SOCIAL NETWORKING AND THE FAKING OF SOCIAL IDENTITY: A BRIEF THEORETICAL DEBATE ABOUT SOCIETY IN KASHMIR

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Abstract:

Globalization and the revolutions in information communication technology have brought tremendous expansion of social networking platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Instagram, Tumblr, Wechat, Snapchat and the like. Almost all the sociologists and theorists of the grand narrative of cultural change agree with the fact that one of the oceanic challenges faced by the cultures of the world in general and by man in particular is the identity crisis. The problem becomes acute in tradition dominated and religion ridden societies like India and the valley of Kashmir. It therefore becomes important to look into the role of social networking through both mechanisms viz *distorting the real identity* and *creating a virtual identity* or to be exact a fake identity.

Key Words: Advertisements, Dramaturgy, Ego, Faking self, Identity, Social climbing, Social networks.

The debate

If we look into the works of front row sociologists who have written on self and identity of man in society, it becomes clear that it is the social environment which frames the self, the personality and identity of a social individual. Taking clues from Karl Marx [*false consciousness*], Emile Durkheim [*Social fact & "Society is God"*], Cooley [*looking glass self*], Mead [*analysis of I and ME*] or Goffman [*Dramaturgy*], the fact is established that individual self and identity is determined by the social environment man is surrounded by.

Having said that it is the society that frames the individual identity, it is important to note that we live in a modern or as they say a postmodern society and here the social environment mainly shows up in the form of markets, commercial hubs, shopping malls, Café'ins, exclusive showrooms, those tall mobile towers and other such gifts of modernization and modernity.

Now there is also one more important arena which operates around the individual and that is where my discussion becomes most relevant viz modern man is also surrounded by identity killing instruments like Facebook, Whatsapp, twitter and others as mentioned earlier.

It is a common site to come across your own friend's display picture captured through a DSLR camera which you won't recognize because when a friend, car mechanic [*mistry*] by profession

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and known as Waseem Bengali in the village because of his dark color, puts a DSLR pic as DP and writes Emolic Waxim [working at St. Xaviers College]; there is no question of a real identity but it brings him a lot of friend requests. Whatsapp is playing even more serious a game with our real identity. Putting a status update like *'success is not the end to my journey'* may give an impression that this person may be next only to Mukesh Ambani when in reality he is a tobacco seller in the most muddy mohalla of the village.

The serious syndrome of fake accounts on social networking sites ranges from *Angel Zoya* [actually a vendor's son Rameez**], *Princess Sehrish* [Gulzar driver], *Dad's Princess* [7th daughter of a farmer], *Invincible Muxi* [Muzamil Najar, a college student playing cricket since last 5 years still appearing in backlog], *Emolic Ubee* [Ubaid Shabeer, an 8th standard kid who totally doesn't know the meaning of the word *emolic* or even if it exists in English or not], *Kalkharaab kott* [a miscreant kid who doesn't even care to close his legs when a teacher passes by], *Sangbaaz fighter* [actually a psychopath or an agent of an antisocial agency] and lot of such fake identities created by people who are either immature, uncivilized or some sort of psychopaths.

People even often have two or more virtual identities through different accounts to connect with people of different categories whom they didn't want to show to each other for instance the wife account and the *ex* account; the office group and the in-laws group etc.

The most beautiful and perhaps the only perfect presentation of identity in a single sentence has been given by the great sociologist C. H Cooley as: '*I am not what I think I am. I am not what you think I am. I am what I think you think I am.* Thus under the impacts of social networking, internet and globalization which creates a suitable substratum for prestige, esteem, show off and ego, man becomes *what the society makes him* and here in this case his society is nothing other than a virtual web of networking where man is already trapped by shares, likes and comments.
The mechanism of social networking operates at the psychological level and is deeply embedded in the mental chemistry of modern man. The priorities include showoff, ego and prestige. When we live a life of online shopping, Amazon & Flipkart decides *what we wear*; Garnier & fair n lovely decides *how we look*; Layer shot & Fogg determine *how we smell*; Renault & Mahindra tells people *who we are*. Then the question of a real identity is vague. The relevance of these examples comes in the role of social networking in the advertisement industry. Actually we live a life of advertisements, which is the basic motive behind most social networking sites through the process of monetisation of online traffic, sharing & likes etc.

Taking everything in its own hands from lifestyle to outlook; costume to social image; consumerism to table manners, the strong force of social networking has brought man to *'I am not myself, I am always somebody else'*. The situation becomes worse as pointed out by the phrase '*if I am a gujjar, why should I call myself a pathan"*?

Giving birth to *social climbing*, social networking has entangled everybody in style copying, what Srinivas calls Sanskritisation. Our youth in particular can cross any limit from buying a Duke 200 bike to taking selfies on mountain cliffs risking their life just to satisfy their virtual identity which is a fake identity, a false consciousness (as pointed by Marx); A dramaturgy (as pointed by

Goffman).

If social networking is our mirror and modernity our reflection, then we have no real existence instead we live in different identities. In fact it has given us multiple identities which are all not only virtual but in fact fake. To end my discussion, I leave you with a big question regarding our identity within the social networking world:

"Who are you and who are you? What is the evidence that you are who you say you are"?

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** All The Names Are Fictitious, For Use To Understanding The Debate.