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PERSPECTIVES - SPECIAL EDITION



Smart Leader IAS

THE SOCIAL FACT

is a monthly bulletin for sociology current affairs which tries to give aspirants a new dimensions in their sociology preparations. The Magazine has been designed in such away that the reading experience is enriching and insightful for the readers.

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ISSUE 30 : SPECIAL EDITION

THE SOCIAL FACT

Dear Readers,

As UPSC CSE Mains 2025 is round the corner, we from "The Social Fact team", like to send good wishes for all the aspirants.

To make your preparation simpler, in this special edition we compiled all previous editions of the 'Perspectives-sections'. We hope, this will save your precious time and bring much needed dynamic for the sociology mains paper.

All The Best!!!

PERSPECTIVES

POCKETS & PREJUDICE

Tina Das, the author of this article, is of the view that lack of pockets in women's clothing is actually political, and its time to bring them back as soon as possible. In the dizzying world of women's fashion, high-street and haute couture, pockets are irrelevant. Well, here's a news flash. Women need pockets in their outfits—ASAP. And not pockets that can barely hold a few coins or bulge if more than three Rs 10 coins are stuffed into them. We need pockets that accommodate our hands, cellphones, and other mundane items that we need on hand. They can actually prevent phones from being snatched away by thieves on the road. It would also not necessitate holding a bag.

But pockets and patriarchy seem to go hand-in-hand, with fashion doing little to bridge the divide. The freedom to walk without a bag has been sacrificed at the altar of fashion. Most women cannot leave their homes without a handbag to store keys, a phone, some tissue paper. Men, on the contrary, can stuff the pockets of their shirts and pants with all sorts of odds and ends without judgement. Even if I do not want to carry a big tote bag to cram stuff, often I have to. And now, even handbags are getting tinier and more expensive. It appears as if it's the reverse of evolution when it comes to women's fashion. From tall heels that give backache to tiny bags that barely hold anything to lack of pockets, the utility factor is constantly being overpowered by some morbid idea of fashion that is incomprehensible

What is even worse is fake pockets. They're there in jeans and dresses—illusions to appeal to the silhouette without the practicality of it. That can really increase the rage situation to a hundred. Adding insult to injury is the increased price when there are pockets in a dress. Even if big designers add pockets to their cargoes or evening dresses, it hardly solves the problem. How many people can afford these outfits? More importantly, how many times will a woman wear the same outfit, simply for the sake of pockets? It is not supposed to be a bespoke fashion moment but an everyday pragmatic one. In fact, it prompted author Hannah Carlson to write an entire book titled *Pockets: An Intimate History of How We Keep Things Close*.

A Brief History of Pockets:

Pockets are deeply rooted in patriarchy. It's political. It was only by the late 17th century that pockets were increasingly incorporated into men's clothing. They were added to suits, coats, waistcoats and trousers. But they were always absent in women's apparel. The reasons are steeped in misogyny. Women need to look 'delicate', which means no unseemly 'bulges' on their bodies. What would women even keep in their pockets, considering their husbands are the breadwinners? They can use their hands to carry a reticule instead. Some were sewn under petticoats and panniers where women would secrete essentials like keys, spectacles, combs, and money. Women wearing clothes with pockets—especially hidden ones—were viewed with suspicion. During the turbulent years of the French Revolution, internal and external pockets were banned from women's clothing. The idea was to prevent them from carrying revolutionary material. The lack of pockets also means that one really doesn't know what to do with one's hands while posing for photos. Men get that one standard hand-in-pocket pose. Why should women not get that option?

Coco Chanel attempted to change this by incorporating pockets in her clothes. She popularised the slouch among women—they could put their hands in their pockets the way men had been doing all these years. During World War I, practical clothing became the norm and the suffrage movement saw pockets become a symbol of women's freedom. There were manuals on how

to sew proper pockets. But the movement was short-lived. As women's clothes got tighter, pockets started getting smaller and smaller—until they disappeared again. Today, entrepreneurs and designers have not just spoken out but also tried to start the change with their own labels. India's Jayalakshmi Ranjith has started a clothing brand that actively includes pockets in her clothing line. Other brands, which are homegrown, like Okhai or Why So Blue, also include pockets in their women's clothing items. An Indian entrepreneur based in Seattle said in an interview that pockets are the 'superpower' of their clothing collection. "Only 5 per cent of women's pockets can fit a smartphone, compared to 85 per cent of men's pockets. On average, women's pockets are 48 per cent shorter and 6.5 per cent narrower than men's pockets," said Aditi Sinha, the co-founder of Seattle-based women's workwear label Point of View, told Seattle Refined.



GREY DIVORCE

Grey Divorce is a term that describes divorces that happen later in life, generally after the 50s, after the couples have spent years together. People who separate after spending such a long time together are called Silver splitters and divorcing later in life can cause financial difficulties, among many other complications. Grey divorces are increasing rapidly. According to Pew Research Center, 40 per cent of all divorce cases in the United States in the past two decades involved individuals aged 50 or older. The rate of grey divorces doubled since 1990 and this number tripled for those over the age of 65. Why Are People Separating After Decades Of Marriage? Shivani Misri Sadhoo, a psychologist and marriage counsellor, recently shared her insights with Zee News Digital regarding the causes and possible implications of grey divorces: Empty Nest Syndrome: When children leave home, couples realise they no longer share any common goals or interests leading to a reevaluation of their marriage. Increased Life Expectancy: The life expectancy rate is higher and people are living longer, hence couples find themselves growing apart over time and seek personal fulfilment in new ways. Financial Independence: Women are more independent today as they have their own careers and all the financial resources, which provide them the means to leave an unsatisfactory marriage.

Changing Social Attitudes:

Society is now accepting the concept of divorce, which is making it easier for older adults to consider this option. The future of grey divorce is likely to see continued growth, with significant implications for families as social institutions. As the trend of older adults divorcing continues, several key impacts on the family structure and society are expected:

Continued Increase in Grey Divorce Rates:

Demographic Shifts: As the population ages and lifespans increase, more couples may reassess their relationships in later life, leading to higher rates of grey divorce. This trend is expected to persist, especially as the baby boomer generation continues to age.

Changing Social Attitudes: With growing acceptance of divorce across all age groups, older adults may feel less societal pressure to remain in unfulfilling marriages, contributing to the rise in grey divorces.

Impact on Family Structure and Relationships:

Redefining Family Roles: Grey divorce can lead to a reconfiguration of family roles and responsibilities. Adult children may find themselves supporting divorced parents emotionally or financially, potentially reversing traditional parent-child roles.

Strained Intergenerational Relationships: Divorce in later life can create tensions within families, particularly between parents and adult children. These tensions may arise from concerns over inheritance, loyalty conflicts, or the emotional burden of supporting a parent through a late-life transition.

Impact on Grandchildren: Grandchildren may also be affected by their grandparents' divorce, particularly if it disrupts family traditions or leads to changes in living arrangements and family dynamics.

Economic Implications for Families:

Financial Strain: Divorcing later in life can lead to financial difficulties, as older individuals may have less time to recover from the economic impact of splitting assets. This strain can ripple through the family, potentially affecting adult children who may need to provide financial support.

Impact on Retirement Plans: Grey divorce can significantly alter retirement plans, potentially delaying retirement or requiring additional work to maintain financial stability. This can affect not only the divorced individuals but also, their families, who may need to adjust their expectations for support or inheritance.

Changing Nature of Social Support Systems:

Social Isolation: Older adults who divorce may experience increased social isolation, particularly if they lose mutual friends or struggle to rebuild their social networks. This can lead to a greater reliance on family for emotional and social support.

Role of Extended Family: As the nuclear family structure changes due to grey divorce, the role of extended family members may become more important. Siblings, cousins, and other relatives may play a greater role in providing support and maintaining family connections.

Evolving Social Institutions:

Redefinition of Marriage: The increasing prevalence of grey divorce may lead to a redefinition of marriage as a lifelong commitment, particularly in later life. Society may become more accepting of the idea that marriage can evolve or end based on individual fulfillment rather than traditional norms.

Policy and Legal Considerations: As grey divorce becomes more common, there may be changes in policies related to divorce, retirement, and healthcare to better address the unique needs of older adults going through this transition.

The future of grey divorce suggests a shift in how society views marriage and aging, with significant implications for the family as a social institution. Families may need to adapt to new dynamics and challenges, including financial strain, changing roles, and the redefinition of intergenerational relationships. As this trend continues, it will likely prompt broader societal changes in how we understand and support family life in later years.



TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST SOLIDARITY

This piece is an attempt to think through some of the ways in which feminists in the Global South, during the period of decolonisation, thought about difference and hierarchy, and how they imagined solidarity despite—and through—these realities. This is part of a larger project that looks at transnational feminist connections and disconnections during the moment of decolonisation in the twentieth century. I touch on moments of both disconnection and connection to show how postcolonial feminists articulated solidarity and how they negotiated coming together as well as understanding the complicated notion of identity and representation within movements that they highlight. I posit that many of the feminists I look at in this article understood feminist solidarity as possible only on the basis of certain shared assumptions about the world and how it works; a certain world-view that is anti-capitalist, anti-racist, anti-imperial and anti-patriarchal. Perhaps this is unsurprising, given the historical moment during which these connections and disconnections emerged; decolonisation was indeed a moment of radical rethinking and restructuring. Today, faced with an intensifying capitalist, white supremacist, and patriarchal crisis, I wonder if this call to create solidarity through such political positionalities is more urgent than ever. We come together not because we may identify as women; rather, we come together because we believe that we can only be free and live better lives with the end of capitalism, white supremacy, Western empire, and patriarchy. As Mohanty and M. Jacqui Alexander write in their book *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, transnational means: A way of thinking about women in similar contexts across the world, in different geographical spaces, rather than as all women across the world; an understanding of a set of unequal relationships among and between peoples; and taking critical antiracist, anticapitalist positions that would make feminist solidarity work possible.

The first moment I want to touch on is one of disconnection. This moment took place in Copenhagen in 1939, at the International Alliance of Women conference. This conference is notable because it marked a breaking point—or disconnect—in relations between Western and feminists of the Global

South. There had been growing tensions within international feminist spaces, particularly around the devastating effects of European colonialism. Given the colonial context during which many of the early feminist debates began, women from colonised countries clearly articulated gender equality as tied to national liberation. In other words, they refused to separate the question of national independence from the question of gender equality—as many Western feminists insisted on doing. This soon produced confrontations between African, Asian, and Middle Eastern feminists on the one hand, and Western feminists on the other. The crux of these confrontations concerned the refusal of Western feminists to take seriously the problem of colonial rule that their own governments were invested in.

Much of my research has focused on Egypt, and through this I have come across fascinating archival material on how Egyptian feminists responded to confrontations in these spaces, including the conference in Copenhagen in 1939. It was this conference in particular that revealed to Egyptian feminists the myth of a global sisterhood, and a common thread is the accusation Egyptian feminists levelled at Western feminists of not upholding the democratic and equal principles they constantly spoke of. Egyptian feminists pointed out, for example, that countries such as Britain were never criticised for colonial rule or the giving away of Palestine, whereas countries deemed “undemocratic” such as Egypt were constantly criticised. There was a particular moment during which there was an explosive confrontation surrounding the myth of a “global sisterhood,” pushing Egyptian feminist Huda Sha‘arawi to state: “It had become necessary to create an Eastern feminist union as a structure within which to consolidate our forces and help us to have an impact upon the women of the world.”

These contradictions led feminists from the Global South to turn towards other African and Asian feminists to create separate conferences that focused on issues affecting colonised nations. The reluctance of Western feminists to speak out against the Balfour Declaration and the subsequent colonisation of Palestine was the final straw for many, who did not see a separation between gender justice and national liberation. In an instance of colonisation, they saw feminism’s role

as one of resistance; feminists were supposed to challenge all forms of oppression, rather than focus on gender as though it was neatly separable from other forms of oppression. Alongside this was the obvious problem of Western feminist support for these very colonial projects. We see that for women supporting colonial projects, colonised women simply were not deserving women. The category of “woman” has always been an already-racialized category that is far from universal, even as it was claimed to be so. This brings to mind our current moment, where again we see resistance from feminists in the Global North to take seriously colonisation in Palestine.

This shared analysis of imperialism connected women across different geographical and cultural spaces, and provided a means through which solidarity could be created. As Elisabeth Armstrong has written: “Fostered by the shared analysis of imperialism, women from newly independent and still colonised nations in Asia and North Africa honed what I call a solidarity of commonality for women’s shared human rights, and a solidarity of complicity that took imbalances of power between women and the world into account.” Similarly, Antoinette Burton has written that these conferences made visible the refusal by women in Asia and Africa to be dismissed or seen as developmentally backward in its demands, or mobilised without consultation into a Western-dominated feminist agenda. Solidarity then, is not about identification with gender, but about a shared belief in what freedom means and how to bring it about.

The growing momentum around transnational and anti-colonial feminist solidarity was heightened by the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung in 1955. Laura Bier writes, “As new alliances were forged in the international arena, groups of women activists, writers, students, and politicians circulated within the milieu of international conferences, visiting delegations, summits, and committee meetings. The resulting exchanges and networks were part of what made possible the sorts of imaginings that overflowed the boundaries of the nation state.” Throughout all of these meetings, the central articulation was around postcolonial agency and the importance of feminists in the Global South to speak on their own terms. Even before this meeting, however, feminists such as Amy Ashwood Garvey and Claudia Jones were engaging in internationalist

NITISHA THAKWANI

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I would sincerely like to thank Sivarajavel sir for his continuous support throughout UPSC journey.

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Thank you sir not just for sociology but for motivating me during low times.



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activism around imperialism and gender. Other conferences where women from across Africa and the rest of the Global South came together to discuss imperialism, capitalism, and gender include the 1947 Conference for the Women of Asia, held with the explicit aim of “opening a new chapter for Asian and also African internationalist leadership.” The conference was held in Beijing, and was one of the first international events organised by the Chinese Communist Party, including 367 women from 37 countries. It became clear from the conference that what connected women from across Asia and Africa was anti-imperialism, mass-based organising, a membership dominated by rural women, and anti-capitalism. Conference reports such as the one based on this one entitled *The Women of Asia and Africa*, emphasised the shared struggles women in both continents faced. One fascinating point that was raised by women at this conference was the need to hold both their own states as well as imperial states to account. Indian feminist Jai Kishore Handoo, for example, led a campaign against the use of Indian troops to put down the independence movement in Indonesia, and a Vietnamese delegate appealed to African delegates at the conference to protest against Algerian, Tunisian, Senegalese and Moroccan soldiers being taken to Vietnam to “fight against a brother people, against whom they have no reason whatsoever to fight.” What created solidarity, therefore, was a shared commitment to fighting against imperial oppression, both at home and abroad. This is important to highlight today, where we face an increasing need for both external critiques of the Global North as well as autocritiques that hold postcolonial states and elites accountable for political, economic and social violence. Across the Global South today we see movements pushing back against both imperialism and local dictatorship, seeing the two as connected. An example of this double critique, aimed at both Western feminism as well as at postcolonial states, was the focus on social reproduction, which posed a question to such states as to whether they were taking the gendered consequences of state-led capitalism seriously.

In an incisive piece, Mai Taha reads debates Egyptian feminists had through the concept of the “social factory.” She argues that projects such as Gamal Abdel Nasser’s centered the factory and industrialization in the development

of the modern Egyptian nation state while deflecting the question of social reproduction, largely being carried out by women. Some feminist debates, therefore, centered around this displacement, and argued for a postcolonial state formation that took seriously social welfare and social reproductive benefits. Similarly, Amy Ashwood Garvey addressed the Pan-African Congress in Manchester in 1945, focusing on the position of the Black woman and the postcolonial state: In Jamaica, the labouring class of women who work in the fields, take goods to the market, and so on, receive much less pay for the same work than the men do...the Negro men of Jamaica are largely responsible for this, as they do little to help the women to get improved wages.

This double critique was central to the ways in which African, Asian and women of African descent imagined decolonisation. Decolonisation was never simply about men from these countries taking over political power; it was about liberation for both men and women.



THE KNOTTY PROMISE OF SECTION 69

As India enforces the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the new set of criminal laws that replace the Indian Penal Code, Section 69 faces questioning from legal eyes for its gender bias, potential misuse, and implications on modern relationships, finds Soibam Rocky Singh. On July 31, a 25-year-old woman from Ramgarh, Jharkhand, filed an FIR accusing a man of engaging in a sexual relationship with her under the pretence of marriage. The woman claimed in her FIR that the man, 26, who she had known from college, had come home on multiple occasions and expressed the wish to marry her. In one instance, he allegedly told her mother explicitly not to consider any marriage proposals for her, as he intended to marry her himself. The woman stated in her first information report (FIR) that she was introduced to his mother, who allegedly supported their union. She claimed that the man and his mother “backtracked on their commitments”. She was therefore filing a case under Section 69 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), the new set of criminal laws that replaces the colonial-era Indian Penal Code (IPC). While the trial is still pending, the man was granted bail by a local court in October. Section 69 of the BNS, criminalises “sexual intercourse by employing deceitful means” and cites the “promise to marry...a woman without any intention of fulfilling the same”, as grounds for imprisonment up to 10 years and the possibility of a fine. While it is not treated as rape, it is considered “inducement” and also applies to “false promise of employment or promotion, or marrying by suppressing identity”. There are several cases in court that use Section 69 in their FIRs, opening the doors to public and legal discourse around it. Before the BNS came into being, up to 40% of all rape case allegations pertained to ‘friend,’ ‘live in partners on pretext of marriage,’ and ‘separated husband,’ going by National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data between 2016 and 2022. On December 5, the Guwahati High Court granted bail to a man after he was arrested when a woman claimed that she and the man had been in a relationship for nine years, during which period, they engaged in physical relationship regularly. The man also allegedly promised her to marry. However, she found out that he had become engaged to another woman. When she asked for an explanation, the man allegedly cited parental pressure to marry the woman.

“It is a settled position of law that a simple promise to marry without anything more does not give rise to the concept of misconception of fact. Therefore, under the given circumstances, the petitioner does not deserve to be detained in custody,” the High Court said.

Based on the past:

Prior to the enactment of the BNS, such cases were registered under Section 376(2)(n) (commits rape repeatedly on the same woman) along with Section 90 (consent known to be given under fear or misconception), says Advocate K.S. Nanda, who represented the accused man in Jharkhand. Effectively, the two IPC Sections now form the base of Section 69.

Ravi Kant, advocate and country head of the Access to Justice Project, an international non-profit offering pro bono services, explains the difference between the previous law under IPC and the new provision in the BNS. “This is a new offence because they have used words such as ‘deceitful means’, ‘inducement’, ‘false promise’. This is not rape,” he clarifies. Section 69 comes within Chapter 5 of the BNS: ‘Of Offences Against Woman and Child’, under “sexual offences”. The need for this Section, says Kant, was “because such cases were reported a lot in the courts during the IPC time”.

Another difference is that earlier, if a relationship lasted several years, and the woman claimed she was cheated on the pretext of marriage, the court typically dismissed such cases, he says. “It was reasoned that a long-term relationship implied mutual consent and understanding, making fraud difficult to substantiate.” Now, even if the relationship is consensual, it is treated as an offence because it is taken as a false promise or a deception.

Gender biased

Deepika Narayan Bhardwaj, a journalist, filmmaker, and activist, calls the new law “inherently gender biased and discriminative” with the law suggesting that women do not have agency in decisions around sexual matters. On January 10 this year, she had started an online petition on Change.org to repeal Section 69 of the BNS, which has since garnered over 60,000 signatures.

Her contention in the petition is that “a consensual sexual relationship made on promise of marriage will be a crime only if a man reneges from it and not a woman”.

The petition also talks about the power equation, where “the law presumes a woman cannot be in position of power to induce a man into sex by false promise of job or promotion”. She called the law “extremely regressive” and also said it “completely discards the concept of will and consent” around sexual matters. Since Section 69 is a recent addition, Bhardwaj uses past data recorded under Section 376 (rape) for context and comparison. Until 2015, the NCRB that compiles a yearly compendium of crimes across India in ‘Offenders Relation to Victims of Rape’ category under the ‘Crime Against Women’ chapter, the relationship between the accused and the survivor in rape cases was broadly categorised as a ‘family member’, ‘neighbour’, or ‘stranger’. However, the growing number of cases involving ‘false promises of marriage’ led the NCRB to refine its classifications. In 2016, specific subcategories were introduced under the ‘Offenders Relation to Victims of Rape’, including ‘friend’, ‘live in partners on pretext of marriage’, and ‘separated husband’.

NCRB data further reveals that the average conviction rate for all rape cases between 2016 and 2022 stood at 29.71%. However, the data does not include a sub-classification of conviction rates under the ‘Offenders Relation to Victims of Rape’ category. This makes it challenging to determine conviction trends specific to cases involving false promises of marriage or similar allegations.

Parliamentary report

The report no. 246 of the Rajya Sabha on the BNS, released by the Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs on November 12 last year, six months before the BNS came into force, had cautioned against reinforcing gender stereotypes. According to the report, it was

difficult to prove whether a promise to marry had actually been made. It also said “intentions can change over time”, alluding to the very nature of relationships. The report stated that “criminalising a promise to marry” can

intrude into an individual's right to privacy and autonomy. It said that "defining what constitutes a legally binding promise to marry can be vague and open to interpretation", which could lead to "inconsistencies in enforcement and judgments". Also, a verbal intention to marry could be a challenge when it came to evidence collection.

Differing court views:

On November 26, the Supreme Court flagged a "worrying trend" of criminalising long-term consensual relationships after they turn sour. "If criminality is to be attached to such prolonged physical relationship at a very belated stage, it can lead to serious consequences," the Bench of Justices B.V. Nagarathna and N. Kotiswar Singh said, while quashing an FIR against a man accused of rape by a woman who was in a relationship with him for over nine years, by her own account. In another judgment, the Gujarat High Court on September 19 commented: "In every case where a man fails to marry a woman despite a promise made to her, [he] cannot be held guilty for committing the offence of rape."

The High Court's ruling came while quashing a February 2019 FIR for rape filed against a man, who had entered into a physical relationship with a woman on the promise of marriage. Cases registered before the BNS came into force are being tried on the old IPC. The woman in her FIR complaint alleged that she got pregnant and when she informed the man, he reneged on his promise.

During the pendency of the trial, a baby boy was born. However, when the DNA samples of the accused and the child were tested, it was proven that the accused was not the biological father. Meanwhile, the woman got married to another person and didn't show up for the court proceeding again.

"He can only be held guilty if it is proved that the promise to marry was given with no intention to honour it and also that was the only reason due to which the woman agreed to have a sexual relationship," the High Court said, adding that "cases of consensual sexual relationship being later converted into allegations of rape are rapidly increasing".

On the other hand, in a separate case, the Kerala High Court in October declined to quash the criminal proceedings against a priest accused of raping a woman after promising to marry her. Dismissing the plea of the priest, the High Court observed that prima facie, the allegations warranted a trial, and that there was no reason to close the proceedings earlier.

Supporting the new law, advocate Gaurav Dudeja, Partner at law firm Phoenix Legal, in Delhi, says, “Section 69 of the BNS addresses the gaps and ambiguities in the previous law concerning sexual intercourse obtained under false pretences such as promises of marriage or other deceitful means.” “The definition of rape revolves around the ‘consent’ of the woman, and courts have consistently held that sexual intercourse based on a false promise of marriage, where there was no genuine intent from the outset, falls within the scope of rape. By introducing Section 69, the BNS explicitly criminalises such acts and provides clear punishment for them,” he explains.

The law is protective to women who operate in a male-dominated, patriarchal society, where marriage for women is often seen as a way of attaining personhood. Many women are consistently told in their childhood years that they belong in another home — that of their husband’s and in-laws’.

Dudeja says the law broadens the legal framework by introducing the concept of sexual intercourse through deceitful means. “Moreover, it acknowledges that coercion is not limited to physical force, but can also be psychological or emotional — an aspect not explicitly addressed under the earlier law,” he says.

PIL in Kerala HC

In September, a public interest litigation (PIL) was filed before the Kerala High Court challenging the constitutional validity of Section 69 of the BNS. The plea by a lawyer practising in the courts of Kerala contended that “the Section is derogatory and misogynistic to the extent that it views women as naive, gullible and incapable of making decisions pertaining to their life”. The plea also contends that the Section would lead to “serious issues for people who are in live-in relationships and people in relationships in the nature of marriage”. “By

omitting to include the LGBTQ community, it is violative of the equal protection clause. Further, it penalises a very basic human emotion, the right to have sexual union, a facet protected Under Article 21 of the Constitution,” the plea stated. The High Court sought a response from the Central government on the issue.



SHOWING UP

If you've spent any time on TikTok lately, you've probably come across the "showing up" trend. It's a feel-good trend where parents proudly showcase how they try to be present for their kids, whether it's for school events, games, or random day-to-day moments that mean the world to children. The message is heartwarming: being there matters, and kids notice when parents show up.

This article is written by Monica Radu under the topic Relationships. I also know that research consistently suggests that parental involvement is important. But as a working mom, I can't help but feel a little tug of anxiety every time I see those videos.

The pressure to be physically present for every milestone or school event ties into the larger societal expectation that good parents—especially mothers—are always available. This isn't a new idea, but social media has amplified it, making it harder for working moms to ignore. These pressures align with the concept of intensive mothering, which demands that mothers devote immense time, energy, and emotional labor to their children, often at the expense of their own needs or professional aspirations. Whether it's a holiday party or a preschool graduation, there's an unspoken (and sometimes spoken) expectation that we'll be there. And while these moments are important, they often come at a cost.

For me, like many other moms, that cost is work. When I get the message about my child's holiday party, the internal conflict begins. Should I carve out time to attend, risking falling behind on work and canceling class and office hours? Or do I stay focused on my job and feel guilty about not being there? This is a classic example of role strain, a term sociologists use to describe the competing demands placed on a person due to the different roles they hold in life. In this case, it's the tension between being a mother and an employee. Both are important roles, yet society often makes it feel like being a "good" mom should come first.

The pressure to “show up” is not distributed evenly. The expectation that moms should be the ones attending every event is deeply tied to gender roles. Despite the progress we have made toward gender equality, there’s still a lingering assumption that mothers are the default parent. This expectation adds an extra layer of guilt for moms who have to prioritize work, something that fathers often don’t experience in the same way.

Social norms and gender roles reinforce the idea that being a mother means always being available, and that’s what makes this situation even more complicated for working moms. We face a unique kind of work-family conflict, the struggle to meet the high demands of both our careers and our families. When you add to this the rising costs of childcare, the reality is that many families simply cannot afford for one parent to stay home full-time, even if they wanted to. So, for working moms, the stress of “showing up” becomes another weight to carry in an already overburdened balancing act.

The idea of “showing up” is important, but I believe it’s time to rethink what that means. As much as I want to be there for every field trip and class party, I have had to come to terms with the fact that it is just not possible. And that’s okay. I’m still an involved parent even when I’m not physically present at every event.

Being a good parent doesn’t always mean showing up for every moment; sometimes, it means showing up in different ways, ways that work for both you and your child. For working parents, this might mean finding ways to stay involved outside of traditional school hours or setting aside quality time for your kids when you are off the clock. It might mean making sure your kids know you are thinking of them, even when you are at work, by sending a note in their lunchbox or asking about their day when you get home.

We also need to broaden our societal understanding of what meaningful parental involvement looks like. Schools and daycares should recognize that not every family has the flexibility to attend midday events and instead provide

opportunities for parents to engage in ways that fit their schedules. Whether it's virtual participation, after-hours events, or simply acknowledging that working parents are juggling a lot, there are ways to foster inclusivity in these spaces without creating guilt.

At the core of this issue is the need for systemic change. Employers can play a significant role in supporting working parents by offering more flexibility, whether that's through flexible work hours, remote work options, or family leave policies. Workplaces that recognize the realities of working parents create an environment where we don't have to choose between being there for our kids and succeeding in our careers.

Moving forward, we should celebrate all forms of parental involvement, whether it happens at a classroom party or around the dinner table at the end of a long workday. So the next time you see a "showing up" video, remember that it's not just about being present at every event. It is about the countless ways we show up for our kids, even when we're not there in person. And that should count too.



RAMAYAN TV SHOW AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

The broadcast of the Ramayan television series happened at a pivotal moment in India's media and cultural history. It aired from January 1987 to July 1988. This was a time when television signal reception was expanding but still limited. So for a substantial mass of the population, their very first exposure to this novel medium was the televised adaptation of the ancient Hindu epic. Combined with a gigantic viewership and the religious dimension, it caused the serial to have an outsized impact on its audiences.

Exploiting this aspect — the “geographical and over-time variation in television signal strength” — to identify “the causal effects of exposure to the Ramayan TV show, the authors of this paper pose the question: “Can exposure to religious narratives through mass media shape cultural identities and, in turn, influence political landscapes?”

There already exists a body of research that says ‘yes’. For instance, it is not a matter of debate that the Ramayan broadcast aided the rise of Hindu nationalism. It did. This study, by “examining the long-term effects of the Ramayan broadcast on cultural, social, and political outcomes,” seeks to bridge the “several interconnected strands” of this literature. Its unique methodology hinges on leveraging variations in TV signal strength across India to track how “exposure” to the Ramayan serial “affected cultural norms, communal relations, and voting behaviour in the years that followed.”

How the show affected cultural behavior:

The paper offers three key findings. First, areas with “higher Ramayan exposure (higher TV signal strength in 1987) experienced significant changes in cultural practices indicating a strengthening of religious identity.” This study tracked two cultural practices — naming of new-borns, and diet in lower-caste households — and both revealed significant changes. “Hindu parents became more likely to give their newborn sons common Hindu names, and lower-caste households showed increased adherence to orthodox Hindu dietary practices (a substantial increase in vegetarianism).”

Secondly, areas with higher exposure to Ramayan witnessed a “short term” increase in Hindu-Muslim communal violence through 1992. And finally, the study found a “long-term” effect (through to 2000) on electoral outcomes, with the Hindu nationalist BJP gaining an increase in its probability of winning assembly elections in areas that had higher Ramayan exposure.

In this context, one question automatically comes up: how do we know if the effects attributed to Ramayan exposure are not also an outcome of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, which was gaining steam around the same time? The authors isolate the ‘Ramayan effect’ using a control variable “measuring proximity to the travelling mobilisation rallies known as the Ram Rath Yatra (held in 1990)”. By doing so, they found that the “estimated effects of exposure to Ramayan starting in 1987 do not appear to be confounded by exposure to the Ram Rath Yatra, the key event in advancing the Ram Janmabhoomi movement.”

Consolidating a singular identity:

Pointing out that prior to Ramayan’s introduction, there had never been a TV show in India with a religious theme, the paper notes that the Ramayan series “represented a step-function in religious TV content”. To document this quantitatively, the authors “collected data on all 176 television serials broadcast on Indian public networks since 1980”. There were zero religious shows prior to 1987. This was another factor that amplified Ramayan’s unique impact, given that its viewership, too, was “unprecedented in India”, with an estimated 80 million people tuning in to watch each episode.

At its peak, over 100 million viewers were watching Ramayan simultaneously at a time when there were only 30 million television sets in India. This is explained by the phenomenon of “community viewing” wherein people gathered in “large groups around a single television set, often in public spaces or at homes of neighbours who owned TVs”. As a result, “for the first time, all Hindus across the country saw and at the same time listened to the same thing”. The serial “introduced a congregational imperative into Hinduism” and “provided a unifying narrative that transcended local differences”.

In a way, the mass dissemination of a standardised story of Ram, an avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu, couldn't have come at a better time for the advocates of Hindutva, as it helped prime a diverse Hindu population brought up on regional and linguistic variations of the epic, for the unitary ideology of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement. Interestingly, as the paper underscores, the political impact of the series was likely unintended by the government. "At the time of the broadcast, the national government was led by the Congress party and not the BJP" and the "primary motivation for airing Ramayan was to increase advertising revenue for the state-owned television network." In fact, the show's creator Ramanand Sagar had to contend with much scepticism from officials and lobby extensively to get the show approved for broadcast.

Based on their findings, which revealed a strengthening of Hindu religious identity as indicated by shifts to popular Hindu names for new-borns, switching to vegetarianism, and changes in long-term political preferences, the authors contend that "the content of mass media can have far-reaching consequences beyond mere entertainment, potentially shaping the cultural and political landscape of a nation for years to come."

This empirical study is an important intervention at a time when the Indian media landscape, especially news television, is marked by the perverse phenomenon of polarising communal rhetoric beamed out to millions on a daily basis. It also opens up avenues for future inquiry

For instance, given the rising trend of majoritarian propaganda films coming from Bollywood, how does a certain "narrative structure, character portrayal, and symbolic imagery activate particular social identities?" And how does the mode of consumption — viewing such content as a "communal experience" in a cinema hall or multiplex versus individually — affect its impact on beliefs and group identity? Such investigations could illuminate the mechanisms through which sustained media exposure to particular kinds of cultural and religious content shapes personal identity and political alignments.

As the paper concludes, “The story of the Ramayan broadcast serves as a powerful reminder of the responsibility that comes with the power to shape narratives and, by extension, the cultural and political future of a nation.

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