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ABUSING FOR LAUGHS: SELF-DEPRECATION AND PROFANITY IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN STAND-UP COMEDY

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Abstract:
The landscape of Indian stand-up comedy has evolved considerably, functioning as a dynamic platform for cultural representation and social critique. Comedians increasingly employ self-deprecating humour and profanity as tools to engage audiences and challenge societal norms. This alteration reflects broader transformations within India's socio-cultural landscape, as emerging communication methods gain significance, and traditional boundaries are increasingly challenged.
Comedians who employ self-deprecating humour often present themselves as relatable individuals, facilitating a connection with the viewers. Artists establish an environment that embraces and promotes vulnerability, highlighting their own imperfections and unique traits. This approach is particularly noteworthy in contexts where hierarchical systems may influence social interactions. Traditionally viewed with disdain, profanity has evolved into a tool for questioning established norms and enabling comedians to audaciously and irreverently address sensitive topics. This paper aims to analyse the integration of profanity and self-deprecation within the context of contemporary Indian stand-up comedy. The objective is to examine the relationships between these elements as mechanisms for audience engagement, cultural critique, and tools for negotiating identity.

Keywords: Indian Standup comedy, Profanity, Self-Deprecation, Humor

Introduction

Contemporary Indian stand-up comedy emerges as a significant cultural phenomenon, mirroring the evolving social and political landscape of a nation grappling with the tensions between tradition and modernity (Miller, 2020). The increasing accessibility of stand-up comedy on internet platforms has notably broadened its allure, particularly among urban audiences (Paul, 2017). Especially for marginalised communities, this artistic medium serves as a potent instrument for satire, providing insights into various dimensions of Indian society while allowing for the expression of personal identity (Paul, 2017). While governed by certain regulations, stand-up comedy in India distinguishes itself from other forms of media by largely operating outside the purview of direct state oversight (Madhavi Shivaprasad, 2023).It is essential to acknowledge, in the interim, the existing structural barriers within the comedy industry that prevent it from achieving true intersectionality (Nautiyal &Nautiyal, 2023). This shift towards more subversive and intimate forms of comedy mirrors broader trends in the sociopolitical landscape of India. A society grappling with the tension between tradition and modernity is illustrated by its willingness to embrace vulnerability and challenge established beliefs (Miller, 2020).
In this evolving landscape, the functions of vulgarity and self-deprecation diverge significantly. Through the cultivation of their public personas, comedians utilise self-deprecating humour to foster rapport and engage with their audiences (Miller, 2020). This awareness, as Martin

suggests, can foster closeness and shared experiences. Concurrently, the use of vulgarity enables comedians to interrogate societal conventions and audaciously address sensitive topics (Lakshmi, 2014).

Widely employed in comedic contexts, self-deprecating humour holds particular significance within the Indian milieu, as it frequently acts as a subversive tool to interrogate prevailing narratives and confront societal disparities. Comedians frequently draw upon their personal experiences, vulnerabilities, and perceived shortcomings as a foundation for humour, thereby fostering relatability and establishing a connection with their audience. This method emphasises the mutual understanding with the audience through shared experiences, serving as a strategy for navigating social pressures or personal disputes. Self-deprecation allows comedians to approach sensitive topics such as body image, mental health, and family expectations in a manner that is more accessible, thereby fostering reflection and dialogue. Comedians engage in their craft to navigate delicate cultural subtleties and societal taboos, employing self-deprecation to disarm audiences and create a conducive atmosphere for discussing difficult subjects.

This form of humour can serve as a coping mechanism, allowing both the performer and the audience to confront difficult realities and anxieties through laughter (Pereira & Tyagi, 2022). However, the use of self-deprecation is not without its complexities. It is vitally important social and cultural phenomenon, and the student of a culture and society cannot find a more revealing index to its values, attitudes, dispositions, and concerns in humor (Brodie, 2014). The effectiveness of self-deprecation is heavily influenced by the comedian's social standing, with marginalized voices potentially facing greater scrutiny and criticism for employing similar comedic strategies as those from privileged backgrounds.

The strategic deployment of profanity in Indian stand-up comedy is another critical element that warrants careful examination. While traditionally considered taboo in many segments of Indian society, the use of coarse language has become increasingly prevalent in contemporary comedy, particularly among younger comedians and audiences (Gillota, 2015). The inclusion of profanity can be seen as a deliberate act of rebellion against societal expectations, challenging norms of decorum and pushing the boundaries of what is considered acceptable speech (Shivprasad Madhavi, 2020). Profanity, when used judiciously, can amplify the impact of a joke, add emphasis and convey a sense of authenticity and raw emotion (Greenbaum, 1999).

Furthermore, the language and logic strategies employed in stand-up comedy can shape the humour's impact and deliver moral messages to the audience (Kumar et.al, 2021). However, the use of profanity also carries the risk of alienating certain audience members and inciting controversy, especially in a country with diverse cultural and linguistic sensitivities. The line between humour and offensiveness is subjective and varies across different communities, making it essential for comedians to be aware of the potential impact of their words. Stand-up comedy strives not only to entertain but to persuade, and stand-up comics can only be successful in their craft when they can convince an audience to look at the world through their comic vision (Greenbaum, 1999).

Self-Deprecation and Identity Formation in Modern Indian Stand-Up Comedy

In the evolving landscape of Indian stand-up comedy, self-deprecating humor has emerged as a pivotal tool for comedians to navigate and negotiate their identities. By humorously criticizing their own perceived shortcomings, comedians foster relatability and challenge societal norms. This section delves into how self-deprecation functions as a mechanism for identity construction and social commentary within the realm of Indian stand-up comedy.Self-deprecating humor

enables comedians to present themselves as approachable and genuine, bridging the gap between performer and audience. By sharing personal anecdotes and highlighting their own flaws, comedians create a sense of intimacy and trust. This strategy resonates with audiences, as it reflects common human experiences and vulnerabilitiesMatwick and Matwick (2017) observed that self-deprecatory comments in television culinary shows serve to entertain and promote camaraderie, thereby enhancing authenticity. Although their research focused on a different medium, the core concepts are relevant to stand-up comedy, where authenticity is highly valued. Self-deprecating humour in Indian stand-up serves as a nuanced form of resistance to entrenched social inequalities, in addition to fostering relatability. Comedians address sensitive topics such as caste, gender, and religion by positioning themselves as the subject of the joke, thereby circumventing direct confrontation. This method enables viewers to reassess established beliefs and contributes to the disruption of traditional power dynamics. Sarkar and Siraj (2022) assert that Indian stand-up comedians employ controlled pauses and language code-switching to create comedy that simultaneously reinforces and challenges ideological constructs. Self-deprecating comedy intersects with gender, particularly in the ways female comedians navigate their comedic identities. Historically, women in comedy have employed self-deprecation to conform to societal standards and mitigate reactions. Contemporary female comedians increasingly reclaim this narrative, interrogating and redefining concepts of feminism and body image through self-deprecating humour. Tomsett (2018) examines how self-deprecation in women's stand-up comedy can both contest and reinforce restrictive patriarchal notions, contingent upon the context and audience response.Self-deprecating comedy can influence audience perceptions of a comedian's likability and competence. While self-deprecation may enhance relatability, excessive use can lead to a diminished perception of one's self-esteem or authority. Speer (2019) argues that self-deprecation can serve as an effective communication tool when employed judiciously; however, its impact is contingent upon factors such as delivery, context, and audience demographics.

Profanity in Indian Stand-Up Comedy

The incorporation of profanity in Indian stand-up comedy, while seemingly straightforward, reveals a complex interplay of cultural norms, linguistic constraints, and audience anticipations (Kumar et.al, 2023). In this context, profanity serves a dual purpose: it not only elicits shock but also acts as a calculated tool to challenge established morals and social conventions. In the context of Indian stand-up comedy, the use of profanity serves as a significant mechanism for challenging linguistic norms and societal expectations. In public discourse, India's culture consistently upholds formality, respect, and grammatical precisionprinciples that are indicative of the use of profanity in stand-up comedy functions as a tool to challenge and interrogate established social norms. Profane language serves as a prevalent instrument employed by comedians to interrogate the entrenched standards of civility and decorum within Indian society. This transgression provides a platform for comedic expression while simultaneously prompting the audience to critically examine established norms regarding language and behaviour. The humorous application of profanity poses a direct challenge to societal tendencies that prioritise restraint and decency, offering an intriguing avenue for self-expression and humour. In the context of Indian stand-up comedy, the use of profanity serves as a significant mechanism for challenging established linguistic norms and societal expectations. In public discourse, India's culture consistently upholds formality, respect, and grammatical precision—principles that are indicative of the use of profanity in stand-up comedy functions as a tool to challenge and

interrogate established social norms. Comedians frequently employ profane language as a means to confront and critique the entrenched standards of civility and decorum within Indian society. This transgression provides a platform for comedic expression while simultaneously prompting the audience to reevaluate established norms regarding language and behaviour. The humorous application of profanity directly confronts societal tendencies to prioritise restraint and decency, offering an intriguing avenue for self-expression and humour.

In stand-up comedy, profanity frequently acts as an emotional enhancer, amplifying the absurdity of situations. Highlighting the absurdity or irony of a particular situation necessitates this enhancement. The use of obscene language often enhances the emotional impact of a joke, leading to a deeper interaction between the audience and the humour presented. Cela et al. (2023) assert that the use of profanity serves as a mechanism for highlighting societal issues that might otherwise remain unaddressed. Powerful language, for example, can enable a comic to elevate a minor injustice or everyday irritation to a point that compels the audience to confront its absurdity or societal significance. The impact of profanity can enhance focus and transform mundane statements into striking impactful critiques.In Indian stand-up comedy, the use of profanity serves as a tool for entertainers to connect with their audiences, particularly among younger generations. Profanity serves as a genuine method for articulating raw ideas and emotions within contemporary Indian society, particularly as younger demographics increasingly challenge traditional beliefs. Comedians who use profanity often convey a level of vulnerability and honesty that fosters a deeper connection with viewers regarding their experiences. Comedians establish a setting where their humour is deeply connected to the audience's lived experiences by utilising a language that resonates with the everyday communication of their listeners. Profanity serves to establish a common cultural experience and reinforces the connection between the audience and the comedian.

The context surrounding the use of profanity significantly influences its effect in Indian stand-up comedy. The reception of profanity is significantly shaped by the cultural and social makeup of the audience, along with regional differences within India. A predominantly urban audience might exhibit a greater acceptance of profanity, influenced by evolving social norms and their exposure to global media. Conversely, viewers from rural or conservative backgrounds may perceive the same language as disrespectful or inappropriate. The potency of profanity is further influenced by the tone of the comedian's performance, whether it is light-hearted or provocative. An understanding of these factors is crucial for a comedian to ensure that the use of profanity achieves its intended humorous effect while minimising the risk of offending segments of the audience.

The use of profanity in stand-up comedy presents a risk of alienating or offending certain segments of the audience(Banerjee, Kumar, 2024). Using strong language or making poor word choices can lead to discomfort or criticism from audience members who hold more traditional or conservative views. In a country such as India, characterised by its regional, cultural, and religious diversity, the acceptability of language can vary significantly. What is considered appropriate in one context may be interpreted as offensive in another. Comedians need to recognise the importance of maintaining a balance between humour and respect, ensuring that their use of profanity does not inadvertently alienate or offend a significant portion of their audience.

In India, the intricate interplay of diverse linguistic, religious, and cultural traditions creates a complex social fabric, making cultural sensitivity particularly important. Language that may be

acceptable in certain contexts or cultures has the potential to deeply offend individuals on a personal level. Stand-up comedians navigating India's diverse cultural landscape must approach these differences with careful consideration. Humour that is appreciated in one cultural context may be perceived as offensive or inappropriate in another; comedians who overlook these distinctions risk estranging a significant portion of their audience. Considering this, the essential skills for any comedian include a deep understanding of cultural nuances and the ability to adapt language to suit the specific social context.Rasa theory, rooted in Indian classical aesthetics, focuses on the emotional experience evoked by a performance. In stand-up comedy, profanity disrupts the traditional rasa of tranquility, introducing a sense of shock or discomfort. The use of profane language in this context can stir strong emotional responses in the audience, including amusement, surprise, or even disgust. According to rasa theory, such disruptions are essential for creating a dynamic emotional experience, as they provide a contrast to more restrained forms of humor. Profanity in comedy, thus, introduces a heightened emotional intensity that adds to the overall impact of the performance.

The use of profanity in comedy is often explained through the incongruity theory of humor, which posits that humor arise when there is a violation of expectations. The unexpected use of taboo words or phrases creates a sense of surprise, which in turn generates laughter. In this sense, profanity is a mechanism for breaking the audience's expectations of what is socially or linguistically appropriate, producing humor through the incongruity between the expected and the actual. The subversion of linguistic norms and the breaking of societal taboos generate a comedic tension that resolves in laughter, aligning with traditional humor theories that focus on surprise, incongruity, and the violation of norms.

Linguistic pragmatics explores how language is used in social contexts to convey meaning, and profanity plays a significant role in this domain. The use of profanity in stand-up comedy is often a strategic move that shifts the emotional tone of a performance. It alters the perceived authenticity of the comedian's voice, making their narrative feel more genuine, raw, and unfiltered. In many cases, profanity also reflects the social context in which the comedian is performing. By adjusting their language based on the audience's expectations and social environment, comedians ensure that their profanity serves its intended purpose without undermining the overall tone of the performance.As Emre & Suabsi (2016) describe, profanity is a tool that allows individuals to convey intense emotions, often in a raw and direct manner. In the realm of comedy, swearing becomes more than just a means to express frustration or surpriseit is a method to engage, shock, or entertain an audience. However, its use must be balanced with considerations of humor, cultural sensitivity, and social consciousness, as Greenbaum (1999). emphasizes. The comedic use of profanity, therefore, should not only serve as a source of humor but also respect the diversity and sensitivities of the audience it seeks to entertain.

Research Methodology

Profanity has been used by Indian stand-up comedians in their comedy sets3. Another questionable element is analysing the discourse material critically to see how it has been employed within the humorous discourse. This study used critical discourse analysis (CDA) to investigate these questions (Van Dijk 1993). A popular qualitative research method for analysing or interpreting how narratives create or justify perceived social injustices is critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Saxena 2024). Additionally, CDA encourages social interventionism and incorporates theoretical and social insights into discourse analysis (Blommaert and Bulcaen 2000). Three layers of analysis are possible with CDA: the text, the discursive practices (in this

example, the delivery of comedy shows), and the broader social context. This study uses CDA to examine the text, the broader social context in which it is created, and any potential consequences.

Data collection

A collection of data was obtained from videos that are publicly available on YouTube. Transcripts were generated through a manual process involving careful listening to each video. The sample included the performances of comedians who presented their acts in English, Hindi, or a combination of both languages. This research concentrated exclusively on YouTube videos generated by the comedians' official channels, in addition to those uploaded by authorised businesses or official representatives. The selection process ensured that the videos utilised in the research were either released with informed consent, primarily for promotional purposes, or provided freely for public access by the performers. The selection of films was determined by the application of the YouTube algorithm, employing Collaborative Filtering Analysis as its computational method (Ben et al. 2007). This method incorporates user engagement metrics such as shares, comments, and video views (Covington, Adams, and Sargin 2016) alongside machine learning techniques. The research conducted by Arthurs, Drakopoulou, and Gandini (2018) illustrates that the Collaborative Filtering Analysis method employed by YouTube consists of an intricate framework that integrates computational techniques with human contributions. The videos chosen by YouTube's search engine, influenced by specific search keywords, significantly affected their popularity (Rieder, Matamoros-Fernández, and Coromina 2018). Their position at the top of the search engine results was evident. Consequently, each chosen video exhibited a significant level of human engagement, aligning with the framework of YouTube's algorithm.

Observations:

Examining the relationship between self-deprecation and profanity in Indian stand-up comedy calls for a thorough awareness of the socio-cultural setting around these productions. A comedian's ability to establish a relationship with the audience, convey unvoiced reality, and offer a unique perspective on the world defines their efficacy (Brodie, 2014).Comedians often act as social commentators, using humour to shed light on important issues, challenge power structures, and promote critical thinking. Stand-up comedy is hard and, at times, amazingly unrewarding (Greene, 2012). It is worked to build a five-minute set. This is because the comedian must winnow down the material to the most potent words and gestures. Stand-up comedians are both products of their time and agents of change, constantly adapting their material to reflect the evolving sensibilities of their audience. The study of humour can enhance the understanding of many aspects of social life, and this is why it's use is so important and so effective (Vinton, 1989). Contemporary Indian stand-up comedy, with its embrace of self-deprecation and profanity, offers a valuable window into the complexities and contradictions of a nation in transition (Sturges, 2015) (Cashion et al., 1986). Stand-up comedy represents a distinctive mode of communication (Brodie, 2009). It exists in a realm of entertainment (ROY-OMONI, 2022). However, it possesses the capacity to shape cultural values and influence public discourse.

Combining self-deprecation with sharp, often unvarnished profanity, the work of comedians like Zakir Khan, Aditi Mittal, Munawar Faruqui, Rahul Subramanian, Kenny Sebastian, Kunal Kamra, Samay Raina, and Swati Sachdeva offers an interesting and varied perspective to Indian stand-up comedy. This mix lets these artists investigate a broad spectrum of social concerns, personal fears, and cultural quirks in a way their audience will find real and very relevant.Zakir

Khan's stand-up comedy is highly autobiographical in content, and his beloved "sakht launda" (tough guy) persona is at the heart of his comedy style. This character presents the conventional ideals of a masculine ethos of being strong and stoic, but Khan subverts the ideal by depicting himself as weak, in a self-deprecating manner, and it is in the sharing of personal failures, and those more generally in matters of romantic relations, being socially clumsy, and a sense of alienation, that he makes himself relatable to the viewing public. In his special *Haq Se Single*, for example, he explores tales of romantic rejection and insecurity, hyperbolizing them to depict the emotional vulnerability that underpins the tough exterior of the character.

Self-deprecation in Khan's comedy provides a site of both laughter and introspection. In pointing out the vulnerabilities of himself, Khan universalizes the "sakht launda" character, presenting a commentary on the social pressures exerted on men to be strong and in control of their emotions. Humor in Khan's work is about how, in the secular, urban context, traditional values, typically aligned with patriarchal ideals of manhood, get at odds with the emotional lives of young people. In several of his performances, Khan's self-deprecation is intensified by the employment of profanity, frequently combined in a blend of Hindi and English slang ("behen***", "ch***"). This use of language serves two purposes: it lends the authenticity that renders Khan's stories believable, and it reinforces the raw emotional content of the feelings Khan expounds on. Profanity in this context is not used so much to shock, but as a device to illustrate the power of the feelings Khan is expressing. Profanity is a vehicle for the communication of frustration, shame, and the sense of emotional release which characterizes the streetwise, untamed quality of his humour.

One of the lines that is remembered from *Haq Se Single* is, "Hum middle class log ka struggle khatam hi nahi hota. date pe jaane ke liye paise bhi borrow karne padte hain." It not only makes you laugh, but it also points out the social and financial pressures that a lot of Khan's audience can identify with. The humour in it stems from the farcical presentation of not being able to achieve social standards, resulting in a poignant and ironic twist in the image of the tough, untouchable "sakht launda." Khan's humour, in turn, acts as a cultural catharsis for many young males in North India, who are typically instructed to keep their feelings in check. Through self-deprecation and the use of swear words, he encourages them to laugh at the very things they are usually asked to concealshame, heartbreak, and emotional repression. The presence of profanity in this context serves as more than just offensive language; it embodies a deep emotional fervour, reflecting a gritty, authentic experience that resonates powerfully with the audience. Ultimately, Khan's comedy invites his audience to confront vulnerability and discover humour within life's challenges, as well as the societal pressures surrounding masculinity.

Aditi Mittal employs self-deprecation and profanity in her stand-up routine, crafting a powerful blend that allows her to challenge societal expectations and engage with deeply personal topics such as body image, sexuality, and gender roles. Mittal confronts the restrictive structures that seek to confine women's voices, empowering both herself and her audience to accept the intricacies and imperfections of womanhood through her bold and unapologetic humour. Her comedy employs wit to challenge societal norms and foster more sincere, transparent conversations regarding the experiences of women in contemporary India, thus functioning as both a means of advocacy and a source of emotional release. Aditi Mittal's comedic approach is rooted in self-deprecation. However, in contrast to typical forms of self-deprecation that stem from self-doubt or insecurity, Mittal's approach serves as a deliberate, strategic tool for resistance and empowerment. She employs self-deprecation to craft the narrative surrounding her body and

experiences, thereby converting what might be perceived as vulnerabilities or shortcomings into sources of strength. She does not portray herself as a victim of societal norms; instead, she embraces a stance of defiance against these constraints by openly discussing topics such as menstruation, masturbation, and body image. Mittal employs humour to assert control over her body and experiences, sharing them as relatable stories that invite laughter, even when they challenge societal norms. Her willingness to embrace self-deprecation allows her to deflect potential criticism from her audience while simultaneously employing her humour to challenge societal norms.

For example, there are those who refer to me as a plus-size woman. Nonetheless, my family characterises me as "healthy." Like diabetes, my friend, in a way that promotes health. Mittal reflects on the overwhelming expectations imposed on women's bodies by societal beauty norms through a lens of self-deprecation. The phrase "healthy like diabetes" highlights the contradictions in societal perceptions of body weight and health, while humorously amplifying the notion of "healthiness." In this instance, her self-deprecation serves to comically undermine the absurdity of societal standards, rather than portraying her as insignificant or frail. A significant element of Mittal's humour is the use of strong language. The use of profanity in Things They Wouldn't Let Me Say serves to enhance the boldness and authenticity of her message, rather than merely aiming for shock value. The incorporation of profanity in her performance highlights the authenticity and fervour of her emotions, simultaneously challenging the refined and polite persona that society often expects from Indian women.Mittal directly challenges the traditional belief that women ought to communicate in a composed, restrained, and "feminine" way by incorporating profanity. This dismissal of conventional gender roles emerges as a form of defiance—she declines to be confined to a narrow and idealised conception of femininity. Incorporating expletives into discussions surrounding intimate topics such as menstruation and body image fosters a sense of liberation. It dismantles the barriers that are often established to restrict women's ability to openly share their bodies, sexuality, and experiences.

In reference to the earlier mentioned sentence, the exaggerated and comedic application of the term "bro" in "Healthy like diabetes, bro" illustrates her dismissal of the conventional, gentle demeanour anticipated from women, infusing the statement with a playful and ironic tone. Especially for younger generations caught between traditional values and modern urban culture, her nonchalance in delivering the jokeemploying both profanity and a casual, conversational tonecreates a sense of connection.The humour of Munawar Faruqui is a dynamic blend of irreverence and self-mockery, with these aspects working together to reveal complex political, social, and cultural themes. His employment of self-deprecation effectively humanises and contextualises his marginalised identity, even as he critiques the systems that seek to criminalise or mute his voice. Conversely, the intentional incorporation of profanity compels the audience to face difficult realities and questions conventional beliefs by creating a clash between societal decorum and the stark truths he aims to convey. Faruqui challenges the prevailing norms through this blend, employing humour as a means of defiance, evaluation, and emotional release, thus providing an insight into vulnerability and genuineness within a politically intense environment. In Dongri to Nowhere, Munawar Faruqui's stand-up comedy skilfully blends dark humour with intentional profanity, creating a nuanced exploration of personal suffering, religious identity, and political commentary. Facing intense examination due to his political beliefs and religious background, Faruqui leverages his platform to engage audiences while simultaneously

challenging the structures that exclude and penalise him. His humour engages with themes of poverty, censorship, and the political backdrop that underpins religious and societal disparities, thereby highlighting the intricate experience of maturing as a Muslim in post-2002 Gujarat. Faruqui's comedic persona is significantly influenced by his employment of self-deprecating humour. With humour related to his community, economic circumstances, and experiences with imprisonment, he fosters a setting in which his identity is examined yet rendered more accessible. I am a comedian; I create humour and often let it slip from my mind... yet people don't forget the complaints they file." This statement illustrates my perspective quite clearly. At first glance, it appears to be a straightforward and entertaining remark regarding Faruqui's journey of crafting humour and subsequently progressing forward. Upon further scrutiny, a critique of the societal and legal consequences stemming from an individual within his community engaging in comedy becomes apparent. The FIR illustrates the legal repercussions associated with his expressions and actions, emphasising how humourparticularly when addressing delicate political or religious topicsoften lingers in the recollections of both authorities and the public.

Faruqui employs self-deprecation to present himself as sensitive and approachable, thereby revealing the human aspect of someone frequently subjected to stereotypes or condemnation. His incorporation of humour regarding his personal challengeslike his time in prisonserves to counterbalance the notion that his identity is solely shaped by his political affiliations or religious beliefs. Instead, he appears to be a significant figure who embodies the collective emotions of guilt, annoyance, and powerlessness. Faruqui employs self-deprecation to demonstrate that, while his identity faces intense scrutiny, he simultaneously finds himself as a casualty of an unjust system that assesses him with undue severity.Faruqui employs profanity in a nuanced and impactful manner. He employs profanity with intention, ensuring that its inclusion significantly enhances his critique or emotional expression. The employment of profanity serves as a calculated strategy, illustrating the intricate balance that he and others in similar situations must navigate in their everyday interactions, thereby generating a conflict between politeness and incitement. Faruqui's employment of profanity distinctly highlights the underlying tensions, as it serves to unveil the absurdity of the situations he addresses and transcends conventional social niceties.

The previously noted line illustrates that humour can serve dual purposes: it acts as both a reprimand and a source of relief when "FIR" is subtly woven into the jest. Deliberate yet impactful, the restrained application of profanity highlights the deeper significance of his statements without excessive embellishment. It conveys a sense of dignity and respect, while also emphasising the discontent associated with being confined within a structure that holds onto previous errors. Faruqui employs profanity not merely for comedic effect but also to scrutinise the hypocrisy and double standards prevalent in Indian society, particularly concerning free expression, political protest, and the treatment of religious minorities. In this context, the use of profanity serves as a tool for Faruqui to push against the limits of respectful dialogue. It highlights the refined and sanitised portrayals of political and religious conversations that are frequently presented in mainstream media. Through the strategic incorporation of profanity, he encourages the audience to engage with the stark truths surrounding censorship, communalism, and identity politicssubjects that are often overlooked in conventional discussions. Faruqui's intentional and measured use of profanity reflects the broader political landscape of India. The use of profanity emerges as a form of resistance in a society where the challenges to free

expression and dissent are intensifying, especially for marginalised groups. This highlights a significant perspective on a framework that punishes specific forms of expression, particularly those that contest established beliefs. For Faruqui, the use of profanity transcends mere discomfort; it serves as a deliberate challenge to a framework that punishes his self-expression and identity. His incorporation of nuanced profanity intertwined with humour serves as a purposeful mechanism for asserting agency and mastery over his narrative.His self-deprecating comedy regarding the FIRs highlights a broader societal concern: the increasing tendency to censor or penalise humour, especially in the realms of politics and religion, is being directed towards. Faruqui highlights the precariousness of his role as a comedian in an environment increasingly characterised by political repression and censorship, particularly in instances of subversion.Kunal Kamra's humour, marked by its self-deprecation and obscenity, exemplifies how comedy serves as a medium for social commentary and a means of resistance. His self-deprecating remarks serve to make his role as a contentious comedian more relatable, allowing him to connect with his audience while highlighting the intrinsic risks associated with his profession. When employed intentionally, profanity enhances the emotional impact of his political statement and serves as a means of resistance against the constraints of formal, restricted political discourse. The combination of these elements offers a significant comedic perspective that challenges the authority and restrictions threatening free expression in contemporary India concurrently. Kamra's comedy operates on two levels, intertwining political and personal themes to prompt his audience to reflect on the broader implications of censorship, dissent, and the fragile state of free expression within a rapidly evolving political landscape.Kamra underscores the potential pitfalls of his politically infused humour, yet his reliance on self-deprecation plays a vital role in making his satire more relatable and relevant to modern audiences.Kamra directly criticised Eknath Shinde, the deputy chief minister of Maharashtra, by calling him a "traitor" in a parody song, therefore criticising his political deftness. Though funny, this act had great political weight. Kamra uses self-deprecating humour as he admits the dangers involved in such a critique, including police monitoring and damage of his performance space. Often presenting himself as a " Comedian in trouble," he leans towards the reality that his art is provocative and generates reaction. Kamra humanises his position by projecting himself as a weak person, therefore highlighting the fact that his humour comes with personal costs and repercussions.This self-deprecating style also emphasises the vulnerability comedians have in a society when humour that questions political power is not only disliked but also penalised. Kamra's audience will relate to his openness on the challenges he has communicating truth to power. It emphasises the larger issue of censorship and the stifling of free expression in India, therefore turning him from just a comic into a symbol of resistance. This has two effects: the audience is inspired to consider the growing restrictions on freedom of expression as well as sympathises with Kamra's fight.

Another crucial component of Kamra's comic approach is his use of profanity It serves to enhance the emotional impact of his remarks, allowing his political observations to be more immediate and intense. It is not utilised precisely. His candid employment of coarse language in his performance underscores his frustration with the political climate, thereby amplifying the intensity and precision of his critique. Kamra's use of profanity in the performance critiquing Eknath Shinde underscores the seriousness of his dissent, thereby contrasting the courteous language usually found in political discussions with the unfiltered expressions he uses to articulate his frustration.In Kamra's comedy, the use of profanity serves as a tool for defiance. It

presents a direct and unfiltered examination of authority, stripping away the politeness and formalities typically associated with conventional political discussions. This transcends the refined rhetoric commonly found in mainstream politics, where politicians sometimes resort to ambiguous and polite expressions. In this context, profanity serves to intensify emotions and convey a political message. It underscores Kamra's dissatisfaction with the establishment and encourages the audience to partake in that frustration. This straightforwardness serves as a form of defiance, as it challenges the norms of polite, unspoken dialogue that are often imposed on opposing perspectives.

By intertwining vulgarity with a sense of humility, Kamra's satirical works underscore the fragile state of free expression in India. The employment of humour to challenge political figures like Eknath Shinde serves as a means of opposition; it provides a perspective on the issues of censorship and the risks associated with voicing dissent. His reaction, ranging from acts of vandalism to police investigations, underscores the increasing dangers linked to expressing dissent in India. Kamra's humorous yet self-critical comments about his predicament in the comedy scene highlight this tension in a compelling manner. By pinpointing these hazards, he not only underscores the perils faced by comedians and critics but also transforms his humorous endeavours into a form of advocacy. In this scenario, cursing serves as a strategic element in Kamra's arsenal; it enables him to emphasise the emotional intensity of his perspectives on governmental authority and to underscore his points effectively. His aggressive language serves not as a marker of crudeness, but as a direct confrontation to the authority that aims to suppress or intimidate him. It illustrates that humourparticularly in the realm of political satire—plays a significant part in the democratic discourse, especially in situations marked by high stakes and when facing repression from opposing forces.

Stand-up comic based in Delhi Swati Sachdeva represents a significant shift in the dynamics of gender and sexuality within the realm of Indian stand-up comedy. A viral clip from her solo special So Rude of Me, in which she joked about her mother discovering a vibrator in her bed, ignited significant controversy in March 2025. She claimed, to escape the embarrassment, that the device was her father'sa daring jest that led to accusations of profanity and vulgarity on social media platforms (India Today, 2025). The joke elicited laughter during the live performance; however, its reception online was marked by significant moral outrage, highlighting the tension between the context of live humour and the scrutiny of digital platforms.This joke, along with sexual innuendo and familial conflict, exemplifies what scholars refer to as "performative transgression" (Shivprasad Madhavi, 2020).Sachdeva's comedy introduces an essential unease in contexts where female sexuality is often overlooked or repressed, particularly in domestic settings. The introduction of a sex toy within a family context challenge prevailing cultural norms while simultaneously providing a space for the expression of queer feminine sexuality. This aligns with Wolf's (2018) concept of "feminist vulgarity," in which sexual humour and profanity transition from instruments of humiliation to strategies for liberation. The humour in the joke primarily relies on a sense of self-deprecating unease. Sachdeva effectively conveys the core attributes of the subject of the joke—her demeanour reflects embarrassment, surprise, and a lack of grace. Brodie (2014) argues that this type of comedy functions as a protective barrier against mockery, enabling comedians to tackle taboo subjects while maintaining the audience's empathy. The self-deprecating narrative does not diminish the controversial elements of the comedy; instead, it enhances its accessibility and relatability. Lockyer and Pickering (2005) assert that self-deprecation provides comedians with a "comic licence," enabling them to address

socially sensitive topics without causing offence to their audience. The response to Sachdeva's joke reveals underlying gender double standards present in Indian humour venues. Male comedians may resort to vulgarity and sexual innuendo when there is a deficiency in comparable analysis (Sarkar & Siraj, 2022). Female comedians, particularly those who identify as LGBT, face a higher degree of moral scrutiny. Sachdeva's act highlights the intersection of gender, sexuality, and censorship in Indian comedy, where female voices frequently face restrictions for "crossing the line" (Vyavahare, R. 2025).

Furthermore, the public outrage underscores the intricacies of context collapse within digital media. Content designed for a specific live audience may be misunderstood or criticised when disseminated among varied online groups, as noted by Vestergaard, A. (2015). The distinction between comedy and offence is increasingly ambiguous, requiring comedians—particularly womento rationalise their intentions following a performance. The present issue of Samay Raina's YouTube series India highlights how progressively vulnerable comedy in the digital Indian public sphere is to cultural backlash. Ranveer Allahbadia, better known as BeerBiceps, features in this programme. Allahbadia made a humorous joke in a February 2025 broadcast sexualizing the holy emblem "Maa," (mother), a topic of Indian cultural dialogue. Though characterised as harmless banter among friends, the remark touched up great wrath that resulted in multiple FIRs under categories of public obscenity and religious sensitivity (The Economic Times, 2025).

This episode differs from others including comedians such as Kamra or Sachdeva in that it lacks self-deprecatory framing. The joke revolved on outside, culturally sensitive figures instead than Allahbadia herself as the target. This difference is significant. Comedians who use self-deprecation can earn a type of discursive licence to break expectations since their comedy "punches inward," rather than outward, (Brodie, 2014; Shivprasad Madhavi, 2020). Without this buffer, Allahbadia's joke was interpreted as nasty, disrespectful, and against public moral values. Moreover, the event catches the phenomena of "context collapse" in digital performance venues, in which content meant for a certain audience leaks into more generic, less sympathetic publics (Marwick et.al, 2010). Particularly in a society where motherhood is linked with nationalistic and religious ideas, the informal and unplanned nature of the YouTube show did not translate well to the moral scrutiny of a bigger audience. While Samay Raina tried to defuse the situation with humorous responses during his Canada tour "Thanks for paying my legal fees" and "Main Samay hoon"the show's removal from the platform and the chilling effect on similar content show how the limits of permissible profanity remain fluid, inconsistent, and highly politicised in Indian comic discourse (Indian Express, 2025).

Conclusion

Self-deprecation and obscenity in contemporary Indian stand-up comedy transcend simple humour; they embody a profound cultural impact that is transforming how society interacts with issues of vulnerability, gender, politics, and social norms. Comedians such as Zakir Khan, Aditi Mittal, Munawar Faruqui, Kunal Kamra, and others utilise humour to reflect on both personal experiences and societal issues. Self-deprecation allows for the disclosure of personal flaws and fears, while the use of profanity amplifies the emotional intensity of the messages conveyed. This mix facilitates a connection between the artist and the audience by eliminating the barriers that exist between them, thereby enhancing the authenticity of their presentation. Comedians enhance their relevance by utilising self-deprecation, allowing their audience to

connect with their struggles, errors, and emotional openness. The comedians establish a platform that encourages the audience to examine their own imperfections, thereby facilitating a cultural shift that nurtures transparency regarding emotions, individual weaknesses, and the complexities of modern existence. This comedy critically examines the strict norms that traditional society enforces on individuals, especially concerning gender roles, offering a sense of relief for both the audience and the performer. This enables viewers to connect with topics such as emotional awareness, sexual identity, and societal pressureselements that frequently remain unnoticed or suppressed in everyday existence.

Conversely, the use of profanity enhances the effectiveness of their communication. The use of profanity in these works' functions primarily as an expression of defiance rather than as a mechanism for eliciting shock. The established standards of politeness and propriety governing public discourse in India are evidently confronted by the existence of certain taboo subjects. Their use of profanity serves as a tool to challenge societal norms, prompting discussions on intricate and often uncomfortable topics such as politics, religion, gender, and sexuality. This approach prompts viewers to examine the social systems that inhibit freedom of expression and emotional articulation, thereby fostering critical thinking skills.In Indian stand-up comedy, the interplay of obscenity and self-deprecation serves as significant cultural drivers. They rigorously scrutinise established cultural norms, create opportunities for marginalised viewpoints, and foster candid discussions regarding individual and societal issues. The promotion of candid, straightforward, and unembellished discussions surrounding identity, power, and vulnerability is fundamentally transforming Indian society. These comedians go beyond simple entertainment; they critically examine and question conventional wisdom through their humour, thereby reshaping our understanding of emotional expression, social norms, and the profound nature of laughter.

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