

circumstances they have to live in. Tactical acting is individual, defensive and powerless; it is a survival practice, a coping mechanism without any perspective of change. Strategic acting, on the other hand, may become a form of resistance and may develop into some sort of coordinated collective endeavour with a plan to change the situation. Scheper-Hughes argues that the extremely difficult situation of these people makes the possibility of change very slim, but there were definitely also moments of strategic acting among the labourers.

In several places in her analysis, Menon actually describes acts of resistance, such as the Muslim Club activities, but also Abida's moral self-improvement and her eagerness to acquire and convey knowledge. This is resistance against unequal power hierarchies, and it shows the agency, resourcefulness and resilience of these women, but the question then remains why this is called place-making.

A last comment and related to the previous one concerns forms of informal leadership in relation to what James Scott calls "hidden and public transcripts" of resistance (1990). Menon refers to Scott but did not address the importance he attached to hidden forms of resistance, communication and knowledge, invisible to the outside world and the oppressor but nevertheless crucial for effective resistance. I gather there must have been forms of hidden communication and networks among Muslims in Old Delhi, and I could imagine that Islam would play a crucial role in shaping these "hidden transcripts." A more systematic discussion of such forms of activity would have certainly provided insight into the dynamics of everyday life in Old Delhi and it would take away the impression that Muslims are just victims. Menon's account clearly refutes this.

Despite these shortcomings I consider *Making Place for Muslims in Contemporary India* a valuable document that seriously takes issue with the lives of the people in question.

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Being Single in India: Stories of Gender, Exclusion, and Possibilities.

By Sarah Lamb. University of California Press, 2022. 221 pages. Paperback, \$34.95 USD, ISBN 9780520389427. Ebook, open access, ISBN: 9780520389434

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In a world where the rising trend of singlehood is often presented as the celebration of choice, autonomy, and liberation, particularly in the mass media platforms, the title, *Being Single in India*, might initially conjure images of carefree, solo adventurers breaking free from societal conventions.

However, the subtitle of the book, *Stories of Gender, Exclusion, and Possibilities*, as well as the introductory chapter, effectively unveils a world where singleness is not a one-size-fits-all concept. From class to caste, urban to rural, and at the dynamic intersections where these identities converge, this book is a testament to the myriad ways in which singlehood finds its place within the unique habitus of individuals from all walks of life.

Besides offering a rich tapestry of insight into being single in India, the book presents a meticulous ethnographic study conducted by a scholar who is a non-native to Bengali society, yet possesses a unique ability to connect deeply with her subjects. Seven years of extensive fieldwork from 2014 to 2021 in Kolkata and nearby areas of West Bengal in India, along with her prior research on gender and aging in West Bengal, is evident in the author's contextual and gendered interpretation of being single throughout the book.

The lives of an overlooked segment of the population—never-married single women aged 35 and above—a demographic often considered beyond the “marriageable age” in Indian society, presents a compelling subject of investigation. The author's selection of interlocutors for the study was enabled by snowball or referral sampling method, as is usually the case with studies examining unconventional spaces, choices, and circumstances, often hidden from the mainstream. Besides the 54 core interlocutors, the author acknowledges systematically seeking insights from countless others, both married and unmarried, within the wider community to comprehensively understand the normative expectations and deviations surrounding singlehood in India. The never-married women interlocutors represent a diverse cross-section of society, ranging from highly educated professionals to barely literate day wage earners; from those who consciously chose to remain single to those whose life circumstances led them down this path; those who self-reported being heterosexuals as well as lesbians; living in variety of arrangements such as living with natal kin to those in working women hostels and old age homes.

The first chapter delineates the intricate Indian societal context that makes it nearly impossible for women to remain single beyond a certain age, unless they opt for a life of monkhood. Emphasizing the parallels between anthropological tradition of making the known ‘strange’ and queer studies’ endeavour to ‘destabilise the notions of the normal’ (p. 11), the author demonstrates a clear inclination toward applying a queer lens as a means to unveil the intricacies and nuances that may otherwise remain hidden when examining singlehood through more conventional frameworks. Her commitment to unsettling taken-for-granted assumptions is evident from the very outset, as she invokes Bourdieu's ‘doxa’ or ‘taken-for-granted’ world (p. 33) and Gayle Rubin's ‘sex/gender system’ (p. 34), to deconstruct established assumptions concerning gender, sexuality, and heteronormativity. Furthermore, as a foundational step in comprehending the intricacies of singlehood, the author adopts a structured approach by presenting the reasons provided by her interlocutors for not marrying. The subsequent chapters delve in-depth into the real-life stories of single women, offering a deeper understanding of how individuals navigate and negotiate the complex web of societal expectations, personal choices, and unique circumstances that influence their decisions regarding remaining single.

Chapter Two of the book, like the others, opens with a captivating narrative, this time featuring the interlocutor Medha, emphasizing the experiences of women who cited prioritizing their aspirations for education and work as primary reasons for not entering into marriage. Through thick descriptions, the author meticulously interprets how education and employment, while empowering women by offering pathways to self-actualization, simultaneously impose constraints on their marriage prospects within India's hypergamous society. The perception that highly educated women may be deemed too old for marriage, the challenges in finding suitable grooms for educated women, and the perception of highly educated women as less adaptable in patrilineal in-law families, emerge as the three key ways in which education can limit women's marriage prospects in hypergamous Indian cultural landscape. The chapter also underscores the multifaceted nature of work as a means of self-actualization for some women and as a means to fulfil family needs for others.

Chapter Three continues exploring the intricate motivations behind women's decisions to remain unmarried, delving into the profound question of what happens to the material, social, and affective needs of husbandless women. Ten women in the study cited supporting their birth families as a

compelling reason to forgo marriage, in a cultural context where the prevalence of virilocal post-marital residence creates a normative demand that the fruits of women's labour, both within the household and in the broader labour market, be transferred to their marital families. To contextualize such experiences, the author was recommended to watch the poignant Bengali classic film *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, which portrays the life of an unmarried daughter who prioritizes the care needs of her natal family over her own desire for marriage. The author's interpretation of unmarried daughters and sisters' experiences who, despite residing in their natal homes, often find themselves relegated to a corner as their homes transform into their brothers' patrilineal households is effectively situated against the backdrop of the storyline of *Meghe Dhaka Tara*.

The discussion also touches upon the Hindu Succession Amendment Acts of 2005 and 2020, emphasizing the legal inheritance rights of daughters over Hindu joint family property of their fathers. However, the chapter provides a stark reality check, citing research such as Basu's (1999, Basu's 2015), which revealed that women often receive meagre shares in their parental property and are left to support themselves primarily through their wages. The chapter concludes by underscoring a critical dichotomy: while well-off single women may have the means to support their natal families and simultaneously address their own care needs by hiring other women, impoverished single women often have no recourse beyond their kin.

The following chapter continues to delve into the concern of care by examining the precarity of circumstances faced by single women in a society where old age is predominantly seen as a phase where one deserves and needs care, often provided by family members. Old age homes are frequently stigmatized and viewed as places of abandonment in Indian society, but based on the findings of her prior studies (Lamb 1997, Lamb 2000) on ageing in India, the author challenges this monolithic perspective, presenting them simultaneously as modern sites of aspirations and care. Central to the examination is the concept of 'care' itself, and how it becomes a complex intersection of gender, kinship, marital status, age, and social class, shaping the multiple interpretations of well-being and singlehood over the course of one's life. The chapter also highlights the troubling issue of sex-selective abortions in India driven by the desire for a male child to provide future care and avoid the risk of residing in an old age home. Within this context, unmarried women experience a unique sense of belongingness and acceptance in old age homes, where instead of them being questioned, they witness married and with-children elderly encountering the question "Why are you here?" This shift in questioning highlights how both groups, whether unmarried or with children, face societal scrutiny and challenges because their life choices and circumstances deviate from established kinship and gender norms. Throughout the chapter, the author underscores the scarcity of senior living choices in India, which are primarily accessible to those with financial means.

Chapter Five begins with author's self-reflection of how her return from fieldwork in India to her native society, the United States, incited an estranged sensibility in her to relook at the perception and experience of singlehood in the US. Being single in the US does not automatically imply a lack of prior romantic relationships or sexual intimacy, which contrasted strikingly to Indian perceptions and experiences of single women's sexuality and love lives.

The author uncovers the veil of secrecy surrounding female sexuality, revealing how women are conditioned to view sexual pleasure solely as a means of reproduction rather than self-gratification. Through a review of Narayan's (2018) research, involving interviews with educated, middle, and upper-class women, the author delineates the discomfort and aversion associated with discussions about female sexuality in Indian society as well as other cultures. The chapter also highlights the societal pressure on women to maintain their chastity and the dire consequences they face if their premarital sexual involvement is revealed, as also reflected in the rising trend of re-virginization surgeries in Indian cities and towns. In addition, the role of women as barometers of family honour in Indian society, leading to strict control and vigilance over their sexuality, is underscored. This control extends to the everyday exclusion of single women from social life, as they are perceived as potential temptations for married men, and renting accommodation to single women is considered risky. Despite these challenges, ten interlocutors in the study shared their stories of pushing against societal norms that restrict

female sexuality to pursue sexual relationships. However, nine of these were from the urban professional and elite classes, where some level of privacy and sexual freedom is possible. Some women also narrated their experiences of exploring queer relationships – a concept virtually unheard of during their upbringing. The chapter concludes on an optimistic note, highlighting how elite women challenging the boundaries that limit their sexuality can serve as catalysts for change.

A profound exploration of the experiences of women who embraced single motherhood through three distinct non-normative pathways, including outside wedlock birth, adoption, and IVF, is the core theme of Chapter Six. A recurring theme throughout the chapter is the relentless demand placed upon single mothers to establish the paternity of their children, a challenge that manifests across a spectrum of social and legal contexts. The author raises a thought-provoking question about whether single mothers are, in essence, carrying forward their own father's identity, a concept she intriguingly terms "matrilineal patriliney" (p. 151). Moreover, the exploration of how single mothers employ various strategies to address questions and comments about single motherhood, within the framework of King and Stone's concept of 'lineal masculinity' (2010), offers valuable insights. Since lineal masculinity conveys the flow of social existence through men over generations, it prompts the author to re-evaluate her own initial assumption that being single would be more challenging for women than men. Through a systematic review of studies on single men and gay individuals, who are often stigmatized as the "lineage destroyers," the author makes it apparent that single mothers, whether through biology, adoption, or assisted reproduction, have a pathway to motherhood, though not widely considered socially legitimate. For single and gay men, embracing fatherhood can be an almost insurmountable challenge. In the concluding remarks, the author underscores the class-based aspect of embracing single motherhood, particularly through adoption or in vitro fertilization (IVF), which remains largely accessible to urban elite women. This observation highlights the enduring class-based disparities that shape the landscape of motherhood in contemporary India.

The last thematic chapter of the book, Chapter Seven, opens with a thought-provoking conversation between the author and her key interlocutor, Medha. Their discussion revolves around Medha's lingering remorse regarding her sister-in-law (referred to as "Boudi" in Bengali), who once commented that her daily chores increased when Medha visited them. This seemingly innocuous comment leads to a profound exploration of cultural expectations of femininity and the advantages and disadvantages of being married versus single. Furthermore, this conversation highlights a significant blind spot in the author's research, where the assumption had been that married women enjoy several advantages. However, it becomes evident through a review of cross-cultural scholarship as well as interlocutors' experiences that being single holds greater potential for leisure, pleasure, and personal pursuits that married women typically do not experience. Nonetheless, the author emphasizes the pivotal influence of cultural context and prevailing inequalities in shaping women's opportunities and challenges in forming friendships and pursuing pleasure.

One of the initial obstacles discussed is the "pleasing syndrome," in which girls are socialized to prioritize pleasing others at the expense of their own desires. Another challenge arises from societal norms that segregate married and unmarried women, complicating the formation of friendships. Elite women in the study often had an easier time overcoming this obstacle by dining out with friends and colleagues, a luxury not easily accessible to those with limited incomes. The final obstacle discussed is the inaccessibility and societal unacceptance of women having fun in public spaces in India. Drawing on Phadke, Khan and Ranade's (2011) work, the chapter highlights the tension between women seeking enjoyment in public spaces and the idealized notions of gendered respectability. Despite these obstacles, financially independent middle-class and elite single women successfully navigate these challenges to push boundaries and carve out meaningful spaces for pleasure and enjoyment in their daily lives. The chapter concludes by highlighting that although it may seem that single women have more opportunities for leisure and enjoyment compared to their married counterparts, they encounter distinctive challenges such as building friendships, accessing public spaces, and embracing fun while navigating societal expectations.

In its exploration of the experiences of single women across diverse caste, class, region, and educational backgrounds, this book stands as a profound testament to the potency of ethnography in unravelling the intricate tapestry of human existence. It delves deep into the lives of single women, shedding light on the nuanced ways in which their individual stories are woven into the broader fabric of society. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the book's focus on Hindu interlocutors limits its ability to capture the religious distinctness of the single women's experiences. India's rich religious diversity, with Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis, and tribal faiths coexisting alongside Hindus, holds the potential for unique perspectives and challenges related to singlehood. Nevertheless, for students, scholars, and enthusiasts of anthropology, sociology, and gender studies, this book offers an awe-inspiring journey into the struggles and strategies employed to interpret and narrate the intricacies of human experience, as it emerges organically from the rich and textured narratives of single women.

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The Rohingya Crisis: Analyses, Responses and Peacebuilding Avenues

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Following clearance operations in Rakhine State by Myanmar's security forces, Rohingya refugees fled to neighbouring Bangladesh in August 2017. This book, by authors with an in-depth knowledge of Bangladesh and the broader region, takes a deep historical look at the roots of conflict. For those happy to take an ahistoric view of the Rohingya refugee 'crisis' as a recent phenomenon, this is not the book to read. Conversely, those wishing to understand the historic causes of the contemporary conflict, take into account the importance of colonialism and imperialism in shaping processes and events leading up to August 2017 and/or take a deep dive into the range of actors involved, this