrested under the POTA on allegations of “Maoism.”⁵⁵

The abuses of POTA became a mobilizing political issue in the 2004 elections and the Congress party won with a mandate to revoke the act. However, after doing so they made immediate changes to the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), which maintained many of the same human rights issues that had emerged under POTA.⁵⁶ The Peoples Union for Democratic Rights declared that ‘UAPA is intended as a surrogate for POTA’.⁵⁷ They argued that it ‘confirms a dangerous trend, whereby extraordinary law becomes a model for remapping ordinary criminal jurisprudence’.⁵⁸

Under civil law, if the government wants to ban a group it has to have its decision ratified within six months by a juridical tribunal headed by a High Court Judge; however, if you are charged with being a ‘terrorist group’ the requirement does not exist.⁵⁹ Under the UAPA it is much easier to ban an organization, which has led the Peoples Union for Democratic Rights to state that ‘there is a danger that any organization taking up democratic rights issues, or any other civil society organization, for that matter, may find itself branded a terrorist gang’.⁶⁰

The anti-terror laws existing in India today police the borders between legitimate and illegitimate exception by determining who belongs to ‘the people’ and who does not.⁶¹ With its anti-terror

⁵⁴ Roy, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice*, 203.

⁵⁵ People’s Union for Civil Liberties. *A Preliminary Fact Finding on POTA Cases in Jharkhand* (2003) <http://www.pucl.org/topias/law/2003/pota-jarkhand.htm>

⁵⁶ Kalhan, Colonial Continuities, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=970503, 153.

⁵⁷ People’s Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR). *Obsessive Pursuit: The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (2004); Reinforcing Draconian Law*. (2004) www.pudr.org/index.php?option=undemocraticlaws12.htm, 18.

⁵⁸ Ibid 18-19

⁵⁹ Siddarth, M. *Anti-Terrorism Laws in India and the Need of POTA*. Legal service India (2003) www.legalserviceindia.com/articles/anti_pota.htm, 14.

⁶⁰ People’s Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR). *Obsessive Pursuit: The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (2004); Reinforcing Draconian Law*. (2004) www.pudr.org/index.php?option=undemocraticlaws12.htm, 17

⁶¹ Singh, U.K. “The Silent Erosion: Anti-Terror Laws and Shifting Contours of

legislation, the state of India has repeatedly sanctified official violence. The desecration of accountability and the consecration of violence implied by POTA and the UAPA have been used to legitimize atrocities on behalf of the government and its institutions. However, the suspension of accountability that the acts imply is not restricted to the domain of the state. Companies in the business of “development projects” have also utilized opportunities to blur the line between violence and law.

The crucial part of this analysis is that the state of exception is a technique of governing that is deliberately created with aims and intentions. It is a direction implemented by government when it can no longer guarantee the empirical ends it desires to attain through the legal system.⁶² It is a conscious and pragmatic decision on behalf of the state, for which the creation of shadowy spaces beyond law is a technique for managing certain groups in a population.

It is the mystery and unnerving potential for violence that contribute to the imaginative construction of the state. As Michael Taussig argues, it is in the government’s interest to keep the memory of public protests, and the cruel violence unleashed against them, alive.⁶³ The strategic use of force on the blurred borders of the legal is employed by the government to rule through the strategic use of the abnormal.⁶⁴

Stories of explicit violence and intimidation from companies managing ‘development’ emerge from the accounts of hydel projects in Himachal Pradesh. In Chamba district, a few hours west of the Tirthan Valley, workers on a project attempting to build hydroelectric dams on the Ravi River went on strike against their treatment by the company. Meetings between the workers representatives, the project co-coordinators, the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation, and its subcontractors, the Hindustan Construction Company, produced no results and the strike dragged on. One night, after a failed meeting, four representatives of the strikers were walking back along the gloomy paths that weave their way along the steep rocky valleys. In the darkness, they were approached by armed men who murdered three of them. The bodies were thrown down the rock face into the river rushing below. The only reason the story became public was that the fourth man escaped, scrambling over the rocks at night.⁶⁵

Following the murders, ten people were arrested and the Inspector-General of Police announced that the sub-contractor had masterminded the killings. He told the media that incidents

Jurisprudence in India.” *Diogenes* 212 (2007): 117.

⁶² Benjamin, Walter. *Reflections*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1986): 287.

⁶³ Taussig, *The Nervous System*, 47.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 47.

⁶⁵ Rajalakhsmi, “In Cold Blood.”

leading up to the murders, the interrogations of the arrested people, and developments after the events provided ‘strong circumstantial evidence against the arrested persons’⁶⁶. No one has yet been charged with the killings⁶⁷.

The threat of law in the normative sense of trial and punishment does not prevent companies from resorting to violence. A whole mass of officials, corruption and extortion grows in the spaces for abuse created by anti-terror legislation and feeds on the terror and indeterminacy. The murky domains are used by companies who know that they can remain unaccountable for violence perpetrated on their behalf. They use terror as a way of controlling workers and suppressing opposition.

REPRESENTATION IN THE STATE OF EXCEPTION

It is with an understanding of the functioning and effects of the state of exception that has been introduced through anti-terror legislation that we can begin to unpack the issues facing resistance to neo-liberal projects in India. To do so it is essential to investigate the effects of the international circulation of images of capitalism, environmentalism and resistance. A reading of Walter Benjamin’s writing on the state of exception opens spaces for discussing the productive effects of representation around the state of exception. He wrote:

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the state of exception in which we live is not the exception by the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight⁶⁸

In this extract Benjamin points to both the reality of the state of exception as a permanent thing in many people’s lives, and to the need for a radically different way of analyzing the events that this reality constantly creates. In the state of exception certain people are exposed to violence beyond the protection of the law. This spilling of violence beyond the borders of law blurs the distinctions between order and disorder, normality and abnormality for the groups of people close to those targeted. In relation to those people this blurring of domains is a technique of governing because it creates a state of durable precariousness. However, many people looking from the outside remain blind to the permanence of the state of exception and the immense tension it contains. In an analysis of Benjamin’s writing, Taussig points out that if we are to take full measure of the

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. (London: Fontana Press, 1973), 248.

state of exception as the rule of our times, then we are compelled to rethink our notions of order, certainly, centers and margins, all of which now appear as 'sieged dream images'. They are the hopelessly hopeful illusions of minds seeking to find ways of escaping the circulation of violence.⁶⁹ A consequence of accepting the state of exception as the rule, and of seeking ways of thinking that are in keeping with this, is that our very means and forms of representation are a part of the 'sieged dream images' that Taussig describes. They are involved in the circulation of the state of exception and they contribute to its power by the subtle work of veiling and supporting areas of investigation. Our ways of thinking and talking are tied into the blurring of violence and law. It is these effects on our forms and means of representation that must be picked apart to understand how the state of exception in India, just as in other places, affects us here and now, and more importantly, how our representations affect it, there.

To understand the workings of our representations we must engage with the ways in which the self-styled 'green' capitalism blossoming all over the world is creating a certain 'ethical logic' of environmentalism and politics for its consumers. By influencing the category of what is a 'legitimate' environmental struggle, this 'ethical logic' haunts those fighting to save their land from those very same companies styling themselves as conscious 'green' businesses. It is here that we, the seemingly disconnected and unaffiliated, can glimpse our position in the state of exception. We have a role in perpetuating the circulation of images of legitimacy, and through the power of such categories, of producing and maintaining the thin walls of a category of struggle that can be spared some of the violence of the state. In the ability of this 'green business' discourse to influence both government and resistance movements in India, we can see the need to extend our discussion of governmentality to modes of governing that are becoming established in international spheres. This corresponds to Gupta and Ferguson's proposal that we 'extend the discussion of governmentality to modes of governing that are being set up on a global scale.'⁷⁰ I have argued that neo-liberalism is one such emerging global discourse, while international environmentalism is another. This is evidenced in the power with which representations of 'legitimate' environmental struggles influence the ways in which states, individuals and organizations are imagined, described and engaged with. Understanding the relationship between local activist movements, the governmentality of nation-states, and the flow of international discourses is crucial. In certain ways, the local can trump the government by reference to

⁶⁹ Taussig, *The Nervous System*, 10.

⁷⁰ Gupta and Ferguson, "Spatializing States," 990.

these discourses of global governmentality,⁷¹ just as the correspondences between governmental and international discourses on issues such as neo-liberalism and conservation can work against activists. It is to these issues that I now turn.

GREEN CAPITALISM AND IDEOLOGY IN THE GLOBAL CIRCUIT

The dams, just like the national park, are not simply a local issue. The money and ideas that create and justify them fly into the valley from all around the world. Ideas spiral around like birds in air streams; for the activists struggling against the dams it was essential to try and understand the international movement of ideas, influences and funding for the hydro-electric projects. GTZ, the German company subsidizing hydro projects in Himachal Pradesh, presents itself as an environmentally responsible company. It describes itself as committed to meeting the growing demand of energy 'without adversely affecting the climate or the environment'.⁷² It is fully committed to business as the vehicle to achieving this and describes their work as 'paving the way for German companies'.⁷³ Writing about its projects in India, GTZ describes its three priority areas as 'sustainable economic development', 'energy' and 'environmental policy', which includes both conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources.⁷⁴

For many consumers in the West and the cities of India, GTZ appears to be an environmentally responsible organization. Its ideology suggests no difficulties or contradictions in the dual aims of economic development and the sustainable use of natural resources. For its customers ecology is being remodeled as the new morality of capitalism. Through this union GTZ proposes that the twin goals of a neo-liberal economy and international ecological responsibility are achievable. However, as the case in the Tirthan valley shows, the reality of such projects is more complicated and contradictory than the pictures painted by the companies suggest. The privatization of natural resources has devastating effects on the livelihoods of the communities who rely on them, and the 'environmental sustainability' described in environmental impact assessments and by planners at the level of policy turns out to be an ecological catastrophe in the places where construction occurs. In the shadows beyond the grand sounds of hydro-electricity as clean and green, there is a biography of damage and disruption that has huge social and ecological

⁷¹ Ibid, 989.

⁷² "Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) Homepage," Accessed at www.gtz.de/en

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

implications.⁷⁵

The 'green' neo-liberalism of companies like GTZ creates a widespread conception of environmentalism as an issue of abstract ecology, rather than a fundamentally political-economic issue of access to resources and autonomy over their use. This creates a massive disjuncture between both the conceptual and physical experiences of those who live in the areas where the hydro-electric dams are being built, and the consumers of the electricity and ideas that companies like GTZ subsidize. This disjuncture makes it difficult for people protesting the destruction that companies cause to their livelihoods and the ecologies they live with to articulate their message to those who consume the products of the companies. Furthermore, the disjuncture becomes incorporated into the rhetoric used by governments to conceptualize and advertise conservation and neo-liberalism.

The 'green' morality of neo-liberalism has saturated the common-sense rationality and imaginative contexts in which many of us live. As Harvey notes, neo-liberalism's constant attempts to depoliticize the economy have been so successful that it is rarely thought of as an ideological or political issue.⁷⁶ The economy has become a normative process, detached from the perceived realm of the political to such an extent that it is no longer considered ideologically marked. Žizek argues that the depoliticized economy is the primary effect of neo-liberal ideology. It is the 'fundamental fantasy' of post-modern politics, which is to say it is the essential but frequently vanishing ground on which the edifice stands.⁷⁷ The idea of the depoliticized economy has the effect of relieving the individual subject of any responsibility in the perpetuation of capitalism, which is itself neutralized as an inevitable canvas of our lives. It is this unproblematic neutralization of certain features of neo-liberalism into a kind of spontaneously accepted background that is the feature of ideology in its purest and most effective form.⁷⁸

The story of GTZ in the Tirthan valley is part of the current attempt by neo-liberal institutions to reconfigure their position in relation to business and ecology. It is a pertinent example because it highlights how the same company can manifest completely divergent ideologies and practices to different communities it is in contact with. The green businesses that are presented as environmentally sensitive to their customers in Europe can have devastating effects in the places they operate. The enclosure of the common property of the

⁷⁵ McCully, *Silenced Rivers* / Hildyard, ECA-Watch, A Trojan Horse of Large Dams.

⁷⁶ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism*, 155.

⁷⁷ Žizek, Slavoj. *The Ticklish Subject*. (London: Verso, 1999), 355.

⁷⁸ Žizek, Slavoj. *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*. (London: Verso, 2009), 88.

river has disastrous effects on people's livelihoods. The separation of the economic from the political is productive of the ethical logic of people who believe it. I now argue that the depoliticized environmentalism produced by neo-liberal rationality comes back to haunt those fighting the enclosure of their land by establishing a typology of legitimate resistance movements into those who are eligible for international support, and hence spared the full brutality of state repression, and those who are not. The repression and delegitimization of more political opposition to the expansion of privatization in the mountains, and the corresponding calls for access to livelihoods, food and fuel are implicitly justified through this narrow space of legitimacy. This dynamic relationship is manifested in the convergence of conservation and privatization in the case of the Tirthan valley but is expandable to struggles over the privatization of resources in many situations. Engaging with this correspondence is essential if we are to comprehend the subtle role that international environmentalist logic plays in enclosure of common resources and the violence that creates.

SPIRALS OF REPRESENTATION: A CURRENCY OF LEGITIMATE RESISTANCE

Amita Baviskar describes how international pressure from Western environmental and human rights groups has created a typology, describing a certain category of environmental resistance movements that can use international eyes as a shield to deflect state violence. She points to how the state of exception as a form of governmentality has affected the ways in which resistance echoes through the halls of India's police stations and occasionally all the way across the oceans to distant ears. She writes:

The 'art of resistance' seem to be more successful if a struggle manages to represent itself as an environmental movement within a framework recognized by certain global audiences. Claims to environmentalism are more likely to be accepted if they fit into the template of 'green politics' developed in the north over the last three decades.⁷⁹

To fit the criteria, a social movement must be able to make a case for its ecological superiority and create genealogies that represent its subjects as 'natural' communities with ecologically virtuous ancestors. It is obliged to be unwaveringly committed to non-violence and electoral processes. It must also convert the fluid identities of its members into primordial (preferably tribal) categories, ironically

⁷⁹ Baviskar, *Written on the Body, Written on the Land*, 356.

resembling the very stream of stereotypes on which their marginalization rides.⁸⁰ Failure to establish such a case for ecological superiority and unified identity undermines a movements claims to environmentalism and allows the state to categorize it as 'Maoist' or 'Left Wing Extremist'. This legitimizes the violence of the state of exception against the group, usually without serious opposition or even comment from international groups.

The relative protection afforded by conforming to the categories recognized by international environmental and human rights groups has the effect of fundamentally depoliticizing environmental struggles. Baviskar gives the example of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), an association established to protect the Narmada River from damming that has grown to be one of India's most internationally famous resistance movements. The NBA has realized the de-politicizing effect their publicity has on their message, and tries constantly to assert itself as a movement about more than just protecting nature in the abstract sense. However, the parts of their rhetoric that criticize the architecture of neo-liberalism and the structural violence that rural communities face are ignored, smothered in transit.⁸¹ The tragedy of the situation is that the category that can protect them from the full extent of state repression and allows their internationalization has the effect of depoliticizing the movement.⁸²

The 'template of green politics' described by Baviskar is one that fetishizes an idea of nature and ecology homologous to that which fuels the enclosure of the commons for conservation. It does not recognize the intimate relationship between environmental and social movements, and the need for a political-economic ideology sensitive to local autonomy over use of resources. The template paradoxically replicates the fundamental slogan of neo-liberal ideology; the economy is not a political issue, just as it adds the environment to the concoction of depoliticized concepts. Through this it creates a discourse where legitimacy resides in 'pure' environmental struggles, revolving around misunderstandings in the most appropriate relationship to nature and completely removed from contentious political issues about the enclosure and exploitation of natural resources for profit. The outcome of the court case about hydro-electric dams on the Tirthan reflects the logic of this depoliticized green politics. The courts saw legitimacy in the potential of the hydro-electric dams to interfere with conservation efforts in

⁸⁰ Ibid, 355.

⁸¹ Ibid, 363.

⁸² See also Guha, Ranajit "The Prose of Counterinsurgency", in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, [eds.], Ramachandra Guha and Gayatri C. Spivak. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

the national park rather than in the destruction of livelihoods and the desolation of the agricultural economy of the area.

This template of green politics is homologous to the discourses of GTZ, and plays a role in mystifying the affects of their practices. By wearing a cloak of environmental consciousness for their customers, they create the impression that green business can be the solution to environmental issues and claim that the problem is not one of a structural violence inherent in neo-liberal practice but an issue of the kind of business doing the work. And people believe it. The idea that ecological issues are separate from social political ones becomes hegemonic, and environmentalism is seen in a narrow perspective. In this way a symptom of the disengagement of the economy from politics floats back to haunt resistance in rural India. Neo-liberal ideology affects the opposition to its manifestations. It restricts those suffering injustices caused by companies from being able to vocalize the essentially political nature of the issues they face, and it obscures the violence legitimated by the government. In subtle but vicious cycles, representation creates reality and de-politicized forms of environmentalism end up reinforcing the root causes of the desolation they endeavor to prevent.

IN CONCLUSION

In this paper I have voiced a few important points that emerged from a series of discussions I had with activists involved in the opposition to hydro-electric dams in the areas surrounding the Great Himalayan National Park. I have explained these relationships both as they were manifested in local spheres, and as they elucidated a series of connections to broader movements in international environmentalist discourse, neo-liberalist ideology and the possibilities for communities to defend lives and livelihoods from privatization and enclosure.

The first point I made was drawn from the relationship between conservation and neo-liberal development that emerged from the issues in the Tirthan valley. Following the perspective of activists, I argue that conservation and neo-liberalism share a fundamental agreement about the exclusion of people from areas of rich natural resources. Both eliminate local people from spheres of authority and seek to wrest the resources upon which their livelihoods depend from their control. Furthermore, both see natural resources as separated from human use and construct resources as either semi-mythic in conservation or open to exploitation as potential capital in neo-liberalism. Through their interaction, conservation and neo-liberalism signify a segmented approach to natural resources that justifies their simultaneous enclosure and

privatization. This argument represents a modification of many accounts that posit a hierarchy of development, conservation, and local livelihoods in the logic of governing. I suggest that a more subtle understanding of this relationship is necessary if we are to engage with the complexities of their interaction and create the understanding necessary to challenge the operation of these logics.

The second point concerns aspects of the relationship between the state and neo-liberalism that became elucidated by the experiences of activists. The relationships between the state and the companies building the dams contradict the majority of theoretical accounts of neo-liberalism which conceptualize it as a situation in which the state withdraws to a regulative and administrative position, leaving people to interact directly with the forces of the market. From the activists' positions it was clear that the Indian state plays an enormous role as the producer and distributor of legitimizing ideas about the benefits of neo-liberalism, as the creator and director of legislative authority, and as a force of coercive discipline with which resistance movements must engage. I argue that by categorizing certain projects as 'development' in the service of the public good, and inscribing activists as anti-national, left wing extremists, the Indian government has created a space for the use of legally sanctioned violence in which opposition to projects can be publicly destroyed. This mobile category of left-wing extremist has been legislatively conflated with the similarly slippery idea of the 'terrorist' and used to justify a state of exception; a quasi-juridical situation in which the coercive power of the law is exercised against certain groups without the safeguards usually accorded to citizens. The potential for violent repression hovers over movements that try to resist the enclosure of land for development and conservation. To understand processes of neo-liberalization we need to engage with the centrality of governmentally legitimized violence to its success.

The third point I have made is that the violence of the state of exception is not local to India but is engaged with, directed and sustained by ideas that flow throughout the world. The processes of damming rivers are funded and supported by international companies that present themselves as ecologically conscious green businesses to customers in the West and the cities of India. For many customers, ecological responsibility has become the new morality of capitalism, and the two are no longer seen as antithetical ideologies. The effect of this movement has been to create an international idea of environmentalism, which tends not to see the environment as a political-economic issue but rather as one of abstract ecology. This conceptual creation comes back to haunt those fighting the enclosure of their land on a political basis by establishing a typology of 'legitimate' resistance. The category of 'legitimate' resistance movements has come to designate those who are eligible for

international support or concern—and hence spared the full brutality of state repression—and those who are not.





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