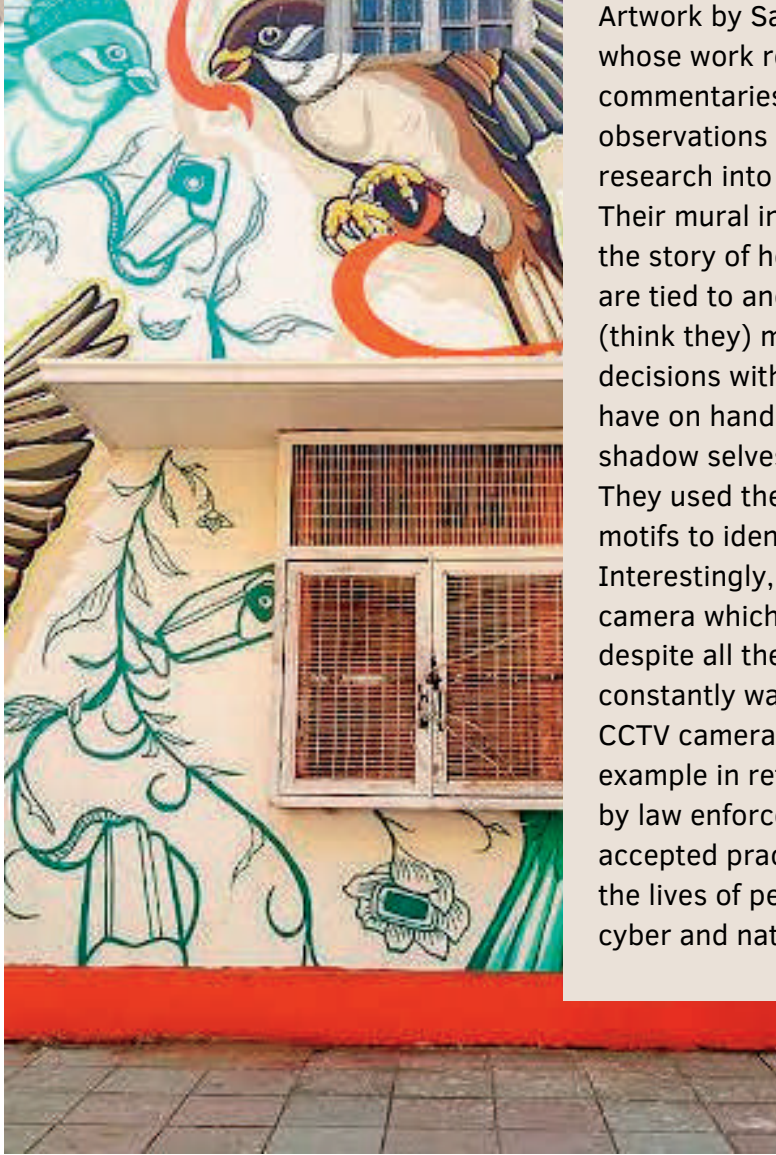
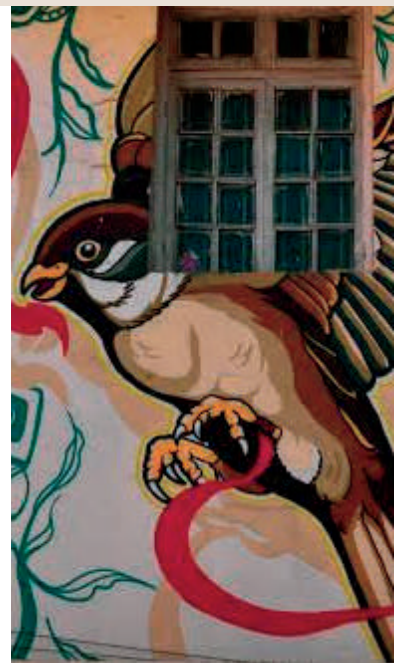


BEACON 2023



Artwork by Sam Lo, a Singaporean artist whose work revolves around social commentaries fuelled by daily observations of their surroundings and research into the sociopolitical climate. Their mural in the Lodhi Art District "tells the story of how a little sparrow's actions are tied to another's fate. As free as they (think they) may be, they make their decisions with all the information they have on hand while dealing with their shadow selves and their environment." They used the signature Mughal floral motifs to identify with New Delhi. Interestingly, they incorporated a CCTV camera which serves as a reminder that despite all the freedom, we are constantly watched. The portrayal of the CCTV cameras could be shown as an example in reference to how surveillance by law enforcement agencies, an accepted practice, is a way of controlling the lives of people under the guise of cyber and national security.





April 2023 Edition

BEACON

The Newsletter of the Department of Sociology, LSR

EDITORIAL

Dear reader,

The virtual space has seeped in all arenas of our life especially after two years of lockdown. As our network society expands with each day, questions of safeguarding our personal life and what we consume online crop up. This edition seeks to explore the far-reaching impacts of social networking and the ways in which the digital space can compromise with our identity and security. Today, with personal and organisational information and data becoming one of the most valuable assets, cyberattacks are on the rise with each passing year, and the propensity for damage, not only to individuals but to institutions, are more than ever. Such a danger requires one to engage deeply with the virtual world so as to highlight how surveillance by law enforcement agencies has always been an accepted practice in India, justified by concerns about national and cyber security.

This edition brings to the readers these perplexing questions, in addition to a sociological reflection on how the technology that connects us, also has the power to control us, by getting access to our lives in ways more than one. An exploration, of the threats that we as a society face from data breach and the ways in which we can collectively protect our data, forms the core of this edition.

IN THIS ISSUE:

- COGITO ERGO SUM
- VOX POPULI
- PHOTO STORY
- SOCIOLOGY OF VIRTUAL WORLDS
- REVIEW OF THE SOCIAL DILEMMA
- PANOPTICON
- ACCESSIBILITY FOR A SURVIVAL IN THE CYBERSPACE
- PANORAMA
- CREDITS

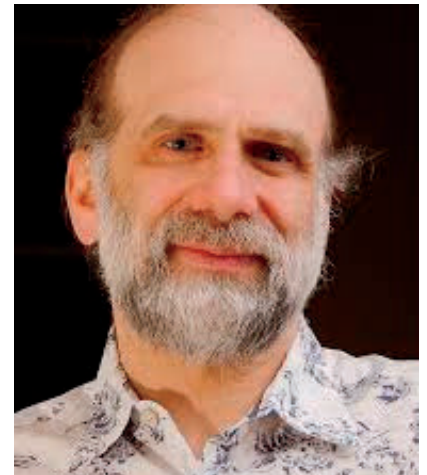
Bruce Schneier



Bruce Schneier is an American cryptographer, security professional, and writer. He has penned various articles, essays, and books, including his latest, "We Have Root". His influential newsletter "Crypto-Gram" and his blog "Schneier on Security" are widely read and have been path-breaking. In 1999, Schneider popularised the concept of 'human nature of cyber security' that aptly grasps his work as an intersection of technology, security, and people. In 1999 Schneier popularized the concept of the human nature of Cyber security that cyber security is about people, process and technology. His works are an amalgamation of behavioral economics, psychology, sociology, neuroscience, and other fields. Through such an interdisciplinary analysis, Schneider has been able to understand cognitive biases in humans that could be studied to better the awareness about cybersecurity.

EARLY LIFE

Born to Martin Schneier, he grew up in the Flatbush Neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. Schneier received a bachelor's degree in Physics from the University of Rochester in 1984 and subsequently, a Master's degree in Computer Science in 1988 from the American University.



CAREER

In 1991, after being laid off from his job, Schneier began to write for computer magazines. In 1994, he published his book 'Applied Cryptography' that delineates the use and application of cryptographic algorithms. His weblog 'Schneier on Security' focuses on the latest threats and his own thoughts on cybersecurity. Schneier is currently a fellow at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University, a fellow at the Belfer Center at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, and a board member of the Electronic Frontier Foundation. He is also a special advisor to IBM Security and the Chief Technology Officer of Resilient.

SOCIAL CYBER SECURITY AS A NATIONAL SECURITY

-Charusmita Das and Paridhi Choudhary

The present era marks the zenith of information and communication technology. We all are witnesses to this giant predator that spread its wings to every nook and corner of the Globe which has been transformed into an interconnected Global Village. We are almost at the finishing line in complete transition into a virtual platform where from buying groceries for home to managing multi dollar empires takes place on it. A minimum sense of security and safeguard is called for by this kind of advancement. This is due to the fact that cybercrimes, which target online systems, networks, and infrastructures, occur worldwide and have major societal repercussions. This is where cyber security comes into being.

In today's times, we all see how platforms like Twitter act as a major medium for mass movements, where hashtags and trending news are capable of drawing attention the world over. And, for this virtual society where physical borders are liquified, what we need is a social cyber security system which focuses on not only the protection of individual information but also how groups and societies are manipulated and opinions are shaped. Let us take the example of the MeToo movement, which is seen as the fourth

wave of feminism which mostly took place on the digital platform, with the help of internet tools. One after another, people came up with their own traumatic experiences. What is important to understand is that individuals, one after another, came up and gradually turned into a mass movement. It is the relationship between individuals and society that must be taken into account.

Cybercrimes are something which impacts society, and hence we require not only social cyber security but also a means of protecting the Nation states and the people. Social Cyber Security is a computational social science, and this approach is noticeably distinct from a pure computer science approach. The methodology and theories developed include: 1) considering the socio-political context into account methodologically and empirically; 2) it tends to predict on issues of the extent of influence, persuasion, manipulation, and theories that link human behavior to behavior in the cyber-mediated environment. Also, 3) they are focused on operational utility rather than just improving the scores for machine learning algorithms. Social cyber security is focused on how humans are placed in society and how the digital environment can be manipulated to alter both the community

and the narrative. Dmitry Kiselev, coordinator of the Russian State Agency for International News, states that "information wars are.... The main type of war." Information is used to strengthen our narrative while attacking, disrupting, distorting, and dividing the society, culture, and values of other competing states and organizations. By weakening trust in National Institutions and consensus on national values across the international community, an actor can win the next war even before it has begun.

Two changes in human interaction and societal information have enabled the social cyberthreat. First, with the low cost of entry, financial incentive to create viral content, and anonymity is relatively easy to accomplish. Moreover, quality control of information flow is now decentralized, and fact-checking is now conducted at the user level rather than at the journalist level. Users, many of whom grew up in an era where news was largely trusted, are now unprepared to digest information in an era where truth and untruth are mixed, especially when the distortions of the truth are designed to validate their own biases. While recent legislation across the world is trying to find a way to centralize control, in all cases this involves some type of censorship and reduced freedom of speech. Second, with the coming of the internet, physical proximity is hardly required as it has erased this requirement, with most societies interacting in free and open online environments that allow actors to participate from the far corners of the globe with few national borders in the

cyber domain. The vulnerability of open societies to social manipulation through technology is exacerbated by the fact that most of these strategic information efforts are launched on global social media platforms that are privately owned and outside of the direct supervision of governments (though influenced by regulation). While all social media companies censor content on their platforms, their motivation is generally focused on improving the user experience for the greatest number of people across the world, not the national security concerns of any single nation. This is because choosing sides on any issue is generally bad for businesses because it alienates a segment of their customer base. On the other hand, government censorship of content is assumed to be partisan and violates the freedom of speech espoused by these governments.

All of this points to the fact that social cybersecurity is national security, because when the data of millions of internet users is stolen, it can and is being manipulated in a variety of ways if not secured. The most common of these is when it is turned into hate speech and can affect millions of people, especially the minorities of specific countries, who are most vulnerable to this attack. As we know, a fractured nation is inherently a less potent nation in terms of its ability to withstand an attack. Arguably, the greatest strategic weakness for any country is internal, not external. Hence, leaders must understand social cybersecurity in order to defend these internal weaknesses from external manipulation.

PHOTOSTORY



SOCIOLOGY OF VIRTUAL WORLDS

TRUTH IN THE DIGITAL WORLD, AND OTHER SECRETS OF THE UNIVERSE

-Riddhi Mukherjee

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault writes about a plague, towards the end of the 17th century. He describes the measures put in place by the authorities to limit the spread of the contagion: a prohibition against leaving the space already inhabited by one; each street kept strictly under the surveillance of an all-seeing government syndic. Each day, the syndic goes to the street he is responsible for, and everyone still alive appears at their windows. In this dystopia, one is deemed alive only if the syndic knows they are alive and the syndic is their only window into the outside world. In the 21st century, the virtual world is the medium of the syndic- to track people's lives, control the truth and tailor relationships to please Big Brother who pays the syndic. As for the victims of the plague that is the virtual revolution- we believe that the world appears in its truest form online in a space disconnected from reality. This metaphysical space gives us a larger-than-life hope that we can never really access, one that remains a distant dream, as forces bigger than us use our escapist optimism to slowly take over our lives.

The world in today's day remains an epitome of Castell's network society and a distant successor to Orwell's 1984: capitalism isn't about material production

anymore but about trading information for power. Our screens watch and report us, and we think we have a choice in the matter- when we genuinely just don't. Everyone that uses the internet knows that their data is being stolen. We sign away our privacy rights by accepting cookies that monitor our activity online, we use websites owned by big companies that sell the commodity of our eyeballs to bigger companies who pay for advertisements that choke our social media feeds. We trust Twitter with information that we don't trust our parents with. If your son is in a secret fight club that is plotting to overthrow the establishment, you are much more likely to find out from social media than by talking to him.

There are three kinds of respondents to the travesty that is the digital age: people that don't think about it, people that think about this but don't care, and people that do care but can't do much about it.

A vast majority of people do not think about data control, because the harm of it isn't proximate enough to harm their lives on a day-to-day basis. The smaller group of people that do think about this ask themselves why Mark Zuckerberg would care about their lives. They do not know that their data is being sold to politicians who then manipulate this information to

seize control of nuclear weapons. US citizens that are on the bipartisan fence watch presidential debates religiously to decide whom to vote for in the elections not knowing that these debates are grounded in their revealed political preferences on social media and that Donald Trump says to drain the swamp because Zuckerberg tells him that US citizens want to drain the swamp. The line between us consuming information through virtual media and virtual media consuming us is as blurred as can be. We form opinions based on what we read online and what we read online is a result of what we have already posted there-trapping ourselves in ideological echo chambers that create inescapable cycles. We do not see beyond the immediate, into vast chasms of panoptical corporate surveillance where mammoth teams pool their resources to create filter bubbles that mediate and sustain our virtual presence. But more importantly, we do not see that identity online means as little as dust. As cybersecurity online becomes more and more elusive due to the flimsy algorithms that govern and protect our data, we see more and more people being tricked by their consumption of social media. While everyone suffers the fallout from the lack of awareness about online security, women and minorities draw the shortest stick because their identities can be used against them. The lack of awareness around hacking and security checks and balances causes many young people, particularly young women and sexual minorities, to reach a point online where

their pictures are used against them to harass them for money, and favours, using their identity against them by threatening to out their online identities. Power becomes important in this regard because even though all identities are anonymous, some anonymous identities remain further detached and less at threat than others. The nature of information sensitivity changes because while information is abundant if you are zeroed down on by a hacker on a regular Sunday because of any unusual online behaviour, everyone on the internet will have access to the information you shared privately, with social media or even just a friend.

The bigger issue is that the people that do think that all of this matters are resigned to a state of having no alternative. Consumers in the virtual world are addicted to the live streams that tell them what the world is doing- where information belongs to everyone and no one. Data is anonymous, relationships are faceless, and we are all slaves to our screens, unable to stop scrolling. What then becomes of our truths and identities- who are we in this online maze of virtual perception? Are we red or blue? Are we Sanghi or liberal? Are we the God we believe in or the gender we identify as? Are we defined by how many people follow us- do geospatial relationships and identities still matter?

Perhaps the biggest reason to care is that our virtual presence makes us lambs in the eye of the tiger. Walt Whitman's multitudes die a sad death in the eyes of autocratic governance. We know that the media becomes a weapon funded by moneyed

polity to spread state-supportive propaganda and manufacture consent through the extensive work of men like Chomsky. The metaphor of the panopticon becomes crucial in this regard- an ingeniously crafted circular prison, wherein the guard at the centre has insight into all of the inmates' rooms and can see exactly what they are doing at any given point in time. The inmates, however, have no way of knowing who the guard is watching, and therefore perpetually live in a hyperaware state of being watched. This changes the way they act within the prison and is similar to being watched by algorithms online. Virtual interactions, through mechanisms like censorship and shadowbanning, are triggered by algorithm on social media that responds to behaviour programmed into it as 'bad', and the fear of being deleted on Instagram thus stops people from behaving 'badly'. Consequently, what is bad is often non-conforming in the public eye- black women being shadowbanned for posting empowering photos of their bodies online, while white women post the same content with no backlash. Muslim people in India are unable to post anti-establishment literature whereas upper-caste Brahmins like Shashi Tharoor can make careers out of it. Much like Maslow's hierarchy of needs, power operates like a pyramid online, arranged unbendingly against the vulnerable minority. No matter how much space you can claim online, the virtual world falls prey to the same power imbalances so stark in the real world: it is run and sustained by the state, always in

bed with corporate money. Below that lie the IT cells that brainwash civilians with Ache Din propaganda, below which lie the faceless majority that hates everyone that isn't them. At the bottom of the barrel lie the dissenting minority with identities that do not fit in with the state's homogenising agendas. Your truth online is only valid if you conform and if you don't, the consequences of asserting that truth are far more permanent than any benefits that can come out of speaking it can be.

As a result of this, minorities flock to find community and safety within this jungle of online policing. This process is as threatening as it can be cathartic. Those in power always have the resources to trace back from your anonymity to your reality. But a more disillusioning aspect of finding community online is that you never know who is behind the other screen. It is impossible to trust anyone online because of the moment you do, you are scammed out of lots of money with no express delivery package at your doorstep. When you meet someone on a dating app they can turn out to be people with identities entirely different from what you have grown to know. When queer people from around the world started connecting through online platforms that gave them a space that had been historically denied to them in the real world, Facebook exploded around the notion of speaking your truth online. But this is hardly an accurate image. Everything online is tailored to fit Cooley's looking glass, everyone is acting how they think the other person wants them to act. This slowly gnaws away at our

ability to unconditionally trust. Our perceptions of ourselves also change kaleidoscopically as we see people achieving aspirational success on their social media, finding happiness in spaces we couldn't, or finding love with people that we couldn't find love with. Women like Kim Kardashian build billion-dollar empires that exploit women's insecurities by creating filters that only look good on camera as substitutes for plastic surgery that make them look like factory-produced Barbies, and young women comply. We are so alienated from ourselves online that we never once question.

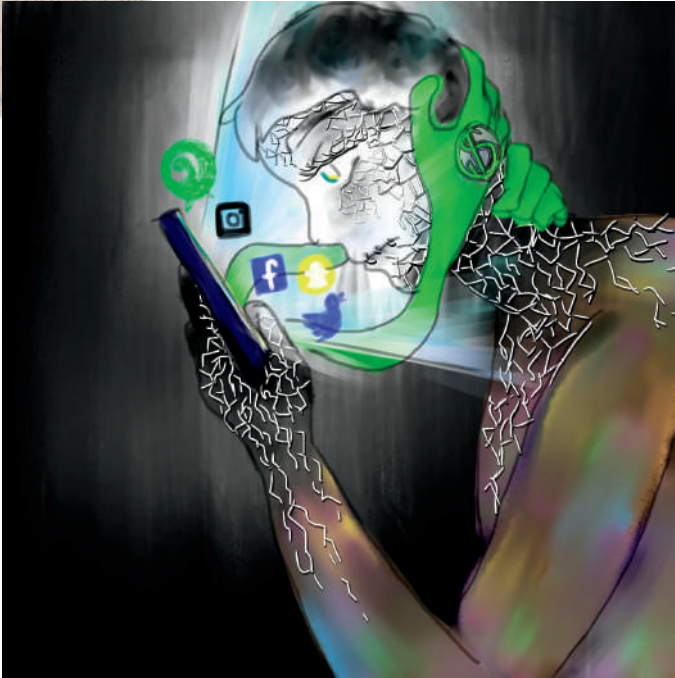
Because as easy as it is to find community online, it is infinitely easier to fall into an almost Marxist alienation. The ability to connect on the internet allows one to withdraw from the real world in ways they couldn't have in the absence of the virtual world. We are hyperconnected to each other, and this dilutes the depth of human interaction- of memories that you can remember and look back on- of individual growth and epiphanies that you can only experience when you look outside the virtual world. The human inability to process the reality of our virtual interactions can be succinctly observed from observing our own dreams- we dream of real people and see the real world- but there are never any phones or computers or even the minutest trace of a virtual world. Either virtual reality penetrates our minds only to the cosmetic Freudian level of the 'Id' or primal instinct, without actually ever reaching the subconscious- or our minds do not know how to process

the way it reaches a deeper level of our being.

I do not know the way out of the matrix. There are many problems but not many answers. All I know is that there is no truth in the virtual world and no escape from the horrors of the real world. All that exists is the delusion of an insulated space where everyone can be who they want to be when in reality everyone is trying to be photocopies of one another and forgetting their individualities, while Big Brother smiles and approves.

FILM REVIEW: 'THE SOCIAL DILEMMA'

-Shreya Mukherjee



Few months back, I complimented a friend for a beautiful necklace that she was sporting, following which she sent me a photo of the same over WhatsApp. Later that night, an ad for the exact same necklace down to the last detail in the pendant- popped up on my Instagram feed.

"Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."

The chilling experience of having private conversations on one social media platform be reflected on another is downright disconcerting. While Arthur C. Clark's quote could be interpreted in different ways, it is safe to say that we as a society have moved beyond a simple fascination for the magic of connecting

with others living thousands of miles away. Today, the social media phenomenon feels more like a spell cast by a nefarious magician, meant to make us tear holes into the social fabric with our own hands. The Social Dilemma, directed by Jeff Orlowski- who has a number of other existential documentaries to his name- presents this exact picture to most.

The Social Dilemma, aptly titled, is a 2020 documentary that makes an attempt at understanding the fundamental problems underlying contemporary patterns of technology use. What is that one thing that lends itself to problematic usage of social media platforms, that one problem that connects such technology to issues of addiction, mental health, political polarization and social extremism, fundamentalist violence, and fake news, to name just a few? Where exactly did social media go wrong?

In trying to answer these, the film brings in a number of Silicon Valley and Big Tech hot-shots, along with named psychologists and social scientists who have worked on digital surveillance issues. From Pinterest's former President Tim Kendall and co-founder of Center for Humane Technology Tristan Harris to noted social scientist and author calling for complete digital detox Jaron Lanier, Orlowski's range of

interviewees is diverse. What connects most of them, however, is a single fact- all of the Big Tech people have worked in creating the same business models and tech features that have, according to them, created the possibility of a civil war in the “short run of things”. These people have seen how the other side of the screen actually works, and Orlowski brings them in to paint the picture and provide suggestions for countering this technological crisis.

The documentary tries to point to a nameless malaise plaguing the tech industry. This “new normal” that we inhabit- of multiple devices, of checking the phone first thing after waking up, of boredom during device-free meal times- is more of a concerning, existential situation. Although the Big Tech scientists make clear that none of these tools, be it Google, Facebook or Twitter, were deliberately made for harm, they do advance that in figuring out how to monetize these platforms, the advertising business models that they came up with opened up room for profound unforeseeable negative consequences. In enjoying seemingly free-of-cost services on social media, the documentary presents that it is us who have become the products being sold to advertising customers of Big Tech.

Dr. Shoshana Zuboff, author of ‘The Age of Surveillance Capitalism’, presented a very succinct but hard hitting explanation of how it all works- businesses dream of certain success if they place an ad, and Big Tech monetizes by selling this certainty. But to guarantee this, it needs great

predictions, which can only come from building progressively improving models of predicting future user behavior through extensively collected data. For better predictions and monetization, Big Tech wants to hold onto our

attention for as long as possible. These models come to be structured through algorithms, which by no means are objective. These codes are written with subjective goals in mind, generally profit considerations. Through machine learning, these programs have gotten so good at achieving the end goal that even coders have lost almost all control over their own creations.

The argument of persuasive technology is something unique that the documentary tries to bring to larger audiences, an understanding of which is perhaps essential in breaking social media’s control over us. These technologies use our psychology to target our unknown mental vulnerabilities and monetize from them by subtly altering our behavior and creating habits that revolve around technology use. What these models have supposedly done is generate real-world change without triggering our awareness as users. Social media is also portrayed as a drug that caters to our biological imperative to connect with others. Social media follower counts become conflated with real social approval in our minds, bringing about behavioral changes across entire generations- be it Gen Z or Generation Alpha.

The flow of the argument reaches its crucial peak with the problem of fake news. In the process of creating accurate models of us, each of us are presented by social media with a worldview specially curated for us, and we end up accepting that as objective reality. According to the experts the documentary brings in, this has seriously hampered our ability to even stand contradictory perspectives and facts. Things that conflict with our own ideas of reality appear to us, quite justifiably, as fake, creating greater ideological polarization worldwide. What we have in had is basically a 'disinformation-for-profits' model, which tilts the whole balance towards fake news because it monetizes faster and better. The source of this existential threat apparently lies in the fact that we are fundamentally fighting a losing battle against an algorithm that knows everything about us but which we know nothing about.

The Social Dilemma definitely does what it says. It shows us the problems that we couldn't understand. It renders visible an important structural element to these issues- surveillance capitalism, or the growing commodification of collected personal data on Big Tech platforms. The risk society- borrowed from Ulrich Beck- that we live in is not simply, then, one of manufactured environmental hazards. What is fundamentally at risk here is the very core of our very personalities. Societies constantly run at risk of collapse, should some socio-political interest choose to appropriate the tools of social media to spread fake news or influence national

elections.

However, the documentary does fall short at the level of complexity. While disclosing the existential issues concerning our social media use is appreciable, it paints a doomsday picture without any constructive suggestions for solutions. The dramatic re-enactment scenes contained within it do sometimes break the continuity of the broader argument. More than that, Orlowski fails to deal with the nuances of the true social dilemma. While the documentary does mention that social media has overwhelmed human weaknesses, accentuating and exaggerating the worst that society has to offer, it does not do the problem justice.

Science is a tool in our hands, and it can never be fully neutral. Social media technology, although threatening our personal and social security by violating our data privacy, is still a tool. Yes, it has progressed to a point of artificial intelligence that gets hard to fathom. However, the insertion of capitalistic intentions into these was a conscious social decision. At the heart of the problem is not social media itself. It is the vested interests that have commercialized our futures and our very behavior, and gained profits by eroding our basic human power of information analysis. The "worst in society" that the film briefly alludes to has always existed. Countries have waged wars against each other through soft culture and propaganda before. What has crucially changed now is the magnitude and possibilities of doing so. In the absence of regulations on digital

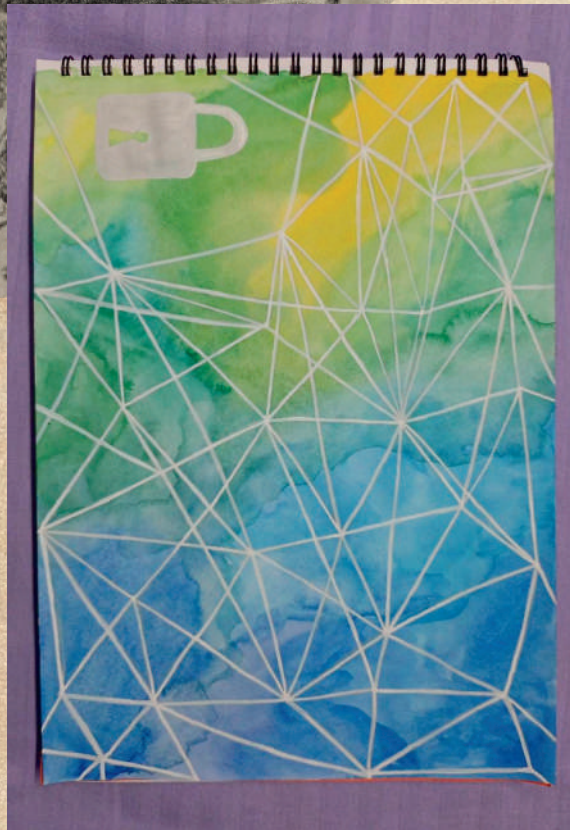
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platforms, the fast communication features of our technology have become susceptible to uses driven by interests of one group to harm another. Society has always had the propensity for misinformation, radicalization, mistrust and violence, just like its room for creativity, innovation, justice and informed debates. What we are witnessing now is not a problem of simply Facebook, Instagram, Google or Twitter. It is not even a problem of one country, one capitalist investor or industrialist.

This is a systemic, structural problem that's beyond the conscious control or scope of any individual, group, or nation. The nuances of the radicalization against Rohingya Muslims do rest in the fact of the global forces that have made Facebook pretty much the only social media platform Myanmar knows. But the problem is also in the culture of mobile phone sellers feeling the need to pre-load the app on every phone purchased, in decades-old social justice concerns of illiteracy and military dictatorship, and in an infringement of democracy predating any substantial social media use in the country. Social media has indeed made fomenting dissent and chaos easier than ever before in recorded human history. But it has also made genuine connectivity more seamless. Deleting our accounts is not the solution to our social dilemma. Dealing with the ideal of "profit-at-all-costs" and inculcating a better sense of moral responsibility might be.





ACCESSIBILITY FOR A SURVIVAL IN THE CYBERSPACE**-Regina Gurumayum**

As the world becomes more and more digitalized, cyberspace is susceptible to attacks on a growing basis. Cyber security as we know it, seeks to safeguard against unauthorised use of systems, networks, and technology by lowering the risk of these cyber-attacks. The question that now arises is, "How successful are we in securing cyberspace?" Despite the efforts, cybercriminals continue to operate, and successful attacks are on the rise. In fact, as rightly pointed out by Will Hurd, technology and cyber issues are no longer confined to tech geeks in some backroom but are instead a major concern for everyone in this digital era. As a result, the need for accessibility with regard to security and privacy measures is gaining prominence across the globe.

According to Karen Renaud, in the case of cyber security, it is frequently assumed that users are fullyabled and efficient, cognitively unimpaired, have the necessary resources, and have the necessary dexterity to interact with the security system, resulting in the exclusion of a number of people from essential online services. Although knowing how to secure our devices and computers is undoubtedly challenging, doing so is absolutely essential for everyone. In today's world, as more and more services are becoming

digitalised and as people's use of mobile technologies and the internet grows, the need for accessible security and privacy has become increasingly important.

While we traditionally think of accessibility as being about people with disabilities, it entails various other aspects as well. For instance, creating a strong password would be difficult for a person who has not had the benefit of an education. Likewise, software updates can only be carried out if the device itself is modern enough and has enough hard drive space to accommodate them. Hence, in order to avoid excluding and marginalising large segments of the population who cannot use the privacy and security measures in the same way as abled users, accessibility must be enhanced.

Gone are the days when governments could protect their citizens every step of the way, so they now focus primarily on providing advice and building capabilities. Considering this, accessible security and privacy technologies would allow a wider cross-section of society to use digital services without being concerned about online risks and attacks. This would in turn enable people to access essential digital services and to live free from the fear of living without access to the resources needed to build a secure life. Inclusive

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security would ensure that access to online services, whether essential or not, is accessible for any needs or wants regardless of the individual's capabilities, abilities, and resources.

Hence, the accessibility of the security measures put in place must be taken into account by those involved in digital development and cybersecurity by taking into consideration the wide diversity of human experiences during the design process. They need to design security and protection measures that are both for universal use and also for the security issues of particular circumstances if they are to be of benefit to all.



CASE RE-ENACTMENT & SOCIO ADDA- LAW & SOCIETY



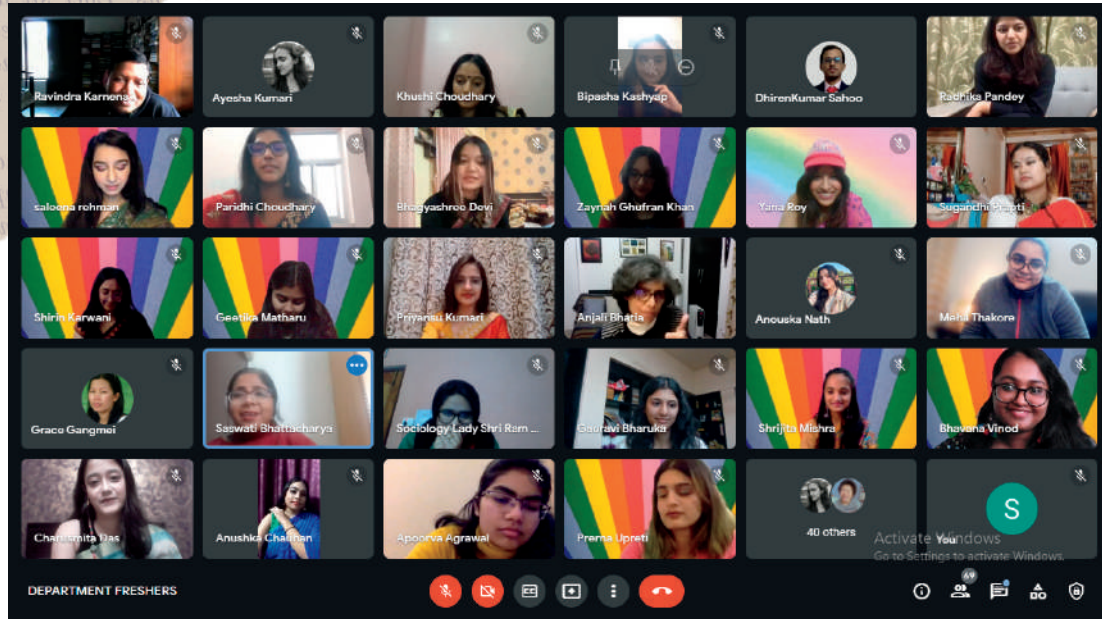
On 25th April 2022, the Department conducted two classroom events. The first was Case Re-Enactment of *State of Maharashtra v. Indian Hotel and Restaurant Association* around the theme of Gender and Law. What followed the student demonstration was a student-led Socio Adda around the theme of law and society.

The discussion revolved around contemporary legal incidents such as the Karnataka hijab incident, followed by an exploration of what law actually means. In the discussion, various aspects of law were highlighted by students- how it was not about right or wrong, rather about law as what has been socially determined as such for regulation of society in specific ways. In extension, students also problematized notions of order and chaos, and how different brands of order may be desirable in different contexts. In addition, they noted that law very often functions as a tool by majority forces or the top rungs of social hierarchies to uphold the status quo, oppressing minorities.

The discussion went on to inspect legality, morality and law as dictated by social identities- by certain motions of class and caste background, specifically within the Indian context. Furthermore, the attendees explored the generational nature of law and how law in general remains a very grey area.

The question of one's conception of law therefore was declared as more philosophical than legal, and law cannot be done away with. The session ended with a brief discussion around restitutive law and its potential in the Indian context.

DEPARTMENT FRESHERS 2022

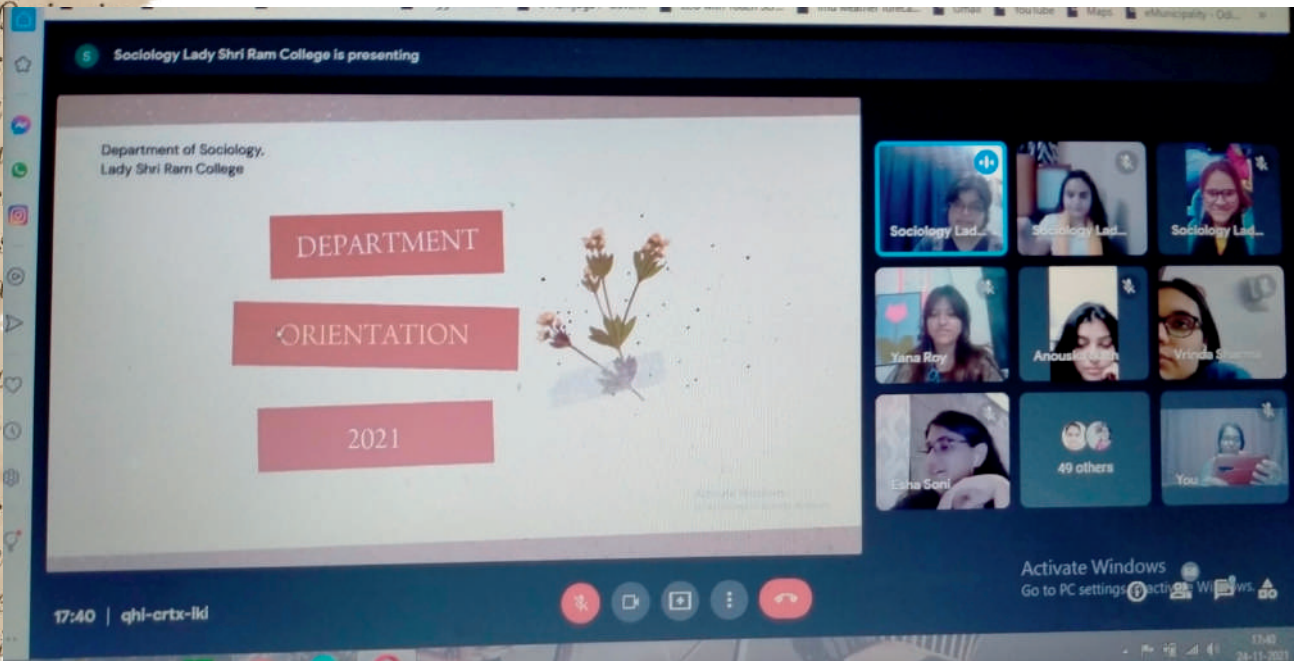


The long-awaited Freshers' Event took place on the 20th of January, 2022. The theme decided upon was, 'Rainbow' in order to showcase the inclusive nature of sociology as a discipline and as a symbol of the ebullient journey that the freshers would embark upon as a part of the Department of Sociology. In order to encourage everyone to show dressed up in their rainbow best, the Union recorded a video with all the mentors sending personalized messages to their mentees and cordially inviting them to the event. After the address of the professors, the main part of the programme ensued. First and foremost, a video delineating the offline journey of the students in the Sociology Department, was shown. Post the video screening, a round of games began with the first one being, 'Unique Introductions!'. The freshers' had to choose an object near them and talk about which aspect of their personality it reflects.

Then, came the performances by students of the department. The first one was a graceful dance by Khushi Yadav. Then, Souromi Dhar produced a marvelous rendition of 'Manmarziyan', followed by Apoorva Agarwal's rendition of 'Mora Saiyaan.' Suhani Sood, Shrijita Mishra and Charusmita Das presented enthralling dance performances. Sugandhi Prapti's mashup of 'Cold/Mess' and 'Abhi Na Jao Chhod Kar' was well received by everyone. Shrijita Mishra also recited a self-composed poem centred around the theme of self-love which was liked by all.

This was followed by the game, 'Unpopular Opinions': A game wherein everyone would have to state a few unpopular opinions that they held. One after the other, everyone put forth their unique, unpopular favourite food combinations and each opinion was met with amazement and animosity alike. It was a memorable evening full of dance, music, and games!

DEPARTMENT ORIENTATION 2022

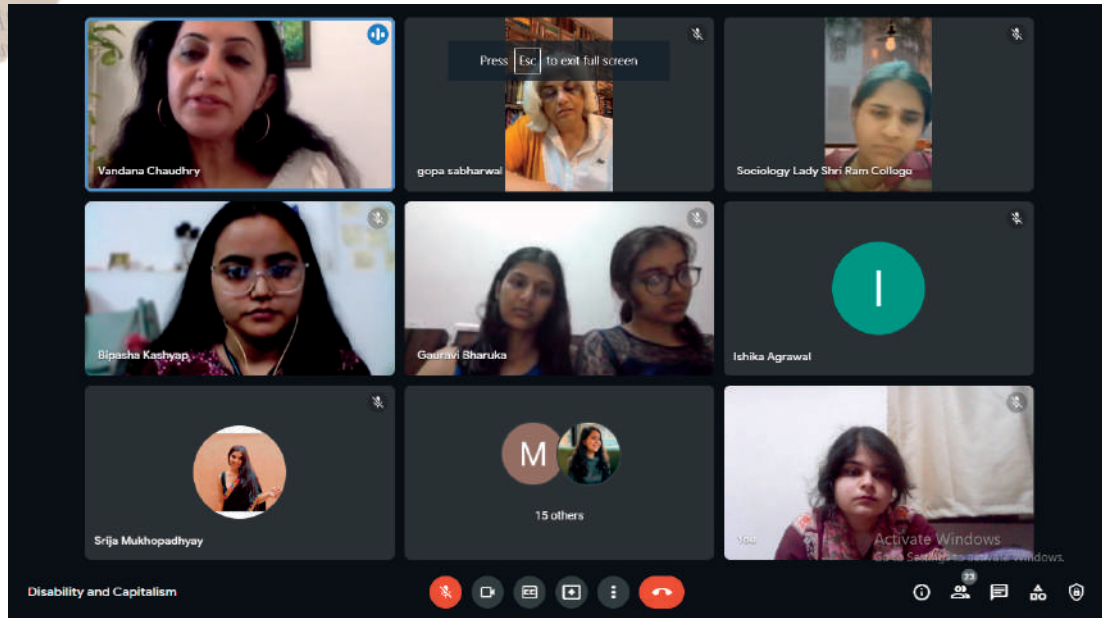


The orientation of first years was held on 24th November, 2022. The students were first welcomed by the union president and then they got introduced to the professors. All the professors gave their welcome speech one after another and presented their views regarding the discipline and social life.

Key points addressed by the professors were: 1. Developing sociological thinking is the most important aspect of this course. We need to understand our responsibilities as sociologists. 2. In the pandemic the roles of teachers and students and their definitions have changed and the total process has become so monotonous. But still there's a hope that we will all sail through it. 3. We need to consider various aspects of social life and connect it with the subject to understand the whole process of socialization better.

Then the whereabouts of the course, the college societies and department teams- the data about all these was discussed by the treasurer (Shreya M.) . She briefed them about the syllabus of the course and other opportunities that the college provides. This was followed by the Question and Answer session, during which few juniors clarified their doubts.

**TALK BY DR. VANDANA CHAUDHARY, IN COLLABORATION WITH
'REACH' THE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY CELL &
ENGLISH DEBATING SOCIETY**



The Department of Sociology organised a talk in collaboration with REACH, The Equal Opportunity Cell & English Debating Society on the topic “Disability and Capitalism.” The talk was held on 18th April 2022 at 6.30 pm, and the speaker was Dr. Vandana Chaudhry. Through this talk, the speaker highlighted the need for an alternative perspective rather than one of ableism. It's necessary to move beyond the binary categorisation and overcome the hegemony of able- sexism. According to her, ableism infiltrates every other form of oppression in a capitalist world. In doing so, she explored certain linkages and shed light on the role played by capitalist mode of production in perpetuating ableist structures. She concluded with the view that personal is political and we need to find our way out of not only ableism but also the dominant narratives of disabled, which marginalized all other forms of oppression. It's our duty to create a healthy environment and develop inclusive work culture. After her presentation there were a few questions asked by Prof. Gopa Sabharwal Ma'am, Souromi and some other students. Finally the vote of thanks was given by Bipasha, the Union President. It was an insightful session.

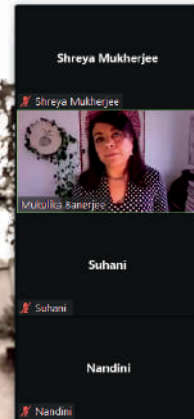
A TALK ON 'CULTIVATING DEMOCRACY' BY DR. MUKULIKA BANERJEE

Why India Votes? (2014) Conclusions

There is (a lot of!) money, muscle, patronage in elections



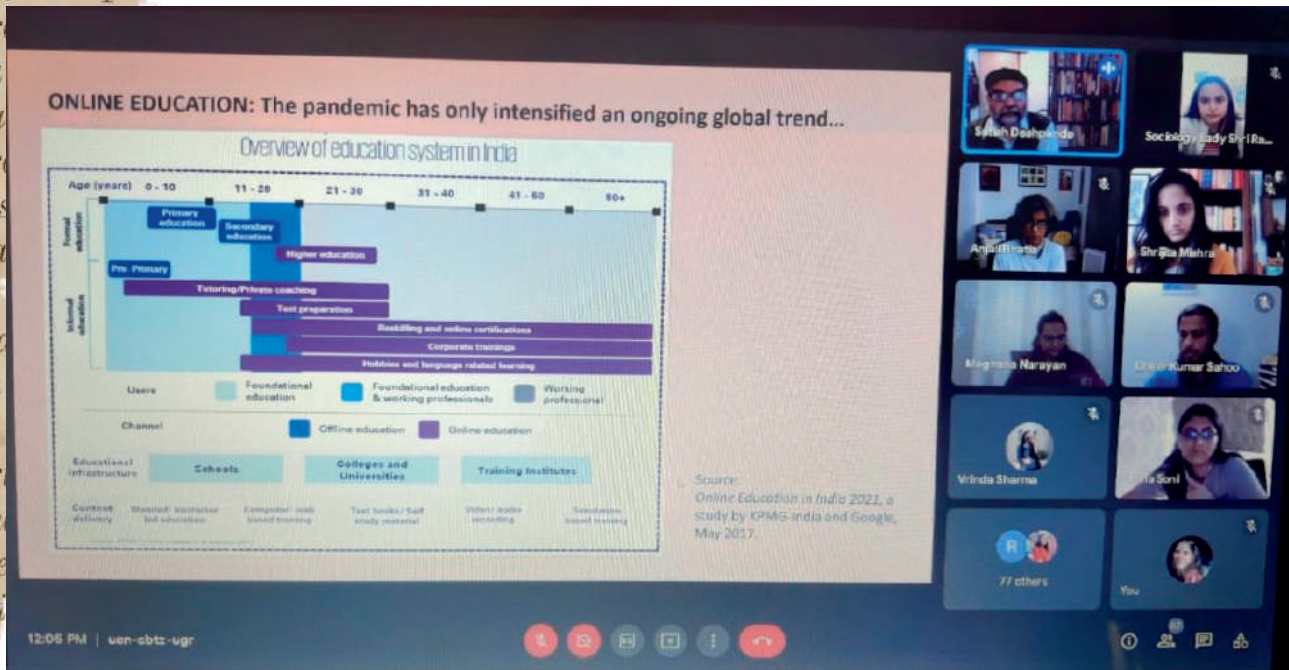
But also meaning



On 23rd February, renowned author and social anthropologist Dr. Mukulika Banerjee delivered a talk via Zoom on her newly launched book 'Cultivating Democracy', an electoral ethnography of India. Noting how the share of voting was higher in rural India compared to the urban, Dr. Banerjee discussed the wuideron of why people participate in the hosting exercise, invoking Dr. Ambedkar. Dr. Banerjee elaborated on the basic argument of her book, that despite issues of casteism and sexism, village life fosters necessary democratic values. She explored in brief four major events she noted during her fieldwork- a scandal, harvest, a qurbani and an election season to note how the sense of community present in village life helps in the creation of values necessary for democratic life. Through a scandal, people learn to behave politically, while a harvest created the need for a group for a task that couldn't be done alone. There was a combination of communism, caste, kinship, cash and constitutional rights, while people learned to cooperate. Qurbani highlighted certain egalitarian ideas of Islam and the values of redistribution and giving away of excess. Elections highlighted solidarity through participation, and emphasized on the notion of duty/rights. The speaker concluded that the anthropology of democracy studies both democratic institutions and democratic culture. Democratic values are often created in non-political settings. Participation in elections is considered sacred or secular. Values need continuous cultivation- vigilance, nurture, hope. Answering some audience questions, the speaker further shed light on her views on the future of democracy in the country, as well as her observations about caste in the field. She further spoke on democracy in family life. The talk ended with a vote of thanks.

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A TALK ON 'ONLINE TEACHING-LEARNING' BY PROF. SATISH DESHPANDE



The much awaited guest talk with Professor Satish Deshpande was held on 25th November 2021.

After greetings were exchanged between our professors and Prof. Deshpande, the President of the department SU gave a brief introduction about him for the knowledge of students. With an amusing statement on online learning, the professor started his talk with the help of a presentation.

Through this, Prof. Deshpande highlighted both the pros and cons of online teaching and learning. After the lecture, the floor was opened for questions. The event ended with a vote of thanks from the Students' Union. A feedback form was also circulated post the talk where positive reviews were received.

INAUGURAL LECTURE ON FAMILIES "NORMATIVE" & "ALTERNATIVE" BY PROF. ANUJA AGRAWAL



The Department of Sociology held its inaugural lecture for the session 2021-2022 in the month of October 2021. Prof. Anuja Agrawal was invited for the same and she spoke on the topic- Families: "Normative" and "Alternative".

After a brief introduction, Prof. Agrawal started her talk. She discussed the topic with regard to both eastern and western societies. She pointed out the fact that this topic is generally considered western and so speech will include the articles and views of many influential Western thinkers.

She took examples from thinkers such as Judith Stacey, A.M Shah, Ruth Vanita, Pushpesh Kumar, Engels etc. Turning to her own work, the speaker highlighted the plurality that is found in family identities and relationship ties. References to the term family keep shifting as there is a change in the assumptions regarding it. Further, demographic transition does not only bring radical changes in the economic and political sphere, but also changes the emotional bonds and social relationships in society.

Through her talk, Prof. Agrawal went beyond the heteronormative understanding of family. Post her lecture, she addressed a few questions pertaining to the future of tension between desire and sexuality, the toleration of extramarital relationships in India and lives of single fathers. The lecture came to an end with a vote of thanks by the Union President, Bipasha Kashyap.


TALK ON SOCIOLOGY & LITERATURE BY DR. IRFANULLAH FAROOQI

LSR Department of Sociology, LSR brings to you

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Dr. Irfanullah Farooqi

Dr. Irfanullah Farooqi is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology, South Asian University, New Delhi. His research interests include Islam in South Asia, Urdu studies, and Sociology of Literature and Education. A few of his publications include- "From a symbol of culture to a marker of identity: the trajectory of Urdu in colonial India", "Re-envisioning Academic Freedom: Reflections of an early career professional," and "Progressive Writers' Association: A case for South Asian literary imagination."



LSR Department of Sociology, LSR brings to you

ABOUT THE TOPIC

Sociology & Literature



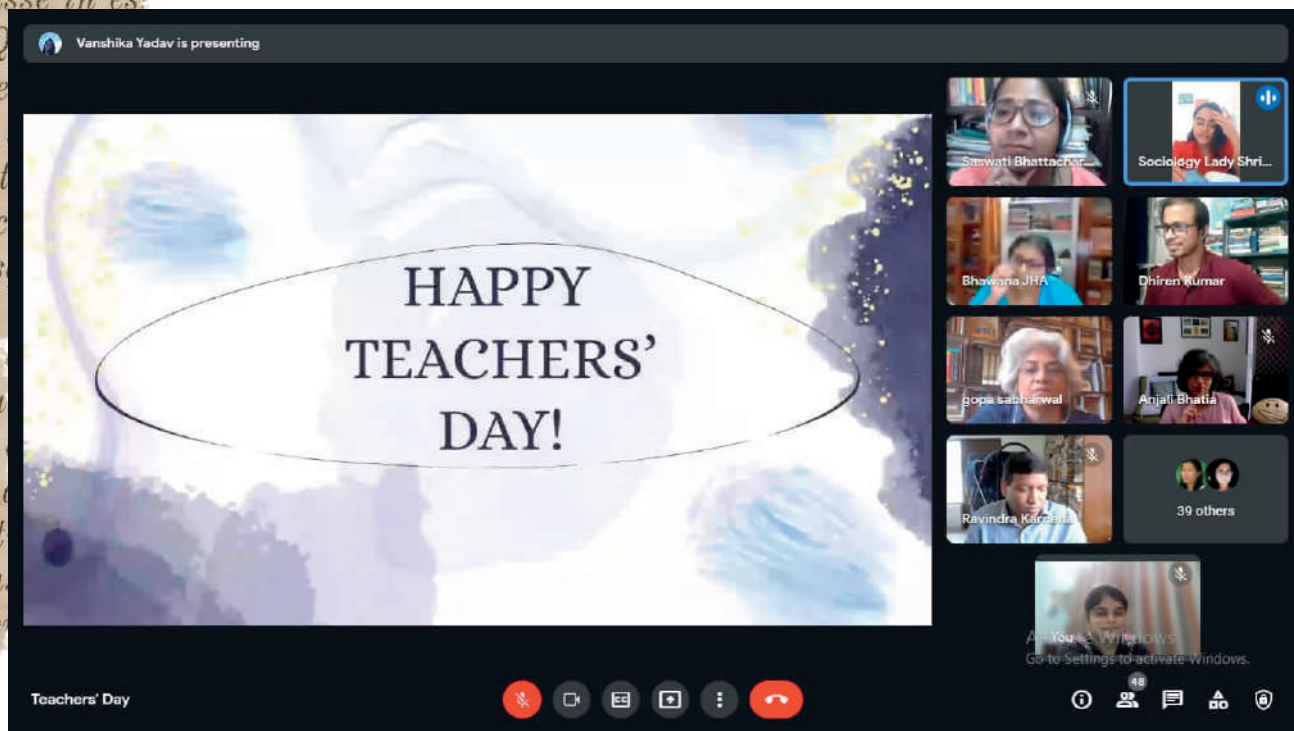
Literature encapsulates human expressions, feelings and ideas and stands as a product of a social creative process, allowing sociology a rich base to study human society. The sociology of literature is one field which holds much promise for widening the horizon of our sociological imagination. The function of sociology is to underscore the connection between the social contexts and the social factors and literature stands out as the proper mechanism to do so.

On the 27th of January, the department of Sociology organised a talk on 'Sociology and Literature' by Professor Irfanullah Farooqi. He is an Assistant Professor at the department of Sociology at the South Asian University, New Delhi. His publications include 'From a Symbol of Culture to a Marker of Identity: The Trajectory of Urdu in Colonial India', 'Re-envisioning Academic Freedom : Reflections of an Early Career Professional', and 'Progressive Writers' Association: A Case for South Asian Literary Imagination'.

The session began with Prof. Gopa Sabharwal introducing the guest and then Prof. Farooqi took over. Prof. Farooqi gave insights about the convergence of Sociology and Literature and the various media used to sketch their similarities and differences. He also narrated the story of 'Kalu Bhangi' to illustrate the same. Referring to the nature of literature, he thus stated that literature should not have a moral position. Nevertheless, in the real world both literature as well as sociology, unfortunately, did take moral stands. He went on to mention Professor Krishna Kumar's opinion here about children's stories and how moral positions ruined these stories.

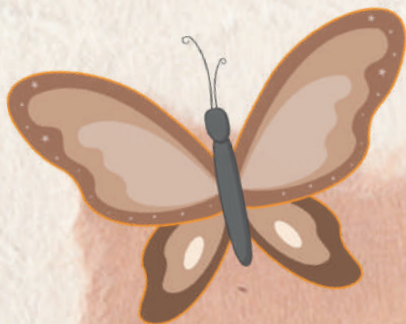
A great sociology text, as Professor Farooqi mentioned, was something that did not essentially take a position but opened up the world to others. The kind of trust that sociology and literature engendered, could be put to use to make sense of the world. In literature subjectivity was central, but in sociology it was only important in some cases. The discussion was followed by a question-answer session post which the Union delivered a vote of thanks.

TEACHER'S DAY EVENT



The students of the Department of Sociology, Lady Shri Ram College for Women organised a virtual Teachers Day celebration for their professors on September 2nd, 2021.

The programme was initiated by welcoming the professors that was followed by a letter of gratitude penned down by the Union. The students of second year had sent pre recorded performances that were played in the compiled PowerPoint presentation. The dance as well as the songs were centred around the idea of celebrating and appreciating the guiding lights who work for us all year round. The programme ended with a heartfelt conversation with the professors.



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