



**Subverting Laughter: Unveiling Transgressive Humor and Shaping
Public Perception in Stand-Up Comedy”**

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Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
DECLARATION	4
SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATION	5
ABSTRACT	6
CHAPTER I	7
INTRODUCTION	7
1.1 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM	9
1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY	10
1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	12
1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	12
1.5 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY	12
LITERATURE REVIEW	14
CHAPTER III	18
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	18
3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN	18
3.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	18
RELIEF THEORY	18
PUBLIC OPINION THEORY	20
3.3 SAMPLING AND DATA COLLECTION	21
3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS PROCEDURE	22
3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	22
3.6 LIMITATIONS	22
CHAPTER IV	23
DISCUSSION	23
4.1 ANALYSIS OF AMERICAN COMEDIANS	23
4.2 ANALYSIS OF PAKISTANI COMEDIANS	29
4.3 ANALYSIS OF INDIAN COMEDIANS	33
REFERENCES	40

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DECLARATION

I declare that all material in this thesis is my own work, and that any material which is not my own has been duly acknowledged. Furthermore, I affirm that no portion of this work has previously been submitted or approved for the award of a degree by this or any other university.

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SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATION

It is certified that the work presented in this thesis has been carried out and completed under my supervision.

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Subverting Laughter: Unveiling Transgressive Humor and Shaping Public Perception in Stand-Up Comedy

ABSTRACT

Satire has always served an important role in shaping public opinion, undermining authority, and focusing the spotlight on social issues. Satire has changed a lot in stand-up comedy, what used to be intelligent, thoughtful humor has become more provocative and sometimes even controversial content. Drawing upon Relief Theory and Public Opinion Theory, this research attempts to analyze the satirical humor in stand-up comedy and focuses on comparing an older generation of stand-up comedians with contemporary comedians, including **American** (George Carlin with Hasan Minhaj, Max Amini), **Pakistani** (Amanullah Khan, Umer Sharif with Tabish Hashmi), and **Indian** (Johnny Lever, Raju Srivastav with Saurabh Rawat, Madhur Virli, Sumit Mishra, Harsh Gujral, Pranit More, Munawar Farooqui).

Relief Theory claims that humor relieves psychological tensions in society, while Public Opinion Theory asserts that the public opinion towards the issue is formed by the media. Satire was first used by older comedians to provoke critical thinking, and nowadays, modern comedians employ exaggerated, provocative humor with a notably higher entertainment factor than a critical one. This study will analyze exaggeration, absurdity, social criticism, and audience perception of comedy through thematic analysis of verbal speeches.

This research is significant because it indicates whether modern stand-up comedy continues to be a form of powerful social criticism or has become a medium for controversy-driven entertainment rather than intellectual discourse.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This research examines how satire in stand-up comedy went through a significant change from the respectful and socially constructive period to the current comedy that is absurd, vulgar, and also lacks respect for religion, gender, race, and overall decency (Park-Ozee). Using Relief Theory (Sigmund Freud) and Public Opinion Theory (Walter Lippmann) as a background, this research obtains primary data from old and present stand-up comedians in America, Pakistan, and India. Primary data used to represent older stand-up comedians were George Carlin (USA), Amanullah Khan/Umer Sharif (Pakistan), and Johnny Lever/Raju Srivastav (India). These older stand-up comedians had a nuanced intellectual, linguistic, and cultural treatment of satire. These stand-up comics were thoughtful, reflective, and socially critical without being offensive. Carlin, Amanullah, and Umer Sharif, along with Lever and Srivastav, used politically and socially critical humor entwined with theatrical performance, and their comedy enriched society, providing comic relief.

Contrasting modern-day comedians such as Hasan Minhaj, Max Amini (USA), Tabish Hashmi (Pakistan), Munawar Farooqui, Pranit More, Harsh Gujral, Madhur Virli, Saurabh Rawat, and Sumit Mishra (India), instead of subtle criticism, favor controversy, shock value, and a more performative style. Although they cover relevant sociopolitical and cultural issues, their strategies often resort to profanity, overt sexual language, and polarizing stereotypes based on race, religion, gender, and class. The emotionally provocative political satire of Minhaj, the ethnic-cliche-based approach of Amini, the controversial punch lines of Hashmi, and the obscene, self-deprecating, and stereotype-based material of the Indian modern standup comedy illustrate a comedic culture increasingly shaped by digital virality and immediate satisfaction of the audience over intellectual interaction.

This paper foregrounds Relief Theory as its primary analytical framework to draw comparisons between older and contemporary comedians. Using the Public Opinion Theory, this paper analyzes the effects of the comedian's discourse on society's perception of satire, which suggests

that early satire preserved the socially educated discourse, but today's satire is more likely to desecrate socially offensive humor. Through thematic analysis of the selected performances on the exaggeration, absurdity, social critique, and audience reaction, this paper posits that the pattern of the selected performers articulating social critique parody reflects or is indicative of the changing parameters of the audience's media consumption, social tolerance, and humor ethics. Ultimately, it raises the question of whether contemporary satire still serves as social critique or has it simply become clickbait entertainment.

Oral literature presented in the form of stand-up comedy has traditionally been both a means of entertainment and social commentary, reflecting cultural ideals, political conditions, and social conflicts. (LINTOTT). The nature of satirical comedy has changed dramatically over the decades, from being an intellectual and socially responsible stage to comprehend and criticize, growing to a medium that often thrives on controversy, vulgarity, and divisive humor. This research explores such transformation by comparing the older and contemporary comedians of three regions, i.e., America, Pakistan, and India, using the perspective of Relief Theory and Public Opinion Theory. George Carlin has been considered an icon of thoughtful analysis of politics, religion, and language through keen satirical insight, masterful wordplay, and intellectual heft. His material made the audience think deeply while also allowing them to have moments of relief through the laughter he created. In contrast, Hasan Minhaj combines storytelling and satire, dramatically and emotionally, and Max Amini tends to use cultural and racial stereotypes that can alienate the audience rather than bringing them closer to one another.

In Pakistan, the great comic stage figures Amanullah Khan utilized the craft of wit and character-driven comedy, and cultural commentary without using vulgarity. Similarly, contemporary stand-up comedian Tabish Hashmi explores provocative humor trends and taboo social issues with little regard to sensitivity around religion, gender, and culture.

Older Indian comedians like Raju Srivastav and Johnny Lever mastered the craft of observational satire and family-friendly comedy and drew humor out of shared cultural experiences. Meanwhile, contemporary Indian comedians like Munawar Farooqui, Pranit More, Harsh Gujral, Madhur Virli, Saurabh Rawat, and Sumit Mishra are more edgy, containing profanity, self-deprecation, and stereotype humor which aligns with the influences of online platforms and changing consumer behavior.

Sigmund Freud came up with the Relief Theory, which states that humor is used as a psychological relief, where individuals are able to express and expel repressed emotions or social stress in a socially acceptable manner. The Public Opinion Theory, introduced by Walter Lippmann, suggests that the perception and attitudes of people are more dependent on media, influential people, and how the information is presented. Using the two theories, this study examines exaggeration, absurdity, social criticism, and public reception to support the claim that, although satire is still powerful, its ethical bounds and societal influence have changed from encouraging critical thinking to serving clickbait-driven entertainment.

1.1 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

One of the most influential forms of oral literature and social commentary in the modern world, stand-up comedy has acquired little scholarly attention, particularly on its evolving satirical nature in varying cultural contexts. Although satire in literature, film, and television has been extensively examined, the specific transformation in stand-up comedy, i.e., the evolution of stand-up comedy into more provocative, absurd, and offensive humor, remains underexplored. The existing research often disregards comparative analysis of generational changes in comedy and their moral implications, concentrating on either individual comedians or the entertainment aspect of comedy.

This research gap is most notable in cross-cultural analyses of American, Pakistani, and Indian stand-up comedians, with sociopolitical, religious, and cultural contexts playing a significant role in impacting comedic material and how people perceive it. George Carlin, Amanullah Khan, Umer Sharif, Johnny Lever, and Raju Srivastav are examples of older comedians from an era when satire was developed to question social norms, raise awareness about political or cultural concerns, and critique them without using profanity, insults, or insensitivity. Their work demonstrated how comedy could balance entertainment with constructive social critique.

In contrast, many modern comedians like Hasan Minhaj, Max Amini, Tabish Hashmi, Munawar Farooqui, Pranit More, Harsh Gujral, Madhur Virli, Saurabh Rawat, and Sumit Mishra tend to use comedy that is based on profanity, explicit remarks, and divisive stereotypes based on religion, gender, race, and class. Though such performances might attract

short-term attention in an era of viral media, there is a risk of such comedy becoming an acceptable pattern of disrespectful and exclusionary attitudes, posing ethical questions about the role of comedy in shaping public opinion.

Based on Relief Theory and Public Opinion Theory, this research addresses a significant gap in literature. It will evaluate the changes in tone, delivery, and purpose of satire in stand-up comedy, contrasting the polite, more intellectual comedy of older comedians with the more offensive and edgy comedy performances by modern comedians (Foster). Using the themes of exaggeration, absurdity, social criticism, and audience perception, this study aims to determine whether stand-up remains a valid form of social criticism or has evolved into merely a tool of controversy-based entertainment.

1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

This research aims to bridge the gap that is most evident in the cross-cultural study of American, Pakistani, and Indian comedians, particularly with the socio-political, religious, and cultural contexts that impact and influence the comedic material and its reception. Comedians such as

George Carlin, Khan Amanullah, Umer Sharif, Johnny Lever, and Raju Srivastav were of an older generation, an era when satire was used to challenge social conventions, create awareness around political and cultural issues in a literary manner, and critique them without insulting other people and without being grossly insensitive. Their comedies were an entertainment form that also criticized social constructs.

In contrast, modern-day comedians such as Hasan Minhaj, Max Amini, Tabish Hashmi, Munawar Farooqui, Pranit More, Harsh Gujral, Madhur Virli, Saurabh Rawat, and Sumit Mishra are often associated with a type of comedy that revolves around the use of profane, vulgar, and explicit, as well as controversy, divisive, and divisive remarks on issues regarding religion, gender, race, class, and politics. However, the critique of such performances and comedy is primarily centered on the moral and ethical use of comedy to express and influence controversy. It is also important to point out that such performances are often used as a marketing tool to attract distraction and attention in a social-media-viral and attention-deficit age. This research aims to assess how tone, style, and purpose in satire change over time. While using the

components of hyperbole, the irrational, social critique, and audience focus, the aim of the research is to consider if stand-up is still a legitimate critique of social injustices or if it has merely transformed into entertainment that thrives on controversy.

In terms of cultural and social significance, this research is also academically relevant as it addresses an important gap in the study of stand-up comedy as a genre of oral literature and social critique. Even though comedy has been studied to reflect a society's attitudes, values, and conflicts, the literature on the comparative construction of satire in cultural performances of stand-up comedy over time and across a number of cultures is minimal. This study contributes to the literature a comparative diachronic perspective that has been thin and virtually non-existent in the literature on stand-up comedy in the United States, Pakistan, and India by focusing on older and contemporary comedians.

This study specifically examines American, Pakistani, and Indian comedians. With the advent of modern technologies and the increasingly globalised world, the world of comedy has changed. In the study of whether comedy creates or alters attitudes towards politics, religion, gender, race, and cultures, the transformation of comedy becomes vital. In the understanding of the ethical and intellectual evolution of comedy, the framework of the study that juxtaposes old comedians with new ones will be beneficial.

The study expands the Public Opinion Theory and Relief Theory to the analysis of oral performance, thereby moving beyond the usual boundaries of media studies and moving to the more scholarly realm of satire, and more precisely, stand-up comedy. It will be significant in its definition of stand-up comedy as not simply an entertainment form, but more importantly, as an agent of discourse, and hence, of public opinion.

This study has the potential to benefit any upcoming researcher as it provides an organised way of studying comedy, particularly its thematic elements, such as exaggeration, absurdity, social criticism, and audience reception created over time and across cultures. There are multiple avenues to explore the digitalization of comedy, the moral implications of humor, and digital media's impact on the social critique and artistry of social commentators. This study will serve as the basis to gain deeper insights into the morality of humor, the work of comedians as social critics, and how digital media impacts comedy styles.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To examine how the nature of satire in stand-up comedy has evolved.
- To compare the comedic styles of older comedians with modern comedians in terms of satire and social critique.
- To evaluate how satire influences public perception and whether its effectiveness has changed.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How has satire in stand-up comedy evolved from older comedians to modern comedians?
- What are the key differences in the satirical styles of older and modern comedians?
- How does satire in comedy influence public opinion today compared to the past?

This research will provide insights into how satire has changed and whether modern comedy still serves as a meaningful critique of society or has shifted towards controversy-driven entertainment.

1.5 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

A defined set of comedians, theoretical models, and measurements is being studied to ensure precision and unity of scope. The focus of this study will be on a select group of comedians from various time periods across three distinct cultures: American, Pakistani, and Indian stand-up comedy. From older times, the study will focus on George Carlin (USA), Amanullah Khan and Umer Sharif (Pakistan), Johnny Lever, and Raju Srivastav (India). The modern era would include comedians like Hasan Minhaj and Max Amini (USA), Tabish Hashmi (Pakistan), Munawar Farooqui, Pranit More, Harsh Gujral, Madhur Virli, Saurabh Rawat, and Sumit Mishra (India). Other comedians other than this list will not be included in the study to ensure fair comparison. This study also limits itself to the Relief Theory (Sigmund Freud) and the Public Opinion Theory (Walter Lippmann) as the only frameworks. The dataset will consist of stand-up comedy performances alone, and no other humor and media theories will be incorporated in this analysis. The scope of theories, however, constrains the analysis of the performances of comedians to be evaluated through these theories alone.

Performances being analyzed will be restricted to publicly posted stand-up acts and recorded shows. This study will rely on translated transcripts as needed, though not on live or unrecorded performance, and not on informal comedic interactions (e.g., social media posts or informal conversation). The thematic analysis will be precisely limited to four parameters, which include exaggeration, absurdity, social criticism, and audience perception, and it will not expand into other comedic devices, including improvisation skills, stage presence, or delivery mechanics, unless they directly relate to the core argument.

Geographically, the study will only focus on the performance of the comedians in America, Pakistan, and India, with no attention to their performance in other regions unless they are part of their mainstream performance repertoire. Temporally, the study will be limited to some of the works of each comedian that represent their signature style, instead of their entire lifetime career.

These delimitations maintain focus within this research by eliminating unnecessary digression from the main idea, to critically compare the intellectual, respectful satire of older comedians to the provocative, controversial humor of modern comedians in the context of the selected cultural and theoretical parameters.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Oral literature in the form of satire has been studied widely for its effects on social critique, public discourse, and entertainment. The role of satire as a reflection of cultural values, politics, and social dynamics of a particular society has been studied extensively (LeBeouf). In addition, many studies look at the evolution of satire from classical literature to contemporary forms of oral expression, such as stand-up comedy. This evolution has been influenced by audience tastes, available media technologies, and the surrounding sociocultural context.

One of the key arguments in satire research is that the traditional satirical forms were a product of intellectual and thought-provoking discourse. Scholars discuss how historical satirists used wit, irony, and subtle social critique to challenge authority without being overtly offensive.

Works such as Carlin's have been studied in various papers for their deep linguistic and philosophical aspects. Researchers such as (Bnini) argue that Carlin's satire was unique in dissecting language, revealing how words shape thought and social realities. "Carlin's thought-provoking views remarkably contributed to culture and humanity in America and the rest of the world." "He became a reference of wisdom and a pioneer of awareness among educated people." Similarly, Umer Sharif and Amanullah of Pakistan, and Johnny Lever and Raju Srivastav of India have been much praised for influencing the culture of clean but effective comedy. Umer Sharif, popularly known as the King of Comedy, gained prominence due to his stage plays that aptly combined satire with the daily social problems without being vulgar, but at the same time appealing to the masses (Ashraf). One of the first performers of Punjabi stage comedy was

Amanullah, who relied on wit, improvisation, and family scenarios to bring out the struggles of classes and cultural conflicts without resorting to vulgarity. Johnny Lever changed the concept of stand-up in India by integrating mimicry, observational humor, and commentary on the life of the middle-class, and was one of the first comedians to reach mainstream fame in Bollywood, while still keeping family-friendly material. Raju Srivastav, however, ascended

to fame through The Great Indian Laughter Challenge, where he was able to parody societal hypocrisy, political actions, and cultural fixations with a simplicity and relatability that managed to prove that clean comedy can still be incredibly popular (Hiranandani). These comedians, together, demonstrate how humor that is based on observation and satire can still be sharp, influential, and respectful, and therefore can be enjoyed by audiences of all ages. Clean comedy does not contain offensive or sexual material. It is based on observational knowledge, imitation, pun, and satire. For instance, a set of well-known wedding jokes by Raju Srivastava recorded the social behavior in Indian weddings without transgressing the cultural borders. Likewise, Johnny Lever was known to be the icon of family-friendly shows that even children would appreciate. These types of comedians were respected over a long period and are remembered today. On the other hand, vulgar comedy involves sexual implications, double meaning, and taboo-breaking jokes. The comedy of Saurabh Rawat regarding erogenous zones or the interaction with the audience, as in the case of Harsh Gujral, where the discussions about the topic evolve into a discussion of pornography, shows how comedians can push the limits. Munawar Farooqui also provoked even greater controversy when he joked about Hindu gods, and this resulted in court proceedings and cancellations of shows. The comparative analysis indicates that clean comedians are more acceptable and long-lasting, whereas vulgar comedians win younger and urban audiences, but are also quickly censored and criticized. Therefore, the nature of humor that a comedian uses has a direct impact on the career path and image of the comedian.

On the other hand, many scholars noticed that modern stand-up comedy shifted to a more provocative and controversial style. In his book *Free Speech and Why It Matters*, satirist and political commentator Andrew Doyle writes, "comedy cannot exist without the possibility of offending." (Levine). Unlike traditional forms of satire, which relied on print literature, modern stand-up comedy is fueled by short-form content, viral videos, and algorithm-generated popularity. As a result, many comedians have adopted more aggressive, attention-grabbing techniques and use profanity, shock value, and divisive humor to grab the audience's attention. News headlines of comics overstepping boundaries of play and outrage have become increasingly commonplace, with more than 146,000 news articles on "political correctness," "cancel culture," or "cancelled comedians" published in the past year alone (Levine). Studies of modern comedians like Hasan Minhaj, Max Amini, and Munawar Farooqui indicate that

although they discuss critical social and political issues, their style is more emotionally charged as well as exaggerated. For instance, Minhaj ingeniously combines personal narration with satire in a style of his own, although he sometimes leans a little too much toward melodrama. Scholars (Zinoman) point out, Minhaj's emotional delivery in satire does question the sincerity of his critiques, leaning toward more performative than substantive. Max Amini's satire has also come under criticism in these studies for the use of racial and cultural stereotypes. (Green and Linders) argue that Amini's satire is more problematic than constructive, as it reinforces the stereotypes he claims to critique.

The change in styles of comedy has also been subject to Relief Theory in psychology. (Larkin-Galiñanes) claims that humor is an outlet of suppressed emotional tension that the audience is encouraged to release by laughing. The likes of Saurabh Rawat, Madhur Virli, Tabish Hashmi, and other recent performers combine absurdity with self-deprecation and obscenity in a style of their own that connects with a given audience. While it does make the performance more applicable to a given generation, recent studies point out that it also normalizes inappropriate content and reinforces negative stereotypes in a way that is clearly offensive.

The recent research work and Walter Lippmann's Public Opinion Theory about public attitudes and satire describe the significance of public perception shaping satire in literature and the role satire plays in public perception. Older comedians like Carlin and Umer Sharif were able to carefully craft satire to challenge dominant perspectives and controversial narratives without offending the audience. On the other hand, modern-day comedians have been subjected to backlash because of the controversial content in their performances. Modern satire has become more controversial than in the past because it is depolarized, which has also been controversial because of the modern-day distortion where the line is drawn between satire and downright offensive content.

The reflections of modern society and evolving technology help in understanding the transformation of satire in stand-up comedy. Comedy performances transform in nature because of the changing audience expectations. Modern-day performances rely more on instant engagement, emotional responses, and the controversial nature of comedy, which is a different approach than that of older comedians who relied on satire, mental engagement, and precision

of language. The evolving nature of satire in comedy is controversial because of uncertainty regarding the direction it will take. Will it continue to lean on and prioritize social critique and the responsibilities that come with it, or simply become punitive, centered on divisiveness, and shock value?

Based on research surrounding oral literature, the potential that satire must act as a constructive tool for commentary and critique remains. However, the potential for satire to be constructive, commentary and critique is dependent upon the use and reception.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This paper presents an analysis of stand-up comedy based on a qualitative, textual, and interpretive study of stand-up comedy performances, focusing on the transformation of satire from older figures to modern comedians. Since satire is inherently cultural and social, it is proposed that thematic analysis of the comedians' speeches will be conducted to reveal the linguistic elements, themes, and humor used over the years, particularly between older satirists like George Carlin, AmanUllah Khan, Umer Sharif and contemporary comedians like Hasan Minhaj, Max Amini (USA), Tabish Hashmi (Pakistan), and Munawar Farooqui, Pranit More, Harsh Gujral, Madhur Virli, Saurabh Rawat, Sumit Mishra (India) who use absurdity, vulgarity, or controversy as a means of humor. The objective is to compare the provocative techniques employed by modern satirists to grab the audience's attention with how traditional satirists sparked intellectual reflection.

3.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

RELIEF THEORY

The two theoretical frameworks that are used in the research are Relief Theory and Public Opinion Theory. The Relief Theory states that laughter is a psychological means of relieving ourselves of pent-up nervous energy, which was initially proposed by Herbert Spencer in the 19th century and later developed by Sigmund Freud. Relief Theory of humor has evolved throughout centuries and was built in accordance with the theories of many philosophers and thinkers who tried to grasp the aim of laughter and the emotion it expresses (Solowiej). When it was first presented in the eighteenth century by Francis Hutcheson, this concept was closer to the Incongruity Theory, humor being presented as the result of divergence from norms in the given situations. However, his belief that laughter is a means of alleviating emotional distress set the stage for later relief-focused interpretations of humor. Early formulations of the theory that laughter acts as an emotional release can be found in Hutcheson's concept, who identified the behavior of humor as reducing the feelings of humiliation or tension.

The theory was further developed in the nineteenth century by Herbert Spencer, who approached it on a more physiological level. In his essay “The Physiology of Laughter,” he described how humor is a method of releasing accumulated nervous energy. Drawing inspiration from Alexander Bain, Spencer described this release using a hydraulic model, comparing laughter to releasing pressure from a dam. Spencer argues that the laughter we give out physically is an indication of releasing energy from the body, which restores the balance in the body. His contribution changed the way people interpret humor to emotional and physical reactions, thus giving new insight into why people laugh.

These ideas were further elaborated on by Sigmund Freud in the early twentieth century, who gave the theory a psychological dimension. According to Freud's theory in “Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious”, laughing arises when mental energy that would typically be utilized to repress socially unacceptable thoughts is abruptly released. He explained three humor-related experiences, each involving a different kind of conserved energy: jokes, the comic, and humor itself.

Freud considered laughter a form of releasing repressed feelings in a socially accepted manner. (NADANI). As scholar Andrew Stott points out, Freud viewed laughter as not only a conscious process but also as a reaction that is involuntary and reveals unconscious truth, focusing on the actual psychological nature of humor.

Though the version of the Relief Theory by Freud was rather influential, it was also criticized. His categories were seen by scholars as very rigid, and his use of non-observable unconscious processes made the theory difficult to approach with scientific evidence. Despite such limitations, the ideas of Freud remain significant in the interpretation of the psychological role of humor.

The relevance of the theory was further examined by later intellectuals such as John Dewey. Although Dewey and others noted its deficiencies, they still accepted the main premise that laughter aids human beings to come out of emotional or social strain. As the critique of theorist (Gimbel) circulated, and in the evolution of the relief theory, new theories were developed, such as the relief theory, according to which the calming effect of humor after a stress situation appears to be more significant than a simple physical discharge of energy. This shift demonstrates the way Relief Theory began to incorporate other areas of emotional well-being.

Relief Theory is very important in the context of stand-up comedy, as it remains true that jokes

often target serious subject matter as traumatic and unjust events. Relief Theory explains how humor provides both the comedian and the audience with a means to confront and cope with the discomfort of the situation, which is a traumatic event (Morreall). While not primarily relied on, it is very interesting to provide the norms of society with an explanation of Relief Theory, as many people experience stress, and it is common for them to resort to laughter to relieve stress.

PUBLIC OPINION THEORY

The theory of public opinion by Walter Lippmann has progressed through a century with evolutions due to both his original works and the subsequent interpretations of others. Lippmann's interest in how individuals perceive reality began as early as 1914, when he engaged with Freudian psychology. He believed that contemporary psychology, particularly the works of Freud, helped one get below the surface of thought and find out how people develop their opinions. He rejected the conventional rationalist theories that rejected emotion and instead admired the efforts of Freud to explain the unconscious forces that determine human perception. This psychological insight influenced his subsequent writings on popular opinion, strengthening the point that individuals do not react to the objective reality, but instead to a subjective representation of this reality according to the influence of emotion, memory, and media.

Additionally, Lippmann's focus on how the media shapes people's opinions is exactly in line with the role that stand-up comedy plays in modern society (Herbst). Comedians who are based online play the micro-media role where they convey narratives, criticize social matters, and construct realities by use of satire. Their content not only entertains the audience but also helps them shape their views on politics, social conduct, and what is morally upright or not, a fact that makes the framework of Lippmann applicable in explaining their effects.

In 1922, Lippmann published his seminal work *Public Opinion*, in which he coined the term the "pseudo-environment", which is an image of the world created not by immediate experience but through the media (Eulau). He cautioned that this constructed reality was misinforming the people and was contrary to the democratic ideal of a well-informed citizenry. He contended that the ordinary citizen was not omniscient and a rational being, but was prone to prejudices in the form of stereotypes and was not competent enough to understand the intricacies of governance in a modern society. These arguments made *Public Opinion* a powerful critique of democracy as it

was practiced in mass society.

Later in history, other people expanded on and criticized what Lippmann thought. The mid-20th century saw the development of media effects theories such as agenda-setting and framing, with echoes of the same arguments that were outlined by Lippmann regarding media influence on perception. These concepts were developed by researchers such as Paul Lazarsfeld, Elihu Katz, and Maxwell McCombs, who demonstrated how media emphasis or interpersonal interactions might filter information. In the meantime, critics argued that Lippmann was too pessimistic regarding the ability of people to reason.

By the late 20th century, scholars revisited Lippmann's work with renewed appreciation. Discussing this in 1999, Susan Herbst noted that Lippmann had identified two major issues about the democratic society, namely the myth of the all-knowing citizen and the media's failure to educate the public sufficiently (LANG). She agreed that decades of empirical research that had become available in such disciplines as psychology, sociology, and political science made the skepticism of Lippmann sound more accurate than obsolete. His caution about democracy failing to operate effectively when affected by mass media appears extremely relevant now due to the prevailing issues of media saturation, disinformation, and decreasing civic trust that are major problems, influencing contemporary discourse on public perception and democratic health.

3.3 SAMPLING AND DATA COLLECTION

A purposive sample of approximately 15–20 comedic performances (10–20 minutes each) will form the data corpus, featuring older English-language satirists—George Carlin (U.S., 1970s–2000s), AmanUllah Khan, Umer Sharif (Pakistan) and Johnny Lever, Raju Srivastav (India) and contemporary comedians Hasan Minhaj, Max Amini (USA), Tabish Hashmi (Pakistan), and Munawar Farooqui, Pranit More, Harsh Gujral, Madhur Virli, Saurabh Rawat, Sumit Mishra (India) who base their work on absurdity, vulgarity, or controversy as one of their staples. iTranslator and Microsoft Translator will be used to generate transcripts and translate where needed, and then corrected manually to ensure cultural idioms, puns, and tone. To ensure contextual accuracy, the Intercoder reliability of selected transcriptions will be assessed by another researcher who is conversant with the studies of satire and humor. The step is important to minimize personal bias in the coding process and to achieve thematic consistency. In addition, the method of delivery, the audience response, and the social, political context of the given

performance will also be considered. All the performances will also be contextualized by secondary literature on the topic of comedy and the effect of media to anchor the interpretations within the broader field.

3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

Thematic analysis involves multiple stages: deepened familiarization with transcripts; preliminary coding of segments associated with devices such as exaggeration, absurdity, irony, provocation, vulgarity or intellectual wit; developing themes like class satire, political criticism, bodily taboo, moral reflection or absurd social scenarios; cross-era comparison to trace patterns and change; and theoretical interpretation using Relief Theory (intellectual vs. visceral tension release) and Public Opinion Theory (agenda-setting, stereotype disruption or sensationalization).

3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Regarding ethical considerations, intellectual property should be respected, the translation should render the text accurately that preserving context and intent, and scholarly objectivity is to be maintained. A focus on English-language performance, the interpretive nature of theoretical applications, and reliance on recorded routines without direct audience response are some of the limitations.

In this regard, Relief Theory offers the opportunity to differentiate the intellectual tension relief in older satire, as opposed to the shock value relief displayed in modern routines, whereas Public Opinion Theory places satire in the context of other media to see if satire is educational, sensational, or if it simply sets agendas. Taken together, these theories inform a nuanced comparative analysis of the evolution of stand-up comedy satire in style and social impact.

3.6 LIMITATIONS

Though the predominant theory of the methodology will be Relief Theory and Public Opinion Theory, it will also engage with larger academic discourses, enabling the identification of patterns such as intellectual versus sensational satire, educational versus shock influence, audience passivity versus engagement, and so forth. This assuredly means that the findings are not solely constrained to the historical and cultural patterns of satire, as there is a deep well of theoretical and empirical work to draw from.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

4.1 ANALYSIS OF AMERICAN COMEDIANS

George Carlin (1937–2008) was an American stand-up comedian, actor, and social critic, and considered one of the most important figures in modern comedy (Falk). He was born in New York City and began his career in the late 1950s with light, conventional routines, and over time evolved into one of the sharpest satirists with bold critiques on politics, religion, language, as well as social hypocrisy. The first comic to perform the routine entitled "Seven Words You Can Never Say on Television", which went on to become a social critique, was George Carlin, who also went on to challenge the evolution of the social debate on the parameters of censorship on free speech in America. Carlin's comedy was a critique of the social order of American society on the issues of the consumer society, war, race, religion, inequality, and manipulation, which transcended the boundaries of a mere social entertainer to make him a public philosopher.

Carlin's performances and social critiques went on until the last of his specials, "It's Bad for Ya" which was aired in 2008, which was a few months before his death. This final special went on to solidify the legacy of Carlin as the social commentator of American society who worked within the confines of the art of comedy.

Carlin asserts, *"Why are there ten [commandments]? ... Ten sounds official ... Ten is the basis for the decimal system... a psychologically satisfying number... having Ten Commandments was really a marketing decision! ... a political document artificially inflated to sell better."* (*A Problem with the Ten Commandments*)

Carlin's approach to the Ten Commandments shows how one can curate and present a performance in a comedic fashion, all the while maintaining the decorum to not disrespect anyone's beliefs or sacred artifacts and proportions of the show. Carlin manages to reframe the discussion, take a seemingly mundane pattern, and, with the use of philosophical reasoning, beeline straight to the issue of why there may be a need to have a concretized sense of "Ten" Commandments. He takes a rhetorical pattern of reasoning, wherein he merges the craft of reduction, and collapses "ten" to "two" as in the case of "Be honest, be faithful, and do not kill" as a totem of the core values of humanity. He competently shows the moral bankruptcy of being

"obedient" and not "coveting" and "worshipping," demonstrating excellently the religion's use of control for not only morality, but also external control. Thus, he indirectly provides a pathway for inspecting adherence to authority, without framing the issue controversially. He provides closure, within the context of Relief Theory as the stereotypical excess of morality vis-vis simplistic morality is expunged, while a more robust Public Opinion Theory rests on the stand of Relieved Democracy, which Carlin embodies and goes beyond the framework of organized religion, with the core values of the organized religion reflecting on basic principles of humanity.

Carlin says *“basic double standard this country was founded by slave owners who wanted to be free am I right a group of slave owners who wanted to be free so they killed a lot of white English people to continue owning their black African people so they could wipe out the rest of the red Indian people and move west and steal the rest of the land from the brown Mexican people giving them a place to take off and drop their nuclear weapons on the yellow Japanese people you know what the motto you know what the motto of this country ought to be you give us a color we’ll wipe it” (Double Standard)*

In this stand-up comedy performance, Carlin exposes America’s historical hypocrisy by pointing out the irony of slave-owning founders fighting for their own freedom while oppressing others, linking it to the violent displacement of Indigenous peoples, Mexicans, and the bombing of Japanese civilians. His punchline, “you give us a color, we’ll wipe it out,” reduces centuries of systemic racism to a satirical motto, confronting audiences with uncomfortable truths. The humor lies in the contradiction of ideals versus actions, offering cathartic frustration. This is furthered by the Public Opinion Theory in how the critique of patriotism is shaped by the media and education systems, which implores an audience to think outside of the whitewashed past. This supports the thesis argument that Carlin’s satire sparked the ruminative and reflective discourse of systemic racism, political patriotism, and the critique of media or educational systems, shaping narratives by using irony and satire rather than crudeness.

“I saw a slogan on a guy's 28:33 card said proud to be an American and I thought well what the fuck does that mean proud to be an American you see 28:40 I've never understood national pride I've never understood ethnic Pride.....to me Pride should be reserved for something 29:10 you achieve or attain on your own not something that happens by accident of 29:15 birth. Here's another slogan you run 29:57 into all the time, God Bless America once again, respectfully I say

to myself what the fuck does that 30:03 mean God Bless America is that a request is that a demand is that a suggestion 30:10 politicians say it at the end of every speech as if it was some sort of verbal tick. America prays for God to destroy our enemies our enemies pray for God to destroy us somebody's going to be 31:34 disappointed somebody's wasting their time” (Question Authority)

In this segment, Carlin critiques blind patriotism, religious slogans, war culture, and social hypocrisy, urging audiences to question authority and national myths rather than accept them uncritically. The mockery of slogans such as “Proud to be an American” or “God Bless America” exemplifies the dismantling of national exceptionalism. The satire in the commentary on America’s warlike nature is in the declaration of a “war” on social issues that serves to distract from the real problems, like homelessness. The proposal to repurpose golf courses as housing exemplifies the addressing of social inequality with an absurd yet logical solution. Carlin’s comedy sparked critical thought using irony, logic, and wit to challenge authority and expose hypocrisy.

This analysis also examines the comedy of George Carlin and Hasan Minhaj. Minhaj, born on September 23rd, 1985, is a comedian, writer, and actor who has Indian Muslim ancestry. Minhaj was brought up in the state of California, where he began his career in stand-up comedy in the early 2000s. His notoriety began when he joined The Daily Show as a correspondent. His 2017 Netflix special, *Homecoming King*, analyzed race, immigration, and identity, and the Patriot Act series of 2018 to 2020 was a fusion of comedy and social and political commentary. Minhaj is an important figure in the realm of comedy and commentary for the way in which he expertly combines social, political, and immigrant narratives in his work. He also gives a voice to the struggles of immigrants, which is something that is often overlooked and not talked about. He does all of this while still maintaining a humorous narrative, which addresses the issues of Islamophobia and racism.

Personal narratives are pivotal to Hasan Minhaj’s stand-up specials on Netflix, which The New Yorker documents and critiques by isolating the alleged discrimination, Islamophobia, and surveillance racism Minhaj experiences and contends have happened. Minhaj theorizes and defends his practice by claiming that the emotional truth of his comedic encapsulations is far more important than their actuality (Akhtar). In the immediate aftermath of having received the New

Yorker report detailing the extent of the creative exaggerations culled the Minhaj, the comedian conveyed creative processes and intent in other documents that sparked claim revisions and emotional engagement with the report. In the aftermath, Minhaj was the center of mass controversy, as his peers, including other comedians, stood in support of him with their suspended public holdings impacting humor. Minhaj stood to lose his daily show hosting opportunity in the aftermath, and by many accounts, the most support stood to lose. Hasan Minhaj's humor is unlike his predecessors in that the animated dramatization, unlike Carlin's, conveys the point of humor irrespective of the truth or deep, intellectual critique, and is emotional (Toto). Carlin, by contrast, humor animated intellectual reflection, the dissection of which prompted a detailed and profound critique of authority, politics, and culture (Malone).

“Every story in my style is built around a seed of truth — my comedy Arnold Palmer is seventy-percent emotional, this happened then thirty-percent hyperbole, exaggeration, fiction.”

“The emotional truth is first. The factual truth is secondary.”

“No, I don't think I'm manipulating. I think they are coming for the emotional roller-coaster ride.... To the people that are like, ‘Yo, that is way too crazy to happen,’ I don't care because yes, fuck yes—that's the point.” (Hasan Minhaj Responds To Story After Admitting To Embellishing!)

Public trust is built through storytelling in comedy. As the New York Times article explains, Hasan Minhaj's performances contain emotionally charged stories about discrimination, family threats, or hazardous emails, which would then be viewed in the public realm (Zinoman). There is a significant risk associated with these emotionally charged public expressions, given their potential to sway public opinion in each direction, which is, in fact, the central point of Public Opinion Theory, which argues that individuals adjust their attitudes depending on the strength of the narrative that is articulated (Gentile). In Minhaj's words, “the emotional truth is first. The factual truth is secondary.” Minhaj points to the fact that, in comedy, emotional truth trumps factual truth. In other words, emotional truth is a greater factor of the comedy than factual truth. This poses a greater risk when the comedy is in the hands of public figures who attempt to discuss serious issues, which is the case with Minhaj, considering the emotional truth that people in the audience are going to feel, and the factual truth that is going to be left out or misrepresented (Petski).

An article in Slate titled “Hasan Minhaj Meant Something to Brown Americans. Was It All an Act?” discusses how Hasan Minhaj became popular from his performances that emotionally resonated with an audience, especially regarding discrimination and the need for belonging from predominantly South Asian and Muslim American ethnic groups (Pahwa). This article chooses to discuss Minhaj's emotional acts, the emotional truths that, in this case, appear to be telling nothing but the truth, but then are used ostensibly, instead of the constructed truth, an emotional truth which, in this case, is an abuse of the true emotional acts of the audience that are composed of the audience for whom the emotion of the acts is constructed.

Many other articles also stated that Minhaj relied on emotional truth rather than factual accuracy in his stand-up comedy (Clift). Later, he defended all these in his video, saying some of his statements were misunderstood and wrongly implied. He also stated that the authors of the articles combined wrong quotes to manipulate the meaning of what I said.

“This 5:02 sentence is incredibly misleading and 5:04 implies the exact opposite of what I 5:07 meant” (My Response to The New Yorker article.)

“They 7:57 misled readers by excluding all of that 8:01 and splicing two different quotes 8:03 together to leave you thinking that I 8:05 made up a racist”

“I 20:25 meant going forward will I be more 20:28 thoughtful about sticking to the facts 20:29 in my storytelling 20:32 absolutely I have no problem with honest 20:35 good faith critique because I am always 20:37 trying to improve as a 20:38 performer at 20:37.

He ended his video on this note of working on his comedic style with less emphasis on emotional fabrication and more on factual accuracy.

Another American contemporary comedian, Max Amini (born September 20, 1981) is an Iranian American stand-up comedian, actor, and producer, raised in Washington D.C. and later based in Los Angeles. He began his career in the early 2000s performing at comedy clubs while studying theater at UCLA, gradually gaining recognition for routines that drew on his Persian heritage, immigrant family dynamics, and cultural clashes between East and West. Amini incorporates observational humor, stereotype humor, humor derived from identity, humor from relationships, humor from the generational gap, and humor from the Iranian American experience. Whereas George Carlin would, at times, incorporate vulgarity in his work to critique language, authority, social hierarchies, and social relationships, and other mainstream social critiques, Max Amini

uses vulgarity in a more nonchalant way to add emphasis to his jokes about relationships, cultural aspects, and other facets of life

“What a big asshole big asshole 4:30 very big 4:31 asshole big asshole big asshole” (Audience Reaction)

Max Amini incorporates the phrase "big asshole" in a vulgar/simplistic way, which is a tactic many contemporary comedians use to generate a quick laugh out of the audience, rather than physical comedy, which takes more thought and greater dexterity. Unlike George Carlin, whose vulgarity was more to critique and censor other forms of underperforming language, Amini uses vulgarity in more of a shock-joke performative form to generate and maintain the audience's attention in a lighthearted way. With the content of public opinion, Relief Theory is the social tension that is released as a form of laughter. In this comedy context, the social tension is the vulgar language being used, and the released tension is the social norm being contradicted.

“Nice to see you, buddy I like that guy. What's your name suck dick suck 0:40 dick I appreciate the 0:47 offer” (Best of Max Amini 2024)

In this performance, Max Amini turns an audience interaction into crude humor by repeating “suck dick,” relying on shock and sexual vulgarity to generate laughs. This illustrates how modern comedians often prioritize provocation and instant reaction over intellectual or socially reflective satire. From a Relief Theory lens, humor works by releasing tension around taboo sexual language, while, through Public Opinion Theory, it shows how such performances can normalize crassness in public discourse, contrasting with older comedians like Carlin, who used sharp language strategically to challenge authority and stimulate critical thought.

“You're going to hold your camera all night if you keep holding it, the security guard is going 2:35 to come here and shove it up your ass, but judging from your pink tie 2:41 you're going to like” (Max Amini FULL COMEDY SPECIAL 2025 "Randomly Selected")

In this part of Amini's comedy, he directs a crude sexual remark at an audience member by joking that a security guard will “shove it up your ass” and then implying, based on the man's pink tie, that he would enjoy it. The punchline plays on the stereotype of associating pink with homosexuality, effectively mocking the audience member by hinting that he is gay. This reflects

Amini's reliance on sexual innuendo and stereotypical associations for humor, using provocation and embarrassment of the crowd rather than thoughtful or intellectual satire.

4.2 ANALYSIS OF PAKISTANI COMEDIANS

Amanullah Khan (1950–2020) was a legendary Pakistani stage comedian and actor, widely regarded as one of the pioneers of modern Punjabi and Urdu theater comedy. He was born in Lahore and, in the 1970s, started his career in local stage plays and was renowned for his ability to critique society and extract humor from everyday social situations (Abbas). A significant difference between Amanullah and other contemporary comedians is that Amanullah does not rely on vulgarity; rather, he applies character-based satire and observational humor to discuss pertinent societal issues, including impoverishment, dysfunctional families, outdated cultural traditions, and political corruption.

0:52 Educated people shape their style—

0:56, and they use perfume, Dettol, everything.

1:09 But if a poor man wears new clothes or new shoes, he just roams around the neighborhood feeling ashamed.

1:22 He doesn't have confidence.

1:26 People in the neighborhood tease him: "Everything okay? Take it off now."

6:39 Punjabi villagers keep doing desi remedies. 6:48 Someone says: "Try treatment with cow dung."

6:54 Another says: "Eat cow dung paste—nothing will happen."

7:01 Someone says: "Eat coconut peel with butter—you'll feel like climbing a tree!" 7:15 Another remedy: "Keep your eyes open and count the goat's testicles."

7:24 The goat starts hitting its head against him."

"8:40 "Rich people flush once, and water runs over the whole house. We villagers? We go to the sugarcane fields, done in two minutes." (EPISODE 10 Part 03 | Jaahil aadmi ki pehchaan | The Great Indian Laughter Challenge Season 3)

Without resorting to vulgarity, Amanullah's humor and comedy remain deeply satirical. He comically illustrated and critiqued impoverished and everyday class struggles. Relatability and

social issues were shrouded in comedy. The silhouette of overly exaggerated dreams of paradise strongly illustrates the stark social commentary and the impoverishment faced every day. This shows that comedy does not necessarily need to be vulgar or controversial to convey social critique.

“Rich people’s children see dreams—“Mama, I saw in my dream I was roaming around.” Poor people’s children suddenly jolt awake. “Son, what happened?” “Father, the donkey kicked me.” Dreams match the environment you live in.”

“Rich people’s fans run smoothly in prosperity. Poor people’s fans... turn this way, it creaks, then swings back. For the very poor, fans are vengeful. They never get them repaired, the fans stay angry—look how the fan glares.”

“One gentleman was eating chicken shashlik, after washing his hands. I asked, “Whose is this?” He said, “Your hand touched it—it’s yours now.” (EPISODE 10 Part 02 | Ameer aur gareeb ka fark | The Great Indian Laughter Challenge Season 3)

Amanullah’s performance here shows how he builds humor from everyday social realities without resorting to vulgarity. By imitating the lifestyles of both the poor and the rich, such as comparing the calm dreams of wealthy children with the jolting awakenings of poor children from donkey kicks, or highlighting the contrast between the smooth-running fans of the rich and the “vengeful” broken fans of the poor, he makes the audience laugh while exposing class disparity. The most playful of his dialogues are those when he makes fun of people overreacting to food that is being touched and other similar absurdities that people consider to be part of life.

Yet another comedian with his roots in Pakistan, Umer Sharif, also stands out as a legendary comedian, actor, and playwright. He was born in Karachi, and much like other people in this area, he also started performing live as a teenager. He was also a producer with several other hits, but he is best remembered for his plays and is the most recognized for his *Bakra Qistoon Pe* and *Buddha Ghar Pe Hai*, which are now part of the South Asian Comedy Hall of Fame. His style blended sharp wit, situational humor, and social commentary, addressing everyday struggles, class differences, politics, and cultural hypocrisies while keeping his performances relatable to ordinary audiences.

"I like the announcement of Emirates the most among Dubai airlines."

“Our women immediately cover their heads with dupattas, and men put on caps, because it’s a matter of the Arabic language. When we first went there in 1979, I saw something written in Arabic and started kissing it. Then someone explained to me, ‘Brother, this is a bathroom.’ I said, ‘Oh, I’m sorry.’” (1st Hum Awards Hilarious Performance by the King of Comedy 'Umer Shareef')

In this performance, Umer Sharif uses light-hearted cultural humor to highlight the innocence and misunderstandings that arise when Pakistanis first encounter Arab culture (Islam). His jokes about women covering their heads, men wearing caps, and mistaking Arabic script for something sacred show how he drew humor from everyday cross-cultural experiences without vulgarity. This reflects his clean, situational comedy style that entertained while offering subtle commentary on society and cultural gaps.

"People are going to America. I would just say one thing to them: whichever country you go to, use its culture, language, and things with care, so that people there realize civilized people have come to their country. Keep the respect for your homeland abroad. Our people are not used to standing in lines; here in Karachi, people climb buses through the windows. When I went abroad, I drank the water and my stomach got upset, because I am not used to pure water. Even though our water is not fit for animals, we drink it. Our luggage is searched for because our own behavior is like this." (Umer Sharif's Kamal Performance | Outstanding Stand-Up Comedy at A New Year Show | Epk Comedy)

The excerpt also exemplifies Umer Sharif's signature clean yet pointed social commentary. In particular, Sharif's craft humorously critiques the social problems while also advising the audience on the respect they should accord to the cultures of other nations, as well as the dignity they should maintain when traveling abroad. In this instance, Sharif comments on the social problems of discipline, civic responsibility, and the national image (Wagenseller). While some of the subject matter is serious, such as the long line-ups of customs and immigration as well as the deplorable water quality, he discusses such issues in a lighthearted and humorous fashion as a means of social commentary. Thus, Umer Sharif's social commentary served, in this instance, as a means of education and social awareness through the art of stand-up.

This study attempts to analyze how old Pakistani stand-up comedians such as Umer Sharif and Aman Ullah differ from contemporary Pakistani stand-up comedians such as Tabish Hashmi.

Tabish Hashmi is a stand-up comedian and a television host from Karachi who gained fame through YouTube as a stand-up comedian and later through his television show To Be Honest. He started his career with small online ventures and comedy gigs. He is known for his unique voice, engaging, and conversational style. He gained popularity because of his ability to engage with his audience and perform live. He is not a traditional stand-up comedian, as most of his comedic content involves social satire, light roasting of celebrities and politicians, social commentary, and a discussion of politics, cultural hypocrisy, and the dissection of everyday challenges of the common Pakistani.

“You should go swimming; they understood that only the pool water could cool down my heat.”
(Swimming Kiya Karo! | The Laughing Stock - S01E13 | Tabish Hashmi | Stand-Up Comedy | The Circus)

The section discusses vulgarity in the sensuality of the pronunciation. Hashmi recounts the phrase used by his father referring to “heat” being cooled by “water of the pool,” which in the exaggerated version of his performance, is much more vulgar than a mere phrase. He twists his father's expression enough to elicit a pedagogy break, which could otherwise be a respectful instance of adult subjectivity. His comedy relies more on profanity and vulgarity that transcends ethical and moral boundaries. In contrast to the older comedians, Hashmi uses explicit jokes about his father's statement that shatters the moral grounds of respecting elders.

“We middle-class people have a habit of covering everything—when we buy a new TV, we put a sheet over it, we even cover the remote with plastic. The population has reached 250 million, and where a cover should be used, they don't use it.” ***(Population Control | 18+ Stand-Up Comedy | Tabish Hashmi)***

This excerpt discusses the metaphor of middle-class spending habits before analyzing the ways of overpopulation, suggesting that people neglect to “cover” (i.e., use condoms). While the metaphor sparks an important conversation regarding the neglect of overpopulation, the sexual innuendo of the metaphor makes the conversation vulgar, immature, and perpetuates the lack of awareness of overpopulation (i.e., addressing the issue more responsibly). The vulgar joke serves to relieve social tension and allow people to laugh at the taboo topic, but lacks the constructive dialogue to be useful in the discussion. It relates to the Public Opinion Theory, whereby the joke serves to normalize the taboo and crude humor surrounding overpopulation to an audience, while

providing social commentary on a lack of pertinent discussion surrounding family planning and public health.

Using double-meaning and suggestive innuendos is the method of humor that Tabish Hashmi has built a reputation on. This style of humor is the most bold and suggestive of the comedians in Pakistan. Most of his comedy often receives censorship and backlash for highlighting taboo topics. Most social and religious restrictions in Pakistan make comedy a little more conservative, but comedians like Hashmi still challenge these limitations. He is known to speak openly and is most often pointed out when vulgarity is involved.

4.3 ANALYSIS OF INDIAN COMEDIANS

An esteemed actor and comedian in Bollywood, Johnny Lever, was born on August 14, 1957, in Kanigiri, Andhra Pradesh, India. Lever started his job as a comedian in stand-up performances in his musical acts and his career was first launched in the 1980s as a prominent mimic and observational comedian. Lever's work made a significant social comment as it was based on a collection of social struggles, class inequalities, and multicultural dilemmas. Lever was able to make a significant switch in his career from stand-up performances to receiving the title of a popular culture icon for his prominent acting in films as a comedian, while also doing stage performances simultaneously. Lever's theatrical performances made him a significant pioneer of Indian comedy, which primarily focused on social issues, abuses of the modern world, and poverty

“Earlier, we used to tell children to recite the ABCs, and they would say, “A for apple, B for bat.” I once saw a child and asked him to recite the ABCs. He started, and I was shocked—today’s kids say: “A for Apple, B for Blackberry, C for CPU, D for Download, E for Email, G for Google, I for iPhone... these are today’s children.” (Best Comedy Live Performance By Johnny Lever!)

In this passage, Lever highlights his unblemished observational humor, where he shows the difference in a generation using the ABCs. Lever contrasts the learning of children’s modern technology and how it shapes their worldview with the phrase, “A for BlackBerry, C for CPU, D for download.” Lever humorously comments on the change of a generation using how children learn and their worldview. He shows the transformation of society without vulgarity and in a witty fashion. He demonstrates that observations of society can be light and humorous in a profound way (Vosmer).

“What happened? Nothing, just a cold, flu, and cough from the weather. Why didn’t you call me?

No, I’ll just go to the doctor, I’ll get better.

Doctor? Absolutely not. Right now, take some ginger and black pepper, crush them, and boil them in fresh tea without milk. Drink 5–6 glasses of it hot. He didn’t get better, so they told him to drink yogurt and buttermilk again, saying the coolness would cure him. He did that, and he got pneumonia.” (Best Comedy Live Performance By Johnny Lever!)

Lever’s comedy highlights how in South Asian societies, people are so used to home remedies and superstitions that they bypass medical treatment. The humor comes from the fact that there is an absurd amount of trust in the home remedy that is going to be used to “cool down the body,” and that the home remedy is yogurt. The use of yogurt ironically worsens the condition to the point of pneumonia. Lever’s comedy is an observational critique of cultural practices. He does this without vulgarity, using clean humor, while also giving social commentary regarding the healthcare system and the ignorance of medical science. This also shows how Lever uses humor from daily life to entertain people while also prompting thought.

Another famous comedian, Raju Srivastav, was born in 1963 in Kanpur, India. He also started his career in the film industry, in Bollywood, having small roles. He later gained a higher level of recognition in the mid- 2000s from The Great Indian Laughter Challenge, in which his observational comedy about Indian culture captured and entertained the audience. He focused his comedy on clean, inoffensive, family-friendly humor, typically highlighting the relationships, politics, and social habits of the struggling middle-class that resonated with people of all ages. Raju utilized mimicry as well satire and storytelling and avoided the use of vulgar language in his comedy to discuss and criticize social issues.

“1:20: The textile minister said that last financial year, the textile industry suffered a loss of 100 crores. I say, of course it would—when Mallika (Sherawat) and Bipasha (Basu) don’t wear clothes!”

“On Dawood Ibrahim, Manmohan Singh said, “Dawood Ibrahim will not be spared.” I say, first catch him at least!”

(Then he imitates another lazy newsreader)

“Such a bored and lazy man—if he reads the news, it will sound like: What’s the use of reading? It’s rainy season, better take an umbrella.”

“Recently, a Japanese minister told Rabri Devi, ‘Give us Bihar for 2 years, we will make it like Japan.’ Rabri replied, ‘You give us Japan for 2 months, we will make it like Bihar.’” (The Great Indian Laughter Challenge Part 1)

This excerpt from Raju Srivastav’s *The Great Indian Laughter Challenge* reflects his signature clean, observational, and satirical humor that comments on politics, media, and society without vulgarity. By joking about the textile industry’s loss through references to Bollywood actresses, mocking lazy news anchors, and highlighting political satire, he exposes inefficiencies and corruption in governance and media in a lighthearted yet thought-provoking way.

“And some wedding guests stay in tension the whole time; they don’t care about the jaimala (garland ceremony), their only tension is whether the food has started or not. To pass the time, they keep glancing sideways to check if the food lids have been opened. And the moment the lids open, big people, IAS officers, all line up with plates, but they look like beggars.”

“With five or six items, the plate is already full, but people keep piling on 32–33 items till the end, just so that tomorrow no one can say, ‘How far did you go? Only till the salad?’ Then comes the decoration. And some people walk out with their plate through the crowd, looking as if a soldier is returning from Kargil. All the salad piled up, with the introduction rice sneaking out from underneath and mixing with the dal.” (The Great Indian Laughter Challenge Part 1)

Selected portions of Raju Srivastav’s performances show just how deeply observational comedy, especially the clean variety, can create humor and commentary on the social aspects of the reality we live in. He comments on how wedding guests are obsessed with the food, the impatience with objectives during the entire wedding ceremony, and how guests are described as returning with 4 to 6 plates, as if joining the food battle of Kargil. This Srivastav commentary humorously reflects the middle-class Indians; his critique of the wedding guests is clean and uses no vulgarity. His satire of public Bronze and Lower-class wedding behaviors critiques the societal social habits of excess, disorder, and the showoff culture with no purpose. Srivastav represents as comedians of his time would do, everyday social scenarios, and with extreme hyperbole would critique, with no vulgarity, presenting comedy as mature, gritty, and popular social commentary.

Shifting to modern standup comedians in India, where we shall briefly touch on the work of Saurabh Rawat. He is also known as a storyteller and is an engineer, although he started his career as an opening performer in small, local comedy shows and has grown his presence onto major platforms. Having grown up in a middle-class family on the socio-economic spectrum of India, he found his comedic voice in narrations and family stories of everyday middle-class social drama/pressure comedy. His style is conversational, he strives to let the audience feel like they are friends with a comedic voice in a warm, self-deprecating manner, and laugh from his minor tone shifts. As he is building his audience, we can also see a notable distension in his numbers on YouTube.

“When I started dating, I had my first girlfriend—I had no idea about these things. We were talking casually, and she said, “What are your erogenous zones?”

I also realized one thing—no offense, girls, don’t take it badly—but you really don’t know the language in the bedroom. You say very illogical things. Like my girlfriend used to say, “Harder!”

1:27

*I mean, harder? I can’t do harder. I can do faster, right? This is motion—it can only be faster. What does harder even mean?” (**"Dirty and Dark" - Stand Up Comedy by Saurabh Rawat**)*

The excerpt demonstrates how modern-day comedians like this one deal with graphic sexuality and vulgarity as centerpieces for their acts. The discussion of erogenous zones and the parody of how his girlfriend talks in the bedroom illustrate the comedian's crossing of the correlational moral and ethical scope of public censorship. The vulgar context illustrates the tension of the relational and the comedically exaggerated phenomena against the backdrop of the audience's desire for an antic of a taboo against the closed realm of sexual discussion, as well as the broad social and religious restrictions on open vulgarity.

Madhur Virli is one more comedian who illustrates the common profanity and absurdity of contemporary comedy. The title of Virli's comedy, 'Fifty Shades of Gay', represents a genre of comedy with a focus on the sexuality of a theme and a discrimination against the humor of the audience. His comedy touches on subjects such as sex, the sexual orientation of a person, the use of a condom, and sexual partnerships, often crossing the line of what some audience members might be considered offensive. His comedy faced some disapproving comments on the internet:

“This is not dark, wanna-be comic—people should boycott him.” (Reddit user)

In his work titled *Fifty Shades of Gay*, Madhur Virli frames his vulgar, sexually explicit comedy as mere "sex education," but the content exploits the young audience's attention by normalizing the satirical, incoherent, and misleading portrayals of intimacy. Instead of creating a constructive dialogue, he exploits the audience's curiosity and reinforces the distortion of the public and the audience's sentiment by showing the dangerous side of comedy as a public art form.

In another stand-up comedy presentation by Sumit Mishra, "BRA a Stand-Up Comedy by Sumit Mishra," vulgar and repetitive references to the undergarment bra and some personal absurd anecdotes form a bulk of the stand-up.

"I realized I had worn a bra at home only when I came back from Goa and had strange tan lines."
(BRA a Stand-Up Comedy by Sumit Mishra)

The comedian expands the topic by adding over-exaggeration to the content of the act by wearing the undergarment bra and being mocked in a college setting, sneaking food in the theater bra, and even suggesting that someone carry an excess of the undergarment to throw it at someone. The act primarily relies on the shock value of sexual connotation and objectification, and the audience's laughter from embarrassment and taboo breaking content created within it (Kumar). This shows that sexual content to an audience is the norm, and even the use of responsible messaging and depth is thrown to the side for an immediate audience reaction.

Also, contemporary Indian Comedians such as Harsh Gujral, Pranit More, and Munawar Farooqui have tapped into the usage of vulgar, double entendre, and sexually explicit humor, with the intent of garnering attention instead of the intent of humor. Harsh Gujral, in the set 50 Shades of Grey, engages with the audience and continues to refer to the movie in a vulgar, over-the-top manner. The routine relies heavily on sexually explicit humor, double meanings, and audience embarrassment. Rather than clean satire, it relies on shock value, vulgarity, and sexual references to elicit laughs. Pranit More, another Indian comedian, clearly demonstrates the vulgar and intrusive side of modern Indian stand-up comedy in his performance, "The Ashleel Show".

"Doctor, please answer. Think about it...okay, okay, tell us—when did you first watch porn?"

"Umm...around 18–19."

"Oh, so late? (mocking) What was it like—did you enjoy it?"

"No, actually, I felt disgusted."

“Disgusted? “Okay, fine, so what’s your favorite category now? Come on, doctor, tell us. (teasing) The boys are happy! Will you say it after the show? No, say it now! Everyone, close your eyes! Tell us, what’s your favorite porn category? Just once!”

He coerced his audience participant (a young female intern) into sharing private details such as the first moment that she viewed pornography and further pressured her on what her most adored category of pornography might be. Such humor, which zings the odd and unworthy of illuminating, centers largely on sexual embarrassment, shock value, and objectification. Understood as attempting to be comedic, the presence of this humor lacks wit and instead borders on the absurd and uncomfortable.

One of the stand-up comedians, Munawar Farooqui, was arrested on the first day of the new year 2021 due to an FIR lodged by a BJP MLA who claimed Farooqui was making degrading jokes targeted at the Hindu deities. Scholars and critics have indicated the injury of one’s sentiments on a religion to make a mockery of one’s self as hatred who, in this case, issues such a claim, to be fully a thesis of comedy which has sufficient support within the legal realm and, in good measure, the fine line which exists between comedy as an art and making offensive. Following this, a multitude of his performances were cancelled, and Farooqui, in response, made statements suggesting that he may be retiring from the field of comedy. His case tells a story in how an artist, in the quest to harvest laughter, sometimes goes a bit too far as it touches on the intricacies of freedom of expression, public order, and the art of comedy.

In summary, the development of each of these stand-up practitioners yet again demonstrates the extent to which the boundaries of comedy are continually both creative and morally public.

There are those stand-up practitioners who perform clean, observational comedy, which is enduring and timeless, and some rely on stand-up comedy that is vulgar or controversial. Ultimately, society is defined largely by the public reaction to jokes, whether that reaction is to tolerate the jokes, laugh at the jokes, or reject the jokes, which mirrors the cultural values of that society.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the art of satire in stand-up comedy has passed from a period of intellectual and socially responsible humor to one characterized more by vulgarity, exaggeration, and controversy. Using Relief Theory and Public Opinion Theory, the research investigated how older comedians like George Carlin, Amanullah Khan, Umer Sharif, Johnny Lever, and Raju Srivastav used satire as a corrective and reflective instrument in society. Their humor was rooted in the accuracy of language, moral awareness, and cultural sensitivity. They encouraged social awareness, alleviated social tension, and encouraged audiences to think, intellectually, without breaking ethical or moral boundaries through wit, irony, and observational humor. Their acts were used both as entertainment and education, as their methods provided laughter as a way of enlightenment and release of emotions. Modern comedians like Hasan Minhaj, Max Amini, Tabish Hashmi, Munawar Farooqui, Saurabh Rawat, and many others, in turn, prefer to exaggerate, be vulgar, and controversial to attract attention to their shows. The digital media culture has influenced their humor and makes them focus on emotional narration, provocation, and shock comedy as opposed to intellectuality. Although they still focus on such problems as politics, identity, and cultural conflict, the ways in which they approach them often cross the line between humor and insult. Using the lens of Relief Theory and Public Opinion Theory, this study proves that modern-day satire reflects shifting audience expectations, social tolerance, and the effect of mass media. The change in constructive and reflective to sensational and controversy-based performance suggests a greater cultural change of instant emotional satisfaction. Finally, the development of satirical comedy poses significant questions about its future, whether it will become one of the most efficient tools in social criticism or remain more concerned with entertainment and virality and less with the intellectual and moral debate.

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