

**RECASTING MEN: BHADRALOK MASCULINITIES AND THE  
GENDERED VOICE IN BANGLA NEWSPAPERS SINCE 1947**

**SYNOPSIS**

Thesis Submitted for the Award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts  
at Jadavpur University, Kolkata

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2019

## Research Problems and Queries:

The aim of this dissertation is to explore the performative construction of bhadralok masculinities through journalistic representations in the immediate post-independence and post-liberalisation period in Bengal. It is common to believe that masculinities are an aspect that is hardly problematic. Particularly, heterosexual masculinity is so exceedingly dominant, ordinary and normative, that it often remains beyond critical questioning, even within the academic sphere. While feminism has been the driving force behind exploration of gender issues, historically feminism too has invested its incipient enthusiasm in the issues and debates related to women and femininity. Sexual diversity studies, since the late 1970s, was more focused on critical analysis of homosexuality and the formation of sexual and gender minorities than to heterosexuality.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, for a long period, heterosexual masculinities evaded serious scholarly attention and were mainly used as a reference point for other related studies on gender. Masculinity, as Michael Kimmel explains, assumes the ordinariness of the unspoken norm—not demanding observations or explanations. Its inconspicuousness accredits its prerogative.<sup>2</sup>

Often masculinity, in popular terms turns out to be perceptible in terms of what it contradicts. In other words, in popular conception, masculinity is understood in contrast with what it excludes - the feminine.<sup>3</sup> Public discourse and especially the media, which also invest in the formation of hegemonic categories, shape these popular imaginings. Hence, the idea of hegemonic masculinity emerges as a key concept for understanding gendered categories. R.W. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the

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<sup>1</sup> Radhika Chopra, Chaitali Dasgupta and Mandeep K Janeja, “Understanding masculinity,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 35 no.19 (2017): 1607.

<sup>2</sup> Michael S. Kimmel, “Invisible masculinity,” *Society* 30 no.6 (1993): 28-35.

<sup>3</sup> This may translate into a broader fear of the feminine among men, which results in the social stigma of effeminacy. On another level, such fear may function behind the widespread aversion to intimacy or emotional commitment.

dominant position of men and the subordination of women.”<sup>4</sup> Her formulation is useful for drawing attention to the plural nature of masculinities. Importantly, when an individual is declaring that a particular practice or behaviour is “manly”, he/she is not only making an assumption in line with shared hegemonic beliefs and social norms they are also drawing from and investing into a set of established meanings of the word “manly” in the language they communicate and the culture they identify with. That is to say, language and cultural specificity has a symbiotic relation with expressions and representations of masculinities.

Hence, the issue of representation becomes crucial in this context. Particularly, journalistic representation as public representations is pivotal for identity politics. As the identities are constructed within representations, not outside them it follows that the representations themselves have become a site and an object of struggle in negotiating and contesting identity.<sup>5</sup> In other words, a struggle for identity entails a struggle for the very articulation of that identity. Thus, representations do play a constitutive role, not merely a reflexive or after-the-event one. I look at journalism not merely as a profession or a constitutionally privileged function, but as a textual system and as one of the significant practices in our 'cultural circuit'. As a textual system journalism is characterized by its intention to 'count as true' and its ability to construct its 'readers as publics' within the field of cultural production.<sup>6</sup>

The problem of journalistic writings like ethnographic writings is that it is overdetermined by forces ultimately beyond the control of either an author or an interpretive community. As Anirban Das explains, “To think of how histories of literatures are written does entail a thinking of how histories are written, how literatures are written, and how the acts of writing operate. When all these are thought of in conjunction with the nation and its ideology in a specific setting . . . the task

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<sup>4</sup> Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 77.

<sup>5</sup> Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. J. Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 222–37.

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The field of cultural production: Essays on art and literature* (Columbia University Press, 1993), 115.

becomes vertiginously difficult.”<sup>7</sup> In a similar manner, to think of the representation of Bengali masculinities will involve a thinking of how histories of a cultural-linguistic and gender identities are written, how a specific genre of writing that stands in opposition to ‘fiction’ operates, and how the acts of writing operate, especially within a shifting ideological matrix. To carry out this task, as I have mentioned earlier, this dissertation is located at the crossroads of critical masculinities studies and studies on journalistic representation.

## **Main arguments**

Let me now explain the main arguments of this study. Drawing from Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe,<sup>8</sup> I conceive the journalistic articulation as a practice that establishes the relation among elements, where the articulation has a mutually constitutive role. The “structured totality” which emerges from the journalistic articulatory practice is conceived as discourse and the “differential positions, insofar as they appear articulated within a discourse” are termed moments. For Laclau and Mouffe discourse was not merely “a representation of pre-existing social and historical realities, but was also constitutive of the field of the social and of history.”<sup>9</sup> In this dissertation, I focus on two such moments in Bengal.<sup>10</sup> First is the immediate post-independence period, marked by uncertainties, economic crisis, political turmoil and popular protests; second is the post-liberalisation or neoliberal period, marked by values of the new economic policies, circulating the narratives of the “new”, liberalized India and the wide-ranging issue of the cultural transformation, which has reshaped subjectivity of the contemporary Bengali men. The purpose behind identifying these particular moments is to underline

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<sup>7</sup> Anirban Das, “Sexual Difference in Literary Historiography: Writing the Nation in “My Life,” (paper presented at *Nationalist Ideology and the Historiography of Literature in South Asia* Conference, Halle University, Germany, 21-24 September, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics* (Verso Trade, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Judith Butler, *“Excitable speech”: A politics of the performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997),13.

<sup>10</sup> The idea of the moment is useful in relation to speech act as well. It is at the *moment* of the utterance that the illocutionary speech act performs its deed. Although this particular moment is ritualized but “the “moment” in ritual is a condensed historicity: it exceeds itself in past and future directions, an effect of prior and future invocations that constitute and escape the instance of utterance” (Butler, 1997, p.3).

their differential positions, within the discourse of bhadralok masculinities. The objective is to locate the utterances and inscriptions of performative bhadralok masculinities in journalistic writings during these formative moments.

Within this framework, let me state the outline of my arguments. The dissertation addresses three interconnected questions: Firstly, if we consider bhadralok masculinities as performative, then can we identify different forms of iteration inside a general iterability of bhadralok in response to particular historical moments? Second, how bhadralok masculinities accommodate conflicting inscriptions that act as constitutive contingencies for the normative, regulatory utterances of their performative masculinities? And finally, within neoliberal imperatives, how do we comprehend the changing configuration of gender practices that open up categories like the “national”, the “global” and even the “masculine” as empty signifiers, invested with the phantasmatic promise? These inquiries in turn relate to the broader question: What is the specificity of the journalistic articulatory practices and in what way journalistic articulatory practices invest in the discourse of bhadralok masculinities in a specific historical, political moment? Hence, broadly, this dissertation is posited at the intersection of two fields: critical masculinities studies and studies on journalistic representation.

Let me offer a brief explanation of the title of this dissertation, which is unmistakably borrowed from the seminal book *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History* (1999), edited by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid. I have chosen the title not only because it was one of the most influential introductory texts that I encountered during my initiation in Women’s Studies, but also because the approach and motivation behind the edited collection of essays, are similar to my own approach. *Recasting Women*, argued in favour of a feminist historiography which “rethinks historiography as a whole and discards the idea of women as something to be framed by a context, in order to be able to think of gender difference as both structuring and structured by the wide set of social relations.”<sup>11</sup> Hence, the project appears to be a feminist historiography, without

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<sup>11</sup> Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, eds., *Recasting women: Essays in Indian colonial history* (Rutgers University Press, 1990), 3.

being exclusively women's history and it is a choice open to all. "Gender", writes Janaki Nair in her review of the book, "is here developed as an analytical category, and the difficulties of archival silences are overcome in the extensive use of discourse analysis, which enables tracing the constitution and re-constitution of patriarchies."<sup>12</sup> It is pertinent to remember the quote from "On the education of Hindu Females" (1846) by Koylaschander Bose printed as the epigraph of the book, "She must be refined, reorganized, recast, regenerated . . ." Is it not also equally relevant to the figure of the bhadralok? Is he not also being refined, reorganized, recast, and regenerated in response to shifting political, economic and socio-cultural conditions in post-independence and later post-liberalization periods? In this dissertation, I address some of these questions, but before I discuss the main arguments of the study, a brief overview of the historical development of journalism in Bengal is in order.

### **Research Methodology:**

A brief note on the methodology employed in this dissertation is in order. The discursive turn in social science and humanities research has drawn attention to the significance of language and discourse and its crucial relation with power and ideology. Within the poststructural approach, discursive sites are conceived as sites of struggles, entailing various socio-political, economic and cultural forces. Unpacking the discursive constructions through a feminist lens may open up these sites with additional gendered enunciations.<sup>13</sup>

In this research, I engage with close reading of Bangla newspaper texts. Textual analysis as qualitative method is characterised by close reading of texts that allows an "immersion in the materials" offering an intimacy with the text to underline patterns,

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<sup>12</sup> Janaki Nair, "Reconstructing and reinterpreting the history of women in India," *Journal of Women's History*, 3 no.1 (1991): 132.

<sup>13</sup> Michelle M. Lazar, "Feminist critical discourse analysis: Articulating a feminist discourse praxis," *Critical Discourse Studies* 4, no. 2 (2007): 142.

relations, and ideological meanings that may not be apparent in the corpus independently.<sup>14</sup>

This dissertation uses feminist critical discourse analysis as a research method, couched in the form of poststructural discourse analysis that is informed by the Foucauldian notion of discourse. Feminist critical discourse analysis “aims to advance a rich and nuanced understanding of the complex workings of power and ideology in discourse in sustaining (hierarchically) gendered social arrangements. This is all the more pertinent in present times, when issues of gender, power, and ideology have become increasingly more complex and subtle.”<sup>15</sup> The primary distinction between the traditional discourse analysis and the Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis is that often the former refers to conventional linguistic attributes, while the later focuses on institutionalized patterns of knowledge, which emerges in disciplinary structures and functions through the relation of power/ knowledge. Hence, as I engage in questioning the truth-claim of journalism and the hegemonic notion of masculinity, such approach is useful to remind us that the discourse analysis is “always interpretive, always contingent, always a version or a reading from some theoretical, epistemological or ethical standpoint.”<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, working with archival material has always been the most demanding task. While access and the condition of the materials are always a challenge, a more pressing concern is the decision of inclusion and exclusion of the materials that I am engaging with. “Nothing is less reliable, nothing is less clear today than the word “archive”, Derrida pointed out in his seminal essay, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*.<sup>17</sup> In the context of this dissertation, out of all possible materials that I could include I had to decide on a few. Then how do I come to an unambiguous judgment about the inclusion and exclusion of the newspapers? The act of including one and refusing to include the other will always entail a violence of exclusion, of forgetting. The

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<sup>14</sup> Elfriede Fürsich, “In defence of textual analysis: Restoring a challenged method for journalism and media studies,” *Journalism studies* 10 no.2 (2009): 238-252.

<sup>15</sup> Lazar, “Feminist critical discourse analysis”, 141.

<sup>16</sup> Margaret Wetherell, “Debates in discourse research,” in *Discourse theory and practice: A reader*, eds. Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor and Simeon J Yates (London: Sage, 2001), 393.

<sup>17</sup> Derrida, Jacques, and Eric Prenowitz. “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression.” *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (1995), 57.

interpretation of the discursive structure will certainly modify with significant change in the structure of the archive, and therefore, the justification of the inclusions will always be unstable. But then, the question can be rephrased as can there ever be a point in archival research at which the researcher can be certain of all possible inclusions. Isn't an archive always incomplete? "The objectivity of the historian, of the archivist, of the sociologist, of the philologist," Derrida argues, "the reference to stable themes and concepts, the relative exteriority in relation to the object, particularly in relation to an archive determined as already given, in the past or in any case only incomplete, determinable and thus terminable in a future itself determinable as future present. . ."<sup>18</sup>

In a similar way, the archive can be considered as a "system of discursivity", which "differentiates discourses in their multiple existence and specifies them in their own duration". Therefore, it does not claim to unify "everything that has been said in the great confused murmur of a discourse".<sup>19</sup> This research is thus informed by Foucault's idea of the archive, as the archive cannot be described in its totality; it emerges in fragments, regions, and levels. "It is not possible for us to describe our own archive, since it is from within these rules that we speak, since it is that which gives to what we can say – and to itself, the object of our discourse – its modes of appearance, its forms of existence and coexistence, its system of accumulation, historicity, and disappearance."

<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Derrida reminds us that "the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event".<sup>21</sup> My experience of the difference in the technical structures of archiving different newspapers, perhaps also produced and determined my interpretation of the newspaper texts. With that concise elucidation, I now deal briefly with the chapters in this dissertation.

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<sup>18</sup> Derrida, Jacques, and Eric Prenowitz. "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression." *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (1995), 36.

<sup>19</sup> Foucault, Michel. "The archaeology of knowledge (translated by AM Sheridan Smith) London: Tavistock." (1972), 145-147.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 146.147.

<sup>21</sup> Derrida, Jacques, and Eric Prenowitz. "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression." *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (1995), 17.



## Chapter 1: Mapping Bhadrakok masculinities: Theoretical Framework

The first chapter particularly focuses on the notion of masculinities. My argument regarding the figure of the bhadrakok is contingent upon my specific position of understanding the notion of masculinities. I perceive masculinities, first, as a historically contingent social and cultural construct; second, a hegemonic construct; third, a plural construct (masculinities); and finally and more importantly as a performative identity. This chapter with reference to the historicity of the social and cultural identity category of the bhadrakok begins with an attempt to understand the illusory concept of the bhadrakok and the continuously shifting identification with the term. Thus, the Bengali man is on the one hand an ethnic-linguistic identity; on the other hand, he also bears the national identity. Here, the figure of the bhadrakok embodies this “double narrative movement”, which can be neither monologic nor resolved. However, while the notion of national identity wields the hegemonic influence, ethnic identity becomes subordinated; and as a corollary, Bengali masculinity becomes subordinated to Indian *national masculine*. To put it in elementary terms, *national masculine*, is a form of hegemonic masculinity that is contingent upon a phantasmatic promise of “being masculine” and the empty political signifier, “nation”.

Referring to the colonial discourse regarding the masculinity of the Bengali men, I point out that since the late nineteenth century, the discourse moved in three distinct trajectories. (i) a manner of self ridicule and self-irony, primarily embodied in the writings of Madhusudan Dutta, Kaliprasanna Sinha, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and others, (ii) a mode of mythic-historical discourse about reclaiming the supposedly more masculine past, and (iii) a discourse cantered on urban middle class bhadrakok, who seek out a more ambivalent masculine self that is beyond the gender-binaries and forms a more subversive, flexible masculinity. My point is that parallel to the discourse of Bengali male being effete, it is important to acknowledge that another crucial discourse on the “compensatory” agency of such effete masculinity was also being articulated. Thus giving the Bengali masculinity a unique shape, and in the process forming an idea of compensatory masculinity. The fundamental compensatory agency for the Bengali male’s masculinity was centred on the notion of “*buddhibal*” in contrast with “*bahubal*”.

Thus, the performatively constituted postcolonial middleclass Bengali masculinity, with its paternalistic, prohibitive “acts” along with a “promise” of hegemonic ‘modern’ *national masculine*, is irreducible to any historical certainty and settled nature. It does comprise traces of contradictory and irreconcilable “narratives of identity” that intercede with notions of gender, ethnicity, nationality and history.

The chapter concludes, with a reading of Derrida’s article, “Signature, Event, Context”<sup>22</sup> to look particularly at journalistic writing as a performative utterance. Such a reading reveals the structural similarities between gender and journalism. First, journalism through its formal, textual strategies attempts to wipe out the factual and other incongruencies for the sake of a linear, causal, truthful narrative, which reminds us of the performance of gender as a strategy. Second, journalism like gender pose a naturalness in terms of its truth-effect, its believability, its consistency, concealing the possibilities of disruptions, ruptures and incongruity. Therefore, the performative outcome of both journalism and gender, as I would argue in the course of this study, remains essentially phantasmatic, impossible to embody.

## **Chapter 2: Outlining the Idea of Journalistic Truth Claim**

The second chapter engages with the elementary aspect of identifying the key differences between journalistic representation and other kinds of representations. The chapter argues that if the “truth claim” or truth effect is what sets apart journalism from other kinds of representations then we must ask ourselves what processes ultimately mediate or produce these truth effects? With reference to a number of texts and theoretical trajectories, this chapter seeks to understand the framework of modern journalism, which is supposed to produce truth effect.

The first section dealing with the production of news, locates the truth claim of journalism within a particular historicity of journalistic practice. This brings us to the question, what aspects underline the persuasive power of journalism that compels us to consider a representation of event as true? To understand this, I argue, it might be

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<sup>22</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988).

useful to look at journalism as a performative discourse instead of approaching journalism as a descriptive discourse. The performative force of journalism does not come from the content, rather from its established ritualized form. While the content can be varied, the form remains the congealed effect of sedimented iterative norms and refers to broader cultural discourses as well as conventional and commonly used news conventions and practices. Similarly, the idea of objectivity, the cardinal principle of journalism, which provides a ritual confirmation of the professional practice, also functions as performative. Belief in journalistic objectivity, I suggest, drawing from Žižek,<sup>23</sup> works similar to this displaced belief system of religion. Objectivity as a displaced belief is supposed to have an ultimate guarantor of it, however this guarantor is always deferred, displaced, absent. Because of this structural absence, belief in the objectivity, similar to any knowledge production that has a truth claim, functions fundamentally “through another”.

The chapter also points out that often the journalists and editors conflate journalistic ideology with the idea of professionalism. This conflation makes it evident that the idea of agency of the journalist is always already implicated within the scaffold of professionalism. The term dominant ideology is used here not in terms of a struggle, but as an assemblage of values, approaches and formal methods typifying professional journalism and widely shared by the journalists.

The second section of the chapter focuses on the reception of news. This section explores the cultural system of news drawing from a number of theoretical approaches to make sense of the connection between deeply layered practices of journalism, the idea of common sense and truth-effect. Clifford Geertz sees common sense as a cultural system, a form of knowledge, a historically constructed and historically defined standards of judgment.<sup>24</sup> Here the category of the experience becomes crucial. While

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<sup>23</sup> Slavoj Žižek, "The Interpassive Subject: Lacan turns a prayer wheel," *Slavoj Žižek, How to Read Lacan*, April 8, 2009, <http://www.lacan.com/zizprayer.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Clifford Geertz, "Common Sense as Cultural System," in *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 73–93.

the experience as a work of re-presentation remains structurally undecidable,<sup>25</sup> journalism as a structure of writing seeks to impose a forced decidability on this plurality of experiences. As it emerges, journalistic writing assumes a teleological approach. It seems to offer definitive answers and fixed interpretations in a common sense approach to even complex political, social, economic and cultural conditions. The idea of commonsense and the influence it yields can be explored through the notion of the “image of thought”. Gilles Deleuze conceptualizes the image of thought to describe what comes before thinking.<sup>26</sup> This subjective presupposition is couched within the faith in “everyone knows”, which means that the understanding is available in a pre-conceptual manner. The general framework of representation is contingent upon such commonsensical assumptions. Journalistic writing, I propose, invests in the image of thought that is grounded in common sense. This is not to say that all journalistic writing is commonsensical and devoid of any critical engagement. Rather the point is that the very structure and practices of journalistic writing has a mutually constitutive relation with the image of thought. Hence, the inherent truth claim of journalism is also dependent on its grounding in common sense.

Now, the question proper to such an analysis might be formulated in this way: what is the specificity of truth in journalistic writing? To address this question, the concluding section of this chapter argues that the truth claim in journalism is affectively invested, instead of being cognitively evaluated. Journalistic text and its formal practices invest in affective articulation of a social imaginary within which truth effect is embedded.

### **Chapter 3: Journalistic writings and the Radical Middleclass Masculinity**

The third and fourth chapters primarily engage with the news texts. The third chapter critically analyses the journalistic writings in Bangla newspapers in immediate post-independence Bengal (1950s and 1960s) to make sense of the ways in which journalistic articulatory practices give shape to bhadralok masculinities in a specific

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<sup>25</sup> Anirban Das, *Toward a politics of the (im) possible: The body in third world feminisms* (London: Anthem Press, 2010), 151.

<sup>26</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and repetition* (London: Bloomsbury, [1968] 2014).

historical, political moment. News texts are read closely to understand the ways various discourses, as “structured totality” constitute bhadralok masculinities as a performative gender identity. As it is important to clarify that a single discourse does not produce the specific performative masculinities of the bhadralok at any given time, rather, there are a range of discursive trajectories that produce the performative gender identity. Hence, this chapter focuses on a number of elements such as employment, labour, standard of living, education, language and behaviour to study how regulatory, normative practices of gender formation and division constitute the internal coherence of the Bengali middleclass bhadralok’s masculinity.

Drawing from specific examples from *Anandabazar Patrika*, *Dainik Basumati* and *Swadhinata* the chapter argues that the semantic field of Bengali masculinity dynamically sought to identify itself with the empty political signifier, *national masculine*, “whose semantic emptiness becomes the occasion for a set of phantasmatic investments to accumulate and which, through being the site of such investments, wields the power to rally and mobilize, indeed, to produce the very political constituency it appears to ‘represent’.”<sup>27</sup> The historical and political period of the immediate post-independence Bengal becomes crucial here. This historical moment is a particularly tumultuous phase, with a number of political, social, economic and cultural transformations and struggles taking place simultaneously. Interestingly, the series of leftist protest movements had a formative influence on the masculinity of Bengali men in the 1950s in response to pressing middleclass concerns like growing unemployment, food shortage, fare hike, price rise of everyday items and low salaried jobs. A brief glance at the pages of newspapers published during early 1950s suffices to show that the ongoing crisis at that period was a markedly bhadralok crisis.

A close reading of the news texts may reveal that such everyday items like sugar, mustard oil, or fish operate as metonymically connected signifiers for a specific class to become part of a hegemonic struggle linked with gender, occupation, caste, religion, and a host of other active and compelling signifiers. The contingent articulations, as Laclau

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<sup>27</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 149.

would explain, become a part of “essential belonging”<sup>28</sup> of the bhadralok and the editorials and letters to the editors in the 1950s gives shape to this hegemonic, “essential belonging” for the middleclass educated men as the *chakurijibi* bhadralok or salaryman masculinity. By the term, *Chakurijibi* bhadralok I broadly refer to the educated Bengali men engaged in salaried government or private sector jobs, which may enable them to embody the standard conformist, heterosexual husband/father and protector/provider role in the family. Although a significant section of the educated middleclass men in the 1950s may not completely fit into the formulation of *Chakurijibi* bhadralok, but it remained a hegemonic, normative, iterative structure, as a critical engagement with the seemingly mundane news texts illustrates. However, one should be reminded that the term “hegemonic masculinity”, does not identify the most statistically widespread kind of masculinity but rather to the most desired form in respect to social, cultural and institutional expressions.<sup>29</sup> For the Bengali men, the *national masculine* and conformist *chakurijibi* bhadralok masculinity both constitute hegemonic masculinities within the “differential typology of forms of iteration” inside a general iterability.<sup>30</sup> In the course of this chapter, I have proposed other forms of iterations, which need to be thought in relation to by “its capacity to structure and constitute the political field, to create new subject-positions and new interests.”<sup>31</sup>

The increasing inability to appropriately express social and cultural power in the 1950s collectively made the bhadralok aware of the possibility of the failure of the performative utterances, as performativity is not merely a repetition of its own prior instance; rather it rests on the credible production of “authority”. The bhadralok participation in a series of protest movements can be read as a struggle toward reinstating the condition that is conducive to the normative reiteration of *chakurijibi* bhadralok masculinity. Hence, the radical middleclass masculinity emerges as a temporal displacement of the conformist, *chakurijibi* bhadralok masculinity in the early

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<sup>28</sup> Ernesto Laclau, “Articulations and the Limits of Metaphor,” in *A time for the humanities : futurity and the limits of autonomy*, eds. James J. Bono, Tim Dean and Ewa Plonowska Ziarek (New York: Fordham, 2008), 68.

<sup>29</sup> Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 77.

<sup>30</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 18.

<sup>31</sup> Butler, *Bodies that matter*, 158.

1950s. Journalism, which produces affective truth, underlines and shapes this specific form of performative masculinity in post-independence Bengal.

As I explain in the course of this chapter, I do not intend to use the term “radical” simply because of the fact that in the early 1950s middleclass Bengali men participated in dynamic, at times evidently aggressive, masculine public protests, which marks a discontinuity from the colonial formulation of effeminate Bengali masculinity and the postcolonial conformist *chakurijibi* masculinity. While I acknowledge such discontinuity, I primarily and more importantly conceptualize the radicalism in terms of the specificity of the iteration, which accommodated working class inscriptions, and demonstrated a proliferation of points of rupture that spill over normative, regulatory utterances, even though in order to ground class hegemony. Thus, this chapter seeks to explain how radical middleclass masculinity is asserted through a process of signification as it circulates within various interlocking discourses in post-independence Bengal.

The movement against increase in tram fare, teachers’ movement and later food movement and the students’ movement in many ways offer us a rich corpus of news texts that may help us to understand the shift from the *chakurijibi* conformist masculinity to radical middleclass masculinity in post-independence Bengal. The coverage of these protest movements in Bangla newspapers often highlighted those aspects that are supposed to be excluded for the constitution of a ‘successful’ or ‘pure’ performative *bhadralok* masculinity in Bengal.

The journalistic rhetoric intended to accomplish two objectives through its coverage: firstly, to portray the movement not only as a movement for personal economic gain but towards the reform of the education policy as a whole. This reflected the intention to label the movement as a people’s movement. Second, the journalistic writings recurrently describe the condition of the teachers within the rhetoric of working class struggle. In almost every article, the teachers are often referred to as hungry, starving, underprivileged, oppressed, and demoralized. By labelling protesting teachers as “hungry workers”, the newspaper underlined the working class alignment of this

essentially middleclass struggle. It must be noted that the Bangla press sought to meticulously balance the coverage of teachers' movement in such a way that it may garner the popular support through the affective reporting, often conflating the teachers with starving workers; and at the same time, the class affiliation remains unharmed by positing the movement as a wider struggle for educational reform by educated bhadralok teachers.

Interestingly, the coverage of the food movement in 1959 and the students' movement in the 1966 indicated a rhetorical shift. To put it simply, while the previous two movements related to bhadralok identity were predominantly framed as people's movement, giving a wider significance, at times actively garnering support in favour of the protesters, in the late 1950s and 1960s, the protest movements were framed within a predominantly political disposition; often employing a critical stance towards the participation of the bhadralok and the students. While, the coverage of tram movement and the teachers' movement, at least momentarily, disrupted these regulatory inscriptions that are constitutive of the bhadralok identity, in the later case, the coverage often posited the active, aggressive political struggle by the middleclass, and particularly middleclass Bengali students as threatening, incoherent, disruptive and as practices that must be excluded to constitute the 'successful' or 'pure' performative of the bhadralok. Unlike the coverage of the previous movements, which sought to meticulously balance, and offset the exclusionary aspects, the chapter shows that the journalistic writings in the late 1950s and 1960s predominantly underlined that radical middleclass masculinity for the bhadralok, fractures the normative, regulatory, iterable structure and criticised the political approach of the movement in favour of a more performatively pure, conformist *chakurijibi* bhadralok masculinity.

#### **Chapter 4: Journalism, Neoliberal Liminality and Bhadralok Masculinities**

In chapter four, I focus on the other "differential position" or moment: neoliberal Bengal. This chapter seeks to offer an exploration of the discursive construction of a liminal bhadralok identity as represented in the Bangla journalistic writings, and attempts to study in what way, modernity, neoliberal values parallel to an



overwhelming cultural specificity, articulate bhadralok masculinities in neoliberal Bengal. However, one must be aware that the contemporary period of neoliberal economic reforms in India have simply intensified, instead of being the singular reason behind the economic and social transformations of the Bengali bhadralok. Particularly, the media helped in outlining and circulating the narratives of the “new”, liberalized India. Intersecting these economic, political specificities of the middle classes in Bengal is the wide-ranging issue of the cultural transformation, which has reshaped identity and subjectivity of the contemporary Bengali men.

The chapter begins with a discussion on the conceptual issues related to neoliberalism that is crucial for understanding discursive formation of hegemonic bhadralok masculinities in neoliberal Bengal. While I locate neoliberalism as a dominant ideology within the Marxist political economy framework, I also further complicate the issue of neoliberal ideology by positing neoliberalism within the idea of a specific governmentality. Hence, neoliberalisation emerges as an embodied process, deeply involved with formation of specific subjects under particular economic, political conditions. The discussion on neoliberalism brings us to the analytical distinction between liminality and precarity, as the later is a more common term in the context of economic and socio-cultural effects of neoliberal reforms in particular and globalization in general.<sup>32</sup> However, both the terms have an intrinsic link with gendered identities. With reference to the middleclass bhadralok, I propose the idea of the “liminal mode” or the processes of shift in the cultural identity as well as in the gendered subjectivity of the Bengali, amidst the changes ushered in the post-liberalization period. That being said, I use the term “liminal” with a specific approach in mind. I borrow the term from the field of anthropology, where “liminality” denotes a kind of an ambiguous state for the subject; a performative space. In the context of this study, liminality appears to be a more useful analytical category, with its more concentrated focus on the cultural and

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<sup>32</sup> The term “precarity” is often used as an umbrella term to mean insecure or uncertain work under globalization or neoliberal market reforms by policymakers, journalists, academics and workers. Since the early 2000, the term was increasingly being used by International Labour Organisation, anti-globalization activists, and in European Union official reports on social welfare. See ILO [International Labour Organization]. (2011). “Policies and regulations to combat precarious employment.” Accessed May 1 2018. [http://www.ilo.org/actrav/info/WCMS\\_164286/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/actrav/info/WCMS_164286/lang-en/index.htm).

the experiential than the economic and the political. This liminal mode has an intriguing relation with economy, class affiliation and popular media discourse, which I explore in relation to the newspaper texts. Similarly, I use the term “mode” to identify the conscious way or manner in which something occurs or is experienced and expressed; more importantly as an agential option, allowing a change in the method of operation. Thus, it denotes a conscious phase of transition, as if by crossing this phase one will reach the desired position, which, I will argue, in effect is a phantasmatic promise. Hence, the problems and difficulties are pacified since those are seemingly transitory, but at the same time, become the focus of debate since they would presumably have a formative influence in the modality of that promise.

The chapter also seeks to rework R.W. Connell’s conceptualization of the “transnational business masculinity” which has enabled us to identify the global hegemonic role of a monolithic top-down masculinity in order to make sense of how certain forms of masculine identity have emerged as a global phenomenon. The local gender arrangements follow the social practices of the consuming classes in the West and distance themselves from the local arrangements of poorer Indians.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, instead of applying the concept of “transnational business masculinity” in the Indian context, the notion of the “transnational middle class masculinity” may prove to be more useful to understand the hegemonic reorientations under globalization in the developing nations. Here, it is important to note that Connell has used the term “hegemonic masculinity” to describe the “configuration of gender practice” rather than a specific “type” of masculinity, nonetheless, often the term is being used to designate specific “type” of masculinity.

In the course of this chapter, I closely read a range of journalistic reports, features and editorials on historical, political, cultural and economic issues, published in *Aajkaal*, *Anandabazar Patrika*, *Bartaman* under neoliberal Bengal that directly or obliquely relate to hegemonic bhadralok masculinities. A close engagement with the journalistic writings in this period reveals in what way the performative space that neo-liberal

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<sup>33</sup> Steve Derné, *Globalization on the ground: media and the transformation of culture, class, and gender in India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2008), 120-121.

conditions open up for the “new” Bengali men, results not in producing a fixed identity but a mode, or to be more specific a liminal mode, which evidently has an intriguing relation with politics, economy, culture and popular media discourse. In addition, the liminal mode is inherently heterogeneous since it is recognized as an agential option, allowing a change in the processes of operation. Hence, the problems and difficulties are pacified since those are seemingly transitory, and seen as one of the several modes of liminality, but at the same time, become the focus of debate since they would allegedly have a formative influence in the modality of that phantasmatic promise.

My objective is to identify the reconfigurations of hegemonic bhadralok masculinities through journalistic discourse in response to neoliberal imperatives. These reconfigurations or recasting may open up categories like the “national”, the “global” and even the “masculine” as empty signifiers, invested with the phantasmatic promise that governs specific ways of being and dominant collective and individual social practices.

## Conclusion

The concluding chapter summarizes the arguments and underlines that this dissertation attempted to explore the performative aspect of bhadralok masculinities represented through journalistic discourse that frame our interpretations. The changing attributes of hegemonic bhadralok masculinities in response to historical and socio-economic conditions remind us that what “we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body.”<sup>34</sup>

It is important to remember at the end that the bhadralok is only “constituted” by discourse but it does not mean that he is “determined” by discourse— “where determination forecloses the possibility of agency.”<sup>35</sup> Bhadrakok masculinity is not determined by the rules through which they are constituted because signification is not

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<sup>34</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2002), xv.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

a founding act, rather a normative, compulsive act of repetition, which is open to variations and/or failure. The discursive categories— to be a radical, modern, urban, liberal, masculine self— in general signify a multiplicity of reiterative normative acts, in response to an array of different demands all at once. The idea of a hegemonic masculinity, I suggest, is contingent upon such phantasmatic promise of “being masculine” and the deployment of the empty political signifiers, with the aim of sustaining arrangements for the proliferation of specific ideologies. In other words, the Bengali bhadralok may only “have” masculinity that is a culturally specific stylized repetition of acts and that will always entail a sense of failure but may never “be” masculine, since it will remain a phantasmatic promise.

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Signature of the Supervisor

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Signature of the Candidate