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A tale of three worlds: young people, media and class in India

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Introduction

A burgeoning literature on young people and media consumption in the west has not been matched by similar studies about young people India or its South Asian neighbours. Published studies on this topic, which will be explored in the opening sections of this chapter, tend to concentrate on urban middle-class *Generation Y* youth or on the educational importance of technology for rural populations. Issues such as pleasure and participation through media consumption are only mentioned in passing. Yet the rapid neo-liberalisation of broadcast media and film in India as well as the erstwhile expansion of its middle classes since the 1990s has given rise to a variety of myths about ‘Indian’ youth. Their consumption habits, educational prowess and aptitude for information technology have been discussed in articles on the new ‘call centre’ crews and dance studios. But questions about the other India or Indias remain unanswered —how are working class young people changing their habits in relation to media, work and consumption? Are young rural migrants to cities and youth in rural areas of India doing the same things and aspiring to the same sorts of lives as their urban counterparts? And how are these aspirations bound up with the media representations which are so ubiquitous in cities? Via snapshots from a decade of interview-based qualitative research, and contemporary literature on the diverse contexts inhabited by children, young people and their parents in India today, the discussion in this chapter will contextualise the complex lives and experiences of different groups and classes of young people in South Asia's most populous nation. To begin with, it is worth asking how this chapter sits with the volume as a whole and why its title contains no reference to Generation X.

When I first considered the topic of Generation X in India seriously at the editor's request, I was assailed by doubts about the meaningfulness of a study that worked from the barest stereotype in an attempt to delineate any aspect of social life in a contemporary nation of the global south. India's presence in a variety of online literatures from those on development or politics to those on trade and the economy¹ is shadowed by clichés—the 'fastest growing market' with 'a middle class of fifty million', the 'second-largest' economy in the developing world, the 'biggest democracy', 'friend' of the US and Europe in the fight against global terror etcetera, etcetera. Similarly the presence of youth in academic and policy literatures the world over has been tainted by journalistic pronouncements about declining participation levels, civic disengagement, individualism, risk culture, remix culture, hybrid identities and a postmodern, global cultural sensibility. Academic articles on Indian cultural production and circulation often open with implicitly homogenizing assertions: "The times they are a-changing! For India, these are historic times. Her long-established and often fiercely guarded traditions are undergoing rapid and sweeping transformations as she flexes her muscles to compete in a global economy"². In my research on both media cultures in India and youth cultures across South Asia and the UK over the past decade³ these clichés have proved more a burden than a guide. They have clearly worked in the interests of some and against the interests of others. So, whose interests have they served?

Numerous academic papers, projects and studies have been funded and spawned by the notion of a risk society and youth civic disengagement and voting decline⁴. Talk of generational breaks and intergenerational rifts, McDonaldized youth culture as well as of patterns of youth consumption can clearly serve the interest of marketers who play on notions of 'cool' and 'hip' regardless of the context. Counter-arguments—suggesting continuities between generations and heterogeneity within generations, cross-cut as they are by class, ethnicity, ability, religion, age, nationality, gender and sexuality—are briefly heard and then

strenuously ignored. At times it even seems that both academics and marketers are colluding to create the absurdly impossible phenomenon of which they speak: distinct generations with distinct characteristics, the world over. And this, unfortunately, means that real distinctions drawn in India by people campaigning on or researching issues of labour, class, gender or religious discrimination⁵ between the everyday experiences of the powerful few and the exploited many, are being ignored in favour of clichés. With regard to India, for instance, it is not uncommon to hear that ‘everyone is now connected’ so ‘let’s move it online’. What these businesses mean is that ‘everyone who *matters* in terms of service capital’ is now connected: the upper-middle-classes, to be precise.

First Class, Seven Star India

Among the upper middle class in India are those who can afford international air travel on a monthly basis, exclusive holidays or go to university in a foreign country; those who have guaranteed housing, running water, multiple servants, private healthcare, laptops, connectivity, cars and the latest mobile phones⁶. This group includes those who buy branded clothing both Western and indigenous, who have never been without food or shelter for a day, who participate via various networks in both Indian and global cultural activities from fashion, dance and drama to film, books and music⁷. Most importantly, many people in this group have connections to political power, to the police and to law enforcement; they can obtain visas and reservations which are denied to others; many, but not all, avoid paying their taxes by hiring the most expensive accountants; on some occasions they can even get out of jail or avoid prosecution for crimes which carry severe sentences; they can fund or withdraw their support from political campaigns; they can and do go into politics. And this group of people—what else can one call it but an *indigenous elite*?—are not a fiction, although, like the employer in Indian novelist’s Arvind Adiga’s *White Tiger* (2008) they are

disproportionately represented even in fiction. Indeed, they and their disposable wealth held either in India or overseas have grown exponentially over the past two decades, contributing to everything from global warming via the use of multiple cars⁸ to rightwing religious nationalism and a potential nuclear war with Pakistan. It is worth dwelling for a spell on this group, and on studies of their media habits, their consumption patterns. They are the smallest minority in terms of India's class system (barely 1% of the population are upper-middleclass), but they are the most internationally visible, the group by which much that is defined as 'Indian' is measured and often celebrated⁹. And, ironically doing even the cliché injustice, it is this group who are also often elided with Generation X. While UK-based Bollywood scholar Rachel Dwyer (2000), distinguishes between the public cultural consumption patterns and historical transition of India's 'modern metropolitan bourgeois' in terms of old and 'new middle classes', 'lower middle classes' the 'upper classes' and the 'nouveau riche'¹⁰, sociologist Arun Saldanha's ethnography of music consumption in Bangalore is situated amongst the uppermost layer of the *nouveau riche* (who make up a miniscule 0.01% of the population in India). He discusses the interconnectedness of wealth, spending power, symbolic capital and political power amongst this group, suggesting that their 'subcultural capital' extends far beyond the obvious power of being chauffeured around in expensive cars in the middle of the day or 'midday-parties' held while others are at work and school (p. 341) to the symbolic status conferred by listening to western pop music, hanging out and flirting openly in a society which frowns on and sanctions intimacy between unmarried youth of different genders.

Cultural anthropologist Ritty Lukose, who has worked for many years on gender, class, youth and consumption in the South Indian state of Kerala (2005), argues that specific gender norms relating to caste or religion continue to structure some of the experiences of children and women even in the most upper class homes. Lukose rejects some *essential*

commonality of experience between poor women in India and their elite counterparts but acknowledges gendered experiences amongst upper-middleclass youth. She intentionally nuances the almost monolithic picture of privilege drawn in the opening paragraphs of this chapter. She suggests that, “by paying attention to this terrain (of cultural consumption), it becomes possible to examine the contradictions of consumption for young women and men who are both objects of commoditization and subjects of consumption”¹¹. Processes of globalisation and cultural consumption in India’s neoliberal economy thus have implications both in terms of class and of gender. The beauty industry, with its conspicuous emphasis on the female body and sexuality, is a case in point. This emphasis has become more evident via hotly contested¹² beauty contests, and popularised by the crowning of Indian contestants, such as actress Lara Dutta, as Miss Universe.¹³

However, as Lukose proceeds to explore, some of these pageants became the grounds for ferocious debates and violent clashes between different factions of the Indian public—rightwing religious nationalist groups, leftwing feminist groups, marketers, local and global media and the police forces of various states and towns. Problematically, the ideological tensions between the various groups of protestors were erased in public debate in favour of a monolithic moral condemnation of the pageant organisers and participants. This was despite the fact that for protestors allied with Hindu chauvinist rightwing politics the pageants were constructed as a symbol of some invasive ‘alien’ culture while for feminists it was associated with an ‘imperialist’ and sexist form of ‘capitalist oppression’¹⁴: (same as above).

Picking up with overt disapproval on representations of the ‘nation’ on music television in the context of an interview-based study of urban MTV-viewers, US-based sociologist of youth and media, Vamsee Juluri makes the point that many young Indians *assume* they are participating in a global youth culture which appreciates and admires ‘India’ in particular, when actually what they are doing, according to Juluri, is buying into the ‘easy

naturalness' of 'poverty, individualism and greed'. He insists that 'the nationalism of youth culture is problematically articulated not only with religious nationalism and intolerance but also in the fact that music video discourses of nationality are profoundly orientalist' and argues that young Indians who consume MTV music videos are colluding in their own 'exoticization' and 'spectacularization'¹⁵.

Amongst the urban middle classes in particular, then, there is the merest suggestion of such a thing as a generational consciousness, although not as specific in terms of cultural consumption as in the western literature. The pre-liberalisation generation, who grew up in a closed economy before 1990, with state tv and radio and school text-books that had a strong homogenising national/nationalist vision are quite distinct from those born in the 1990s , whose parents have bought them all that money can buy or try to do so, who have known several bouts of anti-muslim pogroms, a neo-fascist government for ten years and who feel both an affinity for the west and are riven by anxieties about india's traditions and 'place in the world'. As will be seen in coming sections, all of this has had little or no effect on rural and urban working class generational identities – although there are specific places where generation Y youth in the working classes are losing their traditional occupations, and hence joining a loose urban lumpen proletariat, sometimes ready to be mobilised by fascist identities (anti-democratic, anti-Muslim, anti-Christian). Meanwhile even upper middleclass youth from different urban/rural, religious/caste/regional identities have stronger ties to others *within* their region/caste/language group than they do to young people from other classes, making the case for a generational consciousness even within the upperclasses very weak.

Negotiating Hybrid Identities? The Exhausting Constraint of Being Lower Middle-Class in India

Discussed exhaustively in feminist anthropologist Purnima Mankekar's (1999) ethnography of television, nationalism and womanhood in a New Delhi suburb, the living conditions, aspirations, sexual practices, religious beliefs and political practices, consumer habits and media consumption of this shifting grouping in different cities and amongst different castes and religious groups nevertheless varies significantly around a consistent core: a patriarchal family structure and lack of privacy/living space. Everything else, from religion, the number of members in a household, a family's annual income to political affiliation and educational aspirations may vary quite significantly between small towns and large metropolises and even between ethnic communities or groups. For instance, according to interviews I have carried out, at least in urban areas, lower-middle class women may work or be confined to their homes but either of these options generally depends on the demands or agreement of parents, husbands, brothers; couples may choose to form nuclear family units with their children, but again, living space is a constant and traumatic issue, with privacy at a premium; families may subscribe to a variety of prejudices such as religious nationalist politics or to what is now considered an 'old-fashioned' Nehruvian vision of integration between castes and religions or rarely to openly socialist politics—but they all have to deal on a daily basis with corrupt bureaucrats¹⁶, lack of school places, rising prices. The implications of these factors for the politics, identifications, consumption patterns and sexual relationships of lower-middle class youth has been explored at some length in my own discussions with Hindi film viewers¹⁷ and are meticulously discussed in work by Bombay-based youth sociologist Leena Abraham (2001) and her colleagues with college students in Bombay. In public, strong gendered hierarchies persist, with girls internalising or being forced to spout discourses around the 'dirtiness' of sex and the value of female chastity, while

at least some boys and young men can boast of sexual exploits, and play the field. Abraham concludes that gender relations amongst lower middle class youth are deeply asymmetrical when it comes to acquiring information about and/or exploring their sexuality, and discrimination against young women and girls is 'all-pervasive'. Abraham attributes the cultivation of an aggressive/assertive male sexuality and a passive, timid and shame-filled sexuality on the part of young women to the overall patriarchal context. Paraphrase and remove quote

Media, particularly since the increased availability of satellite channels, is seen to play an interesting role in this apparently tightly controlled discursive field, not least in relation to consumer culture¹⁸ and Rightwing Hindu nationalist movements¹⁹. Each of these sets of literatures is worthy of several volumes in its own right, particularly in relation to the social psychology of fascism and the (at least internationally) lesser known and discussed behaviours of millions of Indian citizens. [TEXTBOX 1] Instead, I return once more to the ways in which interconnections between class, public culture and gender amongst lower middleclass youth in India have been theorised by researchers in the field and been excluded from studies on Generation X; and here the term 'hybridity' comes to the fore as a key concept.

Offering an analysis of what they term the 'hybrid' articulations of identity, nationalism, and gender in popular singer Alisha Chinai's music video, [*Made In India*](#), and answering their own question about the kind of resource provided for young Indian women by Indian pop videos and music television, Shanti Kumar and Michael Curtin argue that "[t]o term the hybrid articulations of Indianness engendered by the transcultural discourse of music television as *schizophrenic* may seem rather disturbing to those of us more attuned to the so-called normal models of singular identity"²⁰. However tempting it might be to subscribe wholeheartedly to an optimistic notion of schizophrenic or hybrid identity as a metaphor for

the creative encounters between lower middle-class youth and media in India—and it is tempting, especially when reading some of the more turgid *effects* studies which accuse the media of everything from child pregnancy to rape and de-culturation—poststructuralist commentaries sidestep problematic issues concerning the everyday discourses around, for instance, religion, or sex, class and the body, already circulating in viewing communities, and the political economy of media control. Leela Fernandes argues that “Hybridity in this context does not transcend but is intricately connected to processes of capital formation within the boundaries of the modern nation state [. . .] hybridity in India is inextricably linked to the class-based cosmopolitanism of the urban middle-classes” (p. 622). Her conclusion, interestingly, like that of Ritty Lukose, is that anxieties and fractures in reception of global-local/western-Indian cultural hybridity is displaced onto a gendered discourse which views women (and the control of their sexuality) as an ultimate arbiter of cultural Indianness. Discussions with young film viewers in India over the past ten years suggest that this displacement of anxieties about ‘westernisation’ (conceived as entailing a break-down of the traditional Indian joint family and, potentially, a sort of individualistic materialism) onto young women in particular has striking psychic and material repercussions. Most notably, the hypocritical enforcement of norms of modesty in clothing for young women following their marriage is discussed openly by young men, as if it is completely natural. This entails first a confusing insistence that ‘girlfriends’ dress to emphasise their bodies in a way similar to Hindi film actresses *before marriage* and second that once these same girls become ‘wives’ that they forego any pleasure to be had from fashion and cover themselves, particularly in the presence of men’s parents. Ironically, this attitude on the part of young lower-middleclass men was considered particularly ‘modern’, as ‘traditional’ people would apparently refuse to allow young women to dress ‘sexy’ either before or after marriage. Young women’s wishes and habits, their agency in relation to clothing and dress, were really not of particular concern

to the young men who spoke in this way, although these views were challenged, on occasion, by both young male and female cinema-goers²¹.

Although discussions with lower-middle class urban viewers (born in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and interviewed between 2000 and 2003) provide only part of the picture, the insights which arise are echoed in other studies since then, and remain an important reminder of the absurdity and dangers of homogenising discourse about the psychological characteristics of a supposed-Generation X in India. As I discuss in a forthcoming chapter on Bollywood representations of youth and class,²² the depiction of modern consumerist practices on-screen, with teenage heroes and heroines drinking Pepsi, wearing brand-name clothing, and jetting off to foreign locations is indeed sometimes accompanied by more exploratory representations of gender, heterosexual sexuality and romance; these offer young people repositories for fantasy and imagined futures and identities which are evident in discussions with them and, as such, are not reducible to a single problematic representation. However, equally frequently, consumerist modernity in media productions is embedded in a context that posits so-called 'tradition' as counterbalancing western consumerism and residing in young women's (and even young men's) sexual virtue, chastity and their obedience to their parents' endogamous demands. Nor are these discourses recognised explicitly only by academics. When given a chance to talk and think through issues, some young lower-middleclass viewers are thoughtful about the kinds of compromises materialist fantasies might entail, noting that there are painful choices to be made about the kind of lifestyle one wants, the amount of independence one can expect, the complex pressures of living in consumerist surroundings. A lower-middle class 20-year old emphasised, 'It is okay to like Nike-Shikey stuff... But I know friends of mine who don't ask "does this boy respect me?" they only ask "How much does his daddy earn?"' Somehow in the films, like in *Yaadein/Memories*²³, boys are rich and they let you work outside, but it doesn't always end

so well.’ Another family, interviewed in 2007, detailed the tensions between parents and teenage children, where the tug-of-war over purchasing material goods was always imbricated with the symbolic struggle for independence and control over the young people’s lives and characters.²⁴ Using interviews to access North Indian urban men’s feelings on a range of issues, US Anthropologist Steve Darné (p. 205) too argues, “The divergent effects of globalisation on class lines is most clearly seen when it comes to transformations in family and gender.” Some of his interpretations of interviewee testimony do rely on debatable descriptions of what is ‘essentially Indian’ or ‘traditionally Indian.’ However, he also suggests that, “middleclass identity is more and more rooted in consumption” (p. 203) primarily in cases where consumption is actually a possibility because of increased income rather than just because of more advertising. This leads him to conclude that actual institutional possibilities, rather than mediated ‘messages’ and imaginaries inflect male viewers’ behaviour with regard to gender-relations, and returns us to a more materialist arena where ‘economic structures’ trump ‘new cultural possibilities.’ Darné’s simple proposition, made in relation to mediated meaning, identity and the lower middle-classes, is a good starting point for our final section on the Generation X concept, working-class youth and media in India.

Third Class and Below: Working Class Lives and Media Globalisation in India.

Researchers and journalists as well as other cultural commentators and ‘the public’ at large in so-called developed nations certainly know *intellectually* that there are many poor people in India. The poor do exist, one way or another, as a metaphor (for the wretched of the earth) or as a reality (slum tourism is more and more popular)²⁵. One has only to look at the statistics - as mentioned, India’s middle class, including both upper and lower echelons, is

estimated at around 200 million, barely 20% of the population - or to watch *Slumdog Millionaire*. There have been dozens of more or less detailed and participatory studies of working class lives, work, labour-relation, caste, politics, violence and gender in India over the past two decades which testify not only to the *existence* of 80% of India's population but also to the massive diversity in their experiences. As we will see, even selective engagement with these disrupts powerful academic narratives about Generation X in India.

Writing in 2009, before an election, that little is set to change for the majority in India despite over '150,000 suicides by farmers' in recent years, veteran Indian journalist and social activist Praful Bidwai notes 'the affluent in India pay among the world's lowest tax rates, usually *under 20%*. Nor is there inheritance tax in this super-hierarchical society where privilege at birth guarantees lifelong status'.²⁶ Other commentators can and do take issue with a perspective that is based simply on analyses in terms of social class—and lessens the importance, for instance, of voting to keep out of office a government which uses popular racist rhetoric against minority communities and indulges in ethnic cleansing and pogroms to boost their electoral might²⁷. However, the facts remain. The priorities and often desperate needs of families, youth and children in the majority of India's population are so different from those of the middle-classes and upper classes that the exclusion of 80% of India's population from much cultural studies literature (such as that on Generation X) is both predictable and extremely damaging.

So, in what ways should neoliberal policies (of which the so-called 'liberalisation' and 'globalisation' of the media and cultural environment are but strands) be seen to be accelerating changes in the lives of poor, working-class and/or destitute Indians in both urban and rural areas? Varman and Belk, in what is a somewhat simplistic but nonetheless instructive study of the *media effects* of consumer advertising on working-class lives believe that economic liberalization in India has entailed easy access to cheap labour for

multinational corporations and at the same time the removal via structural adjustment plans of any safe-guards, state control and employment generation which the poor and destitute had relied on in previous decades. Indeed, ‘The reduction in state expenditures in India has resulted in an overall decline in per capita consumption in the critical domains of food’ (p. 233). This, they insist, has entailed an increase in the horrifying gap between the middleclasses and the vast numbers of poor people across India. So, while it is not as crude as ‘Here, have 24/7 TV, but don’t worry, we’re enabling it by removing price subsidies for hundreds of millions of people who live on less than 500 calories a day’ it is also not absurd to conceptualise the ‘great changes’ happening in India in that manner.

Pal, Lakshmanan and Toyama, (2009) meanwhile, discuss the relationship between poverty and perceptions of computers in Education in four rural districts in Karnataka, South India, noting that most rural parents who work on estates would send their children to a school regardless of whether the school had computers as long as there was a *midday meal*; however the withdrawal of a food-to-study incentive would mean that they would remove their children from school. However, there were also unforeseen benefits noted by some of the parents in this study to the introduction of collective computer resources in the school— notably the necessity in terms of social pedagogy for children from different social classes and castes to sit beside each other ‘on the same bench’ (p. 143) while using the computers— where slates or notebooks would not have necessitated such an intimate collective endeavour. Based on ethnographic fieldwork among the youth of a marginalized leather worker community in urban West Bengal, Ruchira Ganguly-Scrase²⁸ gives an account of levels of tension around economic and cultural change and their distinct repercussions for women, men and the community as a whole. She describes how changes in the leather industry and in workingclass male perceptions of this occupation have left painful gaps in household incomes and in the identities of young *Rabi Das* men which are, depressingly, being filled by the

multiple pressures on Rabi Das girls and women to quit education, take up menial domestic jobs and remain as secluded as possible to ensure a family's 'honour'.

In a similar vein, Qayum and Ray's work (2003) on modern middleclass employer's changing relationships to domestic servitude should make shocking reading, but it is an everyday reality across most of South Asia, either on one side of the class divide or the other. Their argument is, broadly, that the master-class have been used to controlling every aspect of their servants' lives, including having them living with their homes and have, in return, taken on a feudal role towards their servants; however, the move to middle-class nuclear families and flats as well as a sort of democratisation in expectations means that feudal bonds are floundering, particularly in big cities but that the need of the middleclass for servants has not diminished. In one tiny telling instance, a working-class woman complains that, despite supposed changes, even intimate aspects of her everyday life are controlled by her bosses. As Qayum and Ray recount in one particularly poignant case, young domestic servant Zeenat's employer refused to allow her to bathe in the morning, as was her custom, humiliated her continually and accused her of using 'more soap than the entire family (p. 542).

Such accounts by working class women given post-globalisation and post neoliberal reform are consistent with those given in the extended interview-based study *My Life if One Long Struggle* in 1984 by labour historians Rohini Hensman, Sujata Gothoskar and researcher Neelam Chaturvedi. Sitting, standing, sleeping, which vessels to eat or drink from, whether one is allowed to watch television or listen to the radio while doing chores, whether one can raise one's gaze when speaking and when one might visit one's children are all tightly controlled by the middle-classes, particularly for domestic servants. Given that a phenomenally large number of domestic servants in India are children between the ages of 8 and 16, the power-differentials and psychic impacts are even more traumatic. While it has

been suggested that paid domestic servitude for working-class boys and girls provides some measure of protection from the harsh conditions of slum sweat-shops, brothels, restaurants, rag-picking, plantation work or other factory and manual occupations, it is also the case that being confined indoors with middle and upper middleclass families can be equally dangerous, particularly where working-class life is held cheap. The number of reported and unreported sexual assaults, sexual harassment and rapes of domestic servants in India, as well as deaths from beating or accident is not known. But extended discussions with young people, including slum-dweller children and female domestic servants over the last decade suggest that reported cases form only the tip of a horrifying iceberg.

Generation X – What Generation X?

When researching responses to the film *Slumdog Millionaire* in Bombay in 2009, I was told a variety of disturbing stories in and around discussions of the film's depiction of slum-dwellers and street children. One 19-year old, Sushil, recounted how he came at the age of 11 to Bombay from his tiny, destitute village in Uttar Pradesh and worked first as a tea boy and then as a domestic servant. He was constantly criticised and then beaten brutally for apparent inattention to his chores, and for 'looking at' his employers. When Sushil talks about there being 'nothing to do' and 'nothing' in his village, he does not mean that there are no shopping malls or discos. He means that there is *no work*—and *no food*. Nor does his concern with being employed mean that he is not interested in cultural life. We had a long and emotional discussion about his use of the mobile phone and his delight in a variety of films. But none of the potential cultural attractions in Bombay counterbalance the exploitation and violence he has experienced. If there were a decent livelihood to be had back in his home state, that is where he would be. Asmita, who has a three year old daughter and

moves from building-site to building-site with her construction-worker husband, described the only time in her life when she had the opportunity to watch television, when she was pregnant and working as a maid. As the primary care-giver to her employers' three children, she would feed them and watch television programmes chosen by them at the same time. She was dismissed when her own baby was born, however, despite her entreaties, and remembered the job as being one of her better places of employment because she was neither assaulted nor humiliated there, and had access to media.

Najma, quoted in a recent paper on *Slumdog Millionaire*²⁹, was full of regret at the absence of her children from her everyday life. Living in a shantytown and working six domestic jobs, she bitterly misses her eight year old son and two year old daughter, who have remained in the village with her mother. She said she occasionally got to watch part of a film while cleaning in someone's house, and had thus viewed *slumdog millionaire* in segments, at odd times. Her comment that during the film *Slumdog Millionaire* 'everyone was just waiting for the poor boy to become rich... most of us are not so fortunate' sums up her sense of the film's core weakness. However, unlike some of the other viewers in this category, she reflects on the fact that Hindi films rarely show the life of the 'common people', finding in the film some merit as well as some emotional resonance. Her comment 'it was in his stars so he won' sounded straightforward—almost as if she believed in fate—but it could have been ironic or even slightly accusing: a director who does not believe in fate using fate as a gimmick to reinforce for most poor viewers the uselessness of trying to change anything in their lives. Ultimately, *Slumdog Millionaire*, though it used their labour and their stories, like so many trendy global media products, was not really aimed at working-class viewers in the country and city it depicts. Meanwhile, across villages and small towns, some young people and children are experimenting with television by viewing collectively or going to far-flung houses which have cable connections to relax, learn three or four languages or get a better

understanding of what it means to ‘have sex’; while others have intermittent electricity, no running water or time to do this, for after their two-hour trek to and from school, their household chores and work with animals they, like their parents, are simply too exhausted to look further afield for entertainment.

It is infuriating, rather than ironic, given these circumstances, that many middle and upper-middle class respondents speak casually in interviews of the working-classes as lazy and stupid, aggressive, prone to addiction, sexist, vulnerable to the ill-effects of media and generally waiting to participate in urban violence and communal rioting. Evidence from a range of studies³⁰, of course, suggests *not* that poor people in India are saintly or happy, but that they suffer —differentially, based on location, caste and gender of course—from many of the same prejudices and processes affecting other social groups; and anti-minority violence is included in this list. Like socialist or socially conscious members of the upper and lower middle-classes, however, the rural poor and urban working-class also organize themselves³¹ into collective formations, social movements, trade unions, co-operatives, media collectives. They participate, often at great risk to themselves individually, in attempts to change the vicious and unjust social frameworks ignored or reinforced by the very global capitalist system which gives Indian elites *iMacs* and the lower-middle-classes V-TV style hybridity and 24/7 news.

Space dictates that I draw this whirlwind discussion to a close. Leisure and cultural consumption are not luxuries, and I do not mean to make out that they are. Like food, water, clothing, shelter and education, they are, in many ways, necessities of life. But in countries like India, however fast things may seem to be changing for highly visible parts of the population, however resilient formal economic growth has proven, however much multiple identities or intersectional identifications might be in evidence during interviews, however cosmopolitan an elite seems to be with its social networks and American slang, things are not

changing in the same ways and at the same pace across different groups in the population. In fact, some things are hardly changing at all. Despite several decades of subaltern studies and subaltern history, despite engagement with the critiques of postcolonial theorists, it is still not unusual to find a tiny distorted part of India taken for the complex whole. However, if you still think that you can spot a 'Generation X' in India—who am I to stop you?

Notes

¹ Rediff 2007, Hilary Clinton 2010, Brown, 2011.

² Chakravorty, p. 211

³ See Banaji 2002; 2005; 2006a and 2006b; 2008a and 2008b; 2010a and 2010b

⁴ cf. Banaji and Buckingham 2010 for further discussions of this topic.

⁵ See sophisticated discussions by Patricia Caplan 1985, Mary E. John and Janaki Nair 1998, Britta Ohm 2007 and 2010; Purnima Mankekar 1999 and Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia 2001

⁶ These issues are discussed in different contexts by Qayum and Ray, 2003; Saldanha, 2002; Pavan Varma, 1995.

⁷ Rachel Dwyer 2000, Leela Fernandes 2000 and Steve Derne 2008 have all written in more or less coinciding ways about the cultural consumption of this particular section of the urban Indian middleclasses.

⁸ http://drupal.meltonfoundation.org/files/Can-India-Mobilize-its-Middle-Class-and-Reduce-Emissions_.pdf ; <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2007/09/indiasmiddleclassfailure/>

⁹ Although it is difficult to find agreement in the conceptualisation of class and poverty and the statistics of poverty and wealth arising therefrom, a scan of the statistical studies in this area in 2011 indicates that of India's 1.21 Billion population, roughly 0.01% are super-rich; Using the World Bank's undoubtedly dubious definition of middle class (households bringing in US\$4500 to 22,000), the number of upper *and* lower middle-class households in India would then seem to be 28.4 million in year 2009-'10, accounting for some 120 million people). This indicates that well over 80 percent of the 1.21 billion people in India exist in poverty, as this is defined even by neoliberal economic organisations; and, according to a report entitled "Conditions of Work and Promotion of Livelihoods in the Unorganized Sector" by the state-run National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS), an overwhelming majority of this number, '*seventy-seven percent of Indians*, about 836 million people, live on less than half a dollar a day' which qualifies as being below the poverty-line as defined by world economic organisations.

¹⁰ Dwyer 2000, p. 1

¹¹ Lukose, 2005, p. 915

¹² Also discussed by Shohini Ghosh, 1999, p. 247

¹³ Lukose, 2005, p. 919

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 923.

¹⁵ Juluri 2002, p. 283.

¹⁶ Based on the literature, and on interviewees accounts of their own parents, I suggest that many corrupt bureaucrats themselves hail from this class background, and corruption (referred to in one instance by Ganguly-Scrase and 'nepotistic networks') has become a way of supplementing low incomes.

¹⁷ See Banaji 2006a and 2006b

¹⁸ See, in particular, discussions in the work of Purnima Mankekar 1999; Indian media scholar, Anjali Monteiro, 1998; Management scholars Varman and Belk 2008; as well as US Anthropologist, Steve Derne 2008.

¹⁹ See Rajagopal 2001; Ohm 2010; Banaji 2008b.

²⁰ Kumar and Curtin 2002, p. 363

²¹ Banaji 2006b pp. 93-97

²² (In Press). 'Bollywood' Adolescents: Young Viewers Discuss Childhood, Class and Hindi Films' in Benwell, B., Proctor, J. and Robinson, G. (eds) *Postcolonial Audiences Readers, Viewers and Reception*, London, New Delhi and New York: Routledge (publication date: Spring 2012).

²³ Directed by Subhash Ghai, 2001.

²⁴ There are, of course, methodological pitfalls in reading off theoretical positions from the testimonies of small samples of research participants, and even from one's own observations over extended periods of time. Over-generalisation from a few critical stances as well as a problematic tendency to essentialize on grounds of class, religion or 'national' characteristics when confronted by a dozen or more people saying similar things is not uncommon. These failings are further amplified when small parts of the research are presented as factual findings in monographs and book chapters. This health warning applies equally to my work and to that of other 'South Asianists' utilizing ethnographic methods.

²⁵ See Paulo Favero, 'What a wonderful world!: On the 'touristic ways of seeing', the knowledge and the politics of the 'culture industries of otherness' *Tourist Studies* 7, April: (2007) 51-81

²⁶ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/apr/21/indian-election-politics> In an Election for the masses the rich will be the winners. *The Guardian*. Tuesday 21 April 2009.

²⁷ See the frightening accounts of such anti-Muslim and anti-Christian pogroms in the SriKrishna Commission Report, 2001; Javed Anand and Teesta Setalwad, 2002; Tanika Sarkar, 2002; Britta Ohm 2010.

²⁸ Ganguly-Scrase 2007, p. 232-233.

²⁹ Banaji 2010b.

³⁰ See, for instance, Chakraborty 2010; Paik 2009; Sodhi and Verma 2002.

³¹ Meticulously researched and superbly discussed by Bina Agarwal 2010, Jan Breman 2004, Rohini Hensman 2011 and Rashmi Sawhney 2010.

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