**HM 402 PUBLICS IN SOUTH ASIA: CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES**

**‘Private Publics: New Media and Performance of Pakistani**

**Identity from Party Videos to Cable News’ ~ Mobina Hashmi**

**GROUP 5: DATE:** May 3, 2022

Shubham Patel 201901100

Tirathraj Solanki 201901185

Prakruti Pathwar 201901291

**Introduction**

The reading starts with two stories from Pakistan that took over Twitter in early 2017. The 1st one was the missing of several bloggers and activists from Islamabad and Lahore who people thought were possibly kidnapped. Since the opinions of the Pakistani political and military classes had dominated, now with the commentary put forward by journalists and activists, this incident allowed the people to create an independent public sphere. The other story was of a 10-year-old girl named Tayyaba, whom her middle-class professional employees repeatedly abused. The “pictures of the child's bruised face were circulated” over social media. As a result, “the police were forced to do an investigation.” (PAGE)

The issue of kidnapped bloggers tells us how this story was published to establish independent institutions capable of holding the government accountable for its acts. Tayyaba's story tells us how people's lives are protected from the public eye due to class privilege. But the growth of the media public has made the domestic private life of people available to the public.

The new norms that would arise due to the new publics are a combination of private conversations and already existing rules for public behaviour. In this chapter, we shall see how old norms are broken by the emerging new media publics. We would see how online websites publicize informal and intimate spaces of conversation. An example of one such platform would be Youtube. We get a glimpse into Pakistan, which is different from what is displayed on more official channels.

**"Official Digital Publics: State and Activist Calls for Censorship and Regulation"**

Censorship is why Pakistan's internet cultures are on the world news agenda. For example, the government prohibited streaming the movie *Innocence of Muslims* (2012) on YouTube, citing concerns about national security and Islamic values. Many activist groups are calling into question this framework for regulating digital environments. Bytes For All was one of the prominent groups against the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Ordinance (2016). The ordinance was designed to discourage hate speech and harassment. However, it also included broad language that might be used to restrict criticism.

Much of the discussion on public/private disparities focuses on women's mobility across borders that are fluid and influenced by class, locality, and religiosity. As a result, it is natural that some of the most apparent conflicts over older and contemporary concepts of modernity revolve around women's bodies and public appearance. *Girls at Dhabas* is one such example. The elite women of the society boldly entered conventionally male spaces such as public parks *and dhabas.* They would also organize shared bike rides to protest against the harassment faced by women. Although the movement garnered significant publicity in the English press, rural and working-class urban women who travel to masculine public areas regularly continue to be highly vulnerable.

Pakistani videos demonstrate a more chaotic reality than political rhetoric about humility, administration, and privacy. It is typical for YouTube videos to have comments in an informal tone. However, these types of talks show concern regarding the public life of Pakistan in terms of religious morality, social welfare etc.

**"Theorizing Pakistani Digital Media Publics"**

When we look at Pakistan, we need to look at a hybrid of "public" and "private" spheres. In the past, the country has been governed by the "military, the industrial elite, and the landowning elite." These communities are related through "kinship and business ties". The intertwining of these sectors has "constructed, negotiated, cemented" how the government, public, private business and "familial interests" work together. Therefore the author says that "the institutions and practices" of the "state, media, and the civil society are best understood as the sedimentation" - as the result or the outcome - "of these relationships."

Scholars such as Zizi Papacahrissi mention that "democratic participation needs to be civil, but need not be polite". We can see that the people of Pakistan argue about what is being shown. They may not be polite but still are civil because the individuals are putting forward arguments.

Many scholars also argue that YouTube provides a platform for new "acts and practices of (unlocated) citizenship". This allows the consideration that emotions such as anger, satire, or amusement have political impacts. They demonstrate how, rather than the representation of citizen identities, the political component of digital publics might incorporate discrete performances or acts of citizenship.

**"*T*ehzeeb*, Ikhlaaq,* and *Takalluf*: Norms of Civility on Pakistani Television"**

Here we see the two discourses that shaped Pakistani television. First is the "*Ganga-Jamani tehzeeb* (north Indian, Muslim, Urdu-speaking elite culture), with its elaborate norms of *takalluf* (deference, politeness) and *ikhlaaq* (manners, morals). Second is the 24-hour news channel's journalistic practices, overtaking these norms in the multimedia age. "Uncle talk", aka the old norms, was where the elite males of the society would gather in "semi-private" spaces to discuss public matters. Until the 1990s, the Urdu dramas were written by "Urdu-speaking elites' norms of *tehzeeb*" to make their private places and lifestyles and connections with public life. It was seen that even after the "growth of regional news channels class diversity and freedom from the state", the new public continued to have "uncle talk", particularly in the elite Urdu-speaking society.

After Pakistanis were introduced to the western ways of media, the journalists wanted to redefine their "professional identities" and therefore adopted "a more confrontational style." The Pakistani news channels opted for the new ways: "live reporting on location, person-on-the-street interviews, investigative journalism and reality programs".

There was one such example, where a journalist of a popular program, "*Sar e Aam"*, invites people with him to a beauty parlour, which is a private residence in a poor neighbourhood and is considered "respectable", to show the reality of Karachi's brothels to the people of Pakistan. The reporter breaches the privacy of the women working there and does not listen to them, even when they beg when asked not to film their faces. His "confrontational ways" change when he comes across a sex worker of the upper class compared to others. When this episode was uploaded on YouTube, many comments were about how the reporter was inconsiderate and rude to these women in the name of journalism. At the same time, others liked his way of journaling.

The conflicts between "religious beliefs, gendered ideologies about protecting women, class critiques, fandom," and dislike of the host's approaches demonstrate the variety of ways in which ordinary Pakistanis discuss complex matters. These comments illustrate the variety of ways the "ordinary Pakistanis think and talk about uncomfortable topics." They also reveal the different versions of "private and public life in Pakistan," despite the government's efforts to "sanitize the internet."

**“The Private Publics of Digital Pakistan on YouTube"**

The author was doing research for her topic when she came across the diverse world of Pakistani digital media. It contains videos of "parties, dance, and sexy films". These unlawful parties and movies were shot on the phone and published to YouTube by any random person. Poor lighting and focus, inconsistent sound levels, erratic camera movement, and hurriedly designed framing were all taken with a mobile camera. Ordinary users uploaded these videos as we have seen and related channels with subgenres like mujras, party videos, and college or school girl videos.

The videos of a "private-public" can be divided into several categories:

* "private videos of school or college girls' dance practice or performances that have gone viral outside"
* "illegal mujra recordings"
* "recordings of video sex chats or sexual activities that are shared without the mutual consent involved"
* "video footage of "underground" dance events at rich homes or nightclubs"
* "clips from news or documentaries that have been recorded that included sexual content"

Many of these videos' descriptions reflect a desire to make "private spaces" accessible to the public. They used a mixture of Urdu, English, Hindi, and local, regional languages. Urdu comments are occasionally written in the 'naqsh' script, but they are more commonly translated into Latin. These YouTube video clips present an entirely different point of view of Pakistan. The central theme in debates over women's rights is couched in the dichotomy between Islamic principles and Western modernity. The following comments were made in reaction to three YouTube videos:

* a private mujra
* an amateur documentary about an underground nightclub in Karachi
* a video of a young woman rehearsing a dance in a University of Lahore classroom

In the video of a young woman rehearsing a dance in a University of Lahore classroom, a young woman is doing the practice dance in her classroom. It was uploaded on YouTube by the Saknofear channel. A couple of comments from the video are participatory acts of citizenship with a diverse range of motivations. Interactions in these areas reveal what it means to be Pakistani, and they help us understand the everyday experience of living citizenship.

Naima Chudrey uploaded the documentary video of a nightclub in Karachi. The two comments show hate towards the video. A similar amount of commenters criticized the young individuals in the video, referring to them as "wannabees." However, others asked for the location of the nightclub because they liked it. Another strand of comments was more on the reflective side. The nightclub comments centred on concerns about authenticity. The comments on the dance practice at the University of Lahore were divided into two categories: subgroup insults targeted at Punjabis and questioning the performance's location by decoding the room's accents. One person commented on the place, and others claimed the young women could not possibly be Pakistani due to their accents.

I think some people were angry because they believed that the dance of a Muslim girl or having a nightclub in the country is not good in Islamic morals.

A small percentage of people, like commentators on the "*Sar e Aam*" episode, expressed worries about violating the young women's privacy. One person said, opposing criticism from others while also criticizing the uploader and noted that it was just dance and dance is just for fun. On the mujra video, some of the most hateful and violent comments were made. One person considers Punjabi women as cheaters and suggests others never marry them. A dispassionate comment on an older version of the nightclub film was on the opposite side that it was a bad upload. In the end, the author talks about some hateful, abusive comments on the University of Lahore video that illustrates the range of emotions, opinions, desires, and provocations.

Conclusion:

In response to the lack of a "tradition of filmmaking" in Pakistan, filmmaker Sabiha Sumar claims that the country will not be able to develop "unless we can ask, what is Pakistan about, what is our vision, what is our self-image; unless Pakistan can define its dreams; unless Pakistan can define this very clearly and bring on board the majority of this country to agree to that vision—that dream, that self-image—we will not be able to create anything successfully." We don't have a country. Admin Punathambedkar says "to listen, consider , contemplate, think about, give more thought to, support, and at times, tolerate an idea, a suggestion and feelings. We might discover a manner of being in the process that is more in tune with the Pakistani digital public experiences of citizenship, belonging, and disaffection." Pakistan is still developing in this regard and is trying to reconstruct its self-image.

**Keywords:**

* sedimentation
* Uncle talk
* Censorship
* Civil
* polite
* *Tehzeeb*
* *Takalluf*
* *ikhlaaq*
* confrontational
* sanitize
* mujra - erotic dances by women or hijras exclusively performed for all-male audiences at parties, weddings, and other events.
* comment - a verbal or written remark expressing someone's opinion or reaction
* private-public space - public means everyone is allowed to access, private means that only members of the same class are permitted to access