Female Pleasure and the Gender Politics of "Girliyapa"

Shailendra Kumar Singh

Abstract: In this article, I examine the discursive portrayals of gendered experience and subject positions through Sarjita Jain's "Girliyapa," an online entertainment channel (on YouTube) for female-oriented content in India. I demonstrate how the question of female pleasure that the channel repeatedly foregrounds by way of introducing relatively censored topics of discussion (such as girls buying condoms or articulating their orientation toward same-sex love) is inextricably intertwined with a gender politics that never turns a blind eye to the existing conventions, stereotypes, or structural inequalities that precipitate gender-based violence and discrimination throughout the country. The widespread prevalence of marital rape, color prejudice, and workplace sexism which, in turn, does not allow for a straightforward valorization of girl power is thus satirically interrogated by "Girliyapa."

Keywords: color prejudice, creative pedagogy, India, marital rape, YouTube content, workplace sexism

Introduction

By 2023, India is expected to become a US$5 billion online video economy with more than 650 million Internet users (Laghate et al. 2018). While these numbers are in themselves quite staggering, what is equally extraordinary is the disruptive entry of Indian conglomerate Reliance into the telecom sector through Reliance Jio which has played a pivotal role in revolutionizing Internet access throughout the country (Mukherjee 2019). Besides investing $42 billion in digital infrastructure, Jio "scaled the overall Internet consumption in India by providing low-cost 4G Internet rates along with Jio smartphones" (Mehta 2019: 5551). This aggressive approach has forced other leading telecom operators to reduce data prices substantially, thereby removing the financial stumbling blocks to Internet consumption altogether. As a result, there has been a conspicuous democratization of the way in which digital content is being consumed in India through

Girlhood Studies 14, no. 3 (Winter 2021): 55-71
doi: 10.3167/ghs.2021.140305

ISSN: 1938-8209 (print) 1938-8322 (online)

affordable smartphones that cut across the otherwise glaring divisions of language, class, and region throughout the subcontinent.

This burgeoning viewership is seen as a promising client base for digital content creators who employ social media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook as dynamic outlets in which discourses of the nation, identity, censorship, feminism, and representation are undertaken (Kay 2018). Here, I investigate the issues of female pleasure and gender politics by looking at "Girliyapa," a YouTube channel that creates online content for female consumption in India. Primarily using a female-dominated team of writers, directors, and actors, the channel actively seeks to deconstruct gender stereotypes through quirky and hilarious videos that traverse a fine line between sheer entertainment and creative pedagogy. I argue that "Girliyapa," despite occasionally reiterating the stereotype,[1] still embodies a subversive gender politics that juxtaposes the necessity of female pleasure and entertainment for young girls with an ongoing concern for gender justice and equality.

Girls, "Girliyapa" and Female Pleasure in India

Often perceived as an avoidable subject, the notion of young girls having fun does not find much favor in the average Indian household. Girls are often at the receiving end of familial rebuke if their everyday behavior and mannerisms are considered in any way too forward, daring, or self-indulgent. In many instances, this has resulted in negative interpretations of female pleasure and is simultaneously associated with feelings of guilt, shame, and regret. For example, in a recent study of young women's viewership of pornography in urban India, Ketaki Chowkhani (2016) incisively demonstrates how a deep-seated sense of self-reproach and mortification stems from the fact that if people discovered girls and young women consuming sexually explicit material, they would attribute this to their being single, unmarried, frustrated, or sexually dissatisfied. The impossibility of pleasure without guilt is also evident in the way in which Indian girls and women consider masturbation to be a harmful exercise which causes weakness, disease, infertility, and, in the case of married women, marital disharmony (Sharma and Sharma 1998). As opposed to this, the intimate interactions that often occur between food vendors and young women working night shifts in the call centers of the subcontinent reveal an intersubjective dynamic that ephemerally disrupts societal hierarchies and goes against the grain of historically cherished ideas of modesty and social acceptance

(Parikh 2019). Moreover, in Mumbai, Oh My Hrithik, a project created by five college-going girls, dispels taboos associated with female self-pleasure (Shalkie 2019). In literary representations of post-millennial India, women writers also valorize young and rebellious female subjects with a voracious sexual appetite (Lau 2014). Compared to the Indian literature of previous decades, these subjects are no longer posited as the outsider, the lost, or the depraved to be held up as a moral lesson for all good girls (Lau 2014).

"Girliyapa" seems to proceed and operate from a similar premise. Creating hilarious albeit instructive videos that revolve around themes such as a girl losing her virginity before marriage, confidently buying condoms from a convenience store, or articulating her orientation toward same-sex love thoroughly demystifies the aura of secrecy and exclusion, and the cultural stigma that often surrounds such topics in India. The very fact that two of these videos garnered the greatest number of views for any online content put up by the channel while the third one was made in collaboration with YouTube's "Creators for Change" initiative demonstrates how the "participatory model of pedagogy" that the video-sharing platform offers constitutes "vivid moments of learning-by-doing, learning-as-process, and learning-as-communication within the public sphere of Internet media" (Kellner and Kim 2010: 13). Be it the International Women's Day (March 8), the World's AIDS Day (December 1) or the decriminalization of homosexuality in India on 12 September 2018, "Girliyapa" constantly responds with timely and topical content that seeks to facilitate further dialogue, exchange, understanding, awareness, and sensitivity among young girls and women regarding female pleasure and the need to be completely unapologetic about it. This challenges the otherwise impossible demand for young women in India to be "sexually desirable" as well as "sexually virtuous" (Phadke 2005) in a context in which "urban modernity" offers new prospects of self-expression as well as voicing traditional concerns vis-à-vis "morality" and "Indianness" (Srivastava 2013: 19). In other words, the search for pleasure is never shadowed by the specter of virtue (Srivastava 2013) in the world of "Girliyapa" with its transgressive sexuality, radical consumerism, and endless quest for celebratory self-fulfillment. This aspirational paradigm is unique in many ways since a young Indian women's identity is firmly entrenched in the family and in tradition (Thapan 2001). Even to South Asian girls and women, the individualism and independence so valued in the West appears selfish and irresponsible as Yasmin Hussain (2005) reminds us. It is a significant intervention for female empowerment that foregrounds dissident, cheerful, and fun-loving subjects as a sustain-

able site of emerging pleasures without invoking the judgmental parameters of social propriety.

Marital Rape as a Routine Affair

The neoliberal girl power that "Girliyapa" seems to communicate through its pronounced insistence on female pleasure almost hints at a "postfeminist impasse" that is engendered by the "disparity between the postfeminist promise of personal and professional fulfillment and its lived reality" (McDermott 2017: 51). Cultural theorists such as Rosalind Gill (2007) observe that media constructions of the "empowered female subject" often promote women who are "simply following their own desires to 'feel good'" (153–154). In addition, Sarah Projansky (2007) draws attention to the way in which "[g]irlness—particularly adolescent girlness—epitomizes postfeminism" and how "the postfeminist woman is quintessentially adolescent … no matter what her age" (45). In light of these theoretical postulations, does "Girliyapa's" depiction of individualistic varieties of female pleasure thrive on a convenient logic of populist rhetoric and a depoliticized self? After all, girl power feminism that is rooted in individuality and a politics of choice does not encourage girls to consider the structural forces that contribute to the need for change, the ongoing oppression of girls and women, or the collective nature of social change movements (Zaslow 2009). In the video in which the girl reveals to her mother that she is not a virgin, they make peace without too much fuss or protest. However, most of the comments that viewers posted below this video emphasize how sharing this experience with parents in real life is a different story altogether. Where, then, does one locate the gender politics of "Girliyapa"? One way is to examine those videos in which there is a first-hand engagement with social and political questions that, in turn, have a direct bearing on gender hierarchies and relationships in India.

In a video provocatively titled "How I Raped Your Mother" ("Girliyapa" 2016a),[2] Devika, a newly married young woman vociferously speaks out against her husband who forces her to have daily sexual intercourse with him. To her utter surprise, her natal family remains completely callous, derisive, and nonchalant about this. In their opinion, "marital rape" is just another synonym for "intense lovemaking." They not only belittle and trivialize the questions of will and consent but also support Devika's husband's claim that while he has to wake up every day and go to work,

his wife does nothing other than cooking and cleaning. Arun further justifies his predilection for "intense lovemaking" by revealing how it enhances his sense of manhood (since it allows him to vent all his frustrations and therefore feel loved and powerful). He even argues deviously that because his wife never cares for his approval when preparing his meals, she clearly should not be the one talking about consent. Hearing this, Devika has a change of heart, and she eventually blames herself for being so selfish and narrow-minded. The matter is successfully diffused without further difficulty even as Devika's younger sister, who is about 13 years of age, continues to grapple with the apathetic and indifferent attitude of her family members.

"I'm 13 and I Understand All of This"

The video is intended as a satirical take on the vexed issue of marital rape in India that is perceived as a non-existent issue in society. It employs subversive humor through using the *mise en scène* of a typical sitcom and its various techniques such as exaggerated characterizations and raucous laughter from a live studio audience to demonstrate how the question of consent remains irrelevant in India as far as sexual relationships between spouses is concerned. To begin with, Devika's entire family is completely outraged when she tells them that she is being raped every day. However, the moment they find out that the accused is none other than her own husband, they make a mockery of her complaints and start laughing uncontrollably; one of her uncles even falls off the sofa. There is a constant effort to downplay the gravity of the situation through bathetic diversions and preposterous rejoinders. For instance, when Devika tells her father that Arun forces her to have anal sex with him, the latter's only concern is whether his son-in-law is a homosexual or not! Her uncle, for his part, rebukes her by saying that she must have mistaken "a friendly gesture" as "this new age rape." Condemning the various videos about female empowerment that are available on the Internet, he laments how this has totally spoiled the entire mindset of the present generation. Such satirical performances of gender on YouTube (see Wotanis and McMillan 2014) are especially potent, disruptive, and revolutionary because they do not attempt to find "a point of view outside of constructed identities" (Butler 1990: 187). Instead, they simply "locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions" (188). Parodying the normative perceptions of marital rape that exist in India is also instructive since parody, as Susan Burgess (2011) points out, "seeks to transform its audience's consciousness so that it can no longer view the object of parody in the same way ever again" (130). A cursory look at some

of the viewers' responses will better illustrate this point. Divya Bhargav comments, "It was painful to watch … it was truth hitting hard" while "Pretty Lady" observes how "'Girliyapa' is ahead [by] almost 100 years!" Liza opines, "This is pure dark humor. I'm 13 and I understand all of this," which proves how the video mobilizes idiosyncratic humor to communicate a compelling message to its perceived viewership of girls and young women. Faiza, another girl, comments, "OMG! The legendary moment when the kid [referring to Devika's younger sister] went like 'WAT DA F**K.'" This sentiment was reiterated by Neha, a young girl, who observes, "My thoughts are same [as] the little girl in the video … WTF!!"

India is one of the 36 countries in the world (along with Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, China, several African, and some West Asian countries) that refuse to treat marital rape as a crime (Variety 2019). According to Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code, forced sexual intercourse by a man with his own wife, who is not under 18 years of age, does not count as rape (Scroll Staff 2019). And yet, the most recent National Family Health Survey states that 83 percent of married woman between the ages of 15 and 49 who have ever suffered sexual abuse cite their current husband as the perpetrator (Wangchuk 2018). This "license to rape" (Finkelhor and Yllo 1985: 2) without fear of punitive repercussions only encourages men to use sexual violence as just another predatory strategy to control and dominate their wives (Martin et al. 2007). Moreover, 47 percent of Indian girls who are married even before they turn 18 and almost always with the consent of their parents, often lack the courage to go to the police or court and file a case against their husbands (Hall 2017). This, in effect, renders inconsequential the very question of legal protection that has been promised by the Supreme Court of India to the child brides in the country. This is indeed a glaring issue since India is home to 223 million child brides, out of which 102 million were married before the age of 15 (The Bastion 2020).

In a large part of South Asia, the very ideas of bodily autonomy and reproductive rights are deemed preposterous and hard to swallow (Choudhury 2018). As a result, the question of marital rape is treated with utter flippancy—something that "How I Raped Your Mother" neatly captures. The trauma and psychological aftermath experienced by the helpless victims of marital rape is not only trivialized by society at large, but also augmented by the fact that even family members, friends, and the community contribute to a secondary register of emotional victimization by downplaying the utmost gravity of the situation (Bhat and Ullman 2014). In other words, Devika's plight is further rendered wretched because her mother,

aunts, and maternal grandmother have themselves deeply internalized the crude patriarchal rationalizations of marital rape thereby lacking the fundamental capacity to empathize with a young woman's point of view. By drawing attention to the existing structural inequalities that refuse to criminalize marital rape in India (at one point in the narrative, Devika's uncle frivolously points out the glaring absence of the concept of marital rape in Indian law books), "Girliyapa" thus never presumes to position itself as a shallow postfeminist platform designed for sheer entertainment. Instead, it discursively foregrounds the principal necessity of gender justice and equality that could bring about a desirable change in outlook vis-à-vis girls' and young women's will and consent within the larger framework of marital relationships and the domestic sphere.

The Ugliness of Color Prejudice

Skin color discrimination is one of the most subtle as well as overt forms of bias that often has devastating consequences for the overall self-esteem of young girls and women in society. Jennifer Hochschild and Vesla Weaver (2007) rightly point out how color preference is a "cousin of racial prejudice, and like prejudice it is closely linked with the urge to obtain and maintain powers over others" (646). Although colorism affects attitudes about the self for both men and women, it appears that these effects are stronger for women and girls than for men and boys (Thompson and Keith 2001). As Margaret Hunter (2005) succinctly puts it, "light skin tone is interpreted as beauty, and beauty operates as social capital for women. Women, who possess this form of capital, are able to convert it to economic capital, educational capital, or another form of social capital" (37). In India, the fairness cream industry is worth around $450 million, with Hindustan Unilever's "Fair & Lovely" exclusively occupying more than 50 percent share of the market (Banerji 2016). Widely advertised as "alchemic agents of self-transformation" (Nadeem 2014: 224), skin-lightening creams promise swift, easy, and hassle-free solutions that prey on girls' and young women's deepest doubts, concerns, and inhibitions regarding the acceptability of their facial features and color among friends, family members, and/or various social acquaintances.

In another video by "Girliyapa" (2019a) titled "Unfair and Lovely," the viewer is introduced to Shefali, described as an average Indian girl, who, we are told, has always been dark-skinned since her childhood days. She

is constantly ridiculed by her friends because of her skin tone and is never chosen as the female lead for theatrical performances. Often rebuffed by prospective suitors and blatantly ignored by her parents and even the security guard of her building, she is presented as a lost cause who cannot be redeemed by fairness creams. During one of her job interviews, when the Human Resources Manager tells her that the company is genuinely looking for "fair" people, Shefali upbraids him and points out that it is her talent, intelligence, and skills that will ultimately make a difference to the company's targets. The video concludes by showing that she eventually starts accepting herself for who she is even as the manager mischievously confesses that when he said "fair" he meant honesty not her skin tone. Employing scintillating yet mordant wit, the video categorically debunks the existing myths and illusions on which fairness creams unapologetically thrive. Shehzad Nadeem (2014) rightly points out how through advertising and popular media, corporate giants like Hindustan Unilever regularly produce a dominant fairness motif that equates light skin with beauty, success, and empowerment. According to a 2014 marketing study, almost 90 percent of Indian girls cite skin-lightening as a "high need" (Mishra and Hall 2017). Here, however, skin-lightening creams are subversively parodied as useless, ineffective, and misleading alternatives for a dark complexion, for limited employment opportunities, and for plummeting self-esteem. A counter-narrative of this kind could go a long way in demystifying negative stereotypes about physical appearance and educating public opinion vis-à-vis cosmetic beautification. As Mary Douglas (1982) succinctly puts it, "The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society" (65). Highlighting the inefficacy of fairness creams may thus dissuade young girls and women from taking recourse to fanciful formulas and counter-productive mechanisms that are at best utopian aspirations bound to end up in failure, disappointment, and exasperation.

At a different register, though, the video also critiques the liberating possibilities of girl power that skin-lightening creams meticulously choose to exploit and celebrate. The advertisements encourage viewers to figuratively objectify themselves and to work on their skin—a fundamentally narcissistic appeal that indicates individual rather than social transformation (Nadeem 2014). This pronounced emphasis on personal responsibility and self-determination profits from the idea of girl power that encapsulates the narrative of the successful new girl or young woman who is ambitious, confident, and "self-inventing" (Harris 2004: 17). Fairness, in this context,

simply becomes a matter of choice and is no longer posited as an inaccessible standard of beauty. In other words, these products not only draw on the existing prejudices related to skin tone but also reiterate stereotypes based on notions of difference and distinction. The video also takes a satirical dig at the way in which Hindi movie songs further perpetuate existing color prejudices by incorporating controversial and problematic lyrics that suggest how it is only the fair ones who look good while sporting black shades or that it is only they who can steal away the hearts of men! Here digital space is humorously mobilized as a site of "feminist critique and community building," so that it constitutes a classic example of "doing feminism in the network" through "networked laughter" (Rentschler and Thrift 2015: 329). Shefali's constant struggles with her dwindling self-esteem is symptomatic of a larger crisis that besets girls and young women in South Asia where looks, appearance, and desirability often act as pivotal determinants both in terms of job prospects as well as finding a suitable bridegroom.

In India, the stigmatization of dark-skinned girls and women is so pervasive that the film, modeling, television, and advertising industry remain largely inhospitable to them (Shevde 2008). Other positions for women such as that of a receptionist, news anchor, sales associate, and flight attendant are also considered difficult career choices (Khalid 2013). In Maharashtra, a state spanning west-central India, about 100 so-called tribal girls, who were trained to be flight attendants and cabin crew under a government scholarship program aimed at empowering them, were denied jobs apparently because of their darker skin tone (Khalid 2013). The situation is further compounded by the fact that in countless matrimonial advertisements skin color is one of the most prominent distinctions made while introducing young girls and women to prospective male suitors (Nagar 2018; Vaid 2009). This immediate association of fair skin with attractiveness, desirability, and professional worth and competence has also been buttressed by a number of Bollywood actresses (such as Priyanka Chopra, Deepika Padukone, and Yami Gautam) who are also equally complicit in endorsing these products and perpetuating prejudices, stereotypes, and discrimination based on skin color. Kareena Kapoor, another well-known celebrity of South Asian cinema even described Bipasha Basu, one of her former costars as a "*kaali billi*" (black cat) on account of the latter's dark complexion (Pinkvilla Desk 2019). The pernicious and crippling implications of such actions for young girls in the subcontinent cannot be emphasized enough since Indian celebrities appear to be the dominant body ideals for these girls and young women (Li et al. 2008). Besides, the sale of skin-whitening

products is also problematic because hydroquinone, topical steroids, and toxic mercury found in these products cause cancer, thin skin, and damage to the kidneys and nervous system (Sims and Hirudayaraj 2016).

In communities of color, hierarchy based on skin tone is long-standing and widely, if often silently, acknowledged (Hochschild 2006). Against this frame of reference, Nandita Das, an Indian actress, film-maker, and social activist has vehemently allied herself with "India's Got Colour," a major initiative to end skin color bias in India through instructive workshops, periodic counseling, and media culture. The "Dark is Beautiful" campaign started by Women of Worth (WOW) in Chennai, India, has also become a national forum that allows women and girls to express their values of self-worth and self-love and discourage discrimination against and maltreatment of dark-skinned women and girls (Sims and Hirudayaraj 2016). In this context, the profound disillusionment and skepticism vis-à-vis fairness creams that one finds in "Unfair and Lovely" constitutes a radical statement about the pressing need for total self-acceptance by girls and women, and the predatory logic of numerous beauty products.

Between "Sis Code" and Workplace Sexism

Glass ceilings in India are a major stumbling block that prevent young women from achieving their true potential and contributing more effectively to the overall success and growth of organizational structure and development. Linda Lindsey (2015) argues that sexism is reinforced when "patriarchy and androcentrism combine to perpetuate beliefs that gender roles are biologically determined and therefore unalterable" (3–4). Similarly, Jennifer Berdahl (2007) points out how harassment that is based on sex should be viewed as "behaviour that derogates, demeans or humiliates an individual based on that individual's sex" (641). This is true for girls, of course, as well as for women. Gendered discrimination at the workplace not only precludes women from occupying executive and managerial positions, but also fosters sexual harassment (Bell et al. 2002). The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 is a legislative stipulation in India that seeks to protect women against sexual harassment in the workplace. Sexual harassment of women and girls includes ill-advised acts or behavior (whether directly or by implication), such as physical contact or advances, demand or request for sexual favors, sexually colored remarks, showing pornography, or any other unwelcome physical, verbal, or

non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature. Despite this, 17 percent of women working in urban India have experienced some form of sexual harassment while on the job (Goel 2018). In a 2012 survey of 6000 girls, conducted by students at a south Mumbai college, almost 97 percent were found to be victims of sexual harassment at some point in life (Rao 2012).

In a video by "Girliyapa" (2019b) titled "Sis Code at Work," Divya is shown anxiously preparing for her upcoming presentation. Meanwhile, one of her female colleagues finds it impossibly difficult to use the ladies' washroom because it is not clean enough. Divya quickly comes to her rescue by lending her a toilet seat sanitizer spray. When she finally rehearses for her presentation, Rahul, a male colleague, tries to discourage her by finding unnecessary faults with her work. Seeing the situation spiral out of control, Divya's friend returns the favor by mischievously suggesting Rahul take over. Unfamiliar with Divya's work, and filled with an exaggerated sense of self-assurance, he makes a complete fool of himself in front of the senior manager. Divya's efforts are ultimately acknowledged and appreciated even as the two friends exchange intimate glances with each other. The video is a compelling illustration of how "sister codes" can be an intuitive, practical, and efficient strategy to counter everyday sexism at the workplace. Rahul's clear willingness to deliberately engage in mansplaining is symptomatic of a larger crisis that plagues Indian workplaces in general. This is because a distinct bias toward men over women in the workplace, both in terms of hiring and salaries offered, is seen across blue- and white-collar jobs in India (Jain 2018). According to a recent survey, a staggering 40 percent of India's women engineers do not have jobs because of rampant sexism at the workplace (BI India Bureau 2019). Moreover, workplace bias can itself be reason enough for Indian women to drop out of the workforce (Bahri 2019). In such a scenario, "sister codes" can be an impressive countermeasure from which female employees may benefit immensely. Hemant Shrivastava (2015: 451) points out the way in which the informal sisterhood networks at the workplaces in India constitute a hidden phenomenon where women share their stories and extend mental and moral support to a woman colleague. Such gendered solidarities can go a long way towards promoting a culture of sisterhood, companionship, and emotional intimacy which can, in turn, challenge deeply entrenched sexist attitudes and behavior. The relevance of these videos for girls cannot be emphasized enough because a number of young female viewers relate to them at an affective register. For instance, Ramandeep Kaur comments, "Woaaahhhhhhhh … girls, we need it [sister codes] everywhere." Similarly, another girl, Richa Bhatt, observes, "Girliyapa is always about one girl uplifting another girl, which I really

love" while a third viewer, Anky Anku, opines, "I love these kinds of 'girl love' videos. We need more of these in the world." This affective kinship is also important since, as Deepa Narayan, a sociologist based in Delhi, citing Doshi (2018), persuasively argues, one of the key reasons why sexism in the country gets normalized is because girls are raised in "fear training" so, of course, they become fearful. She further points out how "fault finding, with everyday ordinary things like how a girl combs her hair or how a girl stands or talks, is a strategy intended to dampen confidence" (n.p.). The workplace sexism that we find in the video thus owes its origins to a much larger and therefore more damaging discourse of gender discrimination that kills 239,000 girls in India each year (George 2018).

With a fan base of almost four million, "Girliyapa" is not only taking the lead in advocating the need for girl power and female pleasure through popular culture but is also interested in undermining conservative attitudes vis-à-vis gender relationships in India. Here a depoliticized postfeminist position is never championed as an integral component of neoliberal girl power. Instead, what emerges is a distinctive amalgamation of gender politics and female pleasure. As Sarjita Jain, the channel head of "Girliyapa" succinctly puts it, "While we're essentially into content and comedy, we realised that we have a responsibility towards our audiences … Once in a while, we do something that helps us sleep better at night" (Benu 2019: n.p.). It is this idea of "feminist humor" (Shifman and Lemish 2011: 255) that remains critical of gender inequalities and hegemonic stereotyping that "Girliyapa" seeks to foreground for girls and young women in India. With affordable smartphones and low-cost Internet access being a concrete reality in the country, the channel effectively taps the digital medium as a powerful vehicle for articulating dissident pleasures, promoting critical thinking through biting satire, and forging affective camaraderie and gendered solidarities. It is a unique and radical intervention that can have a major impact on the ways in which ideas of leisure, consumerist modernity, and third-wave feminist politics can be debated, encouraged, and vocalized on social media and digital platforms.

Shailendra Kumar Singh (ORCID: 0000-0002-6848-8108) is a research scholar working in the areas of gender studies, postcolonial literature and South Asian cinema. His articles have been published in *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, *Fat Studies*, and *South Asian Popular Culture*. E-mail: Shailendra.cat09@gmail.com

Acknowledgements

I thank Yuvaan, Aditi, Saumya, Pooja Singh, and Santosh Kumar Singh most sincerely for engaging with the successive versions of this article that is humbly dedicated to my late mother.

Notes

1. There is an inadvertently reductive portrayal of tomboys and an unwitting celebration of lechery in some of the videos. See "Girliyapa" 2016b; 2017b.
2. The name is in part derived from the catchy title of the popular American sitcom, *How I Met Your Mother* that had a successful run on CBS from 2005 to 2014.

References

Bahri, Charu. 2019. "Workplace Bias Can be Reason enough for Indian Women to Drop Out of the Workforce." *India Spend*, 3 February.

Banerji, Ranjavati. 2016. "In the Dark: What is Behind India's Obsession with Skin Whitening?" *The New Statesman*, 28 February.

Bell, Myrtle P., Mary E. Mclaughlin, and Jennifer M. Sequeira. 2002. "Discrimination, Harassment, and the Glass Ceiling: Women Executives as Change Agents." *Journal of Business Ethics* 37 (1): 65–76. http://dx.doi.org/10.1023/A:1014730102063.

Benu, Parvathi. 2019. "Why You Must Watch TVF Girliyapa's Hard-Hitting Video on Human Trafficking." *Edex Live*, 12 August.

Berdahl, Jennifer L. 2007. "Harassment Based on Sex: Protecting Social Status in the Context of Gender Hierarchy." *The Academy of Management Review* 32 (2): 641–658. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2007.24351879.

Bhat, Meghna, and Sarah E. Ullman. 2014. "Examining Marital Violence in India: Review and Recommendations for Future Research and Practice." *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 15 (1): 57–74. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1524838013496331.

BI India Bureau. 2019. "A Whopping 40% of India's Women Engineers Don't Have Jobs Because of 'Rampant' Sexism at Workplace." *Business Insider*, January 11.

Burgess, Susan. 2011. "YouTube on Masculinity and the Founding Fathers: Constitutionalism 2.0." *Political Research Quarterly* 64 (1): 120–131. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1065912909343580?journalCode=prqb.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
Choudhury, Sumedha. 2018. "Why is Outlawing Marital Rape Still a Distant Dream in India?" *The Wire*, 28 October.
Chowkhani, Ketaki. 2016. "Pleasure, Bodies, and Risk: Women's Viewership of Pornography in Urban India." *Porn Studies* 3 (4): 443–452. https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2016.1147374.
Doshi, Vidhi. 2018. "Why India's Modern Women Say it's a 'Burden' to be Female." *The Washington Post*, 12 March.
Douglas, Mary. 1982. *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*. New York, NY: Pantheon.
Down to Earth Staff. 2018. "India Witnesses One of the Highest Female Infanticide Incidents in the World: Study." *Down to Earth*, 19 September.
Finkelhor, David, and Kersti Yllo. 1985. *License to Rape: Sexual Abuse of Wives*. New York: The Free Press.
George, Steve. 2018. "Gender Discrimination Kills 239,000 Girls in India Each Year, Study Finds." *CNN*, 15 May.
Gill, Rosalind. 2007. "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10 (2): 147–166. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1367549407075898.
"Girliyapa." 2016a. "How I Raped Your Mother." Video, 13:03. Uploaded 15 May.
"Girliyapa." 2016b. "Why Should Hot Girls Have All the Fun?" Video, 04:52. Uploaded 18 March.
"Girliyapa." 2017a. "Mom, I'm Not a Virgin." Video, 05:24. Uploaded 6 March.
"Girliyapa." 2017b. "Why Girls Get Brozoned." Video, 06:20. Uploaded 28 April.
"Girliyapa." 2019a. "Unfair and Lovely." Video, 05:32. Uploaded 17 January.
"Girliyapa." 2019b. "Sis Code at Work." Video, 10:16. Uploaded 27 July.
Goel, Sangeeta. 2018. "Third Generation Sexism in Workplaces: Evidence from India." *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 24 (3): 368–387. https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2018.1496616.
Hall, Sara. 2017. "Marital Rape for Girls 18 and Younger Becomes Illegal in India." *New York Minute Mag*, 18 October.
Harris, Anita. 2004. *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century*. New York, NY: Routledge.
Hochschild, Jennifer L. 2006. "When Do People Not Protest Unfairness? The Case of Skin Color Discrimination." *Social Research* 73 (2): 473–498. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/527465/pdf
Hochschild, Jennifer L., and Vesla Weaver. 2007. "The Skin Color Paradox and the American Racial Order." *Social Forces* 86 (2): 643–670. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/86.2.643.

Hunter, Margaret L. 2005. *Race, Gender, and the Politics of Skin Tone*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hussain, Yasmin. 2005. *Writing Diaspora: South Asian Women, Culture, and Ethnicity*. Hampshire: Ashgate.

Indo-Asian News Service. 2018. "Gender Bias Kills Over 200,000 Girls in India Each Year." *India Today*, 15 May.

Jain, Dipti. 2018. "Indian Companies often Prefer Men over Women in Hiring: World Bank Study." *Live Mint*, 30 March.

Kay, Kavyta. 2018. *New Indian Nuttahs: Comedy and Cultural Critique in Millennial India*. London: Palgrave.

Kellner, Douglas, and Gooyong Kim. 2010. "YouTube, Critical Pedagogy, and Media Activism." *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 32 (1): 3–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/10714410903482658.

Khalid, Saif. 2013. "Fighting India's Ugly Fancy for Fair Skin." *Al Jazeera*, 2 October.

Laghate, Gaurav. 2018. "Indian OTT Market Has a Potential to Reach $5Bn by 2023: BCG." *The Economic Times*, 20 November.

Lau, Lisa. 2014. "No Longer Good Girls: Sexual Transgression in Indian Women's Writings." *Gender, Place and Culture* 21 (3): 279–296. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2013.791252.

Li, Eric P. H., Hyun Jeong Min, Russell W. Belk, Junko Kimura, and Shalini Bahl. 2008. "Skin Lightening and Beauty in Four Asian Cultures." *Advances in Consumer Research* 35: 444–449. http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/13415/volumes/v35/NA-35.

Lindsey, Linda L. 2015. *Gender Roles: A Sociological Perspective*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Mandal, Saptarshi. 2014. "The Impossibility of Marital Rape: Contestations Around Marriage, Sex, Violence and the Law in Contemporary India." *Australian Feminist Studies* 29 (81): 255–272. https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2014.958124.

Martin, Elaine K., Casey T. Taft, and Patricia A. Resick. 2007. "A Review of Marital Rape." *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 12 (3): 329–347. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2006.10.003.

McDermott, Catherine. 2017. "Genres of Impasse: Postfeminism as a Relation of Cruel Optimism in *Girls*." In *Reading Lena Dunham's Girls: Feminism, Postfeminism, Authenticity and Gendered Performance in Contemporary Television*, ed. Meredith Nash and Imelda Whelehan, 45–59. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mehta, Smith. 2019. "Precarity and New Media: Through the Lens of Indian Creators." *International Journal of Communication* 13: 5548–5567. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/12577.

Mishra, Neha, and Ronald Hall. 2017. "Bleached Girls: India and Its Love for Light Skin." *The Conversation*, 21 July.
Mukherjee, Rahul. 2019. "Jio Sparks Disruption 2.0: Infrastructural Imaginaries and Platform Ecosystems in 'Digital India.'" *Media, Culture & Society* 41 (2): 175–195. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0163443718818383.
Nadeem, Shehzad. 2014. "Fair and Anxious: On Mimicry and Skin-Lightening in India." *Social Identities* 20 (2–3): 224–238. https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2014.881282.
Nagar, Itisha. 2018. "The Unfair Selection: A Study on Skin-Color Bias in Arranged Indian Marriages." *Sage Open* 8 (2): 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018773149.
Parikh, Aparna. 2019. "Liminality of Women's Leisure in Mumbai, India." *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*. https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654419859358.
Phadke, Shilpa. 2005. "Some Notes Towards Understanding the Construction of Middle-Class Urban Women's Sexuality in India." In *Sexuality, Gender and Rights: Exploring Theory and Practice in South and Southeast Asia*, ed. Geetanjali Misra and Radhika Chandiramani, 67–81. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
Pinkvilla Desk. 2019. "Kareena Kapoor Khan May Not Work with These Celebrities in Bollywood." *Pinkvilla*, 16 April.
Projansky, Sarah. 2007. "Mass Magazine Cover Girls: Some Reflections on Postfeminist Girls and Postfeminism's Daughters." In *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, ed. Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker, 40–72. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
Rao, Yogita. 2012. "97% Girls Sexually Harassed: Survey." *The Times of India*, 6 September.
Rentschler, Carrie A., and Samantha C. Thrift. 2015. "Doing Feminism in the Network: Networked Laughter and the 'Binders Full of Women' Meme." *Feminist Theory* 16 (3): 329–359. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1464700115604136.
Scroll Staff. 2019. "Former CJI [Chief Justice of India] Dipak Misra Says Marital Rape Should Not Be a Crime in India." *Scroll*, 9 April.
Shalkie. 2019. "Girls Just Want to Have Fun." *The Asian Age*, 15 July.
Sharma, Vinit, and Anuragini Sharma. 1998. "The Guilt and Pleasure of Masturbation: A Study of College Girls in Gujarat, India." *Sexual and Marital Therapy* 13 (1): 63–70. https://doi.org/10.1080/02674659808406544.
Shevde, Natasha. 2008. "All's Fair in Love and Cream: A Cultural Case Study of Fair & Lovely in India." *Advertising & Society* 9 (2): 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1353/asr.0.0003.
Shifman, Limor, and Dafna Lemish. 2011. "'Mars and Venus' in Virtual Space: Post-Feminist Humor and the Internet." *Critical Studies in Media*

Communication 28 (3): 253–273. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15295036.2010.522589.

Shrivastava, Hemant. 2015. "Harassment at the Workplace, Powerlessness and Identity: Experiences of Women Civil Servants in India." *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 22 (3): 437–457. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0971521515594280.

Sims, Cynthia, and Malar Hirudayaraj. 2016. "The Impact of Colorism on the Career Aspirations and Career Opportunities of Women in India." *Advances in Developing Human Resources* 18 (1): 38–53. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1523422315616339.

Srivastava, Sanjay. 2013. "Introduction." In *Sexuality Studies*, ed. Sanjay Srivastava, 1–23. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Thapan, Meenakshi. 2001. "Adolescence, Embodiment and Gender Identity in Contemporary India: Elite Women in a Changing Society." *Women's Studies International Forum* 24 (3–4): 359–371. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-5395(01)00181-9.

The Bastion. 2020. "Bride and Prejudice: The Fight for Eradicating Child Marriage in Delhi's Schools." *Feminism in India*, 3 March.

Thompson, Maxine S., and Verna M. Keith. 2001. "The Blacker the Berry: Gender, Skin Tone, Self-Esteem, and Self-Efficacy." *Gender & Society* 15 (3): 336–357. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F089124301015003002.

Vaid, Jyotsna. 2009. "Fair Enough? Color and the Commodification of the Self in Indian Matrimonials." In *Shades of Difference: Why Skin Color Matters*, ed. Evelyn Nakano Glenn, 148–165. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Variety. 2019. "Do You Think Marital Rape isn't a Crime? Here are Five Reasons Why You are Wrong." *DailyO*, 7 February.

Wangchuk, Rinchen Norbu. 2018. "Survey Takes Veil off Marital Rape in India: It's Time We Had a Serious Discussion." *The Better India*, 16 March.

Wotanis, Lindsey, and Laurie McMillan. 2014. "Performing Gender on YouTube: How Jenna Marbles Negotiates a Hostile Online Environment." *Feminist Media Studies* 14 (6): 912–928. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14680777.2014.882373.

Zaslow, Emilie. 2009. *Feminism, Inc.: Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.