

LOCATING THE INDIAN GENDERED SUBALTERN ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS:
DIGITAL ACTIVISM IN #SECTION377 AND #METOOINDIA

NARAYANANAMOORTHY NANDITHA

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN HUMANITIES
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

August 2022

ABSTRACT

This work examines the relationship between technology and activism in India, and the role that digital infrastructures play in the development of gendered digital protest. Through a combination of textual discourse and visual analysis, and critical digital humanities, feminist and queer frameworks, I study the digital queer movement around #Section377, and the feminist movement around #MeTooIndia on Twitter and Instagram in India. Through this research, I demonstrate how social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram shape discourse surrounding digital activism, and how digital technologies both enable and disrupt subaltern voices, narratives and bodies in Indian cyberspaces. The comparative study of digital gender movements uncovers how digital platforms empower subaltern gendered voices, enable the construction of digital identities, and facilitate the formation of affective networks of empathy and subaltern counterpublics of resistance through the use of protest hashtags in Indian and Indian diasporic communities in Canada. Simultaneously, however, this study illustrates that digital technologies also hinder the amplification of marginalized voices, and create barriers in participation, representation, and inclusion online. Despite the construction of safe spaces and subaltern counterpublics on Twitter and Instagram, both digital queer and the feminist movements in India are exclusive, and lack individual representation and voluntary participation of women and LGBTQIA+ groups online. This research traces the histories of gendered exclusion that emerge through far-right nationalist, homophobic, and misogynist discourse, and work to actively decenter marginalized voices online in English and regional Indian languages such as Hindi that occur both in the form of textual and visual rhetoric. Ultimately, this research disrupts and troubles the traditional notions of technological determinism, particularly in the Global South, and focuses on questions of digital access, participation, and representation of vulnerable communities.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Krish Perumal.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research would not have been possible without the support of many people. I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Markus Reisenleitner, for his constant support, encouragement, and guidance. His patience and availability for feedback, and his knowledge and insight into the directions I can take this research have been a constant source of strength throughout the course of this dissertation. I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to my committee members, Dr. David Cecchetto for always being available, supportive, attentive and encouraging about my work, and Dr. May Friedman for her constant support, warmth, care, and enthusiasm for my research. I am incredibly blessed to learn and work with such a wonderful committee whose guidance and support at each stage of this dissertation has made this research a pleasure to work on. Your encouraging words and thoughtful, detailed feedback have been very important to me in this journey.

I would like to thank the Department of Humanities for making this research possible, and Divya Verma for always being so patient and helpful with my queries. I am also extremely grateful to Dr. Victor Shea and Dr. Susan Ingram for their incredible mentorship since the beginning of my doctoral fellowship, and whose guidance has made my doctoral journey professionally rewarding. It is an honour to learn from them. I am thankful to the community of friends I have made in the department – Casey Robertson, Sadia Uddin, Mahabba Ahmed, and Sehrish Malik for their support and words of encouragement. I am also grateful for my friends Dhanya Ramachandran, Marcel Forster, Marie-Catherine Allard, Mac Powers, Alessandra Leake, Ichhya Pant, Cristina Chueca, and Amin and Nadine Osmani whose support has got me through my doctoral journey.

I owe a huge debt to my parents and sister for their unwavering love, affection, and encouragement. I am thankful to my second parents, Velumani and Uma Pillai, for their generous advice, love and support. I am deeply grateful to them, and this dissertation would

not have been possible without them. I am also grateful to my in-laws for their constant support throughout the writing of this dissertation. Finally, I would like to thank my husband who has been a pillar of support through the ups and downs of my personal and professional journey. His unconditional love and support have given me the strength to continue not only this research but also my entire academic journey. To him, I owe everything, including this.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	vi
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Chapter Two: Context and Methodologies.....	15
Section 2.1 Background & Significance.....	15
Section 2.2 Literature Review.....	24
Section 2.2.1 Theory as Method.....	24
Section 2.2.2 Digital Identity in the Public Sphere.....	31
Section 2.2.3 The Digital Subaltern.....	33
Section 2.2.4 Gender and Media.....	35
Section 2.2.5 Digital Activism.....	37
Section 2.2.6 Feminist and Queer Movements in India.....	38
Section 2.3 Methodologies and Methods.....	45
Chapter Three: Case Study of #Section377 on Twitter and Instagram.....	66
Section 3.1 Postcolonial and Transnational Identity in #Section377.....	67
Section 3.1.1 History of Indian Queer Sexuality and Desire in Ancient India.....	68
Section 3.1.2 Section 377 Online: Emergence of Postcolonial Identity.....	71
Section 3.1.3 The Role of the Indian Supreme – A ‘post-postcolonial Institution’ ...	85
Section 3.2 Gender Identity in #Section377.....	91
Section 3.2.1 Homosexual Acts Versus Homosexual Identity.....	92
Section 3.2.2 Digital Media and Queer Performance.....	93
Section 3.3 Construction of Queer Empathy and Bonds of Solidarity.....	108
Section 3.4 #Section377 in the Canadian Diaspora: A Transnational Movement.....	121
Section 3.4.1 Indian Diaspora and Queer Sexuality in the North.....	121
Section 3.4.2 Transnational Queer Activism in India.....	124
Section 3.5 Queer Subaltern Representation in #Section377.....	131
Section 3.5.1 Digital Divide in the Global South.....	131
Section 3.6 Lost in Translation: Digital Homophobia in Regional Discourse.....	145
Section 3.5.1 Digital Nationalism: Discourse in Indian Regional Languages.....	145
Section 3.5.2 Nationalist Imaginaries: Memes and Joke Culture.....	156
Chapter Four: Case Study of #MeTooIndia on Twitter and Instagram.....	160
Section 4.1 Digital Storytelling in #MeTooIndia: Understanding Feminist Identity & Embodiment Online.....	161
Section 4.1.1 Digital Storytelling and Sexual Violence.....	162
Section 4.2 #MeTooIndia – Bonds of Feminist Solidarity, Sisterhood, and Empathy through an Articulation of Difference.....	174
Section 4.2.2 Digital Feminist Solidarity in the Global South: Articulation of Difference.....	185
Section 4.3 #MeTooIndia - Discourse among Canadian Diaspora on Twitter.....	190
Section 4.3.1 Diasporic Identities, Bodies and Spaces in Digital Feminisms.....	190

Section 4.3.2 Transnational Mobilization.....	193
Section 4.3.3 Diasporic Embodiment, Autonomy and Agency.....	195
Section 4.4 Representation and Exclusion in #MeTooIndia.....	206
Section 4.4.1 Media Personalities and Celebrities.....	202
Section 4.4.2 Marginalization.....	204
Section 4.5 Misogyny and the Emergence of the Men's Rights Movement.....	212
Section 4.5.1 Digital Misogyny: An Introduction.....	214
Section 4.5.2 Men's Rights Movement on Social Media.....	216
Section 4.5.3 Digital Misogyny in #MeTooIndia.....	217
Chapter Five: Conclusion.....	228
Section 5.1 Comparative Analysis – Bridging Gendered Digital Movements in India.....	229
Section 5.2 Comparative Analysis – Digital Platforms and Social Protest in India.....	242
Section 5.3 Re-Imagining Digital Activism in the Global South: Technology and Platform Design.....	254
References.....	273

Introduction

The inception and writing of this research began with the highly public and legal trial for the decriminalization of homosexuality in postcolonial India. In September of 2018, following a decade long battle by grassroots activists, the application of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code to private consensual sex was ruled unconstitutional, thereby leading to a momentous verdict in the Indian history of queer rights. As an international student living in Canada at the time of the verdict, I both witnessed and participated in a rising digital jubilation over newfound queer rights that paved the way for paradigm shifts in the social perception of queer identity, sex, and desire. I was fascinated, as an identity studies scholar, by how queer communities, individuals, organizations, and corporations took to platforms such as Twitter and Instagram to celebrate, document personal struggles, share stories of ‘coming-out,’ and to create networks of empathy and solidarity for the movement. As the #MeToo movement in India began to bloom simultaneously in early October 2018, I observed social media as a critical site of hashtag activism for both the Indian queer and feminist movements online, and my research on the study of digital fourth-wave gender activism began to take shape. My intention with this research at first was to centre hashtag activism to demonstrate the emerging digital stories using #Section377 and #MeTooIndia on social media – to study how the Indian LGBTQIA+ community used Twitter and Instagram to ‘come-out,’ and how women employed the hashtag to tell stories of their abuse, harassment, rape and violence. Considering the huge wave of support and outpouring of love for the queer community post decriminalization of Section 377, and critical discussions on workplace violence surrounding the Metoo movement, my vision for the research was to incorporate the affordances these platforms create for the subaltern. Therefore, the thesis this research began with was that digital spaces are liberating for gender minorities in postcolonial India, and provide safe spaces for the construction and performance of their

gendered identities. My argument was founded on the evidence of greater access and safety through anonymity online for members of the LGBTQIA+ communities, to explore their identities in ways that offline spaces would never allow. This means that my intention for this research was techno-utopian at first, i.e. my vision furthered the argument that digital technologies and social media platforms only play an emancipatory role for vulnerable communities that participate in digital activism. However, a look at the multi-layered and complex discourse that was emerging through the textual and visual analysis of protest hashtags I conducted began to shape a new research question.

Research Question(s)

In this research, I consider the relationship between technology and activism in Indian cyberspaces, and broadly investigate the role that social media platforms play in centring the voices of the gendered digital subaltern. This study is my attempt to understand technological affordances and constraints of social media platforms, and how digital infrastructures both empower and silence gender minorities in India and among the Indian diaspora. Through the study of fourth-wave gender movements online – #Section377 and the #MeTooIndia –, I demonstrate, on the one hand, how queer and feminist subaltern collectives are formed on Twitter and Instagram through digital protest, how identities (postcolonial, queer, cyberfeminist, personal and collective) are constructed within marginalized gender counterpublics, and how networks of friendship, empathy and solidarity are created through protest hashtags. Through the close reading of texts and visuals on both platforms, I provide evidence that digital platforms do indeed create safe spaces for the congregation, interaction, and expression of identity, and help forge protest imaginaries of solidarity and resistance through the construction of subaltern counterpublic spaces. On the other hand, I find that social media also disrupts the voices of gender minorities, and deepens the digital divide in the Global South. At its core, my research is rooted in questions of power, social differences,

and inequalities, and asks who participates on these platforms, whose voices are represented, who speaks on behalf of whom, and whether the subaltern is accurately represented online. Ultimately, my research brings these questions together through textual and visual analysis of both movements to understand:

1. The production of postcolonial, (trans)national, and gender identity at both the collective and the personal level,
2. The construction of marginalized gendered subaltern counterpublics of empathy and friendship online,
3. The formation of bonds of diasporic solidarity,
4. The representation of marginalized groups and voices in digital protest,
5. The production of postcolonial nationalist imaginaries in the form of misogyny and homophobia.

Significance

My work performs the function of excavating the voices, bodies and narratives of Indian women and members of the LGBTQIA+ community; it demonstrates how these communities and the general public interact and engage with the protest hashtags to create meaningful discourse that aids in the creation of lasting change in the perception and rights of gendered minorities. Ultimately, this research exists as a form of analysis of community generated content and voices from the public-at-large on social media platforms. At the same time, this study also troubles traditional notions of technological utopianism, particularly in postcolonial developing nations, and focuses on questions of access, participation, representation on social media platforms at multiple levels that suppress true representation of these communities online. In addition, it demonstrates the emerging nationalist hateful rhetoric in the form of homophobia and misogyny that occur using the same hashtags. My work offers a critique in relation to the forging of counter-narratives by far-right communities about queer and feminist activism that demonstrates how different communities employ the

same hashtag to produce completely different discourses. In doing so, I address gaps in scholarship by creating a foundation to study community data and digital narratives of resistance produced by queer and feminist communities using hashtags in activism and imaginaries of empathy while also focusing on the lack of inclusion and representation, and presence of hateful rhetoric. I challenge power structures by engaging in the study of activist narratives and counter-narratives that are forged online using the same protest hashtags. Finally, I frame the use of theoretical and methodological interventions in my research not merely to locate the gendered subaltern but also to re-imagine technology and platform design to construct the foundation for inclusive fourth-wave digital activism in the Global South. I ask how platforms should be designed for gender activism; how they can be made more inclusive of and representative to vulnerable communities, and how to give back more control, agency, and autonomy to Indian women and LGBTQIA+ communities on social media.

Interdisciplinary and Comparative Framing

This interdisciplinary research question draws from varied disciplinary fields within the Humanities, speaks to multiple publics in the study of digital activism, and performs the unveiling of power dynamics involved in the construction of digital identity. It connects and borrows from epistemological perspectives, methods, theories and analytical tools from disciplines such as cultural studies, comparative literature, digital humanities, media studies, Asian studies and social work to underscore questions at the intersection of gender, technology, and power. Each of the disciplines that this work carries, prioritizes questions about pre-existing structures of power on technological platforms, and centers what I term ‘the digital Indian subaltern.’ My research in its interdisciplinarity contributes to holistic approaches grounded in the histories of colonialism, gender politics, and queer and feminist activism in India, and unpacks social differences at the intersecting axes of gender, caste,

class and sexual identity. In addition, this trans-disciplinarity in my research is reflected in the multiple theoretical and critical inquiries rooted in postcolonial, queer and feminist theory, and intersectional and decolonial frameworks that further emphasize questions of social justice and difference in digital humanities research. Each chapter draws from other theories that center the Indian woman and queer subject in the digital public sphere. These cultural and comparative frameworks function as critical lenses to address class struggles, locate systems of powers, and re-imagine social media platforms as a space for mobilization, resistance, and inclusive activism. This critical inquiry conducted in India enables a trans-disciplinary dialogue, and provides an inclusionary perspective that transcends boundaries of hegemonic power relations. At its core, my work harnesses critical digital humanities and social justice praxis to contextualize the production of knowledge centered on Indian women and LGBTQIA+ subjects as well as analyze textual and visual codes and modes of reading to dislocate heteropatriarchal power structures.

In addition to this theoretical interdisciplinarity, my research also benefits from the use of mixed-methodologies in the study of gendered digital activism. I employ quantitative methods using software coding in data collection, and qualitative methods in categorizing and analyzing tweets and posts. As I elaborate in the “Methods” section, I define ‘code’ as a framework to engage in both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and as a unit of information or meaning-making in the context of my research. Specifically, my work engages qualitatively with deductive coding as a way to manually categorize tweets and Instagram posts based on criteria I design. Further, a DH praxis allows me to frame this research as a digital narrative thread interconnected with texts and visuals from Twitter and Instagram, while I move consciously between the study of visual and textual modes of reading using close and distant reading methodologies simultaneously to understand larger cultural phenomena that emerge in the datasets. Beyond this interdisciplinarity, this scholarship is

committed to the use of the comparative as both a theoretical and methodological praxis. I address gaps in previous literature specifically by engaging in the comparative analysis of the queer and feminist movements in India. Although scholars have previously studied Section 377 (Dasgupta 2015, 2017, 2018; Misra 2009; Halder & Kant 2011) and MeToo in India (Mathur 2018; Moitra & al. 2021; Pain 2021) in isolation, my study locates and contextualizes the histories of both queer and feminist activism at a cross-roads on Twitter and Instagram. I bring gender movements together through the study of hashtag activism in order to understand how gender minorities construct their identities, and how hashtags are employed to forge communities of empathy. In addition to the comparative analysis on activist movements, I also juxtapose the study of discourse on two different social media platforms – Twitter and Instagram, in order to investigate how they shape activism and the discourse that emerges on each. Many studies conducted previously on social, political, gendered, racial, and/or cultural activism have focused on the study of hashtag activism on a single platform. My work compares both Twitter and Instagram, and engages with them as distinctly textual and visual platforms of study. In this research, I examine the differences in the design of both platforms, and how these differences are reflected in the way participants engage in debates on sexuality and sexual violence in the country. In order to make sense of Twitter and Instagram as largely textual and visual platforms respectively, I expand on the concept of digital textuality and visual cultures in relation to their ability to produce protest imaginaries and activism on social media platforms in India. Finally, I employ the comparative praxis through the study of both English and regional languages in India. I demonstrate how English becomes a more emancipatory language for the Indian subaltern on Twitter and Instagram, and Hindi and other regional languages such as Tamil and Telugu, in the dataset, promote a completely different reality that is characterized by masculinist, heteronormative, and homophobic male dominance in society.

Terms & Concepts

Throughout this research, I use terms that need to be both defined and problematized. Below, I parse the words ‘LBGTQIA+,’ ‘queer,’ ‘transgender,’ ‘Dalit,’ ‘woman,’ ‘marginalized,’ ‘subaltern (counterpublics),’ ‘(digital) platforms,’ and ‘activism’ in the context of this work.

LBGTQIA+

I employ the abbreviation LBGTQIA+ throughout the project, which is an acronym that stands for Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Trans, Queer, Intersex, Asexual. The + symbol simply stands for other sexualities, sexes, and gender categories that are not included. The specific terms denote ‘lesbian’ and ‘gay’, which stands for the emotional and sexual attraction to people of the same sex/gender, in these cases, to women and men respectively. Further, where ‘bisexual’ refers to people who are attracted towards both male and female, though there may be a preference for one gender over others, ‘intersex’ stands for people who are born with a mixture of both ‘male’ and ‘female’ hormonal, chromosomal, and/or genital characteristics.

Trans(gender)

Although I employ and contextualize these terms in the same manner in which they have been in the West, I frame the words ‘trans’ and ‘queer’ differently.

‘Transsexual/transgender’ is someone who changes his/her sex through medical (surgical and/or hormonal) procedures, and/or identifies as a gender outside of their assigned sex.

However, in the context of this research, I elaborate in the chapter on queer identity that the western equivalent of transgender seldom applies in the Indian context. Transgender people in South Asia are part of distinct communities such as the Hijras, Kothis, Jogappas, Shivashaktis, and the Aravanis that each carry their own historiographies, hierarchies, and community specific rituals, and are commonly referred to as a ‘third-gender’ in India. I

employ the term ‘trans’ or ‘transgender’ in this study not to move away from these specific histories and epistemologies of communities, but based on my desire to bring different communities under the ‘trans’ umbrella term.

Queer

In the same manner, I define the word ‘queer’ as an all-encompassing terminology that dictates how LGBT communities counter heteronormative assertions and the hegemonic construction of gender, sexuality and desire. For me, ‘queer’ becomes both a way to address all gender minorities on-the-fringe in India as well as a term symbolic of the political resistance against gendered oppression; as a protest imaginary that breaks binary thinking and defines both sexual orientation and gender identity as fluid. ‘Queer,’ here, captures gender identities of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and trans individuals in the dataset, and represents the struggle of the community by attempting to move beyond the categorization of the heterosexual (Narain 4). Queer theory and queerness, in this context, become a point of rupture for heteropatriarchal status quo for Indians, and through textual and visual protest, push for the decriminalization of homosexuality. In addition, despite the use of ‘intersex,’ and the + sign to denote othered identities that are relatively new to India, the dataset I work with largely features gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans minorities. Thus, the acronym LGBTQ includes gender identities and sexual orientations for a collective diversity that comes together to define the queer community I speak of.

(Indian) woman

Further, I also reclaim the word ‘woman’ and ‘womanhood’ in this project to challenge what is feminine, and to acknowledge that feminist values can be interpreted in different ways across geographical contexts. As feminism moves between multiple interpretations and forms, we must first attempt to answer how the category of woman is constructed or defined. According to Cassell, “gender as an analytic category emerged in the

late twentieth-century” (1), and although earlier theorists argued towards a difference in gender, they did not employ gender as a way of talking about systems or social relations. How we rethink our social relations depends on how we establish social categories, and what those categories entail (Kannabiran 1), and it is therefore imperative to imagine gender beyond the realms of binaries, and as outside the definition of a movement from the North. Daunting questions in feminism such as ‘what is feminism, what does feminist empowerment look like,’ particularly in relation to technology, can be read and interpreted differently by various feminisms. In this regard, what is feminist technology, and how would it promote feminist values, goals, positive representation and access for women everywhere? Another area of debate is whether/how women relate to heteronormative femininity or subscribe to heteronormative representations of women (Landström 14). As Butler states, “bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized” in the process of constructing a “hegemonic and heteronormative model of gender” (Butler 194). Bodies that are different, or on the periphery, are established through representations of the compulsory practice of heterosexuality (194). Feminist HCI promotes feminist values but cannot assume gender neutrality or equality. Bodies, identities, sexualities, desires, likes, dislikes, and interests are constantly in flux, and feminist theory must adapt to the changing definitions and multiplicities of feminism.

I frame the term ‘woman’ in the Indian context through an articulation of difference. I depart from concepts of womanhood in western, one-size-fits-all, and universal feminisms. I conceive of Indian womanhood through intersecting and hybrid arcs of race, class, caste to include Dalit and trans feminisms. Through this terminology and framework, I include the various complexities, and power interests to define the Indian woman, and thereby feminist activism in India. What is also pertinent here is to contextualize Dalit feminism within this framework owing to its distinct history in India. Dalits belong to the lowest castes in the country, and are often characterized as the ‘untouchables.’ Having being oppressed for

centuries under India's caste system, Dalit women, in particular, have been tyrannized and excluded from conversations in Indian feminism. This research brings conversations of Dalit feminism by speaking to the exclusion of marginalized lower-caste voices in the Indian #MeToo movement.

Marginalized Subaltern Counterpublics

In the context of this research, I often use the words 'marginalized' and 'subaltern' interchangeably. 'Marginalized' here characterizes on-the-fringe gender identities; communities that experience discrimination both in offline and online spaces owing to social differences and inequities. In my work, I frame the Indian woman and queer subject as marginalized identities and as the 'digital subaltern' whose voices and narratives are heard less frequently in the digital public sphere. In this regard, I borrow from Nancy Fraser (1991) to define the concept of subaltern counterpublics as spaces that develop in tandem with official public spheres where marginalized identities and groups gather and create counter-discourses to the status quo. Fraser's work speaks to the multiple co-existing discourses that are created by Indian women and queer individuals to express and perform their cultural and gendered identity (126). Counterpublics, therefore, become important spaces in forging digital activism and community building that includes "Indian women, workers, and gays and lesbians" (67). Ultimately, I contextualize Indian women and the Indian LGBTQIA+ community as gendered subaltern online counterpublics, and this research works specifically in the assumption of the digital's function as a space for the creation of subaltern collectives, and for such subaltern societies to gather, mobilize, and fight various systems of oppression.

Digital Platforms

Finally, I borrow Tarleton Gillespie's definition of digital 'platforms' as a "computational infrastructure or a technical base that supports computer hardware, operating systems, gaming devices, mobile devices or digital disc formats" (349). With this framework,

platforms can be defined “around user generated content, streaming media, blogging and social computing (352). In the context of this research, I use this terminology to denote social media applications I specifically work with, Twitter and Instagram, to understand textual and visual discourse surrounding #Section377 and #MeTooIndia. However, following my argument on social media as the new public sphere, the term ‘platform’ also takes on, in this research, a different connotation; as a space for participation, engagement and interaction of different counterpublics and marginalized identities away from the official offline public sphere. The spatiality of the terms, ‘digital’ and ‘platform,’ therefore helps enact imaginaries of political resistance and solidarity. I am aware of the implications and reverberations with my use of these contested terms in this research.

Organization of Chapters

This dissertation is divided into five main chapters, including an introduction and conclusion. The two body chapters, chapter three and four, are case studies on Section 377 and the MeToo movements in the Indian context. Each chapter is divided into several sub-section chapters, each with its own sub-subsections. In the second chapter following the “Introduction,” I lay the foundation for the study by providing a brief literature review, a background on the history and significance of Section 377 and MeToo in India, as well as a foray into the qualitative and quantitative methodologies I employ in this research. Where the background section charts a customized introduction on the evolution of both movements in the country, the literature review offers a focused contextualization of the histories of queer and feminist epistemologies and activism that are defined more generally. In addition, within the section “Literature Review,” I elaborate on several theoretical frameworks including Critical Digital Humanities, Comparative Literature, Posthumanism, Queer and Feminist approaches as methodological constructs that help shape my research. Here, I also focus on the history of the notion of identity construction on digital platforms and the concept of the

‘digital subaltern,’ and examine previous scholarship at the intersection of gender and media. In the following subchapter on “Methods and Methodologies,” I present the two main methodologies I work with: quantitative and qualitative coding, textual and visual analysis of tweets and Instagram posts using critical theoretical frameworks. In this chapter, I provide the code I employ for both the data collection as well as the data analysis process. Although the dataset cannot be indexed and made available along with this research, I have created an open repository of the data on GitHub without names so they cannot be traced back to the authors. In addition to the coding process and the criteria for coding I designed for each movement on Twitter and Instagram, I also elaborate on the choice of platforms, the timeline, and the hashtags I employ for the case studies. Following this section, chapters three and four are centred around the case studies on #Section377 and #MeTooIndia. I organize the subchapters into sections that reflect how digital platforms create affordances and constraints. For instance, the subchapters in both larger case study sections begin by asking how queer and feminist individuals and collectives construct and perform their gender and postcolonial identities; how subaltern counterpublics forge affective networks of empathy, bonds of kinship, and protest imaginaries of resistance and solidarity among Indians and the Indian diaspora in Canada. I follow these chapters in both case studies that speak to social media affordances to begin the study on how these platforms also hinder the subaltern voice. In chapter three, “Case Study of #Section337 on Twitter and Instagram,” I specifically tackle questions of the lack of representation, inclusion, and voluntary participation of queer voices on social media owing to the digital divide in the Global South. In the subchapter “Lost in Translation: Digital Homophobia in Regional Discourse,” I provide insight into emerging forms of homophobia as nationalist discourse in Indian regional languages such as Hindi that deter participation for Indian women and members of LGBTQIA+ communities. Similar to chapter three, I organize chapter four to first speak to how Indian women construct their

gendered identities, and networked empathy through the articulation of difference in the context of India. Following this, I speak to the networked solidarity among the Indian diaspora in Canada that tackles questions of intersectional Dalit feminism on Twitter in the context of my work. Other subchapters in the #MeTooIndia case study provide insight into how Indian women's voices are disempowered and 'hijacked.' For instance, the subsections, "Representation and Exclusion," and "Misogyny and the Emergence of the Men's Rights Movement" offer an overview on how the #MeToo movement's focus on Bollywood and the Indian elite removes the voices of Dalit and trans women's voices, and how emerging misogynist discourse attempts to penetrate feminist spaces and abuse protest hashtags to advocate for a men's rights movement. Although my focus in chapters three and four lies in uncovering how digital technologies perform the function of complex systems of communication in the construction and obstruction of subaltern identities, my conclusion, divided into three subsections, aims for a comparative analysis. My conclusion chapters are divided into a subchapter on a comparative analysis of the emergence of queer and feminist movements and identities on social media; a subchapter on a comparative analysis of Twitter and Instagram and how these platforms shape discourse, and finally a subchapter on re-imagining how digital activism in the South could be constructed to be more inclusive. In "Comparative Analysis – Bridging Gendered Digital Movements in India," I bridge the gendered digital movements in India, but also offer a deeper examination of how critical digital humanities praxis helps construct queer and feminist subaltern counterpublics. My second subchapter in the "Conclusion" focuses on both an analysis of Twitter and Instagram and an examination of what textual and visual analysis mean, and how they enable digital activism in the Indian context. Finally, in the subchapter, "Re-Imagining Digital Activism in the Global South: Technology and Platform Design," I reflect on theoretical frameworks to help rethink digital design for fourth-wave gender movements to be more inclusive towards

marginalized communities. Here, I offer a queer and intersectional design as a framework for future design that is *ruptural* and revolutionary as opposed *ruptured*. I propose a framework using intersectionality and queer theory that engages in the healing of feminist and queer publics in fourth-wave gender movements, and the incorporation of the personal and the political to examine and challenge power structures. Technology, for me, should radically rupture existing institutions, and strive for inclusivity and representation for marginalized communities.

Background & Significance

Section 377

Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code was an archaic colonial law that, until a recent momentous verdict by the Supreme Court in August 2018, criminalized homosexuality.

Section 377 was introduced by the British Raj in 1861 as a reflection of state-sanctioned homophobia of the Victorian British empire. Section 377 was drafted by Thomas McCauley in 1838, and was brought into effect in 1860. It was modelled after *The Buggery Act of 1533*, which was England's first civil sodomy law that prohibited anal sex, bestiality and homosexuality. It read:

Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine (Section 377 IPC Unnatural Offenses). (Dasgupta 2018, 183).

Although not clearly stated, “carnal intercourse against the order of nature” in the Indian Penal Code alludes to sexual acts such as anal sex, oral sex and other non-procreative sex (Misra 21), and therefore applies to both homosexuals and heterosexuals. However, in criminalizing homosexual acts, Section 377 burdens LGBTQIA+ subjects in the country, and therefore those “practicing homosexuality at the fringe of society are forced to keep their lives secret from families, communities and authorities” (21). According to Gupta, the law carried vestigial traces of ambiguity and vagueness surrounding the nature of “unnatural touch”, and remained until its reading down, “shrouded in euphemisms” (4816). In addition, Beyrer argues that the law's archaic status also contributes to its vagueness (1). Penetration became sufficient to constitute carnal intercourse within the law (Gupta 4816), and therefore did not apply to lesbian intercourse. To this day, British era laws “retain the language of buggery to refer to penetrative anal intercourse’ (Beyrer 1). In this regard, Section 377

directly catered to Victorian homophobia and notions of masculinity that were designed to protect the colonizer and manipulate the colonized. Since its integration and eventual adoption into Indian society, the postcolonial nation incorporated colonial imaginaries of the suppression of marginal sexual identities in the public sphere. Section 377 remained interpretive of regressive national politics and the dismissal of queer desire, identity and violence against the LGBTQIA+ communities.

The 1861 Offences Against the Person Act was unified under a single Act, without variation in its text for purposes of maintaining simplicity in colonial laws across colonies. British colonialism targeted queer rights in its colonial societies (Han and O'Mahoney 270). According to Misra, Section 377 still persists as a law in many post-colonial British colonies in Asia and Africa (20). The language of Section 377 is repeated in current laws criminalizing homosexuality in former British colonies such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, Sri Lanka, Seychelles and Papua New Guinea (Sanders 1). For LGBTQIA+ communities in former British colonies, Section 377 has created a constant struggle to express sexual identity and desire. As a display of blatant colonial imperialism and Victorian values, the British Raj reduced and re-labelled queer sexual desires as criminal acts and classified same-sex desire alongside child sexual abuse and bestiality. Eventually, Section 377 became a colonial experiment that was shaped by homophobic attitudes and imported to colonized societies. Its colonial hegemony, primarily serving imperialist interests, was adopted by the Indian Constitution as an instrument of sexual, moral and religious policing of the masses, and remains a vestigial reminder of colonial oppression.

On the one hand, Section 377 has had an adverse impact in the fight against HIV/AIDS with an increased stigma attached to the LGBTQIA+ community (Misra 22). On the other, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual (LGBTQIA)

movement in India emerged partly as a response to the criminalization of subaltern identities and a public health crisis at a time when the law became a subject of reform for HIV/AIDS outreach to vulnerable groups (Haldar and Kant 1). The archaic law has therefore received “attention and support from NGOs and LGBT activist groups” (Shahani 1) thereby contributing to the movement’s visibility. Furthermore, a “rapid increase in HIV infections in India has created a need for queer activism” (Shahani 1). The Non-Governmental Organization Naz Foundation was first founded in 1994 to create awareness surrounding the spread of AIDS, and provide preventative and medical care to marginalized communities, particularly members of the LGBTQIA+ community (Shahani 1). Therefore, it was the Naz Foundation that launched the fight for the legalization of same-sex public relationships in 2001, through a direct impact of transnationalism and globalization in India. In 2003, the High Court dismissed the Foundation’s appeal, and the Supreme Court instructed the Delhi High Court to reconsider the case, leading to a remarkable judgement in 2009 that decriminalized homosexuality. However, the Supreme Court overruled the decision in 2013 with the view that the law merely criminalizes certain ‘unnatural acts’ and did not function with the intention to target specific identities or groups for discrimination. In January 2018, the Supreme Court pledged to revisit its decision, and in August 2018, eventually declared the law prohibiting same-sex acts as ‘unconstitutional.’ The Naz Foundation was one of the most important stakeholders in queer activism that engaged not merely in an almost decade long battle against HIV/AIDS, but also against Section 377. The organization was at the forefront of the fight for the emancipation of the queer community from deeper colonial structures of sexual categorization, and the decriminalization of homosexuality by according a right to privacy, equality, dignity, and non-discrimination to consenting adults. The fight for decriminalization, according to Gupta, will bring “self-acceptance, comfort, confidence and evolving pride among gays, bisexuals, lesbians, transgenders (hijras)” (20). The LGBTQ

movement led by NGOs was superseded by a new wave of social and digital activism that inundated the public and political discourse in tandem with queer politics. The outburst post-reading down of Section 377 seemed to be a culminating moment of the ‘performative coming out’ of queer sexuality in a public space where celebratory spectacles such as pride parades, flash mobs and other performances contrasted the earlier clandestine subcultures of queer life. However, cyber-activism played an equally significant role in bringing awareness to the general public in tandem with street protests. Digital activism has continued to serve as witness to the re-emergence of a defiant and blatant gesture of rejection of Section 377. Indian queer spaces on the internet have come to be defined by the prevalence of queer individuals coming in contact with each other via mainstream websites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter that add dimensions to discussions on queer identity. These sites have become more than mere media platforms that encourage discourses on digital activism. Digital media here, becomes a discursive arena for subaltern counterpublics that develop in parallel to official public spheres, and where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs (Fraser 67). Digital activism around this law, in short, has enabled and encouraged the shattering of boundaries between the real and the virtual; between the everyday and the performative. The digital wave that called for the reading down of the law created pockets of ‘postcolonial unrest,’ in favour of acknowledging queer desire and identity in traditional India. Similarly, the movement has forged a virtual community of transnational empathy and support. The Indian queer movement has grown into a political mobilization for marginalized communities online and has engendered greater political participation among the nation’s youth.

#MeTooIndia

The MeToo campaign first emerged in the United States in 2006 to “support survivors of sexual harassment and assault” (Pegu 152). Led by Tarana Burke, a black activist, the campaign carried the objective of creating awareness and expanding conversations around sexual violence, harassment, and abuse, and holding perpetrators accountable (Pegu 152). Years later, on 5th October 2017, sexual allegations against Harvey Weinstein broke out in The New York Times (Mishra 659). Subsequently, on October 15th 2017, actress Alyssa Milano “encouraged women to use the Twitter hashtag #MeToo to share their stories of sexual harassment and abuse on social media” (659). In October 2017, the #MeToo hashtag was picked up on Twitter and became a global sensation that extended from Hollywood to academia and beyond. The hashtag became viral and was shared as part of millions of social media posts on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Employed as the mouthpiece of women’s stories of harassment and abuse, the #MeToo “heralded an epochal moment in feminist history, and the beginning of a cultural and collective reckoning of sexual harassment” (Pegu 152) on digital media platforms. #MeToo, in the wake of allegations against Weinstein, resonated with women around the world, and enabled the construction of a leaderless, “borderless and transnational” movement to highlight personal stories of sexual abuse and harassment (Mishra 659).

The #MeToo movement in India, as an international manifestation of the global #MeToo movement, has been invested in discussions of sexual violence for Indian women. The movement, constructed around the hashtag #MeTooIndia, has been able to uncover issues of sexual abuse, harassment, and rape at the intersection of sex, power and politics on Twitter. It has employed the digital public sphere to facilitate the experiences of “coming-out” with personal stories for urban Indian women. When the #MeToo movement spread globally, women in India were already employing social media to make visible their

experiences in sexual abuse and harassment by those in positions of power. The digital movement sent reverberations across the country in unprecedented ways and took off on a massive scale in October 2018 (Mathur 1). On an important note, #MeTooIndia made explicit important dynamics about sexuality, vulnerability and desire. #MeToo is a purely digital movement, and although one can compare it to other feminisms and Indian feminist solidarities on the ground, its digitality characterizes it. What began on the streets as the modern third-wave feminist movement in India eventually launched itself onto digital platforms. Digital activism resonated with a much larger number of women online who spoke to larger publics. Scholars Sonora Jha and Alka Kurian have claimed that feminist movements in India are leading a new kind of social media-based fourth-wave feminism that challenged violence in public spaces and sexual harassment issues on social media (2). #MeTooIndia has transformed the digital landscape by creating pockets of security for urban women to engage openly in discussions of sex and power; it functions as a tool and vehicle for feminist change; an amplification of feminist voices indicating a form of feminist emancipation within and beyond the platform.

Although Indian digital spaces and social media platforms have previously enabled the construction of “collaborative feminist movements involving activists, women’s organizations, and journalists” (Sambaraju 604), #MeToo was not immediately adapted into Indian digital spaces. It was instead followed by the creation of a “crowd-sourced list of (alleged) sexual predators in Indian academia on Facebook known as the List of Sexual Harassers in Academia (LoSHA)” (Moitra & al. 111:2) by Raya Sarkar, an Indian Dalit law student at the University of California, Davis. #MeToo in India was therefore first called to action by a Dalit scholar who created a storm of debate online in feminist circles in India with the publication of a list of sexual predators in Indian academia (Roy 7). As discussed above, Dalits are members of the “untouchable” caste in India. They have faced historical

oppression and violence and have been culturally subjugated and politically marginalized. Sarkar's list was meant to give the oppressed a voice to narrate their experiences of sexual assault in academia through anonymity. Instead, it was met with criticism from prominent Indian feminists and scholars in academia. Eventually, the movement shifted away from marginalized (Dalit) voices to media personalities and Bollywood, a rendition of the western trajectory of #MeToo in India. According to Mishra, despite the spread of the #MeToo movement around the world and LoSHA in India, "the movement did not gain traction in India until October 2018, a year after it began in the US" (662) when actress Tanushree Dutta publicly accused actor Nana Patekar (Goel et al. 1). Following this accusation, 35 actresses, journalists, and other public personalities came forward with accusations of sexual harassment and misconduct over the course of the digital movement between 2018 and 2019. These events created a media storm that "snowballed to television industry, journalism, corporate and other workplaces" (Moitra & al. 2). This mainstream media attention for the visible elite in Bollywood led to massive public interest in the movement, and the hashtag #MeTooIndia peaked on Indian Twitter in October 2018 (Goel et al. 1).

However, the Indian #MeToo movement has continued to accumulate criticism on grounds that it caters to a singular, universal, and western idea of feminism. The movement has largely ignored intersectional identities within and outside traditional feminisms and excluded other marginally gendered bodies. It has failed to engage in discussions about the everyday experiences in sexual abuse and harassment of Dalit and trans women, women of lower caste and class, the LGBT community, other marginalized, gendered and queer bodies, and rural communities. The experiences of sexual violence, harassment, and abuse that Dalit and transwomen encounter in India are vastly different from those of the elite, urban Indian woman. As the movement borrowed from the west, it evoked a different response to the issues that Indian women face. Although the movement has successfully created safe spaces

for self-expression, congregation and communication for urban Indian women to engage and bring light to discussions on sexual abuse and harassment, its complete turn in later stages towards the discussion of sexual abuse in Indian cinema (Mishra 670), catering specifically to those with wealth and privilege, has created an even more elitist and exclusive movement. According to scholars Moitra et al, the “movement has mostly witnessed privileged and elite women speaking out, with a significant lack of stories from general middle-class women and women belonging to poor socio-economic strata” (111). Scholars argue that the MeToo movement in India does not make visible or include “Dalit, Adivasi (tribal caste) women and the queer community” (Pegu 153).

Additionally, #MeToo in India, as an exclusively digital movement, creates barriers in participation, access, and representation on social media platforms, and lays bare the practices of non-inclusivity on the platform with respect to its large focus on Bollywood celebrities and other well-known media personalities. For many women, including those living in stigmatized Dalit and transgender communities in postcolonial India, digital platforms remain largely inaccessible. Their low status within the Indian caste system and position within economically impoverished communities exacerbates their vulnerability to severe discrimination. The small distance separating women from their attackers, and from the violent repercussions of men surrounding them, further restricts their ability to seek support and refuge. The violence faced by Dalit women is a relentless, everyday occurrence deeply embedded within the socio-religious framework that dominates Indian society. In addition, the Indian transgender/hijra communities are excluded from online and offline platforms, and their voices continue to be suppressed. The highly gendered nature of the India #MeToo movement tends to assume positionalities and dispositions, and posits an inherent non-inclusivity towards the queer or anyone outside normative notions of femininity. A woman, for the #MeToo Movement, is the cis gendered, upper caste brahmanical

counterpart that participates in dialogues that pave the way forward for Indian digital feminism.

Literature Review

Theory as Method

In this study, I combine multiple theoretical and critical inquiries that draw on approaches in postcolonial, queer and feminist theory, intersectionality, and decoloniality. I also employ the praxis of Comparative Literature and Digital Humanities in relation with social justice and activism on digital platforms. Through my engagement with social media text and visual culture surrounding #Section377 and #MeTooIndia, I reflect on the possibilities of critical methodologies and praxes that I employ to locate what I term “the Indian digital subaltern.”

Critical Frameworks

The Comparative as Method

Comparative Literature as “a discipline with a global history, intellectual relevance and institutional presence” (Zepetnek 190) values analysis through distinct and conceptually equal lenses, and offers a critical solution to social change by providing a framework of alterity to work within. Its “continued construction, both theoretical and applied, is based on national literatures at a time when the paradigm of the global has gained currency in many disciplines and approaches” (177). The question now is how to define and expand the field in the face of a globalization that threatens to reduce comparison to a multiplicity of texts in English and English translation and perhaps also to diminish the importance of literature, whether high or low, within the hierarchy of forms of expression being compared (Ziolkowski 24). Among the challenges the field has been facing in the past two decades is how to overcome the Eurocentrism that has traditionally defined the field of Comparative Literature. Given recent shifts in the focus of literary and cultural studies away from an exclusive concentration on European literatures, it is necessary to consider new directions in studying comparative studies (Behdad & Thomas 7). As Susan Bassnett argues, the new

Comparative Literature needs to move beyond the parameters of Western literatures and societies and reposition itself within a planetary and global context (3-4). In this context, I attempt to redefine literature beyond traditional notions of what constitutes the literary, about the function that literature performs, and what it takes as its object and its *raison d'être* (Kushner 1). In addition to challenging traditional inclinations of comparative literature, I also locate the comparative as a method to interrogate textuality on media different from what is traditionally considered literature. Scholars, including Zepetnek, Kushner, and Hayles address the importance of shifting towards reading and writing in different forms of media, and re-orient close-reading practices towards the digital. I imagine Comparative Literature as a discipline and as a critical method of inquiry not merely to redefine literary textuality to include social media but also to employ the literary praxis to excavate the marginalized subaltern through text. Spivak emphasizes the role of the comparative as the harbinger of alterity instead of difference. Here, Comparative Literature furnishes a particular mode of thinking that enables the study of an active form of resistance of the marginalized gendered “Other” online, underscoring the digital divide and unequal lines of power in Indian cyberspaces.

Queer Theory

Queer theory emerged as a new branch of theoretical intervention in Gender Studies. It grew out of Gay/Lesbian Studies and Feminist Studies, and offered a political critique of non-normative behaviours, identities, and deviant forms of sexuality. Queer theory and its disciplinary traditions have been reworked over time to reveal tensions in relations with postmodern feminisms, women's studies, and gay and lesbian studies particularly by Sedgwick (1990), Butler (1993), Jagose (1996), and Halberstam (2017). For queer theorists like Butler and Sedgwick, queerness indicates a certain indecipherability about gender and sexuality; an uncategorizable quality that crosses normative spaces into queer spaces on the

margins. Although “queer theory is extensively associated with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual movements and notions of sexuality” (Light 432), its radical potential is imagining a future that does not exist (Muñoz 1). Therefore, to queer something is to problematize normativity. Here, I evoke a queer framework to not merely challenge heteronormative, masculine, homophobic power structures but also to re-imagine identity politics and inclusive fourth-wave digital activism.

Intersectionality

The term intersectionality was first coined by the civil rights advocate and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, although the concept already existed among scholars of colour, particularly among black feminists such as bell hooks (1981) and Gloria Anzaldúa (1987). Therefore, intersectionality emerged from critical race studies at the interstices of gender and race to “challenge the notion that gender was the primary determining factor for a woman’s fate” (hooks 14). Crenshaw’s call for intersectionality was to “capture both the structural and dynamic aspects of multiple discriminations that exist within the overlapping margins of race and gender discourse” (Crenshaw 403). The marginalization of women can be observed through multiple lenses and illuminates the lack of protections within social structures against violence for women of colour. This requires examining how discrimination is structured, and how it works,” (Morgan 46). Today, intersectionality has been taken up by feminist scholars across the world (Wong-Villacres et al. 3) and applied in various fields within and beyond feminist thought to highlight oppression and discrimination at the intersections of gender, race, and class. The concept of intersectionality subverts and destabilizes the race/gender binaries to conceptualize, theorize and problematize traditional definitions of identity (Nash 4). Its history illuminates how systems of oppression cannot work in isolation, and advocates for further complexity in gender studies. Power is centred at

the intersections of identity that creates visibility for social action. The different axes of oppression are where hierarchies/ inequities of power exist.

Furthermore, the concept is also incorporated into the study of feminist social movements (Bassel & Emejulu 520). Scholars at the intersection of feminism and activism such as Crenshaw (1991) and Mohanty (2003) have exposed the failure of organizations focused on a single identity such as gender to address power relations among members while prioritizing the needs and interests of the privileged. Deploying identity politics has meant increased theorizations that are founded in the shared experiences of injustice among members of social groups (Heyes 1). According to Gabrielle Reed (105), instead of factoring in multiple axes of identity categorizations, identity politics has aimed to secure political liberation and social justice based on a particular identity marker that, in turn, can promote divisiveness among marginalized groups while encouraging groups to organize around an identity instead of an issue. In the context of this research, I employ the intersectional framework to rethink gender binaries and categorical essentialism, and to explore the construction of a safer and more representative space online for gender minorities. Further, an intersectional approach is also useful for me in re-imagining an inclusive technological design that creates systems of interaction through digital protest. Digital futures in protest must strive to create a neutral, safe zone that provide complete acceptance and inclusion of non-binary genders, dynamic feminisms and sexualities as well as multiple markers of identity. I view intersectionality as an important lens and perspective for how technological systems of the future must be built based on values of equality, diversity, representation, access, fairness and justice.

Poststructuralist Feminism

Gender identity, and the interplay between gender, language and power has evolved through feminist literary analysis under structuralism, Marxism, post-structuralism, and

postmodernism among other perspectives in the history of feminism. Poststructuralist feminism, particularly through the canonical work of French poststructuralists Hélène Cixous (1990), Luce Irigaray (1985), and Judith Butler (1993), argues that the concept of gender is constructed through discourse and power that shapes reality and identity. According to Butler, not only gender but sex itself is a performative social construct, and the configurations of sex, gender and sexual desire are constructed through discourse, speech, and performance (6-7). Therefore, the validity of the concept of ‘woman’ as an exclusionary and essentialized construct is troubled and destabilized. For poststructuralist feminism, woman “are not one unified, coherent group with a singular identity,” (Mohanty 2003, 336) but constantly shifting and creating new identities and subjectivities. This interrogation of gender identity has enabled feminism to step outside of the binaries of essentialism, and to rethink what constitutes the category of ‘woman.’

In addition to challenging normative and patriarchal ideals of identity politics, poststructuralist feminism, along with Derrida’s deconstructive approach (1969) and Foucault’s theory of power/knowledge (1980), draws attention to the erasure of various axes of differences among women. This is particularly pertinent in the context of the Global South, where feminist identities are constructed differently than in the west. The west locates both feminist identities and movements in hegemonic, hierarchical, and patriarchal power struggles, and universalizing and essentializing definitions of bodily femininity. Indian women, however, construct and come into their self-identity differently than western women owing to different social, economic and class structures, conditioning, and restrictions. Identity politics in recent years in India has failed to recognize intragroup differences (Moni 1), and has consistently focused on collectivizing identities, thus alienating other marginalized communities both within and outside the group. Although feminist movements have “claimed to be broader in their vision, more global in their concerns, and more

progressive in their sensitivities to transnational, multiracial, and sexual politics” (Hewitt 661; Moni 1), fourth-wave feminisms in the South have taken a turn towards imitating the west, and have failed to identify the need for feminism in the everyday lives of people in India whose identities constantly shift between gender, class and caste. Therefore, in this context, I evoke a feminist framework to redefine what constitutes the category of woman or womanhood in India; to recover lost voices of women and address shortcomings of theories that centre a form of colonial thinking that privileges only the elite – white, middle class, straight, able-bodied women from the Global North.

Cyberfeminism

The objective of this research is not merely to investigate how digital identity is constructed within queer and feminist subaltern communities in India, but also to liberate Indian women and queer people from pre-defined categories of identity formation and material embodiment. One of the many ways in which digital technology has been theorized is an examination of how it facilitates the emancipation of women from the constraints of their bodies and sexuality. Sadie Plant originally “conceptualized the feminization of culture through digital networks and complex connections” (Paasonen 61) and claimed cyberfeminism as a post-human and digital insurrection against the material reality of patriarchy. The objective of cyberfeminism was “to remap cyberculture with a feminist bent” (Schaffer 50), allowing for the potential of emancipating feminist and queer bodies through a disembodied medium, free of materiality. I employ this critical framework to unpack both feminist selfhood, and collective identity online as well as the digital divide at the interstices of gender and technology in the Global South. Modern digital feminism builds on cyberfeminist tradition to engage with contemporary and diverse issues of feminist interaction, congregation, feminist community building, and feminist social activism to tackle patriarchy, sexism, marginalization and exclusion. The digital here, is also a space where

both feminist identity and activism can be defined outside of the fixed categorizations of identity construction, and binaries of male/female, white/black, human/machine, and self/other.

Digital Humanities and Activism

In the context of this research, I employ a cultural and critical intersectional digital humanities framework to examine intersectional identity construction and representation on the Internet. The field of Digital Humanities, employed as a method in the context of this research, works to reinterpret human values in an “era when relation to information, knowledge, and cultural heritage is migrating to digital formats” (Gold 1). Digital humanities “is born of the encounter between traditional humanities and computational methods,” and a product of the migration of cultural materials into networked environments that create new challenges for humanists (Gold 1). According to Elizabeth Losh, digital humanities is a re-adaptation of traditional humanities, and concerns itself with “deep issues facing humanity and society, and what it means to be human” (Losh 2012, 1). Digital humanities operates as a methodological tool, a perspective, a critical lens, and/or an extension of traditional humanities, and functions as “site of political activism, in its incorporation of the marginalized subjects” (Gold 1). According to Digital Humanities scholar Roopika Risam, the digital carries the hallmarks of colonialism, fissures and lacunae, and problematics of politics of representation from the Global South (79). Digital Humanities, therefore, emerges as a theoretical approach at the intersection of digital technologies and humanistic inquiry in an attempt to decolonize both the digital space as well as the field of Humanities. In the context of this research, a DH praxis helps decolonize digital spaces where activism occurs, and informs the investigation of how textual and visual discourse on platforms such as Twitter and Instagram can perform the act of decolonization. Cathy Davidson positions Digital Humanities as a site for political activism for the oppressed and marginalized (1). In

the history of the field, various cultural, social and pedagogical projects including #TransformDH, #dhpoco, FemTechNet, HASTAC, GO: DH, Torn Apart/Separados, and Puerto Rico Mapathon have paved the way for critical engagement in social issues. Current scholarly work in the Digital Humanities is timely, political and radical, and attempts to dismantle power structures within marginalized communities using critical DH frameworks and digital tools. Amy Earhart argues that “DH frameworks can enable the use of Internet space to allow those who [have] been silenced to have a voice” (1). Therefore, DH at the intersection of social activism can create a bridge between lingering theory and practice to generate positive social change and uplift marginalized communities. For the purpose of this research, a DH activist lens is employed to “question the quality of access, visibility, representation and participation concerning subaltern groups on digital platforms” (Morais 2013), and to acknowledge the new digital divide in the Global South.

As this research is invested in the examination of identity and representation in digital communities of the South, I chart previous studies from key scholars who define the field of identity studies and contextualize queer, feminist, postcolonial, diasporic and subaltern identity within the digital public sphere in the Global South. Here, I also map the field of digital hashtag activism, outline the affordances and constraints of social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram in creating safe spaces for the marginalized, and illustrate the historiographies of Indian feminisms and queerness to provide an introductory framework for the study of Indian fourth-wave queer and feminist movements on digital media.

Digital Identity in the Public Sphere

Definitions of identity came to abound within Humanities scholarship, particularly in the postmodern world, where the concept garnered social relevance and meaning in the culture industry (Altheide 1). Diaspora studies and postcolonial criticism have facilitated the emergence of an exchange of cultures that further complicated, destabilized, deterritorialized,

and deconstructed identity and the process of identity making (Cohen 7). Where Anderson's imagined nation and homelands created "bonds of language, religion, and culture" (7) for newly emerging postcolonial nations, diasporas nurtured relationships of a different nature with the host country. As postcolonial cultures facilitated the creation of national, and often heteropatriarchal and homophobic identities, diasporic exchanges mobilized multicultural communities and problematized the human subject through the geographical displacement of peoples and practices. In relation to diasporic cultures, identities and hierarchies are constantly "mobilized, transformed, and interrupted" (Brah 1), and media and migration render identities as unstable units, constantly in flux, fragmented, multiple, untenable, and disjunctured (Appadurai 1).

This process of identity building becomes even more complex as we dive deeper and deeper into an age of data abundance on digital platforms for information, communication, congregation, and self-expression. Digital spaces have transgressed boundaries, particularly in community building and collective identity construction. Scholars Rheingold and Jones speak of virtual communities as "social aggregations that emerge when people carry on public discussions, with human feeling to form webs of personal relationships" (Rheingold 5). The digital platform has come to define the new-age public sphere as a space for self-expression, and collective identity construction, and to enable the presence of the 'Other' in a manner hitherto unseen. Furthermore, with the advent of new media, or digital media as the new public sphere, virtual counterpublics have grown in number (Downey 199). Identities became even more fragmented; a "more fluid sense of self engendered greater capacities for acknowledging and accepting diversity" (Turkle 261). Cyberspaces, in this sense, have worked to create communities that strive for equality and/or address gaps in equality. As the "communication landscape gets more complex," there are more opportunities to engage in public discussions and participate in a larger collective (Clay 1). With few exceptions,

therefore, digital platforms unsurprisingly blossomed into the cornerstones for broader discourses of liberation. As Altheide notes, “identity politics and identity rights” (23) stress the need for the postmodern human subject to create a sense of self, build networks of kinship, and participate in the liberation of the ‘other’ through digital activism. In this research, I locate and define what identity means in the context of the digital, and engage in the inquiry of the digital platform that both empowers and restricts the gendered subaltern as both an individual and a collective in the new public sphere.

In the process of creating virtual communities, networked societies, and collectivities for public communication online, digital media, according to scholars Sousa et al, has “become central to the public debate, and therefore, inseparable from the concept of the public sphere” (9). German philosopher Jürgen Habermas defines the public sphere as the platform where public and social life intertwines, where public opinions may be formed (1), and public conversations for private individuals can be held. Recent scholarship on the digital as the new public sphere posits that the “Internet poses new theoretical, methodological, and practical challenges for socialization, networking, dissemination of information” (Sousa et al. 9). In the context of this research, the digital locates itself as the new public sphere where the hashtag becomes the discursive unit that both enables the formation of connections, networks, and collectivities for feminist and queer communities, and promotes discourse that drives the liberation of gender identity and desire forward in the Indian subcontinent.

Digital Subaltern

However, the foundations of the Habermasian public sphere are built on the exclusion of certain groups and reflect the inherent power structures and hierarchies within the state. Castells notes that “counter-power exists under different forms”, and “where domination exists, resistance to domination” also emerges (248). Nancy Fraser expounds on the framework of the subaltern counterpublic collective that I employ, with her critique of the

exclusionary public sphere. She points out that there is a need for multiple coexisting counterpublics to express one's cultural identity as a response to a single dominant public sphere (126). She contests the importance of a space to construct open collectivities for "marginalized communities and members of subordinated groups, that includes women, workers, people of colour, and gays and lesbians" (67). Counterpublics "form communities of solidarity and reciprocity that are grounded in collective experience in marginalization" (Downey 194). Therefore, the creation of counterpublics in new media has contributed to an explosion in the discussions of personal and collective marginalized identities.

Additionally, I locate the internet as a platform that facilitates democracy and enables the creation of safe spaces for Fraser's subaltern counterpublics in order to communicate both with the state, and with each other. Therefore, I contextualize the subjects of the Indian woman and the Indian queer in relation to the postcolonial oppressive and traditionally patriarchal Indian state. By participating as a democratic public, in order to discuss their private issues, the members are able to negotiate their desires, and oust systemic violence using their peripheral status. In addition to the creation of subaltern counterpublics, I also engage with subaltern representation, and the emergence or lack thereof of subaltern voices on social media platforms. Mitra examines the process of expressing oneself in cyberspace through the metaphor of 'voice', by discerning a similarity between the process of speaking and the presentation of the self in cyberspace (2011). The metaphor of voice allows the examination of expressions in cyberspace in a dialogic manner and demonstrates a unique voice that can be produced with the technology of cyberspace. Gajjala maps a particular path in examining how voice and silence shape online space in relation to offline actualities (2013). Implicit in this investigation is also the question of how offline actualities and online cultures are in turn shaped by online hierarchies as well as different kinds of local access to global contexts. Furthermore, this research attempts to locate the authentic subaltern voice of

Indian women and queer communities, and examine whether they are accurately represented on social media. The gendered subaltern in India is constantly ‘otherized,’ and pushed to the periphery in public spaces through traditional norms of exclusion.

Gender & Media

To further explore the gendered subaltern, it is important to examine the relationship between gender and media, and how gender identity is constructed on social media. Gender identity, states Johanna Oksala, “differs from other forms of identity in the integral role it plays in how we define our core essence” (42). To be “human is to conform to the binaries of gender construction although the idea of gender stems from our subjectivities and experiences that shape the idea” (42) of a body culturally and politically. For Judith Butler, “the construction of gender operates through exclusionary means” (xvii), and sexual desire and identity are connected closely with sexual bodies, particularly for “peripheral and marginal sexualities” (Foucault 41). Therefore, the control of desire operates through the policing of bodies, and through a rigidity in sexual identities. Gender, as a social tool of power, necessitates a construction and conceptualization that is carried through discursive mechanisms of bio-power and identity delineations.

One of the ways in which digital technology has been theorized has been to see how it liberates women from the constraints of their bodies and sexuality. Kira Hall, in her review of Donna Haraway’s classic, *A Manifesto for Cyborgs* (1985) explores the author’s argument on the “number of responses to the growing technological affordances” (Hall 147). Haraway identifies in this process a new kind of feminism. She argues for a blurring of boundaries between human and machine that will eventually reinvent the body (110) and make categories of identity construction obsolete while contemplating a world without gender (610). Her predictions from cyberfeminism, scholars argue, do not extend as logical, practical extensions of their real-life counterparts. However, what this research takes away from this

history is that it is no coincidence that many queer organizations and social groups have embraced the computer as a cultural icon, because theorizing it as a utopian medium has enabled neutralized (or at least mediated) distinctions of gender, race and sexual orientations. Haraway's "cyborg", in essence, embodies the notion that womanhood is hybridized into simultaneously everything and nothing. As long as the body is an immaterial idea, its likeness is malleable and uploadable and potentially indomitable. Haraway's decidedly third wave views, informed by the idea that "there is nothing about being 'female' that inherently binds women," (16) attempt to morph reductive, binary notions of gender into logical values on the spectrum of 0-1. Hester Baer offers an analysis into the potential for digital platforms to help shape new modes of inquiry and discourses in feminist thought, ideas and embodiment in the our reinvention and to take the same conversations to different configurations of activism across the globe, both online and offline (18). Baer points out that the body has now taken on more significance as a site of both self-representation and surveillance in regard to gender identities (19). Her key argument problematizes feminist theory's flawed logic to categorize and delineate the body in gendered parts on the basis of politics primarily to enable intersectional dialogues and conversations. Cyberfeminism, and the imagination that it renders accessible, suggest a way out of dualisms in which we explain our bodies and tools to ourselves. Women and queer communities have been successful in creating safe spaces for self-expression, congregation and liberation on digital technology that continues to reproduce sexist and misogynist environments that the marginalized contend with offline.

As this research is invested in uncovering the role of social media platforms in digital protest in the Global South, both in the empowerment and amplification of subaltern communities and the restriction they face on social media platforms, it is important to also question the rhetoric of the Internet technologies as being "great equalizers" for the Global South. Gajjala argues that cyberfeminism continues to carry assumptions of first world

technologies liberating the “third world from its ‘pre-developed’ misery” (Gajjala 122). The Internet constructs of ‘third-world’ ignorance and identity occur within a framing of ‘civility’ and netiquette that are defined in westernized and urban bourgeois terms. At the same time, the speaking and silencing of women from various races, classes, castes and geographical locations continues to be governed by a ‘benevolence’ that is nonetheless hierarchical in that it enables or disrupts the other. Gajjala’s arguments speak to gender construction as an act of colonization in ‘third world countries’ (123). Similarly, Faith Wilding problematizes the utopian aspect and the elitism apparent among cyberfeminist inquiries/ frameworks/ debates, or what she calls techno-utopian expectations of electronic media that will “always create a fresh start where women can employ technology to help change the feminine condition” (9). She argues that cyberspace cannot be assumed as a space that is free of gender and race struggles, and new media mirrors patterns and practices of discrimination that are embedded in economic, political, and cultural environments (9).

While digital technology has led to a greater and more diverse participation in political and social discourse, it does not necessarily create more democratic spaces. Unequal access to digital technology restricts the possibility of marginalized groups participating online. Where Haraway and other cyberfeminists posit a posthuman blurring of boundaries between human and machine, this research attempts to centre the Indian feminist and queer communities online, problematize issues of lack of access, participation, and representation that these communities face, and attempts to reimagine a new design for the liberation of sexual bodies online.

Digital Activism

The advent of social media is rooted in its ability to connect, communicate and collaborate across time and space (Castells 29). In the last decade, digital activism has proved to be a powerful means of grassroots mobilization that has revolutionized political dissent in

the public sphere. With its power to bring both private and public issues, including sexuality, to light, digital cultures have evolved into a transformative space that enable the development of non-traditional identities. However, in the Global South, the public sphere remains either highly regulated or rooted in traditional patriarchy. Recent years in India have witnessed a “proliferation of groups representing marginalized voices in digital spaces” (Mitra 38). The Internet has played a pivotal role in the growth of *gendered* movements (Roy 180). Furthermore, Instagram and Twitter are now important sites of countercultural practice, intervention, and representation (Jackson et al. 5), enabling connective action and uniting people with similar interests from different parts of the world (Bakshi 47). Hashtags perform the function of centring on Indian feminist and queer politics, on making visible their struggle for acceptance and creating networks of solidarity and empathy. Hashtags, according to Losh, are also critical in promoting other feminist causes, such as ending domestic violence, street harassment, gender segregation on transportation, and the early marriage of girls (Losh 12). For survivors of sexual violence, the internet has enabled networks of solidarity beyond geographical boundaries and consciousness-raising without physical risk (Bailey et al. 1). Therefore, this study is a ‘merging together’ of scholarly ideas on identity and representation to create a dialogue on media activism, the affordances and constraints of media in the formation of bodies and identities, gender and national identity in the context of India.

Feminist and queer movements in India

Indian Feminism

Feminist movements, in their very character, create visibility, structure, and progress through universalizing and essentialized definitions of feminisms. However, feminist movements in India have had various conflicting, often warring, factions with differences in perspectives, origins, locations, strategies, and even what a feminist future and solidarity should look like (Roy 1). Indian feminist movements, in particular, “have a long and

historically well-established trajectory characterized by internal divisions, inequalities, diversities, fuelled primarily by class and caste divides” (Narayanaswami 2162). Indian feminism has been forced to negotiate with the British and the postcolonial state, colonialism, nationalism, and capitalism to be understood as part of the modern democratic project. Universalizing feminist struggles in the Global South, particularly in countries such as India, manifest through assumptions of displacement of intersectional struggles of class, race, caste, and gender. India has a complex colonial history that sets a jarring precedent for its uniquely organic evolution in feminism. The Indian woman as a colonial and postcolonial subject has acquired specific processes of resistance against patriarchal, hegemonic, hierarchical, institutional and cultural systems and structures. With “considerable distinctions between the global and the local/the North and the South” (Chaudhuri 35), India’s feminist movements have a long and vibrant history where “violence against women has been key in mobilization” (Raiva & Sariola 1). The colonial upper caste women’s movements “politicized Sati or widow-burning in the 17th century as part of their campaign to socially legitimize British imperialism in the country” (1). According to Raiva and Sairola, “Hindu nationalist movements adopted oppressive casteist and patriarchal notions of gender and sexuality, continuing therefore, to subject women to excessive control in the name of honour and protection” and “sexual violence here, was a means to reinstate male power and female possession” (1). The Indian feminist movement has been marred, to say the least, by a *colonial past* that brings the large diversity of woman’s rights movements together (Chaudhuri 24). India has always been a country of “inequalities and diversities” (7) that had to consistently engage and grapple with questions of “both difference and inequality” in the past (24). However, with the country’s modern capitalist emergence onto the global landscape that began with colonialism (25), its feminist ideologies merged with that of the West, where feminism had different interpretations. Our post-colonialist and capitalist

understandings were fused with the North, and challenging patriarchy became synonymous with challenging the state, caste, class, community, region, household, family and marriage since patriarchy moves and operates through these sites” (35). In the 1970’s therefore, Indian feminism came to be branded as an “elitist and western” movement where the “urban class women began speaking *for* the poor” (Phadke 7). Phadke argue that intersectional differences between Indian women have effectively ignored the larger feminist cause (7), particularly in relation to the Dalit or transgender people. With “contested ideas on fragmentation of identities” (8), the women’s movement requires new solutions for taking all narratives into account. The globalization of the South has effectively re-classified categories and has enabled the disappearance of caste-based perspectives within the movement. As Phadke puts it, “to be a woman does not necessarily mean to have to identify as a woman” (11). As Kim argues, “diversity and inclusion are about paying attention to the experiences of marginalized groups to ensure an equal playing field” (1). This leads to a contention that a mere focus on gender may subsequently “benefit a subset of the population” (1) and will lead to practical isolation and estrangement for other groups. Feminism perpetuates biases within gender owing to its own “history of exclusionary practices” (Hoskin 3). It is, therefore, detrimental to centre any feminist movement around the category of women at the cost of racial, casteist, trans-gendered sexual silences that cannot be addressed otherwise. A key slogan of the Women’s Liberation Movement in the West in the 1960’s and 70’s, *Sisterhood is powerful*, celebrated womanhood, but without considering factors like nation, class, religion, and race. India is a pro-active state where intersectional concerns of “difference in class, caste, region, religion and gender have never been uniform” (Narayanaswami 2165).

Therefore, it may be an ill-conceived logic to continue to borrow from colonial renditions of universal womanhood and contemporary western movements as a foundation for Indian feminism. Mohanty argues that “western feminists appropriate and colonize the

fundamental complexities and conflicts which characterize the lives of women of different classes, religions, cultures, races and castes in these countries,” (335) and that it is in the process of homogenization of oppression that power is exercised. Therefore, Indian feminism, both offline and online, needs to examine what feminism constitutes, and whose voice it enables. On the one hand, how do we answer to the purpose of a *feminist* movement if we take away the centrality of the category of *woman*? On the other, the problematics of the term assume elitism, and take for granted the voices of those that speak for it.

Therefore, Indian women construct and come into their self-identity differently than western women owing to different social, economic and class structures, conditioning, and restrictions. Identity politics in recent years in India has failed to recognize intragroup differences (Moni 1), and has consistently focused on collectivizing identities, thus alienating other marginalized communities both within and outside the group. Although feminist movements have “claimed to be broader in their vision, more global in their concerns, and more progressive in their sensitivities to transnational, multiracial, and sexual politics” (Moni 1), fourth-wave feminisms in the South have taken a turn towards imitating the west, and have failed to identify the need for feminism in the everyday lives of people in India whose identities constantly shift between gender, class, caste etc. (Crenshaw 1; Moni 1).

Although earlier feminist movements and campaigns were limited in scope, they set the precedent for fourth-wave feminisms conducted on social media platforms. Following broader awareness for modern feminism, digital campaigns such as the #pinjratod, #IWillGoOut, or #whyloiter emerged to address issues surrounding misogyny and violence against women (Sambaraju 604). In particular, the Delhi Rape case of Nirbhaya in 2012, shifted the political mobilization of feminist struggle to digital spaces, and digital activism, and the discourse against feminist violence and equality resonated with more women as part of the digital public sphere. However, cyberspaces in the South are complex and have a

different set of constraints from the North. Furthermore, the issue of who speaks for whom becomes even more important owing to lack of access, resources, voluntary participation, and representation of a significantly large population. Caste, class, and geography are significant factors that impede, create taboos, or alienate members from their communities for public sharing of experiences of sexual abuse in India. In this context, there are additional limitations for speaking out on a digital platform for gendered minorities who do choose to share. As feminist activism is becoming increasingly visible on social media platforms, as feminist communities expand and are re-imagined through the use of new media (Mendes et al. 1), it must also be noted that digital culture can be an incredibly complex and toxic space for gendered bodies that are constantly vilified, and objectified. Therefore, barriers to inclusion can, according to authors Vickery and Everback, arise owing to “mediated misogyny” (2018) that oftentimes deliberately infiltrates feminist hashtags to incite violence, hate, and toxicity within the movement and directed towards members. This research engages in the tensions that emerge when Indian women employ social media platforms to conduct public discourse surrounding sexual harassment and violence in India today.

Indian LGBTQIA+ movement

According to Indian scholars Das & Rao, “heterosexual acts have been the only acceptable sexual practices in the prevailing interaction among genders in the community” (23). However, the existence of homosexual, transgender, and gender fluid bodies as part of ancient Indian tradition has been depicted in Indian texts such as the Manusmriti, Arthashastra, and Kama Sutra. The Indian trans or ‘hijra’ community (eunuch in Urdu) “have been a symbol of gender variance and fluidity in India” (23), and the community has a significant role in Hindu religion and traditions. Although both feared and revered within Hindu customs such as weddings, and birth of sons in the family, the hijra has always been ‘otherized’ both as a community and as individuals in Hindu communities.

In addition to trans bodies and identities being discriminated against, non-traditional sexual acts also became a punishable act in British colonial India. Section 377, widely viewed as the cornerstone of the Raj's violent regulation of sexuality before independence, continued to offer an expression of nationalist anxieties in postcolonial India. The concept of Indian nationhood is deeply entangled with the rise of postcolonial modern India, and the rise of the Hindu nationalist party (BJP) is defined and shaped by heteropatriarchal norms and codes for citizenship and sexuality. Sexualities on the fringe have had to endure a path fraught by stigma, prejudice, and possibly significant mental health adversities. The movement around Section 377 also highlighted the tensions between sexuality as a public vs private matter including the community and individual, and their interactions with state institutions and public services.

Although these fraught tensions between gendered bodies and the state have existed for a long time, mainstream LGBT and sexual minorities movement have only recently taken shape in India, primarily through non-governmental organizations that campaigned for the acceptance of LGBT communities and sought to bring more awareness to the HIV epidemic in the Indian subcontinent (Kole 1). Therefore, the globalization of India in the early 90's and the subsequent import of LGBTQIA+ NGOs set up in response to the HIV epidemic had a major impact on queer mobilization in the country (1). Post decriminalization of homosexuality in the country, the "queer dissident citizen is now focused on transforming their "otherness" to a new sense of belonging and thus forging a new relationship with the state and society" (Dasgupta 2014, 214). Digital activism, in recent years, has allowed the queer community to resist and challenge heteropatriarchal structures on social media, and subsequently claim their existence in the fabric of Indian society. The Indian movement demonstrates queer world building across national borders and showcases queerness as an alternate way of life, a desire to understand life "otherwise" (Halberstam 2). The term queer

functions as a particular way of thinking for Indian citizens that defies all traditional expectations, a term that in Halberstam's words, never ceases in self-construction and self-critique; that is in a spiral of constant motion and meaning making. Queerness becomes in this context an act of destabilization of unequal lines of power and evokes an all-inclusiveness that characterizes the digital era. Discourses of queer identity forge digital spaces for interaction and dialogue as a means of support for a transnational movement of queering. The Indian queer movement has undeniably been at the forefront of the LGBTQIA+ activism in the Global South, and continues to redefine the foundational definition of queerness, leading the fight for the decolonization and destabilization of Victorian institutions beyond the law on homosexuality.

Methodologies and Methods

I employ several methodologies to both locate and explore the cultural significance of the gendered digital subaltern in Indian cyberspaces. Through the processes of data collection and analysis that drive my research framework, I bring both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in conversation with each other. Primarily, for the data collection process, I employ Twitter APIs and an Instagram crawler to collect data in the form of text and images. I elaborate on the process of data collection below, and consider it important to provide the code(s) I employ in my research. As a scholar in the Digital Humanities, I define code as more than mere software that informs my methodological framework, and I frame it as a unit of information such as a “line of poetry, a page, taxonomies of a library, DNA, or bits and bytes of a computer programme” (Clement 1). In that sense, code, for me, is not only the scripts of information I write for data collection, but also a methodological approach for meaning-making in the process of data analysis. Although I employ qualitative tools and methodologies in the form of deductive coding, and textual and visual analysis to understand how gendered identities and counterpublics of empathy are constructed by users online, I find that they can, in fact, be defined as codes/criteria I create for analysis. In order to conduct a data analysis that addresses the above research questions, I specifically employ manual coding frameworks as well as close/distant reading of tweets and Instagram posts. Based on the criteria of study that I define, I employ sample representative tweets for analysis throughout the research.

Choice of Platforms

Research in social media is carried out across multiple disciplines, and across a wide range of social media platforms using qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Highfield & Leaver 3). For this study, I engage in a textual and visual analysis of two contemporary social media platforms used for Indian digital protest – Twitter and Instagram. As a social

media researcher, I find that Twitter is a more accessible platform than Facebook, which functions as a “mostly private network with challenges to holistic research on the platform” (Olmstead & Barthel 1). Twitter’s attractiveness as a social media platform of study stems from the relative ease of data collection, textual analysis (Rogers xii), and the focus on networks that emerge from the common use of hashtags (Bruns & Burgess 803). Twitter can be studied as a space or platform for ‘network sociality’ where the creation of subaltern counterpublics can be constructed (Gruzd 1297), and the platform allows for transparency of information in political discourse and public debate by facilitating social connectivity through hashtags (Ausserhofer & Maireder 293). In the context of my research, I examine textual discourse on Twitter based on the platform’s ability to create zones of interaction and large interpersonal networks between politically active citizens (Seegerberg & Bennett 198). The everyday textual culture that the platform evokes offers a glimpse into the cultures, ethics, politics, and social lives of the users I study. Finally, my choice of Twitter stems from the easy use and dissemination of hashtags that creates what I characterize as ‘safe counterpublic spaces’ for the marginalized subaltern to engage “at the intersection of multiple, overlapping oppressions to build coalitions, and deconstruct interlocking systems of power” (Clark-Parsons 4).

In addition to Twitter, I also use Instagram as a platform of study to examine both textual and visual discourse. Although Instagram’s design allows users to engage in the textual representation of discourse as well as the use and the dissemination of protest hashtags, the platform conveys meaning predominantly through photographs, artwork, memes, GIFS, text and hashtags (Laestadius 4), and promotes visual communication and context through image. Similar to Twitter, the platform offers another way of accessing and organizing subaltern counterpublics through visualizations (Highfield & Leaver 6). However, I find that Instagram is a much more private platform to access than Twitter. For social media

researchers, Instagram restricts data collection on multiple levels. For instance, the platform does not provide Web APIs for easy data collection, nor does it provide filters for location, multiple hashtag search, or a range of dates for use. I scrape Instagram data because of the platform's unique ability to bring textual and visual discourse in conversation with each other when locating the Indian digital subaltern using protest hashtags.

While I considered working with Facebook and WhatsApp applications, which constitute treasure troves of personal and public discourse in the Indian context, I ultimately decided not to pursue that line of inquiry. The complexity of data collection and analysis, the lack of hashtags on WhatsApp, as well as the problematics of data analysis on labyrinthian enclosed spaces in these contexts, prompted my decision to focus on Twitter and Instagram for platform study.

My choice of two different social media technologies with vastly different user interfaces and platform designs was based on the fact that each platform shapes user experience, and the discourse that emerges on it, differently. My approach takes into account "the architecture of the medium as essential to the meaning making process," (Brock 1013). I combine critical theory and discourse analysis to underscore the aspect of technological design of Twitter and Instagram and user participation on these platforms. I observe how discourse is shaped on the platform, and the role of the medium in cultural production; how Twitter and Instagram "serve and mediate discourse, and how cultural and discursive strategies shape platform use" (1025). Specific platforms carve specific types of discourses, and what role the medium plays in creating affordances and constraints for the marginalized digital subaltern in the Global South. In both cases, although the forging of networked counterpublics and online communities occurs in different ways, Twitter and Instagram provide a shared sense of space, practice, and identity most relevant to understanding hashtag-based communities (Baym 73).

Hashtag as a Movement

Following Rosemary Clark's work on hashtag activism (2015), I frame this research around protest hashtags surrounding Indian gender movements as an extension of queer and feminist histories and their evolution on digital platforms. Hashtag activism, as a field of study, emerged recently to "describe the aims to raise awareness for social issues on social media" (Xiong et al. 11). Scholars have previously focused on the centrality of hashtag activism in human rights, LGBT rights, #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo both in domestic and international contexts (Jackson & Foucault-Welles; Clark-Parsons; Jackson et al.) highlighting how the hashtag is fundamental in characterizing contemporary digital protest to promote discussion and awareness on contemporary social issues. In the context of this research, I locate hashtags in digital protest as units of semiotic meaning-making that "allow communities to emerge socially and form ad hoc publics that can be extremely efficient" (Bruns & Burgess 7). The primary function of hashtags in digital discourse at a semantic level is to carry information (Wonneberger et al. 2). Hashtags have helped create meaning and establish relationships between multiple actors for the purpose of social justice, and enable public discourse not possible outside the safety and anonymity of the digital sphere on queer and feminist rights in India. In this process, hashtags have become subaltern counterpublic spaces, and can be contextualized as an integral part of contemporary digital gendered protest in India; burdened with the need to carry the voices and narratives of Indian women and members of the LGBTQIA+ community at an intersectional level.

Population and Sample

Twitter Data Collection

In this section, I specify the exact steps that I followed in collecting Twitter data, both to be transparent in regard to my methodology and to provide an example for other Digital Humanists.

First, I set up a Twitter account. Then, I authenticated the account using an [OAuth key](#). As soon as developer access was granted, I created an application to generate API credentials to access data. Next, I began the process of data collection through the Twitter API using a shell script that allowed me to set parameters, and define queries in the form of hashtags. To write the shell script, I employed **TextWrangler**, a text and code editor for MacOS. Text editors enable users to open, view, and edit plain text files that can then be run as scripts from the command line. Below I provide a sample shell script that I used to collect Twitter data on Section 377.

```
curl -X POST "https://api.twitter.com/1.1/tweets/search/fullarchive/dev.json" \
-H "Authorization: Bearer
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAOnR9QAAAAAAAAiJJRSTEVwExUXTDHnVyMtwlIYI%3DKw5z8FvhCzqx9Yn8235lRK0EbtSlG64
PKRKMXinlrOG9gpG7cd" \
-d '{
  "query": "(#Section377 OR #Article377 OR #Strikedown377 OR #sec377) -'RT' lang:en"
  "maxResults": "500",
  "fromDate": "201708010000",
  "toDate": "201708072359"
}' \
> data/fullarchive/ 1Sec2017Aug1-7.json
```

The above code uses the curl command to request data from the server through the Twitter API, and specifies the parameters for the request. The **query** parameter extracts particular terms or hashtags, **maxresults** specifies the maximum number of results for each request, **fromDate** and **toDate** the timeline for each request. In the specific request above, I query multiple hashtags such as #Section377, #Article377, #Strikedown377, and #Sec377. In this case, I employed OR instead of AND because the AND operator would require all hashtags to occur together in a single tweet. I collected 500 tweets each time I ran the above code. Each request contains a date range as a filter. In the above case, my date range was a week; between August 1st and 7th, 2017. Each time I run the script, I change the date range so


```

"user": {
  "id": 881671213860270080,
  "id_str": "881671213860270080",
  "name": "Chai pe charcha",
  "screen_name": "chaipebakaiti",
  "location": "No man's land",
  "url": null,
  "description": "Ordinary",
  "translator_type": "none",
  "protected": false,
  "verified": false,
  "followers_count": 31,
  "friends_count": 233,
  "listed_count": 1,
  "favourites_count": 3962,
  "statuses_count": 8587
}

```

Each request for data collection through the Twitter API produces a maximum of 500 tweets, and therefore, each JSON file can carry information of up to 500 tweets. Following data collection, I created a Python script on TextWrangler to transfer tweet texts from the JSON file onto an Excel sheet (.csv), which can be accomplished in a number of different ways. I took this extra step to store data in Excel sheets in order to organize the data I collected, and to engage in manual coding of tweets and characterization of larger themes that emerged in the dataset. In order to undertake this study I enacted each step for each data collection request I made using different date ranges.

For the data collection on Section 377 and MeTooIndia that I elaborate on below, 500 tweets were collected each week randomly, and retweets were excluded from the sample dataset. I used the Twitter API to also automate the data retrieval process that was capped at 1% of all tweets with a random or representative sample. This ensured that every time I retrieved a sample of tweets, the data was always evenly distributed to ensure randomness, fairness, and transparency. As I collected random tweets every week, the dataset I

accumulated represented a diverse sample from both celebrity and non-celebrity Twitter users alike who engaged with the protest hashtags used in this study.

Before I outline specific data collection strategies for Section 377 and MeTooIndia, I wish to make a brief note on the languages and script I employed in the study. In this research, I set the parameters to either “en,” for English or “hi,” for Hindi. Twitter allows data collection in a multitude of scripts in Indian languages including Hindi and Bengali. For the purpose of this research, I collected data in Hindi, both as a transliteration in English as well in the Devanagari script. Later in my study, I also employed tweets in the Devanagari script that I translated for the purpose of close reading. While my intention was to cover other Indian languages such as Tamil within the confines of this research, the Tamil script is not available as a search parameter on Twitter. Therefore, I continued to employ the Devanagari script for the study owing to the fact that Hindi is the most commonly spoken regional language of India. I collected tweets in Hindi with the intention to study discourse surrounding the movement that originated in a non-English, local national language. I also found that discourse in Hindi addressed questions of nationhood, citizenship, and sexuality differently from mainstream discourses held in a global, transnational language such as English among the Indian elite. Furthermore, Twitter is a public platform, and can therefore provoke a forced sense of solidarity against Section 377 IPC that criminalizes homosexuality. The networks of empathy for queerness are most often countered by local languages that promote a different masculinist, heteronormative, homophobic, postcolonial national identity.

Data Collection for Section 377 and MeToo

For the digital movement surrounding Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, I collected and filtered a total of 5380 unique tweets using Twitter APIs between August 1st, 2017 and August 31st, 2019. The choice of the timeline stemmed from the aim to trace the evolution of public and political discourse surrounding the law and the battle for queer

acceptance before and after homosexuality was legalized in the country. Although the legalization of consensual sexual conduct between adults of same sex occurred during 2018, the Indian Supreme Court declared the right to privacy as a fundamental right protected under the Indian Constitution on 24th August 2017. This historic judgement, originally in relation to the Indian law of privacy, was also seen as the precursor to the judgement on the decriminalization of Section 377 IPC in the country. This was followed by the Indian Supreme Court's promise to re-evaluate petitions to decriminalize homosexuality in January 2018. In August 2018, after a long battle, section 377 of the Indian Penal Code was written down. I continued to collect tweets after homosexuality was decriminalized in court on the 6th of September 2018 as the hashtags gained prominence after the reading down of the law as a continued form of community building on digital platforms.

Out of the original 5380 tweets, I collected 5000 in English that carried tweets both in the English language as well as in transliterations of the Hindi language into English. In addition, I filtered 330 tweets exclusively in Hindi (Devanagari script), and the remaining 50 as part of discourse in Canada using the location filter¹. I attempted to build a larger dataset of tweets to examine diasporic discourse around the queer movement. However, the number of tweets collected here was highly restrictive as most Twitter users do not provide their geocode or location tags. In this context, I applied a close reading framework to investigate how the queer movement borrows from the west, and how it refashions itself as a global transnational despite its unique conceptualization and evolution in India.

As with the queer movement, I collected 7280 unique tweets on MeToo in India using Twitter APIs between October 1st, 2018 and October 3rd, 2020. The choice for the timeline of

¹ This dataset is based on the use of a geolocation filter in Canada, and cannot therefore guarantee that each tweet originates from a member of the Indian diaspora.

data collection here is to chart the complete evolution on the public discourse on MeToo as a digital feminist movement in India. Although #MeToo in India borrowed from its western counterpart in Hollywood and was picked up by Twitter in October 2017, it reached its peak in India during October 2018 (Mathur 1). Following October 2018 and into 2020, the hashtags increased in international visibility, and are dedicated to creating awareness online about the everyday struggles of women in India. Debates around the MeToo movement in India now go beyond a campaign for sexual abuse and power dynamics, and function as a new tool to create a contemporary digital feminist awareness. Out of the original 7280 tweets, I collected 7000 in English, an additional 230 in Hindi/Devanagari script, and finally 50 using the location filter from Canada to denote diasporic discourse. As I find in my research, tweets in national and/or regional languages indicate exclusion and patriarchal, national, and (post)colonial imaginaries of womanhood and masculinity. In the context of the Indian feminist movement, I employed #MeTooIndia instead of simply #MeToo to maintain methodological consistency. Only tweets specific to the Indian context are filtered.

Hashtags for Section 377 and MeToo

For Section 377 on Twitter, I employed textual filters in the form of various hashtags related to the queer movement in India, thus ensuring maximum coverage of tweets on the public discourse surrounding Section 377. I used both single and multiple query parameters that were either exclusive to the movement or broadly connected to the notion of queerness in the country. Single hashtags that I collected here between the timeline include #Section377, #Article377, #Sec377, #377quitindia #lgbtq, #gay, #lesbian, #homosexuality and #queer. I also filtered certain hashtags separately or in conjunction with Section 377 to further the understanding on the movement for queer rights and acceptance in India. In this context, I employed filters with multiple query parameters strung together such as

#article+penal+code+377, #decriminalize+homosexuality, #equalrights+pride, and #supreme+court+sec377.

Similarly, for MeToo on Twitter I used filters in the form of various hashtags related to the widespread fourth-wave feminist movement in India. As mentioned above, I do not employ the open #MeToo in order to ensure that the tweets speak specifically to the Indian feminist movement. Between the timeline, I used single hashtags as filters such as #metooindia #sisterhood, and #womanhood. Further, multiple search terms that I employ together include #india+metoo #womanhood+metoo+india, and #feminism+metoo+india. These hashtag filters are highly specific to the movement, but can pick up tweets that broadly concern the contemporary feminist movement and public perception regarding individual and collective feminist struggles.

Criteria for Data Analysis for #Section377 on Twitter

In order to explore the #Section377 movement, I manually annotated and labelled all 5380 tweets for five criteria to study discourse surrounding the movement. The criteria include:

1. Does this tweet indicate a personal opinion on any topic?
2. Does this tweet discuss a personal experience, story, anecdote or narrative using the hashtag?
3. Who speaks (queer voice amplification) – is it a tweet by an organization, person, celebrity or public figure?
4. Does this tweet demonstrate a positive or negative sentiment for the #Section377 movement and/or the Section 377 IPC law in India?
5. Does this tweet demonstrate a decolonizing sentiment towards the Victorian law?
6. What are the emotions associated with the tweet?
7. Is there empathy and solidarity for the movement?

I marked each criterion on a binary scale of 0/1, where ‘Yes’ is coded as 1, and ‘No’ is coded as 0. For the question that examines sentiment on Section377 as a law, -1 denotes a negative sentiment about the law, and therefore a positive sentiment towards the movement. Similarly, a +1 denotes a positive sentiment towards the existence of the British law, and therefore a negative sentiment towards the Indian queer movement.

Criteria for Data Analysis for #MeTooIndia on Twitter

Similar to the queer movement, in order to examine how feminist identity is constructed on the Twitter platform through #MeTooIndia, how bonds of solidarity and empathy are created through networks of support for the movement, and finally to verify if the digital feminist movement is inclusive and representative of Indian women, I manually annotated and labelled all 7280 original tweets according to the following criteria

1. Does this tweet discuss a personal experience, story, anecdote or narrative using the hashtag?
2. Does this tweet indicate a personal opinion on any topic?
3. Does this tweet demonstrate a positive or negative sentiment for the #MeToo movement in India?
4. Is this tweet about Bollywood actors, celebrities, known media personalities, comedians, journalists, authors etc.?
5. Does this tweet indicate misogyny, violence against women, hate speech or advocacy for men's rights activism?
6. What are the emotions associated with the tweet?
7. Is there empathy and solidarity for the movement?

Similar to the above criteria, I marked these on a binary scale of 0/1. My conclusions are based on the tweet count of the labelled categories as well as a qualitative discourse analysis of the representative tweets.

Instagram Data Collection

In order to study visual culture at the intersection of gendered digital activism in India, I engaged with the social media platform Instagram. Since data cannot be collected from Instagram owing to the lack of APIs provided, I used data extraction techniques using scraping. I downloaded all posts using the specific hashtags on the Instagram webpage using the Selenium Project (2019) library in Python. Below, I provide the scroll script I employ in the study:

```
# imports
from selenium import webdriver
import time
import os
import chromedriver_autoinstaller

# log in to Instagram
# ensure that the following environment variables are set:
# INSTA_USERNAME, INSTA_PASSWORD
```

```

chromedriver_autoinstaller.install()
browser = webdriver.Chrome()
browser.get('https://www.instagram.com/')
time.sleep(2)

browser.find_element_by_xpath("//input[@name=\"username\"]").send_keys(os.environ['INSTA_USER
NAME'])
browser.find_element_by_xpath("//input[@name=\"password\"]").send_keys(os.environ[INSTA_PASSW
ORD'])
browser.find_element_by_xpath("//button[@type=\"submit\"]").click()

# scroll down every 60 minutes until all Instagram posts are shown
hashtag='section377'
browser.get('https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/'+hashtag)
num_scrolls_per_iteration = 45
max_time = 1*60*60 # 60 minutes
start_time = time.time()
elapsed_time = 0

while elapsed_time < max_time:
    for i in range(num_scrolls_per_iteration):
        browser.execute_script("window.scrollTo(0, document.body.scrollHeight);")
        elapsed_time = time.time() - start_time
        time.sleep(10)

```

This code, for which I used a Jupyter Notebook, helps scroll through the images/posts that each hashtag produces every 60 seconds or 1 minute. I ran this code once to let the scrolling continue until all posts with the specific hashtag were scraped. Without using this code, I cannot peruse all the posts on Instagram with a single hashtag owing to limitations on user scrolling. Below is a sample search of #MetooIndia, and demonstrates the first page from where the scrolling begins.

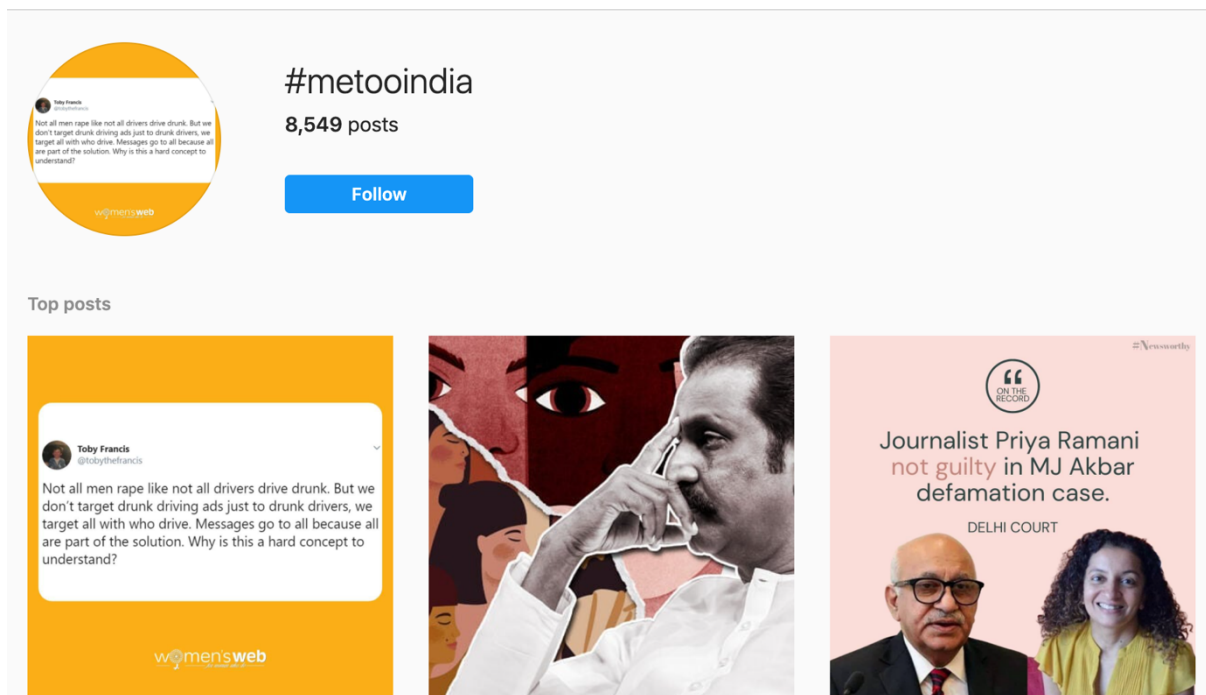


Image 3: Scrolling on Instagram using Selenium Project

I scraped all posts for both the #Section377 and the #MeTooIndia hashtag. Although the number of posts is well beyond 5000 in both cases, I selected around 1000 posts after careful examination for each hashtag, as each post needs to be screenshotted manually to include the image, username, the date, the timestamp, the number of likes and part of the text.

Section 377 and MeToo on Instagram

Owing to the lack of multiple search filters, I employed a single query/filter; a single hashtag, #Section377, to conduct the search. I inspected all original posts manually to filter data between the timeline for data collection i.e. between August 1st, 2017 and August 31st, 2019. Although #Section377 generated 34,402 posts in total, I took screenshots of 1000 posts for the purpose of this study. I decided to work with #Section377 instead of #Article377 and/or other specific hashtags because #Section377 yielded the highest number of posts in comparison to others. I selected only posts that were unique and relevant to the movement. Often, I find that the hashtag on Instagram is used for more visibility rather than to participate in the discussion on queer sexuality in India. In this context, I attempted to gauge the relation between the post's text and the image. Further, I considered personal posts more often in comparison to posts by organizations. Personal stories are more likely to be shared on private or highly visual platforms such as Instagram.

Similar to the queer movement, I explored the feminist MeToo movement in India on Instagram through a single hashtag: #MeTooIndia. I selected this particular hashtag simply to study the feminist movement in the context of India, and eventually in comparison with the west. #MeTooIndia generated a total of 7455 Instagram posts. After checking the correlation between text and image, I filtered unique and personal posts between October 1st, 2018 and October 3rd, 2020. Finally, I collected a total of 1000 posts for the purpose of this study.

Deductive Coding on Instagram

Similar to the approach taken for Twitter, I applied a deductive coding approach for the Instagram dataset for both #Section337 and #MeTooIndia to study the textual discourse that emerges in the form of Instagram captions, the larger patterns that appear within the dataset including the type of images, the number of personal stories shared, the number of images with pride colours or Bollywood personalities, and the overall sentiment for the movements. For Section 377, I designed the criteria to include:

1. What type of image is the Instagram post?
2. Is the image posted by an individual or an organization?
3. Does this tweet discuss a personal experience, story, anecdote or narrative using the hashtag?
4. Does this image have pride colours?
5. Is the sentiment on the law and the queer movement positive, negative or neutral?

Similarly, the criteria for MeToo include:

1. What type of image is the Instagram post?
2. Does this post discuss a personal experience, story, anecdote or narrative using the hashtag?
3. Does this post indicate a personal opinion on any topic?
4. Does this post demonstrate a positive or negative sentiment for the #MeToo movement in India?
5. Is this post about Bollywood actors, celebrities, known media personalities, comedians, journalists, authors etc.?
6. Does this post indicate misogyny, violence against women, hate speech or advocacy for men's rights activism?

Methods in context

For this research, I employed a mixed-methods approach, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies in an effort to more cohesively analyse and extract meaning from text and image on social media platforms as “various forces compete to discursively define social issues in the public sphere” (Jackson 10). In order to investigate the social movements, I applied a deductive coding method, a critical discourse analysis as well as close and distant reading approaches to focus on textual and visual interpretations online. These methods, employed together, enable the extraction of multiple meanings from both the individual tweet/image as well as larger patterns in discourse from the entire dataset collected from Twitter and Instagram (Phillips & Hardy 22-23), which are more fitting to explore both

broader and more specific questions on identity and representation in gendered digital activism in India.

Deductive Coding Approach

I undertook a range of steps in order to undertake deductive coding. First, I conducted a deductive analysis on the sample of tweets (Matthew B. Miles, Huberman, Michael & Johnny Saldana, 2013; Clark-Parsons, 2018) where I coded, labelled and categorized the sample set manually for emergent themes as defined in the above criteria. Deductive coding here demonstrates how many tweets indicate personal opinions, personal experiences, anecdotes, stories, or narratives of sexual abuse, the number of positive or negative sentiments for both movements (both as individual tweets as well as taken together within the dataset), the number of posts that illustrate misogyny, homophobia, exclusion, empathy for the movements, and how many speak for themselves, and their personal experiences as part of the digital movements etc. I employed a deductive approach to draw broader conclusions from the sample set about identity, representation, and empathy and bonds of solidarity surrounding the hashtags for both movements.

It was my initial intention to employ computational and other quantitative approaches for data analysis, including sentiment analysis, to examine how the movements were perceived, topic modelling to demonstrate the primary themes of discursive textual analysis, and network analysis to investigate the origin of misogynist and homophobic tweets and Instagram posts. My final choice in this qualitative methodology stems from the ability to manually quantify tweets according to criteria I define in order to create the space for both close and distant reading, and in visualizing the discourse around Twitter.

I undertook a manual coding approach in the form of deductive coding rather than employing NLP and/or other computational tools for data analysis for several reasons. First, the dataset I employed for both movements was well below 10000 tweets and 1000 Instagram

posts, which did not necessitate the kind of computational analysis that would be useful for a much larger corpus. Secondly, Natural Language Processing and computational analysis are fraught with problems in respect to the accuracy of thematically coded content, and would create problems with labelling. Further, large-scale computational analysis usually centers on distant reading of cultural patterns rather than the small units of semiotic text or meaning-making that I draw on in this research. Therefore, I employed a more traditional social science and humanities-based qualitative framework to manually code the tweets and posts using criteria that I define within the dataset. The use of deductive coding here, therefore, is my intervention in this research as opposed to data analysis using computational tools.

Distant and Close Reading

In tandem with deductive coding, I applied a distant reading approach in order to chart and observe larger patterns in discourse around the movements on Twitter. Distant reading can be defined as a method of literary criticism where computational and data analysis is employed to identify meaningful patterns in a large corpus of text. Unlike close reading, my objective here is to study broader patterns throughout the corpus or dataset that may be difficult with the close reading approach. Digital Humanities scholar Franco Moretti refers to a distant reading to obtain a bird's eye view of a literary corpus. Originally applied for literary analysis, I employed distant reading for a corpus of tweets collected through Twitter API. This approach facilitates the mapping of broader patterns of analysis, including plotting the overall sentiment towards both movements, quantifying tweets that discuss marginalization through text, and measuring tweets that discuss personal experiences versus tweets that are from organizations. Eventually, distant reading based on a deductive coding approach can facilitate a comprehensive study of language through broad linguistic markers for both movements. However, distant reading has been the subject of extensive criticism from scholars, particularly women, in the Digital Humanities, for its exclusivity and

unwelcoming nature. I attempted to re-commit to the project of further exposing power structures against the marginalized subaltern at a larger scale using the distant reading approach.

According to Ruiz de Castilla, “close reading or close textual analysis investigates discourse to observe what makes a text function” (137). By conducting close reading, common themes and topics in the dataset that may have been hidden or obscured surface. Close reading assumes that the text is itself an “artefact that stimulates meaning” (137). Therefore, in the context of this research, the tweet becomes a textual artefact as a single unit of meaning that must be examined in isolation. For larger cultural patterns to be examined more thoroughly, and to interpret the meaning of the text, I employed representative tweets from the sample throughout the research chapters. I studied select tweets from the same dataset to provide illustrative examples of identity building and representation of the marginalized subaltern online that support the broader arguments made through the deductive approach. This emphasis on close/distant reading of data within the critical discourse analytical framework allowed me to explore #Section377 and #MeTooIndia as gendered movements in India, and to create spaces for discussions on what lies behind the discourses that drive protest movements forward.

Critical Discourse Analysis

In addition to both a deductive and a close/distant reading approach, I carried out a multidisciplinary qualitative critical discourse analysis (CDA) in order to interrogate how power structures operate against the marginalized and the oppressed. According to Schroder, discourse has the power to frame and define social reality (99). I employed critical discourse analysis to study how social inequalities, power, dominance and resistance emerge through textual discourse, how networks of feminist/queer subaltern identities are constructed on Twitter, and to investigate representation of the subaltern voice, and resistance to queerness

and feminism in the Indian context. Theoretically informed by Foucault's study of power (1970), critical discourse analysis facilitates the capture of the socio-political contexts of both movements and power issues prevalent within the digital movements. CDA is employed to study "the processes by which power pervades society, how power structures can be subverted" (Huh 13), offering a critique of social structures through the study of discourse. In the context of this research, CDA can be employed, through textual discourse, to study the emerging patterns of power and oppression in feminist and queer social activism. According to Rachel Huh, this methodological approach gives the study "flexibility to examine multiple avenues of power, and social inequalities in Twitter's #MeTooIndia" (15) and #Section377 discourses, and demonstrates "discriminations against non-cis-gendered, able-bodied, economically privileged urban elite in India" (47).

Visual Analysis

Visual methodologies are emergent and novel approaches to qualitative study of social media posts, and are used to "understand and interpret images (Glaw et al. 2) such as photography, film, video, painting, drawing, self-art, graffiti, advertisements and cartoons," (2) all of which make up Instagram posts on Section 377 and MeToo India. In this research, I examine a variety of visual dimensions as part of the Instagram datasets, and provide insights into the artistic worlds created around activist hashtags. I conducted visual analysis and close reading to study patterns that emerge – both in text (captions used to describe the post), in the colours used, particularly for the queer pride movement, in art, photography, cartoons, memes, and advertisements created by organizations. Ultimately, I employ a visual praxis to understand how images create a collective queer and feminist identity surrounding a hashtag.

Ethics

According to Highfield and Leaver, social media researchers must consider the details that users provide in the form of comments, images, and videos intentionally and/or unintentionally (9). They argue that public sharing of user details can raise methodological

concerns in research, and that researchers must treat the data with respect (9). In the context of this research, in cases where individual users provide identifiable information including their names in public posts on Twitter and Instagram, I maintain user anonymity and pseudonymity have been maintained. Throughout this research, I follow the Association of Internet Researchers' (2012) recommendations for ethical decision-making to change the names of individual users on Twitter, and blur names of participants on Instagram. I also make minor alterations to participant word choices in tweets/Instagram posts collected such that personal opinions and private information cannot be traced back to authors through a search engine. However, for public figures or names of organizations, both on Twitter and Instagram, the original names have been kept.

Caveats

This research does not incorporate ethnographic components, whether through observation or direct engagement with members of the community. Although this study would undoubtedly benefit from bringing direct experiences and stories from member communities, it may hinder or complicate the methodological inquiries made through data collection on a larger scale. Furthermore, it may not add significantly to the data already collected, unless done on a much larger scale. To avoid complication and confusion at this stage of data collection, the study exclusively employed data from Twitter and Instagram for investigation of identity and representation within digital subaltern communities.

I acknowledge that the internet is always a condensed view of reality, particularly in the Global South. Data collected through quantitative methods is not representative of the entirety of a population. The lack of access and the subsequent problematics of representation in digital spaces in the Global South are complications that arise in internet research. A deeper understanding of social media research is impossible without the discussion of this caveat. Twitter and Instagram provide ease of access to “large scale databases of human

activity” (Tufekci 1). Twitter can easily be mistaken for a model organism that makes scholarly research deceptively uncomplicated and ultimately reductionist.

A second layer of complication arises from questions of access. Only the urban elite in India have access to social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. Cyberspaces in the South, therefore, are naturally exclusive spaces that give rise to stronger elitism among member groups engaged in social activism online. Digital media establish new gatekeeping roles, limitations, and constraints, particularly for the gendered subaltern. Research contextualized in India always runs the risk of unequal access, and therefore makes digital technology, by its own nature, more elusive and elitist. I also recognize the affordances and constraints of digital activism. I do not disregard questions of authenticity, representation, participation, access and adequacy on the platform but seek to work with these concerns. Despite the enthusiasm over the presence of diverse marginalized and gendered voices on the digital platform, it is necessary to question whether online spaces facilitate equal participation among different groups, allowing for an expression of subaltern narratives and voices that contribute to online public discourses in equal measure.

CASE STUDY I (#Section377) – Twitter and Instagram Analysis

Postcolonial and Transnational Identity in #Section377

In this chapter, I map the production of a ‘post’- postcolonial identity that users forge on social media platforms around Section 377. I examine the various ways in which digital infrastructures enable the construction of a postcolonial identity either through a process of decolonization and a desire to return to India’s ancient roots in sexuality, or through an acceptance of modern transnational solidarity with the LGBTQIA+ movement. My intent is to locate the digital queer and unpack the construction of queer subaltern counterpublics that are established through a personal and collective digital postcolonial identity. I make the argument that two ‘strands’ of postcolonial identity emerge around the discourse on the decriminalization of homosexuality in India. The first builds on the process/act of decolonization of Indian queer sexuality that occurs either through the political rejection of colonial power structures and legacies in queer sexuality, or through the expression of a desire for the recuperation of precolonial imaginaries of queerness in India; the second strand emerges through the construction of a postcolonial identity in what users define as a ‘global, modern, and transnational LGBTQIA+ identity.’ In order to expand on my contention, I draw primarily on Rohit Dasgupta’s concept of the ‘dissident citizenship’ that, in this study, materializes in both digital queer and non-queer populations. I add to Dasgupta’s analysis by articulating a new form of collective resistance imaginaries that challenge queer unbelonging through discussions on Section 377 on Twitter and Instagram. In addition, I am also invested in uncovering the role of social media platforms in the creation of queer subaltern counterpublics in the digital public sphere (Dasgupta 124) in relation to collective resistance imaginaries for queer rights and desire in the country. However, in order to examine contemporary debates in postcolonial identity construction in the realm of Indian queer sexuality on social media, I must begin by charting the evolution of queerness and non-

normative sexualities in Ancient India, under the British Raj, and the postcolonial imaginaries of sexuality in the contemporary postcolonial nation state. colonial supplanted postcolonial imaginaries.

History of Indian Queer Sexuality and Desire in Ancient India

Despite the recent emergence and visibility of LGBTQIA activism, queer sexuality in India has always had a complex and precarious history that interweaves “cultural, legal, and political dimensions” of belonging and unbelonging (Shahani 1). Although homosexuality in India is widely considered to be a recent western import, the country’s ancient archives, architecture, literature and the culture of storytelling validate a thriving queer sexual history (Loi 1). Hindu scriptures abound with “homosexual, gender-queer and trans representation” (1). Textually, India also carries a tradition of exoticized and ritualistic invocation of desire in the form of the *Kamasutra* (Srivastava 1; Dasgupta 203). Named after Kama, the God of desire, India’s *Kamasutra* is “personified as the most in-depth text about spiritual and sexual desire in human history” (Loi 1). As such, the book calls for the inclusion of both homosexuality and homosexual acts that are often left unlabelled, and therefore, ‘un-othered.’ Amara Das Wilhelm’s reading of the *Kamasutra* and other ancient and medieval Sanskrit texts finds that “homosexuals and the ‘third gender’ were not only in existence in Indian society back then, but that these identities were also widely accepted.” (Ray 1). Therefore, although the contemporary queer community in India is comprised of multiple gendered and classed subjectivities” (Dasgupta 210), ancient Indian scriptures allude to the existence of queer women, Kothis, and Hijras, defined as “phenotypic men who wear female clothing, renounce sexual desire/practice by undergoing a sacrificial emasculation, and are endowed with the power to confer fertility on newlyweds or new born children” (Reddy 2). These identities were characterized as the ‘third-gender’ and tethered non-normative sexualities in the pre-colonial era to Hinduism and spirituality. In addition to scriptures, the famous

sculptures of the Khajuraho temples in Madhya Pradesh, India depict sexual acts and fluidity between men and women from the 10th to 12th century A.D. (Ray 1). Here, I evoke the history of queer sexuality in ancient India to re-affirm that the origin of a conservative perspective on homosexuality was introduced in India by the British Raj and continued with the evolution of postcolonial nationalism after independence.

Queerness under the British Raj

I argue that contrary to common perception, homophobia was a western import brought to English colonies across the world through the process of colonization. Versions of Section 377 spread across the British empire and sought punishment for not merely homosexual acts/desire but also for non-normative sexual identities through otherization (Srivastava). It was through Judeo-Christian moral codes towards purity of sex and heteronormative sexuality that the concept of ‘unnatural’ subjects and homophobia “entered the realm of state politics in India” (Vanita 1; Shahani 1). Furthermore, the colonial administration also listed Indian hijras and transgender women as a ‘criminal tribe’ prone to sodomy (Srivastava 1). Section 377 forced the migration of the discourse on sexuality from the private to the public realm, thereby collapsing the demarcation of the public and the private sphere and marginalizing most vulnerable sections of society, including the hijras and kothis (Shahani 1).

Queer Sexuality and Postcolonial India

The British colonial law was codified under the Indian legal system, “replacing the fluidity of pre-colonial Indian legal traditions” (Shahani 1). Despite India’s post-independence desire to build an anti-colonial India, Section 377 maintained a legal presence in the country, and carried forward the colonial legacy of sexual discourse to serve the interests of a patriarchal, masculinist nation state (1). Homophobia thrived in postcolonial India as Indian nationalists, both left-wing and right-wing, embraced and sought to uphold

British puritan values and colonial imaginaries in sexuality, and re-adapted Christian sexual and moral codes to Hinduism. Postcolonial India produced a heteropatriarchal imagined community through the alienation of disenfranchised identities. As Dasgupta argues, the postcolonial nation state, and the crucial role it plays, “reflects the complexity between the transgression of (sexual) norms by citizens and the legal and moral standpoint of the State” (Dasgupta 247). Sexual identities on the fringe were rendered stateless through the colonial Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. The history of the law on homosexuality in India is intimately tied to the idea of a coherent postcolonial nation state that upholds masculinity and sexual purity in its attempt to preserve western values. Spivak and Butler (3-4) rightly contend that queerness can produce a state of permanent non-belonging for minorities in relation to the state. Queer citizens in India, therefore, lay claim to “the deprivation of citizenship without legal rights” (Dasgupta 206), and become the ‘marginalized subaltern’ that are forced to engage in political resistance for emancipation, leading to contemporary LGBTQIA+ activism in India. In addition, colonial and postcolonial imaginaries of heteropatriarchy continue to be heralded by the contemporary far right Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) government in India that is founded on the principles of Hinduism and Hindu culture (Banerjee 97) despite the decriminalization of homosexuality in the country.

The recent LGBTQIA+ activism has “brought to the fore the existence of subaltern queer subcultures in India in parallel with the rising religion-based Hindutva nationalism” (Narain 144). In the post-independence state, Hindu nationalism gained popularity in the early 90’s through the right-wing Hindutva BJP party’s proclamation to build a fundamentally Hindu nation with values and morals steeped in Hindu tradition (Prasad 1). Section 377, then became the “rubric for the protection of Hindu culture and social morality, and a linchpin for the nation-building project through the marginalization of queer sexualities” (Narain 158). The migration of sexual discourse from the private to the public

realm ensured the wheels of the nation state turning, sustaining heterosexual marriages in the service of the nation. As Sanjay Srivastava states, sexuality and the concept of an Indian family are deeply intertwined and are of legal and moral concerns to the state owing to how it impacts the foundational social fabric of Indian society (II). India's right-wing's hold remains, continuing to otherize, marginalize, and oppress religious, casteist and sexual minorities, and perpetuating gendered violence against women, Dalits, LGBTQIA+, and particularly the hijras and kothis who remain unprotected by the state. Dasgupta offers a dialogic discourse on queer citizenship and the nation-building exercise where queerness exists outside the peripheries of nationhood and citizenship (204). For the postcolonial nationalist Hindutva state, queerness in its precarious state, "embodies the anti-nationalist, sexually promiscuous, materialistic, and western attitude" (204). Particularly in the last decade, as tensions between queerness and heteronormative nationalism reached their peak, India's "private realm of sexuality became a focal point in various forms of political and legal assertion" (144). Through this evolution of non-normative sexualities in India, I locate the Indian queer as a marginalized and oppressed subaltern that continues the fight for emancipation in gender identity, and sexual desire, orientation, and practices.

[Section 377 Online: The Emergence of a Postcolonial Identity](#)

The intersection of queer theory with postcolonial theory spawns a multitude of questions concerning the relationship between nationalism, citizenship and sexuality. The point of contact between queer and postcolonial perspectives thus engenders a critique of national, colonial and postcolonial histories, and epistemologies of domination. In order to locate the queer subaltern and study how networked counterpublics employ Twitter and Instagram to construct a 'post'- postcolonial digital identity, I parse the digital discourse surrounding the Section 377 movement to identify citizen discourse speaking to the relationship between queer communities and the Indian postcolonial nation state.

Specifically, I seek to understand how participants attempt to diverge from colonial legacies of heteronormative oppression and marginalization; how they strive to simultaneously decolonize and modernize the LGBTQIA+ movement in the country. Although my argument is constructed for the most part discursively, I consider it important to engage with postcolonial identities and perspectives that emerge in relation to the Section 377 movement. In order to examine the questions motivating this study, I employ a postcolonial lens to assess the dataset, and demarcate tweets and Instagram posts that lead the discourse on Indian nationalism, postcolonialism, and queer sexuality in the context of Section 377. The reading down of Section 377 visibilizes particular tensions in how postcolonial identity emerges on Twitter and Instagram. The first ‘strand’ of postcolonial identity, as I define it, builds on the process of *decolonization* of Indian queer sexuality through digital discourse on Section 377. I argue that users forge an active political rejection of colonial power structures and policies on queer sexuality on digital platforms. Social media’s affordances, in this way, both produce and provoke a rejection in both colonial and postcolonial authority. The second ‘strand’ of postcolonial identity is shaped by online gendered communities in the construction of a *transnational and globalized identity* wherein queerness, for digital users, is a global birth right that borrows directly from western definitions of modernity and progress, and simply characterizes itself in transnational queer solidarity.

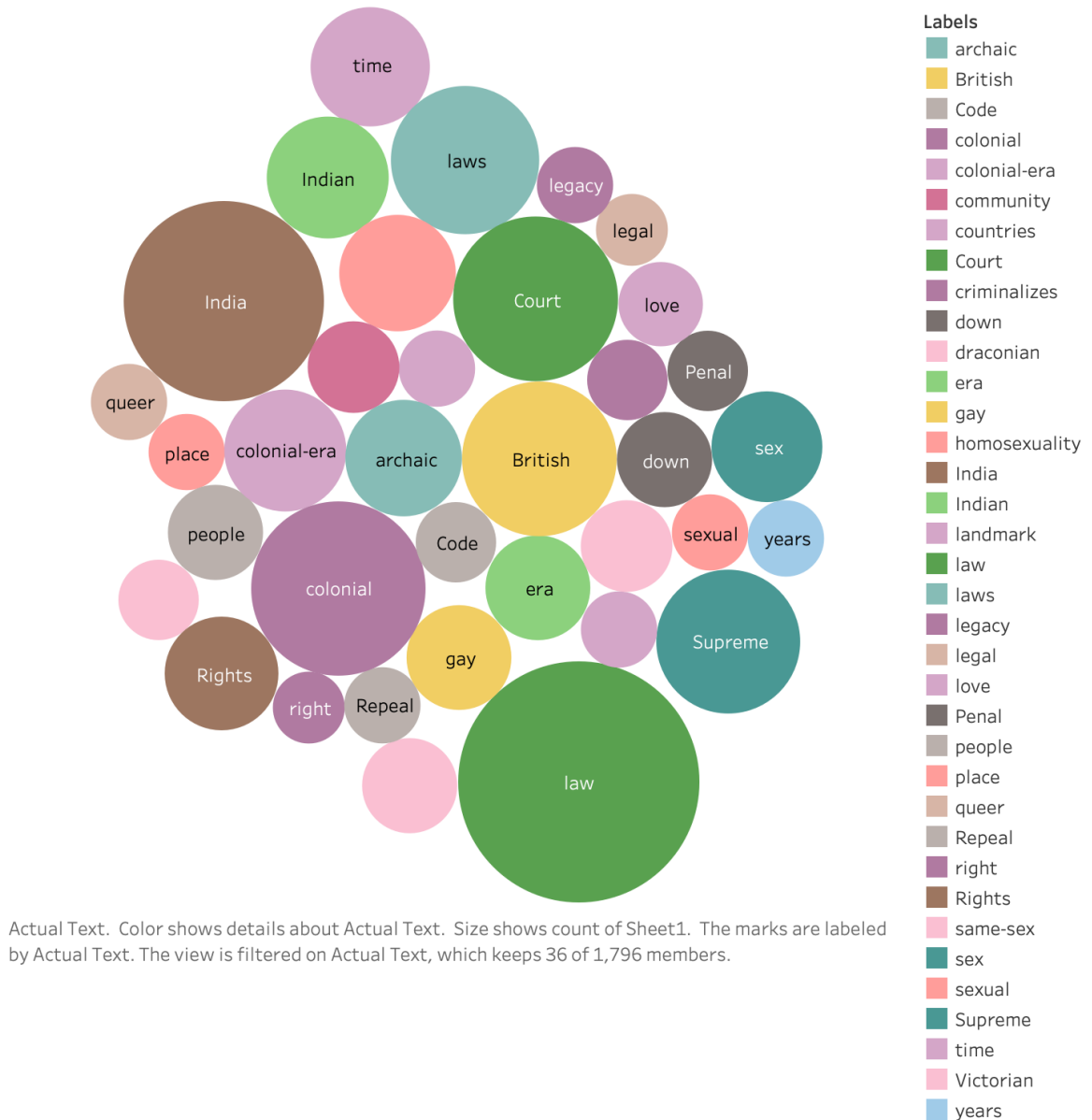
Decolonization in Digital Discourse

The reading down of Section 377 visibilizes an emerging postcolonial identity in the dataset with tweets and Instagram posts indicating a *decolonizing* sentiment. Users in their tweets and Instagram posts either demonstrate:

1. a complete rejection of the archaic British law on Indian homosexuality, or
2. a call to become Indian again by engaging in discussions of ancient Indian sexuality.

For Twitter, out of 5000 tweets, I coded 216 tweets that primarily performed a decolonial function for queer sexuality. Post-isolation of the above tweets and removal of stop words, I chart the word frequency of the top 35 words in the discourse on decolonization.

Discourse on Decolonization: Section 377



The graph above depicts the most frequently occurring terms in the decolonization dataset and relates to larger patterns in the discourse on decolonization with terms such as “colonial-era,” “archaic,” “British,” “Victorian,” or “draconian.” Before I engage with posts on users’ desires to decolonize Indian cyberspaces through their participation with #Section377, I also

note that while the judgement by the Supreme Court is ‘decolonial’ in intent, the reading down of Section 377 does not “challenge the idea of the state, law and society defining what can be characterized as unnatural (Bakshi 38; Narrain & Bhan 45). Therefore, although the reading down of the law was celebrated by Indian users online as a form of decolonization from the homophobic sexual codes of the British empire (Easwaran 1) and a move away from “heteronormative colonialism towards queer affirmative codes within the national imaginary” (Shahani 1), this may not be decolonial in praxis. Here, a digital humanities and decolonial praxis together enable the rewriting of collective histories and genealogies of queer sexuality and desire in India, and decentralizing collective resistance, survival, care, healing and resurgence of the community online.

Rejection of the Archaic British Law

Twitter and Instagram discourse also locates the digital queer in the rejection of colonial legacies of non-normative sexualities, and the dismissal of the British law as an archaic, dystopic vision for colonized societies meant to preserve Christian values and police acceptable desire. For the British, normative and normalized conducts in love signified a heteronormative encounter, while the rest were labelled ‘unnatural.’ The digital decolonization of normative codes of sexuality written and established by the British is an essential step towards questioning assumptions of a single and dominant system of knowledge. According to Rohit and Debanuj Dasgupta, queerness emerges as a direct “form of questioning dominant knowledge formations that work to deconstruct normative ideas of gender, reproduction and the family” (1). On Twitter, queer counterpublics collectively reassert queering with dominant power structures that digital discourses reject. The following twitter feeds work in conjunction with these observations with most writing in anticipation and desire of overthrowing colonial, postcolonial, and patriarchal notions of control. Specifically, the following tweets oppose the archaic law on homosexuality, and the

endowment of Victorian religious cultural values in British colonies around the world. For example,

²Sampath (@sampath). “It is high time the Government of India does away with this *draconian and colonial vestige* and gives people the liberty to lead a life with anyone of their choice. The world needs *more love*. #Section377. April 24th, 2018, 1:37 a.m.

Mohan (@Mohan_12). “Let’s discard anti-gay laws in India — including colonial relics such as #Section377’s ban on so-called “sodomy” — and to move forward to full *protection, equality, and inclusion*. 🇮🇳 July 7th, 2018, 6:32 a.m.

Jihan (@KJihan). “The battle to love will not end with #Section377. Until we relax our *archaic #rules* and *#attitudes* about who we can love, all who dare to step out of narrow confines of ‘*legitimate*’ love will continue to battle for their love to be recognized. #LGBTQIA+.” January 4th, 2019, 6:18 p.m.

Twitter participants in the above tweets highlight the discursive tensions with the British law. They acknowledge and actively resist India’s colonial legacy and the draconian nature of the law on homosexuality, evoking, in the process, a new nationhood that aims to subvert colonial hegemonic heteronormativity and provides freedom, protection, inclusivity and equality for Indian sexualities on the fringe. Tweets, including those of Sampath, attempt to redefine the concept of love outside of heteronormative ideals and codes laid down by the British in the 1860’s. Similarly, Instagram posts, such as the examples below, discursively arrive at the history of Section 377 as a controversial British era law banning homosexuality and homosexual acts, and LGBTQIA+ activism in India that has opened a multitude of non-normative pathways for love to exist in the country.

² All the names of individual users in tweets have been changed. Minor alterations to participant word choices have also been made.



The queer subaltern, as the Instagram post below indicates, successfully finds their voice through the process of decolonization and reading down of Section 377.



The above post translates to “the country has been independent for the last 71 years but it took the LGBTQIA+ community until 2018 to finally find freedom.” Therefore, similar to the Twitter feeds, the pattern of decolonization surrounding Section 377 on Instagram evokes a resistance to colonial legacies. In addition to the call to repudiate India’s Victorian inheritance in relation to queer sexuality, some tweets display deep-rooted sentiments directed at the British Raj, including anger towards obsolete legislations and vestiges of colonialism:

Saumya (@saumya). “Hello, white British folk? A reminder that you didn’t just take shit, you also left some shit...#Section377.” July 14th, 2018, 6:49 a.m.

Participants below also speak to shame and contempt in relation to the adoption of British imported homophobia into the postcolonial Indian constitution as well as their fear of oppression, marginalization, ‘otherization,’ and persecution of closeted members of the LGBTQIA+ community by IPC Section 377:

Pratap (@PratapDelhi). “Homosexuality is not a Western import. It is as Indian as anything else. #Section377 is a Western import by Macaulay and Bible driven. *We should be ashamed that we have let such a law remain on our books.* The SC hearing was not about bestiality - it WILL remain on the books.” July 28th, 2018, 7:11 a.m.



Prasad. (@laxmi401). “On Human Rights Day, let’s think about the hundreds of millions of #LGBT ppl in India who are living in closets, *in fear, are oppressed, arrested & prosecuted by a draconian law #Section377.* Let’s hope the new year will bring a change for them., and that the judiciary repeals this regressive law. December 10th, 2017, 12:05 a.m.

Finally, posts like the one below also indicate positive sentiments like happiness, bliss, jubilation and celebration over the final reading down or scrapping of the colonial law:



Meha_Arun (@Meha_Arun). “*Happiness and hope* increase tenfold when it is tried by students of our society ...There is no place for this British-era outdated law. Let's fight to scrap #Section377 . We will get a better India.” May 17th, 2018, 6:05 a.m.

The above posts demonstrate the LGBTQIA+ activism on the streets, the celebration of freedom in pride parades, and an attempt by the community to move beyond the pain, fear, shame, persecution, and stigma associated with colonial codes of homosexuality towards self-love and acceptance. In the same vein, Twitter discourse against the colonial law is accompanied by the critique of postcolonial institutions that have adopted and honoured the Section 377 regulation after the departure of the colonizer. For example,

Gender&SexualityLaw (@GenderSexLaw). “You have an opportunity here not just to speak to [LGBTQ] people and other minorities in India, *but a Post-Colonial world that still bears the shadow of Colonialism.*” Arundhati katju speaks on the wider precedent set by the Supreme Court's decision in repealing #Section377.” November 20th, 2018, 4:57 p.m.

The very position of being a citizen of a particular country decisively shaped by postcolonial imaginaries of nationalism and heteronormative patriarchy often runs counter to queer subjectivities and strategies which are not always invested in the concept of ‘belonging.’ To further contextualize the argument, the institution of the Indian queer is often at odds and in opposition to a heteronormative, homophobic and masculine ideal of the Indian nation (Dasgupta 11). The postcolonial nation perpetuates colonial imaginaries and

responsibilities for regulating the sexual desires of the public, with religious and cultural perspectives contributing to heteronormative values. Religious sects and justice re-emphasize a brand of nationalism that imitates colonial oppression against the subaltern. This authority is exercised as a means to subdue the powerless and strip them of a voice. However, the driving force for the digital activism campaign lies in its *decolonizing* nature and its focus on the construction of newer collectivities in the name of queerness. In this context, therefore, the construction of postcolonial identity for the queer subaltern community occurs through the process of decolonization and eventual rejection of colonial era laws.

Ancient India – Becoming “Indian” Again

The decolonizing sentiment surrounding Section 377 on social media platforms also manifests through an active desire to return to one’s own roots in a gender fluid India. In other words, the discourse initiates a call to take India back and become authentically “Indian” again. Tweets and posts by participants below refer to ancient queer diversity and fluidity of gender and sexuality when homosexual acts and same-sex love have both flourished and been embraced as part of traditional Indian culture. Despite the colonial legacy of homophobia, homosexuality, carved into Indian temples, carvings, sculptures, mythologies, literatures, and scriptures, has been an intrinsic part of Indian history. The discourse presented below refers to ancient Indian culture with pride and locates India as a liberal country in pre-colonial times only tainted during its time as a British colony. The posts seek to create more awareness of the fact that homophobia was a British and therefore western import, and that India had always embraced both the existence and diversity of queerness:

Jagan (@jaganst4). “So we should stop aping the British Victorians who gave us #Section377 and be truly Indian by embracing queer diversity as our ancestors showed us in *Kamasutra*, temple carvings, scriptures, and myths.” April 24th, 2018, 3:09 p.m.

Aakash (@Aakash0574). “Sodomy and homosexuality were demonstrated in *Kamasutra* and many major temple carvings like sun temple Konark, which is 100% a part of Indian culture. I don't

comment on the other part (siblings having sex), as I am not aware of it. #Section377 is a Victorian legacy!! Not Indian.” August 6th, 2018, 5:04 a.m.

Mounika Reddy (@Reddy4). “India's *fluid notions of gender and sexuality*, which even recognized a third gender, did not work for British colonizers, who criminalized homosexuality. India has now restored some LGBTQ rights, overturning a 157-year-old ban on gay sex. #Section377.” September 12th, 2018, 3:53 p.m.

NoToSection377 (@NoTo377). “#India, since ever, has been open to “queer existence” and what better examples of that than India’s *mythology*. #Section377 only made its way to us in the 1800s-time to send it packing.” May 11th, 2018, 10:52 p.m.



The Instagram post here represents sculptures depicting homosexual love at the Kala Bhairava Temple located in the state of Madhya Pradesh, India, and epitomizes the reading down of Section 377 as a veritable act of decolonization through which India can return to its glorious past.



Embracing homosexuality and LGBTQIA+ communities becomes tantamount to re-embracing Indian culture and re-tracing one's steps to a pre-colonial India away from the clutches of colonialism. As the users below re-iterate, India is not in the process of westernizing, but reverting to its pre-colonial pluralist and inclusive state. In other words, through the scrapping of Section 377, India has the opportunity to become Indian again.

Vishakha Joshi (@joshi). “#section377 was introduced by the British in 1861. “India isn’t westernising; *India is becoming India* again.” September 7th, 2018, 1:11 p.m.

Harish (@hiyer). “It is time that *we become truly Indian* and throw the remnant of the colonial hangover into the pits where it belongs. Section 377 is un-Indian. India stands for plurality and equality. If you support 377, you are not a nationalist. #section377.” July 6th, 2018, 5:48 a.m.

The above discursive evidence lays bare the manner in which postcolonial identity is constructed through the act of decolonization of Indian queer sexuality on social media platforms. The reading down of Section 377 emerges in digital discourse both through patterns of rejection of colonial authority and a desire to move towards pre-colonial and gender-fluid Indian culture. Twitter discourse in particular provides more evidence of the importance of decolonization of the homophobic legacy of the British Raj. For instance, participants below argue that in former colonies like India, complete freedom and independence relies on the project of decolonization that also serves as a reminder of the origins of homophobia in the country:

Kiran (@Kiran40). "India *decolonising* the homophobic legacy of the British Empire" #Section377." October 4th, 2018, 10:01 a.m.

Jiya Khan. (@Khan). "Real freedom has to mean complete revision of colonial era laws... We must ask ourselves, how do we complete the project of freedom, which is really *decolonization*?" December 10th, 2018, 2:19 p.m.

Lata N. (@DrLata). "Great and progressive victories have been won by LGBT rights activists over decades in the West but a '*decolonising*' lens would offer a gentle reminder that the legislation underpinning homophobic laws #section377 were put in place by the British during the empire in the first place." June 12th, 2019, 4:19 a.m.

Postcolonial Digital Humanities scholar Roopika Risam argues, in Fanon's words, for the need to use digital technology to "dismantle the master's house" (79). How can digital media be harnessed to undo colonialism? What processes can the Global South cultivate online to subvert "epistemic colonial violence" (79)? I argue that Indian cyberspaces through activism are beginning to undo colonial and postcolonial structures on digital platforms and speak out against hierarchies of knowledge. Subaltern queer communities made up of both queer and non-queer subjects are employing digital tools to overthrow Victorian and post-Victorian institutions. The postcolonial and anti-colonial aspects of revolution become important in the advocacy and acceptance of queer desire and queer ways of life; of a slow interpretation and inculcation of newer perspectives. The active participation online against such institutions ushers social, cultural, and political change to pave the way towards a modern India.

LGBTQIA+ Activism: A Transnational and Modern Movement

In this context, the subaltern counterpublic also creates a postcolonial identity that emerges in the construction of a transnational and global identity within the Indian LGBTQIA+ movement, borrowing from western definitions of modernity and progress and celebrating the scrapping of the law in a bid to move towards a more progressive India. Modernity and progress engender a phenomenon wherein "queerness is now global" (Cruz-Malavé & Manalansan 1). Whether in "advertising, film, performance art, the Internet, political discourses of human rights in emerging democracies, or images of queer sexualities

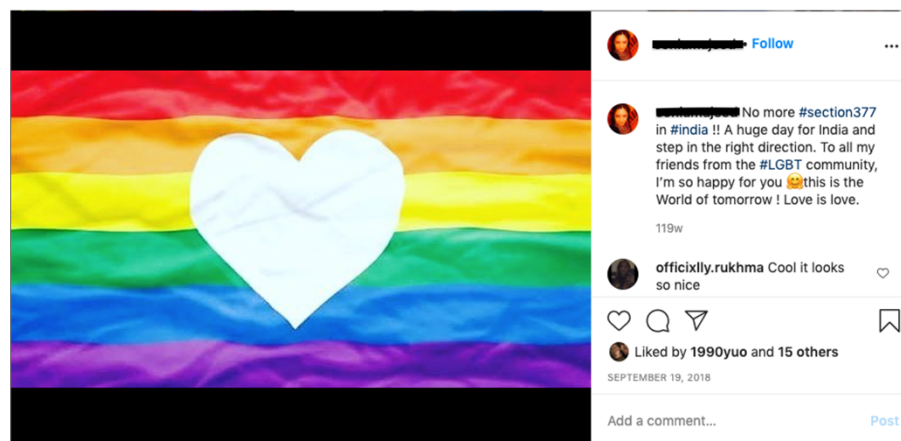
and cultures circulating around the globe” (Altman 1), queerness and LGBTQIA+ activism in India can now be classified as part of a western globalist movement that characterizes itself simply in transnational solidarity. For instance,

Aparna Kirpan (@ApK). “Glad. Hope the government realises what rainbow colours stand for in *modern times*. :) #Article377.” November 27th, 2017, 9:40 a.m.

Savanta (@Savanta12). “Independence day of *Modern India* 🇮🇳💖 #Section377.” September 13th, 2018, 8”10 a.m.

Piyush (@pyspeaks). “The Supreme Court is making big strides in transforming India into a *modern nation*. Striking down archaic laws which lack reasoning or validity is essential to each generation. Next, bring in Uniform Civil Code. #Section377.” September 28th, 2018, 2:39 a.m.

Swaroop (@sswaroop). “With instances like Adultery Verdict and #Section377, It looks like *India is finally coming into the modern world*. Although it has taken a lot of time, It's a step towards the future. Adultery Law Scrapped.” September 27th, 2018, 2:31 p.m.



In the above Instagram post and tweets, participants celebrate the reading down of archaic laws and espouse the modernization of India and its entrance in the “world of tomorrow.” They argue that the Supreme Court’s judgement has finally brought India on par with progressive western nations at the forefront of the global LGBTQIA+ movement. Participants express pride at the foundations of a new postcolonial nation-building exercise for India that offers opportunities for sexual freedom, self-love, and acceptance for marginalized identities. They contend that India’s presence in the transnational network of queer activism engenders both queer self-expression and collective empathy within the movement.

In this context, users argue that India, as the world's largest democracy, should take a leap towards a progressive welfare state that ensures equality for all genders and the right to love and live. The following Instagram post and tweets refer to India's coming into the new world, and the adoption of western values of democracy, freedom, inclusivity, tolerance and acceptance.



ZEE5Premium (@ZEE5Premium). “Your efforts against #Sec377 laid the foundations for a *progressive, strong and tolerant India*. Thank you for inspiring us to make #377अबNormal.” March 17th, 2019, 2:23 a.m.

Chanchal (@MishraCh). “India is taking the leap towards a *progressive and welfare state*. From #TripalTalaq to striking down the #Section377, capital punishment for sexual offenders of minors and so on. The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression by the bad people but the silence over that by the good people. 3 down. Many more to go. #Section377. Oppressed no more.” September 28th, 2018, 1:16 p.m.

Gowtham (@gowdru). “Finally! One of the biggest Hindu Countries completely adopting *Western culture*. #Adultery #Section377.” September 27, 2018, 3:41 a.m.

As opposed to an act of decolonization, the above discourse suggests that the fight against homosexuality and the LGBTQIA+ movement in India is a western import. Here, the emergence of postcolonial identity occurs through the construction of what users define as a global and transnational identity. According to the participants, India, post reading down of Section 377, is coming into a modern and progressive world where marginalized and oppressed sexualities in the country are becoming a part of the transnational network of queer acceptance and empathy. Although queer and other non-conforming sexualities have always been a part of ancient Indian culture, postcolonial imaginaries of heteropatriarchy have

carried the burden of colonial legacies in the form of Section 377. Therefore, users here locate the collective queer subaltern through India's modernity and progress; finally 'stepping onto' the transnational LGBTQIA+ activism.

The two strands of postcolonial identity carry foundational tensions in how homosexuality and homophobia are understood in the Indian context. The first strand depicts homophobia as a direct result of the encounter with the western world. Therefore, decolonization emerges as a critique of colonial legacies of homophobia and a desire to return to a pre-colonial India that was inclusive of all genders and acts of sexuality. The second strand of postcolonial identity is constructed through the understanding that homophobia has long adapted colonial codes of regressive sexuality as part of the Indian constitution. In parallel, this recognition carries the desire to arrive at the crossroads of a modern, progressive nation defined by western values of inclusion, tolerance and acceptance carried by LGBTQIA+ activism. Where the first strand eschews western beliefs in favour of returning to traditional knowledges in Indian queerness, the second strand encapsulates the values of freedom, independence, rights, and desire at the core of the civil rights and queer movement. Both strands perform the construction of a subaltern collective of queer support, empathy and emancipation using the hashtags.

[The Role of the Indian Supreme Court – A 'post-postcolonial institution'](#)

The Supreme Court as the supreme legal authority also participates in locating and supporting the Indian queer. It fractures colonial and postcolonial codes of homophobia and sexual purity, intimately tied to the idea of a masculinist and heteronormative nationhood in India, and re-emerges as the legitimate representation of a 'post-postcolonial institution.' In this debate, the Supreme Court of India materializes as the institution that performs both functions of decolonization and modernization of India and exists outside of, and beyond, the colonial and postcolonial renditions of sexuality. For instance, the following tweets and

Instagram posts demonstrate the Supreme Court's role in striking down the archaic 150 year-old patriarchal and homophobic Victorian laws in the country. According to participants, the institution and the recent judgements have provided immense faith and hope in the country's judicial system:

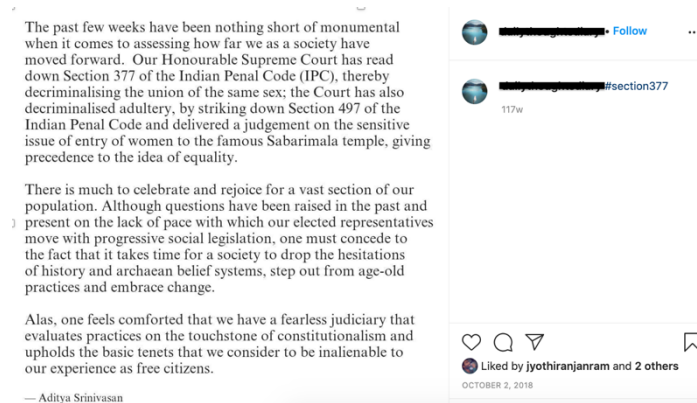
Sahgal (@Sumati). "The Supreme Court is on a roll . Moving away from archaic laws and hopefully towards a move open mindset #Section377 #SabrimalaVerdict #Section497Scrapped." September 28th, 2018, 3:13 p.m.

Nilesh (@bnilesh). "SC striking down 150yrs old Victorian Laws. So, when you think of it, it's a BREXIT for IPC! #section497 #Adultery #Section377." September 27th, 2018, 2:31 a.m.



Furthermore, the Supreme Court has been credited with the transformation of India and the modernization of the Indian constitution through the reading down of not merely the law on homosexuality, but also the laws on adultery, privacy, patriarchy, and freedom. As the posts below indicate, the Supreme Court in the year 2018 secured major accomplishments in an attempt to create a modern, progressive, and inclusive state.

Manvendra (@Manvendra). "The Supreme Court has started early celebration of Diwali. Every bomb it blast causes more sound then the last. Triple Talaq #Section377 Aadhaar Verdict Section 497, Sabarimala and the upcoming Ram Mandir. End of *colonial laws, Feminism, Privacy, Freedom and Jai Shree Ram.*" September 28th, 7:58 a.m.



Gaurav (@GSinha). “First they killed #Section377 . Then came the Aadhaar Verdict. And today's victim Section 497. The Supreme Court is turning into unlikely *evangelists of progressive thinking* at a time when this country needs it most! Bravo! #Section377.” September 27th, 2018, 5:28 a.m.

The above tweet defines the Supreme Court as the “evangelists of progressive thinking” in modern times. Therefore, I locate the Supreme Court here as a massive force of resistance that has decisively rewritten imperialist heteronormative notions of sexuality and opposed traditional structures of postcolonial patriarchy and toxic masculinity.

Queer Subaltern Counterpublics: Collective Resistance Imaginaries

My analysis of the discourse on the construction of a ‘post post-colonial identity’ on social media surrounding Section 377 makes visible the production of queer subaltern counterpublics. Rohit Dasgupta defines queer counterpublics as spaces in the digital public sphere that do not merely enable but re-awaken a sexual revolution through the construction of a queer subaltern subculture, providing queer men and women opportunities for self-exploration, and freedom to “engage in issues around identity, belonging and community” (Dasgupta 206). My study maps the evolution of the perception towards non-normative sexualities in the Indian public sphere to demonstrate the often fraught relationship between the Indian queer and the concept of nationhood and belonging. Digital media effectively transformed into a tool of resistance against colonial inequality and erasure. The online public sphere, as an alternate public venue, has lowered barriers of participation (Holm 14), presenting a crucial opportunity for “subordinated social groups to come together to formulate their interests and needs to contest existing power structures” (Holm 19). India’s LGBTQIA+ communities, as historically disadvantaged groups, have successfully created a counter narrative on digital platforms and advocated for their identities and sexual freedom. In common with many subaltern counterpublics around the world, the Indian queer subject has been relocated, reconstituted, and redefined on social media platforms and digitally networked spaces resulting in the formation of digital queer counterpublics (Hill 288). Platforms such as Twitter and Instagram create unique opportunities for traditionally excluded voices such as the Indian queer subject and facilitate the telling of their narratives in the public sphere. Digital media platforms provide a space for these queer subaltern counterpublics to thrive and push for their right to love and be. Online counterpublics that have emerged within the queer movement in India should, therefore, be understood as groups that emerge primarily through affordances of online public venues.

In this sense, Dasgupta's analysis of the queer digital counterpublics follows his idea of a 'dissident citizen' that locates the digital queer subject at the center of resistance to oppression and otherization (124). According to the author, queer communities actively participate in dissenting practices in relation to the nation state on social media platforms (151). This leads to the formation of an "oppositional politics" (151) that allows queer citizens to take agency over their bodies and rights. In the context of my research, however, I frame the queer subaltern counterpublic not merely with queer politics of resistance, but through the notion of the collective; through connective resistance imaginaries that challenge queer unbelonging through discussions on Section 377 on Twitter and Instagram. I argue that digital activism has created new and safe spaces in response to the community's marginalization. Here, members of LGBTQIA+ communities can afford a sense of belonging with non-queer participants. India's turn to digital media secured new affordances in LGBTQIA+ activism. Further, I construct the counterpublic, in this study, as also carrying non-queer members who participate in the exercise of collective and performative postcolonial identity building. These networked counterpublics that lead to the production of a postcolonial identity are made possible through hashtag activism to change debates about queer rights in India. Hashtag queer activism on platforms such as Twitter and Instagram have both made visible the queer minoritized subaltern and perform the crucial function of re-centring and accelerating the process of decolonization by forging the means to dismantle the foundations of both colonial and postcolonial knowledge. Therefore, networked queer counterpublics are not necessarily made up of queer individuals and other members of LGBTQIA+ communities. Instead, the movement for the emancipation of the Indian queer occurs through the participation of both the queer and the non-queer. In this context of hashtag activism surrounding #Section377 in India, queerness and queer collective empathy emerge on Twitter and Instagram in opposition to normative sexual politics and nationhood

and evoke solidarity through empathetic acknowledgement of subaltern struggles, and the affirmation of their identities and rights in the country (Kouri-Towe 21). As Foucault (1978) argues, the community can perform queering as a gesture of dismissal that works against the discourse of power and truth around human sexuality. The networked voice is constructed especially to combat the heterosexual, homophobic authority of Victorian institutions, nationalist masculinities and patriarchal ways of being. Queer empathy and queer collectivities largely carry the burden of the queer cause. It is the movement itself that intends to be a space for queer representation. It takes agency in the construction of a subaltern voice, even in the possible absence of the subaltern. Therefore, it is the movement and not the individual that reshapes existing hierarchies and participates through both the performance of collective dissidence, and resistance imaginaries. Activism comes in many forms, which enables a veritable shift of the voice, thereby extending a space for subverting, dismantling and rebuilding power structures. Enabling this activism are hashtags that have become a cultural artefact since their emergence and adoption by Twitter and Instagram. They are now a part of a codified logic that shapes dissent and voice in gendered digital movements. Therefore, in the process of community-building, and the practice of solidarity and empathy online, hashtags emerge as the nodal interface from which relational and affirmational publics are forged between multiple collectives. Although I elaborate on collective queer empathy in another chapter on Section 377, I draw on queer digital counterpublics as a community-building exercise and collective resistance in the form of fourth-wave hashtag movements with the Indian queer at the centre to challenge patriarchal power. These networked counterpublics ultimately represent an emancipatory potential in response to their marginalization in the dominant public sphere historically rooted in postcolonial imaginaries of the nation state.

Gender Identity in #Section377

In this chapter, I examine how digital infrastructures create affordances for the safe participation of the Indian subaltern queer, as well as facilitate the construction of both personal and collective gender identity of Indian LGBTQIA+ communities. Social media sites can function as a safe space and refuge for the Indian queer subaltern to self-express, communicate, interact, and congregate, and in the process help “create and refine their queer identities from dating and sexual bonding to politics and activism” (Dasgupta 12). Digital spaces offer “critical opportunities for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and other sexual and gender minorities to explore and perform their identities, access resources, connect with peers” (Craig et al 2), and take charge of their narratives of existence. Virtual platforms equally enable a smoother coming-out process for LGBTQIA+ individuals, and offer a unique support system, thereby facilitating an online curation of personal identity, self-agency and control over self-disclosure (Craig et al 2). Queer spaces in India exist on completely queer sites such as Gaydar, PlanetRomeo and Guys4Men, but “queer communities also encounter each other on mainstream websites such as Twitter and Instagram that have added another dimension to the question of queer identity and self-representation” in the digital public sphere (Dasgupta 10). The queer cyberspace becomes symbolic of the Foucauldian concept of space that performs the vital function of a “counter-site” (Foucault 24; Dasgupta 10) for reconfiguration of queer identity for the LGBTQIA+ community in India. In this context, I investigate whether digital spaces, such as Twitter and Instagram, provide safe spaces for marginalized LGBTQIA in India, and enable the community to express and explore issues of sexuality and gender. Using evidence in the form of selected tweets and Instagram posts, I specifically examine how the Indian queer subaltern subject asserts and expresses their sexuality, gender identity, agency, performativity, and embodiment, using linguistic discourse and visuals, on social media platforms.

Homosexual Acts versus Homosexual Identity

Before I delve into analysis of the emergence of gender identity and agency on Twitter and Instagram, I find it particularly important to elucidate the difference between engaging in a homosexual act and identifying as a homosexual/queer person in the Indian context. These specifics were not distinguished in Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code.

Ruth Vanita argues that “Indian conceptions of sexuality were based on sex acts rather than identity,” and were defined on the spectrum of penetration of either the masculine or feminine partner (Vanita 1). In Hindu mythology and philosophy, gender identity is considered fluid and ever-changing, and for the Indian gods as well as for humankind, gender is “simultaneously male, female, and neutral” (1). Gender is flexible, and expressed in different ways through different stages of life. Therefore, the concept of queer identity, theoretically, personally, and politically performative and gendered, appears alien to Hindu ideology. According to Vanita, in the Indian context, the only distinct category of gender identity in the spectrum of masculine and feminine is the “third-gender, consisting of men who desire men, or persons of the third nature with either masculine or feminine appearing characteristics” (1). The cultural frameworks that define and shape the “third gender” emerge from the recorded presence of Indian hijras, kothis, and other groups of transsexual identities in ancient Indian mythologies and religious texts (Altman 81). Vanita asserts that “nineteenth century Euro-American sexologists were, in fact, the first to invent sexuality-based categories of identity that were preceded by a range of sexual behaviours” and fluidity in gender (Vanita 1). Altman adds that western and/or modern understandings of sexuality that were spread through HIV prevention programs recreated lesbian and gay identities, and introduced the concept of homosexuality as both a personal and collective identity in former British colonies and the Global South (81). In the West, prior to the emergence of the LGBTQIA+ movement, the markers for homosexual identity and homosexual behaviour were often used

interchangeably (82). The adoption of this terminology began with HIV/AIDS activism in India aided by discourses of human rights. In fact, Indians employing the terms “lesbian” and “gay” are descendants of the legacies of colonialism, and “internalized imperialism” (85). Several non-profit organizations working towards HIV/AIDS awareness in New Delhi and other major cities employed the term “same sex desiring people” to indicate lesbian, gay, and bisexual people (Vanita 1). In this light, for pre-colonial India, gender identity outside the binaries of the male and female existed only in defining Indian transgender people. However, with the arrival of Section 377, the history of colonial heteronormative nationalism, and subsequently LGBTQIA+ activism, both gender identity and gender activism were re-conceptualized in broader terms of an identitarian framework that emerges in the discourse for emancipation in queer rights.

Digital Media & Queer Performance in #Section377 – Narratives of Coming Out

Here, I examine how members of LGBTQIA+ communities in India employ Twitter and Instagram to construct a queer identity through their narratives of ‘coming-out.’ Queerness performs the function of disruption, instability, and trouble, and forces the adoption of an unclear, unstable, and fluid identity in order to thrive. For the queer Indian subaltern subject, performing queerness on social media websites such as Twitter and Instagram becomes a means to re-conceptualize their gendered body and sexual life in public. Their presence, visibility, and performance on digital platforms enables the destabilization and dismantling of heteronormative and patriarchal expectations placed on the queer body in the Indian postcolonial context. The Internet, for Indian queer people, offers a safe space and a sense of freedom to openly “script their desires of a non-normative identity and sexuality” (Dasgupta 299). Digital media, therefore, become the primary site of production of their queer sexual identities (Gray 1165). I investigate the emergence of queer identity on Twitter and Instagram in the context of the discourse around #Section377 through an examination of

coming-out narratives by gay, lesbian and trans individuals, drawing on Judith Butler's theory of performativity and Jack Halberstam and Mary Gray's theory of authenticity and realness in the emergence of queer identities online. Performativity, as Butler points out in *Gender Trouble*, refers to the lack of a pre-discursive identity where all aspects of gender including subjecthood, agency, gender norms and sex are produced through discourse (49). For Butler, "performativity is the reiterative and citational practice of discourse rather than a single and deliberate act" (2) or performance. The production of gender through performativity is a process without destination and therefore "provides a future without constraints and regulations associated with a categorical gendered identity, body, behaviour, desire, acts and thoughts" (Cover & Prosser 87). In addition, performing gender identity through discourse troubles personal identity that comes into being only through the act of writing or performing online. In reconstructing Butler's notion of gender performativity to understand queer identity, I argue that coming-out stories by Indian gay, lesbian and trans individuals indicate a "coming-into being" through discursivity and textuality on social media platforms. These performative acts of public declaration of subjecthood function as a direct counter-narrative to normative expectations in the postcolonial state. While these stories may be personal to the Indian queer youth, the participants' performance of non-conformity equally works to subvert the larger singular narrative of masculinity and patriarchy in heteronormative societies and cultures such as India. Public and political performativity of queer identity creates moments of visibility in being and becoming queer; where the personal becomes the political, and stories of the self become stories of the community (Duggan 793; Gray 1170). Altman reiterates that "non-heteronormative sexualities come out in order to facilitate the development of a sense of community (141). Coming out can therefore be considered an inherently political act, a social process connecting the private and personal aspects of othered subjecthood (Plummer 82), grounded as a "socio-sexual and cultural

feminist political framework” (Cover & Prosser 81). As Mary Gray asserts, coming out on public platforms carries a transformative power to change politics of representation, vulnerability, and intimacy for both individual bodies as well as for social communities. The materiality of performance creates a network of LGBTQIA identities and produces universal codes in behaviour, desire, and sexual identity within the community. In the specific context of #Section 377 in India, the coming out narratives “critique and reinforce dominant and essentialist conceptions of masculinity” (82) that are pertinent to the hegemonic conception of sexuality in India. The gender identities of participants online emerged through their discursive performance of coming out on digital platforms and created queer visibility and group solidarity for the movement through textuality and visual cultures. #Section 377 and the eventual decriminalization of homosexuality creates a platform and an opportunity to host a collective queer identity through the discursive practice of performativity.

In tandem with the notion of performativity, I draw on Jack Halberstam and Mary Gray’s argument that despite the public and political performativity online, the expression of queer identity has an aspect of realness and personal authenticity to the participants that share their stories online; that the expression of identity is “not exactly always an act, or an imitation, but a way that people and minorities appropriate the real and its effects” on their bodies (Halberstam 51; Gray 1163). This personal identity generates and expands on a “sense of place, home, and belonging of the self within the queer social community” (Gray 1182). The transformative power of coming out and self-identification is one of the “primary features of queer youth culture” (Driver 16). Similar to the performative element, #Section377 also creates a platform for Indian queer youth to express their authentic and real personalities, their journeys of coming into the realization of queer subjecthood, their interactions with family and friends, their struggles with acceptance and self-love, and the myriad stages of queer identity construction before culminating in a public coming out.

Coming out, in this sense, is a deeply autobiographical journey towards self-actualization (Saxey 36) and rite of passage identifying as part of the LGBTQIA+ community. Often, the process of self-identification for a person belonging to a sexual minority can be a rather hostile process “characterized by unpredictability, backtracking, denial, alienation, confusion, and harassment” (Gonsiorek & Rudolph 164-5). Through this personal and political journey of self-exploration, self-disclosure and self-labelling, the participants on Twitter and Instagram are compelled to work through internalized homophobia both online and offline. Therefore, queer identity, in the context of the discourse surrounding #Section 377, emerges through the discursive practice of coming out online, and participants’ queerness oscillates between a performative and authentic element; between the “attempt to articulate similarity and community” (Cover & Prosser 84).

At this juncture, queer identity online becomes visible through a coming out process for gay, lesbian, and trans identities in various ways. First, through the act of writing and narrating, participants on Twitter and Instagram attempt to create an ‘authentic and real’ self on social media. They reflect on the representation of their non-heterosexual self and produce and reinforce their sexual non-normativity through the description of their interaction with family and friends, their struggles of being queer, the harassment they face, and the multiple stages of their coming out process. Often, the tweets and/or posts also speak to “a linearity of selfhood” where participants have known their queerness since childhood (84). Second, they express their queer identities as a performative gesture that enables the construction of a social and collective queer identity. Here, participants express their sexual identity directly in relation to the reading down of Section 377 decriminalization of homosexuality in the country. In this context, they communicate joy and relief at finally being able to live and perform their queerness in the public sphere. Furthermore, the performative coming out of famous personalities in India also aids in collective identity building and support within the

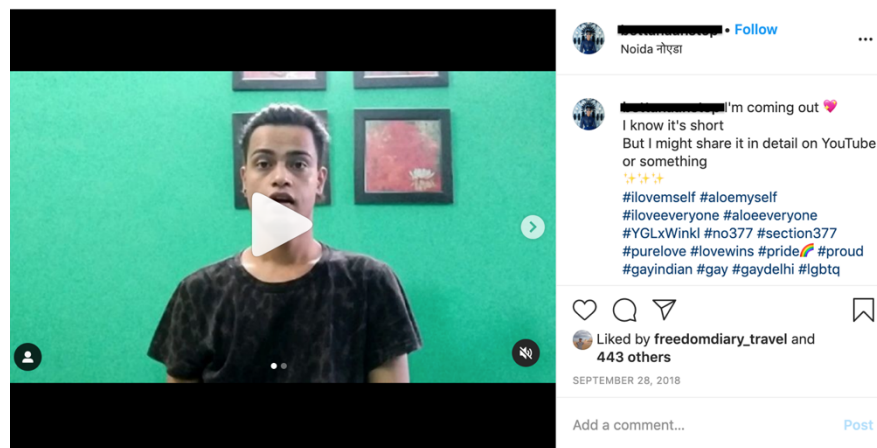
LGBTQIA community. The first argument of emerging queer identity through the act of coming out in an authentic and real sense is evidenced in several tweets and Instagram posts.

For instance,

Sadia (@AS11). “I'm declaring myself to be a criminal in the eyes of the law - waving a white flag saying, 'I'm culpable for life in prison'. #Section377.” May 30th, 2018, 10:21 p.m.

The first participant declares themselves to be openly both queer and criminal before the reading down of Section 377. The following tweet and Instagram post, similarly, demonstrate a simple yet authentic declaration of the self through the act of coming out of the closet online.

Raya (@RMahila). “Coming out of the closet be like... #Section377.” May 30th, 2018, 10:21 p.m.



In addition to powerful statements made by participants, queer individuals also employ social media platforms to communicate and lay bare their personal and real struggles of being and growing up queer. Communicating their personal stories online enables the creation of a linearity of selfhood for participants where they speak to their interactions with the outside world and navigate their own non-normative queer identities. For instance, the post below details the journey of an individual coming into their queer identity as a lesbian and navigating their sexuality in Indian society without any media representation. Queer individuals in India lack appropriate LGBTQIA+ representation in media, and are therefore forced to manoeuvre through their sexual/gender identity.



The following post dwells on the early discomfort associated with being different, and the attempt to 'self-normalize' through heteronormativity. The participant also evokes the legacies of internalized homophobia in the postcolonial Indian nation despite the decriminalization of the law.



In a similar post of self-labelling below, the participant communicates the struggles of isolation and loneliness from their peer and social groups in their coming out journey, and their eventual coming into self-love and acceptance as a queer individual. These posts also

demonstrate that despite online homophobia, social media platforms remain one of the few, if not the only, safe space for self-expression and coming out for the Indian queer youth.



Participants share and relive the traumatic and hostile process of coming out as queer in a deeply personal, real, and authentic exploration of the self on digital platforms. As the post above demonstrates, the participant's coming out as queer occurred in various "excruciating stages of denial, self-hatred, suicidal tendencies, self-tolerance, self-acceptance,

and the eventual acceptance of help and love.” Sharing this traumatic journey of identity building creates authenticity and meaning in discursively constructed non-normative sexual identities. Although these tweets and posts demonstrate the queer performance of the participants and establish a deeper network of support with the LGBTQIA+ community in India and the Indian diaspora abroad, ultimately they are a testament to a personal rite of passage and the lived experiences of queer individuals both offline and online. The narration of personal struggles and discursive self-labelling also occurs for marginalized identities other than “gay” and “lesbian” communities in India. For instance, the following post describes an act of coming-out as a queer bisexual woman to her parents. The bisexual community is not represented well among the LGBTQIA+ community in India, and is not particularly well received owing to the confusion between sexual desire/act and gender identity.



Transgender identities are also represented in the context of #Section377 online, particularly on Instagram. Trans identities emerge through discourse on Twitter and autoethnographic visuals on Instagram, through the public documentation of struggles as a Hijra/Kothi despite the larger acceptance of trans bodies in India, and through an authentic self-declaration of trans identity. At this juncture, I consider it important to clarify that the

western equivalent of transgender seldom applies in the Indian context. Transgender people in South Asia have formed distinct communities such as the Hijras, Kothis, Jogappas, Shivashaktis, and the Aravanis, who each carry their own historiographies, hierarchies, and community specific rituals. Their presence has been recorded in ancient Indian mythologies and texts such as the ‘Mahabharata,’ where they were referred to as gods that can change genders on a whim. My choice to employ the term transgender here stems from my intention to include multiple voices from diverse communities but should be understood as an imperfect descriptor of the identities under discussion.

The study of trans and other marginalized identities in the context of #Section377 is pertinent because the focus of the movement has largely been on gay and lesbian identities. As Prasad argues, the “British Raj and the Indian Court have supported historical maltreatment of transgender people in India, and that even after several years of independence, discrimination against transgender, Hijra, and Kothi people persisted” (1). The historic pain, trauma, and agony of trans existence in India in public spaces is often dismissed and disregarded by the western movement since the Hijras, Kothis and other communities are native to India and have existed for centuries as the third gender. However, a small number of posts highlight trans existence and self-labelling and celebrate the multiplicity of trans voices and identities in the country.

For instance, in the following tweet, the transgender individual speaks to their fluid gender identity, and the ability to move between the male ‘Akshay’ and the female ‘Bruna.’

Outlook Magazine (@OutlookIndia). “I am a crossdresser. I start from home on my bike as Akshay and then, transform into the person I really am—Bruna #Section377.” October 12th, 2018, 11:35 a.m.

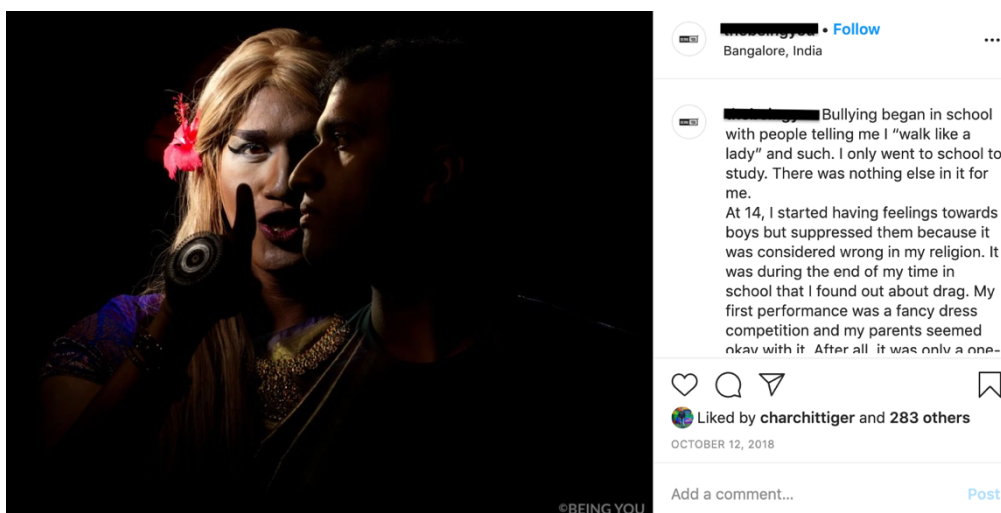
Another transgender person speaks to the gender dysphoria they experienced from childhood, the linearity and awareness of selfhood, and their eventual transition to ‘Shivali.’



However, most tweets and posts by trans individuals communicate the struggles, harassment and bullying they underwent as queer children, and the systematic rejection of trans identities in the country. The following tweet follows a small trans community celebrating the decriminalization of Section 377 while speaking to the exclusion of trans identities and voices in the movement:

PriyaS (@PriyaS). "There has been a systematic rejection of our existence and identities from historical texts and mythology" How a small group of trans persons in Kolkata celebrated the decriminalization of #Sec377 by putting up a rare Ardhanarishwar idol for Navratri." October 20th, 2018, 3:54 p.m.

Others highlight the social rejection, bullying, and mental and physical abuse that trans individuals face every day.





The author of the post conveys a deep awareness of trans selfhood as a child and/or the public perception of their trans identities which motivates their eventual transition. Another post below focuses on the individual's journey to self-acceptance and self-love in their non-normative sexuality and identity. The discursive self-labelling using photographic visuals in the Instagram posts above brings these individuals into their trans identities in public and enables them to openly declare themselves as queer in the digital public sphere.



Similar to the above posts, the expression of queer and trans identity in these personal stories, which occurs through the act of writing and narrating, carries an aspect of authenticity and realness. In addition to the expression of selfhood and personal gender

identity online, participants also reveal their queer identities as a symbolic and performative gesture that enables the construction of a collective and social queer/LGBTQIA+ identity. The participants perform non-conformity through the process of self-identification and self-labelling on social media platforms. This often occurs in relation to the decriminalization of homosexuality where the participants evoke #Section377 to come into their queer identities and perform queerness in the digital public sphere. For instance, the tweet below signals the performative coming out on social media for an individual post reading down of Section 377.

Rupal K(@RKaur). "I am so Gay today (literally and figuratively) as I am no longer a criminal. #Section377." April 20th, 2019, 6:40 p.m. Tweet.

The post below depicts both a personal jubilation as well as collective identity and community building over the emancipation of queer rights in India. The coming out on social media in the context of Section 377 enables the performance of queerness and non-normativity and creates a network of solidarity and support within the movement. It “encourages polyvocality, and promotes polysemy as a means by which members of the LGBTQIA+ community create appeals to one another on a larger platform” (Jackson et al. 1).

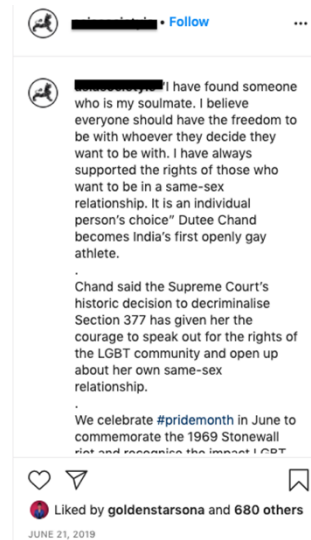


For this participant, decriminalization of homosexuality has enabled their performance of queerness both on social media platforms as well in public pride parades and with family and friends. In addition, the movement around Section 377 and the eventual Supreme Court reading have also encouraged bisexual and trans individuals to declare their sexuality and queer identity, and organized collective structures for other marginalized identities within the LGBTQIA+ community through their performative coming out using the #Section377 hashtag.

Finally, I contend that the discursive and performative coming out of famous personalities on social media platforms in India helps create more awareness of queer identities, and fosters a collective act of identity building within LGBTQIA+ communities, as can be seen below:



Dutee Chand, India's fastest runner, and first openly gay athlete was praised by Indian media for her coming out as a lesbian. A torchbearer in the fight for the eligibility of female athletes in track events, Chand used her platform to speak out for the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community through the declaration of her love and same-sex relationship with another woman post the decision by the Supreme Court to decriminalize homosexuality.



Chand's performative and personal coming out has influenced many within the community. However, despite the overturning of the colonial rule on homosexuality, many in India, especially in rural towns and villages, continue to follow the codes of heteronormativity and patriarchal culture. Chand's coming out, has therefore created a national controversy and backlash in relation to her new identity, and her village has disowned her. Notwithstanding the alienation from her family, Chand continues to be an example for members of the LGBTQIA+ community, particularly those from rural parts of India, and inspires Indian youth to live their queerness and non-normativity. Similar themes emerged around the public and performative coming out of Meenakshi Guruswamy and Arundhati Katju as a lesbian couple. Meenakshi and Arundhati were the lead advocates in the Section 377 case in court and argued against the discrimination and violence the LGBTQIA+ community in India faces. Their coming out as the first openly gay Supreme Court lawyers generated considerable interest in both traditional and social media. Hundreds of tweets and posts about the couple, like the one below, were shared on Twitter and Instagram in order to boost the movement and create more awareness about lesbian identities.

Amit (@AmitOj). "Menaka Guruswamy and Arundhati Katju have made history by "coming-out" as a couple, the only openly gay women lawyers in India. The psychological trauma of being queer in a tribalistic society like India escapes all but a few. #Section377". July 20th, 2019, 7:20 p.m.

Although the couple's struggles are deeply personal, their unfolding story and coming out performed an act of non-conformity that sought to subvert the narrative of masculinity and patriarchy in Indian society. Performativity, here, enables both the coming into a personal gender identity through discourse and a communal and collective identity in the context of #Section377. Gender identity that emerges on social media platforms in the Indian context through an act of coming out constantly oscillates between the personal and the political; between an authentic and a performative self; between an individual and collective identity. These deeply personal stories of selfhood shared on digital media by numerous LGBTQIA+ members become stories of the community writ large. Digital technologies ultimately enable both the individual and the community to express and explore issues of sexuality and gender and create safe space for the voice of the gendered subaltern to emerge.

Construction of Queer Empathy & Bonds of Solidarity

In addition to aiding in the construction of safe spaces for queer individuals to forge their postcolonial and gender identity online, digital technologies also create considerable affordances for queer emancipation through the production of a networked counterpublic of empathy and solidarity for the movement. In this chapter, I study how digital spaces become principal sites in the emergence of transnational empathy and are marked by the creation of ‘imagined collectives’ that perform the acknowledgement and affirmation of queer identities and rights. In the context of the Indian digital queer movement, online gendered collectivities employ #Section377 and other hashtags not merely to engage in discussions surrounding the legalization of homosexuality in the country, but also in the construction of transnational networks of empathy and bonds of solidarity with the LGBTQIA+ community. In this era of globalization and digitization, it is imperative to understand how virtual communities function and conduct themselves in relation to the queer subaltern, and how digital platforms forge networks of empathy and solidarity that legitimize queer rights and identities. Here, I study the formation of digital counterpublics of empathy and kinship, and I frame the conventional discourse around #Section377 in the creation of what I term ‘zones of queer empathy’ that function as safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ subjects online. First, in order to examine how ‘zones of queer empathy’ emerge on Twitter and Instagram, I borrow Zizi Papacharissi’s theory of affective publics (2014) to argue that the hashtags in the Indian queer movement forge networks of solidarity, empathy, and empowerment online through an act of acknowledgement of LGBTQIA+ rights and identities. Second, I argue that empathy emerges in the movement through the creation of imagined collectives that is visibilized by the presence and participation of both LGBT/non-LGBT organizations that collectively represent the struggle for queer emancipation. Finally, queer empathy is evidenced through

the construction of positive affirmation that is demonstrated with the use of emotions and sentiment expressed on social media platforms.

The process of community building and mobilization on social media platforms occurs through the discursive practice of sharing that becomes necessary for creating networks of solidarity to ensure the success of the movement (Gerbaudo & Treré 869; Tewksbury 606). Papacharissi's notion of affective publics was developed to unpack the discursive tensions in the process of meaning making, particularly in the context of digital protest, and contends that digital technologies "facilitate feelings of engagement, belonging, and solidarity" (Suk et al. 2). Sharing effectively engenders a thriving networked connection between digital bodies that produces an "affective attachment" (Tewksbury 606). According to Papacharissi, social media fosters connections between people and promotes friendship, kinship and support for 'othered' communities. Suk et al. argue that affective publics and relationships, in the context of hashtag activism, are developed through an open act of "acknowledgement of personal vulnerabilities and strengths as a community" (2). Here, "acknowledgement is a deeply relational act, and offers an opportunity to encounter others in digital spaces, and communicate care" (2). Therefore, affective publics and the acknowledgement of the struggles of the queer subaltern 'de-otherizes' the marginalized, and empowers the movement as a whole. Rodino-Colocino speaks to the notion of "empowerment through empathy" in a digital movement that helps facilitate connections between social media participants, and creates networks of solidarity that "expose systems of oppression, privilege, and patriarchal oppression" through empowerment (97). The production of "affective solidarities" in hashtag movements therefore promotes healing and care for marginalized communities on digital platforms (98-99) and re-affirms a sense of communal sharing and a cohesive network of acknowledgement among both the subaltern community and those on the 'outside' (Suk et al. 2). Furthermore, as Stewart and Schultz

argue, social movements are networks built with a sense of shared collective identity, collective agency, and therefore collective action (1). Collective action, according to the authors, evokes a sense of unity, collective belonging, and togetherness that fosters empathetic connections, and enables one to put themselves in the others' shoes (2). Therefore, collective action both produces and "performs solidarity in protest rituals, and embodies actions such as dressing in certain colours, and /or holding flags (Stewart & Schultz 3). However, the creation of solidarity here occurs through "imagined collectives" where participants are unaware of the identities of their fellow participants (Anderson 49; Stewart & Schulz 6). The lack of the physical and material embodiment on digital platforms, according to Stewart and Schultz, produces a different form of imagined communion that erases difference and "privileges collective identity" and the creation of empathy through empowerment (6).

My argument posits in this depiction a level of mutuality and collective empathetic understanding for and among South Asian communities whose attempts at asserting power demonstrates a queering togetherness. I frame the emergence of a visible network of subaltern queer counterpublic through the presence of both queer and non-queer participants in the discussions surrounding Section 377. Here, I evoke my previous argument on the digital queer counterpublics to assert that it is not merely queer individuals that carry and/or push the movement forward; it is, in fact, non-queer participants, as well as larger non-governmental organizations and corporations and their expression of empathy and display of solidarity for the movement online that brings positive change in queer rights in the country. Evidence from the dataset highlights the intention and inclination to 'create a network of solidarity'; a space for the queer community to flourish where participants do not necessarily identify as members of the group. First, networks of empathy emerge through the empowerment and acknowledgement of queer rights and the affirmation of their identities. In

the case of Twitter, out of 5000 tweets in the dataset, 2094 tweets have been manually coded as “empathetic,” both in relation to members of the LGBTQIA community as well as the movement as a whole. These mediated networks of affective empathy among those within the subaltern create a foundation for digital mobilization that culminates in queer emancipation in the country. In the case of Twitter, connective action that occurs through the hashtags transforms into a collective and empathetic identity (Papacharissi 314) where users perform a shared collective voice in the acknowledgement, support, and understanding of queer rejection, harassment, and struggles in India. For instance, the following tweets highlight how users view the social rejection and harassment of the transgender community, and how they locate their own subjecthood in relation to the transgender ‘other.’

Chetan (@Brahma). “We have sympathy for transgenders #Sec377 - God made them that way.” July 21st, 2018, 10:11 a.m.

Srikant (@svsrik18). “99% of #transgender folks have faced social rejection and 96% are denied jobs. How is anyone okay with these numbers? We need to work as a society on changing hearts, minds and policies. #Section377.” August 13th, 2018, 1:54 a.m.

Zubaan Books (@ZubaanBooks). “Members of the transgender community are still vulnerable to harassment by the police almost a month after the Supreme Court read down Section 377. The legal reading down of #Section377 has not changed the way the police harass our trans communities.” October 9th, 2018, 6:17 a.m.

These tweets demonstrate care, compassion, affinity, rapport, and sympathy with the transgender community, and recognize the everyday social and personal struggles that transgender people face. The affective solidarity and user support is built through hashtag connections, emerges through the open act of ‘acknowledging’ the vulnerabilities of the subaltern group, and promotes feelings of attachment and belonging with the community. These tweets equally speak to the importance of fostering social connections and togetherness, both offline and online in order to create awareness regarding the struggle for minoritized communities, and eventually enact both lasting social and political changes. Where users above appear more sympathetic to the plight of trans lives, the tweets below

underscore affective empathy for the trans community in relation to the cis community online.

Tanya S. (@tanyat). “The trans community has erupted in protests in various states in India. It is imperative that cis members of the queer community rally with their trans brothers and sisters. I support #StopTransBill2018 and #StopTraffickingBill2018. #Section377 is gone but it wasn’t the end. December 22nd, 2018, 6:18 a.m.

Tanvi (@tanvibh). “I just signed a petition to #StopTransBill2018! As a cis person for whom the trans community came out in full force for during #Section377 this is literally the least I can do, and you should too.” December 22nd, 2018, 1:49 a.m.

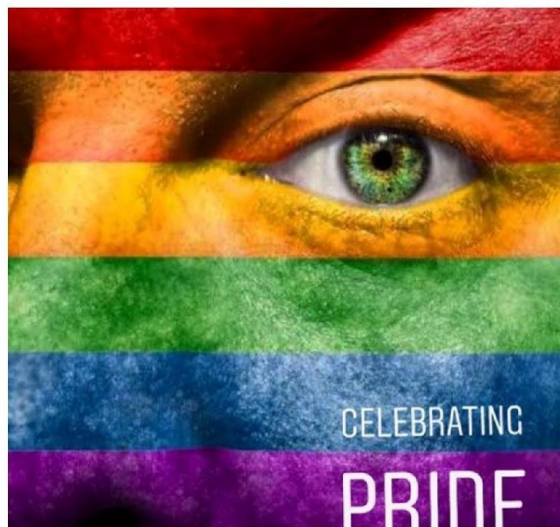
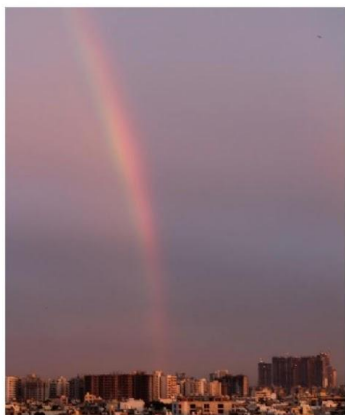
Both the users above define and locate their cisgender subjectivity in relation to their “trans brother and sisters,” and perform allyship by coming out in complete support for the subaltern transgender community. The users and their comments perform empathy through empowerment, acknowledgement and dislocation of their own privilege as cis-gender individuals. The process of empathy through empowerment is equally made visible when participants challenge and confront the rejection of non-normative love and political and religious codes that force LGBTQIA+ communities to engage in a constant battle to assert their identities. For instance, the users below decry the constraints of homosexual love in society, and the struggle of queer identities in self-assertion.

Besharam (@besharam). “Don’t suppress or contain them, let them live, hold hands, touch, express their love just like straight people do #Sec377.” November 26th, 2017, 8:07 a.m.

Padmanabhan (@janz). “It is sad world when people are forced to fight for their identity and choice when world religions such as Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism and Buddhism have long acknowledged queer identities. The Ardhanareeswarar is proof enough #Section377.” January 10th, 2018, 5:41 a.m.

Twitter uses hashtags in the queer movement in order to create affective connections between digital bodies that perform affective acknowledgment, affirmation, and empowerment of queer desire, rights, and identities. Furthermore, the support and solidarity, in this context, extends to both the identities as well as the movement as a whole. The voice of empathy and solidarity carries the movement even without the visible presence of the subaltern on digital platforms. Through the practice of sharing, the networks of empathy

produce bonds of solidarity and friendship between heterosexual users and the gendered subaltern communities where their connections empower the fight against heteropatriarchy, homophobia, and the postcolonial nation state. Where affective empathy occurs through a discursive textual practice on Twitter, Instagram demonstrates the use of collective performance of queerness and the construction of queer zones of empathy through the use of pride images. In the dataset of 1000 Instagram posts, I coded 276 as images with pride colours posted either by individuals, or by large corporations and non-profit organizations in support of the reading down of Section 377. The pride images are employed in various different ways including as flags, in the presentation of food, jewellery, clothes, or simply as a rainbow of colours. Protest movements can, in fact, generate powerful emotions that are reflected in repetitive symbols and/or meaningful practices that a social movement incorporates (Stewart & Schultz 3). The pride colours and the use of the rainbow(s) in Instagram posts demonstrates solidarity and symbolizes collective and connective action with the queer subaltern. The images below, drawn from my sample, depict the vibrant use of pride colours by participants and organizations to engage in queer movements. The visual activism on display in the images is marked by jubilation and a celebratory performance of queer empathy and solidarity with LGBTQIA communities. The use of pride colours also facilitates the production of imagined collectives that both re-affirm and legitimize non-normative love and queer emancipation on digital spaces.



Similar to Twitter, Instagram users participate in the discursive construction of empathy in tandem with visual activism. For instance, the user below employs an image in pride colours to celebrate the reading down of Section 377 and acknowledge the lives and dreams of the LGBTQIA community.

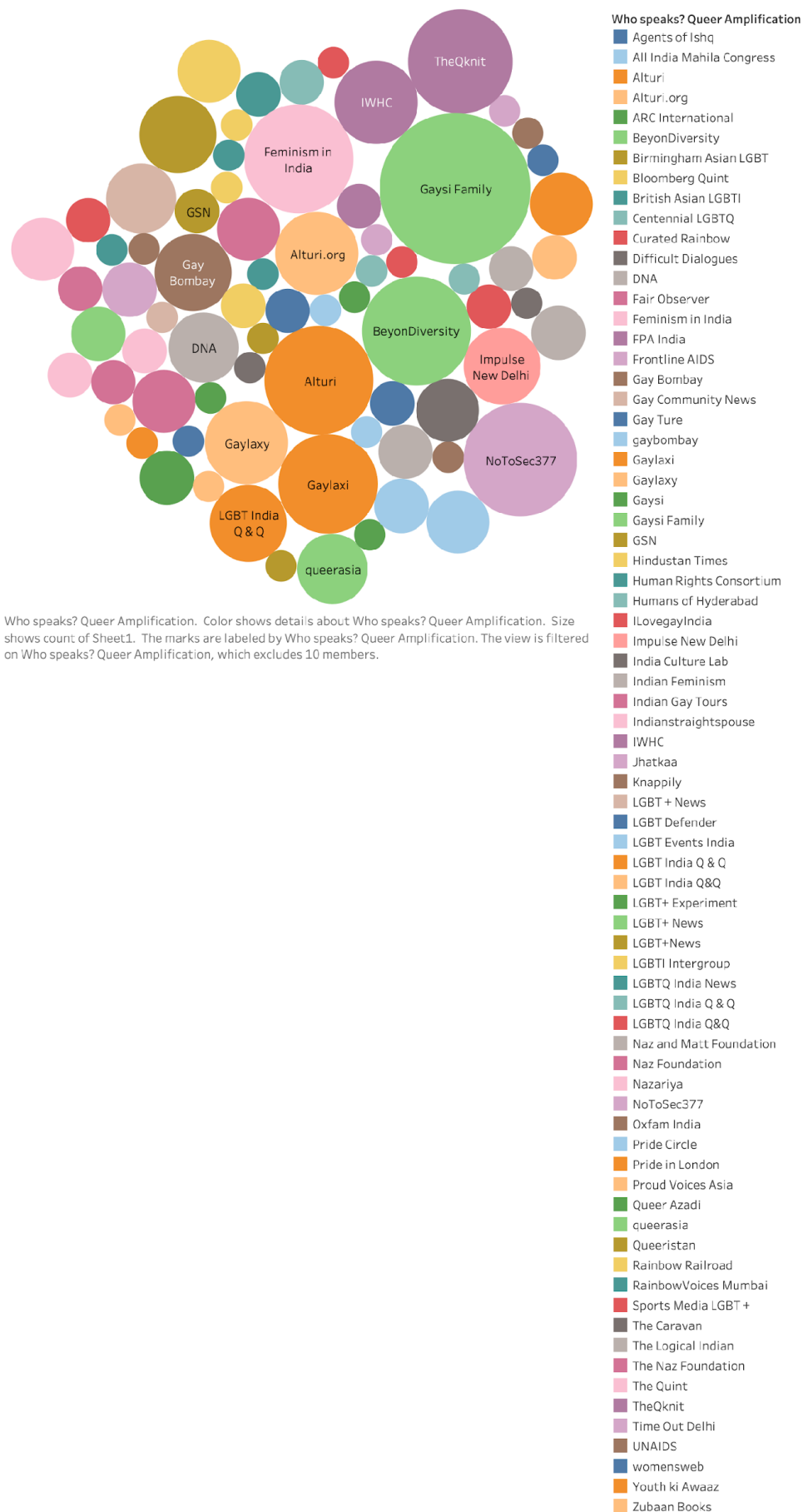


Finally, pride on Instagram is also an expression of collective solidarity that occurs through the discursive and visual engagement of both individuals and organizations. For instance, several for-profit organizations, such as the one below, employ and/or incorporate pride colours in their designs or presentation in order to both celebrate the judgement as well as establish their brand through an inclusivity of LGBTQIA+ groups in the country.



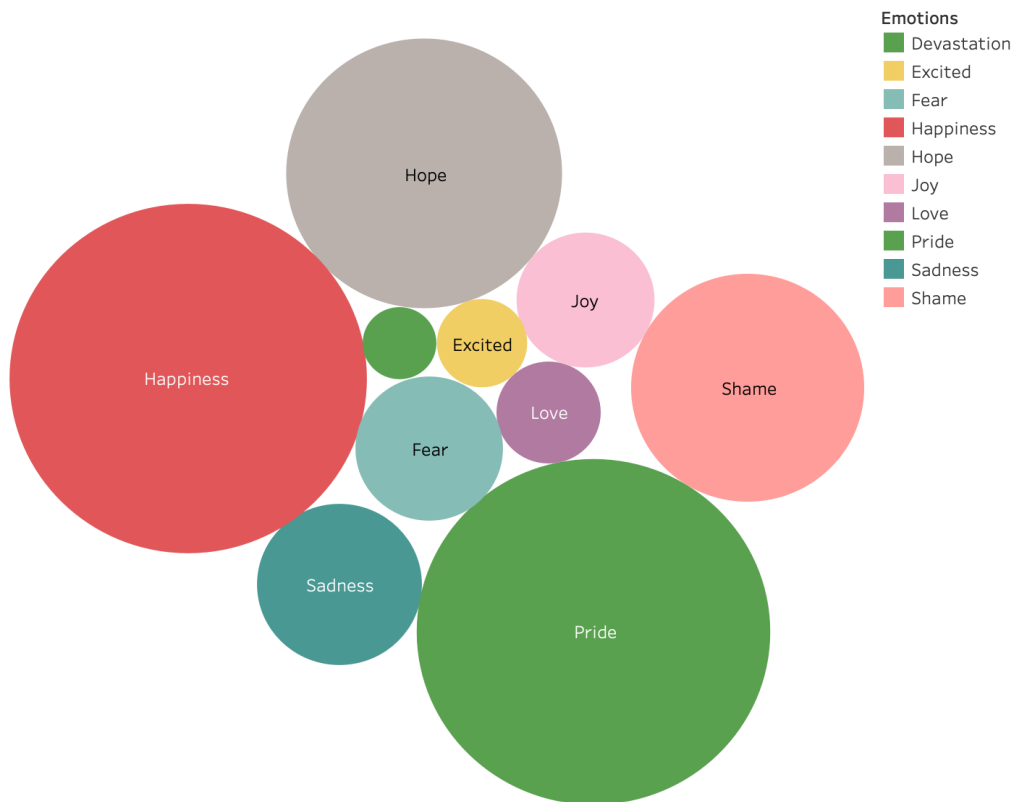
In fact, the Twitter dataset records the participation of several organizations that work to reform gay, lesbian, and trans lives in the country, uncover and narrate their stories, and create a platform for sharing and building connections within and outside the community. The self-representation of queer individuals is not visible in the dataset, and often their struggles are voiced on platforms of organizations that assume the act of storytelling and community-building on their behalf. These organizations also play an integral part in the acknowledgement and affirmation of LGBTQIA+ rights and identities online through their engagement with the hashtag, and celebration of pride. Similarly for Instagram, 652 posts were posted by anonymous users, and 47 were positively marked as posted by organizations on the platform. Some of the organizations, more established on Twitter than Instagram, displayed in the chart below, have tirelessly advocated for queer rights since the inception of the movement. Therefore, larger organizations partake in the digital queer movement, generate interest and algorithmic visibility for the hashtag and the movement as whole, and thereby enable the construction of networks of collective empathy for the subaltern groups.

Queer Empathy - Organizations



Finally, I assert that networked empathy materializes in the dataset on Twitter and Instagram through an indirect yet positive affirmation of the queer movement. I manually encoded the ‘sentiments’ for the movement in order to examine how many tweets and posts express positive feelings and emotions towards #Section377 as a movement. On Twitter, a total of 1092 tweets expressed positive sentiment for the movement, and on Instagram 495 posts out of 1000 tweets spoke positively about the movement. Queer empathy is evidenced through the construction of positive affirmation that is also demonstrated in the use of positive emotions and sentiment to engage in discourse around #Section377. Users embed their emotions in relation to the movement and discursively participate in community-building through the expression and voicing of their feelings. Expression of positive emotions, feelings and sentiments, therefore, enables the construction of lasting affective relationships, connections, friendships, and bonds of solidarity and empathy. For instance, on Twitter particularly, the study of emotions in the discourse demonstrates the use of positive words such as “happiness,” “joy,” “hope,” “love,” and “pride” to describe both the movement and where/how the users locate themselves in the discussion around queer emancipation.

Emotions in #Section377



Emotions. Color shows details about Emotions. Size shows count of Sheet1. The marks are labeled by Emotions. The view is filtered on Emotions, which has multiple members selected.

Tweets that employ emotions help affective publics in solidarity and support of the movement. The tweets below state that the users are “proud and happy” with the reading down of Section 377, and express pride and joy to celebrate the moment along with the LGBTQIA+ community.

Kanika (@Kingaka). “So proud and happy of students who are taking initiative to scrap down #Section377. It’s about time in India where ALL the people have the right to LOVE.” May 17th, 2018, 7:01 a.m.

The Naz Foundation Trust (@sNaz_Foundation). “It brings us sheer joy to see the wave of celebration spread from India to the entire world. Love won, at last! #Section377.” September 13th, 2018, 3:01 a.m.

Other tweets empathize with the movement by expressing sadness over queer struggles and/or mimicking the fear that marginalized communities experience. In this context, even words that have a negative connotation work to build bridges with the

community and often demonstrate a positive affirmation for queer rights. For example, the user below expresses sadness over the constraints of non-normative love and the inability of queer individuals to love freely in the country. Similarly, the organization Jhatkaa.org celebrates the reading down of the law, and the subsequent freedom of being queer without the fear of persecution by police and law enforcement.

Kavita (@kavi_the_rock). “LGBT I feel sad today. We all talk about freedom to wear, to eat, to think but still we are at the place where we don’t allow or talk about freedom to love #Sec377.” June 30th, 2018, 1:51 p.m.

Jhatkaa.org (@Jhatkaadotorg). “Isn’t it wonderful to be your true self without the fear of police?” June 14th, 2018, 11:12 a.m.

The expression of these sentiments and emotions using the hashtag connects people in the context of digital protest and engenders the creation of safe spaces or *zones of queer empathy*. I have demonstrated in this chapter that, in the context of #Section377, transnational networks of solidarity, and *zones of queer empathy* emerge on social media platforms through the formation of affective publics, acts of acknowledgement of queer struggles, the discursive empowerment of marginalized communities, the creation of imagined collectives, the participation of organizations for queer emancipation, and the construction of positive affirmation through the use of sentiments and emotions online.

#Section377 in the Canadian Diaspora: A Transnational Movement

In tandem with the construction of queer networked counterpublics of kinship, empathy, and friendship, digital media technologies also provide a space for the production of a transnational diasporic solidarity. In this chapter, I chart the varied ways in which users of the Indo-Canadian diaspora employ Twitter and Instagram to generate discourse in support of the movement for queer rights and emancipation in the country. First, as I mention in the ‘Method’ section, owing to the lack of a location filter on Instagram, I only collected posts from Twitter. Secondly, due to the lack of use of the geolocation filter by Twitter users, I was only able to collect and code 50 tweets from Canada. Finally, although I expected diasporic discourse to partially represent colonial, postcolonial or even Hindutva imaginaries of sexuality, the tweets I collected demonstrate the formation of a transnational counterpublic of solidarity and empathy. Before I expand on how diasporic discourse surrounding Section 377 is constructed, and how digital infrastructures facilitate the formation of these counterpublics, I frame the relationship between the Indian diaspora and queer sexuality in the North.

Indian Diaspora & Queer Sexuality in the North

Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur contend that diasporic cultural production occurs through the examination of nationhood and recent trends in transnationalism. In fact, the etymological framework of the term, according to Gopinath, “summons the image of scattered seeds” (5) that is emblematic of the rooted patriarchy and heteronormativity in nation-building that diaspora studies is meant to critique. This juncture between nation and diaspora, “where the latter is an imitation of an originary national culture” (Gopinath 7), also creates myriad ways in which local and queer imaginaries are shaped in relation to the nation state (Gajjala & Mitra 408). Diasporas, according to Homi Bhabha, have always occupied the “liminal third-space, and [are] eternally caught in the discontinuous time between translation and negotiation”, enabling the reimagination of the nation state altogether (38).

Particularly in the context of Indian diasporas in the Global North, identities constantly oscillate between states of discontinuity and fluidity, between fortifying the role of the Indian nation state in hetero-patriarchal sexuality, and spearheading a transnational queer emancipatory movement of solidarity and empathy. Indian diasporas in the early 80's and 90's re-inscribed notions of home in the context of sexualities, and the discourse around homosexuality was dismissed as a foreign incursion to be resisted (Shah 1). The intransigence in the rejection of non-traditional and peripheral sexualities within the Indian diaspora signalled a deeper resistance towards an 'othered anti-Indianness' that came with identifying as 'gay.' The desire to be an 'authentic Indian' was fortified through the gender binary as diasporic communities held onto the idyllic concept of religious codes of India's nationhood. Therefore, the location of diasporic identities in relation to "queer lives, desires, bodies, cultures and collectivities remains unimaginable in the dominant diasporic framework" (Gopinath 194). Gopinath's argument on this "diasporic nostalgia" (14) of queerness is founded on the violence and "criminalization of queer bodies, pleasures, desires, histories, and lives" within the Indian diaspora that constantly rework the relationship between nation and sexuality in the diasporic imaginary (187). The performance of a diasporic imaginary and colonial legacies of the homeland are primarily constructed through "hegemonic constructs of the nationalist patriarchy" within the domestic space (14).

Furthermore, Leidig argues that diasporic identity is also built on the foundation of religion, and subsequently the historical, and socio-political character of nation-building (77). In the Indian context, therefore, the construction of diasporic identity occurs through the political mobilization of Hindu, Sikh, Christian, and Muslim Indian communities in the Global North. However, as Leidig contends, the legacy of the Indian diasporic project in the West is largely focused on Hindutva (or Hindu nationalist) ideology that both promotes the superiority of the Hindu civilization and preserves codes of sexuality prescribed by the Hindu nation (77).

Hindutva ideology and supporting organizations have had an incredibly long history and legacy amongst the Hindu diaspora, particularly in the UK, US, Canada, Caribbean, and Africa (Bhatt & Mukta 435), where Hinduism has remained the prominent manner in which nation-building exercises have transpired in the West. Members of the Indian diaspora engage with internationally funded organizations in the West in an “attempt to reconnect with home culture” and preserve their personal and collective Hindu identity (Leidig 80).

Gopinath establishes the “complicity between diasporic formations and nationalism that engender processes of transnational capitalism and globalization” and the connections between diasporic imaginaries and nationalism that “underwrite Hindu nationalist projects” (7). Diasporic nostalgia, longing and desire are “converted into material linkages between the diaspora and the homeland” (7). According to Tölölyan, “homelands consistently refine efforts to recruit the financial, cultural and political resources of diasporas,” and therefore, Indian diasporic organizations have continued to celebrate the “historical, political, and cultural relations between the Indian state and diasporic populations” (43). The recent popularity that the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has garnered among the diaspora in the West is testament to the emergence of a pure Hindu/Hindutva identity founded on both memory and cultural identity attached to the Hindu nation (Shah 1). Non-resident Indians “are an important cog” in the government’s wheel and enable the financial support of the Hindu right around the world (Shah 1). The Indian diaspora plays the role of fortifying and bolstering the Indian nation state and cementing the rise of Hindu nationalism beyond Indian borders (Eswaran 1). This ideology otherizes minoritized communities including women, lower caste groups, LGBTQIA+ members, the economically poor, and those deemed politically undesirable to “serve the homeland’s elite nationalist claims” (Tölölyan 41), in perpetuation of a hetero-patriarchal logic and nationalist desires of Hindu normativity (Gopinath 10). In addition, contemporary ideology often emerges in the West in the form of

Islamophobia and anti-Islamic sentiments (Kurien 732) in the “highly politicized agenda that creates multicultural identity politics” (Leidig 80). These ideologies are further exacerbated by the impending shift in the media landscape and the expansion of social media platforms.

Transnational Queer Activism Around Section 377

However, despite the spread in Hindutva ideologies throughout Indian diasporic communities in the North, contemporary diasporas have also employed social media to create “exemplary communities of the transnational moment” (Faist 16). The intersections of diaspora and transnationalism have successfully built bridges and communicative relationships between host and home countries in myriad ways that are reflective of empathy and support for the global LGBTQIA+ movement (Kissau & Hunger 247). Transnational diasporic communities have now come to occupy “diasporic public spheres” (Appadurai 147) that enable the “diffusion of western norms of human rights into regulations and constitutions of the nation state” (Faist 15). As Gopinath argues, although diasporas “function in collusion with nationalistic interests,” they are equally imbricated in and produced through the processes of transnational capitalism (9). At this juncture, transnational queer activism in the Global North also performs the function of challenging “nationalist narratives that imagine and consolidate heterosexuality” (Gopinath 12) and locating queer empathy and support in a “more forward-thinking western modernity” (Muñoz & Perez 1). Therefore, the west imported LGBTQIA+ activism has carried western values of empathy and solidarity into the diasporic production of nationalist discourse.

Transnational Queer Movements

The “creation of gay communities in North America, Australia, and Europe,” (Altman 79) suggests a fundamental change in queer acceptance and enables the visibility of LGBTQIA+ groups and the discourse on “changing sexual regimes and relationships between sex/gender order” (87). The emergence of the globalized LGBTQIA+ campaign and

discourse is directly linked to the rise of the New Left in the 1960's and 70's, a by-product of the civil rights movement (Srivastava 1), and ultimately forged a "new critique of family, gender, and sexual repression in the form of the gay liberation and lesbian feminism" (Srivastava 372). In parallel, western identity politics became an important emancipatory manifestation of the modern transnational LGBTQIA+ activist movement through global consumerism, and created separate identities for lesbian women, gay men and trans communities. According to Altman, a common LGBTQIA+ consciousness and a global and universal homosexual identity began to emerge through the forces of globalization (79). The entanglement of global capitalism and queer cultures enables the "articulation of various forms of subjectivity, culture, affect, kinship, and community" for the diasporic imaginary (Gopinath 12). This global narrative of queer activism and empathy is imagined within the cartography of Eurocentric and western values. Therefore, a western modern identity largely borrowed from the West and the Global North influenced LGBTQIA+ activism in the Indian subcontinent. The trajectory of the Indian movement began with the import of globalization in the Indian market in the early 1990's. The use of English language labels such as 'gay,' 'lesbian,' 'bisexual,' and 'transgender' infiltrated local terminology among postcolonial Indian queer subjects through the vision of international activism. In addition, the "explosion of mass media and trans-cultural contacts" through global consumerism provoked the spread of LGBTQIA+ activism in India and produced a universal queer identity in its emancipatory framework. The growth of queer activism in India demonstrated an opposition to the heteropatriarchal nationalist narrative through increasing empathy and acceptance for homosexual acts and identities. Similarly, these values infiltrated the Indian diaspora in the North, particularly in Canada, where (im)migrants adopted the transnational narrative on queer identities imbricated with the legacies of globalization and western modernity.

Despite the Global North's entanglement in the origin of postcolonial homophobia and gender policing (Muñro & Perez 1) and its erasure of unique local queer identities in postcolonial societies, LGBTQIA+ activism originating in the West has effectively highlighted the vulnerabilities and struggles of queer communities and enabled the legal, political, and socio-cultural equality of the queer in the Indian subcontinent as well as among the Indian diaspora. The diasporic voice is visible through support groups that have coalesced around South Asian queer communities with emerging organizations such as Satrang, Trikone, Khush, DesiQ Hotline, and Gaysians as peer support helplines for the South Asian LGBTQIA+ youth in the North (Toppa 1). Gaysians as the umbrella brand and platform for the South Asian LGTBTQIA+ community creates opportunities for networking on social media, and enables community building. On the streets, the reading down of Section 377 by the Indian Supreme Court was met with enthusiasm, and followed with massive rallies held in major Canadian cities like Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver (Eswaran 1). Although the decriminalization of homosexuality explicitly affects Indian nationals living in India, the experiences of Indian diasporic queer communities are intricately tied to the homeland (Joshi 1). Social media platforms carry diaspora voices that evidence values of empathy and acceptance of queer subcultures and help in the construction of "new public spaces opened up by media technologies with an implicit potential to frame vigorous trajectories of autonomous action" (Zavos 22) within the diaspora. In this context, the discourse from Canadian diasporic members of the Indian LGBTQIA+ community celebrates freedom from the sodomy law despite the lack of direct consequences under Section 377. For example:

Trisha Banerjee (@Trish). "Finally I am free. #Section377 ❤️🏳️🌈." September 6th, 2018, 11:41 a.m.

Nina Bhattachjee (@onina). "I'm crying. Section 377 is gone. As a queer woman in the diaspora, my heart is so full for the friends and activists who have struggled and survived for this moment." September 6th, 2018, 7:48 a.m.

Both participants express support for the queer communities in India while simultaneously staging a ‘coming-out’ as part of South Asian diasporas in the West. The diasporic queer imaginary in Canada is therefore deeply tied to contemporary transnational narratives around the decriminalization of homosexuality in India. Furthermore, the Indian diasporic discourse on Twitter demonstrates solidarity for the global movement. Diasporic engagement, however minimal, has enriched the Indian queer movement and manifested as a globalized voice of support and empathy that merges with the human rights framework from the homeland. For example,

P (@priyank). “A much awaited change! #Section377.” January 8th, 2018, 12:04 p.m.

Samridhi (@samridh). “India breathes again, finally! Equal Love #Section377.” September 6th, 2018, 8:39 a.m.

Aveer (@Aveer9119). #Section377 struck down!! Best news to wake up to. Congrats to friends and colleagues in India who’ve been in the struggle for many years!” September 6th, 2018, 7:39 a.m.

According to tweets collected in Canada, the discourse surrounding the reading down of Section 377 was evidenced by celebration and jubilation over the emancipation of queer sexualities and the LGBTQIA+ community members from the legacies of colonial oppression. Through a transnational modernist narrative, Twitter participants perform empathy, acceptance and solidarity with their Indian queer counterparts. The discourse is also employed to declare triumph over the first step taken by a former British colony in the Global South towards the acceptance of queer rights, desires, and bodies of queer and LGBTQIA people. For example,

Nishi (@Nishi_A). “For the first time since 1860, LGBTQI Indians can live freely without fearing for their lives. Every *queer desi* in the diaspora is rinsing out the bitter aftertaste of the empire tonight. #Section377.” September 6th, 2018, 12:31 p.m.

Sanjukta (@jsanj). “With such a powerful ruling from the Supreme Court on #Section377, *we see a global reverberation*, especially in the global south, what do you think will be some of the key initiatives that will be taken in the coming years, especially with respect to LGBT+ rights?” May 4th, 2019, 2:13 p.m.

The above tweets advocate for the laborious journey of LGBTQIA+ activism towards justice in India and celebrate the Supreme Court of India as a modern institution. Twitter serves as a site for Indian diasporic users to create a collective identity and networked empathetic imaginary of LGBTQIA+ members in both India and the North under the umbrella term ‘desi,’ a self-referential term used by South Asian people. I find that Twitter discourse also points towards the desire to *decolonize* postcolonial queer cultures in an attempt to return to a gender-fluid India of pre-colonial times. Participants, in the tweets below, embrace India’s past diversity, and seek the dismantling of colonial legacies and structures through the reading down of Section 377:

Needhi (@NBhalla). “*A country decolonizes itself slowly*. The Supreme Court’s decision on Section 377 snips away one more tether binding India to its colonial past. But the verdict resembles a strong beam of light only because it pierces through the stormy, illiberal weather around it. #Section377 October 6th, 2018, 10:35 p.m.

Ankush (@LambaAnkush). “The world’s largest democracy has set precedence for other ‘not so progressive’ nations to follow, and embraced its diversity while empowering millions of people to be their *authentic selves*.” September 6th, 2018, 10:40 a.m.


Anushka (@anushkap). “Can’t overstate what Section 377 will mean for Western diaspora parents who see queerness as a Western concept. This is a revolutionary acknowledgment of *persecution and erased history*. This is saying “homosexuality has always been part of our culture, but homophobia has not.” September 6th, 2018, 9:22 a.m.

As the user above states, the decriminalization of homosexuality also brings awareness among the Indian diaspora about the erasure of queer history, the persecution of queer identities, and the import of homophobia as a western construct in the subcontinent. The diasporic discourse on the platform demonstrates the desire for the authenticity of Indian queer culture. Similarly, other tweets locate the Indian diaspora at the centre of the discourse on empathy and compassion towards queer communities and question the role of religion in the post-postcolonial system. For example,

Richa (@RPandey). “Now that the #Section377 is decriminalised, *how shall empathy and compassion be developed in the Indian diaspora?* How can #Hinduism plays a role in it?” December 17th, 2018, 11:46 a.m.

At this juncture, participants on the platform demand empathy for queer communities and seek acceptance for the future of marginalized identities in marriage and adoption laws, resolve the contentions between queer sexualities and postcolonial citizenship, and bring the diaspora into the discourse to offer representation and strength to the transnational queer movement.

Shiksha (@Sbags). “Though the verdict marks a win, the fight is still on inside and outside the courtroom as the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) community seeks acceptance in terms of marriage laws, adoption laws, and more. #Section377.” November 16th, 2019, 12:04 p.m.

Repeal of #Section377 in India, was a victory. Next, the #LGBTQ  community must take up the challenge of obtaining full citizenship for themselves. It is possible, just a matter of will.” March 11th, 2019 2:55 p.m.

Sahana (@sahm). “Under section 377 which the British colonizers imported. I think we in the diaspora can use our privilege to offer representation and give strength to queer Indians to come forward.” June 6th, 2018, 3:29 a.m.

The above participants, as part of the Indian diaspora in the North, represent and acknowledge the transnational queer movement and offer empathy, kinship, and acceptance of India’s long struggle towards queer emancipation. I conclude that Twitter has transformed into a crucial space for redefining nationalist imaginaries and building affirmative and empathetic communities that shape contemporary forms of nationalism. Diasporic access to the public sphere unlocks the positive connections that are constructed through threads of transnationalism and globalization. The Internet, and social media platforms specifically, have enabled diasporic communities “to share imaginations and commonalities” and furthered the potential for developing diasporic cultures of mediated and transnational communication” (Kissau & Hunger 247). Participants have expressed solidarity with the transnational movement, a desire to belong to a collective national and queer imaginary of India, and empathy and acceptance of fringe sexual identities. The hashtag #Section377 has been employed in Canada to decolonize homosexuality and national hetero-patriarchal norms

of sexualities.³ Ultimately, digital technologies such as Twitter have enabled diasporic communities in Canada to not only participate in the discourse using protest hashtags but also actively form communities of trust, care, and empathy with the Indian queer subaltern.

³ At this point, I would also like to note that owing to the limited use of the location feature on Twitter, the study lacks evidence of digital diasporic discourse in relation to Hindutva and nationalist ideology surrounding Section 377.

Queer Subaltern Representation in #Section 377

Digital Divide in the Global South

I have demonstrated in earlier chapters how digital platforms such as Twitter and Instagram enable safe spaces for the politically marginalized queer subaltern not merely in the construction of personal and collective postcolonial and gendered identity, but also in the production of queer networked counterpublics of empathy, solidarity, and connective activism. However, through this research, I simultaneously trouble the traditional notions of technological determinism by focusing on how social media platforms also disrupt the amplification of the subaltern voice. I demonstrate the constraints of digital platforms, and the ways in which the voice of the digital subaltern is suppressed, including through a veritable lack of access, participation, and representation of Indian women and queer communities, and through the production of nationalist rhetoric and counter-narratives by far-right collectives online. In this chapter, I examine the representation of the voice of the Indian queer subaltern online through textual and visual analysis. Using distant reading, I investigate how the Indian queer subaltern is represented on social media platforms in the context of the Section 377 movement; how many participants employ self-mention markers such as “I” or “we” to declare their personal experiences, stories of coming out, narratives of persecution, alienation, and oppression, and a reflection on their experiences of marginalization in India. Ultimately, in this context, I study whether the subaltern is represented and visibilized in discourse on Twitter and Instagram, and if not, who speaks on these platforms on their behalf.

As we enter this process of self-digitization and digital materiality, we find ourselves intricately embedded and deeply enmeshed in the realities of digital spaces. Our move towards digital platforms demands urgent discussions on the affordances and constraints of digital technology and the role they play in constructing digital democracies. As the

challenges of representation, access, and participation in the Global South are different than that of the North, I identify, in the context of India, several layers of complexities in the problematics of queer subaltern voice and representation on social media platforms. The question of what access and visibility mean in cybernetworks of the South are vital for future debates on presence and inclusion. As Gajjala states, “in the case of the third-world subaltern “other”, there are more steps in access and gatekeeping both culturally and technically” (6) and only specific kinds of “hierarchies of literacies are engaged” (6). Therefore, in an attempt to lay bare these complexities, I consider it important first to briefly reflect on the caveats of my own methodology and the limitations that the dataset carries. At this juncture, it is noteworthy to reflect on both the algorithmic and researcher biases that amplify certain voices and suppress others in the study of queer subaltern representation online as the first layer of complication. The process of data collection, filtering, and analysis carries “methodological limitations and pitfalls” for the researchers’ algorithms (Olteanu et al. 1). Algorithms, through user engagement and content ranking, determine what information is made visible, and how and when it is displayed (Olteanu et al. 10). The primary objective for social media research on Twitter and Instagram is owing to its ease of access to “large scale databases of human activity in social media” (Tufekci 1). Twitter, in particular, has been labelled as a ‘model organism’ that makes scholarly research deceptively uncomplicated and, ultimately reductive (1). It is important, therefore, that social media researchers pay “special attention to the validity, the reliability, representativeness” (1) of the dataset, the inclusivity of social media big data owing to the randomized sample sizes of the Search API, and the selection of hashtags when conducting research. Furthermore, researchers should be aware of our inability to identify and differentiate between bots and people, and other big data vagueness as part of the grander “algorithmic invisibility” (1). The randomized sample size collected is not representative of the entire population or the movement, nor does it focus

exclusively on minoritized subaltern voices. Olteanu et al. argue that bias also emerges in the demographics of populations, cultural elements and social contexts reflected on digital platforms where the data underrepresents marginalized and less privileged communities, individuals without access, and from lower economic backgrounds (7).

This reflection elucidates another important point of departure in the larger question of representation in the cyber-south. I locate this second layer of complication in the digital divide in the Global South, and the lack of access for the Indian population to social media platforms. Although Internet access has risen considerably in the Global South and the “proliferation of digital technologies has created unprecedented opportunities for expression and interaction among marginalized groups,” (Ortiz et al. 21) inequalities have persisted for different socio-economic backgrounds and levels of education. Marginalized individuals and communities that are non-representative of the dominant or elitist class often lack access to information technology and social media platforms (Place & Ciszec 1). The “divide between the information poor and the information rich” (Feather 121) is common across the South, and is exacerbated based on multiple markers including “gender, ethnicity, caste, social status, class, wealth, income, and location” (17). According to Kujat, a large part of the subaltern voices are excluded online owing to lack of access to Internet or cell phone services (51). Certain voices are more likely to be policed and excluded than others. Women, particularly in rural parts of the Global South, are more affected by the digital divide that reflects uneven access to agency, privilege, education, and income (Kujat 51). Similarly, other marginalized subjects are excluded or underrepresented on digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram based on gender, caste and religion lines. Currently, Twitter and Instagram register a mere 30 and 80 million monthly active users respectively that roughly accounts for less than 5% of the population. The digital divide guarantees access to information and power largely to the country’s intellectual elite.

The Indian Digital Subaltern & the Politics of Participation

A reflection of the multiple layers of complexity facing the digital divide also merits a discussion on the representation, location, and visibility of what I term the ‘Indian digital subaltern.’ Do both Indian queer communities and individuals really participate in the digital discourse surrounding the decriminalization of homosexuality? Are their voices accurately represented? Do members of the community lack access, or is there a lack of voluntary participation on digital spaces? If so, who speaks for them? Although the “development and perpetuation of a digital divide between information haves and have-nots was framed in relation to the lack of access” (Kent 84), the debate surrounding the visibility of the subaltern on digital platforms in the South necessitates a discussion on privilege and hierarchies of power in the Indian context (Kujat 51). According to Place & Ciszec, “power imbalances create the absence of subaltern voices from public discourse resulting in their omission in popular discourses” (3). Mike Kent defines subaltern oppression and dispossession in relation to this digital divide prompted either by a lack of access to digital platforms, or forced or voluntary exclusion from the digital discourse owing to the perpetuation of marginalization, isolation, and persecution of communities (84). The access and visibility of subaltern groups can be vital to the study of Digital Humanities (Morais 1). In the Indian context therefore, it is important to parse the question of who speaks on these platforms, and who has narrative authority and control over discourse surrounding the subaltern. As Kujat argues, both narrative and participation authority are handed to upper caste and intellectual members of privilege to discuss Dalit and LGBTQIA issues whereas “the subaltern of the subaltern are still excluded from personal activism and contribution” (51). Chemmencheri argues that this lack of appropriate representation and visibility, intentional or unintentional, reinforces the power struggle that the subaltern faces on digital media (190). The digital divide and the inability of the subaltern to access the digital public sphere both enforce their exclusion and

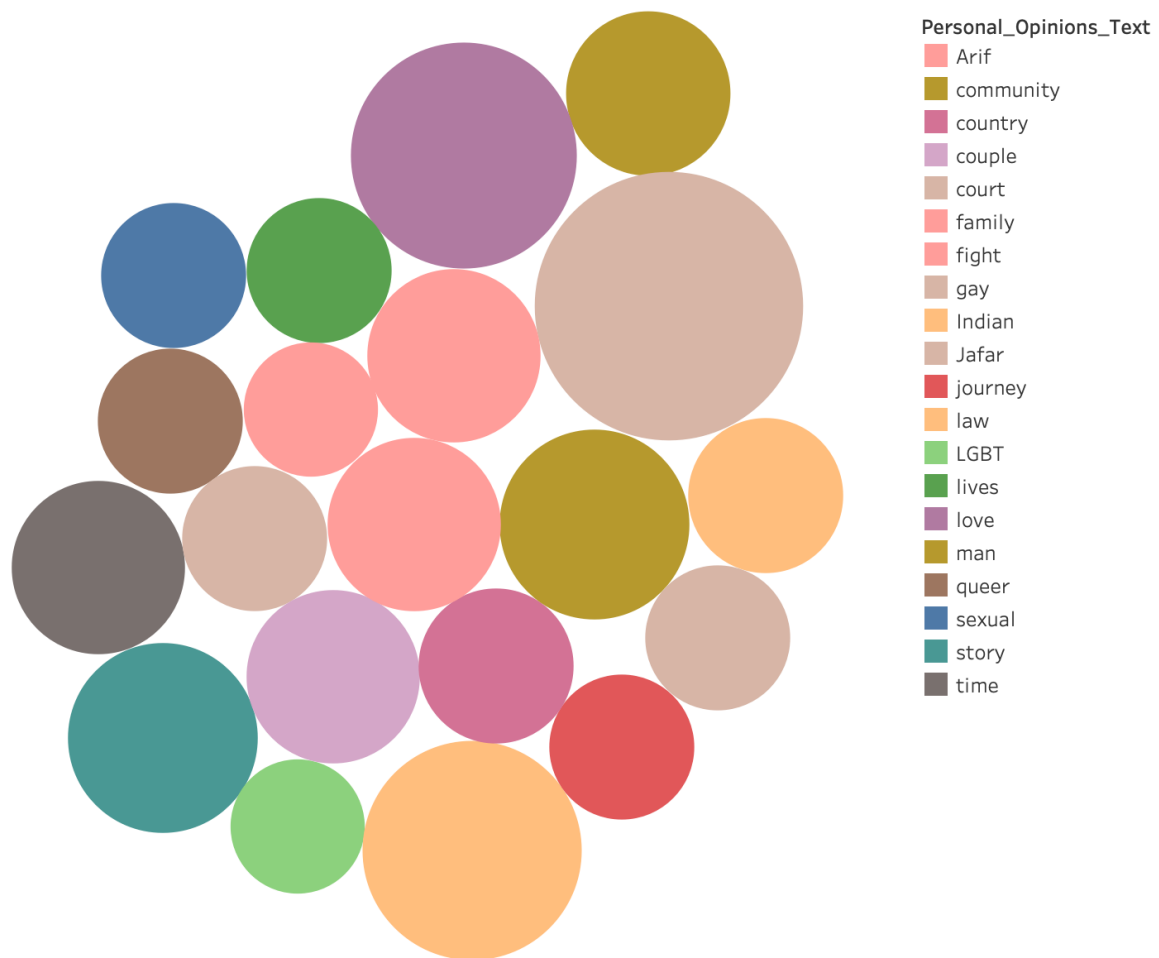
eliminate their awareness of exclusion (Kent 92). The subaltern may sometimes not be aware of their exclusion (92), but their lack of visibility and exclusion on platforms is perhaps the result of a politics of participation where the subaltern is present but may not be heard or is spoken over.

This brings me to the third layer of complexity in the problematics of digital queer subaltern voice and representation. Is mere presence indicative of voluntary participation? Does it mark the existence of the subaltern voice? According to Lisa Nakamura, “even if there is an actual visibility of marginalized groups online, it is not always something that results in fruitful engagement with the paradigms of racial discrimination” (182; Morais 1). In that sense, it could mean that social inequality and discrimination in the cybersphere are extensions of offline realities. The invisibility and/or inability of specific actors to self-identify, in addition to the lack of access, is for Spivak a denial of the expression of their own knowledge. They remain bound by offline hegemonic, hierarchical and authoritarian structures that only the privileged are able to penetrate owing to their Western knowledge. They are unable, therefore, to express themselves, their struggles and challenges, and their voice remains unheard (Spivak 28). Subaltern studies emerged as a critique of postcolonial and post-imperialist societies in the Global South and constituted the systematic erasure of raced, classed, and gendered subjects, and their voices (Place & Ciszec 3). The subaltern as a concept was first introduced as a marginalized group without access to hegemonic spaces in society by Antonio Gramsci. Spivak’s seminal essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak,” addresses the politics of representation and visibility of the marginalized subaltern subject in postcolonial societies. Gayatri Spivak builds on Gramsci’s concept by arguing that the subaltern are denied access and means of expressing their own knowledges, and that they are forced to adopt western modes of knowledge in order to be heard (Morais 1). The subaltern can speak, but are often not heard owing to deep hierarchical structures that exclude the voice

of the marginalized (27). Spivak characterizes the subaltern as those that never speak, and are always spoken on behalf of. I argue that, in the context of the Indian digital queer, the subaltern can and does speak. Digital media has enabled “the permeation of a globalizing force of mediation; forging of empathy, solidarity, support, and new alliances through activism across the world” (Chemmencheri 1). However, as internet spaces are libertarian, the subaltern have the right to express their concerns through activism, but they may not be heard. Furthermore, a large number of the queer subaltern also voluntarily exclude themselves from the process of participation and sharing owing to their own subaltern consciousness and their fear of persecution in relation to their struggles in how they define themselves openly in a postcolonial Hindutva state. Although globalization and neoliberalism have made visible and altered the struggles of the Indian queer (1), the Indian queer subaltern, particularly at the intersection of class, caste, and gender lines, are uniquely aware of their subaltern status in society and prefer to anonymize their struggles to avoid detection on public forums.

For instance, in this dataset of 5000 tweets on #Section377, a total of 3225 personal opinions were expressed. However, the markers of self-mention and narratives of personal struggles from those belonging to the LGBTQIA community represented a mere 201 tweets. Discursive analysis of this small fraction of tweets within the dataset indicates a higher frequency of words such as journey,” “story,” “fight,” “family,” “love,” and “court”, which can indicate how participants speak about their personal stories of trauma, their narratives of coming-out to families, and their expectations with the Supreme Court in relation to Section 377. The following word cloud, with all stop words removed, showcases the word frequency of all tweets that employ self-mention markers to narrate their personal stories in relation to Section 377.

Representation in Section 377



Personal_Opinions_Text (color) and count of Sheet1 (size). The view is filtered on Personal_Opinions_Text, which keeps 20 of 2,154 members.

Similarly, out of 1000 posts on #Section377 collected on Instagram, only 199 posts evidenced personal stories, narratives or anecdotes, or the use of self-mention markers. The following examples demonstrate how queer participants use Twitter and Instagram to both declare their queerness and talk about self-love and acceptance from their families and the community writ large.

Genderlog (@genderlogindia). “To anyone who is reading this and has been through the same things that I’ve been through, accept yourself. Love yourself. Even if the rest of the world won’t, you have to. Never wallow in self-pity. #Section377.” July 19th, 2018, 12:05 p.m.

Gay Life (@gayissh). “He just went outside for a few minutes and I miss him already. It’s too painful that I can’t hold his hands in public or to touch his hair or to hold him in public. #Section377.” April 3rd, 2018, 12:12 p.m.

Gay Life (@gayissh). “He makes me giggle, he makes me laugh, he makes me miss him on random hours, if this is not a thing then what is ? #section377.” April 10th, 2018, 2:42 p.m.

The tweets above show that subalterns can and do participate and self-represent in personal and political expression on social media platforms. However, owing to limitations of gatekeeping and lack of visibility, the Indian subaltern sphere continues to be largely omitted from discourse on digital platforms in the South (Kujat 61). Social media platforms increasingly function as “global gatekeepers that decide what we see and don’t see”, using algorithmic decisions that affect how marginalized communities are represented and perceived online (Leetaru 1). This engenders cyberspaces as naturally exclusive spaces where more privileged groups find themselves being represented by others.

The lack of access or, in other words, digital divide, is a serious problem that concerns the study of the subaltern online and remains one of the primary means of keeping the subaltern space online exclusive. Limitations and constraints of digital media establish new gatekeeper roles that in turn limit the voice of intersectional diversity. Similarly, on Instagram, participants and members self-representing as part of LGBTQIA+ communities continue to engage in discourse surrounding their queer identity, and share their personal experiences of being queer in India. The posts function as both a performative ‘coming-out’ as well as ‘coming into’ a journey of self-love and acceptance identifying as gay and a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. In addition, many participants that self-represent on social media platforms express the trauma of being queer in India. Young men continue being harassed on streets or live in eternal fear of persecution, and are being branded criminals by law. Offline spaces are particularly hostile towards members of LGBTQIA+ communities, and social media offers one of the few safe spaces for youth to share their personal struggles with the public at large.

For instance, the following tweet describes the anguish of tweeters who are not allowed to love freely, and live in constant fear of criminalization and persecution by Section 377 in their own country.

Gay Life (@gayissh). “He loves me. I love him and still we can’t be together because he can’t fight when my own country says it’s illegal to love. Don’t know who to blame #section377 or Modi or Indian society.” April 14th, 2018, 10:41 a.m.

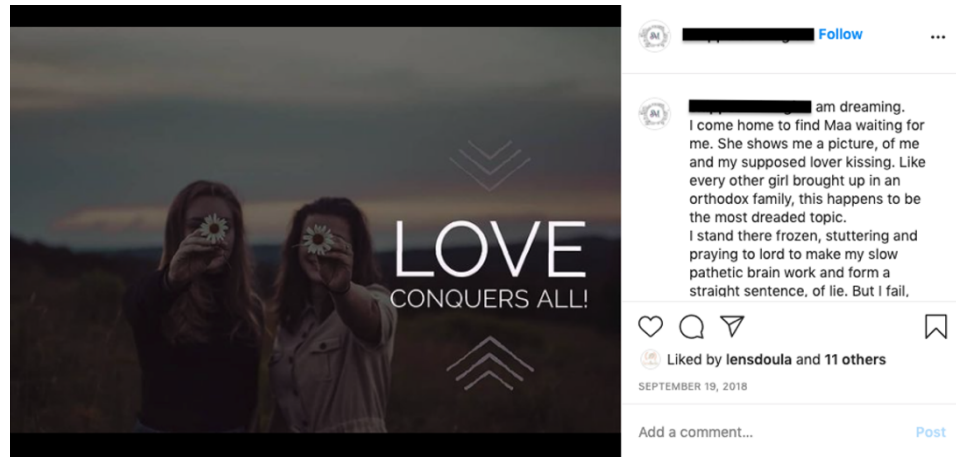
Similarly, the tweets below describe the constant harassment and trauma faced by the LGBTQIA+ community in India, and the values of toxic masculinity and patriarchy that Indian men are raised with:

Genderlog (@genderlogindia). “No place for effeminate gay men? Have you ever been harassed by someone for being you? #Section377.” July 19th, 2018, 11:08 a.m.

Genderlog (@genderlogindia). “One can read on Grindr things like “you are a man, behave like one”.. really makes me wonder about the mindset of people within the community. Masculinity has in fact turned toxic. Are we raised to hate everything feminine? #Section377.” July 19th, 2018, 10:37 a.m.

The following Instagram posts perform the participant’s queer identity, calls for love and acceptance, and visibilize the trauma faced by the community. This trauma associated with simply being queer also carries into the family, and the posts below recall an involuntary coming-out experience with a family member.





Self-representation also emerges in the dataset where participants talk about the experiences and struggles of being queer while also calling for the Supreme Court to decriminalize homosexuality as part of the discourse around activism. For instance, users below, are in non-traditional queer relationships, and demand that the Supreme Court repeal Section 377, and decriminalize their love.

PahujaJ (@JPahuja). “I guess as a person from the LGBTQ community, because marriage is forbidden fruit, we ‘hope’ so desperately that it is granted to us and #Section377 is altered to fit us in.” June 8th, 2018, 3:01 a.m.

Meenakshi (@mg2). “This world did not allow us to stay together,’ the woman wrote. This is just so tragic. The Indian govt and the Supreme Court should act immediately to repeal #sec377 that criminalizes adult same sex relationships.” June 12th, 2018, 8:56 a.m.

Jyotika (@BJyo). “We should all be able to live our lives in the sun, without fear of discrimination just because of our sexuality. I hope #Section377 is repealed.” July 26th, 2018, 2:54 p.m.

Others like the user below employ digital spaces to celebrate the reading down of Section 377, and openly and publicly declare their gay identity, especially to their family members.



The above user on Instagram ponders over their own future, the future of the LGBTQIA+ in India post decriminalization of Section 377, and the community's perception and treatment within society. As Sneha argues, the performative aspect in gendered identity building is an essential component of self-representation and visibility on digital spaces, and determines "what gets viewed, discussed, and acted upon" (Sneha 1). However, although the Indian queer subaltern employ social media platforms for self-expression, performative rituals of 'coming-out,' and for sharing personal stories, narratives and anecdotes of joy,

trauma, hostility, and harassment, their visibility and participation is again marred by the politics of anonymity. As some examples of usernames above, including Genderlog and Gay Life demonstrate, most tweets and posts carrying self-mention markers are posted either under a pseudonym or through an organization that supports queer rights in India. Gajjala and Mitra assert that “queer online spaces in India can be mapped as a vast terrain of digital sites from gay blogs to social networking sites created for queer people” (403; Dasgupta & Dasgupta 10). However, apart from interactions and network building in completely closed networks such as private chats, closed forums or platforms, I find that most self-representation from the queer community in India occurs anonymously. I frame this politics of anonymity in self-representation as equally fuelled by problematics of digital hate, misogyny, and toxicity directed at community members who choose to be visible. Participants who come out publicly are at risk of being harassed, mocked and victimized for expressing their identity. Therefore, many declare their queer identity in anonymity. For instance, the users below attempt to employ anonymity in both offline and online spaces to protect their identity as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community to avoid persecution and harassment.

UdhanK (@udhan_khat). “Mr. Modi aka think outside box I’m proud homosexual medic, people like me will save your life and guess what you will never know about my orientation, so that you can continue to spill rational utter nonsense.#section377.” July 14th, 2018, 4:35 a.m.

Gay Life (@gayissh). “Today she asked if I am gay but I lied. Why I have to lie, why this country can’t be intolerant, why I can’t be what I am. #Section377.” June 24th, 2018, 11:13 a.m.

The use of self-mention markers and performative identity building on Twitter occurs under pseudonyms or under the rubric of an organization. As an open and public platform, Twitter enables self-expression, interaction, collaboration, and sharing of personal stories for queer people. However, I argue that participants rarely employ their own Twitter handle or names to publicly come out or share their gender and sexual orientation, and instead prefer to anonymize their stories. In the collected dataset, several hundred organizations use their

platforms to either speak on behalf of queer people, and/or in support of the movement. Some organizations such as Gaylaxi, Gay Life, Gaysi Family, Genderlog, Feminism in India, India Culture Lab, Rainbow Railroad, and Gay Bombay use their Twitter platforms and Twitter handles to promote discourse emerging from queer people while protecting their identities through anonymity. Instagram, on the other hand, as a more private platform than Twitter, enables open sharing of personal narratives through the use of visuals in the form of photoshoots, photographs, or self-designed artwork that often eliminates anonymity. In both Twitter and Instagram, however, there is a veritable lack of self-representation by the queer community despite the presence and visibility of the subaltern collective, marginalized voices and perspectives, particularly surrounding the reading down of Section 377.

The digital divide, algorithmic invisibility, the lack of voluntary participation, and the politics of power, representation and anonymity play an important role in the erasure of queer voices on digital platforms in India. As power is central to the question of subaltern representation and narrative authority, it is imperative to question and critique queer erasure, investigate who controls digital spaces, who speaks on behalf of queer people, and who lends their voice to the community. However, as evidence from the dataset demonstrates, providing the subaltern with access to Internet and technology may not close the digital divide owing to the fear of participation. Moreover, digital spaces mimic offline realities where racial and gendered bodies are reconfigured but still marginalized (Nakamura 24). Even if the subaltern can and does speak online, their voices and perspectives get buried in discourse produced by others who support and empathize with the queer emancipatory movement.

Ultimately, as Sara Morais argues, “the awareness of speaking for someone else should also exist within discourse in order to adequately represent the cause of the subaltern” (1). For the digital movement around Section 377, the digital discourse includes voices of empathetic collectives that support queer emancipation and sexuality, as well as

organizations that represent the subaltern and bring their personal voices and perspectives to raise more awareness about the movement. The movement has empowered the queer population with tools to bring to the fore their own challenges and struggles of being queer through anonymity and representation through other empathetic collectives, depicting an intent or an ideal of inclusion, queer empathy, and support for a representational group that give their voice on behalf of the community when the subaltern is not heard.

Lost in Translation in #Section377 – Digital Homophobia in Regional Discourse

In this chapter, I continue to focus on how digital technologies disempower the digital Indian queer subject on Twitter and Instagram. In this chapter, I frame this digital disruption of the subaltern voice through a nationalistic lens to examine the emergence of digital homophobia led by the Indian far-right in the discourse around Section 377. Specifically, I investigate the rising assertions of patriarchy, heteronormativity and authoritarianism in the counter-narratives of far-right Hindutva discourse that materialize either through support for Indian cultural and religious values with respect to sexuality, or through blatant homophobic hate speech in Indian cyberspaces.

Although digital media offers a safe space of resistance for LGBTQIA+ youth, a separate strand of discourse originates in direct opposition to queer rights, bodies, sexualities, identities, and subsequently to the decriminalization of Section 377. The tweets and Instagram posts that perform this nationalistic discourse seek to uphold the status quo of Indian heterosexuality and sexual normativity and usurp the hashtag to create a counter-discourse on Section 377. In order to lay bare “the other side of the coin” in the discourse, I demonstrate the rise of Hindutva fundamentalism and nationalism on social media platforms fuelled by support from the BJP government in India, and the various ways in which queerphobic discourse emerges on Twitter and Instagram using the #Section377.

Digital Nationalism : Discourse in Indian Regional Languages

I develop the concept of digital nationalism to locate the digital queer subaltern at the intersection of nationhood and belonging and to understand how participants on social media attempt to actively silence marginalized groups through counter-narratives of nationalist imaginaries that, according to them, reinforce “India’s former glory” through the oppression and otherization of gendered identities on the fringe. Digital media have been hailed as a

crucial factor in the return of a re-imagined nationalism. The important role of digital spaces in contemporary political campaigns carried out by populist leaders and political parties has enabled the “spread of nationalistic rhetoric against liberal and progressive views” (Mihelj & Jimenez Martinez 1). Digital spaces have become the breeding ground for political discourse, action, and polarization (Mohan 340). In the Indian context, social media platforms, “birthed by economic and technological globalization,” have exacerbated pre-existing nationalist sentiments and enabled contemporary discourse that “rejects, culturally and religiously, any plural narratives of the nation state” (Rao 177). Sahana Udupa argues that the expansion of media resources in India have facilitated the amplification of “the nationalist project” and the “popularization of Hindutva” in the country that has infiltrated the Indian and diasporic cyberspace (454). Contemporary Hindu nationalist discourse has emerged as a “dominant political force” in the country post the 2014 electoral win for the Bharatiya Janata Party that successfully spearheaded political campaigns on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram (Udupa 455). The resurgence of the Hindutva political party and Hinduism has brought a “nationalism to the fore where Hindu culture is synonymous and coterminous with Indian culture” (Vaishnav 1). The subsequent emergence of nationalist discourses on social media platforms in opposition to marginalized identities including members of the LGBTQIA community, women, Muslims, and Dalits by Hindutva supporters labelled “bhakts,” or devotees of Prime Minister Modi, has precipitated a culture of heteropatriarchy in response to emancipatory and social justice movements. Sriram Mohan deploys the term ‘Internet Hindus’ to define “a right-leaning online collective” that encompasses fervent supporters of the BJP and its ideology (341). In this context, Internet Hindus exist as a “Hindu supremacist, authoritarian, anti-religious and anti-caste minority” collective that actively resist persecuted gendered minorities and seek to employ digital spaces to delegitimize queer existence (341). These individuals “take up a sort of cyber activism to defend and protect their form of true

and authentic Hinduism" (Gittinger 32). They attempt to uphold the religious and cultural values and codes of Hindu culture that are deeply imbricated with the production of a nationalist, masculine and patriarchal identity not merely among Indians but also among diasporic Hindu communities (Mohan 342). Believers in Hinduism and Indian culture contend that religion and Indian cultural values are at the core of the country's identity and values (Vaishnav 1). With BJP at its centre, Hindutva culture "draws from a Foucauldian sense of power and production of knowledge" (30) online and aligns with Indian cultural and religious ideologies that locate queerness as both 'unnatural' and 'at the fringe' in majoritarian discourse (44). The imagined collective of Hindu nationalism is "replete with the grand narrative of India as a great civilization, culture, and heritage" (Gittinger 33; Mohan 343), and therefore harbours a deepseated "contempt for western culture" (Gittinger 43) and queer sexualities that are often manifested in a tolerance for exclusionary nationalist rhetoric, hate speech, and other abusive and threatening ways with a proclivity to extremism (Mohan 342). In fact, the aim of the counter discourse lies in the act of nation building and winning back for India its perceived former glory. Nationalist discourse in the context of Section 377, therefore, takes on the form of hate speech and homophobia against queer identities online.

Hindi as the Language of Nationalist Rhetoric

Hindi is employed as the primary language⁴ of a nationalist discourse mobilizing against the digital queer movement. Although the Internet as a platform monopolizes the English language for congregation, self-expression, interaction, and archive, and "English language speakers ultimately dominate" digital spaces (Gittinger 25), Hindi has emerged in Indian cyberspace as the carrier of Indian nationalism through textual, visual, and meme culture. Hindi has attained the status of media superiority following the penetration of

⁴ This does not exclude nationalist and/or homophobic discourse in English and other regional languages.

Hindutva nationalism, culture, and politics on digital spaces. Gittinger argues that despite the popularity of English and its power as a global language on the Internet, the Indian digital public sphere has undergone a split into an “English speaking sphere” and “a historically imagined, ancient, and cohesive Hindi second sphere that exists to counter and denounce western influences” (26). The use of Hindi, and in some cases regional languages, in this parallel digital sphere has also engendered further political polarization online, particularly in relation to hashtag movements. In an attempt to study the discourse around homosexuality that originates in a non-English, and therefore local and national context, I analyzed 330 tweets collected in the Hindi Devanagari script. Distant reading of all tweets demonstrates that discourse addresses questions of nationhood, citizenship and sexuality differently from mainstream discourse held in the dominant global language, English, among the Indian elite. Out of 330 tweets, 101 tweets expressed grave concerns in relation to the decriminalization of Section 377, a fervent desire to return to Indian values and culture, blatant queerphobia, and/or antagonism towards the Supreme Court’s final decision on homosexuality. On the other hand, merely 18 tweets expressed positive sentiment and active support for the movement or queer existence in the country. The use of Hindi is symbolic of “muscular nationalism, Hindu pride, and functions as a direct postcolonial response” to the domination of English language in Indian digital spaces (Gittinger 26). In other words, the networks of empathy, solidarity, and support for queerness in the movement around the decriminalization of homosexuality are countered by local languages that promote a different masculinist, heteronormative, homophobic, postcolonial national identity. Hindi is also the lingua franca of the Internet Hindus or the ‘bhakts’ that speak the language of nationalism and perform the rejection of English, particularly in relation to the belief that queerness is a western import that goes against Indian culture. Furthermore, Hindi and other regional languages are also employed by those less fluent in English, and those that associate more with India’s colonial

and postcolonial imaginaries of cultural and religious values and codes. In addition, tweets and posts in English are largely more visible in comparison to Indian languages that carry hashtags. Therefore, it is also possible that the use of Hindi in a parallel discourse is an active attempt at constructing closed echo chambers where homogenized nationalistic discourse can take place using a hashtag. This ensures far less visibility for the Internet ‘bhakts,’ as well as those employing the hashtag for a radically different discourse than the one occurring in the English digital sphere. In the context of the digital discourse around Section 377, therefore, it is interesting to note that English transforms into the language of emancipation and liberation for queer rights, bodies, sexualities, and desires in India. This radical subversion and re-imagining of the colonial language that introduced Section 377 and the codes against homosexuality in the country demonstrate the perception of both queerness and queer activism in India as imbricated with the west as well as the colonizer, and as subsequently alien to the Indian cultural and religious fabric. Ultimately, English is also employed by the urban elite for global and transnational reach, to rally for international support, solidarity among the diaspora, and to create awareness on queer issues using the hashtag.

Nationalist postcolonial discourse emerges on Twitter and Instagram in English, Hindi, and other regional languages in several ways. First, both textually and visually, tweets and Instagram posts emphasize Indian religious and cultural values and express the desire to return to Indian roots in heterosexual normativity. Second, discourse on Section 377 materializes in the form of blatant homophobic hate speech, with posts labelling homosexuality in derogatory terms such as ‘unnatural,’ and ‘against nature.’ Third, both a thriving joke culture on Twitter and meme culture on Instagram demonstrate a nationalistic discourse that emerges in non-violent ways yet is aimed at trolling and mocking the decriminalization of homosexuality in the Supreme Court and delegitimizing queer existence in the country.

Nationalism and Homophobia

In constructing the first argument on the emergence of nationalism and homophobia in digital discourse, several tweets and Instagram posts in English, and predominantly Hindi boast about India's cultural and religious superiority and characterize homosexuality as deeply alien to Indian society, 'anti-Indian,' and 'western.' The participants locate their view on homosexuality as intensely corrosive to Indian civilization and potentially dangerous for heterosexual family values. For instance,

Hasin Agarwal (@agrwl). "Homosexuality is not our culture. The end #Section377." August 6th, 2018, 11:26 a.m.

Rahul (@hul_das). "#Section377 Homosexuality not accepted in society. Homosexuality marriage is very dangerous for our society." September 16th, 2018, 10:04 a.m.

Karthik (@karthikeyan). "India will no longer be remembered for its culture and practices. Love anyone whoever whenever wherever.. No more #section377. There will be no more family values." September 27th, 2018, 4:16 a.m.

The tweets above firmly reiterate that homosexuality is disruptive to the fabric of Indian society, and participants go as far as to lament the loss of Indian cultural practices and its great civilization. One user argues that homosexuality should not be accepted in India using a hashtag that is repeatedly employed in most tweets and posts engaging in nationalistic discourse. #Homosexuality_Not_Accepted becomes the hashtag for a counter-discourse within the digital queer movement, and attempts to confront and counteract western influences in the country. For example, the tweet below employs graphic language to bemoan the loss and active degradation of cultural values that emerge through the decriminalization of homosexuality.

Anand (@sm_anand). "#Section377 step by step, a great civilization is reduced to a cesspool of spineless crawling creatures. And this is happening in government. History won't forgive you, dharma will definitely not." September 28th, 2018, 11:28 a.m.

Here, it is also important to note that following the reading down of Section 377, the Supreme Court Judge Deepak Misra pronounced Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code as unconstitutional. Section 497 had classified adultery as a criminal offence until it was

scrapped by the Supreme Court in September 2018. Therefore, many tweets and posts use the hashtags #Sec377 and #Sec497 in the same context to suggest the erosion of Indian normative and familial values. The Instagram post below suggests that the legalization of homosexuality and the decriminalization of adultery has led to the ‘westernization’ of Indian culture and that such cultural anxieties stem from the belief that the judgements will lead to both the hyper-sexualization of Indian youth and a cultural divorce from the encoded concept of heterosexual marriage.



As the following user Vivek states, the Indian judicial system, through these judgements, is “aping the west,” and “disrupting and vandalizing Indian cultural and societal sensibilities.”

Vivek Rana (@viveksingh). “West aping judgements, disruption of societal sensibilities; cultural vandalism is the new progressivism for the Honourable Supreme Court. So where are we heading? #Section377.” September 30th, 2018, 12:50 p.m.

Tweets in Hindi reiterate the above arguments and emphasize the absorption of western civilization into India. For instance, the tweets below openly accuse the judgement as an attempt to destroy the country’s culture and tradition.

Sushil Rao (@iRaoi). “#Section377 को खत्म करने का अर्थ है #भारतीयता खत्म...#भारतीय_सभ्यता खत्म! और परिणाम, दिखने मे तो हम,#भारतीय होंगे पर,चरित्र से #अंग्रेज और आत्मा से #अमेरिकन! ऐसा प्रतीत होता है कि #लोकतंत्र के चारो स्तम्भों का संचालन #पश्चिमी_सभ्यता के एजेन्टों द्वारा किया जा रहा है!” September 29th, 2018, 9:19 a.m.

fundamentalism, is deeply antithetical to homosexuality and queerness and actively performs the suppression of marginalized gender identities. Religious intolerance, imbricated with postcolonial nationalism, prevails through the active suppression of women and queer identities and preservation of hierarchies of neo-imperialist postcolonialism in India.

Therefore, within religious communities, mere support for homosexuality is prohibited to ensure and preserve a heteronormative mode of thought. In the examples below, users offer religious reasons for the re-criminalization of homosexuality. The Twitter user below criticizes a Muslim celebrity who supports the Supreme Court judgement:

Krishna (@KKumar). "I cannot believe that there will be a time that I won't support you, but in this matter you are alone. As a Muslim, you are fighting against the Qur'an. #Section377 is strictly prohibited in Islam, so supporting it is fighting us." September 7th, 2018, 1:43 p.m.

Notwithstanding independent users who cited Islamic doctrines, several larger Islamic organizations employed social media platforms to voice their displeasure with the judgement. This is also true of several Hindutva and Christian organizations and their diktats that took on the #Homosexuality_Not_Accepted hashtag to declare their opposition. The following post, for example, uses a biblical verse to identify homosexuality as "unethical, immoral" and "an abomination to God."



In addition, the deeper penetration of the Hindutva far-right ideology online has made it easier for individuals and groups to communicate religious extremist views on the subject.

For instance, the following tweet condemns the decriminalization as an attack on the great Sanatan Dharma tradition in Hinduism.

Shekhawat (@shekhawat9). “सनातन परम्पराओं पर घोर कुठाराघात, कहाँ गये वो लोग जो हिंदू हितैषी होने का दम्भ भरते हैं ? संयुक्त परिवार टूटे, अब परिवार टूटेंगे। भविष्य में अराजकता बढ़ेगी। यह कैसा नारी सशक्तिकरण ? क्या हम सनातन संस्कृति की मौलिकता को समाप्त होने से बचा पायेंगे ? #Section377.” September 28th, 2018, 5:16 a.m.

[Translation – This is an attack on our Sanatan traditions. Where do those who pretend to be Hindu benefactors go? Joint family system is broken. Now families will break up. Anarchy will rise in the future. What kind of women empowerment is this? Will we be able to save the original Sanatan culture from being lost? #Section377 #Section497”]

Sanatan Dharma translates to the eternal religious duty of humanity towards God.

According to the participant, recent judgements have assaulted the great Hindu religious traditions, leading to the loss of culture and family system directly embedded within Hindu religious traditions.

Homosexuality Against Nature

With the recent rise of Hindutva fundamentalism on social media platforms, the digital ecology has created and highlighted more exclusive forms of nationalism in the context of Section 377 that manifest themselves through blatant homophobia and queerphobia. Several tweets and posts label homosexuality as ‘unnatural,’ and/or ‘against nature, and therefore, ‘illegal.’ For example, the following posts mark the movement as well as marginalized identities with derogatory language and employ terms such as “mentally abnormal” and “sin for humanity” to brand homosexuality.

Naresh (@bNaresh). “It's against nature , in nature there is no such thing , even animals don't do that . To me It's a **mental abnormally against nature** . #Section377 @ShraddhaFanBase #RajkummarRao #ShraddhaKapoor @TSeries #Stree #AsianGames #SalmanKhan #StreeInCinemasNow #StreeReview #Section377.”

“#Love that implies a sin isn't love. #homosexuality is a sin for humanity. #LGBT is totally **against the law of nature** and so #section377 should be considered as an illegal act. <https://t.co/aODuXmTHzR>.”



The characterization of homosexuality as ‘unnatural’ ironically is borrowed from colonial language employed in the drafting of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, and the nationalist counter-movement has re-adapted the terminology in the postcolonial context to undermine and delegitimize queer identities in the country. However, with respect to the active process of ‘othering’ through language, the use of colonial terminology is the least slanderous in this context. Numerous posts portray homosexuals as paedophiles, psychopaths, and practitioners of incest and pornography. The following tweets can be classified as digital hate speech towards gendered minorities that occurs through the use of #Section377.

Karan (@11kKaran). “Homosexuality/sodomy has been fully embraced by the west. Paedophilia is the natural progression of sodomy. The final frontier is incest #Section377.” July 31st, 2018, 9:59 p.m.

According to the tweet above, homosexuality borrowed from the west is synonymous with sodomy, and eventually the acceptance of homosexuality in Indian culture and society will progress into the acceptance of paedophilia and incest. Similarly, the user below defines homosexuality as a form of perversion and associates the homosexual act with pornography.

Suresh (@SureshChav). “#समलैंगिकता #LGBT पर सर्वोच्च न्यायालय को मेरी अपील। माता पिता भी #Section377 के निर्णय पर गंभीरता से सोचे और हिन्दुस्थान को पोर्नोस्थान बनाने से बचाना है। विकृति को स्वीकृति मत दो” April 16th, 2018, 6:00 a.m.

[Translation - My Appeal to the Supreme Court on #Homosexuality #LGBT. Parents should also think seriously about the decision on #Section377 and save India from becoming a **place for porn**. Don't approve of perversion.]

Another user indirectly refers to homosexuals as psychopaths and killers, and argues against the judgement and the legalization of same-sex love.

Suman (@JdSuman). “कानूनी मान्यता देना एक ऐसी जमात के लिये दरवाजे खोलने के समान है जो उस तरह के कार्यों को ही जीवन माने जिसका कोई उद्देश्य ही न हो, Psychopaths का भी हत्याओं के पीछे कोई कारण नहीं होता, वे बस करते हैं, यह कार्यहीन, लक्ष्यविहीन जमात आदर्श समाज के हित में नहीं है #Sec377.” October 2nd, 2019, 8:15 a.m.

[Translation - Legalizing homosexuality and giving legal recognition is like opening the doors for a group that considers such actions as life which has no purpose, **Psychopaths** also have no reason behind killings, they just do it, it is useless, and not in the interest of an ideal society #Sec377 .]

The above tweets demonstrate how nationalist discourse can masquerade as glaring homophobia against gay and lesbian identities.

Nationalist Imaginaries: Memes and Joke Culture

Finally, a passive and non-violent form of homophobia emerges on social media through a thriving joke and meme culture on Twitter and Instagram, where participants share jokes and memes on the impact of the legalization of homosexuality in the country. Humour on social media sheds light on how nationalist ideologies contradict queer existence, and how divergent practices in trolling and meme culture are rooted in nationalist imaginaries. Internet memes, jokes, Instagram posts and tweets in this context are characterized as “units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated, and transformed by Internet users, creating a shared cultural experience” (Shifman 367), and creating a sense of community among the far-right on digital platforms. Socially dominant groups intentionally target marginalized groups, usurp their safe spaces, drown the voice of the subaltern, and attempt to subvert their discourse. Despite their characteristic non-hostility, the intention of using the #Section377 for jokes and memes may disrupt and divert from the discourse, create an algorithmic flooding of posts, and ultimately engaging in trolling and mocking marginalized communities. More than 150 tweets were manually annotated and classified as jokes. The following jokes carry a similar thread on the platform, and are reframed in different ways on platforms:

Jain (@N_Jain21). ““Bros before hoes” has a different meaning now. #Section377.” September 7th, 5:58 p.m.

Gill (@psgill). “She : Hi He : I have a bf 😊 #Section377.” September 6th, 2018, 3:49 a.m.

In particular, the above tweet has been liked 7818 times, and retweeted around 2468 times. The popularity of the tweet also gives us a glimpse into how homosexuality is framed in contemporary discourse on social media. Another well-known joke on Twitter is the following where ladies are asked to treat their man well or another man will. The obvious implication here is that homosexuality is a choice, and that men will find their newfound freedom to engage in homosexuality.

Aanchal (@aanchal_Gup). “Ladies... treat your man nicely or another man will #Section377.” September 6th, 2018, 6:15 a.m.

Jokes also appear on Hindi Twitter as in the example below in which the user finds it interesting how the country has accepted a sex exemption instead of a tax exemption in the context of Section 377 and Section 497:

Mohanty (@badal_Moh). “देश को टैक्स में छूट चाहिए थी सरकार सेक्स में देर ही है तो क्या ऐसी सरकार चाहिए आपको? #Section377.” September 29th, 2018, 1:31 p.m.

[Translation - The country wanted a tax exemption government. Yet got one in sex. So do you want such a government? #Section377]

Furthermore, there is an active meme culture that emerges in the Instagram dataset with 137 posts labelled as memes in relation to the reading down of Section 377. Some of them employ internationally well-known memes and reimagine them in the Indian context. For instance, the following post is the ‘Rock Driving meme’ from the adventure film *Race to Witch Mountain* and has been part of meme culture since 2011. When Dwayne Johnson as the protagonist asks the girl a question, she responds, making Johnson turn his head with a startled expression.



Johnson asks the girl if he can come over to her place, to which she responds that she invited her girlfriend home. Johnson turns around with a shocked expression and utters “Section377.”



Another internationally popular “cheating girlfriend” meme is re-imagined to explore the potential impact of legalization of homosexuality in India. Here the husband comes home to find his wife cheating on him with another man in 2010. After the legalization of homosexuality, he walks in on his husband cheating on him. This is an ‘attack’ on both Section 377 as well as the adultery law 497 where the practice of homosexuality and adultery are both shown as ‘rampant.’ In addition to the use of international memes, participants

create memes from popular scenes in Indian movies. For example, the context of the following scene in the acclaimed film *3 Idiots* is a conversation between father and son. The son confesses his love for photography, and the father berates his dreams and compares his educational and financial qualifications with their neighbour Verma's son.



The meme describes how the son confesses that he likes boys. The father attempts to compare him to Verma's son, and is told that he, in fact, is his boyfriend. A thriving joke and meme culture on social media in the context of Section 377 demonstrates a lack of understanding gay and lesbian identities and culture. The interpretation that homosexuality is contagious and will become pervasive can be dangerous in the ways LGBTQIA is represented in the country. Therefore, nationalist discourse in the dataset is visibilized in English but predominantly hidden in the Hindutva nationalist language, Hindi, through a rooted desire to return to India's cultural and religious codes and values, in the form of homophobia where participants are characterized as paedophiles, psychopaths, and sex and porn addicts, and through a joke and meme culture that is aimed at trolling and ultimately seeks to disrupt the discourse on social media platforms.

CASE STUDY II (#MeTooIndia) – Twitter and Instagram Analysis

Digital Storytelling in #MeTooIndia: Understanding Feminist Identity & Embodiment Online

In this case study on #MeTooIndia, I locate the Indian woman as the digital subaltern, and explore how digital technologies both enable and disrupt the voice and presence of the marginalized on Twitter and Instagram. In the following chapters, I demonstrate how social media, while creating safe spaces for feminist visibility, the construction of feminist identities, and networked counterpublics through the use of protest hashtags, equally highlights the exclusion and misogyny that disempowers the participation and presence of the digital subaltern. I contend that Indian women are able to employ social media to construct their feminist identities through the digital sharing of their experiences of trauma. I frame this argument through the evidence of discursive stories in the form of text and images on Twitter and Instagram that carve out a space for female victims of sexual violence to share testimonials of abuse and personal expressions of sadness, creating an affective community of active listeners. I demonstrate how digital storytelling in the context of #MeTooIndia enables personal and collective identity building for feminists online. I define digital narratives of sexual abuse as virtually embodied constructions of feminist liberation that occur through the discursive expression of bodily pain, anger and shame on Twitter, and through visuals in the form of photography and art on Instagram. The interplay between the digital and the embodied, the virtual and the material facilitates feminist resistance and emancipation through the production of a posthuman feminist identity. I illustrate how survivors of sexual violence employ digital storytelling to construct threads of connectivity, empathy, support, and therefore, a collective feminist identity in order to overcome personal pain and trauma.

Previous scholarship on digital feminism has effectively demonstrated how feminists employ digital technologies for interaction, congregation, participation, and identity building. Social media platforms have created a uniquely interactive space for the collective sharing of personal experiences and feminist consciousness and have become, in the process, key sites in contemporary feminist activism. As Mendes and Ringrose argue, digital media has enabled the construction of “networked feminist counterpublics” that are forged through “intimacy, personal sharing, mutual recognition, and meaningful resonance” in the feminist community (3). In fact, these affective counterpublics in fourth-wave digital feminisms are largely products of both hashtag activism and digital storytelling that lower barriers for connection on platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. With regard to digital storytelling, Nassim Parvin asserts that “digital technologies continue to play a constitutive role in framing, collecting, and disseminating personal stories” (521) that have forged feminist social justice at a significantly lower cost (517). In the context of the global #MeToo movement, the testimonial practice of digital storytelling has primarily enabled the return to grassroots mobilization in feminist activism and empowered female victims and survivors of sexual abuse, harassment, and violence to create possibilities of interdependence and bonds of attachment. Through the display of their stigmatized narratives on social media, women perform the liberation and reclamation of their bodies, produce threads of empathy as well as create their personal and collective feminist identities. As Lata Mani argues, sexual harassment and abuse are central feminist concerns (1), and online testimonials of violence have shaped digital feminism around the world.

Digital Storytelling & Sexual Violence

I locate the feminist subaltern through feminist practices of digital storytelling, and sharing of testimonials and personal narratives of violence. I employ the framework of digital storytelling to evoke the construction of a posthumanist identity for Indian women online.

The term digital storytelling refers to digital narratives including “web-based interactive stories, hypertexts, narrative computer games” and social media textual discourse and visuals that trace their origins to a grassroots movement in Journalism and Media Studies to help people tell personal stories using multimedia technologies” (Davis & Weinshenker 1).

According to Amy Hill, digital storytelling practitioners draw on “well-established traditions in education, health and activism” in the production of “culturally and historically embedded lived experiences online” (126). Digital media has facilitated an “information exchange through the capturing, sharing, and rapid dissemination of narratives” (Parvin 521).

The practice of storytelling over social media has emphasized the expression of shared identity and a sense of community and solidarity that is reflective of common cultural and political perspectives that contribute to social change (Davis & Weinshenker 2; Parvin 517).

In recent years, digital storytelling has enabled expressions of feminist vulnerability and consciousness through the use of protest hashtags. Hashtags on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have empowered and visibilized discussions on gendered violence in the digital public sphere.

Lata Mani defines sexual abuse as a “violation of interrelatedness that negates existence and relations of intimacy; a violation of the self and the body” (1). Discussions on sexual assault, domestic violence and other forms of erasure and rupture of women’s bodies have long been stigmatized in and excluded from the public sphere. However, the birth of fourth-wave digital feminism has produced a platform to generate discussions about sexual violence and has had an impact on feminist social justice. The global #MeToo has focused on creating substantive conversations about feminist autonomy and bodily agency. As a “digitally networked phenomenon, #MeToo has enabled mass participation and connectivity, and played an important role in creating structural and institutional connections at the intersection of sexism and violence (Mendes & Ringrose 14). The movement has brought

women with “similar stories together in a tight-knit community to speak out, break their silence, and create large-scale public awareness about the issues” (Mendes & Ringrose 5). Through the practice of testimonial storytelling, victims and survivors of sexual abuse have taken to social media platforms to find comfort and support, create emotional bonds, and heal from traumatic experiences in feminist counterpublics. Driven by the survivors, digital narratives in the movement have begun to demand the acceptance of the discourse on feminist violence on public platforms. Through digital storytelling, women hope to reclaim their bodies, their narratives, and their experiences of trauma from the aggressor, and perform a veritable act of emancipatory resistance from their gendered subjecthood.

This act of digital narration, according to Vacchelli and Peyrefitte, draws on the delineation of the discursive and the material where the subject is suspended in an embodied existence (6); distant from their physical bodies. The authors demonstrate how the practice of storytelling through embodiment plays an important role in shaping their narratives online (3). Katherine Hayles defines the posthuman cyborg through the conceptualization of information and materiality online. She describes the posthuman as a “material informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous reconstruction” (Hayles 3; Sarkar 83). As Sucharita Sarkar states, the imbrication of digital and material realities enables the continuous process of creation and re-creation of feminist subjecthood. Sarkar examines how posthuman bodies are constructed on RealSelf.com through the act of naming, stating of physical locations, and verbalizing anxieties about participants’ physical bodies (86). My research follows Sarkar’s study in tracing posthuman bodies that are constructed through textual and visual storytelling. I argue that victim narratives in the context of #MeTooIndia are embodied constructions of feminist emancipation that are expressed through assertions of pain and anger, but are suspended outside of the female body. Where Mendes, Keller and Ringrose have previously focused on the increased role of feminist activism in combatting sexual

violence to examine how social media platforms have shaped feminist grief and healing through victim narrative experiences, my study addresses the gaps in scholarship by investigating the #MeToo phenomenon in India. I examine how the practice of digital storytelling for victims of sexual violence enables the construction of a personal posthuman as well as a collective identity on Twitter and Instagram. My research also adds to the visible gap in the study of visual storytelling in feminist activism online. To address this gap, I engage in the study of stories of sexual abuse, harassment, and rape as well as the resistance against violence depicted in the form of textual narratives as well as through photography, artwork, memes and GIFs on Instagram.

Creation of a Posthuman Identity through Digital Narratives

In the dataset of 7000 tweets on #MeTooIndia, 146 tweets recount personal experiences and narratives of sexual violence. These tweets actively participate in the hashtag by both telling their stories as well as performing empathy for other, similarly positioned victims of abuse. In the case of Instagram, manual annotation of posts indicates that 55 out of a 1000 collected posts in the dataset depict personal narratives through the use of photographs and artwork. #MeToo in India is a deeply divisive and exclusive movement owing to its considerable focus on Bollywood stories, and narratives of Indian celebrities. However, despite the limited number of tweets and posts depicting victim narratives, there is evidence of an interplay between body politics and feminist activism surrounding #MeTooIndia. Digital storytelling around the movement in India produces both a personal posthuman and a collective identity in feminist counterpublics online.

Sucharita Sarkar argues that posthuman bodies on the website are in a constant cycle of construction and reconstruction (84). I find that the construction of a feminist identity through storytelling using #MeTooIndia occurs through the virtual embodiment of survivors. Confessions of trauma survivors and narratives of sexual violence on Twitter and Instagram

can be read as a form of “amalgamated re-design of posthuman bodies” (84). Trapped in their material and physical pain, digital testimonials create opportunities for self-transformation, embodied liberation, and ultimately the construction of a posthuman self (86).

For instance, the tweet below shows how the user feels trapped in their body as a girl.

Arushi (@Arushi8). ‘Being a woman; being a girl is being trapped in her body. Because it’s the body the world sees. Something I wrote last October. #Metooindia. A reality most of us live out there.’ 3 December, 2018, 4:31 p.m. Tweet.

The interplay between body politics and digital feminist activism lays claim to a powerful performance of empowerment for Indian women. Survivors consistently negotiate their bodily autonomy, agency and visibility online to actively construct their embodied identities. Although the embodiment of their virtual narrative is detached from their material and corporeal reality, they are engaged in the process of creating and re-creating their feminist subjecthood. By engaging in the act of telling their stories and sharing their physical pain, they succeed in the virtual emancipation of their gendered selves, and produce digital imaginaries of resilience, love, hope, courage, healing and reparation from trauma. Further, through their stories in posthuman spaces (Braidotti 3), victims express and process their physical trauma, erasure, rupture, and damage to the corporeal body that occurs through sexual abuse. In virtual embodiment, users employ their narratives to break their silence by sharing specific expressions and feelings of guilt, shame, sadness, hopelessness, anger, and pain. For instance, in the following tweets, survivors express shock, guilt, shame, and anger in order to heal from the trauma of rape and other forms of sexual abuse.

Niharika Jain (@Nihar55). “Yesterday I became a victim of toxic masculinity, verbal harassment; abuse; sexual harassment (sending inappropriate text) to my classmate. I’m Still shocked & probably suffering from PTSD. Men need to hold other men accountable. #MeTooIndia.” 17 October, 2019, 11: 09 a.m. Tweet.

Juneja Karan (Karan053). “But shame or sexual violation isn’t what I felt. I felt anger. I got furious. I picked up the phone and let him know how angry I was and how far I was willing to go, to take him down. Told him that my shame and honour is secondary to my anger. This anger is imp. #metooindia.” 21 March, 2019, 08: 14 p.m. Tweet.

Rahul (@Rahul56). "This is my story. I lived it. You don't have the right to tell me I imagined it. You don't get to ask why I didn't leave earlier. You don't have the right to question my intentions to share. Don't you dare shut me up. #Metooindia." 9 November, 2018, 6: 21 p.m. Tweet.

Although these narratives, filled with raw emotions and expressions of shame and anger, create exigencies for users to relive their stories on public platforms, they also liberate them from their physical pain in embodied posthuman spaces. Digital storytelling grants the survivors discursive tools to begin healing by processing their physical, emotional, and mental trauma. The users quoted below also find comfort in speaking to the role their own families played in enabling their abuse.

Nupur Walia (@Walia67). "Me too. Not just once or twice, not just years ago, not just by strangers. Not just without the knowledge of so called 'loved ones. #MeTooIndia." 21 October, 2018, 7:09 p.m. Tweet.

Ghazal (@GHa11). "I was 18 when this happened and it took me 4 years to talk about it on record. I was raped by the ones who were meant to protect me and I never had a law protecting my rights. And I still don't see one. #metooindia." 21 June, 2020, 3:12 p.m. Tweet.

Rohit Sharma (@sharma_r). "Who will believe you?" asked my abuser when I was 10. Who will believe you, asked the cops when I was raped. Who will believe you, was the expression of my parents when I finally told them. #metooindia." 21 December, 2019, 11:30 p.m. Tweet.

In addition, users also often name and shame as well as blame their aggressors.

Mehar Garg (@Garg11). "He can "stand down" all he wants. Be the insensitive comments show why women are standing up & shouting #metooindia Because when it happened to me, I TRIED to keep my "knickers on" but that was the point of rape. For him to take them off. Shame on you!" 21 December, 2019, 11:30 p.m. Tweet.

Survivors of sexual abuse produce a posthuman resistance against their abusers by openly engaging in discussions with deeply intimate and often uncomfortable details of their stories in the public sphere. Here, virtual platforms function as spaces free of the material limits of the body (Brians 121) and create a place of vulnerability for users to participate in. Visual storytelling also demonstrates the use of personal photographs to depict bruised bodies and the corporeal abuse of victims. The following images on Instagram depict sexual abuse survivors who challenge patriarchal power structures and employ their bodies in the performance of resistance, resilience, and empowerment against violence. Their stories are told through embodied digital photographs of the naked or tattooed body, face, or applied

henna on the hands. The tradition of the henna, where women apply the dye and hide the name of their husband's initial before the wedding night, is subverted to display the words "Women against sexual violence."



Figure 1: Digital Storytelling on Instagram – Photography

Captured screenshots taken from these images above further indicate a discursive engagement that occurs alongside the depiction of virtual bodies. For instance, one user employs poetry as a form of storytelling to articulate the physical pain and experience of rape. She says,

“But there was nothing that I could have done. His grip was power. His body thunder. His touch was evil. I had to give in. The pain.”

Another user tells her personal story in which she paints her hands with traditional wedding day henna 5 months after she left her abuser. Her body becomes a visual and performative display of the everyday struggles of sexual violence. Other photographs depict battle wounds stemming from corporal violence against them. Women employ digital photographs to break their silence. Their bodies become battlefields where survivor resistance is visually performed. Through the sharing of their personal stories of violence, physical and mental struggle, and isolation they create a space for personal emancipation through their embodied selves. Thus, digital feminine embodiment constructs the ability to negotiate agency and visibility for the personal as well as performativity in opposition to oppressive structures. In addition to the resistance, their bodies on social media display immense vulnerability and precarity that emerges through their desire to speak for themselves. Their bodies become the site of resistance and are constantly being reshaped to define their identities and belonging. Their visual embodiment online creates a counter-hegemonic space against normative hierarchies and power structures where they can produce an agency over and alternate interpretations of their own stories in order to perform resistance. Their corporeal presence on Instagram and engagement with #MeTooIndia hashtags on digital spaces underpins their precarity, vulnerability and comfort (Sliwinska 9). The material reconfiguration of public and digital spaces, in fact, allows them to recentre their personal stories through the practice of vulnerable sharing. Photography becomes a powerful medium for creating and disseminating narratives of sexual violence.

In addition to visual representations of the self on Instagram, users also employ artwork as a form of active resistance against perpetrators as well as to relate their stories of violence. As Taš & Taš argue, street art in its various hybrid forms is a form of political

statement with the potential to reclaim public spaces, forge new spaces, and negotiate visibility through dissemination (328-329). The aesthetic imaginaries enable the production of “a counter-spatial intervention in the dominant public sphere” (328) that brings necessary self-affirmation, healing, reparations and acknowledgement of the trauma for survivors of sexual abuse.



Figure 2: Digital Storytelling on Instagram – Artwork

Users on Instagram, as in the above images, employ #MeTooIndia, to share their art that depicts the pain and silence surrounding their experiences of sexual abuse. Through the creation and dissemination of their artwork, they locate a deep personal vulnerability and trust in their artistic performance online. Those images illustrate the range of artistic

interpretations of personal trauma for survivors. Some of these digital pieces of art are accompanied with personalized stories from survivors. For instance, one user decries the role of patriarchal gatekeeping structures in keeping Indian women silenced while simultaneously speaking to the power of art to herald a new beginning for sexual abuse victims. She says, “Knowing that to keep silent is to dig our own graves, and to speak out is to pay the price of ostracization – we need to channel our inward anger towards smashing patriarchy and dismantling these structures of gatekeeping that demand our very flesh. Art will appear to suffer and be sacrificed, and ultimately, it is art that will emerge from our struggle. And blood-ridden like afterbirth, it will herald a new life.” Another user writes,

“Even though it was wrong, he thought it was right. I had been told to keep it quiet, which caused me to be frightened. I was a vulnerable child that couldn’t speak out. No matter how much I tried, I just couldn’t shout. This little girl trapped inside, well that little girl is still me, even though I’m older now the horrible thoughts won’t leave. The pain still lurks, but it’s easier to pretend it’s not there.

In each of these cases, art becomes a ritualistic space for self-care and catharsis; a space that implies protection; a place for healing from personal grief and trauma derived from physical violence and oppression. It is through artistic representations of selfhood that participants engage with their innocence and nostalgia for a life before trauma, and it is through this performance that they begin to reclaim and rebuild their lives in a public space in order to begin the arduous process of re-centring their narratives, experiences, voices and stories. Victim artistic imaginaries become a tool for digital storytelling and an intentional form of personal protest. Through the emancipatory potential of textual and visual narratives, posthuman bodies of survivors carry the potential for reclaiming their autonomy and agency. Although feminist survivors of sexual violence still inhabit a gendered existence on digital platforms, their stories of abuse and the bodies they display online are constantly configured and shaped by their engagement with social media. Through their non-materiality on Twitter

and Instagram using #MeTooIndia, users create personal imaginaries of posthuman emancipation from their physical realities warped by pain and trauma.

The act of sharing testimonies of violence on social media simultaneously enables the construction of feminist affective counterpublics and a collective feminist identity.

Communal identity is established through the expression of feminist empathy, solidarity, and acknowledgement of the trauma of sexual abuse. The victims of sexual violence on Twitter often tend to employ #MeTooIndia to empathize with other survivor stories before engaging in their personal narratives.

Divyansh (@vansh5). "I'm so sorry you had to go through this. Totally understand how that feels. An uncle in the family tried to feel me up when I was 15. Haven't had the courage to let the family know yet. #MeToo #MeTooIndia." 4th October, 2018, 4:15 p.m. Tweet.

Shweta (@ShwetaP1). "So disgusted to have worked with him this summer. The energy in the office was toxic, and now I know why. I'm so proud of all the women coming forward, you are unbelievably powerful and brave and I'm so sorry you went through this. #MeTooIndia." 5th July, 2019, 11:13 a.m. Tweet.

For instance, the tweets above demonstrate how certain users begin by acknowledging the pain of other victims as they tell their own stories. The first user apologizes for the painful experiences and struggles in the tweet they respond to and immediately attempts to establish a threaded interconnectedness and intimate relatability in relation to their traumatic past. The second participant relates their story about working in the same toxic environment as the user they respond to and empathizes with the courage and bravery of women breaking their silence. This empathy and acknowledgement of sexual violence in personal storytelling creates a thread of affective connectivity in digital feminist counterpublics. This networked kinship and sisterhood produces a collective and communal feminist identity online that threads experiences of violence together. Through the digital performance of sisterhood, empathy, solidarity and collective resilience, and digital storytelling on cyberspaces, users begin to heal through collective gendered trauma in the Indian subcontinent. On Instagram, this empathy and solidarity plays out differently when users share images that depict artistic

imaginaries of resistance created by other victims and populate the side text with their own stories of violence and abuse. For instance, participants employ poetry, photography, and/or drawings that are widely shared on the platform and reframe the discourse around them by narrating their testimonies. Collective feminist identity on these platforms occurs through the process of affirmation and acknowledgement of the trauma that members of the community suffer.

#MeTooIndia - Bonds of Feminist Solidarity, Sisterhood & Empathy through an Articulation of Difference

In this chapter, I demonstrate how, similar to the queer movement's case study, social media facilitates a community-building exercise for feminist activism and enables the construction of networked feminist counterpublics of feminist solidarity across boundaries. I explore how digital spaces in India on the one hand, become principal sites in the emergence of transnational networks or affective publics of feminist solidarity, sisterhood and empathy, and on the other demonstrate fragmentation owing to the presumption of "woman as a universal and essential category," (Motta 26) in the context of the Global South. First, I argue that in contemporary fourth-wave digital feminism in India, the resurgence of feminist solidarity emerges in the form of a collective coalition to "address women's experiences with sexual assault, gendered inequalities and injustice" (Pullen & Vachhani 3) and as a political action that "envisions a changed future" for feminist collectives (Zaytoun & Ezekiel 198 – 199). Not unlike the construction of 'queer zones of empathy,' digital feminist solidarity engenders the production of affective publics of connection, empathy and empowerment that locates the woman at the centre of the movement in digital spaces through the MeTooIndia hashtag. In order to define the notion of solidarity in feminist practice and contemporary grassroots transnational feminist movements, I borrow primarily from the work of Clare Hemmings and Zizi Papacharissi, who conceptualize networked activism through their theorization of affective publics and affective solidarity, which act as a form of political organizing and collective resistance. In addition, I retrace Rodino Colcino's work on empowerment through empathy to visualize networks of solidarity and global sisterhood in digital feminist counterpublic spaces surrounding #MeTooIndia.

My work also discusses the fissures in #MeTooIndia that emerge owing to the "limitations of collective solidarity" (Trott 15) and the "differences that arise at the

intersection of marginalisation” (12). I consider it important to engage with Black and postcolonial scholars such as Chandra Mohanty, who confront “white-centrist tendencies of feminist scholarship,” and conceptualize solidarity through the articulation of difference and “conflict across formations of race, class and sexuality” (Littler & Rottenberg 866). I see this fragmentation as the antithesis of solidarity, evidenced by a deeply negative sentiment in the dataset directed towards the movement expressed in a critique of its imitation of western feminist solidarity and creation of essential categories of womanhood originating in the west. The work of Mohanty supports my work on #MeTooIndia to both question and challenge the universalization and essentialism in the production of womanhood, and subsequently to locate feminist solidarity in an articulation of difference in the Global South.

Theorizing Feminist Solidarity and Empathy

Before delving into the study of specific tweets and Instagram posts from the dataset to demonstrate how social media platforms offer a space for transnational and visible networks of affective solidarity, I begin by framing the history of feminist empathy, activism, and consciousness, particularly in fourth-wave digital feminist movements in the Global South. Feminist solidarity has a long history (Sweetman 227) of women forging coalitional strategies of mutual empowerment and “collective resistance around sexual violence” (Pegu 152; Pullen & Vacchani 3). Feminist activism shares a commitment to collective action to “promote women’s rights and gender justice” (Sweetman 227), and this visibly “organized feminist approach” is necessary both for a political transformation (Alkhaled 951) and for creating an infrastructure of support between women (Pullen & Vachhani 7). Feminist encounters therefore enable the construction of a personal and political will for mobilizing a feminist consciousness (Zaytoun & Ezekiel 198; Alkhaled 954; Vachhani & Pullen 26). In tandem with feminist solidarity movements, Sophie Alkhaled points to the recent “emergence of a transnational global sisterhood” (Ghadery 253) that fosters resilience and resistance

against “capitalist and neoliberal regimes demarcating systems of oppressions based on gender, class and ethnicity” (Alkhaled 954). In this context, Zaytoun and Ezekiel characterize feminist political activism as deeply tethered to the notion of ‘global sisterhood’ that continues to challenge nationalist imaginaries of sexism, patriarchal oppression, masculinity (199), “gender-based violence, abuse, marginalization, poverty” (Sweetman 219), and xenophobia (Littler & Rottenberg 865). Feminist activism has re-conceptualized the notion of power through solidarity and performs resistance to socio-economic inequalities and patriarchal power at multiple axes of oppression. Strategies of collective feminist resistance in all forms engender the production of mutual support (Sweetman 219) through a networked affective public that emerges through solidarity and empathy in feminism.

In relation to contemporary digital fourth-wave movements, Verity Trott asserts that the “shift from a private exchange of solidarity to a public testimonial” (2) creates new spaces online for feminist solidarity to thrive. In the context of #MeTooIndia, I borrow Clare Hemmings’ notion of affective solidarity and Papacharissi’s concept of digital affective publics in relation to sharing narratives of sexual violence, harassment and abuse in the digital public sphere. For #MeTooIndia on social media platforms, the intimate and affective publics engender relational, familial, intimate and vulnerable encounters and “feelings of engagement and belonging” (Papacharissi 4) among the subaltern feminist collective. The construction of these networks of solidarity, acceptance, and acknowledgement enable the process of empowerment that occurs through the acts of “sharing and affirming personal and collective testimonies and experiences of trauma and violence” (280). According to Vacchani & Pullen, women’s struggles, experiences and bodies are at the heart of feminist organizing and collectivity online (29). Clare Hemming’s concept of affective solidarity exposes women’s desire for transformative and passionate action through feminist solidarity (158). Affective solidarity is therefore “central to feminist resistance against sexism” (25), and

subsequently engenders the production of connective threads of continuity, mutuality, and empathy in the digital public sphere. Here, the MeTooIndia hashtag functions as the “narrative logic” (Suk et al. 2) that produces affective solidarity through the collective capacity of feminist activism online. The hashtag transforms into a narrative creator that produces and connects individual stories, and creates awareness of feminist struggles in the public sphere. The practices of digital sharing and personal storytelling that emerge in the form of the rage from feminist isolation described by Hemmings (150) subsequently create an affective and empathetic connection and interpersonal “feminist personal politics” (Suk et al. 2). Affective solidarities in feminism construct “a counter-spatial intervention in the dominant public sphere” (Taš & Taš 328) that brings necessary self-affirmation, healing, reparations and acknowledgement of the trauma for members of the community. According to Colocino, #MeToo operates by challenging various structures of power that “underlie harassment, discrimination, and assault” (96), and successfully promote empowerment through “transformative empathy” (97). As Colocino argues, empathy begins the process of “structural change for victim survivors” (99). Users are free to share and lay bare their own traumatic histories and experiences with sexual abuse, harassment and assault, and consequently construct threads of acknowledgement and affective solidarity among both feminist survivors and digital witnesses to feminist trauma.

The visible networks of affective solidarity in the dataset emerge in the discursive expression and visual representation of positive sentiment and empathy towards the feminist movement on Twitter and Instagram. Twitter discussions surrounding the hashtag encode 84 tweets that express positive sentiment towards the movement, and 796 tweets that demonstrate solidarity through empathy. Similarly, on Instagram, 295 of 1000 posts display empowerment through empathy, positive encouragement and support for the #MeTooIndia

movement. These tweets and Instagram posts perform empathy and produce affective solidarity through the use of #MeTooIndia on social media platforms. For instance, the first strand of tweets and posts express solidarity with the #MeTooIndia movement. Here, the posts perform the emancipation of womanhood and the fracture of a patriarchal, misogynist, and sexist establishment through a veritable re-awakening of the feminist revolution in the country. Simultaneously, solidarity with #MeTooIndia on Twitter and Instagram uncovers the desire to acknowledge the positive consequences that the feminist movement has brought to the country, and to engage in broader conversations about trauma in sexual assault, harassment, and rape culture in relation to women's rights. Numerous workplaces have implemented anti-sexual harassment campaigns, and facilitated open discussions about gendered violence and abuse. In this sense, #MeTooIndia, becomes a direct manifestation of feminist solidarity on digital platforms where the personal and collective battles against sexual violence and women's rights are visibilized. For instance, the users below emphasize the importance of the digital feminist movement, and the visibility it brings to the struggles of Indian women.

Devi Bo (@DaviBo). "I was skeptical when they talked about an Indian #MeToo movement based on what is happening in #Bollywood.. this is much broader and I am here for it! #MeTooIndia." October 7th, 2018, 3:39 p.m. Tweet.

Rajeshwari (@Raj89) "We must support #MeTooIndia #MeToo this is a very deep meaningful movement against a much neglected and pervasive patriarchal behaviour @msisodia." June 12th, 2019, 4:45 p.m. Tweet.

The above tweet underscores the pervasive patriarchal violence in India, and how #MeTooIndia creates a space for "deep and meaningful discussions" on the everyday struggles that Indian women face. Another user expresses scepticism that the movement could reach Bollywood, but contends that #MeToo in India has enabled a more inclusive, extensive, and expansive conversation for women, and expresses solidarity with the movement. Similarly, the Instagram post below picks up on the history of misogyny and patriarchy that is "evident in Indian society" and expresses solidarity with the #MeTooIndia

movement by marking it as a point of intervention and disruption in fourth-wave feminism. This mediation occurs through the act of sharing personal stories and narratives that produce the affective threads of solidarity in the digital public sphere.



Users and organizations alike employ the hashtag to stand in solidarity with females demanding an end to sexual harassment in the workplace. For example, the tweet below is an example of how the movement has evolved from bringing awareness to women's rights issues to policy changes in the corporate workplace for protection of women employees.

KRKatha (@HRkatha). "The 'MeToo' movement brought many cases of sexual harassment at workplaces into the limelight. It also made the corporate world more aware of the need to put proper policies in place to protect women employees #Metooindia." December 20th, 2019, 9:04 a.m. Tweet.

Similarly, the second strand of tweets and posts express solidarity and empathy with other women on the platform. Users indicate admiration, respect, and ultimately empathy for the courage exhibited by women leading the movement. #MeTooIndia engenders not merely participation in the discussions surrounding female identity, rights and violence, but also the construction of bonds of empathy and affective solidarity. For instance, the following tweets demonstrate how users stand together as part of the "collective battles" of women in the

country. Furthermore, they attest to the “importance of speaking out” that transforms the speaker from victim to survivor. Speaking out and the public act of testifying often becomes a feminist tool for political action. According to Tanya Serisier in *Speaking Out: Feminism, Rape and Narrative Politics*, the global #MeToo has exposed feminist rage, frustration, and anger within the “political project and narrative genre of sexual violence” (21) for survivors. The visibility of the user’s experience in sexual trauma and the “openness of the audience to engage with personal stories” (193) forges a network of bonds of friendship, sisterhood and allyship to dismantle what Hemmings defines as feminist isolation.

Vrutti (@vriuttij). “Tweeted this sometime in Feb. It's all coming true. I have so much admiration and respect for all these women who are leading from the front; fighting individual + collective battles. This is harder than you imagine it to be. Here. In solidarity. #MeTooIndia.” October 7th, 2018, 3:04 p.m. Tweet.

Tanmey (@taniam). “More power to the women! #MeToo it takes courage for a woman to talk about the harassment, abuse or/amp; assault she's endured . Speaking up is the MOST difficult part! #MeTooIndia.” October 7th, 2018, 2:31 p.m. Tweet.

Phalguni (@wryfad). “More power to you all who took a stand and are voicing their story. For a better world. Solidarity is a must. #MeTooIndia.” October 14th, 2018, 6:57 p.m. Tweet.

In the above tweets, solidarity entails both listening to narratives of sexual violence and speaking on behalf of other survivors, and leading a silent revolution using empathy on social media platforms in order to bring social awareness and justice to issues of feminist violence. Therefore, empowerment for survivors emerges through the collective fight against patriarchal culture in a society like India’s where speaking out is key for empowerment. In this context, solidarity is evidenced in #MeTooIndia by the process of ‘standing witness’ in the public trial for survivors and their testimonies.

One of the most well-known public accusations in the movement was made by actress Tanushree Dutta, whose sexual allegations against Indian actor Nana Patekar on a film set garnered national attention and sparked interest in #MeToo in Bollywood, subsequently inspiring other members of the visible elite to ‘speak out’ in the form of digital accusations. Dutta stated on social media about Patekar:

“He was being aggressive and was pushing me around. I complained about him, but it was not heard... When I tried to escape it, they called the media to do a mob lynching attack on us. My mother and father were inside the car. That was horrific... Ganesh Acharya was the one who pressured me to perform an intimate step. Everybody was involved including Amit Siddiqui and Rakesh Sarangi. All of them are good friends.”

Although her public accusations towards the Bollywood star and the witnesses involved were met with social criticism on Twitter, narrative empathy was forged on digital platforms by the affirmation of solidarity. Other Bollywood actresses ‘stood public trial’ to either corroborate her stories, or locate themselves in solidarity with her using #MeTooIndia.



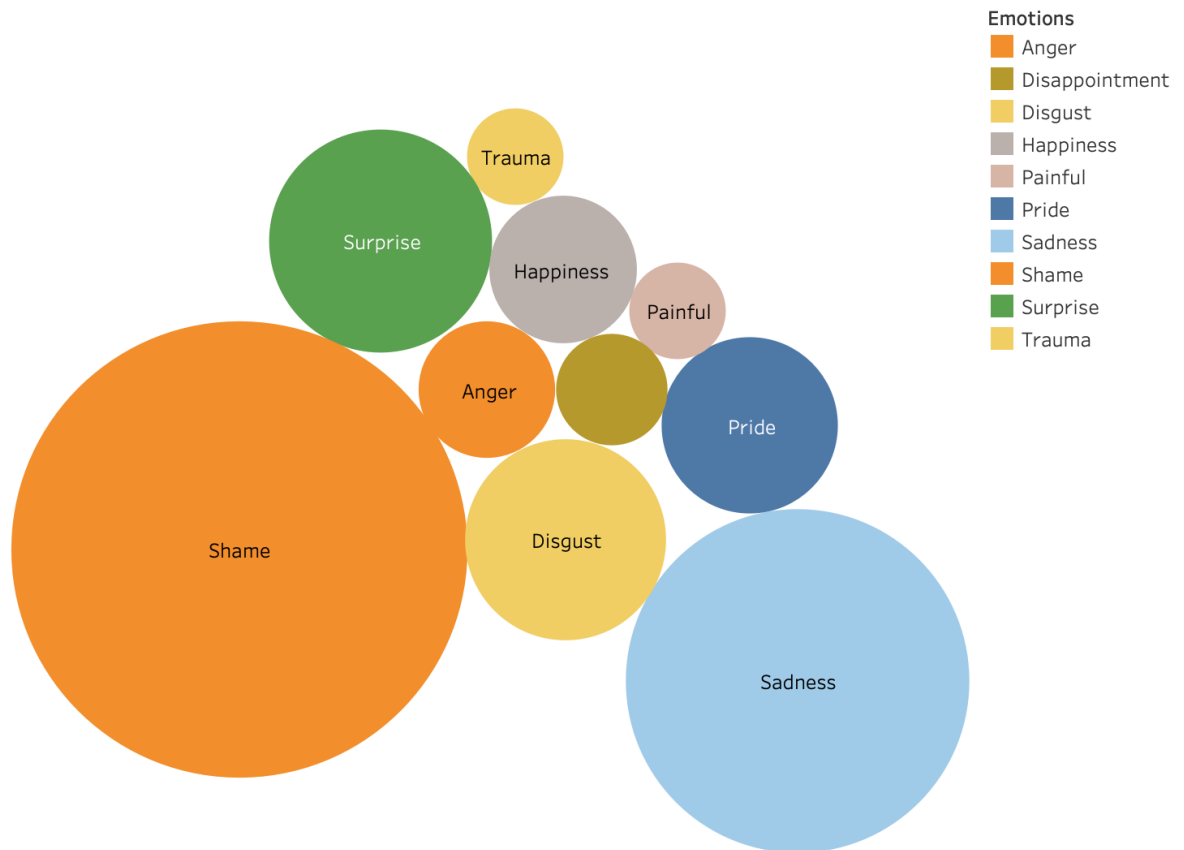
Though thousands of misogynist posts were directed at Dutta, denouncing her experience and story as a fabrication to gain attention, fame and money, the examples above indicate that several Bollywood actresses, including Freida Pinto and Sonam Kapoor, and many Twitter and Instagram users showed public support for Dutta. The act of providing public testimony for a sexual assault survivor demonstrates the practice of allyship and sisterhood that corroborates and adds voices to her story and performs an affirmation of truth and courage displayed by Dutta. Another manner in which feminist allyship and sisterhood materialize online is through the construction of feminist (out)rage against discourses of patriarchy and masculinity in the country and the actual perpetrators of violence. For instance, the posts below challenge the apathy, insensitivity, the lack of compassion and empathy of the ‘other gender’ towards women’s issues, and the active and passive violence, and resultant inequality and injustice against Indian women:





Both the above posts counter feminist isolation through their direct appeal to men to amplify their voices in solidarity with the #MeTooIndia movement and to challenge their deeply ingrained misogyny, masculine entitlement, and victim blaming in the context of sexual violence against women. Networks of affective solidarity emerge not merely through listening to narratives of survivors and speaking out on their behalf, but also through calling out the built-in systems and structures of power inherent in India's patriarchal society. This feminist rage directed at men and the imaginaries of postcolonial masculinity underscore the complete paradoxical feminist isolation in social media bubbles. Despite the discursive and narrative building of these bonds of friendship, allyship, and sisterhood on Twitter and Instagram, affective solidarity exists inside echo chambers of positivity, and in direct opposition to a deeper fragmentation within the movement.

Emotions in #MeTooIndia



Emotions. Color shows details about Emotions. Size shows count of Sheet1. The marks are labeled by Emotions. The view is filtered on Emotions, which has multiple members selected.

This fragmentation emerges through a deeply negative sentiment, and through the expression of negative emotions (depicted in the above chart) in relation to the #MeTooIndia movement. On Twitter, 201 tweets expressed completely negative sentiments towards the movement. Similarly, the above chart represents the dominant emotions that emerge in the discourse surrounding #MeTooIndia. The most prominent emotions in the dataset indicate that the users feel shame, sadness, anger, trauma, and pain. Surprise, in this context, is synonymous with shock for the users, expressed specifically in regard to the culture of rape and violence against Indian women. This fragmentation is also a product of a myriad other intersections, including the increased representation of Bollywood, exclusion based on the conception of womanhood in India, digital misogyny, and the echo chambers of #FakeCases

that occurs in tandem with #MetooIndia functions as a counter narrative to women's experiences on social media, all of which will be discussed in the following chapters. In this chapter, I focus on the fragmentation in the digital fourth-wave movement that is a result of the way feminism and feminist solidarity are conceptualized in the context of the Global South. #MeToo in India is a direct import of its western counterpart, and borrows from western definitions of feminist solidarity. I contend that the concept of feminist solidarity and "global sisterhood, as suggested by western feminism, is founded on universalistic assumptions" (Motta 31). My work proposes an articulation of difference to conceptualize digital feminist solidarity in the context of the Global South and engages with feminist scholarship authored by postcolonial and Black scholars such as Chandra Mohanty, who proposes the term "'Third World Women' as a political and coalitional project" (31) in the Global South.

Digital Feminist Solidarity in the Global South: An Articulation of Difference

Women's struggles against gender discrimination, physical and sexual violence, inequality and injustice re-affirm the need for a collectivist feminist solidarity project. However, although women's bodies have always been the "site of contestation" in relation to feminist organizing and collective identity construction (Steans 732), digital feminisms and feminist solidarity have been marred by "conflicts and tensions in the historical unfolding of the movement" and in regard to the conceptualization of womanhood around the world (729). The concepts of global sisterhood and feminist solidarity, according to Littler and Rottenberg, "cut across various identity categories such as race, class, sexuality, nation, and caste while falling into gender essentialism" (865). However, such a theoretical and political framing forces solidarity between "women of colour, indigenous, working class, disabled, migrant, Muslim, LGBTQIA+ women," and transcends differences between existing categories of womanhood (865). As Jill Steans argues, "the politics of solidarity," particularly

in the context of digital feminisms, is founded on “shared problems” or sameness in gender consciousness (729). Feminist coalitional politics and affective solidarities have been historically contextualized as part of identity politics and increasingly criticized for the “universalization of women’s experiences and values” necessary for a sustainable feminist activism (Pullen & Vachhani 10). Steans highlights the complex ways in which gender is imbricated with histories of nationalism, and indicates that the core theme of feminist solidarity cannot be separated from “nationalist constructions of identity and community” (731). Therefore, the conversations on affective solidarities in relation to digital feminisms in the Global South are particularly relevant in order to take on the “political challenge of building solidarities across difference” (Motta 26).

Technology has radicalized contemporary feminism (Wajcman 143), and the advent of technology has been instrumental in the creation of feminist safe spaces on digital platforms. The feminine has infiltrated and disrupted online spaces to redefine identity and the concept of womanhood. However, feminism and feminist theory are oftentimes problematic systems of hierarchy owing to their singular, stereotypical, and essentialist perspective. Feminist presence online may be potentially revolutionary in creating a collectivist safe space, but its lack of focus on the individual and the intersectional can be disconcerting. Critical intersectional theory problematizes this universalizing aspect of womanhood that does not do enough to move away from traditionally essentialist binary structures and values. As cyberfeminist scholar Donna Haraway notes, “there is nothing about the feminine that naturally binds women” (154). Where identities are inherently fractured and disjunctured, feminism caters to a collectivist ideology. Feminist historiographies and epistemologies are, in part, deeply exclusionary, specific, and part of a system of binary categorizations that imitate offline structures. Similarly, scholar and activist Chandra Mohanty visualizes feminist solidarity based on power differences among the

various communities of women and issues a call for an affective network and shared action that celebrates difference. She argues that coalitional politics in feminism articulate difference in a world where race, class, and caste are impacted by historical realities and experiences of women in the Global South (122). Therefore, an articulation of difference through the political praxis of solidarity (19) locates women in a complex world where their coalitional identities and political realities are “informed by class, anti-racist, anti-casteist, and LGBTQIA+ feminisms” (Motta 26), particularly in the context of India. bell hooks famously argued that feminist solidarity should acknowledge differences in the struggles of women insisting that predictable forms of unity of identity for women of colour cause more fragmentation, contradictions, tensions and splits.

Definitions of what is feminine, and what constitutes feminist values can be interpreted in multiple ways across geographical contexts. Western feminism departs significantly from third-world feminisms of the Global South and needs its own process of decolonization. In the 1970’s and 80’s women’s movements across the world exposed conflicting views on feminist philosophies, methodologies, and epistemologies. Was feminist ideology universal, one-size-fits-all, separatist, or analogous in the Global North and South (Light 432)? It can be argued that the North and South have immensely disparate ideologies and definitions of feminism and womanhood. In the South, the identity of a woman intersects at multiple levels with race, class, caste, nation etc., and feminisms from the South carry this multiplicity as part of their movement. In this sense, a universal feminism assumes the form of a colonial system that speaks on behalf of all feminisms. It is imperative that we not ignore the complicities, complexities, and power interests with the collectivization and universalization of the colonized and oppressed, particularly when it comes to gendered and racialized bodies residing at the lowest levels of hierarchical power. Instead, a “decolonial approach must recognize and uncover other ways of being” (98). As feminism moves

between multiple interpretations and forms, we must first attempt to answer how the category of a woman is constructed or defined (Wacjman 73). According to Cassell, “gender as an analytic category emerged in the late twentieth-century” (1), and although earlier theorists argued towards a difference in gender, they did not employ “gender as a way of talking about systems or social relations” (1). How we rethink our social relations depends on how we establish social categories and what those categories entail (Kannabiran 1), and it is therefore imperative to imagine gender beyond the realms of binary categories outside the definition of a movement from the North. Daunting questions in feminism such as ‘what is feminism, what does feminist empowerment look like,’ (Johnson 1), particularly in relation to technology, can be read and interpreted differently by various feminisms. In this regard, what is a feminist technology, and how would it promote feminist values, goals, positive representation and access for women everywhere?

Another area of debate is whether/how women relate to heteronormative femininity or subscribe to heteronormative representations of women (Landström 14). As Butler states, “bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized” in the process of constructing a “hegemonic and heteronormative model of gender” (Butler 194). Bodies that are different, or on the periphery, are established through representations of the compulsory practice of heterosexuality (194). Elizabeth Grosz asserts that feminist theory is limited by its reliance on identity politics (213; Landström 18). Feminist theory must strive towards a reorientation in order to locate itself in a more open and undetermined objective outside the binary logic (Grosz 213; Landström 18) and adapt to the changing definitions and multiplicities of feminism. In the context of digital feminist solidarity, postcolonial, Black scholars and feminists of colour have previously articulated that a universal claim to feminism eliminates diversity (Zaytoun & Ezekiel 203). In the context of digital feminisms in the Global South, and particularly in the context of #MeTooIndia, feminist solidarity must problematize

western conceptions of womanhood, challenge the limitations of a collective identity (Trott 15), and acknowledge the struggles that Indian women face at the intersections of class, caste, and gender. #MeTooIndia and other forms of digital feminisms must include more than the coalition for urban and brahmanical and patriarchal idea of womanhood (upper class cis-gendered women) and continue to speak for experiences of violence for marginalized, transgender, disabled, and Dalit women (12). Through this articulation and acknowledgement of difference in the conception of womanhood, #MeTooIndia can build and adopt a more coalitional and inclusive gender politics on social media platforms.

#MeTooIndia - Discourse among Canadian Diaspora on Twitter

In this research, I trace the discourse surrounding #MeTooIndia among the Indo-Canadian diaspora to locate the feminist subaltern through the conceptualization of transnational diasporic feminist solidarity. Through the study of tweets tagged #MeTooIndia collected from Canada during the timeline, I examine how fourth-wave digital feminisms are deeply reflective of transnational empathy, solidarity, and support from Indian diasporic communities in Canada; how they enable the construction of safe spaces, and a platform for community-building for Indian women abroad; and how diasporic women in Canada employ the MeTooIndia hashtag to create feminist diasporic resistance through the sharing of personal narratives and stories on sexual harassment and violence on Twitter. I also evoke Raya Sarkar's list (LoSHA), which first sparked the MeToo debate in India to argue that its origin in a diasporic context, created conversations about Indian Dalit feminism.

As imagined and transnational cultural collectives, diasporas simultaneously occupy local and global spaces, and cultural identities across borders. As Avtar Brah (2011) argues, the 'diasporic space,' created through the constructions of dispersal, displacement, and nostalgia of imagined homelands is where the economic, political and cultural processes of identity making converge (Hegde 1). Al-Ali contends that "gender is one such differentiating factor within a diaspora" (1) that enables complex layers of identity formations. Therefore, the "intersectionality of gender" along with other social and cultural constructs like class, ethnic and religious background, political affiliation, and place of origin can be a powerful means to understand women's lived experiences in diaspora (Pande 5).

Diasporic Identities, Bodies and Spaces in Digital Feminism

Recent debates and epistemological interventions at the intersection of migration and feminism have made gender fundamental to the critical understanding of specific experiences of womanhood in "a diasporic setting" (Zhao V). Scholarship on feminist diasporic identities

has raised awareness of the violence and sexual harassment practices in their communities (Crespo 6). South Asian diasporic communities are increasingly turning towards social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook as a preferred source to access and disseminate information and engage in discussions and debates on contemporary social issues, including sexual harassment and abuse. Although the phenomenon of ‘digital diasporas’ and the participation of South Asian diasporic women online have greatly facilitated their ability to connect and create strong ties with their countries of origin, their presence is often marred by a lack of subjectivity. Diasporic women’s voices, narratives and experiences remain unnoticed (V), and according to Zhao, still centre on women “as passive agents or victims” (V). The complex power dynamics in diasporic communities and the spaces that women occupy in them are deeply imbricated with feminist “subjectivities of freedom and subjugation” that reinforce gender hierarchies and fixed notions of femininity (Zhao V; Pande 2). The gendered nature of online diasporas makes them engage in the question of a nationalist womanhood that “objectifies the woman as an icon of cultural purity and the maintainer of the cultural essence of the home” (Gajjala 47). In the patriarchal family structure, Indian women have been considered “agents of culture (Pande 7-8), and the “bearers of Indian tradition” (Pande 1). Ananya Bhattacharjee and Radhika Gajjala connect the concept of digital feminist diasporas to the ideological force of nationalism (47) that emerges through the often gendered creation of immigrant spaces and community building in the host country. The prescribed codes of masculinity and patriarchy in Hindu society lead the legacy of the Indian diasporic project (Leidig 77) and fortify the roles and spaces that Indian women occupy beyond national borders. For Indian women, “diasporic affiliation and continued loyalties to the homeland are considered an asset” (Hegde 2). Therefore, while they carry expectations to conform to traditional gender ideologies, their experiences “are largely subsumed under male-centric homogenized perceptions and meta-narratives” (Pande 7-8).

According to Amba Pande, Indian women are deeply imbricated in “sociocultural moorings and belief systems ingrained in historical and religious narratives” in the patriarchal social order (7-8). Historically therefore, as women’s voices in the diaspora are perpetually excluded, “gender-based violence has been perceived as normal conduct in most South Asian cultures (Kang 148). Noting the gaps in scholarship on feminist perspectives in gender-based violence among the South Asian diaspora, Neelu Kang argues that threats of sexual harassment against women continue as an expression of power in both offline and online communities. She calls for “structural changes” that both define gendered violence as well as enable the empowerment of Indian women (160), particularly through the use of digital media. Today, however, the Internet and the emergence of fourth-wave digital feminisms have helped diasporic communities connect with feminist narratives, experiences and spaces over transnational borders. Previous scholarship on South Asian feminist diaspora has uncovered the construction of digital collectives and safe spaces through the use of blogs and digital archives. However, there is a paucity of research on how social media platforms and hashtag feminisms have created spaces for veritable dialogue and the practice of public testimonies for Indian diasporic women. On the other hand, contemporary digital platforms, such as Twitter and Instagram have facilitated the congregation of female diasporic collectives and provided them with a space to voice their anger against patriarchal structures and hierarchies, domestic violence and sexual harassment. As Zhao observes, diasporic communities have begun to politically mobilize with homeland politics both through organizations in the host country and activism on social media. The #MeTooIndia was introduced in India following international Dalit student Raya Sarkar’s ‘List’ that claimed to break the silence of Indian women as part of the young diasporic collective that live and study abroad. As Raiva and Sairolla state, the list generated general debates on sexual violence and harassment of Indian women around North American and Indian campuses and

quickly faced “institutional reprimands” for public naming and shaming. Although the list was targeted by renowned feminists for its “anonymity and lack of answerability” (Raiva & Sairolla 1), it led to both a transnational as well as an internal disruption of “nationalist framings of feminism and power relations” (Roy 1). More than anything before, Sarkar’s list brought debates in Dalit and Bahujan feminism in conversation with feminist diaspora politics of sexual violence and harassment. Led by a member of the Indian diaspora, the #MeTooIndia created a porous transnational discourse of feminist visibility and active participation.

Transnational Mobilization

Transnational and borderless feminism that occurs through digital hashtag activism that destabilizes notions that diasporic women share the same types of experiences, oppressions, forms of exploitations, and privileges. It enables the sharing of feminist perspectives at the margins or boundaries of Indian nationhood, and the impact of gendered relationships and experiences in the host country. Fourth-wave digital feminisms have opened the lines of communication for diasporic Indian women across traditional and cultural nation-state boundaries and spaces, and social media platforms such as Twitter have allowed for solidarity through difference and empathy for female experiences of violence and sexual harassment. Therefore, transnational feminism and feminist mobilization in the diaspora create different ways of understanding gender, and conceptualizing sexual agency that demonstrate the different power differences at play. Postcolonial feminisms are informed by social, political and historical contexts of diasporic experiences and subjectivities, and are marked by a departure from Euro-American structures of womanhood. These power differences are a product of economic realities and global capitalism. Presently, the connections created by social media activate conversations between Indians and Indian diasporic women on sexual violence. These dynamics are specifically “activated by the

central role that social media plays in the campaigns for violence against women” (Raiva & Sairolla 1). Therefore, social media gives a platform for the voices and experiences of Indian immigrants, first generation migrants, refugees and displaced persons of the cultural Indian diaspora through the use of homeland protest. The political and empathetic diasporic mobilization in the Indian context have emerged as a powerful means of “empowerment, solidarity, co-responsibility and mutual support that are specific to feminist experiences” (Crespo 6). Transnational diasporic feminism fosters collaborative, and politicized networks of solidarity and empathy between feminists through hashtag activism. Through this study, I am able to fill gaps in scholarship by tracing how the Indian diaspora discursively engages in discussions around #MeTooIndia on Twitter. I show that Indian Twitter users in Canada employ social media platforms in order to express empathy for survivors of sexual abuse and violence, and to effectively create networks of solidarity to connect with Indian women beyond the boundaries of caste and class. In fact, evidence from the small dataset demonstrates that the transnational discourse encounters support for Dalit and Bahujan feminism⁵ that is intricately connected to the emergence of #MeTooIndia movement. Sarkar’s anonymous list created a necessary uproar among Indian academics in the North, who enthusiastically challenge dominant “upper caste” narratives of sexual violence emerging online through a focus on Dalit feminism. In this regard, I also argue that first generation Indian migrant women in Canada occupy discursive spaces on Twitter for testimonial practices to share personal stories of harassment and sexual abuse using the #MeTooIndia hashtag. This is particularly true for international students on Canadian

⁵ This includes Indian Scheduled Castes (Dalits), Scheduled Tribes (Adivasis/indigenous, and other peasant castes

campuses, who occupy even more precarious spaces, flitting in and out of diasporic consciousness and the binaries of belonging and unbelonging.

Diasporic Embodiment, Autonomy and Agency

Digital testimonies define contemporary fourth-wave feminisms, and personal and communal storytelling has exploded on social media platforms such as Twitter. Sharing of personal stories through hashtags on Twitter is an exercise of meaning-making and world-building for positive change. In the context of #MeTooIndia, diasporic testimonials of violence, trauma, and fear abound. Where second generation members of the diaspora may employ the global #MeToo to participate in the practice of testimonial storytelling, new migrants such as international students who continuously straddle both Canadian diasporic consciousness and Indian nationalism employ the Indian hashtag to share testimonies of violence. For instance, the user below is a student at a university in Canada who shares her fears and worries about her harasser, and his intent to silence her.

⁶Leela M (@LeelaM). “Yes, I named my harasser during #MetooIndia moment. Yes, he is weaponizing defamation laws to silence me. I’m fighting it. Yes he is using his powers to impound my passport. I’m challenging it. But isn’t it asking for my blood if he writes to my University in Canada to cancel my visa? September 27, 2019” 3:05 a.m. Tweet.

The testimony of the author and the discursive use of #MeTooIndia in her tweet are symbolic of her resistance against bodily violence and her refusal to be silenced. She intends her narrative as a response to her harasser and asserts agency and autonomy over her own personhood. Leela’s story is one of many stories of sexual abuse and violence for Indo-Canadian women whose lives are precariously suspended without a permanent status in the country, and whose public safety is marred by the risk of having to return to the physical

⁶ At this juncture, I would also like to note that owing to the limited use of the location feature on Twitter, the study lacks evidence of digital diasporic discourse in Hindi and tweets in relation to Hindutva ideology surrounding the MeTooIndia movement.

dangers of sexual violence in India. Leela's digital testimony was widely shared on traditional Canadian news media and received numerous messages of support, solidarity and sisterhood on Twitter, where other Indian women from Canada participated in the collective testimony against their abusers. In the following tweet, Dipshikha responds:

Doctor (@Dip_Ghosh). "I'm really sorry, stay strong. Here in solidarity. My harasser is due for a promotion. Openly. He has countless sympathizers for the "trauma" he went through because of being called out and having to "deal with it." I'm just an inconvenience, like every other victim always is."

September 27th, 2019, 9:15 am.

The above user's tweet demonstrates that the sharing of personal and sexual trauma publicly on social media breeds sisterhood. It bears witness to an active form of resistance, strength, resilience, hope and reparation both for the community and the individual. The assertion of a diasporic feminist identity occurs through the process of collective digital storytelling, solidarity building, and the construction of decentralized counterpublics of resistance. The MeTooIndia hashtag, in this context, amplifies the voice of the gendered diasporic subject through discursive engagement and enables the politics of survival, care, healing and resurgence online.

In addition to the networks of solidarity with Indian women as survivors of sexual abuse in Canada, several tweets pay homage to the Indian Dalit movement as the harbinger of the Indian #MeToo on social media. Raya Sarkar upheld caste identities and consciousness as a part of Indian feminist movement. Her list challenged anti-caste feminists and savarna feminism that centred and privileged upper-caste feminist narratives over emerging Dalit, Adivasi (tribal), Bahujan, and other marginalized communities. Feminism in India has disproportionately focused on upper caste women and savarna narratives, and the experiences and contributions of Dalit women have been brushed aside. Sarkar argues that this de-platforming of stories on sexual violence and abuse from lower-caste communities highlights the power imbalance and the exclusionary nature of Indian feminism. Diasporic discourse on

#MeToo, however, engages with Dalit feminism by speaking to the spotlight on upper-caste narratives in the Global North. For instance, Yashica argues that the struggle of Dalit activists helped in re-asserting their rights and identities in the feminist movement.

Yashica D (@YashicaD). “For years, the ‘desi’ identity in the US has been dominated by ‘upper’ caste narratives. But thanks to the decade long struggle of Ambedkarite activists & Dalits asserting our identities, that’s changing.” October 22nd, 2019, 12:49 p.m. Tweet.

Another user from the Canadian diaspora makes their argument at the intersection of diasporic and Dalit identity. They contend that the list was challenged owing to Sarkar’s identity as a Dalit member of the diaspora.

Rohini (@Roro17). “When #MeTooIndia occurred, I remember my liberal friends denying even the possibility of their mentors (largely cis-hetero savarna) being sexual predators and one common tactic was questioning Raya Sarkar’s Dalit identity because she was diaspora. They could accept a Dalit diaspora that was powerful and vocal, and somehow not subservient to savarna academic diaspora. May the Dalit diaspora and the Dalit voices in South Asia grow.” October 23rd, 2019, 6:37 a.m. Tweet.

However, despite the history of oppression and the resistance against the list within academia and on student campuses, the transnational feminist movement in support of narratives of sexual abuse for Dalit and other lower caste communities has gained ground in Canada. Engagement with the hashtags has created a space for rewriting collective histories and genealogies of oppressed communities and forged the means to dismantle and re-centre the foundations of Indian feminism. As the textual discourse demonstrates, users in Canada employ #MeTooIndia on Twitter in an attempt to engage in the practice of testimonial sharing of their personal experiences of sexual abuse, the naming and shaming of their harassers, and the re-assertion of their casteist and gendered identities and belonging online. Personal storytelling enables the women to recount their trauma while simultaneously building networks of affective empathy, resilience and hope with the diasporic community. Furthermore, discussions on #MeTooIndia do not always centre on the individual. The Indian diasporic community online has mobilized on Twitter to provide a platform of empathy and

solidarity with the feminist movement. As the user below argues, Twitter has become a medium that offers a collective voice to survivors of sexual assault on a global scale.

Mohsin (@Mohsin_GG). “Agreed! Honestly, even if most Indians are not on Twitter (or even heard of it), it's no doubt that this medium has given a collective voice to those victims who are on Twitter. #MetooIndia has brought the heat to sexual assaulters in powerful places.” October 14th, 2018, 8:15 p.m. Tweet.

The Indian diaspora in the North represents and acknowledges the need for a global feminist movement and offers empathy, kinship, and acceptance for emerging narratives of sexual violence both for Indian women and for women belonging to the diaspora. Similarly, other users who participate in discussions of sexual trauma often speak to the power dynamics that impact women around the world. For example, the following tweets highlight how influential men including Harvey Weinstein and M.J Akbar, India’s Minister of External Affairs, have used their power to assault multiple women.

Basu (@BasuAshishh). “From Harvey Weinstein to the latest high profile sexual predator ex Indian Federal Minister and Journalist @mjakbar, has anyone asked what drives them to attack women? #MeTooIndia .” October 24th, 2018, 8:22 a.m. Tweet.

Geetika (@Gershom). “#MeToo all these men in power, never in their wildest dream, thought that Indian women, would admit to being raped. Globalised Indian diaspora has brought in the winds of change.” November 2nd, 2018, 3:42 a.m. Tweet.

However, as the above tweet states, the global diaspora “has now brought the winds of change.” Twitter has transformed into a critical site for the participation of Indian diaspora in fourth-wave social movements, continues to redefine Indian feminism, and helps build affirmative and empathetic communities. Diasporic access to the public sphere unlocks the positive connections that are constructed through threads of transnationalism and globalization. In addition to transnational solidarity, diasporic networks equally allow a platform for the performance of sisterhood. The following tweet advocates for Indo-Canadian women to support their “sisters” in India.

Padma (@padma12). “I am suggesting more pressure for the government and society to realize enough is enough. #MetooIndia For now, I'm advocating that @Canada **support our sisters** in India.” May 3rd, 2018, 6:22 p.m. Tweet.

The user's call demonstrates the strength of solidarity and sisterhood dictated by transnational networks of empathy. Women have taken on bodily autonomy, sexual agency, and personal accountability by sharing their narratives on social media platforms. The construction of a sisterhood around #MeTooIndia has given Indian women the courage to speak to and hear each other, and enabled them to find courage to recount their stories. Diasporic sisterhood and solidarity, therefore, have played a role in actively advancing the feminist movement for Dalit communities, first generation immigrants, and international students, and provided them a safe harbour to enter into public discussion on the issue of sexual violence on Indian women.

Representation and Exclusion in #MeTooIndia

In this chapter, I examine digital discourse surrounding the #MeTooIndia movement on Twitter and Instagram to demonstrate the fragmentation and non-inclusivity at multiple levels within the feminist movement. I argue that the digital feminist movement of #MeToo in India remains deeply exclusive, divisive, fragmented, and closed to marginalized communities and a multitude of voices and narratives. I consider it important to critique the central rift in feminism and feminist movements, particularly in the digital context in India, by tracing patterns of exclusion in the #MeTooIndia movement. Using qualitative inductive coding and critical discourse analysis, I examine the myriad reasons behind the practice of non-inclusivity within the movement, and how exclusion within the movement becomes visible on social media platforms. Based on criteria that produce binary results on whether the tweet discusses personal experiences, personal opinions on the topic, positive or negative sentiment for the movement, I find that exclusion is primarily the product of increased attention to issues of sexual abuse among the Indian elite including Bollywood celebrities, journalists, politicians, and well-known media personalities, who employ Twitter and Instagram as a space for “coming-out.” Secondly, non-inclusivity is evidenced through lack of discussion on the question of sexual abuse and harassment in the daily lives of Dalit, trans women, women of lower caste and class, and other marginalized and gendered communities that have vastly different experiences of sexual abuse than elite, urban women. Finally, exclusion is exposed through the sparsity of personal narratives under the same hashtags owing to masculine toxicity as well as the creation of unsafe spaces for gendered minorities to recount their experiences. I document and elaborate on the emergence of men’s rights activism and misogyny within the #MeTooIndia movement on digital spaces in the following chapter.

Although #MeToo has successfully brought a large congregation of women into the movement and transformed the digital landscape by creating pockets of security for urban women to engage openly in discussions of sex and power, the movement was met with criticism from prominent Indian feminists and scholars in academia. #MetooIndia moved away from marginalized (Dalit) voices to give a platform to media personalities and Bollywood in a rendition of the western trajectory of the feminist movement. In this way, the movement has laid bare practices of non-inclusivity on the platform with respect to its large focus on Bollywood celebrities and other well-known media personalities. It has failed to engage in discussions about the everyday experiences of sexual abuse and harassment of Dalit, trans women, women of lower caste and class, the LGBTQIA+ community, other marginalized, gendered and queer bodies, and women from rural communities that have vastly different experiences of oppression from elite, urban Indian women. As it was borrowed from the west and became transnational, it evoked a different response to the issues that Indian women face.

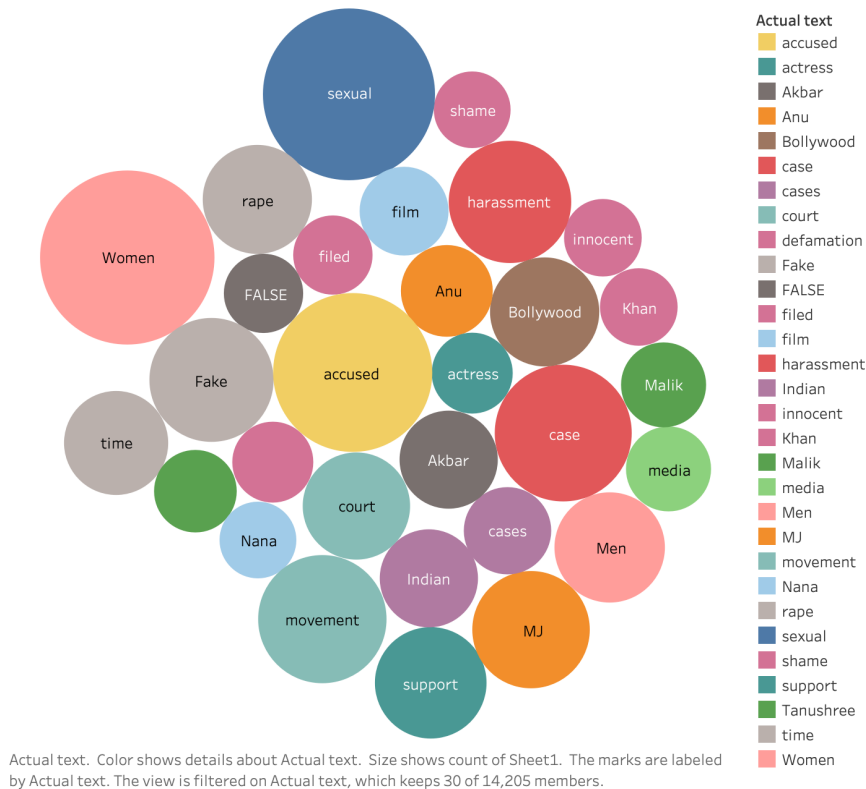
Prior work on the #MeToo in India, and specifically on the aspect of exclusion, uncovered fragmentation within the movement. Suman Mishra (2020) examines press coverage of the global #MeToo in India and asserts how the movement's focus on celebrity scandals has ignored ordinary women from marginalized communities. Palomita Pain (2020) also demonstrates through tweet and interview analysis that there is an exclusion of suburban voices and experiences within the movement. Both studies add to pre-existing work that evaluates and contextualizes #MeToo in India as a fourth-wave feminist movement by challenging the gradual erasure of collectivized marginalized feminist voices and the failure of the movement in bringing together multiple experiences as part of the discourse (Roy 2). I am specifically interested in bringing to light exclusion within the movement in the Indian context, with a focus on the reasons how/why exclusion becomes visible online. Findings

from the dataset reveal that #MeToo in India is indeed a non-inclusive movement at multiple levels. Illustrated below are three ways that exclusion becomes visible in the dataset.

Attention to media personalities and celebrities in #MeTooIndia

Exclusion in the movement is the product of increased attention to issues of sexual abuse, accusations, and public shaming in elite circles of well-known media personalities. Out of 7000 tweets, 2180 tweets focus on celebrities and media personalities, or public accusations regarding media personalities.

Attention to media personalities and celebrities



These tweets are expressed as both personal opinions by celebrities and non-celebrities alike, as well as part of news articles that discuss lives of the visible elite or provide updates on their high-profile cases. The figure above demonstrates the discourse of tweets that discuss #MeTooIndia issues for the visible elite in India. Discourse here is primarily focussed on prominent media personalities at the centre of #MeTooIndia. Most prominently featured in the dataset and the word cloud are four public personalities –

Tanushree Dutta, Nana Patekar, Priya Ramani, and MJ Akbar. Following Tanushree Dutta's accusation, 35 actresses/media personalities came forward with names. Among them was journalist Priya Ramani, who accused journalist and minister MJ Akbar of sexual harassment and misconduct. As the words in the figure "harassment," "cases," and "Bollywood" indicate, many of these public accusations are incorporated as part of Bollywood cancel culture and rarely follow legal proceedings or create proper debates surrounding issues of sex and power in the public sphere. Stories of media personalities and Bollywood celebrities monopolize the dataset, both as part of personal opinions or news articles, and participants express either support for the accused or disdain at how the industry operates. For instance, the users below speak to the toxic and unsafe culture in Bollywood.

Aaditya (@AadityaBagi). "I'm not surprised. With such goons and douchebags in Bollywood, the industry will never be a safe place for women. A tight slap on the face of #metooindia. The system has failed the victims while the perpetrators go scot free. May 6 2019.

Reshma Patel (@reshmapx). "When the girl rejects the male, he becomes aggressive and obviously can't take no for an answer. The problem with Bollywood is that they clearly don't care about women as its clearly evident with what's happening with the #Metooindia movement." July 7 2019.

Sentiment for the movement in the sample sways between positive and negative. Data analysis demonstrates that out of 7000 tweets, there are 80 tweets expressing positive sentiments for #MeToo India. On the other hand, 200 tweets expressed a deeply negative sentiment. The image below indicates that negative sentiment originates from the lack of trust in the movement owing to false allegations, purportedly fake cases, and the association with Bollywood. Words such as "fake," "true," and "false," appear most frequently in the discourse and indicate that participants are unsure of the process that public accusations take. Additionally, the use of words and hashtags like # "feminismiscancer," "#fakecases," and "#mentoo" stipulates misogyny and hate speech in direct association with a negative public sentiment about the movement.

In the context of Instagram, out of a dataset of 1000 posts, 400 are in relation to Bollywood and other well-known media personalities. The majority of these posts offer news

coverage of the “Bollywood drama” between the accused and the accuser, generate visibility and a platform for public accusations for celebrities, and engender the dissemination of Bollywood gossip through memes or jokes. The entire #MeTooIndia movement can be characterized as “Bollywood’s #MeToo reckoning.”

Marginalization

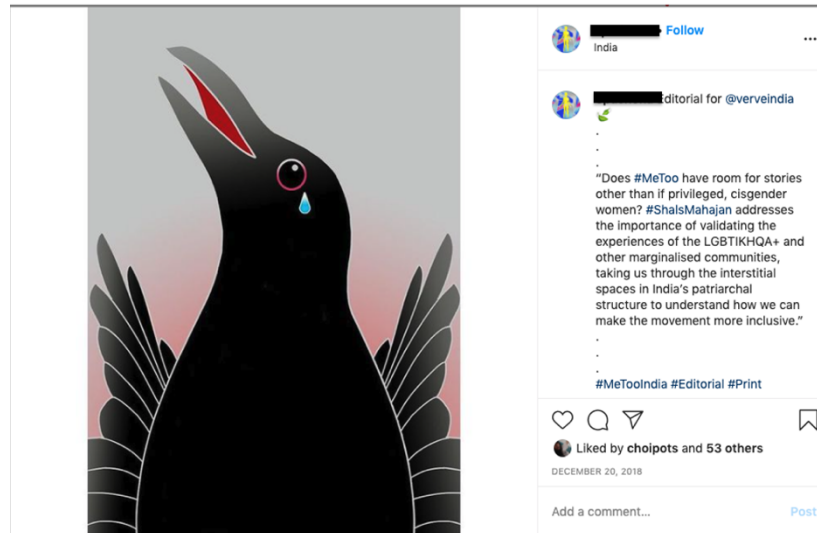
Twitter data reveals that non-inclusivity is also evidenced through lack of discussion about other marginal and gendered bodies. There is a veritable absence of discourse surrounding people from marginalized communities with respect to the number of tweets that employ clear linguistic markers of the issues they discuss. For instance, the word ‘marginalized’ occurs only once in the entire dataset, the word ‘caste’ appears 33 times, ‘rural’ occurs 13 times, ‘lgbtqia’ 13 times, ‘transgender’ 3 times, and ‘queer’ 6 times. The hashtag #LoSHA is only employed 50 times in the dataset containing 7000 tweets. Similarly on Instagram, out of 1000 posts on #MeTooIndia, merely 7 posts discuss Dalit or lower caste, lgbtqia, or rural women’s experience. #LoSHA is employed merely twice in the entire Instagram dataset.

Some tweets that employ these terms argue that the movement is largely non-inclusive at many levels and does not engage in fruitful discussions about sexual abuse for marginalized communities. For instance, India Culture Lab is a platform that calls for an intersectional understanding/discussion about the relationship between sex and power, particularly for the poor.

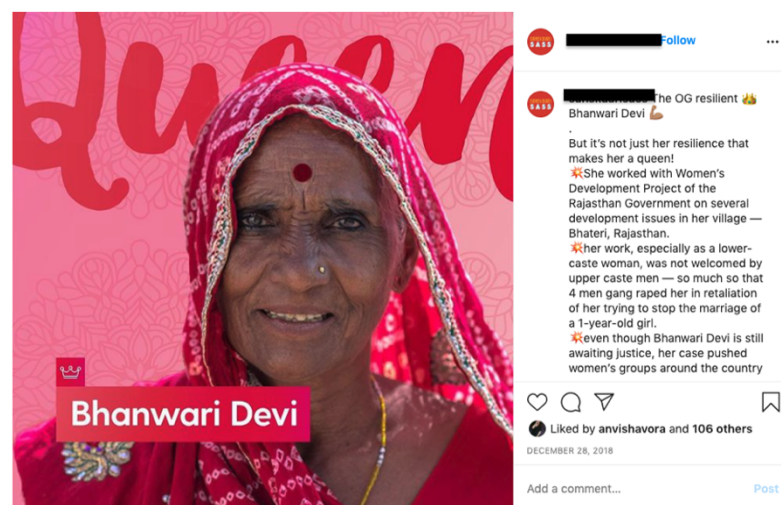
India Culture Lab (@IndiaCultureLab). “Of course, #MeTooIndia has not been successful in bringing out stories of women from all axes of caste, class and religion. For the most part in India, women who accuse their employees of sexual harassment are then accused of theft.” February 16 2019.

Madan Pally discusses how the movement does not cater to the largely invisible and voiceless population, or their issues. #MeToo in India has garnered a vehement backlash for the alienation and isolation of minorities.

Madan (@mnpally). “Without breaking inherent power structures (#feudalism inspired by #brahmanism) in the rural areas, this #MeTooIndia movement will remain fringe, there is no point even in raging when 99% of the victims (rural Dalits, minorities and BCs) have no voice.” October 28 2018.



As the above tweet and Instagram post argue, the voices of marginalized communities at “interstitial spaces within the movement”, including those of Dalit women, trans women and other gendered minorities, will continue to be suppressed and replaced by voices of cis-gendered urban women. That said, one of the few stories that Instagram offers in relation to marginalized voices is that of Bhanwari Devi, a Dalit woman who was raped in retaliation for her attempt to intervene into a one year old’s marriage.



#LoSHA, on the other hand, has provided a moment of “coming-out” for students undergoing traumatic experiences on campuses, and has retained its focus on minoritized communities. Zubaan Books speaks for #LoSHA that started a genuine discussion of sexual abuse and rape on campuses.

Zubaan Books (@ZubaanBooks). “@DivyaKandukuri: As a #Bahujan woman, ‘due process’ will most probably not help me until I’m late in my fifties. Having studied at the LSR and DU, I’ve lost faith in these systems and supposed ‘due processes.’ #LoSHA was the breaking the silence moment for me. #SoManyFeminisms.” February 17 2019.

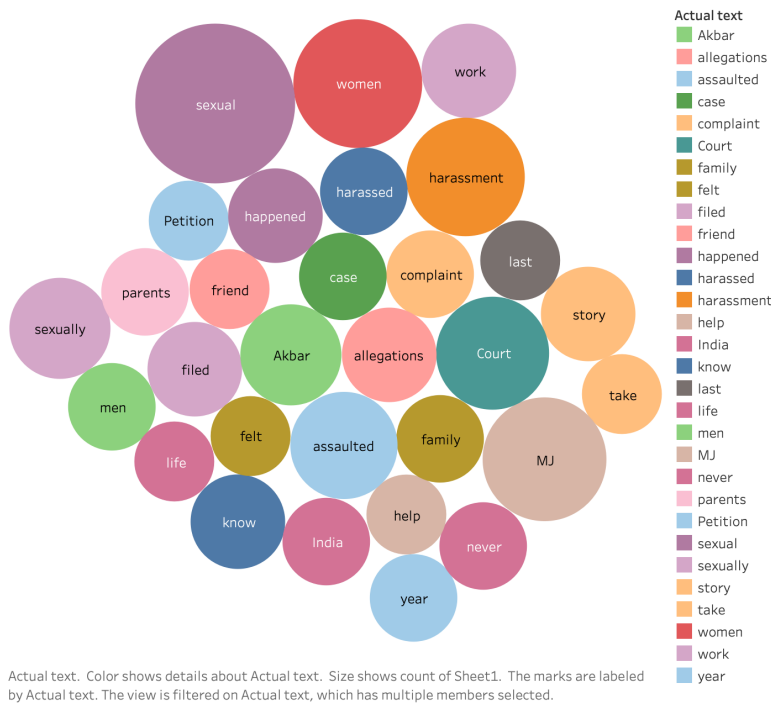
The post below adds to this discussion, and argues that #LoSHA has continued to raise difficult questions about sexual harassment and abuse of women on university campuses using the hashtag #MeTooIndia.



Lack of personal experiences, and hate speech online

Finally, exclusion becomes visible on the platform through the scarcity of personal experiences. The discourse surrounding the #MeToo movement in India lacks real narratives, personal anecdotes, stories, and subjective experiences of women. In the entire dataset, 6186 tweets have been coded as opinions expressed by users. However, a mere 146 tweets express the everyday experiences, sexist or uncomfortable encounters, and/or narratives of sexual violence of users.

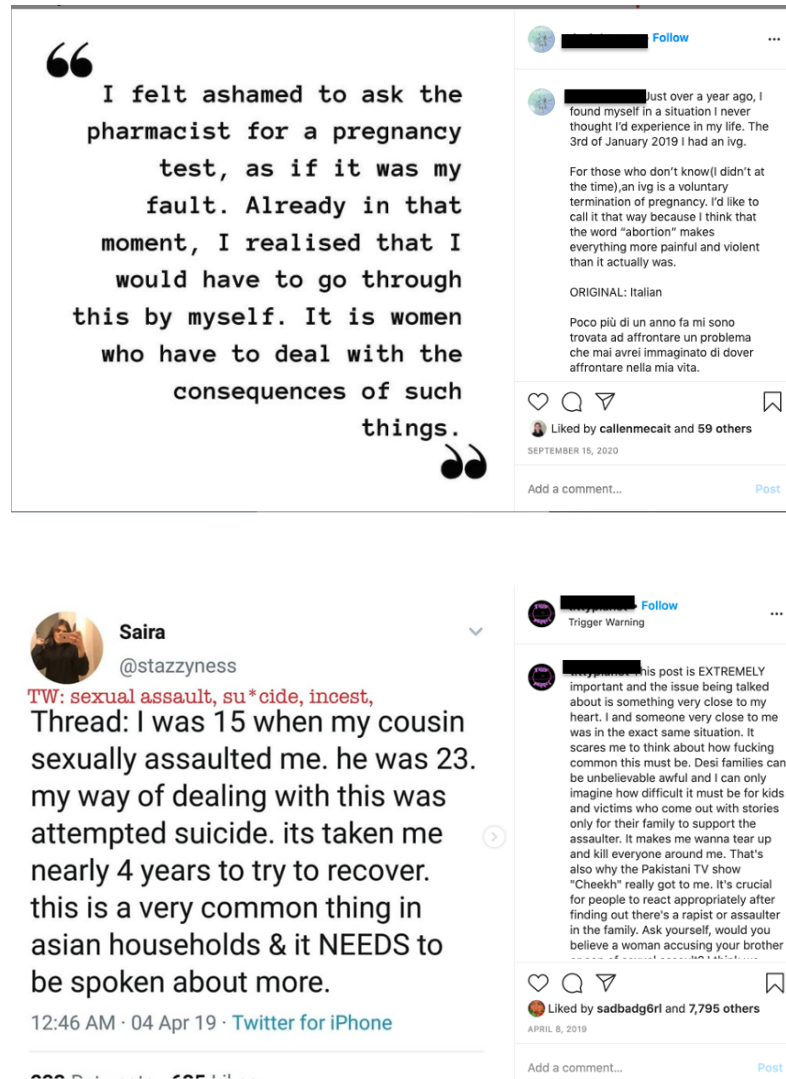
Personal Experiences in #MeTooIndia



For tweets that are labelled as personal experiences, the image above demonstrates that the discourse includes words like “story,” “sexual(ly),” “harassment,” “assault,” “complaints,” and “court”, indicating how participants construct their personal stories on sexual abuse and harassment in the digital public sphere. Similarly, in the case of Instagram, out of a dataset of 1000, a mere 51 posts discussed personal stories of sexual harassment and abuse. Some of the following tweets demonstrate how users use Twitter to discuss their personal trauma of sexual abuse:

Maya (@MayaS). “He began groping me in a way that made me uncomfortable. My desire disappeared. I moved away. He caught me and pushed me roughly to my knees on the dirty toilet floor. I froze. #Metooindia.” July 6 2019.

Swati (@S_Nirmal). “Had Worst experience today in a job interview. Some people just make you feel inferior and enjoy it. Interviewer was definitely sexist. Some corporate firms need servants not employees. #metooindia. I’m glad I didn’t get the job. Will be praying for their current staff. July 25 2019.



The tweets and posts above speak to personal struggles of women in India, where no physical space including a workplace or a domestic space is devoid of predators. The women in these stories employ social media platforms to share their experiences and create broader awareness in the context of sexual abuse. However, their voices are fewer, and therefore less visible in comparison to the sea of #MeToo discourse on celebrities..

One of the underlying reasons for lack of sharing of personal stories is the presence of hate speech, violence, and masculine toxicity directed towards women that acts as a deterrent in participation and creates unsafe spaces for women and gendered minorities to recount their experiences with sexual abuse. #MeTooIndia, “hijacked” and targeted by men’s rights activists, often drowns the feminist voice. The following chapter illuminates the emergence

of both a particular breed of men's rights activism that has penetrated the movement that has usurped the hashtag, as well as misogyny and violence against women who dare to speak out. Qualitative inductive coding and critical discourse analysis expose the exclusion of marginalized gendered bodies on digital platforms and exposure and visibility for high-profile media cases, a demonstrable lack of discourse about the marginalized, and the lack of voices narrating their personal stories and experiences of sexual abuse online.

Ultimately, #MeToo in India emerges as a deeply fragmented, ruptured and exclusionary movement. Although it can potentially be employed as a platform for more robust conversations on issues of power and sexual abuse for a myriad of marginalized communities, it continues to expose a veritable absence of marginalized voices. Bollywood and other Indian media are forms of entertainment that unite the rich and the poor, the upper, middle and lower classes in Indian society, and therefore influence social rules in subtle ways. However, the industry has also been marred by a long history of female objectification, sexism, and a blatant display of patriarchy on screen. For some, #MeToo is now directed as a literal and symbolic gesture towards attempting to eliminate sexual abuse and deep sexism in the largest platform for entertainment. At present, #MeTooIndia carries the burden of what is now a public spectacle of shaming and accusations of public personalities in India. The movement does little to divorce itself from larger discussions outside these circles of elitism. This shift towards the urban visible elite already engenders a deep divide and exclusivity. The current movement, despite the political changes it seeks to bring about and the dialogues it wishes to have with women across the country, "has laid bare deep disagreements and divides among feminist voices and publics" (Roy 2).

#MeTooIndia, not unlike its western counterpart, is invested in uncovering sexism, abuse, and rape among the highest echelons of Indian society—the entertainment industry. The digital platform has enabled celebrities to employ social media for a "coming-out" in the

public sphere. As a digital feminist movement, it mostly caters to the already visible, elite, and urban women who have many followers and whose voices are amplified through social media. Others believe that #MeToo only engages in false accusations by public personalities vying for attention and therefore cannot connect this movement to activism for Indian women. Thus, the #MeToo movement in India becomes exclusive in how it defines feminism, and whose voice it constitutes. The new cyber-movement so far has been largely confined to a specific group of urban middle-class women with access to technology, where it ought to be about LGTBQIA+ subjects, women living in societies dominated by primitive sexism, women without access/resources, Dalit women, and transgender women, who are unable to participate in these discussions or share their experiences of assault owing to the boundedness of these spaces. It is “ultimately the voices of the middle class, journalists, celebrities and other professionals that constitute the Me in the #MeToo India movement” (Roy 2). For the #MeToo Movement, a woman is the cis-gendered, upper-caste brahmanical counterpart that participates in dialogues to pave the way forward for feminism (7).

The term brahmanical refers to a patriarchal ideology in India by which the upper castes (Brahmins) have ritually, socially and economically marginalized both lower caste communities and women. Caste and gender hierarchy are the organizing principles of the brahmanical social order. #MeTooIndia exposes hypocrisy and anxiety, raising questions about the everyday, supposedly harmless and largely normalized practices of sexual harassment and molestation that affect women in public spaces and within families across different markers of identity (Roy 2). It is important for this lesson in intersectional roots to be reflected in the #MeToo narrative. This means seeking out and listening to narratives beyond those of upper-caste, middle-class, non-disabled, cisgender women in urban areas. Although the movement has been widely embraced for its impact factor, it has revealed the fault lines in feminist strategies of activism in India. Finally, exclusion is demonstrated in the

lack of participation, and the relative absence of personal anecdotes, stories and narratives by participants. Although digital spaces can be closed and inaccessible for many women in India, other reasons for lack of participation may be attributed to hate speech, emotional abuse and vilification of women online. Participants recede into toxic behaviour and vilify the movement for its fake cases and accusations, or trivialize it for its lack of legal process. These opinions slide into hate speech and/or exhibit violence against women.

It is important, therefore, for cyber-clusters on social media to distance themselves from predetermined essential boundaries of identity categorizations. Questions on feminist embodiment on digital spaces necessitate a more forward and nuanced understanding of what constitutes feminism and what constitutes a woman, to enable navigation of these complex new territories and self-design identities and desires, particularly for feminist movements in the Global South. Digital spaces must carve out social spaces for more inclusive dialogue that unifies instead of divides in the era of virtual protest in feminist activism. Indian feminism must move away from a western idea of feminism; from essentialized and binary notions of gender identity, from where it locates itself currently for the visible elite. Instead, Indian feminism should underscore different axes of feminist identities for Indian women, look outside the realm of traditionally defined womanhood, and include other gendered and minoritized communities within this discourse. #MeToo must look towards a deeper discussion of everyday issues that women and minorities face in India. If feminism is to be a truly liberatory politics seeking the freedom of all oppressed people and the emancipation of the poor, it has to recognize that feminism has to be an inclusive, intersectional movement.

Misogyny and the Emergence of the Men's Rights Movement

In this chapter, I show how digital technologies can be exploited by far-right nationalist groups in the Indian context to actively silence and target the marginalized feminist subaltern. Specifically, I uncover patterns of misogyny and the emergence of a men's rights activism that seek to decentre feminist voices by usurping the #MeTooIndia on Twitter and Instagram.

Digital platforms in India are becoming increasingly violent and misogynist spaces, thereby creating unsafe spaces for the congregation and interaction of women and other gendered minorities. The presence of hate speech and masculine toxicity acts as a deterrent to participation for women online and their engagement in the public process of sharing personal stories and experiences of sexual abuse. In tandem with the rise in digital feminist activism on social media platforms, and the resurgence of feminist communities in new media (Mendes et al. 1), there is an increasingly visible digital culture that engenders a complex and toxic space for gendered bodies online. The #MeToo movement in India, as a manifestation of the global #MeToo, has been invested in the empowerment of Indian women since its inception in October 2017. However, despite the success of #MeTooIndia in creating a much-needed discourse on sexual abuse and harassment at the intersection of sex, power and politics and facilitating feminist experiences of 'coming-out' on social media with personal narratives, the digital discourse surrounding the feminist movement is infiltrated by organized campaigns of vilification and objectification of women. Here, I study how patterns of misogyny and men's rights activism emerge within #MeTooIndia. Using discourse analysis, inductive coding, and critical reading of the corpus of tweets and Instagram posts, I ask the following questions:

1. Does the discourse surrounding #MeTooIndia demonstrate mediated hate speech, violence against women, misogyny, and an emerging men's rights activism?

2. If so, what is the language of violence against women?
3. How is #MeTooIndia affected by the hijacking and appropriation by men's rights activists?
4. How do the far-right heteropatriarchal and masculinist societies on social media employ assertions of independence in their call for men's rights activism?

In the context of #MeTooIndia, participants recede into toxic behaviour and vilify the movement for its alleged fake cases (using #FakeCases) and accusations, or trivialize it for its lack of legal process. Although feminist digital activism in the Global South begins to enable the construction of safe feminist subaltern counterpublics for self-expression, congregation and interaction, Indian women from marginalized communities who participate in the discourse surrounding sexual abuse in India are left feeling unsafe, alienated, and silenced on social media platforms. The study of the emergence of men's rights activism and misogyny in this context is significant because the discourse around #MeTooIndia is 'hijacked' and targeted by men's rights activists, leading to the effective erasure of feminist struggles and creating barriers to the participation and sharing of personal stories surrounding sexual abuse on digital spaces. The mobilization of a men's rights movement usurps the discourse on women's rights and their testimonies of sexual abuse and harassment through the use of several hashtags including #MenToo, #FakeCases, and #FeminismisCancer. Digital misogyny is equally manifested in the resurgences of the imaginaries of nationalist discourse that occur in India's national language, Hindi. The congregation of far-right heteropatriarchal and masculinist communities on social media employ assertions of independence and free speech to not merely engage in harassment campaigns against supporters of #MeToo, but also in their call for men's rights activism in India. In this way, Hindutva activists and organizations appropriate feminist spaces through digital discourse in English, and the national language, Hindi, to ultimately arrive at a point of gendered exclusion and silencing

of feminist collectives on social media platforms. Misogyny also materializes in the dataset in the form of humour on social media platforms. Tweets, Instagram posts and memes exhibit nationalist imaginaries rooted in sexist patriarchy. The emergence of digital misogyny, in essence, reveals that socially dominant groups intentionally target feminist collectives and drown the voice of the digital subaltern. In the context of #MeTooIndia, digital misogyny engenders an active attempt in the insertion and redirection of the feminist discourse to discuss men's rights in the country, subverting the practice of testimonial sharing for women online and inducing fear of participation for women in the digital public sphere.

Digital Misogyny: An Introduction

In order to document the increasing disruption that men's rights activism poses to Indian digital feminism, I begin by discussing the histories of digital misogyny in India. With the participatory nature of new media, social media platforms have become a "breeding ground for the expression and dissemination of exclusionary, intolerant and extremist discourse" (KhosraviNik & Esposito 47) and the "display of errant behaviour" (Rajagopalan 741). Recent scholarship on digital hate has identified that cyberspaces "have become the new frontier for spreading hate, violence, hostility and intimidation" (Banks 234), particularly towards historically marginalized groups, including Indian women and queer collectives (KhosraviNik & Esposito 51). As Emma Jane contends, the increasing presence of gendered cyber hate and misogynistic violence (287) engenders the rise of a contemporary phenomenon that effectively "undermines women's rights, agency, identity, dignity and well-being" (Citron 411). According to Savigny and Srivastava, misogyny is both a "function and expression of violent patriarchy" (Savigny 42-43), and "takes on varied forms including gender discrimination, sexual harassment, violent and sexual objectification" (Srivastava et al. 111) on social media. Although platforms such as Twitter and Instagram are "ideally suited for political campaigns and feminist activism" (Barker & Jurasz 95), recent years have

demonstrated that women are subjected to increased gendered hostility, discrimination, harassment (746), online vitriol, vicious trolling, and abusive behaviour from men, and are either silenced or punished for public participation (Rajagopalan 746). Digital misogyny is particularly visible in fourth-wave digital feminist movements and “digital campaigns against sexual harassment, rape culture, workplace discrimination, and other types of harassment” (Srivastava et al. 112). According to authors Vickery and Everback, “mediated misogyny” (2018) often deliberately infiltrates feminist movements to incite violence, hate, and toxicity that is directed towards members. In the Indian context, several feminist movements online, including the Nirbhaya Delhi Rape Case and the recent #MetooIndia (112), have brought into focus the “power structures premised on masculine dominance, feminine subordination, and patriarchy” (Savigny 33). Heather Savigny locates misogyny in the global #MeToo movement through the markers of “male superiority structured around patriarchal rule and domination” (46). This implies that although the movement as a platform is open to a “wide range of feminist activists” (46), women face obstacles and challenges in the abuse and harassment they undergo online where “female sexuality is objectified without personal agency” (Rajagopalan 741). Women’s voices and personal experiences are policed, silenced, de-platformed, and drowned, this deliberate insertion of misogyny in social media creates an “unconscious acceptance of sexist norms in relation to women” (Savigny 43-44). In the context of #MetooIndia, I borrow Jean Chapman’s argument that “misogyny is rooted in brahmanical patriarchy,” and that digital violence is born out of an intention to maintain the status quo of male dominance, and an attempt to discipline women, drown their voices and right to a public platform (58). Sarah Benet-Weiser advocates an understanding of an emerging and powerfully resurgent form of digital misogyny claiming authority through its relationship to popular contemporary feminism and technologically mediated discourse, competing movements or competing populisms. She defines popular digital feminism as

marred by the “systemic attacks on women and women’s rights, and the perpetual dehumanization and devaluing of women on social networks” (2). She engages with the manifestation of popular misogyny in digital culture through the politics and economy of visibility that, according to her, legitimates the presence of patriarchal and violent misogyny and thus, “stacks the odds against feminism” (33). Therefore, the mechanism of visibility engenders the political desire to be seen, heard, acknowledged, and given a platform (22).

Men’s Rights Movement on Social Media

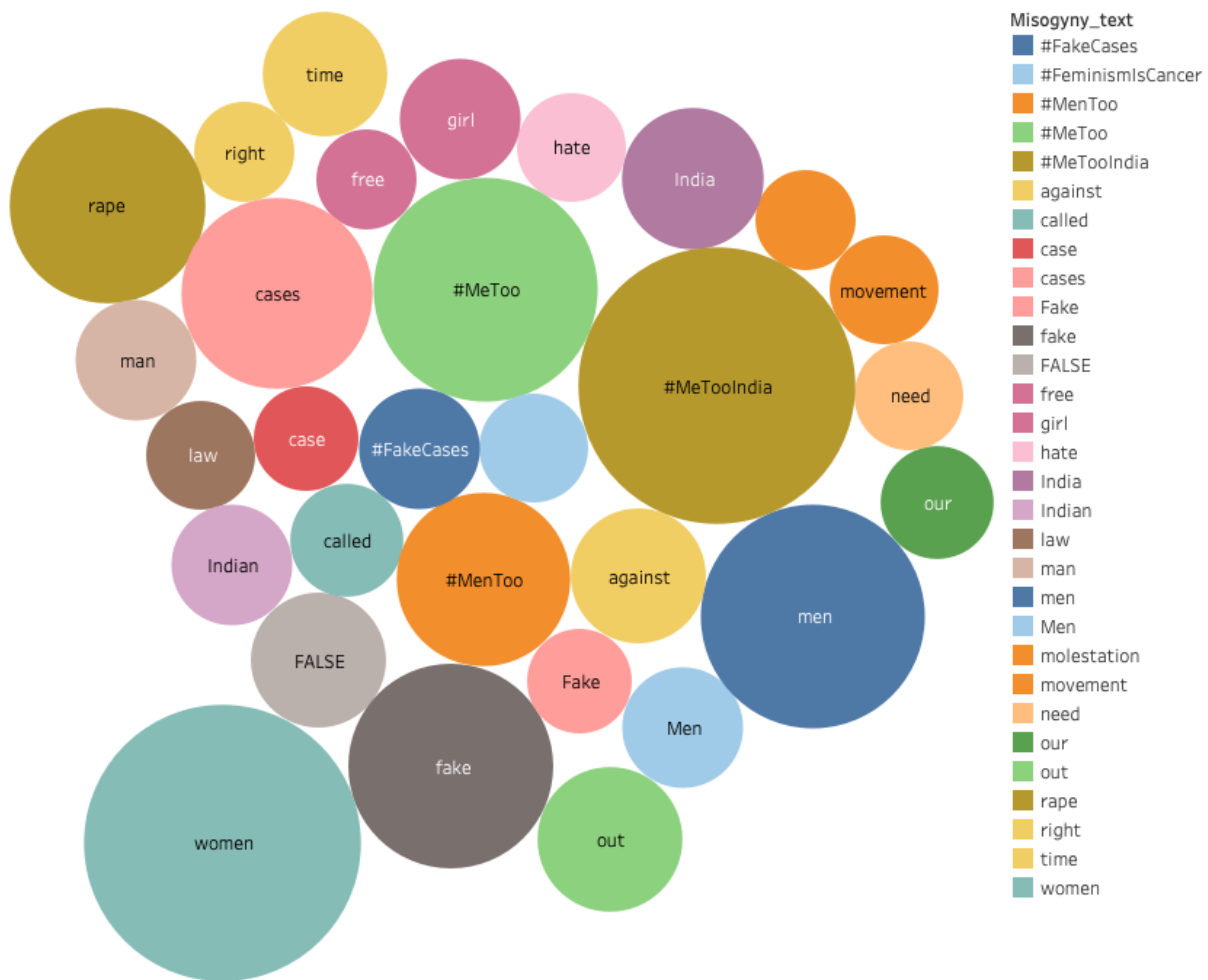
Benet-Weiser also studies digital misogyny through the emergent tactics of men’s rights groups that are either repeatedly deployed to diminish the power of popular feminism or are “dedicated to restoring the capacity of men and traditional structures of heteronormative masculinity and patriarchy” (35). The resurgence of men’s rights movements in contemporary feminism has “historical underpinnings of several ideologies that enable the resolution of the ‘crisis’ of masculinity” (Schmitz & Kazyak 2). The conception and foundation of men’s rights on digital platforms is framed as a “point of contrast in the cultural and political domination of feminism” (Rafail & Freitas 2) and as a political backlash against feminism (Schmitz & Kazyak 2). Contemporary men’s rights movements emerged in response to digital affirmations of womanhood and the feminist testimonial practice of disseminating personal stories. The insertion of men’s rights in feminist movements protects and oftentimes enables the “fabrications of male privilege that disempower women” (2) in both domestic as well as public and visible platforms. Chapman argues that violence against women, in this context, is framed within discourses of “gender justice, human rights, health and well-being, gendered violence, abuse, among others” (49). She declares that the infiltration of men’s voices in the digital public sphere is an attempt at an intimidation of women (52) and the subsequent derailing of digital feminisms. I evoke Srimati Basu’s argument on the men’s rights movement to bring clarity to the

contextualization of misogyny in India. Basu argues that men's rights activists, particularly in the Global South, are founded on the denial and minimization of women's rights, justice and equality, and the resulting gendered violence is a product of their demands for "equality in marriage, alimony, custody, equal protection from violence, and expenditure" in relation to women (51). The author asserts that the mobilization surrounding men's rights movements in India "signifies an ancient re-ordering of values around gender, the re-insertion of hegemonic masculinity" (49) and patriarchal values of "manhood and fatherhood" (51). Ultimately, in the context of #MeTooIndia, the objective of mobilization lies in the refusal to acknowledge and legitimize women's claims to bodily abuse and harassment through the use of multiple hashtags within the movement including #Mentoo, #Fakecases and #Feminismiscancer.

Digital Misogyny in #MeTooIndia

In the collected dataset on Twitter, out of 7000 tweets, 716 demonstrate a deep-seated misogyny and employ hashtags such as #MenToo, #FakeCases, and #FeminismisCancer in an attempt to discursively delegitimize women's stories, or direct attention to the inequalities and injustices meted out to Indian men in contemporary Indian society with the #Metoo movement and the passing of the adultery law. Displayed below is an image indicating the most frequently occurring words that pertain to misogyny within the #MeTooIndia movement.

Misogyny in MeToo India



The lack of trust in the movement along with the active efforts to de-platform women demonstrated in that the word frequency point to false allegations of rape, sexual abuse and harassment, fake cases. Words such as “fake,” “true,” and “false,” appear most frequently in the discourse. Additionally, the image also demonstrates use of words and hashtags like #“FeminismisCancer, #FakeCases,” and “#MenToo” that stipulate misogyny and hate speech in the movement. In addition to the English dataset, out of 230 total tweets collected in Hindi, 88 were manually annotated as misogynist in either their refusal to listen to women’s voices, or in their deliberate insertion of masculinity and male superiority through the argument of rising false or fake rape cases in India. On the other hand, Instagram does not demonstrate a statistically high number of misogynistic posts within #MeTooIndia. A mere 11 out of a 1000

posts collected were labelled misogynistic. However, Instagram has other hashtags under which digital misogyny thrives. I found 314 separate posts under #MenToo, and 1940 posts under #FakeCases displayed under different labels on the platform. Although outside the purview of this research, the presence of these hashtags on Instagram evidences how digital misogyny surfaces on social media. Therefore, we can assume that there is evidence on both platforms that #MeToo in India is being mocked by some for attempting to champion women. Below are examples of digital misogyny and toxic masculinity on Twitter that are introduced to lower morale in the movement and breed discomfort and anxiety in the minds of feminist activists. More often, these discourses can create fear with respect to relaying experiences of coming-out in public without anonymity.

Lavania (@utkarsh_lav). "Alright, princess, calm your titties down. No need to get abusive here. Hope you don't do #metooindia for it. July 25, 2019, 2:40 p.m. Tweet.

Bhavna (@bpatel19). "Even the bible says women should learn in silence. The man was not deceived but the woman was and became a transgressor. #MeToo #MeTooIndia that runs on to support victims and women taking the stand to speak out should learn their limitations given to them by all means of God." October 28th, 2018. 6:47 p.m. Tweet.

The specific tweets above demonstrate hate, violence and emotional abuse propagated against women online. Misogynistic discourse here functions on imaginaries of sexism, and heteropatriarchal codes of masculinity that delegitimize feminist discourse and offer a violent threat for the mere act of speaking up and sharing the trauma of the survivor's sexual abuse.

The users above argue that women should learn their own limitations in society and refrain from participation in the public sphere.

Nitin (@NaiveIndian). "Women think of themselves as strong, independent & equal to men in all terms. Yet, they complain it's a male dominated society. They want feminism, but enjoy chivalry at the same time. #Feminismiscancer #MeToo #MeTooIndia #feminist #Feminism." October 28th, 2018, 5:15 p.m. Tweet.

SarthakK (@Sarthak68). "I don't hate all women. I hate feminists. I hate women who take undue advantage of their exclusive rights. I hate women who hate men. I hate women who fight for feminism and chivalry at the same time. #FeminismisCancer #MeTooIndia." April 4th, 2018, 11:15 p.m. Tweet.

Vinod (@Vinod_M). "When relationships go sour, it becomes #Metoo #MeTooIndia. Men need to stop having relationships with women as they are frauds." January 14th, 2019, 12:11 p.m. Tweet.

Tweets also locate their misogyny in the patriarchal re-assertion of women's belonging in society and the re-affirmation of the superiority of a postcolonial nationalist Indian male. Brahmanical patriarchal traditions have permeated Indian mythology and the country's cultural, social and political landscape. Misogyny in the Indian context is expressed here in the form of belittling women, the commodification of their gendered bodies, and the denial of equal rights and justice to participate in the public sphere. Here, digital misogyny seems to emerge as a means to protect society's ordering of the sexes. The above tweets carry the hashtag #FeminismisCancer and a vitriolic sentiment and deep revulsion towards Indian feminism. Users define feminism as cancerous because its spread has allowed women to speak up, and according to the tweets, "take undue advantage of the system." Simultaneously, the posts assume that feminists are "frauds," and should, therefore, not be accommodated by Indian males, the patriarchs of society. The insertion of #FeminismisCancer within #MeTooIndia demonstrates the deliberate process of the delegitimization of both the Indian feminist movement as well as the women who 'dare' to participate and/or engage with it. Therefore, the use of the above hashtags demonstrates the refusal to listen to, and the active denial of, survivor stories and experiences. Similarly, other posts practice the shaming and demeaning of women by labelling them "characterless." For instance,

Nikhil (@NikhilD). "Isn't she the one who slept with the hero for a 2 min role ? I want to know how many times she slept with the hero? Now she can drag #Metooindia to a new twist and turn?" March 3rd, 2018, 4:19 p.m. Tweet.

Bibban (@Baby040). "Women who tell their fake #metooindia stories are characterless...no one is going to believe you except immoral people." Feb 16th, 2019, 7:43 a.m. Tweet.

The above posts characterize female Bollywood actors and women that use social media platforms to share their personal narratives of sexual abuse as "immoral" and dishonourable. Similarly, the Instagram post below argues how Bollywood stars 'allow' themselves to be sexually objectified for film songs, but are able to testify publicly against co-stars on social media. A woman's worth, dignity and pride are continuously challenged,

and gendered bodies online are perpetually painted with labels, and deemed unworthy in society.



Here, misogynistic labelling functions as another layer of abuse, objectification, and harassment directed at women and becomes synonymous with the practice of victim blaming in Indian patriarchal culture. Shalu Nigam defines the culture of violence and silence in India in relation to the privilege and entitlement that a man enjoys in society. Victim-blaming, therefore, engenders “social passivity and makes it more difficult for women to report violence” (135). Although the feminist movement engendered a visibly public trial on social media platforms and the lack of legal processes, #MetooIndia eventually became a platform for users to silence women’s voices and/or effectively remove their safe spaces. Patriarchy and misogyny, as deeply imbricated structures of power, seek to maintain the status quo of power and impose the order of sexes and expectations of duty based on sex.

In addition to the exhibition of hate speech, violence, and distrust of women, misogyny also manifests in the insertion of men’s right activism that is founded on the flood of “fake cases” that lead to accusations within the #MeTooIndia. Here I borrow from Srimati Basu’s characterization of men’s rights movements as a form of mobilization that enables the “re-assertion of the hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal order” (49). For example,

Sanket (@SanketV). “For how long will the #social platform be used to #defame #men? Where is the equality, justice and equal rights that we brag about. Why should men suffer humiliation and lose job because someone tweeted? #Mentoo #MeTooindia. July 7th, 2019, 8:32 p.m. Tweet.

KavitaM (@Kavita_M57). “Wonder how many such fake allegations will surface in the #MeTooIndia movement. What would be the punishment meted out to women making false allegations? Do they even realise how they destroy a man's reputation, career, marriage and entire life for their own ulterior motives? Shame.” October 14th, 2018, 4:06 p.m. Tweet.

Aashima (@AashimaM). “Men are also very unsafe in India. You can see a tsunami of false cases of dowry and rape cases in India #Metooindia #Mentoo.” October 14th, 2018, 4:06 p.m. Tweet.

Neena (@Neen1). “Innocent boys suffered so much due to shameless and homeless ladies. But women making fake molestation allegations are never punished. Shameful. Fake molestation cases have become an epidemic. Stop this liberalism, stop India. It's fatal for our manhood. #MenToo #Metooindia.” October 14th, 2018, 4:06 p.m. Tweet.

In the above tweets, I contend that users engage with the hashtag #MenToo in order to divert attention towards men's issues, and as a form of disruption in the discussion on women's rights in the subsequent retelling of heteropatriarchal narratives on social media. Users offer exaggerated claims of false or fake allegations that “destroy a man's career, life and manhood” without any evidence or validation. They readily accuse and blame women and label them “shameless.” The tweets essentially seek to “save men” from women and feminism, and re-centre the narratives of men by usurping the #MeTooIndia movement.

Tweets in Hindi follow a similar trend of engagement with #FakeCases and the dehumanization of women who speak out on social media. Yet again, digital misogyny emerges in larger numbers in the dataset in an attempt at re-centring masculinity, patriarchy and male dominance in society. The following tweet employs #FakeCases to demonstrate simultaneously an active hatred for feminism and the supposed ‘oppression’ of men at the hands of Indian women. For instance,

Atul Chaudary. (@AtulRCh). “सही पकड़े है #MeTooIndia सच्चाई यही है सफल आदमी के पतन के पीछे एक महिला होती है #FakeCases एक extortion , बदले , ईर्ष्या के लिए फाइल किए जा रहे है देखने वाली बात कब संज्ञान लेंगे ? इन सब पुरुषों के पुदो के लिए.” February 7th, 2019, 4:29 p.m. Tweet.

[Translation: You got it right! Behind the downfall of a successful man is a woman #FakeCases Filed for an extortion, revenge, jealousy]

MyNation Atul Chaudary. (@AtulRChaudhary). “देश का कानून बहुत कमजोर है। महिला सशक्तिकरण के नाम पर पुरुषों पर अत्याचार हो रहा है। #Mentoo #Metooindia.” September 29th, 2019, 4:11 p.m. Tweet.

[Translation: The law of the land is very weak. Men are being oppressed in the name of female empowerment.]

Amrita (@AmritaP71). “#Metooindia भारत में होता रेप कानून का भारी दुरुपयोग ...आधे रेप मामले होते फर्जी पैसा ऐठने या रंजिश के लिए दहेज कानून के बाद बना रेप कानून दुरुपयोग का सबसे बड़ा हथियार। पुरुषों को फंसाने के लिए बन रहे नए नए कानून.” October 1st, 2020, 2:51 a.m. Tweet.

[Translation: Rape law has been heavily misused in India... Half of the rape cases would have been for money. After the dowry law, the rape law became the biggest weapon of abuse. New laws being made to implicate men]

The above tweet references the anti-rape crime law that was drafted following the gruesome rape and murder of Jyoti Singh, also called Nirbhaya, in New Delhi. The law upholds stricter punishments for rape and seeks to punish sex crimes with death for repeat sex-offenders. According to the user, however, the anti-rape and dowry laws have been employed as ‘weapons’ against men who are implicated in false cases of #MetooIndia by women. This illuminates the marked revulsion for feminism/feminists that emerges in the digital discourse. The arguments above seem to highlight the inequalities and oppression that men suffer at the hands of women. Here, I go back to Chapman’s argument on brahmanical patriarchy to interpret the resurgence of toxic masculinity in digital spaces. Chapman defines Brahmanism in the cycle of birth and rebirth in an Indian women’s life that carries values and ideologies of chastity, fidelity (54), domesticity, and utter obedience to the patriarchs for salvation. She contends that:

Misogyny that is born out of brahmanical patriarchy is impunity to violate and discipline women; to contest their access to the public domain; to challenge or subvert their determination to speak and act for themselves and to preserve male dominance. (Chapman 58)

In the context of #MeTooIndia, digital misogyny that emerges in both English and the national language, Hindi, are an attempt at the subordination of women, the erasure of their

right to a safe public space, and the return to brahmanical patriarchy. I argue that the deliberate de-centring of women's stories and experiences in sexual abuse, the re-centring of male 'oppression' owing to the supposed tsunami of fake cases and allegations, the engagement with hashtags such as #FeminismisCancer, and #MenToo within the #MeTooIndia platform are acts of violence against Indian women. As Chapman states, violence in the digital public sphere is meant as a strategic distraction and political delegitimization of women's rights, issues and bodies (52) and is intended to preserve the male ego. Where misogyny in offline public spaces takes the form of "sexual harassment, verbal and physical abuse in the street and workplace, stalking, kidnapping, misogynist killings such as mutilation murder, rape and murder (52), in the digital sphere it manifests as an emotional and verbal threat, passive aggression, dehumanization of gendered bodies, delegitimizing of women's issues, and a diversion from debates on sexual abuse to imaginaries of oppression for men. Sarah Benet-Weiser describes the practices indicative of both popular feminism and its relation to contemporary and/or 'popular misogyny' that is a product of fear and aggression towards a growing feminist threat online. She identifies a politics of visibility in the "context of available structures for popular feminism including media companies, corporations, and the technology industries" (24) within which digital feminisms must operate. In the context of #MeTooIndia, both the demand and the politics of visibility are what grant the digital movement its flexibility and success. The "mechanisms of visibility that engender the desire of women to be seen, heard, acknowledged, and given a platform" (74) within #MetooIndia is usurped by the men's rights movement. Therefore, shaping the feminist movement with hashtags #FeminismisCancer, #MenToo, and #FakeCases, and de-centring women's voices from the platform is a political and heteropatriarchal strategy towards visibility.

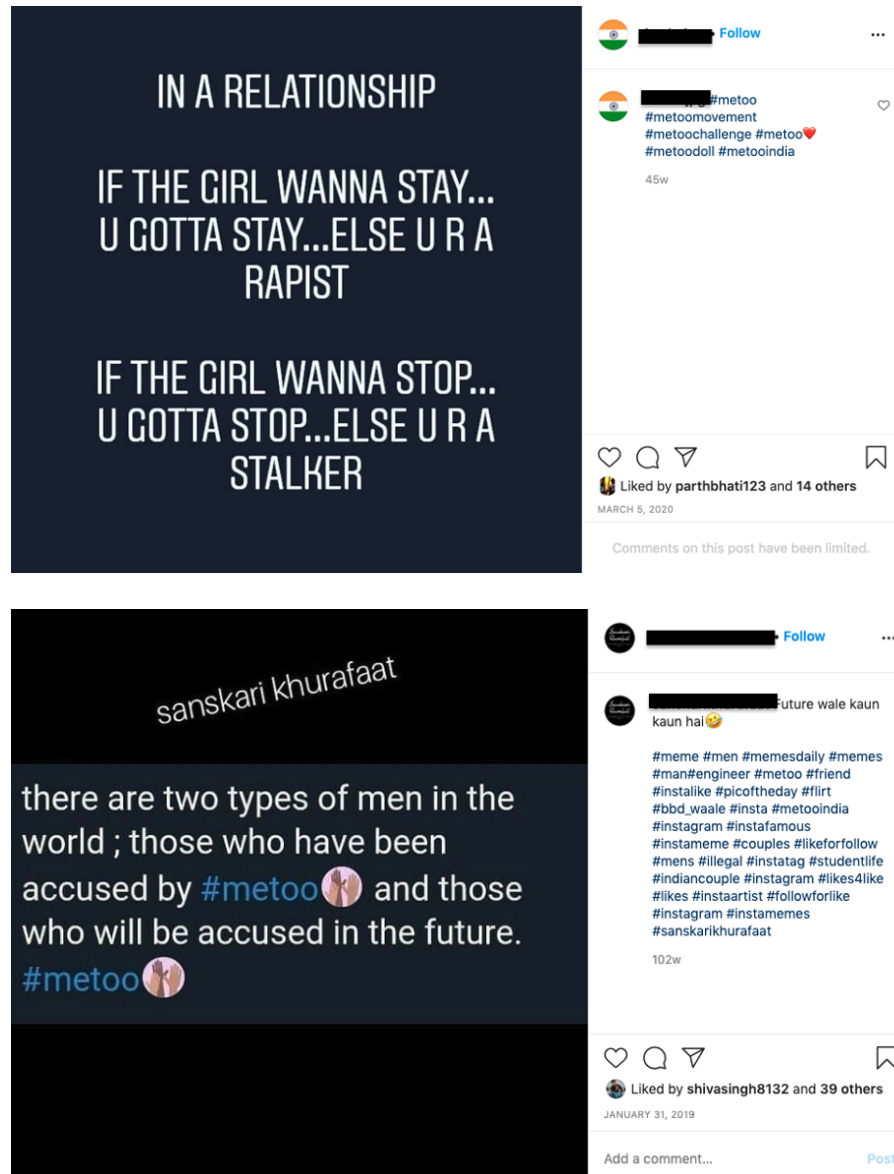
Finally, I argue that digital misogyny emerges in this context through the display of humour on Twitter, and particularly through the use and expression of memes on Instagram that are an equal attempt to derail and/or delegitimize the movement. For instance,

Pragathi (@Deva_Praghi). “Found my old schoolmate on Facebook today. I just told her I missed those school days. She replied immediately - #MeToo. I got so scared that I blocked her immediately. #MetooIndia.” October 14th, 6:59 p.m. Tweet.



The above tweet and meme represent passive and non-violent forms of sexism and misogyny that are founded on the silencing of women on digital platforms. Similar to Section 377, misogyny is visibilized on Twitter and Instagram in the form of a thriving joke and meme culture that either intentionally or unintentionally results in drowning the voices of feminist survivors. Furthermore, the memes such as the one above, attempt to mock the legitimacy of the movement and re-emphasize that the #MetooIndia was created by feminists to target rich men to accuse and lay sexual allegations against. Similarly, the Instagram posts below showcase the supposed ‘power’ that women carry in the world of #MeTooIndia, where they are able to end a man’s career, relationship or life in relation to the possible accusations and sexual allegations. These arguments create the illusion that women are ‘speaking out’ for attention, and/or they already live in society with the power and the right to their voice.

However, digital platforms are some of the only relatively safe spaces that many contemporary Indian women have access to; where they can speak out somewhat safely against their abuser, or simply share their testimonials and traumas of violence.



Misogynistic humour also demonstrates the unwillingness to listen, to share their space with survivors, and silence the subaltern voice. Humour and other ways that digital misogyny emerges online equally shed light on how heteropatriarchal and nationalist communities oftentimes use divergent practices to create their own far-right collectives, or nationalist imaginaries through the practice of trolling, meme and visual culture. Hindutva

collectives employ strategies of violent misogyny that are built into Hindu nationalism and brahmanical patriarchy as a tool for control of minoritized and gendered bodies. The digression of the female body from the Hindu brahmanical systems of domesticity, obedience and acquiescence are punished through acts of aggression, moral policing and silencing of narratives that emerge from the female body. This is true in the context of #MeTooIndia, where women and women's narratives are subject to intense scrutiny, moral policing, and silencing; where feminism and its spread in India is considered cancerous; where passive aggression emerges in tandem, both through the presence of meme humour and in the mobilization of a men's rights collective where the narratives of oppression of Indian men are re-centred.

Conclusion(s)

Comparative Analysis – Bridging Gendered Digital Movements in India

Queer and Feminist Digital Activism in India: At the Intersection of Power, Gender, and Technology in the Global South

In this concluding chapter, I provide a comparative analysis to bridge the gap between the Indian digital queer and feminist movements around Section 377 and MeToo India. I examine the relationship between technology and activism in India, and the role that digital infrastructures play in the development of gendered digital protest. I demonstrate how social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram shape discourse surrounding digital activism, and how digital technologies both enable and disrupt subaltern voices, narratives and bodies in Indian cyberspaces.

To engage in the discussion surrounding technological affordances and constraints in relation to digital protest, I combine textual and visual analysis to demonstrate that Indian women and LGBTQIA+ communities construct individual and collective identities through personal narratives of ‘coming-out’ and the sharing of testimonies of sexual violence. Queer and feminist counterpublics and affective networks of empathy, kinship and solidarity are forged through the use of protest hashtags to not merely raise awareness about queer bodies and violence against women, but to push for legal frameworks that grant bodily autonomy, agency and rights to gender minorities in India. I argue that fourth-wave digital gender movements are reflective of transnational empathy, friendship, and support, particularly from Indian diasporic communities in Canada.

Simultaneously, however, I demonstrate that digital technologies also hinder the amplification of marginalized voices, and create barriers in participation, representation, and inclusion online. Despite the construction of safe spaces and subaltern counterpublics on Twitter and Instagram, both digital queer and the feminist movements in India are exclusive, and lack individual representation and voluntary participation of women and LGBTQIA+

groups online. My work, here, also speaks to the emerging nationalist discourse in the form of misogyny and homophobia, particularly in regional languages such as Hindi and Tamil that occur both in the form of textual and visual rhetoric. In this chapter, I attempt to summarize the above findings and find common ground between the digital queer and feminist movements in India. I examine how the discourse surrounding Section 377 and MeToo India both shapes and is shaped by social media platforms, and how digital infrastructures both empower and hinder the development of subaltern identities and voices. In this context, I add to this discussion by speaking to the digital divide at the intersection of power, gender, and technology, both in the Indian and broadly in the context of the Global South.

Identity construction – Postcolonial and gender identity

As global and digitally networked phenomena, both #Section377 and #MeTooIndia have enabled mass participation and connectivity and facilitated the construction of institutional dialogues at the intersection of gender and power in a postcolonial context. Both gender movements have led to broader conversations on queer and feminist rights, desire, bodily autonomy and agency for gender minorities and women in India. Although these activist movements are characterized by their different origins, histories and epistemologies, fourth-wave digital activism has created avenues for gendered bodies to challenge, destabilize and dismantle heteronormative and patriarchal expectations in India. The mere digital presence and visibility of women and members of LGBTQIA+ groups, and the subsequent and open display of their stigmatized and othered bodies has allowed them to participate in the production of their own identities and destinies online. Where queer individuals and lesbian, gay and trans communities have successfully been able to construct their gender identities through a discursive performance of “coming-out” on social media platforms, female survivors of sexual violence have actively sought to reclaim their bodies,

and liberate their gendered subjectivities and consciousness through the sharing of stories of sexual abuse, harassment and abuse. The performative acts of ‘coming-out’ and sharing testimonies, in this context, are primarily declarations of subjecthood that function as a subversion of larger postcolonial imaginaries of masculinity, patriarchy, and normativity. The act of sharing personal narratives through the use of protest hashtags creates pockets of visibility and group solidarity where the personal becomes the political, forges a return to grassroots mobilization of queer and feminist activism, and simultaneously empowers queer and feminine bodies to create bonds of attachment. Digital testimonies by queer and feminist communities and their discursive expression of personal struggles are symbolic of their embodied resistance, which produces vulnerability, intimacy, realness, and personal authenticity. Through the act of writing and narrating on social media platforms, queer bodies and Indian women are able to reinforce their sexual non-normativity, break their silence on bodily violence, and perform a veritable act of emancipatory resistance and gendered subjecthood.

Reading down of Section 377 has successfully created a platform for the move away from nationalist imaginaries of heteronormativity and homophobic codes of colonial sexuality. Digital technologies have transformed into tools of resistance against the archaic British law through a decolonizing acceptance of ancient and open Indian (homo)sexuality. The subsequent decriminalization of homosexuality in India visibilizes an emerging “post post-colonial” identity that is produced through the digital destabilization of a colonial nationhood and the rejection of dominant power structures in relation to the draconian codes of sexuality. Queer counterpublics on Twitter and Instagram collectively forge new imaginaries that subvert hegemonic heteronormativity, and provide freedom, protection, inclusivity and equality for queer bodies on the fringe. Digital queer activism creates

subjectivities and strategies on social media that are invested in the fostering of counter-narratives for citizenship based on postcolonial nationalism and heteronormative patriarchy.

Feminist and Queer counterpublics of empathy

My thesis defines digital gender activism in India through the spaces it creates for the construction of gendered counterpublics. For both the queer and feminist movements, protest hashtags become principal sites in the emergence of transnational allyship, and performed resistance that are marked by the acknowledgement of queer and feminist struggles, and the affirmation of equal rights for both groups. Digital platforms have not merely offered visibility, safety, anonymity, inclusion, and a sense of connectivity for members of LGBTQIA+ communities and women but also created spaces for the construction of gendered counterpublics that have enabled the development of deep empathy, kinship and solidarity with queer and feminist resistance in the country. Affective publics, networks, and zones of empathy and empowerment that emerge in relation to LGBTQIA+ communities and female survivors of sexual violence produce collective gendered subjectivities and identities. In the case of Section 377, empathy is performed through the dislocation of the privilege of cis-heteronormativity, and is visibilized in how non-queer participants challenge political and religious codes that queer communities in India are obligated to live by. Therefore, imagined collectives, made up of corporations and LGBT/non-LGBT organizations, largely represent the struggle for queer emancipation online. They employ and incorporate pride colours in their designs or presentation in order to both celebrate the judgement as well as establish their brand through an inclusivity of LGBTQIA+ groups in the country. Through this process, they create veritable spaces for collective and communal action. The movement as a networked collective shapes the cause for queer emancipation and activism online. Affective publics perform the necessary shift in dismantling and rebuilding power structures, and eventually create lasting legal and policy changes for queer liberation. The #Section377 here performs

the function of a counterpublic that brings the queer subaltern a space to collectivize; to speak to personal struggles of queerness; to engage and share narratives of ‘coming-out,’ and to build solidarity and zones of empathy for both the queer and the non-queer subject.

Similarly, in the case of MeToo in India, visible networks of affective solidarity and the discursive expression and representation of positive sentiment and empathy for the feminist movement emerge on both Twitter and Instagram. Networks of empathy and feminist sisterhood are forged through a discursive and visual fracture of patriarchal, misogynistic, and sexist establishment in the country. The feminist revolution, similar to queer activism, has successfully uncovered the country’s desire to engage in larger discussions on the personal trauma of sexual harassment and rape in relation to women’s rights. The manifestation of feminist solidarity occurs through the open, intimate and vulnerable dialogues on gendered violence and personal abuse, as well as through a visible network of friendship and sisterhood that dismantles feminist isolation. The #MeTooIndia hashtag enables an inception of debates sparked by survivors of feminist violence who employ the hashtag to share personal testimonies of abuse and harassment. The hashtag also becomes the performative space for empathy, collective feminist solidarity, kinship and sisterhood, particularly among the Indian diaspora communities in the Global North. In the context of my research, therefore, hashtags become a counterpublic site for gender activism and a space for gendered minorities to amplify their voices.

Diasporic Solidarity

This thread of solidarity is particularly evident in the transnational narrative of both LGBTQIA and feminist activism among the Indian diaspora in Canada. Although imbricated in nationalist frameworks, I argue that the Indian diaspora participates on the Twitter platform and carries the values of acceptance of queer subcultures and empathy towards female survivors of violence. In the case of Section 377, members of the Indian diaspora in

Canada engage in a transnational modernist narrative and openly express support and solidarity with the reading down of the sodomy law. Participants react with jubilation over the subversion of colonial oppression and the emancipation of queer rights for their Indian counterparts. Similarly, MeToo has also created a platform for community-building for Indian women abroad that engenders feminist diasporic resistance through the sharing of personal stories of sexual violence. Diasporic communities in Canada have not only lent support to the contemporary Indian feminist movement, but have actively mobilized to engage in conversations about Dalit feminisms after the emergence of Raya Sarkar's #LoSHA in the international community. Dalit histories are directly embedded in the inception of Indian diasporic feminism, and therefore, the support of narratives by Dalit and lower-caste women as well as a call for more inclusivity in Indian feminisms has gained ground among the diaspora. Communities engage with the hashtags to collectively rewrite histories and genealogies of oppression and re-centre the priorities of Indian feminism. In addition to the evocation of transnational solidarity at the intersection of caste and class, diasporic networks also allow a platform to perform sisterhood for first generation international students who employ #MeTooIndia to speak to their experiences of sexual abuse in academia.

Gender Activism and Digital Humanities Praxis

The advent of social media is rooted in its ability to connect, communicate and collaborate across time and space. Hashtag activism around #Section377 and #MeTooIndia has demonstrated a powerful means of grassroots mobilization that has revolutionized political dissent for feminist and queer identities, bodies, and narratives in the public sphere. Digital Humanities praxis and hashtag activism enable an understanding of digital coloniality as a fundamental matrix of power that attempts to centre social media platforms at the heart of a process of decolonization. By forging the means to dismantle and recentre the

foundations of colonial knowledge, the field of hashtag activism has adapted a decolonial praxis in the Digital Humanities. In this sense, Digital Humanities as a methodological and theoretical framework performs a social justice oriented, anti-oppressive praxis building on subaltern queer and feminist counterpublics as safe spaces of congregation and the expression of protest imaginaries of solidarity and resistance. In textual and visual forms of activism online through the use of #Section377 and #MeTooIndia, decoloniality forges a platform to acknowledge, visibilize, and challenge histories of colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and oppressions in relation to gender activism online. In addition to a decolonial praxis, I frame Digital Humanities in my research as a means to examine how digital platforms enable the performance of political and gender identities as well as the construction of networked empathy and protest imaginaries of solidarity and resistance. A critical DH framework performs the critical function of visibilizing the voices of subaltern marginalized identities and illuminates the previously invisible narratives of the gendered subject through the construction of subaltern counterpublics. Through the excavation of their gendered voices, supplanted by digital stories of ‘coming-out’ and testimonies of violence, this research engages in both a new knowledge production on marginalized communities in India as well as a process of decentralization of spaces that provides safety in interaction. DH as a theory allows me to investigate how the construction of decentralized counterpublics of collective resistance, survival, care, healing and resurgence occurs through activism, and how digital platforms create a space for rewriting collective genealogies of historically oppressed communities. DH enables a re-imagining of constructing and sustaining communities that come alive through hashtag activism on Twitter and Instagram. However, DH theory and praxis is not merely useful in uncovering the voices of the subaltern but also in challenging who is represented on these platforms, who speaks, on whose behalf, and who is included in the broader discourse on queer sexuality and feminist rights. I demonstrate that there is a

visible lack of access, inclusion, and representation of the subaltern owing to the digital divide in the Global South as well as through the emergence of nationalist rhetoric in the form of misogyny and homophobia, which hinders participation. In the context of this study, I employ critical DH as a theoretical framework to focus on questions of power and social justice, and challenge traditional notions of technological determinism. Ultimately, this research performs the dismantling of hegemonies and pre-existing infrastructures to re-imagine a new future in digital design.

Exclusion & Lack of Representation and Participation

However, despite the safe spaces that digital technologies help create for gendered minorities in postcolonial nations such as India, social media platforms also disempower marginalized communities, and perform functions of gatekeeping for the Indian gendered subaltern. I demonstrate the various layers of complexities with respect to the lack of representation, access, participation and inclusion for women and LGBTQIA+ members online. The visible lack of subaltern presence indicates that Indian women and queer communities are largely omitted from discourse and are therefore, unable to participate completely in the expression of their struggles and challenges online. In the case of Section 377, I contend that the relatively smaller number of tweets and Instagram posts that employ self-mention markers indicates the lack of individual participation of women and queer people. Instead, participants employ pseudonyms or publish their stories under the rubric of a larger organization or non-governmental corporation that speaks on behalf of not merely queer people but also the movement in the country. Digital discourse, therefore, includes voices, albeit empathetic, from an imagined collective that supports queer emancipation. In the context of MeToo, the exclusion of narratives, voices, and bodies is a product of an increased attention to the Indian elite who employ Twitter and Instagram for publicly naming and shaming their abusers and harassers, a veritable lack of discussion about #LoSHA, Dalit

and transgender women, and finally the visible sparsity of personal narratives in the dataset owing to hate speech in the form of misogyny that deters participation of women online. The complexities of linguistic and social conditions of technological advancement further complicate questions in relation to the digital divide in the Global South (Sneha 16).

India has the second largest Internet user base in the world, but as Sneha contends, “who has access to the Internet and other digital technologies, and who uses them, and for what purpose remains contentious” (7). Although democratic constitutions articulate the right to equality on various levels, some continue to be held back because of their gender, ethnicity, class, caste, wealth, location and other cultural inequalities that create exclusion. Sara Morais argues that “the Internet is a hegemonic space with male, white, western and English-speaking dominance (1). Therefore, the marginalized Indian is “put in a position of disproportionate access to knowledge (1). In this discussion about the global digital divide between the Global South and the North, I re-evoked Mike Kent’s notion of the digital subaltern, who is simply excluded from digital discourse owing to their marginality, lack of access, or knowledge of English; who has no online presence, and who lives an existence of invisibility on social media platforms (87). Below, I highlight how the Indian woman and queer as a the digital subaltern are also forcefully and deliberately excluded from Indian cyberspaces through infiltration of protest hashtags and the use of hateful rhetoric in the form of misogyny and homophobia.

[Hateful rhetoric: Media Manipulation and Internet Trolling](#)

Although social media platforms have now transformed into important sites of countercultural practice, intervention, and representation (Jackson et al., 2018) and create opportunities for connective action and communal gathering, recent trends online demonstrate patterns of political hate speech, state-sponsored propaganda, disinformation campaigns, polarized echo chambers, and fake news that pose significant challenges to civic

discourse in democratic nations. Although political hate speech against minorities drives domestic conflict and provokes intolerance online, the effects and violence usually “spill over into the real world” (Leibowitz et al. 1). This is particularly true for liberal democracies in the Global South. Many ruling governments of countries shaped by colonialism (Udupa 10) are directly engaged in introducing and disseminating digital disinformation, and propaganda campaigns against gender minorities. Political manipulation can, therefore, occur as a deliberate attempt to undermine democracy and silence vulnerable communities. Through this research, I engage with contemporary digital debates in gender-based violence in the form of homophobia and misogyny to understand how far-right clusters employ textual and visual cultures to challenge democratic discourse and threaten marginalized groups on social media platforms. Rising assertions of patriarchy, heteronormativity and authoritarianism materialize as counter-narratives made by far-right Hindutva discourses online. Protest hashtags are employed to both demonstrate support for Indian cultural and religious values with respect to sexuality and engage in blatant homophobia and misogyny through the use of discursive or visual language. In the case of Section 377, hate speech emerges in the form of a nation building exercise that locates homosexuality as the antithesis to India’s cultural and religious superiority. Homophobia materializes in the form of memes and humour on Instagram, shedding light on the impact of nationalist imaginaries of heteropatriarchy that contradict queer existence. These elements of digital rhetoric work towards creating a sense of community among those that seek India’s former glory as a masculinist state. In this context, I draw from Marwick and Lewis (2017) to frame the emergence of far-right discourse around #Section377 as a form of “media manipulation” (28) and “internet trolling” (4) that are tactful and deliberate strategies of performing digital repression of subaltern voices. The dissemination of counter-narratives, especially in the form of humour, occurs through the manipulation of protest hashtags. This discourse can be conceptualized as trolling

that performs the functions of derailing and mocking the movement as well as intimidating the subaltern subject. Far-right groups employ protest hashtags to create a counter-discourse to change the narrative around Section 377 and queer rights in India. Counter narratives eventually perform the dissemination of ideologies that create strong “antipathy towards on the fringe gender identities” (28) and are designed as tactful strategies to oppress the voice of subaltern marginalized identities online. In addition, media manipulation occurs through a deliberate form of distraction from the queer cause. Nationalist framings in Indian queer discourse are often designed to manipulate algorithms in favour of disengagement from the movement and to create a “non-serious” counter-narrative that trivializes the mainstream discourse on queer rights. Homophobic discourse alongside humour in the form of memes is inserted into the queer discourse through the use of #Section377, and is employed as a form of trolling to bait users to an emotional response (4). Trolling here emerges as a way for far-right collectives to target the queer movement and to perform the digital distortion of queer reality and struggles framed around the oppression of minorities on social media. Far-right groups do not only undertake trolling as a manipulation tactic to distract and disengage from the movement, but also as an attempt to drown the queer voice. The elevated presence of counter-discourse and higher engagement with memes and sarcastic forms of humour around Section 377 algorithmically distort what users see when they first interact with the hashtag. In this context, I view the prevalence and dissemination of counter narratives around #Section377 as a form of Internet trolling that actively ‘takes away’ from the movement, and creates algorithmic inequalities where the subaltern voices, narratives, and bodies become invisible.

A similar discourse emerges in the digital feminist movement, where the mediated violence and misogyny are products of a digital appropriation and “hijacking” by the men’s rights movement in the country. #MeTooIndia is infiltrated by men’s rights activists and

other far right heteropatriarchal and masculinist societies who employ the hashtag as a call for the independence and liberation of Indian men. This discourse demonstrates deep-seated misogyny through the additional use of other hashtags such as as #MenToo, #FakeCases, and #FeminismisCancer in an attempt to discursively delegitimize women's stories, or to direct attention to the supposed inequalities that men face in contemporary Indian society. Similar to the queer movement, the rhetoric of hate speech within #MeTooIndia reaffirms the desire for nationalist imaginaries that dictate the values of chastity, fidelity and domesticity for Indian women. Digital misogyny, not unlike homophobia, is expressed in the form of belittling of gender minorities, through the commodification of othered bodies and the denial of equal rights to Indian women. Both forms of hateful rhetoric indicate an unwillingness to listen, and an active attempt to silence the subaltern voice online. I view the emergence of misogyny as an attempted form of trolling and media manipulation that makes a mockery of the feminist movement. In addition, the use of other hashtags alongside #MeTooIndia is a bid to manipulate discourse around feminist violence, and recentre men's rights in the country. The manner in which the men's rights movement materializes using #MeTooIndia demonstrates how protest hashtags are also employed to forge counter narratives that infiltrate women's spaces, disempower feminist voices, and similar to the queer movement, attempt to take away from conversations about Indian feminism.

Although English monopolizes the discourse on queer and feminist empathy, Hindi emerges in Indian cyberspaces as the language that carries Indian nationalism, postcolonial values, and therefore, Hindutva ideologies, and is primarily employed as the language of Hindu pride. The use of Hindi in textual, visual and meme culture functions as a postcolonial response to the support for homosexuality and women's rights in the country. The use of local languages such as Hindi, Tamil, and Telugu promote a completely different reality that is characterized by masculinist, heteronormative, and homophobic male dominance in society.

As Sahana Udupa argues, in South Asian democracies such as India, perpetrators of gender-based abuse have claimed legitimacy by invoking the high ideals of nationhood and focused on regulating sexuality through the articulation of patriotism. These patterns of hate speech, digital surveillance of gender minorities, and mediated gender-based violence that emerge through digital authoritarianism and the manipulation of protest hashtags impact both women and LGBTQIA+ groups, who face abuse, prejudice and persecution online.

Comparative Analysis – Digital Platforms & Social Protest in India

This chapter will provide a comparative analysis between the social media platforms I study, in an attempt to understand textual and visual culture on Twitter and Instagram, and their role in framing digital activism in the context of India. Specifically, I look at how users employ text and visuals on both platforms to generate discussions surrounding queer and feminist movements, and in what ways discourse is shaped by the platforms in which they are produced. I primarily expand on the concept of digital textuality and visual cultures in relation to their ability to produce protest imaginaries on social media platforms. Then, I chart out the differences in how Twitter and Instagram were employed by participants to engage in debates on sexuality and sexual violence in the country.

Digital Textualities

To expand on digital textuality in relation to activism, I begin by redefining social media text on Twitter and Instagram as a form of literary text, a semiotic attribution in the production of meaning. I attempt to reimagine what literary study means within the field of Comparative Literature in order to fruitfully engage with digital text, and ultimately enable digital activism. Therefore, I simultaneously offer both a reflection on the discipline of Comparative Literature in relation to its integration in the contemporary era of digital culture, materiality, and textuality as well as attempt a deconstruction of the terms *comparative* and *literature* in order to rethink how social media text shapes activist rhetoric. To investigate how the discipline can create its new role and vision for digital activism, I argue for the *comparative* as a method, a methodology, a theoretical framework, and a mode of study.

Comparative Literature, as a discipline, has consistently invested in the examination and destabilization of hierarchies and hegemonies of power and in the displacement of a single voice/narrative through its focus on national literatures and languages. However, the transition from print to digital culture calls for an effective mobilization of the field of

Comparative Literature to re-engage in studies of power, race, gender, indigeneity, and postcolonial identity through varied media and newer definitions of literariness in the age of social media and social media research. Comparative Literature characterizes itself as a mode of reading that dissects and investigates a text, its receptions, reactions, and repercussions. The *comparative* functions as a magical thread that sutures multiple ostensibly unrelated events, phenomena and ideas, and discerns the differences and similarities in seemingly unified notions. Comparative Literature is a “discipline with a global history, intellectual relevance, and institutional presence” (Zepetnek 190), valuing analysis through a distinct lens and offering critical solutions to social change by providing a framework of alterity to work within. According to Haun Saussy, “the name of the field *comparative* once denoted a method, and behind that method, a theory of how literature was organized” (Saussy 1). It was from the river of comparative method that the tributaries of “comparative religion, comparative law, comparative philology, comparative philosophy” (Saussy 1) and contemporary disciplines including comparative media studies were derived. According to Jorgen Schafer, “comparative literature from different nations, cultures or languages has benefitted from numerous cultural and disciplinary exchanges” (137). However, the discipline needs to incorporate newer models of comparative methods for different and newer textual cultures.

New Media and Comparative Literature

In this context, the ever-changing definitions of Comparative Literature allude to the re-conceptualization of the literary. To contemporarily define literature is to situate it outside, not merely both world and national literatures that characterize its inception but in the abandonment of traditional notions of the literary. Literature, and Comparative Literature are undergoing a massive shift in the age of media, and particularly social media and Internet culture. These are, in fact, a product of our varying interpretations of what the concepts of

literature, literariness, literary canon, or acts of reading or writing literature constitute (Kushner 1). Therefore, Comparative Literature, as part of its new disciplinary challenge, must be “re-envisioned as part of the rapidly changing map of the Humanities” (Heise 1). Over the last decade, Comparative Literature has come to broaden its scope and engagement with “new and digitally supported genres and media” (Heise 1) where the field has invested in the comparative study of texts, sounds, and moving images in digital media, emerging out of “writing, publishing, reading, and text archiving” in digital media (Heise 1). Media Technology in the modern era has infiltrated the realm of book culture and continues to redefine and destabilize what is currently categorized as literature, and what constitutes literariness. While the print-born landscape lingers, it is also enabled and nourished by an interaction and exchange with new media practices on social media such as networking, tweeting and hacking. Scott Kushner argues that “digital textuality has birthed the textual culture in the form of vlogs, social network platforms and short messaging services, and as non-literary texts,” (1) that can engage Comparative Literature in different ways. Kushner reasons that literary studies should attempt to understand “how different textual frameworks function, how they communicate meaning, what textual practices thrive and falter, and how these traits might compare with other textual cultures,” particularly since we spend more time with screens than pages, and with shorter means of communication in tweets and emails than letters (1). Traditional and electronic print culture have continued to merge over the last decade, and expose the depth to which “electronic culture, including social media have taken on such importance” (Heise 1) in the study of national and global cultures. In fact, the value of literary studies and Comparative Literature emerges from its “acceptance of the significance of media in the construction of cultural encounters, and their role in complex global structures of production, circulation, and exchange” (De Gasperi 1). According to Ursula Heise, “comparatists are uniquely positioned to intervene in the making and unmaking of media cultures whose rapid transformations

outpace social, legal and knowledge innovations” (1). The role of Humanities and Comparative Literature in the age of media cultures would not merely lie in the understanding of new and emerging literary cultures, but also in navigating power structures that exist on the Internet, and other new media. In this sense, the comparative can enable a deeper and diversified analysis of how new media will reshape both literary history and social culture. The imagination of what literature and theory can entail can surpass the “non-Northern, non-Western, non-white, non-binary, non-bourgeois, and other hegemonic traditions that might count in its definitions of literature and authorship” and venture deeper into the problematics of a restricted notion of the literary as a text (1). Digital media works to destabilize these very notions and workings of literature for new generations of writers and readers (1), and gives rise to new forms of resistance against unequal lines of power that are fundamental to the comparative method. According to Scott Kushner, “digital textuality has transitioned from the specific to the banal, provoking an explosion in everyday textual culture in forms that are not literary by conventional definitions” (1). Literary Studies and Comparative Literature will thrive in the intricacies and complexities of finding meaning in everyday textuality on social media and in the interrogation of its own practices.

Comparative Literature as Methodology: Digital Textuality and Activism

Comparative Literature, according to Tötösy de Zepetnek, “has an ideology of inclusion of the Other, be that a marginal literature in its several meanings of marginality, a genre, various text types” (13). Spivak emphasizes the role of the comparative as the harbinger of alterity instead of difference. Comparative thought enables and encourages an (inter)transcultural and interdisciplinary dialogue that includes an inclusionary perspective. This perspective enables a transcendence of boundaries of hegemonic power relations and extends to all forms of the Other; marginal and minoritized and all that has been, and often, still, is considered peripheral (186). The intrinsic form and content of Comparative Literature

that facilitates cross-cultural interdisciplinarity furnishes a particular mode of thinking and applied theory that enables the study of an active form of resistance online; in the establishment of a politicized inclusion of the marginalized Other and the voice of the subaltern in the South. Postcolonial theory, not unlike feminist and queer theory in the field of Comparative Literature, is a form of resistance in the construction of newer identities in the South, underscoring unequal lines of power hitherto taken for granted. Each tweet or Facebook post becomes significant in the characterization of an altered identity of the Other. Only through analysis, criticism and deconstruction can we prevent existing structures of dominance from reasserting themselves. Comparative Literature and literary theory, through deconstruction, enable a process and a mode of reading in the quest for uncovering these very forms of dominance. Derrida explains that deconstruction is not merely a ‘method’ or an application to support an argument or hypothesis, but an ongoing process of interrogation characterized by uncertainty and indeterminacy and concerned with the structure of meaning itself.

A deconstruction of the tweets and other online narratives works within the structures of heteronormative postcolonial and patriarchal institutions to reveal new possibilities for truth. It consists of dismantling, not institutions themselves, but rather the structures within institutions that have become too rigid. Dominant discourses are deconstructed to let the marginal subaltern voices be heard and seen. Absences and silences are as conspicuous as presences and voices. The search for the other voices and other perceptions inherent in a text necessitates the inter-texts since “texts are not structures of presence but traces and tracings of otherness” (Frow 45). Inter-texts prevent a master narrative from occupying realms of certainty and closure. They are born from the assumption that ‘truth’ may differ according to perceptions. The enquiry into the network of textual relations of every work leads to intertextuality.

Julia Kristeva applies Bakhtin's socio-historical theory of each utterance as an intimate interaction of several systems of signs (263) to literary texts where each text, tweet or Facebook post, can be seen as a network of sign systems situating the literary structure in a social environment. This intertextuality (defined, primarily as the relation between two or more texts in the context of French Theory) or a reading of the text in different codes, discourses or voices not only permits the inclusion of the ethnic minority, but in fact, privileges it (Pivato 56). The complex elements of everyday textuality and online narratives that are the driving force behind political activism bring the text successfully to a subtle interface with another, which could mean that in an apparently simple individual work, many voices may be present either in the form of intended authorial meaning or as an unconscious desire. In this context, I also evoke the argument that Todd Presner et al. make in *HyperCities: Thick Mapping in the Digital Humanities*, that tweets with 140 characters in length enable the transportation, retraction, and multiplication of voices (152). They both perform and become a collective event that "cannot be predicted; that breaks free of time" (152). In addition, digital text in the form of tweets and Instagram posts, as single units of semiotic meaning-making, perform activism through the facilitation of public participation, democratization and the "granting of equal importance and weight, such that no voice takes priority or assumes canonicity" (158-159). The authors argue, "Participatory culture is open ended, non-hierarchical, and trans-migratory, aimed at re-establishing contact with the non-physical, the heterogenous, the people and the perspectives left out, erased, and vanished" (Todd Presner et al. 158).

Comparative Literature furnishes, in this niche for intertextuality and deconstruction, the tireless inclusion of the marginalized Other, where the voices of the oppressed are clearly heard and acted upon. Comparative Literature functions, in the 21st century, in relation to Digital Humanities, as a check on power dynamics and unequal relations in the age of globalization.

Visual Activism and Representation - Instagram as a space for Resistance

The advent of digital visual cultures in the form of photography, artwork, and memes has enabled the dissemination of millions of shared images everyday over Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Images exist in an unambiguous yet rapidly changing physical landscape of visibility on social media platforms. Visual culture is multiple; a social practice; a market phenomenon or a technology available to masses (Neumüller XIX). Cultural Studies has focused on the “photographic medium as the framework of visual culture,” not merely as a memory but also as information or data that has been mined (XXIV). In this vast landscape of images, Instagram is at the forefront of visual communication, and has become particularly relevant for contemporary activism. Visuality, as a construct of both semiotic meaning-making and world building, assembles social constructions of images to understand the performativity of visual cultures online. In this context, it is important to rethink what it means to study, and resist social media using a visual framework. Visual media and visual practices “have become a vital part of political and protest communication and gained importance in the study of social movements and digital activism” (Jenzen et al. 419). Visuals carry powerful messages that we process faster than verbal and/or textual cues (Kilgo & Mourão 581). According to McGarry et al., images leave a “trace of social identities, processes, practices, experiences, institutions, and relations” (22). In this context, visual activism is “aimed at catalyzing the social, political and economic change” (Demos 87) through the repurposing of images, politicizing of resistance and creation of new meaning making online (Jenzen et al. 419). Furthermore, visual protest culture fosters mobilization, communication, and participation among users, and engenders the creation of an affective network of “feelings of engagement, belonging and solidarity” (Papacharissi 4). The visual platform has continued to redefine the “production of protest imaginaries,” (Jenzen et al. 416) as artists, creators, and designers find an avenue for personal and collective empowerment

(Lotfolian 1377) through the medium of digital ecology. Emiliano Treré's term "media imaginaries" (108) illustrates how social media is visually represented by artists, and how it is employed by protesters to both "mobilize and communicate their ideas, identities and emotions across diverse social spaces" (Jenzen et al. 415). Instagram, in recent years, has become a "central presence in the media landscape," (Caldeira et al 1073) and in the production of visual activism and other "aestheticized forms of political expressions," (Lotfolian 1371), shaping "visual contemporary culture, aesthetic values and photographic conventions" (Manovich 73). The aesthetic of visual protest culture encompasses "slogans, art, symbols, slang, humour, graffiti, gestures, bodies, colour, clothes, and objects" (McGarry et al. 18) that can be shared across diverse platforms. Treré argues that visual cultures produce "counter-hegemonic imaginaries pushed forward by social movements" for marginalized communities (110). Visuality on the platform, therefore, creates the space for mobilization and resistance against exclusion, inequality and injustice, and enables the representation and visibilization of subaltern minoritized communities in the digital public sphere. Instagram has also been studied in relation to digital self-representation, particularly in the context of fame, visibility, gender and selfies in popular culture (Caldeira et al. 1073). A global and vibrant culture of image production, "curation, archiving, organizing, and dissemination" including photographs, selfies and art has become an important practice in visual activism (Caldeira et al 1077-78), and guides visual strategies of representation. Sharing self-portraits and photographs on Instagram empowers individuals to connect, form affective communities, create narratives, and share their personal stories. Similarly, the emergence of "art works, relational aesthetics, cultural ecology," (Silva 177) and artistic installations demonstrates a "low barrier to artistic expression and civic engagement" (Kang et al. 2) online. As Instagram is now a powerful medium to "discover, promote and critique art, it enables the emergence of a highly interactive process" (2) in citizen participation.

Activist art brings a decolonial perspective and facilitates the coming-together of social and political spheres in order to establish equality and justice for racialized bodies. Digital participation and engagement of bodies through hashtags on Instagram both discursively and visually produce mobilization and affective solidarities. Basia Sliwinska expands on Butler's performative aspect of bodies that ensure empowerment through a collective struggle on social media platforms (3; Butler 4), and function as a personal and a political resistance. The "assembly, embodiment and mobility of bodies in space becomes a vehicle for activism," (4) and the spatiality of visual cultures works to bring narratives to the forefront on platforms such as Instagram (7). Body politics and performativity create spaces for emancipation through an active process of decoloniality in visual representation. Therefore, the digital photographic and artistic reflection of the self against the 'other,' occurs through self-representation and performativity of bodies online (3-4; Grosz 17). Digital visibility, in its complexity, should "be subject to grammar rules and style figures, and full layers of meanings (Negreiros & Joaquim 35). Digital photographs, memes, and other images function as forms of visual texts that are embedded with hidden layers of meaning, where each cultural code must be analyzed and unravelled to perform resistance (35).

Comparative Analysis: Digital Activism on Twitter and Instagram

Following the re-imagination of digital textuality and visual cultures as structures and constructs of protest imaginaries on social media platforms, I demonstrate how platform design, in the context of Twitter and Instagram, produces different forms of user engagement and shapes discourse differently in relation to the Indian queer and feminist movement. Scholars have previously defined Twitter as a platform for microblogging with the "principle of following users without mandatory reciprocity, making it an ideal medium for the study of online behaviour" (Grandjean 1). Its simplicity and minimalist design and more public settings enable broader discussions among a large group of people. Twitter is also the most

studied platform by academic researchers owing to both its easy access and format for interaction. Its data collection methods using Twitter API that enable access to filters for location, language, and multiple hashtags provides different data points for researchers to study. For instance, in the Twitter dataset I collected, a discussion on transnational solidarity within the diaspora became possible only with the availability of tweets with the location filter. As a private platform that is a bounded and enclosed medium for researchers and users, Instagram data collection does not allow the search of multiple hashtags, or access to different language and location filters. Therefore, where I had a large dataset of tweets available for the study of discourse in regional languages and by the Indian diaspora in Canada, my limited access to location and language filters on Instagram made it more difficult to examine these discussions. In addition, Twitter is a more public platform where the rapid dissemination of ideas occurs, and there seems to be a more visible impact and reach for conversations on queer and feminist emancipation. In comparison, Instagram stories and posts by non-celebrities are usually set to private mode and cannot be shared for public view. Therefore, on Instagram, discourse in relation to the queer and feminist movements, particularly from everyday users, cannot be immediately located and circulated owing to the availability of privacy settings for users. However, as Instagram is a relatively more private platform, users engage in personal discussions, testimonies, narratives and experiences to forge both queer and feminist counterpublics. In the Instagram dataset for #Section377 and #MeTooIndia, more participants speak to their journeys of “coming-out,” describe in detail their narratives and struggles of being queer, and speak to their personal experiences of sexual violence and harassment than on Twitter. In addition, the design and format of Instagram facilitates the sharing of an image in the form of photography, artwork, and/or memes alongside the space to narrate their entire experience in the form of digital text, which offers a medium for self-healing and reparations for the user and allows them to create small

“imagined collectives” of resistance through storytelling. On the other hand, in the Twitter dataset, the number of people who engage in personal storytelling are relatively few.

Twitter’s character length restricts the ability to share longer stories. Although Twitter design has the thread feature where tweets by the same author can be connected to each other, the data collection process using Twitter APIs selects random unique and single tweets.

Therefore, it is difficult to collect a complete thread of narration on the platform. Even when users choose to participate on Twitter to share personal testimonies, they rarely employ their own Twitter handle or names to publicly come-out or share their gender and sexual orientation, or sexual violence. Instead, they prefer to anonymize their stories and write or post them with larger organizations who have more followers. For instance, in the collected dataset on #Section377, several hundred organizations use their platforms to either speak on behalf of queer people, and/or in support of the movement. In addition to the comparatively lower rate of personal storytelling, Twitter also creates more visible polarization, forges echo chambers on the platform where hate speech in the form of misogyny and homophobia thrives. Owing to the open and public participation channels it creates, users tend to interact most with those whose opinions are similar to their own, thereby creating spaces for polarized conversations. In the Twitter dataset, I demonstrate more instances of digital misogyny and homophobia that emerges either through nationalist imaginaries of sexuality and sexual desire or the use of other hashtags in the same narrative. Hate speech rhetoric is expressed through the creation of far-right counter-narratives where users ‘hijack’ the protest hashtags to gain more visibility and create more reach. On the other hand, although Instagram does evidence the use of memes and sarcastic humour on the platform, the dataset contained very few instances of hate speech, both in queer and feminist movements. Despite these differences in user engagement, both Twitter and Instagram perform empathy with fourth-wave gender movements in similar ways. First, users on both platforms create bonds of

solidarity and sisterhood through the use of positive sentiments, textual and visual expressions of kinship, the visible display of pride colours and through the general offer of love and support to both movements. In addition, large corporations, and non-governmental organizations create spaces in both mediums to spread the message of solidarity for the movements, and the digital discourse on both Twitter and Instagram includes voices of empathetic collectives. Larger organizations represent the subaltern and bring their perspectives and voices to raise more public awareness about the movements.

Re-imagining Digital Activism in the Global South: Technology and Platform Design

As this research demonstrates, social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram empower subaltern voices, enable the construction of digital identities (diasporic, postcolonial, queer, and feminist) that are both personal and collective, and facilitate the formation of affective networks of friendship, empathy, kinship, sisterhood, and solidarity. However, although digital platforms create safe spaces for queer and feminist counterpublics and pave the way for paradigm shifts in the social perception of feminist and queer identity, sex, desire, and power in India, they also disrupt and disempower the marginalized gendered subaltern. In this study, I trace the algorithmic bias and distortions that emerge in the rise of far-right nationalist, homophobic, misogynistic discourse, and other exclusionary practices that decenter marginalized voices. In this context, I argue that hateful rhetoric on social media is a deliberate insertion designed to manipulate algorithms by far-right collectives in India, ultimately leading to algorithmic inequities that encourage the amplification of certain voices. At this juncture therefore, I believe it is critical to re-imagine the technological design of social media platforms and fourth-wave gender movements in the Global South in order to effectively challenge patriarchal hierarchies and power systems for minoritized individuals as well as communities. How can we build platforms of interaction that through the application of theory can engender more systems that will function with values of inclusion and diversity for marginalized, vulnerable and consequently gendered communities? How can we actively engage in the construction of interfaces that are not merely tools of decolonization and destabilization that enable the fracture of traditional structures of oppression, objectification, hate, and denial of agency of/for these digital communities? How do we erase the visible manifestation of patriarchy, and invest in the creation of safe spaces not merely for the collective but also for the individual? How can we rethink theoretical interventions for

fourth-wave digital gender movements in the South? Technological spaces remain either inaccessible or deeply violent and open to targeted attack based on ethnicity, race, and religion. Therefore, the theoretical interventions for platform and activist design must incorporate both queer theory/queer HCI and an intersectional approach in varying degrees. Keeping in mind these complexities and being open about how the varied layers necessitate restructuring, we can begin to assess the theoretical foundations on which to construct future digital activism.

It is imperative that digital feminism and queer activism be designed to incorporate various aspects of social and political identities to avoid falling into essentialist traps. Digital futures must create a balance between belonging to the collective and the individual in order to create an inclusive space for engagement. The internet must be a neutral, safe zone that provides complete acceptance and inclusion of non-binary genders, dynamic feminisms, sexualities as well as multiple markers of identity, particularly in postcolonial contexts. It is important for cyber-clusters on social media to distance themselves from predetermined essential boundaries of identity categorizations. Questions on feminist and queer embodiment on digital spaces necessitate a more forward and a nuanced understanding of what constitutes gender activism on social media. I argue that the future of platform and activist design can be better supported by both queer theory and intersectionality as approaches to what will be called a *queer intersectional HCI*. Queer and intersectional HCI can provide a tentative theoretical solution for building, designing, and navigating online spaces, and offer a zone of acceptance for individuals as well as group identities. Queer and intersectional theory share a common political vision with feminist and queer theory, and speak equally to their work in social justice and equality. Notwithstanding the intellectual gender debate among STS scholars, it is clear that technology shapes and is shaped by our gender, sexualities, and intersectional identities. Therefore, as Jennifer Rode argues, “we as technology designers

have the unique opportunity to attempt to change values with regards to gender and redefine normative and structural gender design of technology” (Rode 397). It is imperative that while we are aware of the fluidity in our own identities, we begin to conceive of different processes of design that do not rely on the boundaries and binaries of the masculine and the feminine. We must instead create systems that cater to the individual and therefore bring user-centric and queer values founded on intersectional identities.

Is feminist design a solution?

The objectives of the first and second wave of feminism were to establish gender equality. Early gender movements maintained that “men and women were assigned different roles, responsibilities, and respect based on their sex” (Gedro & Mizzi 446), and the rising academic feminist movement in university curricula underscored differences between these binaries. Although feminist theory has plural interpretations, it is primarily motivated towards the “elimination of systems of inequality and injustice in women’s lives” as well as the “celebration of the struggles and achievements of women” and other gendered groups (Shaw & Lee 9). Feminist methodologies in the Humanities and Social Sciences have been invested in questions about privilege, access, representation, participation, and creating equal opportunities and social relations for women and other gender minorities (Gedro & Mizzi 449). Similarly, in relation to gender systems in technology, feminist HCI has always encouraged design that is imbued with sensitivity to the central tenets of feminism – agency, fulfillment, identity, equity, empowerment, diversity, and social justice. However, methodologies that examine power in relation to gender, feminism and queer activism may lean towards accentuating gender differences between men and women. In order to resist patriarchy and masculine attributes such as control and competitiveness (hooks 1), feminist theory must rely on the creation of opposing and therefore, feminine values, and “risk celebrating stereotypes about women, their preferences, skills and work” (Bath 4),

particularly in relation with technological spaces. In other words, codifying “gender difference can reinforce traditional gender hierarchy” (3), and work towards ensuring that these categories remain intact (Kannabiran 1). Representing women as inherently nurturing and pacifist can bolster a view of sex difference and sexual hierarchy. Feminist design, in this sense, will establish a gendered technology, and re-introduce gendered hegemonies founded on the masculine/feminine dichotomy (Kannabiran 1). Feminist technologies and values can merely function as a call for essentialism, since it may be centred on realizing specific goals and interpretations based on both a universal definition of womanhood and queerness and a gendered categorization that is exclusive and singular. This binary opposition in the masculine and the feminine, which carries stereotypes of likes, dislikes, activities, ways of being, and desires, is a purely essentialist cultural construct that Justine Cassell suggests is perceived “differently in cultures, historical periods, contexts,” and in various feminisms across the world (1). This “essentialist approach to gender is a considerable site of critique for third-world feminism” (Rode 395), and without the acknowledgement that women may not identify with feminisms of the North, or the values they espouse, feminist theory in relation with design of technology may become problematic.

Gender movements across the world in the 1970’s and 80’s exposed conflicting views on philosophies, methodologies, and epistemologies. Was feminist and queer ideology universal, one-size-fits-all, separatist, or analogous in the Global North and South (Light 2011)? It can be argued that the North and South have immensely disparate ideologies and definitions of feminism, womanhood, and queer desire. In the South, the identity of a woman or member of the LGBTQIA+ group intersects at multiple arcs with race, class, caste, and nation, and feminisms and queerness from the South carry this multiplicity in identities as part of their movements. In this sense, universal forms of feminism and queerness assume the form of a colonial system that speaks on behalf of all gender identities. Notwithstanding the

question of multiple feminisms and queer ways of being, decolonizing design is equally threatened by this tendency to inhabit binary systems of logic in relation to gender, race, or culture (98). Instead, a “decolonial approach must recognize and uncover other ways of being” (98).

Elizabeth Grosz asserts that feminist theory is limited by its reliance on identity politics (213; Landström 18). Instead, feminist theory must strive towards a reorientation in order to locate itself in a more open and undetermined objective outside the binary logic (Grosz 213; Landström 18); it must enable the creation of feminine technologies instead of technologies designed “explicitly and exclusively for women” (Rode 397). Feminism must incorporate inclusiveness on a wider scale and diversify its communities to include other gender groups, ethnic and linguistic minorities, economically underprivileged people and so on. Feminist scholarship can and does function as a powerful means of critiquing dominant norms, but it must lead the way to the incorporation of other systems and mediations that serve the interests of users on a spectrum of gender identities.

How can feminist HCI, as Shaowen Bardzell suggests, “simultaneously serve real-world needs and avoid perpetuating the marginalization of women and/or other groups in technology” (1304)? Instead of Human-Computer Interaction systems based on feminist values, a de-gendering methodology suggested by queer HCI scholars can aim to attribute equal competencies for all users, and all genders in flux (Kannabiran 1). Design in the future will benefit from a “non-binary gendered” perspective that defamiliarizes heteronormative, colonial and binary structures (1). This approach, according to Gopinath Kannabiran, engenders an “actual engagement with, and understanding of gender” (1) and demonstrates how users can have an intersectional and inclusive interaction. Furthermore, as Bardzell eloquently puts it, “a pluralist approach to design is more human-centered than universalizing designs since the concept of what is human is by itself a complex question” (Bardzell 1306).

Design must “confront our social and ethical norms, and our unjust practices that silence certain approaches, while attempting to “foreground questions of cultural difference to embrace the marginal” (1306).

Is posthuman design the solution?

Where humanism is centred on the idea that human values, needs and concerns are of highest importance, posthumanism is concerned with the transcendence of the limitations of the physical human form and body. Posthuman theory suggests that it is possible for humans to surpass limitations of the biological and physical kind in order to create a liberation of the self from values of the Enlightenment. Theoretically, the posthuman characterizes an aspect of the human condition that functions in parallel with modern machines and technical and technological advancement. The institution of new technologies enables a conceptualization and reimagination of methods of interaction and allows the personal to transform into the cyborg. Technology is always changing to accommodate a blurring of identities; a fusion of all bodies, including the human and the machine, and creates zones and new modes of contact and interpenetration across space and time. Wacjman has argued that “technology has produced a technical homogenization of bodies” (80; Balsamo 125). In the absence of human nature, there are no restrictions or limitations on how humans define or configure themselves. Their existence is not defined by any marker of identity and has successfully overcome the organic essence of its body. A posthuman framework would imply a ‘shift in epistemological framework where identity and identity categorizations cannot and do not function (Currier 333; Landström 21). Posthuman designers “draw from varied lineages and discussions on the decentering of the human, non-anthropocentrism, and human and non-human relations” (Forlano 26). Posthuman design transcends limitations of human-centred design by anticipating the need for robotic, virtual and cyborg beings in the future of platform and activist design.

Particularly relevant in posthumanist theory is the blurring of gender identity through technology. Cyberfeminism as a branch of posthumanism serves to defy boundaries of identity and definition of our gendered selves from the organic body, and enables a reflection on the terms of subjectivity, identity, consciousness in the contemporary digital context. Susanna Paasonen describes this feminist cyber navigation as “leaving bodies behind to virtual spaces and becom[ing] free to explore new forms of identity and interaction” (345). Cyberfeminism opposes radical “approaches that stressed the patriarchal nature of technoscience” (Wacjman 146), and functions as Haraway’s revolutionary tool to overthrow patriarchy and her intention to destroy the existing gender binaries. This provides a veritable counter to decentralizing, monopolizing, and non-inclusive value systems that still exist in southern cyberspaces. The lack of a universal definition or delimitation of the term and the field can allow gender minorities to employ technology for self-expression and self-representation as an act of resistance and empowerment (Baer 7).

However, as argued above, technology is a part of culture (Guerrero 183), and therefore cannot erase the presence of feminine and/or marginal gendered bodies. Instead, as Guerrero describes, technology re-inscribes “the body with similar signs of power hierarchies and sexual divisions that shape social and political order” (183). Human-machine interactions merely rewrite identical sexual stereotypes, and define “new ways of explaining the body,” and thus “enable the creation of fixed categories reproduced through technology” (185). This discourse can instead accentuate “traditional stereotypes of patriarchy where real bodies are replaced by artificial ones” (184). Posthumanism is an imaginative, intellectual and theoretical intervention that engenders an understanding of the human in the technological era, without the burden of subjectivity and physical/sexual identity. However, the above arguments illustrate that technology controls and exerts power over bodies, particularly marginalized and gendered bodies. A posthuman design of technology that aims to erase

gendered subjectivities cannot eliminate online hate crimes against women, queer and other marginalized subjects and communities and cannot disconnect the gendered self from digital spaces. Furthermore, gendered subjectivities and targeted violence are accentuated for people of colour, immigrants, and communities belonging to lower class and caste. Laura Forlano asserts that “it is not productive to speak of the posthuman when so many, including non-white, less privileged, older, indigenous, or people with disabilities have not been historically included in the category of the human in the first place” (28). How can a posthuman design provide a safe space for congregation and self-design for individuals and communities when it neutralizes the arcs of identity construction? A complete blurring of identities cannot occur until discrimination based on identity is eliminated, and not vice versa. Online communities are “deprived of autonomy over their bodies and have no control over amplifying hate crimes against their selves” (Guerrero 184). As Braidotti and Guerrero eloquently summarize, “there is no need to renovate the myth of transcendence to escape from the body,” and “we must instead go back, explore its diversity, meanings and possibilities” (Braidotti 115; Guerrero 191).

An Activist-oriented Design

Sasha Constanza-Chock is one of the leading scholars who argues for design justice, a concept centred on creative practices for design that are inclusive of marginalized communities online (2018). Design justice at all levels of technology and platform design takes into account democratic participation, representation of historically marginalized communities, and underscores the principles of inclusion and social justice (2019). Design processes, according to the author, must be founded on collective liberation of oppressed communities, and divorced from the “reproduction of structural inequalities in relation to white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism” (Collins 229; Costanza-Chock 20). Design justice is an approach that aligns with the theory of intersectionality to “understand

the history of oppression and discrimination in order to support equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice for the marginalized and disenfranchised” (Erete et al. 69). According to some scholars, social movements in favour of immigrants, LGBTQIA, trans and racial struggles, and other systematically ignored and misrepresented marginalized communities have already enabled a creation of new media tools (Bardzell, 2010; Costanza-Chock, 2019). In this argument, social media movements dictate how designers and users navigate through various intersections of their own identity, and how they develop the use of digital technology at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities structured by race, class, gender, sexual orientation, disability, geography and other axes of inequality. A design based exclusively on social justice and the theory of intersectionality is a needed and progressive first step towards rethinking future technology. Social justice and social movements can provide an important gateway for the congregation of silenced groups, enable a voice that speaks for such communities, and facilitate more visibility, acceptance, and representation of peripheral bodies. Distinct from the binary interpretations of feminist design theory, intersectional and social justice-based design can enable thinking of user safety at multiple levels of interaction. In contrast to posthuman design, it brings marginalized and oppressed identities to life and actively functions to represent varied communities online. My argument of queer and intersectional design borrows directly from Costanza-Chock’s design justice approach in organizing gendered fourth-wave activism online. The digital is a cultural space for contemporary representation of communities and defining it in terms of particular collectivities enables a safe space for individual expression and safety. Instead of a feminist or posthuman activist approach, this dissertation builds on an activist approach that aims to serve both a queer ‘coming-out’ of the realm of binary and traditional identity categorizations, and universal collectivities as well as an intersectional means of keeping individual and intersectional identities alive online and offline.

Queer Intersectional Design

To lay a proper framework on the concept of queer intersectional design, it is important to interpret and understand queer and intersectional theory in isolation. Queer theory, in its history of attempting to move away from binaries of gender construction is engaged in “critiquing power relations premised on sexuality and gender while rejecting ideas of the modern subject” (Landström 18). Queer studies has undertaken a path beyond identity in order to confront the logic of heterosexuality and heteronormative hegemony, and challenge essentials of gender and social labels (Light 2011). It has consistently challenged normative structures and dichotomies in gender in order to dissolve differences between gendered identities and nullify the ‘other,’ and aims to “subvert and challenge any granted stabilities in our social lives” (Browne & Nash 5). The term itself signifies a rupture in categorical assumptions, and a harbinger of new freedoms of identity. To queer is to destabilize the status quo, to subvert, to defy; it is an act of resistance; a rupture that signals a moving, unclear, fluid and multiple identity. Queer is the state of a permanent becoming that is in constant motion, and “an identity always under construction” (Jagose 1). This is how it marks its departure from gay and lesbian, or women’s studies. It intends to “disturb all sexual boundaries, create sexual mayhem,” and de-essentialize gender while it performs gender identity (Landström 18). In this sense, queer theory works in opposition to feminist theory that produces collectivities for equality and social justice, but in tandem with posthuman theory that also seeks to divorce itself from identity categorizations. The difference is where the posthumanism seeks to separate completely from identity categorizations, nullify human and cultural differences, and blur boundaries between human and machines, queer theory is invested in disengaging with labels of permanent identity. It moves between multiple identities and is in a constant state of impermanence. Therefore, a queer design would include strategies of non-heteronormativity, and fluidity in identity (Denz & Egglink 2). Based on

this interpretation, queer theory remains open to how “individuals would perceive, accept and repeat their own identities through the design process” (2), and use/describe gender in their words (Haimson & Hayes 3). Queer design itself will provide a space for a radical, porous, and fluid practice of user design and participation in future technology. Queer theory is a design orientation that can give users autonomy to define and design their selves on digital media, and therefore create a practice of user safety infused with queer values. It can produce imaginative relationships and mediations between users and technology. Jacob Gaboury also speaks to how queer theory symbolizes technological failure; a failure of permanence; a failure of being (Gaboury 483) that engenders a non-normative and radical practice operating both within and outside of normative boundaries. While marginality may serve as an organizing tool for queer politics, queering works to expose marginalization as an intentional, socio-cultural-political process that reflects the inequalities and injustices created by the unevenness of power. However, queer theory posits its traditional and theoretical knowledge in the Global North that works outside the historical contexts of gendered and sexual lives of users in the South. Queer theory, in particular, necessitates knowledge of where it locates itself, culturally, theoretically and geographically in order to avoid falling into the trap of colonial interpretations that come with any western and/or universal theory that excludes users from the South. Queer design builds on an activism-oriented approach as it attempts to navigate among multiple definitions of queerness. For some arguments in design, queer theory is a non-normative design that is inclusive of trans bodies and gendered selves that are on the periphery while for others, it is an opportunity to include bodies on the LGBTQIA+ spectrum. As Browne and Nash argue, “what is meant by queer is constantly policed,” and any definition that is not authentic is classified/dismissed as essentialist or simplistic (Browne & Nash 5). Queer theory needs to maintain an “unclear, unstable, and unfit identity” in order to thrive (5).

Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality, on the other hand, calls for a shift away from a single-axis analysis where race and gender are independent constructs, towards an analysis that engages with multiple axes of power such as race, colonialism, sexuality, disability and class (Crenshaw 1251). The history of intersectionality illuminates how systems of oppression cannot work in isolation and advocates for further complexity in gender studies. For Crenshaw, the marginalization of women can be observed through multiple lenses and illuminates the lack of protections within social structures against violence for women of colour (1241). Intersectionality equally complicates the process of identity construction with its focus on difference and multiplicity rather than equality and collectivity (Wajcman 146). In that sense, it attempts to disconnect from the process of collectivizing identities and enables the production of a complex personal identity for people belonging to marginalized groups. As a form of social justice, it contributes to the argument of multiple and dynamic forms of feminism and queerness, and non-essentialist and subjective ways of being. The concept of intersectional design is closely linked to interlocking systems of oppression and facilitates an individual and subjective process of identity building for users. Intersectionality can improve the design process and practice by enabling a platform for users to bring their own backgrounds and personal experiences, and allows for a subjective and unique design through participation. These experiences can be markers of identity for users that are not limited to race, gender or class, and speak to the lives and outcomes of marginalized populations.

Queer and Intersectional Design

Queer theory shares a political space with and draws heavily from intersectionality. It questions the operation of power as it relates to the structural operation of gender. Where queering hovers in a state of non-normativity and impermanence in identity construction,

intersectionality locates subjective experience at the crossroads of multiple identities in parallel; where queerness critiques binary categorizations in identity, intersectionality locates power, relationships, and complexity within identities. The similarities between queer and intersectional theory is in how they respond to power relations in society. For intersectionality, power is centred at the intersections of identity that creates visibility for social action. The different axes of oppression are where hierarchies/ inequities of power exist. Queer theory, on the other hand, disrupts these boundaries and identity categories where power is concentrated. These contrasting features intersect to create a product that enables both an objective and subjective experience for activists and can work to serve interests based on both individual and multiple identities in digital activism. In order to rethink and reimagine 21st century fourth-wave activism in the South, we must be wary of creating systems of interaction that hinge on pre-defined essential or non-essential identity categorizations whether for social justice, equality, or simply to elevate the concerns of a single group. Identity politics should be directed towards protest and ultimately towards policy change for marginalized communities. However, it is also important that identity politics not construct its own hierarchies and power systems that individuals must function within. Furthermore, identity politics can forge safe spaces for right-wing, intolerant, and violent groups to create counter-narratives against marginalized groups. Instead, digital futures and technology of design must oversee a subtle balance between individuality and belonging that will create a safe space for engagement, safety and free speech for gender minorities.

Through his discussion of technological failure, Gaboury points to hate speech, violence and harassment of women, queer, trans people, and people of colour on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Gaboury 484). A queer and intersectional design seeks to produce failure and develop alternate means of existing and interacting online through technology

(484). Van House argues that social media platforms force users to describe and categorize oneself explicitly. Therefore, designers must create safe and marginal spaces online for users to engage in resistance and subversion outside of social and/or algorithmic conventions. Social networking sites must be powerful sites of performativity, awareness, and resistance through the construction of boundaries. Landström asserts that “women’s relationships with technology are constantly represented as analogous with heteronormative projections of women’s relationships with men” (13). Females on the spectrum who identify as males, trans people, or lesbians, for example, are not covered by the encoded entity or category of woman. D’Ignazio and Klein in *Data Feminism* (2020) also illustrate the example of fairness in hiring where white men are prioritized over women and minoritized communities in resume screenings. On the other hand, when the minority groups are over-represented, they are policed and targeted by race and colour. As argued earlier, *Design Justice* (2020) through its own intersectional lens, offers similar instances where Facebook and other social networking sites force users to use original names. Powerful stakeholders in a datafied world, social media platforms carry out control and manipulation tactics to enforce collection of information and specifics of identity to be eventually sold. Blurring identities where power is expressed through categorization and data collected can be beneficial. If anonymity as a design tactic is willfully encoded and adopted, particularly on platforms like Twitter, it can help counter hate speech and violent bullying (that may or not be gendered and/or racial) against particular users. Designing anonymity without the need for information can help protect users, and equally counter companies using their identity to sell them adverts or target them in other ways. Of course, blurring identities can also enable the emergence of right wing, dangerous elements that thrive in these spaces. However, this study merely argues for a way for marginalized users to remain on the fringe if they do not feel safe adhering to traditional and normative notions of womanhood or queerness. This approach can allow

users through intersectionality to create and move among multiple identities without fear of bullying and hate; being forced to perform their identities in public or reveal their identities if they wish as safely as possible. This is not to argue that identities must not exist on digital platforms. However, we must take more caution in what circumstances we take or demand (identity) information, particularly from marginalized users and groups on social media platforms. The examples above in queering and intersectionality demonstrate that social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter are built largely within binary systems algorithmically, and there must be more space for users to maneuver with respect to self-expression online and being able to exist on margins when needed. Where queering and intersectionality provide the ability to exist without being seen and navigate between multiple identities for individual users, platforms of interaction create a space for community building and development. Social media platforms should also be designed to visibilize marginalized communities when needed, especially with respect to social issues – protest movements, healthcare, education, community development, race and ethnic inequality, climate change, and violent crimes. In these cases, underrepresented and marginalized groups should be able to congregate online to push for socio-political change, and allow meaningful addition to data that will contribute to their safety and well-being. Community building can be a way to both raise awareness about the community and digital inequalities on social networking sites. This approach in design can empower groups to create digital spaces for civic engagement where data collected will serve the community – including in health activism, digital protest, preventing language loss in indigenous communities, and racial and domestic abuse within communities,

It is critical for design not to be centred on a singular, universal, and western notion of feminism and queer identity that is non-inclusive. What becomes of Dalits, transgender subjects (who may find it difficult to belong in feminism), or men who suffer from sexual

abuse, and cannot find safety in women's rights groups? Will a universal identity politics support their needs? Will the idea of a western feminism or queerness cater to the needs of gender minorities from lower economic backgrounds in the North and/or South, who cannot afford to prioritize their gendered subjectivities?

In order to disengage from hegemonic power struggles, and hierarchical discussions of bodily subjectivities, and to embark on a veritable project of decolonization, we must build a queer and intersectional design that can produce a counterbalance between a focus on non-normative subjectivities; a design that will allow users to move freely within multiple identities, and the prospect of defining their own self at multiple junctures. The confluence of queerness and intersectionality in this interpretation will empower both individuals and groups and eliminate power by situating performance and non-identity as an aspect of gender identity on digital media. Queer and Intersectional design is an effective blurring of pre-defined identities and value systems that ultimately enables a decolonization of traditional and collective knowledge production for better design of selves online.

This theoretical intervention strives towards creation of safe zones that provide complete acceptance and inclusion of non-binary genders, sexualities, as well as gendered selves that intersect with other markers of identity. Queering will engender an abstract and epistemological solution towards shifting the focus on various different groups. Furthermore, this argument will preserve feminist values of equality, justice, fairness, diversity, participation, access, and representation. The approach will enable activism where users participate outside and within multiple identity categorizations, not merely for the emancipation of communities, but also for the individual self. Queer and Intersectional theory is a design politic organized simultaneously around erasing difference and producing it. It facilitates a positive force of affinity politics that fractures hierarchies of exploitative and oppressive systems to arrive at new affirmations and imaginaries of gender (and other)

identities. It expands on heteronormative limitations of feminist movements by productively complicating and challenging structures of power. With respect to our digital future, it is vital to invest in/ design technologies that are *ruptural* as opposed to those that are *ruptured*; to create technologies and forms of activism where participants forge their own values, and thus engage in the process of design.

Conclusion

In this research at the intersection of cultural and platform studies, I examine the social, cultural, and political impacts of technology in Indian gendered activism. My dissertation investigates the queer and feminist movements around #Section377 and #MeTooIndia on Indian cyberspaces. Through textual and visual analysis of discourse surrounding protest hashtags on Twitter and Instagram, I begin by asking how social media helps create safe spaces for the congregation and interaction of the gendered subaltern. I demonstrate how Indian women and queer communities, both in India and Canada, employ social media to perform their identities, and share stories of coming-out and testimonies of violence. In this way, I excavate the voices of these marginalized communities through the collection and study of public community data produced on social media. Simultaneously, I illustrate the complex ways the digital gendered subaltern is imbricated in notions of Indian nationalism, and religious codes of heteropatriarchy that create legitimate barriers for the digital participation of these communities. I study how discourse in the form of misogyny, homophobia, and nationalist rhetoric disrupts the voices of the marginalized. Therefore, this dissertation ultimately demonstrates how social media platforms and digital infrastructures are non-neutral; how they are inherently complex systems of communication that are shaped, in this context, by both the production of protest imaginaries of performance, solidarity, and empathy as well as counter narratives of hateful rhetoric. Secondly, it troubles traditional notions of techno-utopianism, and re-emphasizes the presence of a digital divide, and the

veritable lack of participation, representation, and thereby the access for queer and feminist communities and individuals in Indian cyberspaces. With the theoretical grounding of histories and epistemologies of gender and gender activism in this research, I strive to prioritize questions of power, and social inequality, and how these shape an unequal information ecosystem at the intersection of technology and activism. My work, in its interdisciplinarity and comparative praxis, offers non-western perspectives to the study of affordances and constraints of social media platforms in digital activism, and locates and centers Indian women and members of LGBTQIA+ community.

Future Research

I foresee multiple directions that this interdisciplinary research project can take. While my work offers a niche through a comparative analysis of gendered activism, and locating what I term ‘the Indian subaltern’ on social media, an ethnographic study to excavate real voices of women and queer communities, individuals, and organizations both in India and Canada would bring an added layer of nuance in relation to study of community data. In this regard, interviews collected on digital storytelling, coming-out narratives, and testimonies of violence can enable the construction of community records and archives produced on digital platforms by marginalized communities. As I write this conclusion in 2022, I am also aware of the increasing access to the Internet in the Global South that simultaneously affords political actors opportunities to engage in digital propaganda, and promote disinformation, polarization, and hate speech against religious, gendered, and caste-based minorities in countries such as India. Although scholars such as Sahana Udupa (2021) have begun to discuss the concept of digital hate, literature on the rhetoric of hate speech in the Global South, particularly in the context of gender activism, remains rare. Regardless of these fascinating questions, the digital revolution has given rise to a new iteration of gender

activism, and collective and connective action in the Global South, and has paved the way for a shift in the dynamics between people and power.

Works Cited

- Al-Ali, N. "Iraqi women in diasporic spaces: Political mobilization, gender & citizenship." *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, 117-118, 2007, pp 137-154.
- Alkhaled, Sophie. "Women's Entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia: Feminist Solidarity and Political Activism in Disguise?" *Gender, work, and organization* 28.3, 2021, pp 950–972. Web.
- Altheide, David L. "Identity and the Definition of the Situation in a Mass-Mediated Context." *Symbolic interaction* 23.1 (2000): 1–27. Web.
- Altman, D. "On Global Queering," *Australian Humanities Review*, 1996. DOI: <http://australianhumanitiesreview.org/1996/07/01/on-global-queering/>.
- Altman, D. "Rupture or Continuity? The Internationalization of Gay Identities." *Social Text*, no. 48, Duke University Press, 1996, pp. 77–94, doi:10.2307/466787.
- Anderson, Benedict R. O. G. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991. Print.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands : The New Mestiza : La Frontera*. Fourth edition. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 2012. Print.
- Appadurai, Arjun. "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy." *Theory, Culture & Society* 7.2-3 (1990): 295–310. Web.
- Association of Internet Researchers. "Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research: Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee (Version 2.0)." 2012. Aoir.org. DOI: <http://www.aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf>
- Ausserhofer, J. & Maireder. "A National Politics on Twitter," *Information, Communication & Society*, 2013, 16:3, 291-314, DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2012.756050.

- Baer, Hester. "Redoing feminism: digital activism, body politics, and neoliberalism," *Feminist Media Studies*, 2016, 16:1, 17-34, DOI: 10.1080/14680777.2015.1093070.
- Bassel, Leah, and Emejulu, Akwugo. "Struggles for Institutional Space in France and the United Kingdom: Intersectionality and the Politics of Policy." *Politics & Gender*, 2010, 6 (4): 517–44.
- Baym, Nancy K. *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2010. Print.
- Bailey, Moya. Jackson, Sarah. Welles, Brooke Foucault. "Women Tweet on Violence: From #YesAllWomen to #MeToo." *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*. No. 15. 2019. DOI: 10.5399/uo/ada.2019.15.6.
- Bakshi, Garima. "The Nirbhaya Movement: All India Feminist Revolution." Published May 2, 2017, Issue I Spring 2017, *Journal Volume XVIII*.
- Bakshi, Sandeep. "Fractured Resistance: Queer Negotiations of the Postcolonial in R. Raj Rao's *The Boyfriend*." *South Asian review* (South Asian Literary Association) 33.2 (2012): 37–55. Web.
- Balsamo, Anne. "Technologies of the gendered body: Reading cyborg women." Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.
- Banerjee, S. "Hindutva—Ideology and social psychology." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1991, pp. 97-101.
- Banks, James. "Regulating Hate Speech Online." *International review of law, computers & technology* 24.3 (2010): 233–239. Web.
- Bardzell, Shaowen. "Feminist HCI: Taking stock and outlining an agenda for design." In *CHI 2010*, ACM Press, 2010, 1301—1310.
- Barker, Kim, and Olga Jurasz. "Online Misogyny: A Challenge for Digital Feminism?"

- Journal of international affairs* (New York) 72.2 (2019): 95–114. Print.
- Bassnett, Susan. "Reflections on Comparative Literature in the Twenty-First Century." *Comparative critical studies* 3.1 (2006): 3–11. Web.
- Basu, Srimati. "Looking through Misogyny: Indian Men's Rights Activists, Law, and Challenges for Feminism." *Canadian journal of women and the law* 28.1 (2016): 45–68. Web.
- Bath, Corinna. "Searching for Methodology. Feminist Technology Design in Computer Science." In *Gender in Science and Technology*, Waltraud Ernst and Ilona Horwath Eds. transcript, Bielefeld, 2014, pp 57-78.
- Behdad, A. & Thomas, D. *A Companion to Comparative Literature*. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. Print.
- Banet-Weiser, Sarah. *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny*. Duke University Press. 2018. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11316rx>.
- Beyrer, C. "Section 377: Why Sodomy Statutes Matter," *Journal of International AIDS Society*, 2019, 22, Article e25285.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge. 1994. Print.
- Bhatt, C, and P Mukta. "Hindutva in the West: Mapping the Antinomies of Diaspora Nationalism: Hindutva Movements in the West: Resurgent Hinduism and the Politics of Diaspora." *Ethnic and racial studies* 23.3 (2000): 407–441. Print.
- Brah, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London, New York, Routledge, 1996.
- Braidotti, Rosi. "Un ciberfeminismo diferente," in *Debats*, No. 76, 2002. Del post al ciberfeminismo.
- Brians, Ella. "The 'Virtual' Body and the Strange Persistence of the Flesh: Deleuze, Cyberspace and the Posthuman." *Deleuze and the Body*. 2011. 117–143. Print.

- Brock, A. "Critical technocultural discourse analysis," *New Media & Society*, SAGE Publications, 2018, vol.20 (3): 1012-1030.
- Bruns. A & Burgess. J. "Researching News Discussion on Twitter," *Journalism Studies*, 2012, 13:5-6, 801-814, DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2012.664428.
- Bruns. A & Burgess. J. "The use of Twitter hashtags in the formation of ad hoc publics," *Proceedings of the Sixth European Consortium for Political Research General Conference*, 2011, University of Iceland, Reykjavik, DOI: <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/46515/>.
- Butler, Judith, and Gayatri Chakravorty. Spivak. "Who Sings the Nation-State? : Language, Politics." *Belonging*. London : Seagull Books, 2007. Print.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York, 1993. Print.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.1990. Print.
- Caldeira, Sofia P., et al. "'Everybody Needs to Post a Selfie Every Once in a While': Exploring the Politics of Instagram Curation in Young Women's Self-Representational Practices." *Information, Communication & Society*, vol. 24, no. 8, Routledge, 2021, pp. 1073–90, doi:[10.1080/1369118X.2020.1776371](https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2020.1776371).
- Cassell, Justine. *Genderizing Human-Computer Interaction*. L. Erlbaum Associates Inc., USA, 2002, 401–412. [33].
- Castells, Manuel. "Informationalism, Networks, and the Network Society: A Theoretical Blueprint." *The Network Society: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2004. Print.
- Castells, Manuel. "Communication, Power and Counter-Power in the Network Society." *International Journal of Communication*. 1(2007): 238-266.

Chaudhuri, Maitrayee. "Feminism in India: The Tale and its Telling", *Revue Tiers Monde*, vol. 209, no. 1, 2012, pp. 19-36.

Chemmencheri, S. "Marginalization and the Media: How does the Subaltern Respond to Mediation?" *LSE South Asia Centre*, 2015. DOI:
<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2015/09/07/marginalisation-and-the-media-how-does-the-subaltern-respond-to-mediation/>.

Citron, Danielle Keats. "Cyber Civil Rights." *Boston University law review* 89.1, 2009. Print.

Cixous, H. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Literature in the Modern World*, 1990:316-326. Print.

Clark-Parsons, R. Clark-Parsons, Rosemary. "I see you, i believe you, i stand with you": #Metoo and the Performance of Networked Feminist Visibility." *Feminist Media Studies*, 2019, 1–19. DOI:10.1080/14680777.2019.1628797.

Clark-Parsons, Rosemary. "Hope in a Hashtag: The Discursive Activism of #whyistayed." *Feminist Media Studies*, 2016, 16 (5), 788–804, DOI:10.1080/14680777.2016.1138235.

Clay, Shirky. "The Political Power of Social Media." *Foreign Affairs* 90(1), 2011: 28–41.

Clement, Tanya. "Where is Methodology in Digital Humanities." In *Debates in Digital Humanities* ed. by Matthew Gold, and Lauren Klein. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota. 2016.

Cohen, Robin. *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. Routledge, 2010.

Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge. 2002.

Costanza-Chock, Sasha. *Design Justice: Community-led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2020. Print.

Cover, Rob, and Rosslyn Prosser. "Memorial Accounts." *Australian Feminist Studies*

28.75 (2013): 81–94. Web.

Craig, Shelley L., et al. “Can Social Media Participation Enhance LGBTQ+ Youth Well-Being? Development of the Social Media Benefits Scale.” *Social Media + Society*, vol. 7, no. 1, SAGE Publications, 2021, DOI:10.1177/2056305121988931.

Crenshaw, K. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Colour.” *Stanford Law Review*, 43, 1991, pp 1241-1299.

Crespo, Nora. “Introduction” In *Women and Peacebuilding from The Diaspora and Exile in Europe*. Report 19, 2021. DOI: https://www.icip.cat/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/informe19_ENG_1410.pdf

Cruz, Arnaldo., and Martin F. Manalansan. *Queer Globalizations : Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism*. New York: New York University Press, 2002. Print.

Currier, Dianne. 2003. ‘Feminist Technological Futures: Deleuze and Body/Technology Assemblages.’ *Feminist Theory* 4(3): 321–38.

Das, Keya, and T. S. Sathyanarayana Rao. “A Chronicle of Sexuality in the Indian Subcontinent.” *Journal of Psychosexual Health*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2019, pp. 20–25, DOI:10.1177/2631831818822017.

Dasgupta, Rohit K. *Queering Digital India: Activisms, Identities, Subjectivities*. Edinburgh University Press, 2018.

Dasgupta, Rohit. “Online Romeos and Gaydia: Exploring Queer Spaces in Digital India.” *Mapping Queer Space(s) of Praxis and Pedagogy*. McNeil Wermers J.E and Lunn J.O. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 183-200.

Dasgupta, Rohit K. *Digital Queer Cultures in India: Politics, Intimacies and Belonging*. Routledge, 2017.

Dasgupta, Rohit K. “Digital Queer Spaces: Interrogating Identity, Belonging and Nationalism in Contemporary India.” *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2016. Print.

- Dasgupta, Rohit K & Debanuj Dasgupta. "Intimate Subjects and Virtual Spaces: Rethinking Sexuality as a category for intimate ethnographies." *Sexualities*. 2016.
- Dasgupta Rohit, K. "Articulating Dissident Citizenship, Belonging, and Queerness on Cyberspace." *South Asian Review* 35(3) 2015, pp - 203–223.
- Dasgupta, Rohit K. "Parties, Advocacy and Activism: Interrogating Community and Class in Digital Queer India." *Queer Youth and Media Cultures*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. 2014, pp 265–277. Web.
- Davidson, Cathy N. "Drinking the HASTAC Kool-Aid." *HASTAC*. 2009. DOI: <http://www.hastac.org/blogs/cathy-davidson/drinking-hastac-kool-aid>.
- Davis, Alan, and Daniel Weinshenker. "Digital Storytelling and Authoring Identity." *Constructing the Self in a Digital World*. Cambridge University Press, 2012. 47–74. Web.
- Demos, T. "Between Rebel Creativity and Reification: For and Against Visual Activism." *Journal of Visual Culture*, 15(1), 2016, pp 85–102.
- Denz, Silas & Eggink, Wouter. "Queer-Sensible Designing." *Conference Proceedings of the Academy for Design Innovation Management*. 2., 2019. DOI: 10.33114/adim.2019.01.189.
- Derrida, Jacques. *De La Grammatologie*. Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1969. Print.
- D'Ignazio, Catherine, and Lauren F Klein. *Data Feminism*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2020. Print.
- Downey, J., & Fenton, N. "New Media, Counter Publicity and the Public Sphere." *New Media and Society*, 5(2), 2003, pp 185-202.
- Driver, S. "Beyond "Straight" Interpretations: Researching Queer Youth Digital Video." In A. L. Best (Ed.), *Representing youth: Methodological issues in critical youth studies*, 2007, pp. 304–324. New York: New York University Press.

- Duggan, L. "The trials of Alice Mitchell: Sensationalism, sexology, and the lesbian subject in turn-of-the-century America." *Signs*, 1993, 18(4), 791–814.
- Earhart, Amy. "Can Information be Unfettered? Race and New Digital Humanities Canon." In *Debates in Digital Humanities* ed. by Matthew Gold. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 2012.
- Erete, S., Israni, A., and Dillahunt, T. "An intersectional approach to designing in the margins." *Interactions* 25, 3, 2018, pp 66–69.
- Eswaran, N. "The Nation-State is Not Our Friend: On Celebrating the Repeal of Section 377." *Jamhooor*, 2018. DOI: <https://www.jamhooor.org/read/2018/11/6/the-nation-state-is-not-our-friend-on-celebrating-the-repeal-of-section-377-in-the-indian-diaspora>.
- Faist, Thomas, and Rainer Bauböck. *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods* (IMISCOE International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion in Europe). 1st ed. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010. Print.
- Feather, John. "The Context of Change: Information Professionals and the Information Professions in an Information Society." *Health information and libraries journal* 23.s1 (2006): 3–9. Web.
- Forlano, Laura. 2017. "Posthumanism and Design." *She Ji: The Journal of Design, Economics, and Innovation*, 3(1), 16–29. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sheji.2017.08.001>.
- Frow, John. "Intertextuality and Ontology." *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*. Ed. J. Still and M. Worton. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990. 45-55.
- Foucault, Michel, 1926-1984. *The History of Sexuality*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978. Print.
- Foucault, Michel, and Colin Gordon. *Power/knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, 1972-1977. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980. Print.

- Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." In *C.J. Calhoun's Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge MIT Press. 1990. Print.
- Gaboury, Jacob. "Critical Unmaking. Toward a Queer Computation." In Jentery Sayers' (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to Media Studies and Digital Humanities*, New York: Routledge, 2018, pp 483 - 491.
- Gajjala, R. *Digital Diasporas: Labour and Affect in Gendered Indian Digital Publics*. London, Rowman & Littlefield International, 2019. Print.
- Gajjala, R. *Cyberculture and the Subaltern*. Lexington Books, Lanham, 2013. Print.
- Gajjala, Radhika, and Yeon Ju Oh. *Cyberfeminism 2.0*. Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, US, 2012. Print.
- Gajjala, Radhika, Rahul Mitra, Natalia Rybas, and Melissa Altman. "Racing and Queering the Interface: Producing Global/Local Cyberselves." *Qualitative Inquiry* 14 (7). 2008, pp - 1110–1133. Print.
- Gajjala, Radhika. *Cyber Selves: Feminist Ethnographies of South Asian Women*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004. Print.
- Gajjala, Radhika. "South Asian digital diasporas and cyberfeminist webs: negotiating globalization, nation, gender and information technology design." *Contemporary South Asia*, 12:1, 2003, pp - 41-56, DOI: [10.1080/0958493032000123362](https://doi.org/10.1080/0958493032000123362)
- Gedro, J, Mizzi, RC. 2014. "Feminist theory and Queer theory: Implications for HRD Research and Practice." *Advances in Developing Human Resources* 16(4): 445–456.
- Gerbaudo, P., & Trere, E. "In search of the 'we' of social media activism: introduction to the special issue on social media and protest identities." *Information Communication & Society*, 2015. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1043319>.

- Gillespie, Tarleton. "The Politics of 'Platforms.'" *New Media & Society*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2010, pp. 347–364, doi:10.1177/1461444809342738.
- Gittinger, Juli L. *Hinduism and Hindu Nationalism Online*. London : Routledge, 2019. Print.
- Glaw, Xanthe, et al. "Visual Methodologies in Qualitative Research: Auto-photography and Photo Elicitation Applied to Mental Health Research." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2017. DOI:10.1177/1609406917748215.
- Goel, V, Venkataraman, A, Schultz, K. "After a long wait, India's #MeToo movement suddenly takes off." *The New York Times*. DOI: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/09/world/asia/india-sexual-harassment-me-too-bollywood.html>.
- Gold, Matthew K. *Debates in the Digital Humanities*. University of Minnesota Press. 2012.
- Gonsiorek, J. C., & Rudolph, J. R. "Homosexual identity: Coming out and other developmental events." In J. C. Gonsiorek & J. D. Weinrich (Eds.), *Homosexuality: Research implications for public policy*. pp. 161–176, 1991. Sage Publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483325422.n11>.
- Gopinath, Gayatri. *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2005. Print.
- Grandjean M. "A Social Network Analysis of Twitter: Mapping the Digital Humanities Community." *Cogent Art Human*. 2016; 3(1): 1–14.
- Gray, Mary L. "Negotiating Identities/Queering Desires: Coming Out Online and the Remediation of the Coming-Out Story." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. 14.4 (2009): 1162–1189. Web.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005.
- Gruzd, Anatoliy, et al. "Imagining Twitter as an Imagined Community." *American*

Behavioral Scientist, vol. 55, no. 10, 2011, pp. 1294–1318,

DOI:10.1177/0002764211409378.

Guerrero, Olya. “Posthuman Bodies? Not so fast.” *Dilematta*. Issue No. 5, 2011, pp. 181-193.

Habermas, J. “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopaedia Article.” *New*

German Critique, 3(Autumn), 1974, pp 49-54.

Haimson, Oliver & Hayes, Gillian. “Toward Trans Inclusion in Feminist HCI.”

Conference Proceedings in *CSCW Workshop on Feminism and Feminist Approaches in Social Computing*, 2015. DOI:

<http://oliverhaimson.com/PDFs/HaimsonTowardTransInclusion.pdf>.

Halberstam, J. *Trans : A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*. University of California Press, 2017.

Halberstam, Jack. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2011.

Halberstam, J. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, New York

University Press, New York, 2005.

Halberstam, Judith. “Automating gender: Postmodern feminism in the age of the intelligent machine,” *Feminist Studies*, volume 17, number 3, 1991, pp. 439–460.

Haldar, Partha, and Shashi Kant. “Reading Down of Section 377 of Indian Penal Code Is a Welcome Move for HIV Prevention and Control Among Men Having Sex with Men in India.” *Indian Journal of Community Medicine: Official Publication of Indian Association of Preventive & Social Medicine* 36.1 (2011): 57–58. PMC. Web.

Hall, K. Cyberfeminism. In S. Herring (Ed.), 1996, pp 147-170.

Hall, Stuart. “Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies,” in L. Grossberg, C. Nelson and P. Treichler. *Cultural Studies*, New York: Routledge, 1992, pp. 277-94.

Hall, Stuart. “The Emergence of Cultural Studies and the Crisis of the Humanities”, *October*

53 (1990): 11- 23. Web.

Hall, Stuart. "Avtar Brah's cartographies: Moment, Method, Meaning." *Feminist Review*, No.100. Sage Publications, Ltd. 2012. Pp. 27-38. URL <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41495192>.

Han, Enze, and Joseph O'Mahoney. "British Colonialism and the Criminalization of Homosexuality." *Cambridge review of international affairs* 27.2 (2014): 268–288. Web.

Haraway, Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." In *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, New York: Routledge, 1991, pp. 149-181.

Hayles, Nancy Katherine. 1999. *How we became posthuman: Virtual bodies in cybernetics, literature, and informatics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hayles, N. Katherine. "How We Read: Close, Hyper, Machine." *ADE Bulletin* 150 (2010): 62-79.

Hegde, Radha Sarma. *Circuits of Visibility: Gender and Transnational Media Cultures*. NYU Press, 2011. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qfqmg.

Heise, Ursula K, Dudley Andrew, Alexander Beecroft, Jessica S. Berman, David Damrosch, Ferrari G. De, Cesar Dominguez, Barbara Harlow, and Eric Hayot. *Futures of Comparative Literature: Acla State of the Discipline Report*. 2017. Print.

Hemmings, Clare. "Affective Solidarity: Feminist Reflexivity and Political Transformation." *Feminist theory* 13.2 (2012): 147–161. Web.

Hewitt, Nancy A. "Feminist Frequencies: Regenerating the Wave Metaphor." *Feminist Studies* 38 (3): 658-680. 2012.

Heyes, C. "Identity Politics." In *the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by E. N. Zalta. Summer, 2016. DOI: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-politics/>.

- Highfield, T. and Leaver, T. "A methodology for mapping Instagram hashtags" *First Monday*, Volume 20, Number 1 – 5, 2015. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5210/fm.v20i1.5563>.
- Hill, Marc Lamont. "Thank You, Black Twitter": State Violence, Digital Counterpublics, and Pedagogies of Resistance." *Urban education* (Beverly Hills, Calif.) 53.2 (2018): 286–302. Web.
- Hill, A. "Digital Storytelling for Gender Justice: Exploring the Challenges of Participation and the Limits of Polyvocality." *Confronting Global Gender Justice*. Routledge, 2011. 144–158. Web.
- Holm M. "The Rise of Online Counterpublics?: The Limits of Inclusion in a Digital Age." 2019. DOI: <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-387426>.
- hooks, bell. *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. 1981. Print.
- Hoskin, Rhea Ashley. "Femme Interventions and the Proper Feminist Subject: Critical Approaches to Decolonizing Western Pedagogies," *Cogent Social Sciences*, 3:1, 2017. DOI: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311886.2016.1276819>.
- Huh, R. *Who is the Me in #MeToo? A Critical Discourse Analysis of Hashtag Feminism*. University of Calgary. 2019. Print.
- Irigaray, Luce, and Carolyn Burke. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985. Print.
- Jackson, Sarah J., et al. "#GirlsLikeUs: Trans Advocacy and Community Building Online." *New Media & Society*, vol. 20, no. 5, May 2018, pp. 1868–1888, DOI:[10.1177/1461444817709276](https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817709276).
- Jackson, S. "Hijacking #mynypd: Social Media Dissent and Networked Counterpublics." *Journal of Communication*, 2015, 65: 932952. doi:10.1111/jcom.12185.
- Jagose, Annamarie. *Queer Theory: An Introduction*. New York University press. 1996. Print.

- Jane, Emma A. "Online Misogyny and Feminist Di-gilantism." *Continuum* (Mount Lawley, W.A.) 30.3 (2016): 284–297. Web.
- Jean Chapman. "Violence Against Women in Democratic India: Let's Talk Misogyny." *Social scientist* (New Delhi) 42.9/10 (2014): 49–61. Print.
- Jenzen, Olu, et al. "The Symbol of Social Media in Contemporary Protest: Twitter and the Gezi Park Movement." *Convergence* (London, England), vol. 27, no. 2, SAGE Publications, 2021, pp. 414–37, doi:[10.1177/1354856520933747](https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856520933747).
- Jha, Sonora & Kurien, Alka. *New Feminisms in South Asia: Disrupting the Discourse through Social Media, Film, and Literature*. Routledge, 2018.
- Jones, Steve. *Virtual Culture: Identity and Communication in Cybersociety*. Sage Publications, 1998.
- Kannabiran, G. "Gender and Design of Technology." *UCLA Thinking Gender Papers*, 2012. DOI: <https://escholarship.org/content/qt0sf3p93j/qt0sf3p93j.pdf>.
- Kang, Neelu. "Women Activists in Indian Diaspora: Making Interventions and Challenging Impediments." *South Asia Research*, vol. 26, no. 2, July 2006, pp. 145–164, DOI:10.1177/0262728006066489.
- Kang, Xin, Wenying Chen, and Jian Kang. 2019. "Art in the Age of Social Media: Interaction Behavior Analysis of Instagram Art Accounts" *Informatics* 6, no. 4: 52. <https://doi.org/10.3390/informatics6040052>.
- Keller, Jessalynn, Kaitlynn Mendes, and Jessica Ringrose. "Speaking 'Unspeakable Things': Documenting Digital Feminist Responses to Rape Culture." *Journal of gender studies* 27.1 (2018): 22–36. Web.
- Kent, M. "Digital Divide 2.0 and the Digital Subaltern." In: *Nebula* 5.4, 2008. DOI: <http://www.nobleworld.biz/images/Kent3.pdf>.
- Kilgo, Danielle & Rachel R. Mourão. "Protest Coverage Matters: How Media Framing and

- Visual Communication Affects Support for Black Civil Rights Protests,” *Mass Communication and Society*, 24:4, 576-596, 2021, DOI: [10.1080/15205436.2021.1884724](https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2021.1884724).
- Kim, J. “Intersectionality 101: Why ‘we’re focusing on women’ does not work for Diversity and Inclusion. *Awaken*. 2018. DOI: <https://medium.com/awaken-blog/intersectionality-101-why-were-focusing-on-women-doesn-t-work-for-diversity-inclusion-8f591d196789>.
- Kissau, K., Hunger, U. The internet as a means of studying transnationalism and diaspora In Bauböck, R., Faist, T. (Eds.), *Diaspora and transnationalism: Concepts, theories and methods*. Amsterdam: IMISCOE Research, Amsterdam University Press. 2010, pp. 245–265
- Kristeva, Julia. *Word, Dialogue, and Novel. Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Ed. Leon S. Roudiez. Trans. Thomas Gora et al. New York: Columbia U. P. 1980, pp 64-91.
- Kole, Subir. “Globalizing queer? AIDS, Homophobia, and the Politics of Sexual Identity in India.” *Globalization and health*. 2007. DOI: 3. 8. 10.1186/1744-8603-38.
- Kouri-Towe, Natalie. “Solidarity at Risk: The Politics of Attachment in Transnational Queer Palestine Solidarity and Anti-Pinkwashing Activism.” *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2015. Print.
- Kujat, Norman Christopher. “Can the Subaltern Tweet? A Net-nography of India’s Subaltern Voices Entering the Public via Social Media.” Master thesis, Malmo University. 2016. DOI: <http://muep.mau.se/handle/2043/20972>.
- Kurien, Prema. “Multiculturalism and ‘American’ Religion: The Case of Hindu Indian Americans.” *Social forces* 85.2 (2006): 723–741. Web.
- Kushner, Scott. “Comparative Non-Literature and Everyday Digital Textuality.” *The*

- 2014 – 2015 Report on the State of the Discipline of Comparative Literature. 2015.
<https://stateofthediscipline.acla.org/entry/comparative-non-literature-and-everyday-digital-textuality-0>.
- Laestadius, L. “Instagram” in *The Sage Handbook of Social Media Research Methods*. Edited by Luke Sloan. SAGE Publications Ltd, London, 2016, pp. 1 – 25.
- Landström, Catharina. “Queering Feminist Technology Studies.” *Feminist Theory* 8(1), 2017: 7-26.
- Leetaru, K. “How Social Media Can Silence Instead of Empower.” *Forbes*, 2017. DOI: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kalevleetaru/2017/10/14/how-social-media-can-silence-instead-of-empower/?sh=6e9621657ba1>.
- Leibowitz, MacDonald, G. Shivaraman, V. and Sanjendra Vignaraja. “ The Digitalization of Hate Speech in South and Southeast Asia: Conflict-Mitigation Approaches.” *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, Georgetown University. 2021. Web.
- Leidig, Eviane Cheng. “Immigrant, Nationalist and Proud: A Twitter Analysis of Indian Diaspora Supporters for Brexit and Trump.” *Media and communication* (Lisboa) 7.1 (2019): 77–89. Web.
- Light, Ann. “HCI as heterodoxy: Technologies of Identity and the Queering of Interaction with Computers.” *Interacting with Computers*. 2011, Vol. 23, Issue 5, 430--438.
- Littler, Jo, and Catherine Rottenberg. “Feminist Solidarities: Theoretical and Practical Complexities.” *Gender, work, and organization* 28.3 (2021): 864–877. Web.
- Loi, Reeta. “India has always been queer AF – we even have a gay Taj Mahal” in *Gaytimes*. 2021. DOI: <https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/life/india-has-always-been-queer-af-we-even-have-a-gay-taj-mahal/>.
- Losh, Elizabeth. “Hashtag Feminism and Twitter Activism in India.” *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 3, no. 12 (2014): 10-22.

Losh, Elizabeth. "Hacktivism and the Humanities : Programming Protest in the Era of the Digital University." In *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, ed. by Matthew K. Gold.

Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press. 2012, pp 161-186.

Lotfalian, Mazyar. "Aestheticized Politics, Visual Culture, and Emergent Forms of Digital Practice." *International Journal of Communication* (Online), University of Southern

California, Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism, Annenberg Press,

2013, p. 1371–1390.

Mani, Lata. "We Inter Are Identity Politics and #MeToo." *Feminist Review*. Issue 130, 2018.

DOI: <https://femrev.wordpress.com/2018/09/10/we-inter-are-identity-politics-me-too/>.

Manovich, L. *Instagram and contemporary image*. 2017.

DOI:<http://manovich.net/index.php/projects/Instagram-and-contemporary-image>.

Marwick, A. & Lewis, R. "Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online." *Data & Society*

Research Institute. 2017. DOI: https://datasociety.net/pubs/oh/DataAndSociety_MediaManipulationAndDisinformationOnline.pfd.

Mathur, S. "India vocal about #MeToo in October" Global Data Analytics." *The Times of*

India, 2018. DOI: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-most-vocal-about-metoo-in-october-global-data-analytics-co/articleshow/66452967.cms>

McGarry, A., I. Erhart, H. Eslen-Ziya, O. Jenzen, U. Korkut (eds), *The Aesthetics of Global*

Protest: Visual Culture and Communication. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University

Press, 2020, DOI: [10.5117/9789463724913_pre](https://doi.org/10.5117/9789463724913_pre).

Mendes, Kaitlynn, Jessica Ringrose, and Jessalynn Keller. *Digital Feminist*

Activism: Girls and Women Fight Back Against Rape Culture. Kettering: Oxford

University Press. 2019.

- Mendes, Kaitlynn, et al. "Digitized Narratives of Sexual Violence: Making Sexual Violence Felt and Known through Digital Disclosures." *New Media & Society*, vol. 21, no. 6, 2019, pp. 1290–1310, doi:10.1177/1461444818820069.
- Mihelj, Sabina, and César Jiménez-Martínez. "Digital Nationalism: Understanding the Role of Digital Media in the Rise of 'new' Nationalism." *Nations and nationalism* 27.2 (2021): 331–346. Web.
- Miles, Matthew B., A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldana. *Qualitative Data Analysis*. Los Angeles: Sage. 2013.
- Mishra. S. "From #MeToo to #MeTooIndia: News Domestication in Indian English Language Newspapers," *Journalism Studies*, 21:5, 2020, pp 659 – 677. DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2019.1709882.
- Misra, Geetanjali. "Decriminalizing homosexuality in India." *Reproductive Health Matters*, 17:34, 2009, pp - 20-28, DOI: 10.1016/S0968-8080(09)34478-X.
- Mitra, A. "Marginal Voices in Cyberspace". *New Media and Society*. 2011. Vol. 3, 29-48. Print.
- Mitra, R., & Gajjala, R. "Queer Blogging in Indian Digital Diasporas: A Dialogic Encounter." *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 32(4), 2008, pp - 400–423. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859908321003>.
- Mohan, Sriram. "Locating the 'Internet Hindu': Political Speech and Performance in Indian Cyberspace." *Television & new media* 16.4 (2015): 339–345. Web.
- Mohanty, Chandra T. *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. Print.
- Moitra, A, Ishtiaque. S, Chandra, P. "Parsing the Me in #MeToo: Sexual Harassment, Social Media, and Justice Infrastructures." *Proc. ACM Human-Computer. Interact.*, 2021, Vol. 5, No. CSCW1, Article 111.

- Moni, Sujatha. "Intersectionality in the Contemporary Intersectionality in the Contemporary Women's Marches: Possibilities for Social Change." *Journal of Feminist Scholarship*, 16 (2020): 1-16, 10.23860/jfs.2019.16.01.
- Morais dos Santos Bruss, S. "Queering Feminist Solidarities. #Metoo, LoSHA and the Digital Dalit." *Open Gender Journal*, 2020. DOI: 10.17169/ogj.2020.71.
- Morais, Sarah. "Theorizing the Digital Subaltern." The Centre for Internet and Society. 2013. DOI: <https://cis-india.org/raw/theorizing-the-digital-subaltern>.
- Moretti, Franco. *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History*. London: Verso, 2005. Print.
- Morgan, Robin. *Sisterhood is Forever: "Multiple Oppressions"*. New York, NY: Washington Square Press. 2003.
- Motta, Renata. "Feminist Solidarities and Coalitional Identity: The Popular Feminism of the Marcha Das Margaridas." *Latin American perspectives* 48.5 (2021): 25–41. Web.
- Muñoz, J. 2009. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. NYU Press.
- Muñoz, B & Pérez-Sánchez, G. "Introduction: Thinking Queer Activism Transnationally." *The Scholar and Feminist Online*, 2017, Issue 14.2. DOI: <https://sfoonline.barnard.edu/thinking-queer-activism-transnationally/introduction-thinking-queer-activism-transnationally/>.
- Nakamura, Lisa. *Digitizing Race Visual Cultures of the Internet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008. Print.
- Nakamura, L. *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet*. Routledge, New York, 2002. Print.
- Narayanaswamy, Lata. "Whose feminism counts?" Gender(ed) knowledge and professionalisation in development." *Third World Quarterly*, 37:12, 2016, pp- 2156-2175, DOI: [10.1080/01436597.2016.1173511](https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2016.1173511).

- Narrain, Arvind. *Queer: "Despised Sexuality."* *Law, and Social Change*. Ed. 1st. Bangalore: Books for Change. 2004.
- Narrain, Arvind. "The Articulation of Rights Around Sexuality and Health: Subaltern Queer Cultures in India in the Era of Hindutva." *Health and Human Rights* 7.2 (2004): 142–164. Web.
- Narrain, Arvind, and Gautam Bhan. *Because I Have a Voice: Queer Politics in India*. New Delhi: Yoda Press. 2005. Print.
- Nash. C & Brown, K. *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research*. Farrham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2010.
- Neumüller, Moritz. *The Routledge Companion to Photography and Visual Culture*. Ed. Moritz Neumüller. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018. Print.
- Nigam, Shalu. *Domestic Violence Law in India: Myth and Misogyny*. Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2021. Print.
- Oksala, Johanna. "Cyberfeminists and women: Foucault's Notion of Identity," *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 6:1, 1998, 39-47, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08038749850167923>.
- Olmstead, K., & Barthel, M. "The challenges of using Facebook for research." *Pew Research Center*. 2015. DOI: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/03/26/thechallenges-of-using-facebook-for-research/#>.
- Olteanu, Alexandra et al. "Social Data: Biases, Methodological Pitfalls, and Ethical Boundaries." *Frontiers in big data* 2 (2019): 13–13. Web.
- Ortiz, J et al. "Giving Voice to the Voiceless: The Use of Digital Technologies by Marginalized Groups." *Communications of the Association for Information Systems* 45 (2019): 2–. Web.
- Paasonen, Susanna. "Revisiting Cyberfeminism." *Communications*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2011,

DOI:10.1515/comm.2011.017.

Pain, Paromita. “‘It Took Me Quite a Long Time to Develop a Voice’: Examining Feminist Digital Activism in the Indian #MeToo Movement.” *New Media & Society*, vol. 23, no. 11, 2021, pp. 3139–3155, DOI:10.1177/1461444820944846.

Pande, Amba. *Women in the Indian Diaspora: Historical Narratives and Contemporary Challenges*. Singapore: Springer Nature, 2018, xiv-200.

Pandey, V. “Why legalizing gay sex in India is not a Western Idea. *BBC News, Delhi*. 2018. DOI: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-46620242>.

Papacharissi, Zizi. *Affective Publics : Sentiment, Technology, and Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. Print.

Park, S. “Cyborg mothering.” In Stitt, J. C., Powell, P. R. (Eds.), *Mothers who deliver: Feminist Interventions in Public and Interpersonal Discourse*, New York: SUNY, 2010, pp 57-75.

Parvin, Nassim. “Doing Justice to Stories: On Ethics and Politics of Digital Storytelling.” *Engaging science, technology, and society* 4, 2018. Web.

Pegu, S. “MeToo in India: Building Revolutions from Solidarities.” *Decisions* 2019, 46, 151-168. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40622-019-00212>.

Phadke, Shilpa. “Thirty Years On: Women's Studies Reflects on the Women's Movement.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 38, no. 43, 2003. pp. 4567–4576. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/4414191.

Phillips, Nelson, and Cynthia Hardy. *Discourse Analysis: Investigating Processes of Social Construction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002.

Pivato, Joseph and De Gasperi, Guilia. *Comparative Literature for the New Century*,

McGill-Queens, University Press, 2018.

Place, Katie R., Erica Ciszek, and . "Troubling Dialogue and Digital Media: A Subaltern Critique." *Social Media + Society* 7.1 (2021): 205630512098444.

Plummer K. *Telling Sexxual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds*. 1995. London: Routledge.

Prasad, Priya. "Tradition and National Identity: LGBT Status in Contemporary India."

Compass, *The Gallatin Research Journal*. DOI:

<https://wp.nyu.edu/compass/2018/04/23/tradition-and-national-identity-lgbt-status-in-contemporary-india/>.

Presner, Todd. "Comparative Literature in the Age of Digital Humanities: On Possible Futures for a Discipline." *A Companion to Comparative Literature*. Eds. Ali Behdad and Dominic Thomas. Oxford: Blackwell, 2011. 193–208.

Presner, Todd Samuel. *HyperCities : Thick Mapping in the Digital Humanities*.

Cambridge, Massachusetts : Harvard University Press, 2014.

Pullen, Allison & Vacchani, Sheena. "Feminist Solidarity and Resistance in the #MetooEra: A Conceptual Exploration." In *Academy of Management Annual Meeting Proceedings 2019*, Vol. 2019 Issue 1: Academy of Management Academy of Management.

Rafail, Patrick, and Isaac Freitas. "Grievance Articulation and Community Reactions in the Men's Rights Movement Online." *Social media + society* 5.2 (2019): 205630511984138. Web.

Rajagopalan, S. "Misogyny, Solidarity and Post-feminism on Social Media: The Work of Being Diana Shurygina, Survivor-Celebrity." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 22.5-6 (2019): 739–762. Web.

Rao, Shakuntala. "Making of Selfie Nationalism: Narendra Modi, the Paradigm Shift to

- Social Media Governance, and Crisis of Democracy.” *The Journal of communication inquiry*. 42.2 (2018): 166–183. Web.
- Ray, S. *En-Gendering India: Woman and Nation in Colonial and Postcolonial Narratives*, Durham: Duke University Press. 2000. Print.
- Ray, Sanjana. “Indian Culture Does Recognize Homosexuality, Let Us Count the Ways.” *The Quint*. DOI: <https://www.thequint.com/voices/opinion/homosexuality-rss-ancient-indian-culture-section-377#read-more>.
- Reddy, Gayatri. *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Print.
- Rheingold, Howard. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co, 1993. Print.
- Ringrose, Jessica, and Kaitlynn Mendes. “Digital Feminist Activism: #MeToo and the Everyday Experiences of Challenging Rape Culture.” *MeToo and the Politics of Social Change*. 2019: 37–51. Print.
- Risam, Roopika. "Decolonizing the Digital Humanities in Theory and Practice.” *English Faculty Publications*. 7. 2018. DOI: https://digitalcommons.salemstate.edu/english_facpub/7.
- Risam, Roopika. “Beyond the Margins: Intersectionality and the Digital Humanities.” *English Faculty Publications*. 2015. URL: https://digitalcommons.salemstate.edu/english_facpub/4.
- Raiva, Mehroonisa and Salla Sairola. “#MeToo and Feminist Activism in India.” *EASST Review*, Volume 37 (3), 2018. From <https://easst.net/article/metoo-feminist-activism-in-india/#authors>.
- Rode, Jennifer. “A Theoretical Agenda for Feminist HCI.” *Interacting with Computers*, 23(5), 2011, pp 393–400.

- Rodino-Colocino, Michelle. "Me Too, #MeToo: Countering Cruelty with Empathy." *Communication and critical/cultural studies* 15.1 (2018): 96–100. Web.
- Rogers, R. "Debanalizing Twitter: The Transformation of an Object of Study" in *Twitter and Society*. Edited by Katrin Weller and Cornelius Puschmann, Peter Lang Publication. 2014, Vol 89, pp – (ix – xxvi).
- Roy, Sandip. "From Khush List to Gay Bombay: Virtual Webs of Real People", *Mobile Cultures: New Media in Queer Asia*, Duke University Press, 2003.
- Roy, Srila. "#MeToo is a Crucial Moment to Revisit the History of Indian Feminism" *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume 53, Issue No 42, 2018. DOI: <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/metoo-crucial-moment-revisit-history-indian-feminism>.
- Ruiz De Castilla, C. "Close Reading." in *The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Communication Research Methods*, Edited by: Mike Allen, SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks, 2018.
- Sambaraju, R. "I would have taken this to my grave, Like Most Women' – Reporting Sexual Harassment during the #MeToo movement in India." *Journal of Social Issues*, 2020, Vol 76, No.3, pp – 603 – 631. DOI: 10.1111/josi.12391.
- Sanders, Douglas E. "377 and the Unnatural Afterlife of British Colonialism in Asia," *Asian Journal of Comparative Law*, 2009, Vol. 4: Issue. 1, Article 7. DOI: 10.2202/1932-0205.1176.
- Sarkar, S. "Playing with boundaries: Posthuman digital narratives in RealSelf.com." *Rupkatha Journal : On Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, Volume VII, No. 1, 2015, pp- 82-90.
- Sarkhoh, Nadia, and Majid KhosraviNik. "Social Media Discourses of Arabism and the Negotiation of Self in the Middle East." *World Englishes* 39.4 (2020): 609–622. Web.

- Saussy, Haun. "Exquisite Cadavers Stitched from Fresh Nightmares: Of Memes, Hives, and Selfish Genes," In *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*. Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006. Print.
- Savigny, Heather. *Cultural Sexism : The Politics of Feminist Rage in the #MeToo Era*. Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2020. Print.
- Saxey E. *Homoplot: The Coming-Out Story and Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Identity*. 2008. New York: Peter Lang.
- Schafer, Jorgen. "Rethinking Comparative Literature: Literary Studies in the Age of Electronic Media." *Proceedings of the ELO Conference*. 2018. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7273/EF7G-DM76>
- Schaffer, Kay. "The Game Girls of VNS Matrix: Challenging Gendered Identities in Cyberspace." In: *Virtual Gender: Fantasies of Subjectivity and Embodiment*, eds. Anne O'Farrell and Lynne Vallone. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1999, pp 147-168.
- Schmitz, Rachel, and Emily Kazyak. "Masculinities in Cyberspace: An Analysis of Portrayals of Manhood in Men's Rights Activist Websites." *Social sciences* (Basel) 5.2 (2016): 18–. Web.
- Schroder, K.C. 2013. "Discourses of Fact." In *A Handbook of Media and Communication Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Methodologies*, edited by Klaus Bruhn Jensen (98–116). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley : University of California Press, 1990.
- Seegerberg, A & W. Lance Bennett. "Social Media and the Organization of Collective Action: Using Twitter to Explore the Ecologies of Two Climate Change Protests," *The Communication Review*, 2011, 14:3, 197-215, DOI: 10.1080/10714421.2011.597250.

Selenium HQ. Selenium - web browser automation. [Online]. Available:

<https://www.seleniumhq.org/>. 2019.

Serisier, Tanya. "Speaking out against rape: Feminist (her)stories and anti-rape politics." *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, No. 16, 2017, pp 84-95.

Shah, N., Chattopadhyay S. & Sneha. P.P. *Digital Activism in Asia: A Reader*. Meson Press:

Lueneberg. 2015. DOI: <https://meson.press/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/9783957960511-Digital-Activism-Asia-Reader.pdf>

Shah, N. "Queer Mobiles and Mobile Queers: Intersections, Vectors, and Movements in India", *Handbook of New Media in Asia*, (Eds.) Larissa Hjorth and Olivia Khoo, 2015, Routledge: London.

Shah, Svati. "From the land of what-might-have-been." *Himal SouthAsian*, 2014. DOI:

<https://www.himalmag.com/indian-diaspora-hindutva-modi-lgbt-rights-family/>

Shahani, Nishant. "Section 377 and the 'Trouble with Statism': Legal Intervention and Queer Performativity in Contemporary India." *Genders*, no. 50, 2009, Gale Academic OneFile.

Shaw, S., Lee, J. *Women's voices, Feminist visions*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill. 2004.

Shifman, Lenor. "Memes in a Digital World: Reconciling with a Conceptual Troublemaker." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Volume 18, Issue 3, 1 2013, pp 362–377.

Silva, Armando. "Imaginaries In Contemporary Aesthetics" *Imaginations* 7:2 (2017):

174-187. DOI: [10.17742/IMAGE.VOS.7-2.10](https://doi.org/10.17742/IMAGE.VOS.7-2.10).

Sliwinska, Basia. *Feminist Visual Activism and the Body*. Routledge, 2021.

Sneha, P.P. "Mapping Digital Humanities in India". *Bangalore: The Center*

for Internet and Society. 2016. DOI: <https://cis-india.org/papers/mapping-digital-humanities-in-india>.

- Sousa, H, Pinto, M & Coste e Silva, E. “Digital Public Sphere”: Weaknesses and Challenges.” *Cominição e Sociedade*, 2013, vol. 23, pp 9 – 12.
- Srivastava, Kalpana et al. “Misogyny, Feminism, and Sexual Harassment.” *Industrial psychiatry journal* 26.2 (2017): 111–113. Web.
- Srivastava, Sanjay. *Sexuality Studies*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Srivastava, Saurabh. “Disciplining the ‘Desire’: ‘Straight’ State and LGBT Activism in India.” *Sociological Bulletin*, vol. 63, no. 3, Indian Sociological Society, 2014, pp. 368–85, doi:10.1177/0038022920140303.
- Spivak, Gayatri. “Crossing Borders” *PSCL*. (2003): 380-398.
- Steans, Jill. “Negotiating the Politics of Difference in the Project of Feminist Solidarity.” *Review of international studies* 33.4 (2007): 729–743. Web.
- Stewart, Maya, and Ulrike Schultze. “Producing Solidarity in Social Media Activism: The Case of My Stealthy Freedom.” *Information and Organization*, vol. 29, no. 3, Elsevier Ltd, 2019, p. 100251–. DOI:10.1016/j.infoandorg.2019.04.003.
- Suk, Jiyoung, et al. “MeToo, Networked Acknowledgment, and Connective Action: How ‘Empowerment Through Empathy’ Launched a Social Movement.” *Social Science Computer Review*, vol. 39, no. 2, SAGE Publications, 2021, pp. 276–94, doi:10.1177/0894439319864882.
- Sweetman, Caroline. “Introduction, Feminist Solidarity and Collective Action.” *Gender and development* 21.2 (2013): 217–229. Web.
- Taş, Oğuzhan, and Tuğba Taş. “Resistance on the Walls, Reclaiming Public Space: Street Art in Times of Political Turmoil in Turkey.” *Interactions* (Bristol, England), vol. 5, no. 3, Intellect, 2014, pp. 327–49, doi:[10.1386/iscc.5.3.327_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/iscc.5.3.327_1).
- Tewksbury, Doug. “Digital Solidarity, Analog Mobilization: An Ethnography of the

- Technology-Embedded Protest Networks of the Québec Student Strike.” *Canadian journal of communication* 43.4 (2018): 601–617. Web.
- Tölölyan, Khachig. “Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment.” *Diaspora: Journal of Diaspora Studies*. Volume 5, Issue 1, 1996, pp 3-36.
- Toppa, S. “LGBT South Asian Americans Remain ‘Hidden’ Post-Supreme Court Ruling.” *NBC News*, 2015. DOI: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/lgbt-south-asian-americans-remain-hidden-post-supreme-court-ruling-n411016>.
- Trott, Verity. “Networked Feminism: Counterpublics and the Intersectional Issues of #MeToo.” *Feminist media studies* (2020): 1–18. Web.
- Tufekci, Zeynep. *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*. Yale University Press, 2018.
- Tufekci, Zeynep. “Big Questions for Social Media Big Data: Representativeness, Validity and Other Methodological Pitfalls.” In *ICWSM ‘14: Proceedings of the 8th International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*, 2014.
- Tufekci, Zeynep. “Engineering the public: Big data, surveillance and computational politics.” *First Monday*, 2014.
- DOI:<<https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/4901/4097>>.
- Turkle, S. “Introduction: Identity in the Age of the Internet”. In *Life on the Screen*. New York: Simon Schuster. 1995, Pp. 9-26.
- Udupa, Sahana. “Enterprise Hindutva and Social Media in Urban India.” *Contemporary South Asia* 26.4 (2018): 453–467. Web.
- Vacchelli, Elena, and Magali Peyrefitte. “Telling Digital Stories as Feminist Research and Practice: A 2-Day Workshop with Migrant Women in London.” *Methodological Innovations*, vol. 11, no. 1, Jan. 2018. DOI:10.1177/2059799118768424.
- Vaishnav, Milan. “Religious Nationalism and India’s Future.” In *The BJP in Power: Indian*

- Democracy and Religious Nationalism. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. 2019. DOI: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/04/04/religious-nationalism-and-india-s-future-pub-78703>.
- Vanita, Ruth. "Acknowledging Mutual Influence: India and the West." *The Scholar & Feminist Online*. Issue 14.2, 2017. DOI: <https://sfoonline.barnard.edu/thinking-queer-activism-transnationally/acknowledging-mutual-influence-india-and-the-west/0/>.
- Vickery, Jacqueline and Tracy Everback. 2018. *Mediating Misogyny: Gender, Technology, and Harassment*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wajcman, Judy. "Feminist theories of technology." *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, Volume 34, Issue 1, 2010, pp 143–152. DOI: <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.1093/cje/ben057>.
- Wajcman, Judy. "From women and technology to gendered technoscience." *Information Communication and Society*. 10. 2007. DOI: 10.1080/13691180701409770.
- Wajcman, Judy. *TechnoFeminism*. Cambridge: Polity Press. 2004.
- Wajcman, Judy. *Feminism confronts technology*. Cambridge: Polity Press. 1991.
- Wilding, Faith. "Where is Feminism in Cyberfeminism?" *Old Boys Network*. 1998. DOI: http://www.obn.org/reading_room/writings/html/where.html.
- Wong-Villacres, Marison & Kumar, Arkadeep & Vishwanath, Aditya & Karusala, Naveema & Divalso, Betsy & Kumar, Neha. "Designing for Intersections." *Proceedings of the Designing Interactive Systems Conference*, 2018, 45-58. DOI: 10.1145/3196709.3196794.
- Wonneberger, Anke, Iina R. Hellsten, and Sandra H. J. Jacobs. "Hashtag Activism and the Configuration of Counterpublics: Dutch Animal Welfare Debates on Twitter." *Information, Communication & Society*, 2020:1–18.

- Xiong, Y., Cho, M., & Boatwright, B. "Hashtag Activism and Message Frames among Social Movement Organizations: Semantic Network Analysis and Thematic Analysis of Twitter during the #MeToo Movement." *Public Relations Review*, 2019, pp 10-23.
- Zavos, J. "Situating Hindu nationalism in the UK: Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the development of British Hindu identity." *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 2010, 48(1), 2–22.
- Zaytoun, Kelli, and Judith Ezekiel. "Sisterhood in Movement: Feminist Solidarity in France and the United States." *Frontiers (Boulder)* 37.1 (2016): 195–214. Web.
- Zepetnek, Steven Tötösy. "About the Situation of the Discipline of Comparative Literature and Neighbouring Fields in the Humanities Today," *Comparative Literature: East & West*, 2017, 1:2, 176-203, DOI: [10.1080/25723618.2017.1387398](https://doi.org/10.1080/25723618.2017.1387398).
- Zhao, Mengyang. "Chinese Diaspora Activism and the Future of International Solidarity." *China Columns*. 2020. DOI: <https://madeinchinajournal.com/2020/09/14/chinese-diaspora-activism-and-the-future-of-international-solidarity/>
- Ziolkowski, Jan M. "Incomparable: The Destiny of Comparative Literature, Globalization or Not." *The Global South* 1.2 (2007): 16- 44.