

Abstract

Title of the dissertation: **Gender and Motorcycles: A Study of Biking Cultures in Kolkata**

This research has been a venture to investigate the hitherto uncharted domain of the relationship between gender, risk, and motorcycling from a sociological perspective in Kolkata, India. This attempts to methodologically explore the rising distinctive culture of motorcycling in Kolkata. It should be noted that this study deals with those individuals who ride a motorcycle either professionally or passionately. The subjective notion of 'riding passionately' here means motorcyclists who ride motorcycles apart from mundane activities. This study has three main objectives. Firstly, to explore the rituals and significant styles associated with motorcycling only, forming a separate community of its own, resulting in a prominent culture. Secondly, to enquire whether motorcyclists are doing gender while riding a motorcycle and it is expressive of a particular kind of masculinity. Thirdly, it would explore what kind of risk men and women perceive and how they negotiate with those risks. This research has followed mixed methods approach which includes both purposive and snow ball sampling and face to face in-depth interviews with observations to understand the non-verbal behaviour. With semi-structured interview schedule hundred motorcyclists, eighteen women, and eighty-two men were interviewed. Conversations were taped at their suitable locations; pseudonyms were assigned to the interviews to protect their confidentiality.

My findings indicate the distinctive rise of motorcycling culture in Kolkata which includes normative rituals, style, specific vocabulary that is being transmitted from senior to junior motorcyclists. It should be also noted that the whole motorcycling community is bonded by the notion of brotherhood, where they would perform gender in various ways to portray their masculinities in order to be 'the one'. Women in motorcycling are rejecting the traditional prescribed roles of being weak, expressive, emotional, and fragile. They tend to construct and reconstruct the notions of gender activities. However, even if women are at par with the men motorcyclists, still they have to face humiliation and taunting. Risks to my respondents are subjective and heavily gendered. They also report that risks are positive as adventure results in excitement or thrill, enjoyment as well as improvement. This helped them to grow more competently. There are various ways both the men and women negotiate the risk that is been associated with motorcycling. An interesting paradox that heavy technology, often associated with masculinity, is labelled as 'She' by most of the respondents in the research.