



STAND-UP COMEDY IN BENGALURU

Stand-up Comedy in Bengaluru

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work incorporated in this report entitled “*Stand-up Comedy in Bengaluru*” submitted by the undersigned Research Team was carried out under my mentorship. Such material as has been obtained from other sources has been duly acknowledged.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	6
ABSTRACT	7
LIST OF FIGURES	8
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	9
1. Background	9
2. Key Concepts	10
2.1 Defining Stand-up Comedy	10
2.2 Problems with Research on Stand-up Comedy	12
2.3 Stand-up Comedy in the West	13
2.3.i. Stand-up comedy in The United States of America:	13
2.3.ii Stand-up comedy in Britain	14
2.3.iii Stand-up comedy in other Countries	15
3. Research Problem	16
4. Aims and Objectives	16
5. Methodology	17
6. Contribution to Knowledge	18
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE	19
1. Introduction	19
2. Humour Theories	19
2.1 The Superiority Theory	20
2.2 The Incongruity Theory	21
2.3 The Relief Theory	21
2.4 Summary of Humour Theories	22
3. Stand-up Comedy	23
3.1 Origins	23
3.2 Comedy in India	24
3.3 Globalisation and Stand-up Comedy in Bangalore	28
4. Conditions of Stand-up Comedy	30
4.1 Performers	30
4.2 Content	32
4.3 Audience	36
4.4 Venues	38
5. Conclusion	41
CHAPTER 3: DATA ANALYSIS 1	43
1. Introduction	43
2. Quantitative Analysis	43
3. Thematic Analysis	43
3.1 Steps in Thematic Analysis	44

4. Themes for Analysis	45
CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS 2	51
1. Performer	51
1.1. The Role of a Host in Stand-up Comedy	51
1.2. Structure	54
1.3. Content	55
1.4 Techniques and Strategies	56
1.5. Language	60
1.6 Modification and Improvisation	62
1.7 Finance	65
1.8 Social Commentary	66
2. Venue	68
2.1 Space and Setting	69
2.2 Revenue	71
2.3 The Online Sphere as a Space in itself	71
3. Audience	74
4. Women in Stand-up Comedy	78
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	81
1. Introduction	81
2. Objectives and Key Findings	81
3. Limitations of the Research	84
4. Future Research	85
5. Contribution to Knowledge	85
REFERENCES	87
APPENDIX	94

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ABSTRACT

Stand-up comedy is a relatively new development, not only in India, but across the world. This research project endeavours to study stand-up comedy in the Indian context, particularly in Bengaluru city. Stand-up comedy has been existent in Bengaluru for approximately the past six years, and is currently in its stage of growth in this city, as opposed to Mumbai, where it has already been well established. This project looks into several different aspects of stand-up, such as the content creation process for the performers, the use of stand-up as a means for social commentary, the impact of the space and setting on the performance, the role of the audience, and the interaction of the comedian, the comic producer, the venue, and the audience in stand-up comedy. The data was collected primarily through semi-structured interviews with stand-up comedians, venue owners, and event managers. Some of the main findings of the research include that many comedians tend to draw from their own personal experiences for their content, and they stick to a more solid structure in paid shows while leaving space for improvisation in open-mics. Venue has emerged as one of the key determinants of the success of a stand-up performance. There are certain key aspects that are necessary in order for a venue to be well suited for stand-up comedy, including the seating arrangement, the stage, noise levels, and lighting. We also found that one of the biggest sources of income for budding stand-up comedians is performances at corporate shows, though most comedians do not enjoy performing at these shows.

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Components of Data Analysis: Interactive Model	44
2. Performer Themes Graph	52
3. Venue Themes Graph	69

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. Background

Comedy has been instrumental in the development and evolution of performing arts around the globe. From its inception as a rival theme to that of “tragedy” in plays, comedy has grown to become a key element in several forms of communication and art. The growth and success of Stand-up comedy in countries such as the United States of America and Britain have been well documented due to its origins in the former (Lee, 2006) and the wide acceptance and appreciation it received in the latter. In India, the growth of this form of comedy is still in its early stages and is yet to be documented in its entirety (Double, 1990). The great linguistic diversity present in the country, the political atmosphere and the socio-economic gaps have proven to be both a boon and a bane for the development of stand-up within the Indian cultural landscape. On one hand, it provides comedians with a wide variety of subjects on which to base their content while on the other, it provides a serious challenge for anthropologists in the documentation of this phenomenon.

In India, stand-up comedy is a relatively new occurrence with the cities of Mumbai, Bengaluru and Delhi being its primary hubs. Its development in Mumbai is now almost a decade long and the opening of The Comedy Store in Mumbai allowed for comedians to perform their acts regularly and perfect their skills (Bhat & Griffin, 2013). In Delhi, the comedy open mic culture began around 2009. Following this, several Hindi and “Hinglish” speaking comedians like Abhishek Upmanyu and Amit Tandon started gaining popularity to the extent that today, stand-up comedy has become a part of Delhi’s lifestyle (Bhattacharya, 2014). In Bengaluru, however, this form of performance has been in play for approximately six years. Owing to its established pub, music and karaoke culture, comedy was welcomed as a new attraction by venue owners (Bhat & Griffin, 2013). The performance form is thus in its stage of growth in Bengaluru as compared to Mumbai and Delhi where it has already planted its feet (Ayushi Jagad, personal communication, 22nd September, 2017). This makes it the most appropriate place to study the phenomenon of stand-up comedy specifically in its stage of growth.

The project attempts to investigate stand-up comedy from an Indian context. This will include answering questions like the part that the audience plays, the process of writing the

content, the methods that the comedians employ to deliver their humour and the economic impact it has on the venues while parallely keeping in mind the unique product that has come from the amalgamation of our diverse culture with a form of performance that was western roots.

The primary method of conducting this research was in the form of semi-structured interviews. The sample consisted of Stand-up comedians, owners of the venues where such events were held and producers of stand-up shows. In addition, this research attempts to trace the history of stand-up comedy, how it arrived in India, its use as a platform for social commentary, the use of regional languages in India as an emerging medium for performing stand-up and the nature of stand-up comedy's appeal.

2. Key Concepts

2.1 Defining Stand-up Comedy

The existing body of research on stand-up comedy reveals multiple definitions for stand-up comedy. One of the definitions of stand-up comedy was proposed by Mintz, wherein he described it as an encounter between a single performer and an audience, with the performer using humour in his actions and speech, without much use of props or other such supporting instruments (Mintz, 1985). David Marc too stresses on the importance of direct interaction between the audience and the performer in stand-up (Řičný, 2014).

However, a broader approach would include a wide range of solo or group live performances that either employ humour to tell jokes directly or in other forms like music and even clowning (Lee, 2006). Stand-up comedy is thus much more complex than a single performer act. It could include seated storytellers, performing pairs, team acts and improvisational acts. It could employ very specific lighting, setting, props, and costumes. It could be a comic narration of personal experiences, or it could be a satirical, social or political commentary (Mintz, 1985).

Two features remain constant in all the definitions of stand-up comedy - the use of humour and the audience-performer relationship. Humour could be applied to the narration of mundane, daily encounters or it could be used to talk about more serious social and political issues. In the latter case, boundaries of propriety are often tested and experimented with

(Wilson, 2008). The results of such experimentation are decided by the audience, who play in integral role in this process.

The directness of the audience-performer interaction is stressed on in several definitions of stand-up comedy. In stand-up, the audience pays a fee to watch a comic perform on-stage. Their role is limited to cheering, booing and laughing, but their responses are what determine the efficacy of the performance. The audience provides the performer the license to use humour in the ways mentioned above, thereby giving him/her the power of social commentary. Any function that the stand-up comedian performs, occurs because the audience allows it. Thus, in stand-up comedy, the audience's role is just as important as that of the performer (Lee, 2006).

The audience and performer take turns speaking and listening (ibid). The comedian first understands the nature of his audience by asking them questions and/or making statements that are bound to elicit agreement in the form of head-nodding or cheers. He/she may playfully insult a few audience members to help them realize that being on the receiving end of jokes is not as painful as one would imagine. In doing so, the comedian establishes a level of comfort with his/her audience and gauges their character as a group. It is only after the audience has been established as a somewhat homogenous group that the comedian establishes his own comic personality. He does this by discussing his personal life and sharing humorous anecdotes that elicit laughter, thereby building an atmosphere of fun and gaiety before the actual comedic act begins (Wilson, 2008).

In light of the importance of audience reactions to the comedic performance, the question then arises- what if the act does not elicit laughter? Is it still considered to be stand-up comedy? The answer is yes. Laughter is the "sole indicator of humour" (Wilson, 2008). In its nature, laughter is an involuntary reaction, making it the purest judgement of what is funny and what is not. If laughter is not elicited, it simply means that joke failed or that the humour was either not received well or was not understood (Wilson, 2008). This does not mean that the individual on stage is not a stand-up comedian, it simply means that that particular joke or act failed. In its own way, laughter is a critique of the stand-up comedian's work. At the end of the day, stand-up comedy must be pleasurable and laughter is the comedian's goal. Consistent failure to elicit laughter will mean the failure of the comedian. It does not mean that the act itself cannot be called stand-up comedy.

Other than the primary function of making people laugh, stand-up is also often viewed as social commentary. As mentioned before, by paying a fee to watch a comedian the audience gives the comedian the license and the power to act as a social commentator. Comedians often use humour as a device to create dialogue about serious social and political issues and address otherwise taboo subjects. Whether doing this makes a larger difference in society or not, is still debatable. Further analysis of this form of performance is required to understand its significance in the social and political context. However, it cannot be denied that stand-up comedy has a vital role to play in allowing for a confrontation of the important aspects of our culture and the expression of shared beliefs and changing social roles and behavior. We see many comedians incorporating this in their sets, such as Karunesh Talwar and Kunal Kamra.

2.2 Problems with Research on Stand-up Comedy

Stand-up comedy is a genre that has been studied through a very limited lens so far. The available research provides a general and scattered understanding of its history. Judith Yaross Lee provides an in-depth understanding of the origins of stand-up comedy in the United States in her paper “Mark Twain as a Stand-up Comedian” (2006) and Oliver Double examines stand-up comedy in Britain through an academic perspective (1991). Other studies include an examination of British comedian Eddie Izzard (Glick, 2007) and a study of Indonesian stand-up comedy (Afidah et.al., 2014) among others.

Definitions of stand-up comedy, as seen above, are numerous and often at odds with one another. While some definitions describe it as an art form involving a single performer and an audience, others stress on the fact that stand-up comedy includes a wide range of comic performances. So far, there is no single, commonly agreed upon definition of stand-up, a gap in existing literature visible at the very outset.

Lastly, there is a lack of academic literature on the state of stand-up comedy at present. The limited research available focuses on its history and provides an evaluation of its nature and content, but very little research is dedicated to its present, growing form. Moreover, most of the existing research has been done with regard to developed countries like the United States and Britain. The literature related to the subject in India is limited and rather scarce, a gap this research wishes to bridge.

2.3 Stand-up Comedy in the West

2.3.i. Stand-up comedy in The United States of America:

In 1850's America, Artemus Ward introduced comic lectures, a parody of the typical informational lectures that were delivered in the 19th century (Austin, 1972). This marked the beginning of the stand-up comedy tradition in the United States. Following Ward, in the 1860's Mark Twain toured the United States of America, and later the world, delivering humorous lectures as a means to promote his upcoming novels. At first, he performed in theatrical settings as that was how comedy was originally accepted. He worked on his comic lectures the same way a typical lecturer of the time would- systematically and with precision. But his performance itself broke from conventional lectures by toeing the line of what was considered acceptable at the time. His content mocked the typical form of lectures and questioned dominant ideas like that of manhood and respectability. Later in his career, he also began performing at public events like banquets, club dinners and fundraisers, thus establishing comedy as a genre in its own right (Lee, 2006).

Comedy as a part of the entertainment industry existed in 1840's America in the form of minstrel shows. In these shows, white Caucasian males painted their faces black and essentially imitated the speech, dress and behaviour of slaves. After the Civil War, Vaudeville, a form of variety entertainment, emerged in America. Vaudeville was a blend of music, dance, comedy and drama performed in extravagant theatres. Its content was strictly censored and prohibited any kind of vulgar or crude humour. The purpose of this censorship was to make the art form accessible to women and children of the middle classes (Railton, 2003). Post the civil war, several factors like the growth of media, increase in purchasing power, improved communication facilities, and changing preferences and tastes of the middle class contributed to making these forms of comedy businesses in themselves. Several stand-up comedians were born from Vaudeville, including Bob Hope, Jack Benny, and Gracie Allen to name a few. Many of them later branched out to radio and television too, thus making stand-up comedy in the United States more accessible, powerful and popular.

2.3.ii Stand-up comedy in Britain

Britain has had an established stand-up comedy circuit since the early 1900s. It is one of the earliest nations to popularise the art of stand-up comedy and has been constantly evolving since then. The history of stand-up comedy in Britain focuses on three major institutions- the Music hall tradition which eventually merged with the Variety era, Working men's club in the 1950s, and the Alternative comedy which emerged in 1979 (Double, 1991).

Stand-up comedy emerged from a comic song in the Music hall era. It was purely about sharing jokes and character based comedy. A major setback in this period was the "stylist conservatism" as the jokes were repetitive in nature (ibid). They lacked novelty and creativity, and to top it off, it was politically conservative as well. Rather than challenging the existing flaws of the society, it enhanced them with elements of humour. The jokes had prevalent themes such as class snobbery and mockery of the working class. Domestic humour and "smutty" jokes failed to question the prescribed role of men and women and the very ideas regarding sexuality (ibid). Comedians failed to experiment in terms of ideologies or style in order to succeed with their audience. It is also believed that the local management and higher sections of society encouraged jokes that are obscene rather than politically radical, and the comedians did not rebel against these restrictions. Although Britain was constantly evolving culturally, the sense of humour remained stagnant, and this led to the death of the Music hall and Variety era (ibid).

Stand-up comedy in working men's club became prominent in the 1960s – 1970s. The focus shifted from primitive jokes to intense "misogyny to race hatred" and the reason behind this is economical in nature (ibid). During this time, clubs were professionalised due to an increase in the number of entertainers. The clubs raised the fees, which pushed the comedians to reduce comic creativity as it seemed too risky. Thus, jokes focused on simple typecasts that reflected the general mindset of the population. Both Variety and Working men's club faced restrictions in terms of experimentation but the major difference lies in the additional problem of censorship faced by comedians of the Variety era. Again, during the era of Working men's club, stand-up comedy did not undergo any radical political or stylistic evolution (ibid).

When Alternative comedy emerged in 1979, it posed a challenge to all the restrictions posed on stand-up comedians. Alternative comedy certainly extended the limits of stand-up

comedy. “Comedians abused audiences, were deliberately boring, and sometimes even deliberately unfunny”(ibid). The subject of the shows got more innovative, ranging from morbid topics such as death to innovations in science. While Variety and Working men’s club were politically conservative, alternative comedians spoke of political ideologies that were considered drastic, such as “anarchism, feminism, gay liberation, and anti-racism.”(ibid) Initially, it provoked intense reactions from its audience, for it questioned their entire belief system. Slowly, the stylistic and political innovations subsidized for comedians and the promoters had to keep the fire burning. Thus, the period of Alternative comedy saw the most innovation in terms of style and politics but also managed to maintain a balance between pleasing and provoking the audience (ibid).

2.3.iii Stand-up comedy in other Countries

Two other countries where stand-up has developed into a significant art form are Australia and Canada. For both these countries, the effect of colonization had a profound effect on the development of stand-up comedy. Cabaret performances, which were considered to be a distinctly British art form, provided the main platform by which stand-up comedy had a chance to develop. In his book *Vizard Uncut*, Bedwell credits The Flying Trapeze Café as one of the main venues where cabaret performances were held. Further, it was here that “the cream of Melbourne’s comic talent” came to perform their pieces thus indicating how cabaret provided a stepping stone for the development of stand-up comedy (Bedwell, 2007, p. 70). One of the primary reasons for the growth of this type of comedy in Australia was that it provided a platform for people to initiate discussions on various topics of a political nature (Wagg, 1998, p. 200). This proved to play a significant part in the lives of Aboriginal stand-up comedians who have now carved a niche for themselves in this industry in Australia. A significant number of Aboriginal comedians use various techniques to deliver their performances such as “mimicry, tomfoolery and even dancing” to deliver their ideas about the issues of racism and political barriers that they face (Austin et al, 2017). Apart from the Aboriginals, Australian stand-up comedy is a platform which is famous for its diversity. This diversity is made most conspicuous by the numerous comedians of Asian descent who are invited every year to the largest cultural festival in Australia- Melbourne International Comedy Festival (MICF). This indicates how the growth of stand-up comedy in Australia has

provided a means for cultural exchange and discussion to grow and blossom, leading to a cultural stimulation (Luckhurst & Rae, 2016).

Like Australia, the primary influence of stand-up comedy in Canada came from cabaret performances and borrowing from the existing culture in the United States (Stebbins, 1990, p. 18). The “structure” of Canadian comedy is strongly influenced by the “political, cultural and spatial domains”. The small geographical area also means that comedians alter their content with respect to each new place they visit and change their content depending on their setting (Woodrow, 2001, p. 27). Thus, in many ways, Canadian stand-up comedy provides a sort of basic model of the general structure of stand-up comedy, how it changes and the relation between the content and the audience.

3. Research Problem

As mentioned earlier, stand-up has been found to be growing in cities like Mumbai, Delhi and Bengaluru. These three cities rank the highest in India in terms of infrastructure, with Bengaluru having the highest quality of living index as of the year 2012 (Mishra, 2012). All three cities are also home to urban English-speaking Indians, who form a significant part of their demographic (Bhat & Griffin, 2013). Bengaluru, however, is different from the two in many ways. The booming IT industry is its most distinctive feature. Additionally, it is also known to have a greater number of entrepreneurs and startups as compared to other Indian cities (Dutta, 2013). An apt example with regard to this research is entrepreneur Sumendra Singh, who opened the venue That Comedy Club in Bengaluru, the second comedy club in India (Kashyap 2016). All of these factors contribute to the mixed cosmopolitan demographic of the city, which was a factor in choosing Bengaluru city as our focus.

4. Aims and Objectives

This research project seeks to understand the emergence of stand-up comedy in Bangalore through an examination of the performer, the venue and the audience, aspects that have been chosen based on a careful review of literature. The main objectives of the research are:

- To trace the origins of stand-up comedy
- To examine the process of content creation of the performer
- To study how the space and setting impacts a stand-up comedy performance
- To investigate the role of the audience in stand-up comedy
- To understand how stand-up comedy is used as a means for social commentary
- To study the interaction of the comedian, the comic producer, the venue and the audience in stand-up comedy

The first objective will be achieved through desktop research, while the rest of the objectives will be achieved through interviews with comedians, venue owners and some comic producers in Bengaluru.

5. Methodology

Ours was primarily a qualitative research study wherein our data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with comedians, audience members, venue owners and venue marketing and event managers. A semi-structured interview is an in-depth interview that allows for more personal encounters with the respondents. It is organized around a set of pre-decided questions, and additional questions then arise in the course of each interview (Whiting, 2008). Semi-structured interviews were found to be most appropriate for this research because it allowed us to receive answers to our research question, while also allowing us the freedom to ask questions beyond the research question that could still add to the project. Further, this technique allowed us to explore the unique experiences and background in comedy that each interviewee brought with them.

The sample was formed using snowball sampling methods. Separate interview schedules were created for performers, audience members and venue authorities respectively. Based on the results obtained a thematic analysis will be performed manually

In order to accurately represent the audience-performer ratio, short surveys were distributed among audience members, thereby adding a quantitative dimension to the study. Employing the survey method helped reach a larger number of people more easily. These surveys were then analysed based on a pre-decided scoring framework.

6. Contribution to Knowledge

In the historical timeline of forms of performance, stand-up comedy has only very recently come to fore. Hence, it is not surprising that not too much research has been conducted in this field yet. Even as we see a rising interest towards stand-up comedy in recent years, research about the form in India in particular is close to non-existent. This gap in literature is the most significant one we faced as a group during our preliminary research for this project, and it is one we hope to bridge through our research project by collecting and analysing primary data.

The existing research provides a historical overview of stand-up comedy, with some papers conducting an in-depth analysis of the work of particular comedians. This research will provide an explanation of the forms of content, the various techniques and strategies used by comedians, and the process of content creation of comedians in Bengaluru.

Further, although India is a diverse country with several spoken languages, there has been little research on the use and role of language in stand-up comedy. This research will investigate the same through interviews with comedians. Lastly, existing research tends to focus on any one aspect of stand-up comedy. This research attempts to understand the functioning of the ecosystem of stand-up comedy, including the comedian, the venue owners and comic producers in Bengaluru.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Introduction

This review process required the evaluation of a multitude of academic work, the conclusion of which brought to light the gaps in literature and study in the field of stand-up comedy. Our literature review comprises a comprehensive investigation into the context of humour and performance upon which stand-up comedy has developed. These include various humour theories and the history of comedy in India. Through this review, certain gaps in literature were identified, which brought to light the need to further study stand-up comedy through an examination of the performers, the venues and the audience. This chapter will commence with an introduction and analysis of the humour theories. The chapter will proceed to narrow down the research by first establishing a contextual basis for stand-up comedy in the world and in India. Following this, the conditions of stand-up comedy are examined to finally identify the gaps in literature that the research is based on.

2. Humour Theories

In order to develop an academic understanding of stand-up comedy, it is integral to study the backbone of this subject- humour. Largely, humour has been studied as a subset of laughter. Therefore, humour can be classified as “non-humorous laughter” or “humorous laughter”; Examples of non-humorous laughter include use of laughing gas, mental disabilities, tickling etc (Double, 1991). The former is beyond the scope of stand-up comedy and thus, the literature review will analyse the various theories in humorous laughter.

Many of the classical humour theories have setbacks when analysed in terms of stand-up comedy. Plato and other philosophers proposed theories which neglected the popular sense of humour for jokes and were thought to be intellectual and rarefied in nature. This stems from the “privileged positions” held by them in society (ibid). Many psychologists and sociologists conducted laboratory experiments to study humorous laughter but certain important variables proved to be non-scientific in nature. For example, an experiment conducted by Richard D. Young and Margaret Fry used a “young, very attractive female confederate” amidst male subjects in order to see if it affected jokes that were erotic in nature

(ibid). The sources of these jokes were usually taken from magazines and comic strips rather than videos of stand-up comedians. These sources went through a panel of psychologists who unintentionally picked jokes that suited their disposition and therefore, it did not follow a truly scientific approach. A controlled laboratory set-up also seemed to alter one's reaction to jokes. It is thus safe to conclude that having a scientific approach to a constantly evolving "cultural phenomenon" like humorous laughter, especially with respect to stand-up comedy, proves to be impractical, as a scientific approach cannot control external factors such as the origins, societal standing, mood of the subject at that particular moment etc. which affect the creation and understanding of a joke (ibid). The basic drawbacks in classical approaches to humour gave birth to three basic theories – Superiority, Incongruity and Relief and they have been extensively studied in the subject of humour.

2.1 The Superiority Theory

Proposed by Plato and Aristotle around 400 BCE, the Superiority theory is the oldest theory on humorous laughter. There are two basic versions of this theory. The first version states that we laugh at jokes that makes us feel "superior" to someone else (Double, 1991), Aristotle defines comedy as "an imitation of men worse than average" (ibid). The second variation in the theory was proposed by William Hazlitt who believed that "we only laugh at those misfortunes in which we are spectators, not sharers" (ibid). Later versions of this theory rose from an assumption that we have a "biological aggression towards others." Freud spoke of jokes which are an extension of "hostile urges against our fellow men"; urges that are suppressed by the norms of the society (ibid).

However, the Superiority theory does not apply to all kinds of humorous laughter. There are numerous jokes which do not victimise or ridicule any one person or portion of society. Therefore, such jokes do not arouse a sense of superiority. The theory also states people have a natural instinct for aggression which makes them appreciate jokes, side-lining other plausible contexts of these jokes. Antonin J. Obrdlik (1942) has expounded on how the people of Czech used anti-Nazi humour for their political advantage – to boost the spirit of the nation and to demoralise principles of the Nazis. In such cases, the political and social motives seem more pertinent than natural aggressive instinct, which may not exist. Aggressive humour can be analysed in a social context as well. An experiment conducted by

H. A. Wolff, C.E. Smith and H.A. Murray (1934) found that “Jewish subjects disliked anti-Scottish jokes; they hypothesized that this was because the subjects identified with the Scots, who suffer from the same racial stereotype of stinginess” (ibid). Therefore, the aggression can be conditioned by the reference group that the individual associates himself with. If a joke belittles the reference group, the joke would not be found funny by the individual.

2.2 The Incongruity Theory

The Incongruity theory is more recent than the Superiority theory. Although it was coined by Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes in the 15th century, it was only in the 1800s that the term was formalized. In layman’s terms, the Incongruity theory is the “suddenly-perceived and unexpected clash of words, or mismatch of concepts, that we laugh when language or logic are used in a habitual manner; we laugh at the incongruous.” (Double, 1991)

A major advantage for Incongruity over Superiority is that it reflects the significance of a cultural background in humour. What is thought to be humorous in one society or time period might be normalized in another. An unfamiliar situation arouses a sense of amusement and laughter (ibid). This is seen within the boundaries of India as well. For example, in India, there has been a categorization of the South as a strange other; the Southern states tend to be referred to in a crude, humorous manner by people of the North (Desai, 2008). This incongruity arouses amusement which is why this is a major theme used by stand-up comedians from both parts of the nation. Thus, the theory cleverly highlights the major link between the cultural significance and humorous laughter.

2.3 The Relief Theory

The Relief theory emerged around the same time as the Incongruity theory. It proposes that humour is the liberation from “emotional” pressure (Double, 1991). There are many versions and interpretations of this theory. The Relief theory states that the act of telling a joke involves a steady construction of anxiety which is finally broken by the concluding statement or the “punch line” (ibid). Some extend the theory to state that humour breaks stress and tension of many kinds. From daily life troubles to times of grave danger,

humour is a temporary getaway. David Hartley pointed that a liberation from an intense negative emotion always ends up as laughter (ibid).

Both the Superiority and the Relief theories rely on universal human instincts such as anxiety, tension and aggression. These are seen as the driving forces behind humorous laughter. The Relief theory however has been analysed as a psychological phenomenon as well. Kant analysed the theory as a patterned movement of muscles while Herbert Spencer said that it is caused due to “nervous excitation”, something that causes the muscular activities that stimulate laughter (ibid). Arthur Koestler proposed an interesting idea - laughter is a mechanism to balance the excess adrenaline released due to our aggressive instincts.

Humorous laughter in Relief theory was also thought to be an “intellectual relief” (ibid). William Hazlitt quarrelled that it is hard to cope with the societal expectations, norms and value systems. Humour offers us temporary relief from “society’s conceptualization” by delaying the thought for a while. Freud gave a similar line of argument stating that it permits us to recreate to our “childhood freedom” where we were allowed to make mistakes without being scorned upon (ibid). As we age, the freedom of thought is restricted at every stage- from being restricted restricting to a logical perspective in academic institutions to keeping with societal expectations as we age. Humorous laughter is a temporary relief from these expectations (ibid).

2.4 Summary of Humour Theories

The three theories can be briefly summarized as the following- a notion that humour is a way of channelling your innate aggression, a notion that it is “caused by incongruity” and that humorous laughter is directly linked to release of anxiety and tension (Double, 1991). Although humorous laughter stems from various reasons, it is very evident that the cultural context is the most important. In this light, it can be inferred that the theory would apply differently in different cultural contexts. Thus, for a study of stand-up comedy in Bangalore, it is essential to have an understanding of the cultural background of the city.

3. Stand-up Comedy

3.1 Origins

At present, stand-up comedy is growing in several parts of the world, including India. However, its roots lie in 19th century America. In the 1860's, Mark Twain first began with what can today be called the origins of stand-up comedy. He toured the United States of America, and later the world, delivering humorous lectures as a means to promote his upcoming novels (Lee, 2006). The inventor of comic lectures, however, was Artemus Ward. He had a short career in the 1850's and was the first to introduce a parody of the typical informational lectures that used to be delivered in the 19th century (Austin, 1972). In many ways, Ward set the stage for Twain's success as a comic lecturer. Onstage, Mark Twain engaged in self-deprecation, mockery and narration of personal experiences. He displayed clumsy, awkward behaviour and ridiculous facial expressions to elicit laughter. Nevertheless, he also displayed command over the English language and intellect through his humour. His content mocked the typical form of lectures and questioned dominant ideas like that of manhood and respectability. At first, he performed in theatrical settings because that was how comedy was originally accepted. Later in his career, he also began performing at public events like banquets, club dinners and fundraisers, thus establishing comedy as a genre in its own right. He also commercialized and branded himself as a comedian. His comic endeavours were greatly facilitated by the growth of advertising and media that was taking place simultaneously. He thus introduced comedy as an industry that could appeal to the masses and generate considerable revenue (Lee, 2006).

After the Civil War, Vaudeville, a form of variety entertainment emerged in America. Vaudeville was a blend of music, dance, comedy and drama performed in extravagant theatres. Its content was strictly censored and prohibited any kind of vulgar language or crude humour. Audiences were expected to maintain decorum and performances were orderly and catered to the tastes of the growing middle class (Railton, 2003). As in minstrel shows, Vaudeville also initially involved humour based on ethnic stereotypes. It mocked immigrant accents, language and pronunciation through monologues and sketches. Ethnic stereotypes were a dominant theme in such variety entertainment because of the safe channel that humour provided for expression of otherwise hostile and negative feelings. Humour in art forms like

Vaudeville thus provided necessary outlets for expression of culturally “unacceptable” sentiments (Mintz, 1996). Moreover, post the Civil War, several factors like the growth of media, increase in purchasing power, improved communication facilities and changing preferences and tastes of the middle class contributed to making these forms of comedy businesses in themselves.

Vaudeville gave birth to the first performer of pure stand-up comedy. This was Bob Hope, who performed stand-up comedy as we know it today- not through a lecture or as a part of a larger theatrical act, but simply as a live monologue. He shifted the focus of American popular humour from ethnic stereotypes and generic gags to jokes that drew from local news and popular gossip of the time (Zoglin, 2010). Many other former vaudevillians like Jack Benny, Gracie Allen and George Burns also turned to radio shows during this time (Parker, 2008). The transition from radio to television occurred in the 1950’s, with shows like “The Ed Sullivan Show” and “The Tonight Show”. Comedy was broadcasted, thus reaching a wider audience.

Stand-up comedy thus began to branch out, from its humble beginnings in minstrel shows, Vaudeville and comic lectures to stand-up acts by Bob Hope and George Carlin. Several processes aided this growth. The social, economic and cultural environment of the time seems to be a dominant factor. The racial tensions in the 1840’s, post-civil war climate in the 1850’s and 1860’s and the expansion of mass media and communication in the 1900’s, all contributed to the form in one way or the other. Later, with stand-up comedy becoming more accessible, the performance space shifted from formal amphitheatres to more informal settings like fundraisers and dinner parties and later, to nightclubs. The change in the space led to greater scope for creativity. Now, performers could use different techniques to elicit laughter, like faster talking speed, subtle gestures and movements. The content too, changed from relatively safer, lighter subjects to social commentaries and a deliberate calling out of commonly held prejudices and skewed beliefs.

3.2 Comedy in India

From our traditional Sanskrit texts and their translations, to satirical writing and journalism, from stories of kings and courts to modern film and television, a distinct evolution is seen, not only in the content, but also in the medium in which it was presented to

the public. From the perspective of an uninformed bystander, it may seem that the idea of what constitutes humour in today's day and age is simply an appropriation of western culture. While this may be true to a certain extent, one cannot discount the fact that humour and satire find their roots everywhere in the world, in the follies and vices that are so characteristic of the human race. Comedy provides refuge, while the laughter it brings provides the solace that we desperately need (Siegel, 1989).

Our traditional Sanskrit literature is a veritable fount of comedy. Through Indian theatre and drama and the evergreen text *Natyashastra*, we have been provided with the concept of *rasas*, including the *hasya* rasa, which is the embodiment of all that is joyous and humorous (Mukerjee, 1965). Humour has been used a device for social commentary and even protest in our history. The witty repartee between Mughal Emperor Akbar and his chief advisor Birbal, features prominently in Indian historical tales and provides a clear example of how wit and humour has been used as a powerful medium to express the truth (Kumar, 2013).

Next, we had *Hasya Kavi Sammelan*- one of the first recorded forms of what can be called stand-up comedy in India. A number of poets would gather together to discuss humorous original verses in regional languages like Hindi and Marathi (Thakkar, 2000). In 1945, an exceptional comedian, Purushottam Laxman Deshpande, entered the Indian comedy scene. He was popularly known as Pu. La. Deshpande. He performed all his works in Marathi and was considered a legend in Maharashtra. His humour was inspired by Charlie Chaplin and P.G. Wodehouse. He produced original work that was never indecent, offensive or insulting. He used wit and puns to elicit laughter from his audience. The appeal of his humour, along with his moral code, gained him popularity and acceptance among the people. He thus introduced and popularized the concept of a solo comedy performance in India (ibid).

One of the ways that comedy was popularized was through cinema, with iconic comic actors who revolutionized the concept of comedy and were ultimately responsible for helping it reach the public. Among these, one of the few who rose to extreme prominence was the irrepressible Kishore Kumar (Valicha, 2016). Kishore derived his sense of the comic from the oral theatrical traditions of *Ramlila*, *Nautanki* and *Tamasha* which were native to his place of birth in central India. He also derived inspiration from various Hollywood stars like Danny Kaye, Gene Kelly and Donald O'Connor, whose influence helped strengthen his concept of the comic (ibid). One of the most well-known individuals who was inspired by him was

India's favourite comic-relief - Johnny Lever, who introduced mimicry in India in 1972. His performances, however, were not well-accepted by the audience at the time. It was only after his performance of the act titled *Kabaddi* that he became well known as a stand-up comedian. It was actors like Kishore Kumar and Johnny Lever who familiarized the general public with the concept of mimicry; thus, providing a different medium than those used in the past. However, in recent times, more than theatre or the big screen, comedy is presented directly to the masses through the television and the screens of their computers.

When it comes to English language stand-up comedy, the origins in India can be traced back to the year 2003, when videos of Indian-origin Canadian comedian Russell Peters took YouTube by storm. This coincided with the Internet boom in India and was especially appealing to the growing middle class in metro cities in India (Paul, 2017). Indian audiences received a first-hand taste with the return of comedian Vir Das to the country (ibid). This led to several changes in the way comedy was performed and perceived in India. The content of comedians transitioned from mimicry to humourous and often satirical accounts of their observations about their surroundings. Vir Das and Papa CJ, the comedians who brought about stand-up comedy as we know it today, had both been educated abroad, and their work was thus heavily influenced by the West. Their manner of performance became popular among the younger generation; a generation that was attracted to the ways of the West to begin with.

In 2005 came "The Great Indian Laughter Challenge", the first television show in India that gave comedians a platform to showcase their talent in front of a live audience and judges. To delve deeper into the same, the example of two Indian shows that first aired in 2006 can be referred to. The first, *The Week That Wasn't (TWTW)*, featured newly-popular comedian Cyrus Broacha and was a mixture of news parody and caricatures, skits and impersonations. The second, *Gustakhi Maaf* (trans. "Excuse the Transgression") was a satirical puppet show. The shows addressed very similar issues, yet employed distinct approaches of execution. This gap is mainly seen in the languages that these shows used to put forth their content and the themes that they focussed on (whether urban or rural), and though both were seen to feature a comic interpretation of national news events, their area of emphasis varies (Kumar, 2013). The Indian ethos is pivotal to the success of these comedy shows; however, the type of audiences they address are mutually exclusive. Among these

patterns is that of the “split public” as described by A. Rajagopal which is a population divided on the basis of language and caste. Differences that were previously mediated through the print media now become increasingly salient and must be mediated in intricate and complicated ways by a media that is linguistically split (Rajagopal, 2009).

However, there was a noticeable boom in English-language stand-up comedy in the year 2008, something that was aided by both the growth of the comedy culture as well as social media. As Bhat and Griffin (2013) found, this was prominently seen in cities like Mumbai and Bengaluru which had an established pub culture, electronic music nights and karaoke culture. These had become stagnant and the owners wanted something new and trendy in order to attract customers (Paul, 2017).

The way for this was paved by the growth of YouTube in 2005 and 2006, which was growing in India as an online platform for individuals to upload and share content. This allowed for comedians to have their own virtual space and individual online shows. This also allowed for greater viewership. With the advent of YouTube in India, exposure to various media increased and performers and audiences began viewing and appreciating humour and content from beyond India as well (Bhat T., Grover V., & Das, V., 2015).

Following the torchbearers of Indian stand-up comedy, YouTube also gave birth to Russell Peters, AIB and a number of other comedy groups as well as independent comedians. YouTube thus provided a safe online space for comedians to create and share content. However, Indian stand-up comedy has not grown without its fair share of problems. Censorship continues to be a major issue today, one that several comedians are taking a stand against. The issues with censorship were brought to the forefront after the release of the AIB Roast, where Indian audiences took offense to the type of humour used in the show.

Apart from censorship, the gender gap in the Indian stand-up comedy scene is also a prominent issue. The growing industry has so far been male-dominated, with only a few female comedians like Aditi Mittal and Radhika Vaz. The lack of acceptance of female comedians may be due to the notion that women cannot be funny (Sarwat, 2015). Despite these roadblocks, at present the Indian stand-up comedy scene continues to grow at an unprecedented rate, with new performers, both male and female, entering the industry every day. The concept of humour that we have today has developed as a consequence of India’s

diverse history and in the process, has developed a sense of humour that is particular to our country.

3.3 Globalisation and Stand-up Comedy in Bangalore

According to Martin Albrow, “globalisation refers to all those processes by which the people of the world are incorporated into a single world society, global society” (“Globalisation”, n.d.). Globalisation reached Indian shores in 1991, with the opening up of the Indian economy to foreign trade (Hensman, n.d.). This brought with it the inflow of foreign culture, through food, fashion and television. The lifestyle of citizens changed and the extent of this change is evident in the tastes and preferences of Indian consumers. Family systems shifted from joint to nuclear, individuals relocated in search of employment, digital media like the internet and television were introduced in every home and accessibility to the ideas and culture of the West increased manifold (Overgaard, 2010). Several theorists even argue that globalisation primarily meant homogenisation in the Western direction and led to an Americanisation of world popular culture (Mudgal, 2011).

Some sociologists like Dominic Strinati define Americanisation as the substitution of one culture with American culture. However, others like Dick Hebdige present a different picture of the term. Hebdige focusses on reinterpretation rather than substitution. He defines Americanisation as the re-assembly and rearranging of American “iconography” (i.e. symbols and objects) in different contexts and cultures. In his opinion, one set of symbols in America can be used and interpreted completely differently in a different country to match with its unique culture and context (Sjobohm, 2008). This explanation of Americanisation can be applied to stand-up comedy, wherein the basic structure of an oral performance is adapted in different places to include its regional languages and references. For example, though stand-up comedy originated in the United States, it is performed in India, often using a mix of English and Hindi and involves jokes that an Indian audience would relate to. Appropriate examples would be Kenneth Sebastian’s “Taking a Bucket Bath in India” or Biswa Kalyan Rath’s “Extroverts and Chaos”, where he speaks about Indian festivals like Holi and Diwali.

When referring to globalisation in India, the city of Bengaluru is an essential component that cannot be ignored. It is touted as the Silicon Valley of India and the “embodiment of a newly liberalized Indian economy and globalized Indian culture” (Lukose,

2005, 921). Among the metropolises in India, Bengaluru is one of the few cities that showcases the highest growth in terms of global popular culture (Raghavendra, 2009).

There are several reasons for Bengaluru's strong association with globalisation. During the British rule, the colonizers particularly favoured Bengaluru because of its pleasant climate and living conditions. The cultural effects of this favourable attitude can be seen in the fact that today, Bengaluru is the hub of the information technology sector in India (Raghavendra, 2009; Stremlau, 1996). In the 1980's, it was found that an increasing number of US-based Indian workers have a tendency to return to India in the long-run because of the increasing employment opportunities in India. These returnees seek occupation in cities like Bengaluru and Hyderabad, which offer them career prospects as well as a more familiar, western working environment. It should be known that by virtue of being transnational migrants, people create identities and connections which are tied to more than one nation. Thus, the returnees bring with them the culture, ideas and trends of the West. The effects of these new influences are seen most in the rising middle class, which constantly seeks to grow and is thus most susceptible to these changes (Chacko, 2007).

All of these factors have created a "new middle class" in Bengaluru, a class of people most directly interacting with the global lifestyle. This class of people adapt to the modern work culture, which manifests in their personal lifestyles as well. They accept and encourage the popular culture of the West and integrate it into their lives (Upadhyaya, 2009). This is explanatory of the youth-oriented culture of Bengaluru, a culture with a vibrant nightlife and numerous bars, pubs and restaurants spread out across the city (Patni, 1999).

The Americanisation of popular culture led to a number of changes in Indian film, television shows, music, social media and more recently, even introduced stand-up comedy in India. Earlier, television and cinema were the only forms of popular media consumed in India. Although creative content existed, there was no accessible medium that could be used to consume it. With the spread of globalisation, the availability and accessibility of different media forms increased. The new cultural environment became more participation-oriented. It began allowing for greater creative freedom and expression due to reduced production costs and a wider audience (Grindstaff, 2008).

In Bangalore, thus, the city environment, with its growing number of pubs and cafes, its history and link with globalisation, and its present-day consumers, who are a mix of Indian residents and US-based returnees, together foster the growth of stand-up comedy in the city.

4. Conditions of Stand-up Comedy

4.1 Performers

Several studies have been conducted into the nature and characteristics of different kinds of artists such as dancers, musicians and actors. However, there is very little existing research on the characteristics of stand-up comedians (Greengross et.al., 2008). Stand-up comedy is a unique performance art that requires a set of skills unlike any other art form. Gaining insight into the nature of stand-up comedians, their characteristics and the techniques and strategies they use on-stage would further research in the field of stand-up comedy as a whole.

Stand-up comedy has grown to become a competitive industry, involving extensive travel, low job security and in the initial stages of one's career, even low income. It is a high-risk profession that could either pay off, catapulting the individual to success, or lead to complete failure. Unlike other art forms, stand-up comedy does not have specialized training institutions or educational support systems. In most cases, it exists as an isolated industry, where the comedian himself is responsible completely for his success or failure. This unique nature of this profession indicates that stand-up comedians have a specialized set of skills and characteristics that allow them to thrive in this business (ibid).

A study conducted to measure the scores of stand-up comedians on the Big Five Personality Traits (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism) confirmed the above statement. It was found that stand-up comedians are more open to experiences than the average population. This is because their profession requires them to brew fresh content regularly based on popular culture and daily news so as to engage their audience. Comedians were found to score low on conscientiousness. Earlier research has shown that people who score low on conscientiousness are more prone to use negative humour. This could explain why comedians often use self-deprecating and sometimes even crude humour in their performances. The most interesting finding, however, was that

comedians are more introverted than the average population. Due to the nature of their profession, one would assume that comedians would score high on extraversion. However, the contrary is found to be true. This shows that a comedian's onstage persona is very different from their real-life personality. Their profession demands an extroverted, easy-going and conversational onstage personality. However, a distinction must be made between their personalities on and off-stage (ibid).

During their performances, stand-up comedians present to their audience a self that has been socially constructed. The self they present on-stage is designed specifically for the performance. Although the comedian seems to be his authentic self on stage, it is important to understand that that is a part of his/her job. Laughter can be more easily elicited if the audience feels comfortable in the presence of the performer. This comfort is established through the presentation of a constructed authentic self. A fair amount of rehearsal and preparation goes into the creation of this self. Thus, there is a level of artificiality and theatre in stand-up comedy (Lee, 2006). Comedians may thus either amplify their eccentricity on-stage or become more dry and blunt, so as to best present their humorous content (Říčný, 2014).

Apart from the construction of the self, a comedian also uses several other techniques and strategies as part of his performance. Stand-up comedy is essentially a form of public speaking since it involves interaction between one individual and a group of individuals. Thus, several aspects of public speaking, like the use of logos and pathos, come into play in stand-up comedy. Comedians also use basic techniques of public speaking in their performances. Maintenance of eye contact and talking to their audience instead of at them, is one of the most important ones. They modulate their voices and use pauses as and when required. Good comedians tend to pause just after a joke and wait until the laughter is just dying out to deliver their next line. This allows the residual laughter be carried on to the next joke. Comic timing thus plays an important role in the performance (ibid).

Comedians also make use of the stage, walking from one end to the other with the microphone, establishing their presence as casual and easy going in the process. Today, stand-up comedians also use subtle gestures and facial expressions as part of their acts. Since venues for performances tend to be smaller and more intimate, the audience can observe and appreciate these subtleties. Comedians often even engage their audience in the performance

by asking them questions about their lives or inviting them on-stage for one section of the act. They may even gently make fun of their audience, so as to establish a level of comfort with them (ibid).

Improvisation and spontaneity are also skills that stand-up comedians consider essential to their performance. They often leave room for spontaneity so as to deal with unforeseen circumstances during the performance. Comedians have to adjust to the different circumstances of every show. This requires some level of skill in improvisation and extempore speech (ibid).

Taking into consideration the nature and demands of the profession, two essential aspects of a comedian's personality shine through. The first is the willingness and commitment to improvement. The success of a joke, an act or a set is determined by the audience. The stand-up comedian is thus committed to re-work and improve his content based on the varied responses he may receive from the audience. The comedian's work is thus a process of trial and error. It involves working and reworking of content to suit the changing tastes of various audiences. This requires a second personality trait- confidence. It is essential for the comedian to have confidence in the material he has created and in his ability as a performer. In fact, many comedians go so far as to say that confidence is what sells their comedy at the end of the day (ibid).

4.2 Content

One of the most important aspects that dictates the success and appeal of a comedian is the content of the performance. To begin with, the 'Humour Theories' form a means by which the content of a comedian can be analysed (Jenkins, 2015). In his article, "Was it Something They Said? Stand-up Comedy and Progressive Social Change", three major theories of comedy are mentioned. These theories are classified into three categories. The first is the study of humour in everyday life and organizational settings. The second is the study of satire in contemporary media and the third is the study of identity politics and representation. The element of content thus plays an important role as it is the primary means by which the comedian connects with the audience and vice versa. Through the content of a performance, audiences are given the opportunity to infer what the comedian believes is important in terms of social, political and cultural issues. Further, the comedian is also able to

encourage or initiate discussions on various topics by structuring his or her performance to emphasize on such topics. The structure of the content and how it is written also plays an important role in the delivery of the joke or message. One of the primary factors of content that has undoubtedly contributed to the unprecedented growth and success of the field of stand-up comedy is its ability to initiate and develop social commentary.

The history of social commentary in comedy in general and in stand-up comedy specifically, is explored in the essay 'Stand-up Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation' by Lawrence E Mintz. In this essay, Mintz states that "Stand-up comedy is arguably the oldest, most universal, basic and deeply significant form of humorous expression" (Mintz, 1985, p. 71). The use of comedy as a social form of commentary can be traced as far back as the courts of the kings in the Middle Ages (Mintz, 1985). Jesters of the court played a pivotal role at a time when no one could question the authority and the action of the king. The jesters were the only ones who could point out the king's follies. This was predominantly done through two devices of comedic expression i.e. humour and satire. Thus, through the use of humour, the jester was given the license to discuss issues without having to worry about offending someone. Subsequently, the role of the jester also had a social significance as at the time he alone appeared to embody the right to free speech. Looking at it from this perspective, the relevance of stand-up comedy today still falls along the same lines as it allows the audience to vicariously release their frustrations or disillusionments about society through the opinions put forward by the comedian. The fact that these frustrations are not limited to a single person creates a feeling of "community" in the audience thereby making this experience more enjoyable (Mintz, 1985, p. 73). Mintz's essay also quotes British cultural anthropologist, Victor Turner, who views stand-up comedy as a ritual in culture (Mintz, 1985, p. 73). Turner talks of how such a positioning has the ability to not only generate discussion about various aspects of society but also to change certain attitudes and beliefs that exist within that society (Mintz, 1985).

One of the primary functions of stand-up is social commentary. Hence, a significant amount of the content of a comedian comes from political, social and cultural issues. However, when it comes to putting their views and observations across, stand-up comedians have a distinct advantage over anthropologists for a variety of reasons. To start with, comedians have the liberty to tackle "taboo" and socially "sensitive" topics with an ease that

eludes anthropologists (Timler, 2012, p. 50). The boundaries that other forms of entertainment and anthropological studies possess is transcended by stand-up to reach the audience in the most impactful, enjoyable and inoffensive way. This is primarily due to the elements of “humour” and “oral narrative” that stand-up comedians employ (Timler, 2012, p. 49). When applied properly, these factors allow the comedians to talk about such topics in a manner that “distorts” the seriousness of the issue without undermining it (ibid). The interactive nature of the stand-up comedian and the “dynamic” and “oral” nature of the field are also huge contributors to its content and popularity. By evolving in tandem with society and culture, stand-up comedy provides a deep insight into the contemporary culture that exists in that time frame in a way that anthropology cannot match up to (ibid). For example, the female stand-up comedian, Joan Rivers, always depicted her body and femininity in a “negative” light as it did not comply to society’s standards. However, as the years went by she soon switched to a positive stand when it came to her body and not conforming to what was a male-centric notion of beauty.

For the development of content, the majority of comedians take inspiration from their surroundings and the effect that it has on their lives. The difference that exists between the content of comedians in India and those of Indian origin who live in other parts of the world is primarily due to the difference in culture and society that they experience. While an Indian comedian might poke fun at the educational system in our country, an Indian comedian living abroad might highlight the prejudice that minorities face in those countries. This point may be emphasized by analysing the content of two of the biggest comedians of Indian origin in America- Russell Peters and Hari Kondabolu. Stand-up comedy has always played a huge part in America not only in the lives of the American people but even those of other ethnic minorities. It is here that comedians such as Russell Peters and Hari Kondabolu took to the stage to speak about issues such as racism and prejudice (Krishnamurthy, 2015). This article by Krishnamurthy credits these performers with not only transforming the existing idea of the Indian culture but also breaking stereotypical ideas that existed in the minds of foreigners. “Armed with a vast array of talents, comedians of Indian descent – particularly stand-up performers – have managed to defy both the entertainment industry’s intractable barriers of race and the conventional three-C’s conception of South Asian culture as hinged purely upon cows, curry, and computers” (ibid). This variation in content provides a significant link to

this research as the success of stand-up comedians of Indian descent in countries such as America proves that the content of comedy need not be restricted to just one culture for it to be accepted. Content is not just an element but a process that facilitates different races to participate and interact with each other in a way that enforces cultural understanding between two diverse ethnicities. In the case of the Indians in America, it serves as an educative platform to not just the people of America but also the residents of India, as it gives us an idea about the troubles faced specifically by the minorities abroad.

The analysis of content can also be done from the very structure of the performance that a comedian has created. An analysis of the physical nature of the content or rather the way in which it was written appears to contain the actual essence of humour. As stated earlier, the appeal of stand-up lies in its ability to deliver a message in a funny way and hence comedians take great care when structuring their content. Many of them attempt to organize their content in a way that flows and hence takes the audience on a journey.

The Journey of a Joke web-series shows us truly how significant structure and content creation are. Created by its host, Abish Matthew, Journey of a Joke is the title of multiple online videos wherein Matthews interviews prominent Indian stand-up comics and discusses their approach and ideology toward stand-up. While a lot of techniques are commonly used and seen in the shows of all these performers, techniques such as punchlines, tags and call backs, the content creation process of each of these performers is rather unique and individual to them. While people like Biswa Kalyan Rath (Matthew, 2016a) and Kenneth Sebastian (Matthew, 2016c) go on stage with tentative ideas upon which they develop and improvise, Kannan Gill (Matthew, 2016b) is an example of a performer who goes on stage with a fully fabricated set and script from which there is no deviation.

However, the common point discovered by Abish Matthew through his interviews was that the underlying factor bringing these heterogeneous approaches together was the fact that for any joke to get a laugh, it must be relatable. A joke will only be found funny if it resonates with some similar lived experience or memory of the audience member, therefore making it humorous and eliciting laughter. This quest for relatability often leads comedians to theatricalities like body language and voice modulation, both of which make the audience feel like they are a part of the scene being described by the performer. This makes it easier for

them to laugh as their involvement in the performance helps make the content and its creator more relatable and likeable.

Comedians also utilize themes for their performances which allows the performance to be more organized and hence better appreciated. For example, Hassan Minaj, a famous American comedian of Indian origin, debuted a comedy special called “Homecoming King” on Netflix in 2017, in which he speaks of his childhood in America and the problems his family faced as immigrants. Minaj’s personal account thus provided a structure to the performance which would certainly not have been as impactful had he simply been speaking about the issue.

Another feature of the analysis of stand-up comedy includes the language aspect. Comedians, along with using the primary language also use the local languages and that gives a more relatable feel to the entire act. A stand-up comedian performing in India must have to alter their content a little for a performance in Gurgaon to what they may have performed in Bengaluru. It can sometimes become as narrow as the areas in the city. With this, the quality and clarity of voice also plays a very important role. The comedian is expected to be able to imitate voices of different people and be able to copy certain regional accents and also use some local language to make his/her performance better and more relevant. It is also very important for comedians to realize where to draw the line. The subjects that they plan to talk about must be chosen carefully keeping in mind the realities at that point and the region they perform in.

4.3 Audience

Stand-up comedy is not a self-contained art form. It is a more collaborative performance in real time, which acknowledges the presence of an audience, and in fact, even relies on incorporating the audience into the performance. It depends on the immediate response of the audience (Wilson, 2011). There are various ways in which the audience tends to respond, including laughter, applause, cheers, and sometimes whistles. Negative audience responses, such as jeers and boos, also occur, although they are not nearly as common (Říčný, 2014). At times, some audience members even interrupt the performance to make comments. Such people are termed as ‘hecklers’, and are generally unwelcome, although the

ability to deal with hecklers, and other interruptions or things that happen during a performance, often acts as a show of the skill of a comedian (Říčný, 2014).

As such, the audience itself plays a very significant and active role in the creation of meaning and humour, and the evaluation of the humour in stand-up comedy is also entirely dependent on the audience (Říčný, 2014; Wilson, 2011). For one, the humour itself is defined, or established, by virtue of the laugh it receives from the audience. In a performance like stand-up comedy, the individual audience in each instance acts as the final arbiter of humour: their laughter, or lack thereof, defines, or indicates, the humour for that moment. Further, the context in which the joke occurs also plays a huge role in determining whether or not it will be well received, as a different context would alter the expectations of the audience. It follows that a joke must be located in a certain time and place. Its humour in one situation does not guarantee its humour in another (Wilson, 2011).

Říčný draws parallels between the audience of stand-up comedy and that of theatre. Theatre, like stand-up comedy, cannot exist without an audience, and over thousands of years, multiple methods have developed which manipulate the reactions and feelings, and even the thoughts evoked in the audience. For one, group dynamics, which describes “the functioning of humans when they come together into groups”, is a significant factor in stand-up comedy (Říčný, 2014). In a group, the tendency of an individual to laugh or react in a certain way is notably influenced by the reaction of the rest of the group. The more people an individual finds around himself enjoying a show, the more likely the individual is to also enjoy the show (Říčný, 2014). Interestingly, stand-up comedy is regarded by most as a social event, and most audience members tend to attend stand-up comedy events along with their friends or family members (Lockyer & Myers, 2011). In such performances, the audience must also suspend their disbelief and willingly “agree to the concept of a quasi-reality” which they will be witnessing for the duration of the show (Říčný, 2014). To this end, a certain aesthetic distance is also created between the audience and the performer (Říčný, 2014).

Friedman, in his study of the audience at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, identified a certain dissonance in the way in which different sets of people articulated their preferences about comedy. In this study, it was found that respondents with ‘high cultural capital’ tended to prefer certain comedy based on its perceived sophistication, or the intelligence associated with the comedy. On the other hand, respondents with ‘low cultural capital’ also show a

preference towards ‘clever’ comedy. However, their notion of cleverness has less to do with intelligence, and more to do with the comedian's ability to generate humour from universal, or mundane experiences (Lockyer & Myers, 2011).

From the perspective of the audience, there appears to be a lot of appreciation, and even respect, of the skill required for the comedian to perform in a live stand-up show. The comedian is admired for the courage it takes to take on the stage in isolation, and single-handedly attempt to entertain the audience (Lockyer & Myers, 2011). There is also a distinct appeal in the unpredictability of stand-up comedy, and the anticipation which comes along with it. This also leads to some stand-up comedians losing a certain aspect of their appeal as they become more popular, as their content becomes more accessible, and thus loses its edge (ibid). Another major appeal of stand-up comedy is the close proximity, and the resulting feeling of intimacy. The fact that the comedian is right in front of the audience, and usually on a low stage and even interacting with the audience, allows audience members to feel more involved, and like they are truly a part of what is going on (ibid). Unlike most stage performances, in solo stand-up comedy, “the comedian is addressing the audience, not other performers on the stage, and needs to build rapport”. The potential and possibility for interaction also adds to the allure of stand-up. Though some audience members also dread being ‘picked on’ by the comedian, this again adds to the unpredictability of the show (ibid). Further, stand-up comedy is a performance that provides for the share of a collective experience of being in ‘the moment’ (ibid).

All performing arts involve an audience. However, in stand-up comedy specifically, the audience seems to play an especially important role. This could be owing to the interactive nature of the art form, and the fact that it is performed in more intimate spaces, as is discussed in the following section. The audience thus becomes an essential subject of study within the sphere of stand-up comedy.

4.4 Venues

To facilitate a performance, what one primarily requires is the existence of a suitable space. But how much does this space affect how receptive audiences are, or how people react to certain content? A large part of the cultural phenomenon of stand-up comedy that we see today has to do with the spaces in which it is performed. Stand-up is, arguably, one of the

more engaging types of performance with the intrinsic relationship between the artist and the audience being a large part of the success of the show. This relationship can be seen in the frequent questions the artist poses to the audience, along with the many jokes that are often cracked at the expense of the audience themselves. What such a performance dynamic means is that a traditional restaurant setting where patrons seat themselves is not be ideal for a stand-up performance, as it would greatly reduce the aspect of audience engagement that is required in a stand-up show.

When one imagines the scene of a stand-up comedy venue, what comes to mind is the quintessential image of a dark intimate space, with the audience facing the stage, and a spotlight focused on the sole performer. Live performance is one of the main ways the effect of space can be studied, preferably at one of the small comedy clubs or intimate night-club rooms. The size of the venue is used to perform two important functions; the comedian establishes the nature of the audience by asking questions of a few people close by or by making statements about the audience followed by a call for agreement. The comedian must establish for the audience that the group is homogenous in order to successfully “work the room,” and allow freedom of laughter (Mintz, 1985). This comfort of being able to find the humour in a particular quip or joke is partly owed to the intimacy of the venue and the slight bonhomie that it creates amongst the viewers, even though the people in the audience do not usually interact with one another.

Within the venue, the setting and the arrangement of the physical elements of the performance play a key role. In order to foster a sense of familiarity, intimacy, community and comfort, the stage is set close to the audience. By doing this, it is ensured that comics are not at too much of a distance from the audience, neither are they looming above them, a physical barrier that could make it hard for the audience to get comfortable with the performer (Brodie, 2008). Venues such as these tend to have dim lighting, low ceilings, rowed seating and the tables, if any, are small and unobtrusive. The comedian on stage is made the focus of the homogenized audience through lighting that focuses on them (Atkinson, 2008 as cited in Quirk, 2011). Unimportant though it may seem, different levels of audience reaction and comfort tend to be observed based on the proximity of people to one another. Where some believe that allowing patrons to sit at a distance from one another affords them the comfort to laugh at their own time, others are of the opinion that keeping

chairs closer together taps into the characteristic of laughter as being infectious, thereby helping people laugh easier. In addition to putting emphasis on the performer, the lights also play a role when it comes to the topic of audience inhibition as they allow people in the audience a certain level of darkness and hence ambiguity, something that often helps people let loose and laugh along with others (Emmerson, 2015). A relaxed atmosphere and informal setting is instrumental to the success of a stand-up comedy performance; this is because along with being an art, it is also a dialogue of sorts between the comedian and their audience. Their jokes and jibes, puns and jests are all based on how engaging the audience is, and this is dictated largely by how conducive a particular venue is for propagating a certain type of ambience.

When one speaks of the venue and the size of it, one cannot dismiss the effect of the number of people that are filling a particular space. It has been found that as audience size increases, so does the number of laughs from the audience per joke. Such large venues and audiences are usually seen for the shows of the biggest names in stand-up comedy. In addition, the length of time spent laughing by the audience is proportional to the size of the audience (Rutter, 1997). An interesting contrast to this however is the equal popularity of smaller clubs which allow a more comfortable and cosy setting. This is not to suggest that one is better than the other, only that large live shows and smaller scale shows have their own respective points of allure, with a smaller venue perhaps allowing the audience to feel slightly more special and included in the performance, as compared to the experience of mere observation that most people have in large venue stand-up comedy shows.

The paramount importance of the venue in stand-up further comes to light when we see that despite the art coming of age through social media and the internet, patrons of live shows find that their attendance is infinitely more memorable and special than just viewing a video. Venues of live stand-up comedy provide a platform for stand-up comedians and enthusiasts and have succeeded for numerous aesthetic and social reasons. There are five main themes, of which a few are facilitated merely by the space within which this performance happens. The themes are: “respecting the stand-up comedian; expecting the unexpected; proximity and intimacy; opportunities for interaction; and sharing the comic experience” (Lockyer & Myers, 2011). Thus, for a stand-up comedy performance to reach its pinnacle, the appropriate venue is an absolute necessity.

5. Conclusion

Following a thorough review of the available literature on the topic of stand-up comedy, a lack of extensive research on stand-up comedy in the Indian context was found. To begin with, the effect of our diverse culture on a performance style that has been adopted from the West is under-researched. With regard to the functioning of the stand-up comedy industry, the specific skills, techniques and strategies employed by Indian comedians when performing and the role stand-up comedy plays in enabling social commentary and discussion of issues that are otherwise taboo within our country remain relatively unexplored. Stand-up comedy is influenced, not just by the performer, but also by the space of the performance. The effect that the space and setting has on particular performances and how they are received is another aspect that requires more attention. Further, the economic viability of the profession and the reasons behind there being a majority of male comics in the circuit, and why female comics are considered “unfunny” are also significant gaps in existing literature.

We aim to fulfil and further expound on these topics through our research, which will take place through a case study of the stand-up comedy scene in the city of Bengaluru, India. Stand-up comedy has become an increasingly popular form of entertainment in the recent years, and there is no specific literature detailing the history of its growth, the effect of our diverse culture on performance and the reception of stand-up comedy by audiences. Enthraling the audience is absolutely instrumental to the success of stand-up comedy as a performance art; there are specific skills, techniques and strategies employed by comedians when performing. Stand-up comedy enables social commentary and discussion of issues that are otherwise “taboo” and “sensitive” in nature (Timler, 2012). This is something that has not yet been looked at in the context of India, a country that is currently in the process of rapid economic, social, and political change. Space, setting and the composition of the audience also impacts the reception of a stand-up comedy performance, and this is something that our research aims to explore in greater depth. Indian comedians are shaping and making their own the way that stand-up comedy is performed. This is highly relevant to the India of today, especially due to the dearth of research regarding the reasons behind the development of certain cultures. India’s culture is not limited solely to its heritage, and this is a phenomenon that we wish to explore further.

Though comedy has always been an integral part of our entertainment culture, stand-up comedy is not a traditional Indian performing art. The evolution and adaptation of stand-up comedy as a part of the modern Indian culture, especially in metropolitan cities is primarily due to the westernization and globalization that has collectively taken place in India (Bhat & Griffin, 2013). Though the culture of the countries that stand-up comedy has been adopted from is not the same as that of India, Indian comics have found various ways of adapting their performances to suit and appeal to Indian audiences. This may range from content to performative techniques, and is something we aim to explore further through our research. Stand-up comedy may also be used as a medium of social commentary. As a developing country, India has constant economic, political and social reforms. We hope to explore this further, along with the taboo on addressing certain topics. Lastly, there is a dearth of research on the economic dynamics of stand-up comedy as a profession, and also how economically viable it is to host stand-up comedians at venues. This is something we aim to explore on field.

CHAPTER 3: DATA ANALYSIS 1

1. Introduction

The research can be classified into three stages - pre-field, on-field and post-field work. During the pre-field stage, we developed the research question, aims and objectives based on existing literature for stand-up comedy. We conducted a sample audio interview with Ms. Ayushi Jagad, a comedian, and email interviews with academics Dr. Oliver J Double, Dr. Rebecca Krefting and Dr. John Limon. Following this, we travelled to Bangalore for our on-field work. We took audience surveys and conducted semi structured interviews with comedians, venue owners and comic producers in order to fulfil the aims and objective of our research. The interviews have been recorded in audio and video formats with the consent of the interviewees.

2. Quantitative Analysis

During the post-field work, the data collected from on-field interviews were transcribed. The analysis was executed using two methods. The content was evaluated quantitatively by coding the data according to the three “Global” themes - space and setting, performers and audience (Stirling, 2007). The quantitative analysis was performed to find the reliability of the “Organizing” and “Basic” themes developed based on the pre-field and on-field findings (ibid). Three individuals with inter-coder reliability manually found relevant keywords under each theme separately. Later, the common themes were compiled and using the software ‘Statistical Package for Social Sciences’ (SPSS), the reliability quotient of the Organizing and Basic themes was evaluated.

The second method employed was qualitative analysis. In his thesis *Paper Women: The Representation of Female Offenders in Irish Newspapers*, Black expounds that, for the analysis of a pre-existing “social phenomenon”, it is suitable to start with a quantitative method, before following a qualitative exploration of meaning (2009). Therefore, the second part of the analysis was done using qualitative thematic analysis.

3. Thematic Analysis

“Thematic analysis is a process for encoding qualitative information” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4). The process involves multiple “codes” which may vary from a list of themes, pointers or ideas that are mutually exhaustive of the aims and objectives of the research (ibid). The theme can be developed either inductively or deductively. Creating themes on the basis of raw data is inductive analysis whereas using prior research to develop themes is deductive analysis. In this research, we have incorporated both inductive and deductive analysis to create codes and using quantitative analysis, we have established the reliability of the themes (ibid).

The process of thematic analysis was best suited for the data analysis of this research. Being a theory driven project, it helps in narrowing our rich, vast data in a concise manner while focusing on the aims and objectives. It further supported in identifying various links “between the evolving themes and the entire data” (Alhojailan, 2012, p. 45). Due to deductive analysis, we were able to develop codes during the pre-field stages when there was no link “between the data gathered and the result of the process itself”. Thus, it helped us compare and find a relationship between the information gathered pre-field and on-field even though the data was gathered at different stages, time and participants. “In this case, the potential for interpretation became infinite”(ibid).

3.1 Steps in Thematic Analysis

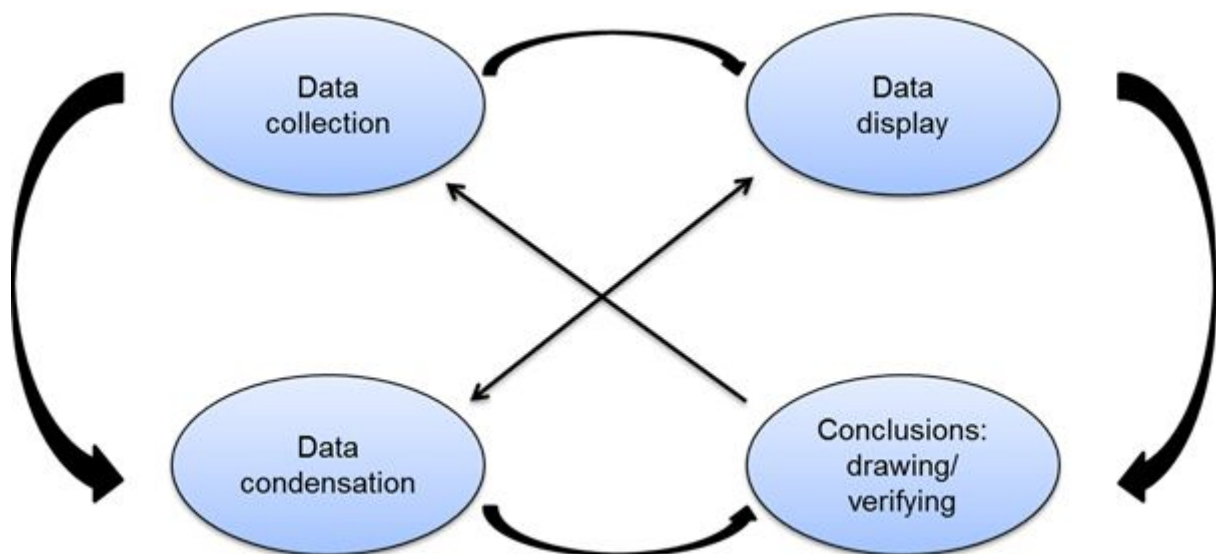


Fig.1. The Miles and Huberman model for data analysis

For the research on ‘Stand-up comedy in Bangalore’, we have used the Miles and Huberman model for data analysis which involves three inter-linked phases – Data condensation, data display and conclusion drawing and verification. “Data condensation refers to the process of selecting, focusing and simplifying, abstracting, and/or transforming data that appear in the full corpus of written up field notes, interview transcripts documents and other empirical material” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 1994). The process involves categorising the data based on the pre-existing codes in order to develop concise yet powerful content (ibid). Data display is the “organised compressed assembly of information” (ibid). Both Data Condensation and Display are about presenting the observations in an orderly fashion. The final stage in Miles and Huberman model is analysis and drawing inferences where the condensed data is used to find patterns and draw conclusions.

Data condensation and display happened simultaneously during our analysis. The codes for our research were developed during the pre-field and post-field stages based on the global themes. With the use of ‘SPSS’ the reliability of the codes was established. Following this, the team divided into smaller groups of four in order to analyse a fraction of the transcripts and categorise it based on the codes. Each individual highlighted appropriate phrases in the designated transcripts and in the small groups, categorised it into the most suitable theme. Later, as a team, we compiled the data of all the interviews based on the codes.

Once the data had been sorted, the final stage of research involved drawing inferences. The inferences were drawn based on the patterns drawn from our on-field findings and the data analysis.

4. Themes for Analysis

Performer

Stand-up comedy has no single definition that encompasses its various features. The same goes for the performer of stand-up comedy- the stand-up comedian. Adde Malmberg describes a stand-up comedian through a list of features. These include the need to be funny, to be alone on stage, the need for direct performer-audience interaction, being alone on stage and the need to be completely oneself when performing, among others (Malmberg as cited in

Sjobohm, 2008). However, this list is not completely applicable since several comedians perform in groups or may take on several roles and play characters when performing (Sjobohm, 2008). This list is thus not an exhaustive one. Two things that seem to be an important part of what makes a stand-up comedy performer, however, are originality and relatability (Sjobohm, 2008; Keisalo, 2016). The comedian is expected to bring to the stage self-created content with the goal of eliciting laughter by being able to relate to the audience and their context. To better understand the role of a performer, several aspects related to him have been analysed.

Structure

The basic structure of a joke includes three components- the build-up, the pivot and the punchline (Hockett, 1960 as cited in Schwarz, 2010). The build-up is the introduction to a joke, the pivot is the phrase around which the joke is centred and the punchline is the conclusion and delivery of the final joke (ibid). Sacks (1972) describes the structure of a joke as that of a story, with a preface, body and response sequence. Different comedians may use different variations of these structures or devise new structures all together to suit their content and on-stage persona. It is important to study the structure that a comedian chooses to create his or her joke around because it allows for a classification of jokes into different categories. Lew says that the biggest problem in the classification of jokes is the tendency to try to put together contradictory elements under a single category (1997). There is thus a need to expand the classificatory categories of jokes. To do this, understanding the various structures used by comedians is of the biggest help.

Content

Content refers to the material that a stand-up comedian performs on stage. The content of the stand-up comedian is a useful source of information because it helps to learn about various aspects related to social and political situation of a society, its language traditions and core beliefs (Sjobohm, 2008). For instance, if comedians use humour that plays to stereotypes, it is reflective of the cultural stereotypes prevalent in that society. Medhurst views comedy as a “cultural thermometer” because it can reflect the state of society (2005, 6). Often, jokes also tend to be an embodiment and experiences of an individual in his or her social context (Correll, 1997). Sanford Pinsker speaks about the “cultural timing” of humour

and how it relates not only to the performer, but to the “zeitgeist”, the beliefs and values governing a time (1988, 822). What performers joke about and what the audience finds funny thus are representative of their social context. Comedians could use their content to either reinforce existing beliefs or reforming them (Henkle, 1982). Thus, the content of a comedian has immense power and an understanding of society is possible through the recognition and explanation of comedic content as a site of struggling ideas (Mcgachy, 2012).

Techniques and Strategies

A stand-up comedy act appears to be rather simple and straightforward, with a performer coming on-stage with material to make the audience laugh (Glick, 2007). However, the truth is far from that. stand-up comedy is a complex phenomenon where the performer engages in interaction, while also maintaining his or her role as a performer. Thus, the performer must give the audience control while also maintaining control himself. The performance also involves the effective use of conversational speech to elicit laughter (Brodie, 2008). The comedian cannot appear as though his performance is rehearsed. It must come off as casual and informal. The comedian employs several techniques and strategies to achieve these complex goals. Some include eye-contact, voice modulation and intonation (Říčný, 2014). Stand-up comedy thus seems to have some basic formulas that dictate delivery. The existence of stand-up comedy workshops provides further evidence for this because it means that there are common strategies that are followed and used in a performance (Rutter, 1997). However, different stand-up comedians use different strategies on stage and have unique manners of delivery that become characteristic of their performance. Analysing techniques and strategies would thus provide insight into the complexities of a performance that appears casual and simple.

Role of a Host

An important aspect of the stand-up comedy who is often neglected, is the host. Open mics and performances with several comedians in the line-up always have a host who introduces each act and acts as a filler between performances. Despite the role that host seems to play in a stand-up comedy performance, there is very little existing literature on it. This theme arose as an on-field finding through the responses of the comedians.

Language

The context of a performer and the audience plays an important role in stand-up comedy. According to Phil Emmerson, stand-up comedy involves an interaction art, space and place (2015). One of the factors that links stand-up comedy to the place and context is language. India's diversity of languages and dialects cannot be ignored when studying stand-up comedy. Indian online stand-up comedy is primarily in English and a mix of English and Hindi, commonly referred to as "Hinglish". In the context of Bangalore, a city in the south of India, the language scope widens to include Kannada, Tamil and other regional languages. Further, since Bangalore is a cosmopolitan city with a very mixed crowd, language becomes all the more important.

Social Commentary

Comedy tends to indicate playfulness and entertainment. The very nature of comedy makes us discount the harsh realities of life and allows us to "let go" (Henkle, 1982, 200). However, underneath the informal performance of comedy is the conscious strategic use of content that is responsive to the values and norms of society at the time (ibid). Early forms of stand-up comedy, like Vaudeville and Burlesque Humour, made heavy use of ethnic stereotypes in the performance, thus reflecting the tensions related to race and culture at the time (Mintz, 1996). Even at present, stand-up comedians often go against the prevailing social norms to talk about various subjects that are otherwise considered taboo. Their goal is laughter, and attempt to achieve it by any means necessary (Perez, 2013). Using humour as a means for social commentary has the potential to change the norms regarding acceptable and unacceptable discourses, spread awareness about important social issues and influence the opinions of the people in the audience. This demonstrates the importance of stand-up comedy and the need to study its functional and structural working to understand its uses and effects (Swinkels et.al., 2016).

Finance

Early forms of stand-up comedy, like Vaudeville in the United States, emerged from theatre. They were performed in large auditoriums and had an audience belonging to the upper middle class. The auditoriums themselves were luxurious and grand (Mintz, 1985). This indicates that stand-up comedy was a performance for the wealthy and comedians were

given the role and honour of a performer. Now, however, stand-up comedy has moved to smaller, more intimate venues like nightclubs, pubs and cafes (ibid). This increases accessibility, but also changes the economic structure of the performance for now, the comedian is not performing in an auditorium with an audience present exclusively for his performance. these changes in the venue bring up questions about the economic working of stand-up comedy from the performer's perspective, an aspect that remains under-researched.

Venue

With changes in the venue of stand-up comedy, from theatre auditoriums to cafes and pubs, it becomes essential to study the effects the setting and space of a venue has on the performance. the physical aspects of the comedian's performance environment directly and indirectly affect his performance (Brodie, 2008). Ricny emphasises the need for a smaller, more intimate setting (Ricny, 2014). Brodie speaks of the need for technological elements like a good quality mic and sound system (2008). Emmerson similarly identifies the need for specific kinds of lighting in a comedy show (Emmerson, 2015). Studying these aspects becomes important because it is these elements that create the show when assembled in one time and place. It is the ambience of a place that brings people into a comedy club or a café open mic event (ibid). The interaction of the performer and the space, along with the audience is what makes a comedy show.

Online Presence

Traditional forms of media like print and television still grow and thrive in India. However, the growing power of the internet, especially YouTube has changed the face of stand-up comedy (Paul, 2017). Several comedy groups like All India Bakchod, The Viral Fever and East India Comedy have begun uploading content to YouTube in the past few years. Online, they reach a wide audience, spanning cities and countries (ibid). The extent of the online audience often determines the comedian's offline audience for live shows (Pant, 2014). This shows that the power of an online presence translates into ticket sales. The flipside, however, is that the appeal of stand-up comedy lies in its unpredictability and anticipation, elements that may be lost in the online world (Lockyer, Myers, 2011). These factors- a large audience, unpredictable reactions and the possibility of interaction through

comments- makes the online sphere a space in itself. It becomes essential study its strength as a space for stand-up comedy and the subsequent interaction of the online and offline spheres.

Revenue

As mentioned previously, the stand-up comedy venue has witnessed a shift. Open mics and comedy shows are now commonly held in smaller venues like cafes, pubs and exclusive comedy clubs. It becomes essential to understand the appeal of hosting such events for venue owners and the effect it has on their revenue.

Audience

The audience in stand-up comedy is not a passive one. It is different from audiences of other performances like music or dance, because they are active participants in the process. Unknowingly, they make the show and their responses determine the success or failure of a joke (Říčný, 2014). Stand-up comedy is a dialogue performed “not to but with an audience” (Brodie, 2008, 154). An analysis of stand-up comedy is thus not possible without an understanding of the role that the audience has to play. The Bangalore audience, in particular, makes for an interesting subject of analysis because of their diversity. The city is home to people from all over India, drawn there due to the available job opportunities and the appealing infrastructure (Dutta, 2013). The comedian thus has to cater to varied tastes and modify content based on varied responses. The audience is thus an indispensable part of stand-up comedy, one that is explored through the perspectives of comedians in the research.

Women in Stand-up Comedy

This theme was discovered on-field based on the responses of the comedians and comic producers. Many respondents brought mention of female representation in the stand-up comedy circuit in the course of their interview. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for further dialogue on the subject although it was not initially a focus of the study. However, through the responses received, it was gathered that the lack of women in stand-up comedy is one of the central issues of the genre today.

5. Reliability: Inter-coder reliability

“A measuring instrument is reliable if measurements recorded at different times give similar results” (Lammers and Badia, 2004, p. 16). Intercoder reliability was used in this research so as to make the analysis of the study more accurate. Since the coding of themes was done manually, intercoder reliability was used so as to overcome any inaccuracies in coding. “Intercoder reliability requires that two or more equally capable coders operating in isolation from each other select the same code for the same unit of text” (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pedersen, 2013, p. 297).

Procedure:

In order to establish inter-coder reliability, two coders selected eight interviews at random from the sample. Each coder individually coded the interviews. Following this, the codes of the two were compared to check for matches. The total number of matches was divided by the total number of codes and multiplied by 100.

Results:

The above calculations gave us the inter-coder reliability measure of 0.76, thus making the thematic analysis a reliable measure of analysis.

Validity:

“Validity refers to whether the measuring instrument does what it is intended to do” (Lammers and Badia, 2004, p.10). Data oriented validity is meant to evaluate to what extent a method of analysis justifies the information that is present in the collected data. It also validates the first steps in content analysis – from reading and categorizing the data to analysing it (Krippendorff, 1980). This study can use data oriented validity since coding and analysis was done manually.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS 2

1. Performer

Various performers addressed a variety of themes over the course of their respective interviews, and spent different proportions of the interview doing so. Upon analysis, it was found that equal emphasis placed on certain themes. For instance, most comedians made frequent reference to the importance of content and audience. A relative comparison of the importance given to the themes has been illustrated in Fig. 2.

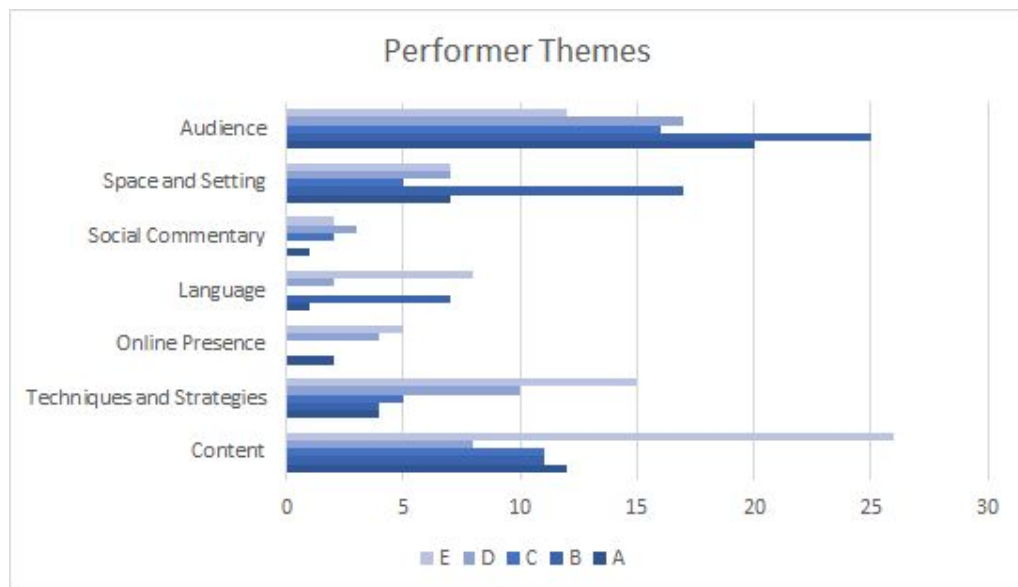


Fig. 2. A comparison of the main themes addressed by the performers

1.1. The Role of a Host in Stand-up Comedy

Stand-up comedians are usually introduced by comperes or hosts. These hosts ensure that there is continuity between acts by different comedians which may differ in style and level of skill. Often hosts fill up the space between two consecutive acts with their own sets and original material. In introducing the comedian, they provide the audience information about him/her and about the itinerary for the show. Hosts are also often responsible for audience interaction and participation (Rutter, 2000).

While many may believe audience interaction is the comedian's job, it may not always be so. A stand-up comedian among the ones responsible for starting up the Bangalore comedy scene, when asked about the same said that he does not engage much in audience interaction. In fact, he believes this is the responsibility of the host. He sees a clear-cut demarcation of responsibility, in that the host engages in audience interaction and the comedian goes on stage and performs his/her content. In addition, he says that a comedian interacting too much with the audience could get monotonous since the host does that through the evening and gauges the audience himself to understand the crowd. The audience may feel more comfortable interacting with the host than with the comedian because they don't view the comedian as someone they must interact with, instead they view him/her simply as a performer. Many comedians in the sample mentioned not engaging in audience interaction and leaving that responsibility to the host of the show. A comic is not expected to interact much with his/her audience. The comic is expected to come on-stage with material prepared to make people laugh. The crowd-work is generally left to the host. If the host is unable to warm up the crowd, it often results in too much pressure on the comedian since he/she did not expect this responsibility and is taken by surprise, says another comedian.

Going in-depth about the role of a host, comedian and experienced host speaks of the responsibility of the host to "warm the audience". As a host, it is not his job to use his best material and do his best jokes on stage. The audience is there to watch the comedian, not him. His job is thus to ensure the show runs smoothly and that the audience is comfortable. In case a comedian does not have a good set, it is his job to ensure that the pace of the show is picked up. He does this by going on stage, interacting with the audience and performing some original material to make the crowd laugh, before handing over the stage to the next comedian.

A comedian and comic producer, when speaking about the importance of getting the first laugh from the audience, mentions the importance of a host. He says- "The hosts are like bait". The host is the first person to go on stage and the first to interact with the audience. The audience in the room could be in any mental state. They could be happy or angry or irritated. The host must gauge the audience's mood and warm them up accordingly to prepare them for the next act. Samson views hosting as the most difficult job and indicates the need for more comic hosts than stand-up comedians in the circuit.

An up-and-coming Pune-based comedian, prefers hosting over doing stand-up comedy. She attributes this to her on-stage experience with theatre and drama as a child and her ability to interact easily with strangers. She describes hosts as the source of energy at an open mic. The host brings up the energy when a comic does not do well, so as to ensure that the audience is not dull when the next comic comes on-stage. She says- “The only job of a host has is just to keep the evening going and keep the audience warm enough so its not unfair to any comic coming up.”

In addition to warming the crowd, one of the primary responsibilities of the host is to introduce the upcoming comedian. Rutter (2000) explains this introduction by dividing it into six parts:

- Contextualisation i.e. providing background information about the comedian is provided
- Framing of response i.e. guiding the audience to welcome the comedian on stage in a particular manner
- Evaluation of comedian i.e. passing a comment or two on the skill and level of expertise of the upcoming comedian
- Request for action i.e. requesting the audience to applaud
- Introducing the comedian
- Audience applause

In performing the above-mentioned acts, the host builds up expectations in the audience and creates a positive foundation for the next act. While these aspects may seem unnecessary, they ensure the organisation of a comedy show. The audience applause, for example, allows for the smooth exit of the host and the entry of the stand-up comedian without any awkwardness. The interaction of the host and the audience is important to set the tone for the next performer. The host, by interacting with the audience and encouraging applause and responsiveness, establishes among them the conventions and expectations of stand-up comedy. Stand-up comedy is thus not mere joke-telling, but involves some level of order and organisation which develops due to the underlying negotiation between the host, the audience and the performer (ibid).

1.2. Structure

A joke is all about the element of surprise. Still, the basic structure of each joke, as described by a majority of the comedians interviewed, follows the same pattern, that is, it consists of a premise or set-up, a punchline, and tags or mixes. The premise is the introduction of the topic that the joke is about. Though this is not the part that gets significant laughs, it is vital for the premise to be set up well, as it establishes the context for the rest of the joke for the audience. Next comes the punchline, which is the main part of the joke, and which is where one gets more significant laughter. The punchline is often followed by one or more tags, which build upon the same joke as far as possible to get more laughs. Though this structure is followed in general, one comedian pointed out that it is not always a conscious effort, but rather, it tends to happen naturally when a joke is being thought out.

Each joke always starts with one thought, and structuring it, refining it, and building on it is a time-consuming process, which does not happen in one sitting. One comedian compares the process of building a joke with playing with Lego- one starts with a single thought that one finds funny, see how it can be presented best, and then one tries to extend it to another linear thought. The joke may be shown to other comedians to get second opinions, or tested at open mics or a few shows, and at each step, certain elements, aspects or ideas are added while others are removed. This process is continuous and ongoing right from the very beginning, such that a joke in its initial stages right after its inception is completely different from what it will look like three months later. Comedians also try to relate it to other jokes in the set. When a joke refers back to another joke made previously, this is referred to as a callback. Such a joke elicits laughter from the audience simply by virtue of it being a reference to a joke already made and laughed at.

One comedian in particular mentioned that unlike most other stand-up comedians, he is not too comfortable telling stories. Instead, he structures his sets using mostly one-liners. These jokes still follow the same basic structure, however, using a set-up and punchline.

Though some comedians do go with a prepared structure for open mics, most use open mics for experimentation on the spot to see how their material flows. They go on-stage with a general idea about what they want to say, but do not usually limit themselves to a fixed structure. For paid shows, on the other hand, comedians make sure they have a set structure and script that they try to stick to as far as possible.

1.3. Content

What Comedians' Content Consists of

The actual content that the set of a comedian consists of varies from person to person, although most comedians draw their inspiration from similar sources. One source for content that was common to almost every comedian we spoke to is their own personal lives. Save for a few exceptions who preferred not to incorporate their personal lives into their shows, most comedians base a lot of their jokes around their own childhood or recent experiences, or observations from their personal lives. Often, these observations, used as the premise of the joke, are exaggerated in order to make it funnier. Some other major areas that comedians tend to centre their jokes on are their opinions and observations on current affairs and from daily life, and things that can simply be categorized as 'random', as one comedian put it, which may include jokes about simply random things, like 'umbrellas, or bicycles'.

However, regardless of what the content itself is, almost every comedian stressed on the importance of the relatability of the joke. The audience must be able to relate to what the comedian is speaking about in order for a joke to work. One comedian mentioned the challenge of coming up with jokes that are relatable, yet unique. Some jokes, he says, are very relatable, and would be more likely to work well with a crowd as everyone would be able to connect with it. However, because of this very reason, it is also more likely that another comedian would also come up with a similar joke, or a joke along the same line of thought. In such a case, a comedian must either do the joke so well that they can lay claim over it, or add unique tags or a different aspect in order to make it their own.

Restrictions on Content

With stand-up comedy, as with any form of public speaking or performance, it would not be alarming to think that the venue or establishment that is hosting the event would have a certain stake in what is said and done on-stage. With this in mind, it is interesting to note that we found that none of the venue owners we interviewed felt the need to place restrictions on the content of the comedians. One venue owner mentioned that the audience generally knows what to expect. Another also stated that they control the audience rather than the content of the comedian. The producers don't place any such restrictions either. One producer we spoke to went so far as to say that producers do not have the right to restrict the content of

the comedians. Further, the owners generally do not have too much trouble because the comedians themselves usually gauge the audience and tailor their jokes for each performance accordingly.

In corporate shows, however, comedians must ensure that their humour is clean appropriate, as there is a certain tension in the crowd, as the audience members are surrounded by their colleagues. Further, this crowd does not want to listen to opinions, they simply want the comedian to make them laugh. In such a show, the comedian would tend not to bring up topics such as sexism, racism, religion, and politics, as audiences wouldn't laugh as openly as with a joke that is basic and relatable. All of the comedians agreed that corporate they did not enjoy doing corporate shows, but in most cases, they have no choice but to perform corporate shows, as it is one of their main sources of revenue.

1.4 Techniques and Strategies

On-stage

Different comedians mentioned different styles of content and delivery that they used on-stage. The two broad styles of delivery were a narrative or story-telling approach and an approach based more on witty one-liners. While all the comedians mentioned drawing from personal experiences for their content, their manner of delivery differed on the above-mentioned methods. The story-telling method could involve narrating a personal experience as is or peppering it and exaggerating aspects of it to make it funnier. The one-liner approach adds an element of surprise through the delivery of a punchline where the audience would least expect it. While some comedians defined the element of surprise as integral to any stand-up comedy performance, others gave more importance to maintaining the interest of the audience throughout the show. In both approaches, comedians spoke about the need for comic timing. This essentially means pausing at the right times and experimenting with intonation. While the joke is what invites laughter, it is these nuances that seem to drive the performance. Variation in the pitch and tone of the comedian tends to prevent boredom, while pauses lead to a rise in anticipation among the audience (Říčný, 2014). The right intonation signals the end of a joke and subsequently invites laughter (Rutter, 1997).

In terms of delivery, two comedians, mentioned using accents heavily during their performance. One of them is an improviser and a stand-up comedian whose material is heavily influenced by Western comics. He cites his multicultural upbringing and his experiences with racism in America as the reasons for his use of an American accent on stage. "...I started picking up a lot of accents in general to make fun of people around me", he said. The other, a North-Indian comedian based in Bangalore, mentions using a heavy Malayali accent on stage. Rutter differentiates between using voices as a prop and as a costume. Using the voice as a costume would mean using that particular accent for the entire duration of the show. On the other hand, using the voice as a prop would mean using the accent for a section of the act when playing or imitating a character (Rutter, 1997). Both the comedians mentioned above use the accents as a prop in their acts. This technique brings in the element of surprise, because her audience does not expect her to speak in that accent. Thus, using the same language as they are used to performing in, they manage to elevate their performance by experimenting with accents.

In terms of content, a common strategy used is self-deprecating humour. In the words of one of the comedians, "Being an underdog is the best thing you can do. People will want to laugh because you are the joke". Talking about oneself and one's personal experiences of failure elicit laughter. "Failure can be devastating individually but it can be funny when it's someone else's.", says the comedian. Self-deprecating humour, along with other-deprecating humour are two of the common forms of humour used in stand-up comedy (Greengross et.al., 2008). The comedians in the sample seemed to prefer the former type of humour in their comedy. An up and coming female comedian in Bangalore explains this preference by putting herself in the audience's position- "...I can't do it. I don't enjoy it. because I keep thinking like, if I went to a show that I paid for and someone was mean to me, I would feel bad." Another comedian maintains that if he makes fun of the audience, he always balances it out by making just as much fun of himself. For all of them, the end goal is to make the audience comfortable so they can enjoy the show.

Audience interaction in itself is a technique comedians use to enhance their performance. A Pune based comedian sees crowd work as her strong point and thus uses it to her advantage in her shows. However, others try not to engage in too much audience interaction during their sets on account of the limited time they have. One of the pioneers of the Bangalore stand-up comedy scene, for example, leaves audience interaction entirely up to

the host. He says- "...see they have come to watch my show, they don't want to answer to what I'm asking...And I don't know if they will be comfortable talking and being made fun of." A majority of the comedians feel that warming up the audience is not their responsibility and try to focus more on their content and delivery. The only time they feel the need to actively interact with the audience is when dealing with hecklers, which is not an everyday happening.

While they may not focus on interacting much with the audience, many comedians mentioned the importance of connecting with them. One of the comedians speaks about the importance of establishing a level of relatability with the audience within the first five minutes of the show. According to him, if a comedian is unable to do this, he/she has lost his crowd. A comic producer and comedian mentioned the importance of the first laugh. According to him, it is at the beginning of the show that the audience passes its judgement about the performer. Getting that first laugh would mean that the comedian has gained the attention and approval of his audience.

Many also talk about audience interaction as a back-up plan, when a joke fails. The above-mentioned comedian gives the example of a recent show he watched in Chennai. The performer there had prepared a set entirely in Hindi. However, on reaching the venue, he found that the audience did not speak or understand Hindi at all. "Since he is so good at talking to people, he just went and spoke to every individual in the audience, everyone. And he got a standing ovation that night.", he says. The up and coming Pune-based comedian, too talks about switching to audience interaction when a set is not going as planned. She does not, however, view this as a positive way to deal with this problem. In fact, she even mentions that senior comics would completely oppose this method as it does not add to the comedian's learning in any way. In her words, "It is a stitch and not a solution."

When dealing with a failed joke on-stage, other comedians find other strategies. A Bangalore-based comedian talks about trying to get an "easy laugh" when he can see his set failing. An easy laugh is elicited most commonly by making a stereotypical joke or by using crass language on stage. Two comedians mentioned playing to stereotypes to get a laugh out of the audience. However, one comedian strongly opposed doing so, stating that he would never want to do a joke that even hinted at stereotypes. This difference in opinions could be attributed to the fact that the latter comedian is much more experienced, while the former is a couple of years into this line of work. The difference can also be seen in how he tries to deal

with a failed joke. Instead of changing his set completely, he sticks to it and tries to see how he can better his existing jokes. For him, it is an ongoing process of trial and error and learning. another experienced comedian, who has been a crucial part of the Bangalore comedy scene, also speaks along the same lines. According to him, when a joke fails, the comedian must immediately move on to his next joke and not give the audience the time to mull over the failed one.

In terms of using crass language, the comedians agreed that it often guaranteed a laugh. the Indian audience is unaccustomed to the use of such language in public or formal settings. This is why when comedians use curse words freely on stage, there is a certain level of amusement that it brings about automatically, which in turn elicits laughter. The use of profane language is viewed as a means to acquire the attention of the audience and make the show more informal. However, it is more of a shortcut or a means to get away with a weaker joke. It simply “spices up a weak joke in a cheap way” (Řičný, 2014, p. 39).

Other on-stage strategies involve the use of body language and the level of energy exhibited by the performer. The responses varied based on the comedians’ own personal styles. Some preferred staying very calm on-stage and focusing more on subtleties and nuances. On the other hand, two comedians stated that they were very high-energy and animated on-stage. It was found that comedians who mentioned having a theatre background tended to report being more exaggerated and theatrical on-stage than others in the sample. They stressed on their tendency to move around the stage and use gestures extensively as part of their sets.

Off stage

One of the most prominent off-stage strategies that stood out from the responses of the comedians was practise. All the respondents in the sample repeatedly stressed on the importance of rehearsal and hard work. According to them, understanding and learning requires time and commitment on the part of the performer. None of the comedians claimed to have perfected their skill. Instead, they spoke about stand-up as a learning process that they were and continue being a part of.

The second aspect was two-fold. It involves the comedian showing his/her original content to other fellow comedians to gain feedback and watching other comedians as a part of their work. A majority of the sample spoke about the importance of feedback from fellow

comedians. They also stressed on the need to gain this feedback from comedians who understood their brand of comedy and could thus provide valuable inputs. Watching other comedians' work, on the other hand, was mentioned as a part of the research process when building their set. Many comedians mentioned watching as much stand-up as they possibly could as part of research.

While every comedian has his/her own style and brand of comedy and manner of delivery, the above-mentioned aspects are ones that were found to be common to them all. Every comedian, however, uses these techniques in his/her own way and adapts it to the set he/she is performing for the audience

1.5. Language

The entire sample of comedians reported performing primarily in English. In relation to the language that they prefer to perform in, three comedians spoke about the cosmopolitan audience in Bangalore. Due to the booming IT industry in the city, a large part of the population is comfortable with English and Hindi, although they are not the languages indigenous to the region. Along with the nature of the audience, the comedians also cited their own comfort as the reason for performing in English. One of the comedians, who does both stand-up and sketch comedy and has his own production house, calls a stand-up performance an honest performance. Thus, it is essential for the comedian to be authentic and use a language that he/she is comfortable with. Another comedian speaks about comfort along the same lines. He mentions turning down an offer to be a part of a famous television comedy show because he knew it would require him to perform in Hindi. Although it was a great opportunity, he knew it was a language he was not comfortable with and would thus not be able to perform effectively in.

A leading Bangalore comedian, whose shows cater to both younger and older audiences, thinks and writes his content in Tamil, following which he translates the entire set into English for the performance. Thus, despite the fact that Tamil is the language that comes to him naturally, he performs primarily in English. "I do English shows to reach a wider audience. There are a lot of non-Tamilians in Bangalore who look up to me for entertainment. I have to satisfy them," he says. He views the writing process as something he does for himself, and the performance as something that is meant only for the audience. This clarifies why he writes in Tamil and performs in English. Conversely, another comedian says that he

cannot write in one language and perform in another- “My preferred show is English- I think and write in it.”

Hindi was found to be second to English among the sample. One comedian calls it the “funniest language you can use on stage”. He reports writing in English since that is his first language. However, when rehearsing, he finds that many of his lines do not sound as good in English as they would in Hindi. Thus, his delivery includes both languages. Other comedians mention not knowing Hindi to be a limitation. They agree that having an English-only performance cuts off a large possible audience. In some cases, then, language acts as a barrier in stand-up comedy.

A common perspective among the comedians was that language can restrict the accessibility of stand-up comedy. They believe that it is language, and not content, that cuts off potential audiences. They also stated that at the end of the day, it is the content that matters. A comedian and comic producer says- “Language is not the barrier, content is the barrier.” According to him, poor content even when performed in languages other than English, will fail because of the lack of quality.

Comedians have begun branching out to other languages already. A rising female comic speaks about Eddie Izzard, a Western comedian, who learns the language of the place he is performing in. She sees this as something that could happen in India with time. The process has already begun. The comedian mentioned previously, who writes in Tamil, recently performed his first entirely Tamil comedy special. He sees this as a way to open up more avenues and markets for stand-up comedy, one in which younger people can bring their parents along for a show. He struggles to satisfy both his Tamil and non-Tamil audience. He wishes to do a bilingual show, the first half of which would be in English and the second half, the same content in Tamil. Another comedian, who is an experienced improviser, wishes to branch out to other languages with his comedy agency. All of the comedians in the sample mentioned switching their language based on the city they perform in. Doing so helps because if the comedian performs in the local language, the nuances of the language are understood by the audience, which enhances the delivery of the content. One comedian, who forms a part of a radical mime comedy group called PunchTantraa, says that language does not affect his mime much, However, he does alter the punchlines according to the local language to adjust to the audience. Another comedian talks about connecting with the audience through language. He begins his show speaking in Hindi to connect to the

Hindi-speaking half of his audience, and then jokes about the language to connect to the English-speaking half. Outside of the sample as well, there are comedians who perform in a mix of Hindi and English. A rising comedian, speaks only in Hindi when performing and chooses to perform only in tier two and tier three cities to cater to the Hindi-speaking crowd.

Thus, language plays a very important role in the delivery and performance of the stand-up comedian. The diversity and sheer number of languages in India makes it difficult for comedians to cater to all sections of the audience. However, they seem to be making a conscious effort to widen their audience base by performing in different languages and cities. This process is, however, in its early stages and may take a considerable amount of time to achieve its goal of accessibility.

1.6 Modification and Improvisation

The intimate setting of comedy venues, proximity and the general involvement of the audience with the comedian allows the audience to be as involved in a performance as possible. Though this is primarily an advantage to the comedian, one of the disadvantages that arises with this type of setting is that it allows people to comment on the performance while it is taking place. ‘Hecklers’ in the audience disrupt the set and the flow of a comedy show and hence unintentionally offer room for improvisation and modification on the part of the comedian. Not only does this point highlight the importance of the audience involvement but it also highlights the dynamic nature of stand-up. Generally, hecklers in the audience arise due to their religious, political or social sentiments being hurt or due to them being in an inebriated state. Different comedians react differently when faced with the problem of hecklers. Though most, primarily ignore hecklers, some comedians react based on factors such as how much the audience is enjoying the show and their performance. If the audience is on the side of the comedian, then they either express their distaste for the heckler or show their support for the comedian and hence contribute to the heckler stopping. In some extreme cases, either the comedian or the heckler has been forced to leave due to the aggressive nature of the heckler and the threat of physical violence. Thus, heckling plays a major role in the performance of a comedian and the liberty that they have on stage in terms of content as well as performance. Though heckling in the audience exists in India, many comedians highlighted the generally polite nature of Indian audiences as opposed to more aggressive

audiences in America and Britain. Primarily, this aspect was related to the immaturity of the audience in terms of exposure to comedy.

In terms of Modification and Improvisation, comedians do leave room for improvisation and spontaneity on stage. However, most acts of Stand-up comedy primarily rely on their original written content as opposed to doing improvised jokes. Many comedians highlighted the fact that content predominantly arises from a thought or a joke being written down and then built upon. The fact that they draw from instances in their personal lives and observations means that they have an idea about the structure of the joke and hence attempt to build on that instead of going to a different line of thought on stage. Since, comedians take around 3-4 months to develop and perfect a joke, it makes it simpler to perform premeditated ideas as it becomes easier to gauge audience responses and edit the joke faster. Time constraints while performing could also be a possible reason for the preference of written content over improvised content. Most open-mics allot fairly short time frames in which people are expected to perform their new jokes. Hence, in such cases, improvisation and spontaneity may not be the best method to employ. Furthermore, setting and the type of show also depends on whether a comedian decides to employ spontaneity or not. Paid shows such as specials and corporate events usually curb all possibility for improvisation as comedians perform material that they are confident with so as to give the audience their money's worth. On the other hand, open-mic events are spaces where comedians primarily perform and experiment with new material which is the primary purpose of such events.

Modification of content is primarily based on audience responses and the city that comedians perform in. However, to a large extent, the content of the performance never changes with different cities. The nature of the content of comedians is primarily the reason for the lack of modification. Comedians talk about personal accounts, observations, and comment on religious, political and social material. Such content does not require a lot of modification as the comedian is trying to make the audience understand his thoughts and experiences. Hence, a simpler method of delivery is preferred. Furthermore, certain comedians also start writing material that is generic in the sense of relatability and hence it lessens the need for improvisation. Most comedians make small changes when referring to a place or a person relevant to a particular city. However, the crux of the joke remains the same. For example, a comedian might make a joke about people living in Indiranagar in Bangalore but if he goes to Bombay he might change the place to Colaba or another place

where a similar class of people live. Thus, class does play a role in the appeal of comedy as it adds to the relatability aspect of a performance. Similarly, in terms of language there is not a lot of modification that happens as if comedians “think” in a certain language, like English, they would prefer to write in that language as well. Many comedians stated that performing in a language that is comfortable for them adds to the authenticity of the show as the audience understands when a performance is forced rather than natural.

The factors that affect improvisation also differ from comedian to comedian. While some target the audience to provide them with moments of improvisation, others draw influences from the room that they are in to perform improvisation on stage. Furthermore, some comedians modify and improvise their content based on a single thought that they go on stage with as opposed to having an idea written down and seeing how it plays out. In terms of the audience, improvisation primarily happens through the interaction with the audience. If the interaction provides the comedian with a reference point to go back to during his set, then that becomes a possibility for improvisation. A leading comedian in Bangalore says that people can recognize “authenticity when they see it”. Thus, such techniques not only generate laughter or recognition but also add to the performance. It also allows the comedian to build an image or a scenario to which every audience member can relate and hence forms a point to revisit during the performance. Comedians also draw from the rooms and the spaces that they are performing in. Identifying an object in the room that could be a part of their set is one of the ways in which comedians incorporate elements of spontaneity into their performances. Since stand-up requires a lot of attention on the part of the audience, venues usually try to maximize the attention of the audience on the performer. However, even then, distractions can occur. In this context, referring to movements, sounds or disturbances that take place during the performance is another way that comedians not only change their content but also bring the focus of the audience back to the performance. Many comedians also cite Improv comedy as a reason for their ability to improvise on stage. They draw from their experiences as Improv comedians and apply them to the stand-up format. This is possibly because Improv comedy generally involves a group of comedians and the building of a scenario requires that a comedian is able to think on his feet, adapt and modify his content based on the direction the other person is taking. Thus, it aids in adding to spontaneity on stage.

Modification of content also depends on the demographic of the audience at open mics or paid shows. Comedians gauge age, sex, language spoken and whether families are present to determine which material will work and how uncensored they can be. For audiences where the majority of the crowd is over the age of 40, comedians may be less inclined to use curse words and make references to popular culture. However, some responses highlight the fact that in certain cases it is the older audiences that laugh more than younger audiences when such material is used. This fact may be tied to the idea of maturity of the audience in terms of being exposed to stand-up comedy. Many comedians highlighted that using curse words and popular culture references to get laughs are not believed to be the best method as these two aspects are considered to be “the low hanging fruit of comedy”. As stand-up in India is still in the nascent stage, younger audiences are more exposed to it than older audiences as they would frequent cafes, comedy venues and bars more frequently. Thus, such audiences would be less inclined to laugh at the use of curse words as they wish to see more refined jokes being performed. Also, comedians may start off with or perform jokes that are stereotypical in order to grab the attention of the audience and ensure that they are listening to him or her. However, stereotyping is considered another “low hanging fruit of comedy” and is a feature that is common in the content of newer comedians as opposed to the ones who have been performing for a few years.

Though modification and improvisation are largely dependent on the response of the audience, comedians do not change a joke simply because audiences respond negatively. For many comedians, jokes are ways of expressing their ideas and opinions and hence they stick to the joke even if it does not work with all audiences. Furthermore, the different ideas of humour that exist contributes to each individual’s preference of comedy and hence finding an audience that shares their sense of humour is another aspect of comedy.

1.7 Finance

Stand-up comedy is a career path filled with financial ups and downs. One of the comedians mentioned quantum income as a common occurrence in the industry- “...you don’t earn anything for years and then suddenly you get a lot of money.” In this sense, the industry is not a completely stable one. Many comedians in the sample spoke about having been in phases of financial difficulty several times in the course of their career. Persistence was thus considered to be essential to stay in the industry. “If you are expecting money in the

first two years, then you won't get it, you won't get money", said a comedian. Stand-up comedy is a career that requires an investment of time and energy before finances get to a point of stability. With time, comedians gain experience and garner a substantial following both online and offline. This guarantees an audience for the comedian's shows, which in turn guarantees an inflow of money. An online presence helps in this case because online following often translates into ticket sales. In fact, one comedian saw an online presence as the only way to sell tickets.

Many comedians also mentioned corporate shows as the primary source of regular income for them. Doing public shows benefits the content creation and modification process, but does not do much in terms of finances. For a constant flow of income, especially if the comedian is the breadwinner of his/her family, corporate shows are the only option, at least in the early years of his/her career. Many comedians also work part-time, so they can maintain a stable income, while also performing regularly at open mics and doing comedy shows.

1.8 Social Commentary

For the most part, social commentary in stand-up reflects the nascent stage of this form in India. As per what most comedians said on field, social commentary is an aspect that requires time, effort and skill to delve into. One of the reasons that many do not actively practice social commentary in their sets is because they feel like they do not possess the necessary knowledge or qualifications to speak about matters of such magnitude. In comparison to stand-up comedians abroad who have had years to hone their skills, Indian comedians are still learning their way around the craft and hence will take time to master all its avenues. Although comedy is still believed to be in such a nascent stage, there are numerous comedians who practice social commentary through their craft such as Daniel Fernandez and Kunal Kamra and hence are bringing this aspect of comedy to Indian audiences. Many comedians also highlight the inseparable link between not only the comedian but also the audience when it comes to initiating social change. Not only is it necessary for comedians to perform the joke in a certain way, it also falls to the audience to understand the intention behind the joke and hence not get offended by statements addressing taboo or controversial topics in a humourous manner.

Though they do believe that comedy can cause a change in society, many believe that the immaturity of the audience must first be overcome in order for the change to be positive and effective. This immaturity ties into the audience being incapable of understanding the context that the comedian is speaking in and hence find themselves getting offended by the content. However, as the audience grows along with the field it will become easier to initiate change as people will be more willing to listen and not be offended. One of the pioneers of comedy in Bangalore believes that stand-up has the potential for change but requires the audiences to see the comedian in a different light. He highlights the fact that for social change to be initiated, audiences must first start taking the things comedians say seriously as opposed to looking at them as individuals who make jokes for a living.

The matter of social commentary always raised a lot of questions due to the improper or ingenuine means of performing stand-up comedy. Comedians seem to use social commentary because it is now considered “edgy” to do it. In other words, they practice social commentary for the sake of social commentary. Addressing an issue such as feminism in a set will generate applause even if it does not guarantee a laugh. In such cases, there is an apparent commodification of the issue that results in it being used as a profit making mechanism rather than a genuine attempt at facilitating change (Adorno, 2007). Furthermore, some comedians also highlighted the negative change that is brought about the fact that comedians who do use social commentary are young and immature both in the field of stand-up as well as in lived experiences. Such comedians who experience fame at an early stage may develop the “Messiah Complex” and hence start incorporating social commentary into their sets as they believe they have a responsibility to do so. Furthermore, the accessibility of information makes it easier for people to read about social issues in little detail and without fully comprehending it and hence further generates a lack of understanding when information is passed on. On the other hand, comedians also highlight the fact that laughing at a joke does not mean you are laughing at the issue. For some comedians, their primary aim is to make the audience laugh and is devoid of any other intention. Thus, making a joke about an issue does not necessarily tie into the trivialization of the issue.

“The only way to criticize someone and not get killed is by making them laugh”, said one of the comedians. This highlights the case made for comedians who serve as the modern day “jesters” and can influence change by using the tool of humour to stimulate thought and introspection in a subtle yet efficient manner. Comedy has the ability to create a change in

society through the subtle observations that comedians make with regards to the existing norms in society. A classic example of stand-up being used as a tool for change was spoken about by improv and stand-up comedian, who worked for an organisation called Global United which sought to work with the youth in conflict-prone countries in Second and Third World countries. One of the methods that is used is organizing events that bring the children together and hence allow them to engage with each other in a manner that breaks down the mentality of hate. He had to perform in front of children from Palestine and Israel. Being an Indian who grew up in the Middle East gave him a balanced perspective on the issue and hence he was able to crack jokes about the two countries which incited laughter between both parties and hence united them in their laughter. Thus, stand-up has huge potential for social commentary if it is used in the right space, manner and intention.

2. Venue

From interactions with various comedians, it could clearly be seen that the space and setting that they performed in was pivotal to making their performance a success. Along with the space and setting, other elements such as online presence and revenue also played a role in determining whether comedians are hosted at venues. Interviews with numerous venue owners also showed that these three aspects were the main aspects that they considered of import. This can be demonstrated in Fig. 3.

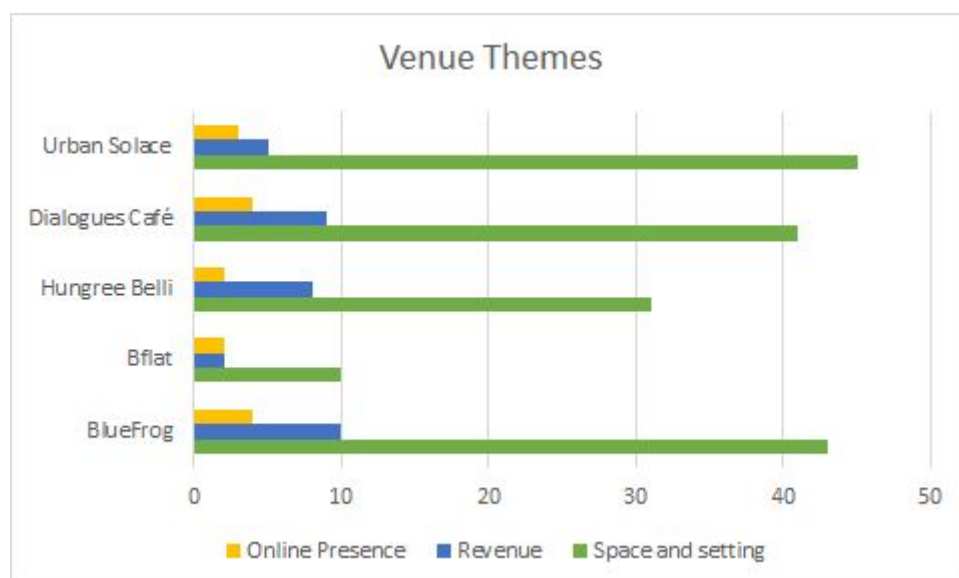


Fig. 3. Relative importance of space and setting, revenue, and online presence

Through an analysis of the interviews conducted with various venue owners, it can be seen that most importance is allotted to how they shape their space, next come the revenue and economics associated with it and finally the online presence of the comedian, and how that impacts turnouts. Each of these aspects will be further explored.

2.1 Space and Setting

Most of the comedians that were interviewed were of the opinion that only certain types of venues were optimum for performing stand-up comedy. Stand-up open mics and acts are hosted across all types of venues across the city of Bangalore, ranging from cafes and restaurants to clubs and bars. Most comedians that were interviewed clearly stated their preference for venues that are tailored for comedy specifically, as these are the spaces where their content and performance alone can be the deciding factor of how much laughter they elicit. Here, the chairs that were upright, with relatively less cushioning and not any kind of lounge seating. The seats, as mentioned above, were thought to be best when arranged closely next to each other, facing the stage. Ordering both food and beverages during the performance is not seen as ideal in venues such as these. A producer stated that he preferred a venue that was closed off, without any background noise which could potentially distract the audience-venues like malls or amphitheaters are not thought to be ideal.

When it came to café's, comedians had a multitude of reasons for their dislike of that particular venue. In a café or a restaurant, patrons are seated at tables, and are able to order food and beverages during the performance. This reduces their focus on the comedian. Comedians thus feel the need to warm up their audiences more in such settings. Though this seating system has been traditionally followed in the oldest stand-up venues in Bangalore, the benefits of an auditorium-like seating system have clearly won out, which has caused venue owners to construct separate spaces to host comedy performances. Certain comedians also seemed not to prefer bars as venues, as drunk audiences are loud and unreceptive to comedy. In addition, there may also be infrastructural difficulties which reduces the appeal of bars. These venues may have partitions, booths and columns that may serve as a part of the structure of the venue when it being otherwise utilized. These may cause poor sight lines and make the room acoustically difficult and thus, reduce the impact of a performance. (Rutter, 1997, p. 73). Most comedians and venue owners were also of the opinion that a theatre-like

setting was the most ideal for a stand-up performance. This makes the audience focus on the performer. However, a comedian was of the opinion that the venue is not the deciding factor in how well a performance goes. In his opinion, “Eventually there is no difference in stand-up. You’re trying to tell a joke to a crowd and getting them to understand the joke and making them laugh.”

The stage serves as one of the most important components of a stand-up comedy performance. The stage includes many important aspects, such as the lighting, the mic, the placement and other such components. The owner of a venue, who is also a producer stated how stand-up comedy only needs a mic, a mic stand (that can ideally be adjusted with a single hand), a small stage around 1 to 1 ½ feet high, a spot-light and an optimum sound. This seems to be the most preferred setting for stand-up comedy. The amount of space that is utilized by the performer is minimal compared to that occupied by the audience. Ideally, a physical stage is always less than two feet high (Rutter, 1997, p. 73). Another aspect that was stressed and highlighted was the importance of the brick wall in stand-up comedy. A brick wall is thought to be representative of the art of stand-up comedy-raw and real. It also is free of any sort of pretense or promise of anything. This allows the audience to focus only on what is going to happen on stage, what the artist is going to say on the mic.

When it comes to a comedy club, one of the most important characteristics is that of intimacy. Most comedians and producers stressed on how intimate, close settings with low ceilings help the audience connect with the comedian better. According to a prominent comedy producer and venue owner in Bangalore, the audience and the comedian need to be close, close enough that if people in the first row stretch their feet, they hit the stage. Seating should also not be fixed, so that chairs can be rearranged based on the number of audience members present, and chairs are not left empty. The aisle should not be towards the center, but should be located near the side. The audience should also be in the dark-the only prominent light in the room should be the spotlight that is focused on the stage, on the comedian. In his words, “... the lack of light or the absence of source of light itself breaks away so many things. People laugh and they laugh freely. They are less conscious about someone thinking that they are losing it. It also helps you focus on stage and not get distracted around you. So every single word a comic is saying in this environment reaches the audience with minimum resistance.” The popular opinion among comedians was of a similar nature; audience members should be seated close together and in the dark. However, the

contrast is not seen to be intentionally stark enough that the audience is unable to see each other, or the performer is unable to see the audience (Rutter, 1997, p. 73). This is especially important when it comes to audience interaction. Comedians too, seem to prefer venues whose setup is shaped by comedy, rather than those who try to incorporate it within their existing arrangement.

2.2 Revenue

Many venues use stand-up comedy events as marketing strategies. Hosting such events allows for their venues to be featured on websites like BookMyShow and Insider, that keep track of events happening in the city. Further, if passers-by see a large crowd at their venue, they will come in out of curiosity, thus increasing their business and revenue. Further, when comedians perform at open mics, they bring their family and friends with them, who will add to revenue through purchase of food and beverages. Open mics, however, have a minimal cover charge for the audience, and do not add to the venue's revenue directly. More than a source of revenue, stand-up comedy works as a marketing avenue for such places. Many venues that host stand-up comedy open mics and shows also host other performances like poetry slams and acoustic nights. Thus, they do not depend on stand-up comedy exclusively as a revenue source, but as one of many sources that could potentially add to their revenue and customer base.

2.3 The Online Sphere as a Space in itself

All the comedians in the sample were unanimous in saying that an online presence is integral to stand-up comedy. interestingly, however, only two of the comedians interviewed actually have and work to maintain an online presence. One of them regularly publishes one-liners on his Facebook page. He says his goal as a stand-up comedian is to reach as many people as he can and make them laugh. the internet has a wider audience than a live show. So, he states- "An online presence is a given for me." The other does sketch comedy videos for his comedian friends. He views the internet as a space where he can market himself and his brand of humour- "Nowadays, everyone who needs to market themselves, does it online. That's the most consumed media, so you would be stupid not to do that."

Not all comedians felt the same way though. While all of them agreed that an online presence is important, many were apprehensive about publishing content themselves. The

primary reason cited by a majority of them was the lack of material. “I don’t think my material is ready to be put up online”, one of them said. Comedians work endlessly for months to come up with fifteen minutes of content. Once that is done, they try out their material at open mics time and time again and revise and rework it according to the responses they receive from the audience. It takes time to create good content. To put up material online, they say they need to have a bank of at least an hour of material- “...everybody is writing one hour or one and a half hour of material to put fifteen minutes of content online”, said one of the comedians. Further, when comedians put content online, that content is lost forever. They cannot perform that material in a live show because a large part of the audience would have seen it online already. Publishing content online also requires money and equipment that comedians don’t see themselves as in a position to afford. One comedian in the sample mentioned having attempted to record a video to publish online several times. However, something always went wrong because of which he could not publish it online.

All of the comedians agreed that the internet provides a wider audience and can reach people from around the world. Many said that an online presence helps sell tickets. “A comedian’s game is to sell tickets. How else do you sell tickets?”, a comedian said. Word-of-mouth is one way for a comedian to gain some popularity, but it is not as efficient or fast as having an online presence. According to one comedian- “The only way to become a popular comedian in India right now is to put material online.” However, the process is not easy for everyone. It varies from comedian to comedian. Some comedians’ work may not translate well online although it works very well in a live show. On the other hand, some comedians may publish just five minutes of content which may go completely viral, gaining him immense popularity. The process is thus advantageous, but unpredictable.

It does not, however, end at publishing a video online and gaining popularity. Once the online audience likes your work, they ask for more. If a comedian publishes five minutes worth of content online and it garners widespread appreciation, he will be flooded with calls to upload more content. If at this point, he does not have more material to publish, he will lose all the popularity in a matter of weeks. Many up and coming comedians rush the process and publish material online very early in their career. This does not help them since they simply do not have enough material to follow. Other comedians who understand how the internet functions, upload content only three or four years into their career, so that they have enough material to back up a five-minute video clip. Comedy is thus a long-game, according

to one respondent. It takes time, effort and an understanding of online and offline audiences to gain appreciation and popularity.

The online audience can be harsh and ruthless. Two comedians spoke about online hate and hate comments. When content is published online, the comedian makes it open to criticism. "...when you are putting stuff online, you are putting it to everyone, all the masses. Everyone is going to watch it. you have to be prepared for that.", said the other. the comedian has to be prepared for comments criticising his or her work as well as comments that are completely unrelated to the content. A live audience's feedback is immediate and visible in the moment. This is not the case with an online audience. Viewers online can pause, replay and fast-forward videos. They can think about the jokes and comment days later. This is why criticism is more evident online. Further, if a comedian is publishing content online, he has to be sure of its ability to make people laugh. Creating a video of the quality that makes most people behind the screen laugh is harder than making audience members laugh live. With a live show, the comedian is interacting with the audience and can change and modify his set according to what he or she thinks is working and what is not. This is not a luxury the comedian can afford with online content. A live audience provides more opportunity for a comedian to experiment. "You gauge your audience when you are doing a live show. Because you are performing in front of people, there are so many possibilities.", says one comedian.

When speaking of a comedian's online presence, YouTube figures in as an important platform. According to the comedians, YouTube is the best place to publish content because viewers prefer it. it is a place where viewers can watch videos free of cost. They do not have to pay an entry fee or a cover charge, as in the case of a live show. It is also a source of quick entertainment. The same viewer would spend about two hours of his or her day attending a live show. Owing to its popularity as a video-sharing website, several comedians have risen to fame because of YouTube. "Take any famous comedian in India, everybody is famous through YouTube", says one comedian.

Subin Paul describes YouTube as a new public sphere (2017). This is because YouTube allows for discussion and discourse. As the viewer watches a video, he or she can also comment on it. The publisher of the content can read through the comments and reply to them. The interface is thus not one that encourages "top-down" flow of information. It allows for feedback and interaction. Interaction being integral to stand-up comedy, this online space

works very well for such videos (ibid). further, says one of the comedians, on YouTube, a comedian is not limited to uploading comedic content. He or she can also upload video blogs or “Vlogs”, as they are known online. These videos give a look into the comedian’s daily life and make the audience feel like they are a part of it. This breaks the barrier between audience and performer. It removes the hierarchy of performer and follower and allows for dialogue between them.

3. Audience

The audience is an integral part of stand-up comedy, more so than in any other type of performance. this is because, in other performances like dance or music, the audience tends to be passive. They are the receivers, while the performer is the giver. In stand-up comedy, however, the audience unknowingly plays a very integral role in the performance. it is their response that makes or breaks a comedian’s set (Řičný, 2014). “Ultimately, stand-up is all about making the audience laugh.”, said one of the comedians in the sample. And rightly so.

When asked why they think stand-up comedy is growing in Bangalore, all the comedians and venue owners spoke of the audience. The audience in Bangalore is cosmopolitan and diverse. Owing to its IT industry and appealing infrastructure, Bangalore is home to people from different parts of the country (Dutta, 2013). A comedian referred to Bangalore as a reflection of people from all over the country. “Any joke will work in Bangalore”, said one of the comedians. This could be because of the diversity of the audience. It gives the comedian the freedom to use both English and Hindi. Further, it also widens the scope of the relatability of their content. Jokes about popular culture, local happenings and international news can all be included in their content because the audience will be able to relate to and understand it. All the comedians also felt that although their audience is still immature in comparison to the audience in the West, in the sense that they may not be completely accepting of social commentary through stand-up comedy. however, they also claimed that the audience is in the process of evolution. Many jokes that were completely unacceptable a few years back, have found acceptance today. Today comedians can speak about feminism and class through their performance, something that was not possible earlier.

Speaking of the section of society that forms the audience for stand-up comedy, many comedians describe them as belonging to the middle or upper middle class. “I think stand-up is a Tier 1 city thing.”, said one of the comedians. According to him, a comedian may get a 1000-person audience in Bangalore, but that may not be the case in cities like Indore or Kochi. Another comedian, however, remains on the fence about this. In his opinion, different people view stand-up comedy from different angles. Another comedian says- “People know comedy differently.” Stand-up on television, on shows like The Great Indian Laughter Challenge, reach much wider audiences and may or may not be appreciated by audiences who watch live stand-up in Bangalore. There are also comedians like Zakhir Khan who perform primarily in Tier II and Tier III cities, with the agenda to widen the stand-up comedy audience. For the most part, however, at present live stand-up comedy seems to be limited to the urban elite who can afford to pay the price of a ticket, can speak and understand English and can appreciate the kind of humour such comedians perform. The audience is thus evolving with the evolution of comedy.

The flipside of the growing appeal of comedy and popularity of comedians is that audiences now love comedians and not comedy in general. A pioneer of the Bangalore comedy scene says- “...the audience is moving to a different level- from going to a comedy show, now they are going to a comedian’s show.” A comedian with an online presence will be able to have a full house, however a comedian just as funny but without an online presence, will not. A comic producer and owner of That Comedy Club, Bangalore, the second comedy club in India, speaks of the short attention span of audiences today. While a cosmopolitan crowd is advantageous to the comedian, they are also a bane because of their fast lifestyle and their need for quick and easy entertainment, which may not always be delivered through stand-up which requires the audience to be attentive and patient.

Comparing audiences in different cities, a female comic from Calcutta says- “Bangalore looks at stand-up more as a profession.” In Calcutta, she says, stand-up is seen as an extension of theatre and is thus viewed as more intriguing and attracts both writers and performers. In Calcutta, the audience attends stand-up for the content. The audience there attends to the content and actively provides feedback to the comedian after his or her performance. The Bangalore does not have the attention span for a complicated joke. This is why, when performing in Bangalore, she focusses on editing her material to simplify it for the audience. In comparison to Chennai, says a stand-up and sketch comedian, the Bangalore

audience is more open-minded. He describes the Chennai audience as more conservative. In Hyderabad, he says, people are just beginning to discover stand-up comedy as an entertainment avenue- “Hyderabad is where Bengaluru was 3-4 years back.”

According to a comedian and comic producer, the Mumbai audience follows comedians more than the Bengaluru audience. The audience in Bengaluru does not “stick on” to a comedian. Comedy fans in Mumbai would attend every possible show of their favourite comedian. But that is not that case in Bengaluru. In his opinion, this is because of the lack of homegrown comics in Bengaluru. Many of the comics came to the city in search of a job or because they were placed there by their company, following which they began doing comedy. There are very few Kannadiga comics, who perform in the local language and speak about issues concerning the local people. This could be the reason the audience does not follow comedians as much as in cities like Mumbai.

A general understanding of the Bangalore audience, however, is not enough for a comedian. For them, every comedy room has a different audience that they must cater to. Several comedians in our sample mentioned asking about their audience before a performance. This is essential so they can gauge the audience for themselves. Unlike the host, comedians have very limited stage time that they must use only to perform their material. Thus, any understanding of the audience must happen before going on stage. They ask venue owners or managers what kind of an audience would be expected and perform their bit accordingly. If this is not possible, they use the first couple of minutes of their set specifically to connect to their audience by interacting with them, asking them questions and mildly making fun of them to make them comfortable.

Even after connecting to the audience, however, the challenge of making them laugh remains. This is not an easy task. A comedian can only gauge what the majority of the audience would be like and alter his or her set accordingly. It is impossible for him or her to cater to the tastes and needs of every individual in the audience. Their job is thus to do their best to understand their crowd and perform accordingly.

When asked about their ideal audience, the comedians dismissed the question entirely. “In comedy, any audience is a good audience.”, said one of them. According to them, a comedian cannot be picky about his or her audience. In contrast, comic producer and owner of That Comedy Club makes a clear distinction between a good and a bad audience. According to him, “a great audience is an audience who gets what the comic is saying every

single time.” continuous applause or continuous laughter is not as important as understanding the flow of the comedian’s jokes and being “queued up” to what he is saying. It is important for the audience to be invested in the performance, instead switching on and switching off during it. he places immense importance on respect for the stage and the performance. in his opinion, it is important that the audience have a basic idea of what stand-up comedy is before entering a comedy room. stand-up comedy for him, is when the comic and the audience meet halfway. That is when the performance can be truly appreciated and understood for what it is. it is different from a movie, in that the audience’s feedback is instant and relevant in the moment and throughout the performance. Comedians, however, did not have such an opinion about the audience. This could be because their livelihood at the end of the day depends on the audience that watches their shows and follows their work. The producer can provide an opinion about an ideal audience since he is a third person observer who is not directly affected by the audience.

Although comedians do not have much control over who their audience would be, there are certain factors and choices they make for their performance that influence this. It should be noted, however, that these are not the only factors that play a part in determining the audience for a performance and that there may be many more that have not been explored here. Through the interviews, the following factors came to light. First and foremost is the language that the comedian performs in. Performing in a mix of English and Hindi would allow for a wider audience. Performing in Kannada in Bengaluru would attract a more local audience. The style of comedy of the comedian matters too. For example, one of the comedians has a very westernized style of comedy that may appeal only to some who appreciate that kind of humour. Other comedians may speak about political and social issues through their comedy, which may not be accepted by a wide audience. From an economic perspective, the price of the ticket is important. Open mics are often free of cost or cost a minimal cover charge, whereas comedy shows tend to be more expensive. This is why, many people tend to attend comedy shows only if they know the comedian and like his work. Lastly, the venue and location of the performance is relevant. It was found that most stand-up comedy performances and open mics happened in and around Koramangala and Indiranagar, the hubs of entertainment and the nightlife in Bangalore. Venues in these areas tend to attract a more upscale audience.

According to Mackeller (2014), there are five different types of audiences- the mass event audience, the incidental audience, the community event audience, the special interest audience and the media audience. In live stand-up comedy, the audience could be two out of these five types. A special interest audience is one that seeks a specific experience related to their idea of leisure and entertainment. The incidental audience, on the other hand, has no intention to attend an event, but may come across it and spontaneously decide to be a part of it (ibid). According to the comic producer mentioned earlier, an ideal audience would thus consist of a special-interest audience that knows and understands this form of performance and is thus able to appreciate it fully. However, a large part of the stand-up comedy audience is also incidental because very often, open mics happen in cafes and pubs, where regular customers who are there for food and beverages also become a part of the audience. Many venue owners also mentioned that when passers-by see that there is some sort of an event that is taking place at their café, they come in out of curiosity to watch the open mic or comedy show.

The stand-up comedy audience could also be a media audience. This, however, is limited to online stand-up comedy and not live performances. A media audience is one that is not really attending the event, but is viewing it through some form of media like television or the internet (ibid). Stand-up comedy has garnered a wide audience on platforms like YouTube. The online audience is very different from the live one. Online, the comedian has no way of choosing who watches his or her content. It is open for everyone to see, appreciate and criticise. The anonymity of the audience often makes their feedback hateful and their criticism harsh. While having a wide online audience fosters the comedian's popularity and increases his or her ticket sales, it also often leads to hate comments and personal attacks. The online stand-up comedy space is thus a completely different dimension, one that this research has not made the focus of its study.

4. Women in Stand-up Comedy

It is very clearly evident through both online content and presence, as well as our own experience on-field, that stand-up comedy is a largely male-dominated sphere. The number of

female stand-up comedians is startlingly low, and the range of opinions about this that we received from the different comedians spoken to was also quite vast.

Two male comedians that we spoke to did not see any problem with the stand-up comedy circle in Bengaluru, with respect to gender. According to them, there is no sexism in the sphere, in terms of stand-up comedy being more easily accessible to one gender than the other. One said that women choosing to participate or not participate in stand-up comedy is simply a personal choice. He also said that a shortage of female role-models or pioneers in stand-up for women to look up to might also be a reason for this. Although he does acknowledge that sexism as a social structure is everywhere, like racism, he still insists that the comedy industry, at least in Bangalore, is free of both sexism and racism, and that it would be better to get more perspectives. The other one said that the reason for the male-dominated nature stand-up comedy is simply that women don't have much of an interest in stand-up. He goes on to say that though the environment for women to come try stand-up comedy is very good, and some women are coming to open mics, stand-up will remain male dominated simply because stand-up is more appealing to men than it is to women.

Other comedians we interviewed had a different take on the question, however. A female comedian spoke about her experience (not only in stand-up, but in general as well) of people approaching the work of a woman in a field where there are not as many women as men, with a certain sense of curiosity and hesitation, and a mindset of either "let me see what she can do", or "she can't do it.". Yet in either case, the approach is due to the fact of the person in question being a woman. However, though she says this was the case while she was starting out, as she was one of the first female comedians in Bengaluru, she feels that this mindset is changing now as a lot more women are entering the circuit.

One male comedian pointed out that women need to have more courage to do the same things that men do shamelessly and easily, just because of the kind of society that we live in, and the way that we have all been raised. Though there are women now doing more and more things, he says it is about taking that first step and getting past that barrier. He acknowledges the importance of a supportive environment for women especially in these initial stages. The fact that open mics generally go on till around 10:30pm-11:00pm, and most big shows run till really late in the night might also be another reason why stand-up might not

be as easily accessible to women. Further, unlike men, they need to deal with stereotypes about women not being funny.

A female comedian also spoke about logistical difficulties like this. Stand-up comedy requires performing at really late hours, and in mostly male-dominated spaces. Even if there are women in these spaces, they might not be as willing to come forward, and they are most likely with a male companion or a group of friends. A woman would need to 'put herself out there' in order to perform stand-up, which is risky, as the woman would be inviting attention. She mentioned that most of the male comics she works alongside are incredibly supportive, and as they have all grown together in this scene, they have seen and understand the kind of challenges women need to face. She participates in a lot of women only open mics, which are being hosted more and more often in Bengaluru. According to her, many women who come for these shows feel more inspired and comfortable to try stand-up just by seeing so many other women performing. For men, she says, a sort of 'bro-code' understanding happens quite automatically, while women need to consciously create it. Even in terms of content, she points out that men and women see the world differently, and women are discouraged from talking about a lot of things which are, in reality, their lived experiences. For instance, both genders would be likely to laugh at 'dick jokes', but a joke about menstruation would not be met with as much acceptance. It is important for women to realize, as she did, that they should simply ignore these restrictions and talk about whatever they want. Another hurdle she mentions is that women are raised in general to not crack jokes as much in order to be taken more seriously.

Two other male comedians agreed that in the name of representation, many female stand-up comedians who are not necessarily very talented or funny are getting much more stage-time than they should, simply because they are women. They added that, if anything, this further propagates the stereotype that women are not funny, because women who are not really too funny are still receiving a disproportionate amount of attention. These two comedians expressed disappointment at the lack of meritocracy in a structure like this.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Introduction

The primary aim of the research was to understand the emergence of stand-up comedy in Bengaluru through an examination of the role of the performer, venue and audience. To do so, semi-structured interviews were conducted with performers, venue owners and comic producers. Through the on-field research, the several aspects of the stand-up comedy circuit were explored in an attempt to understand its functioning. The rising popularity of the art form is evident in the increased amounts of cafes and pubs which have now started conducting open mics for stand-up comedy, something which was beyond question just a decade ago. It was found that stand-up comedy, though seemingly simple, is a performance that involves numerous complexities including on-stage techniques, a long process of content creation and modification and specific space and setting requirements, to name a few. The scope of stand-up comedy is thus wide and unique. The performer and the audience have an interactional, symbiotic relationship. It was also found that the stand-up comedy scene in Bangalore is male dominated. This aspect is reflected in our sample, with fewer female comedians than males.

2. Objectives and Key Findings

The first objective was to trace the origins of stand-up comedy, which was done through extensive review of existing literature on stand-up comedy. through the review, we found that stand-up comedy has its origins in Vaudeville and Minstrel shows in America. In India, stand-up comedy is relatively recent, with comedians like Vir Das and Papa CJ responsible for starting the scene up.

Through the responses of the comedians and venue owners, we found that the stand-up comedy scene in Bengaluru started in 2009, with Vir Das visiting the city regularly to host open mic competitions. The comedian that won got more stage time. It was here that comedians Praveen Kumar, Sanjay Manaktala and Sundip Rao met. The three of them pioneered the comedy scene in Bengaluru by performing at open mics twice a week in venues like Urban Solace. Gradually, the number of open mics held per week began to increase and

budding comedians began frequenting these venues to try out their material. Comedians like Biswa Kalyan Rath and Kanan Gill started their comedy careers in Urban Solace. They brought a new set of skills and expertise to the field, using the internet to post videos of their content, thus increasing their audience base. Today, Bangalore has about fifty to sixty comedians and several venues that host open mics on a weekly basis.

The second objective was to examine the process of content creation by performers. It was found that creation of material to perform on-stage is a process that takes an immense amount of time. All the comedians in the sample stressed the importance of persistence in stand-up comedy. Once ready, content is performed at different open mics to see which parts work well with the audience. Thus, even ten minutes of material goes through several stages of modification until the comedian considers it to be near-perfect. Audience responses and reactions matter a lot in this aspect. The audience also responds more to content that is relatable to them, which is why relatability was a factor several comedians mentioned as essential to content creation. This is consistent with our findings in the review of literature. An inconsistent finding was in relation to a comedian's use of audience interaction as a tool during the performance. The literature reviewed spoke of audience interaction as integral to the stand-up comedy performance. However, majority of the comedians in the sample claimed that they do not engage in too much audience interaction due to their limited stage time. They consider this to be the duty of the host of the show.

With regard to the third objective of the role of the space and setting in a stand-up comedy show, it was found that a smaller, intimate setting was generally preferred to a larger open-air one. A consensus was found to be established among owners of popular venues that the space must place the audience in a comfortable position such that they are able to freely direct their attention to the acts without being distracted by anything happening beyond the stage. While the venue owners would prefer the audience to be seated on tables, so food and beverages could be served to them, the performer preferred the audience to be seated in chairs facing the stage and the stand-up comedian performing in front of them. For a comedian, an ideal café would be one where orders are not taken during the show so that the audience's focus is entirely on the comedian. There were also specifications regarding the height of the stage and its distance from the audience, the seating arrangement, lighting and sound systems, to name a few. The interviews conducted with the venue owners, mostly in the venue itself, gave us a first-hand experience of what goes into building the perfect venue for stand-up

comedy. For the venue owners, the audience consists of their customers. Hosting stand-up comedy increases their customer base. When hosting an event, venues thus need to ensure the comfort of the audience as well as the comfort of the comedian, while also functioning as a regular café.

The role of the audience, the fourth objective, was brought up in all interviews with comedians, indicating they are integral to the performance of stand-up comedy. The audience is the crux of the entire stand-up comedy industry, given how heavily dependent the comedians are on them. The comedian performs for the audience and the audience responds with laughter or silence. In some cases, audience members may even heckle with the comedian. Thus, the audience provides immediate feedback to the comedian on-stage. Their responses shape comedians' content and determine its success or failure. A show cannot happen without an audience. Comedians also felt that having an online presence tends to increase and broaden one's audience range to a great extent.

The fifth objective was to understand how stand-up comedy is used as a means for social commentary. The direct interaction and undivided attention by the audience provides the comedian a chance to use the stage and the mic as a platform and a tool to raise awareness about issues of social relevance. Through our literature review, we found that humour can be effectively used as a medium to create a dialogue about what would otherwise be considered taboo topics, like political and social issues. However, through the interviews, we found that although the comedians agreed to stand-up comedy being a means for social commentary, none of them chose to engage in this themselves. They believe that discussing serious subjects in a humorous way requires a certain level of skill and expertise. Further, they also believe that the Indian audience is not mature enough to accept jokes about political and other such issues since owing to the newness of stand-up comedy in the country.

The stand-up comedy circuit involves several people who take on different roles. With regard to this, the final objective was to study the interaction of each of the elements of stand-up comedy. The comic producer works behind the scenes. He is responsible for organising the event, right from booking the venue and locking the dates to inviting the comedians and selling the tickets. The major components in the ecosystem of stand-up comedy are the performer, the audience and the venue. The venue is emphasised because they run the business. The performer, on the other hand, is responsible for running the show and the audience is responsible for driving the industry. The importance of audience cannot be

emphasised enough for they direct the rise or fall of a comedy show. They are, in an informal sense, the regulatory body for stand-up comedy. The audience also shapes the content, language and delivery of the act. The artists express their thoughts through their act and the audience lends support to this through their response. The comedian's primary goal is to elicit laughter. In the process of achieving this goal, they interact with and are influenced by both the audience and the space and setting of the venue they perform in. The three elements thus make the stand-up comedy circuit what it is.

3. Limitations of the Research

While a wholehearted attempt was made to study every single aspect of the industry in Bengaluru, certain facets could not be studied. Stand-up comedy is increasingly being used as a filler in corporate events. Several comedians we interviewed regularly performed at corporate events. Although such events require "clean" content that the comedian cannot experiment with, they do such shows because they are assured a substantial amount of money for it. Thus, the corporate world has a completely different performance and audience structure. However, our research does not include interviews with corporate event organisers or the corporate audience. A section of stand-up comedy thus remained unexplored.

A second limitation would be the lack of a representative sample due to the fewer number of female comedians than male comedians. Use of the snowball sampling method led to the creation of a sample with comedians of varied experience and backgrounds. The use of a clearer strategy for sampling, for instance based on the amount of experience the comedian has or his online following, would have resulted in a more objective, bias-free sample. Further, the data was collected through one method- semi-structured interviews. The research would have garnered more rigour if, in addition to the current method, performances (both online and offline) of comedians were analysed.

Lastly, although the audience has a major role to play in stand-up comedy, this research does not contain first-hand or primary data from audience members. Instead, information about the audience has been gathered through the perspectives of the comedians, comic producers and venue owners.

4. Future Research

This research may be used as a foundation for advanced studies on how humour works. The comedians in the sample were asked about their process of creating and modifying content and the importance of the audience's response to it. This could be used as a basis to find what people find funny, what they choose not to laugh about and why and how they make these distinctions.

All the comedians in the sample spoke about the importance of an online presence in stand-up comedy and the role that platforms like YouTube play for comedians and audiences alike. Future research can study how an online presence is a tool of leverage for the comedian. It can also conduct a comparative study of online and offline comedic content and audiences.

Many comedians spoke about the differences in the way comedy functions in different cities in India. This research focussed only on the Bengaluru comedy scene. Future research could study the comedy scenes of cities like Mumbai, Delhi as well as Bengaluru in a similar way. This would facilitate a comparative understanding of stand-up comedy in India. It would also bring to light the similarities and differences between urban cities and their popular culture and entertainment.

Lastly, further research could combine qualitative and quantitative data to create a more solid analysis. Along with interviews, performances of comedians could be analysed in a thematic manner. Further, data could be collected regarding ticket sales for stand-up comedy in a city and the number of comedy shows held per week. Such research could include forms like improv and sketch comedy, along with stand-up, to provide a holistic view of comedy in a city.

5. Contribution to Knowledge

The research was successful at understanding the process of content creation, event organisation, infrastructure building, industry dynamics and the subject area of stand-up comedy itself. Due to reflections from both venue owner and comedians, we have an in-depth understanding of both their perspectives. Further, the findings also highlight the importance of an online presence in stand-up comedy.

It was found that the financial structure of the stand-up comedy industry is unclear. Although all respondents in the sample- performers, venue owners and comic producers- were asked about the economic working of the industry, the answers remained vague. This shows that the money transactions for this industry are unclear. There is no system of fixed cuts to comedians, venues and producers. This research thus sheds light on a section of the industry that is unexplored and requires a clearer, defining system.

The current research reveals the under-representation of women in the stand-up comedy circuit in Bengaluru. This discrimination is not unique to Bengaluru or India. Thus, women in stand-up comedy, a subject we explored as a theme, is an important area of research that can be studied in through the wider lens of interdisciplinary sciences like Sociology, Anthropology and Gender Economics.

Stand-up comedy originated in the United States. Yet, at present, it is found to be growing in India, a country with a completely different culture than the U.S. The current research sheds light on how stand-up comedy functions in an Indian city, combining western influences with subjects and languages relatable to the Indian audience.

Despite its limitations, the research has been successful in exploring the functioning of a contemporary form of performance. Stand-up comedy is a relatively less explored performance form because it's growth has occurred only in the past ten odd years in India.

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APPENDIX



The owner of Cafe Urban Solace, one of the pioneers of Stand-up Comedy in Bangalore



In talks with comedians Kjeld and Aamer



In an interview with the owner of That Comedy Club, one of the biggest comedy clubs in the country



An interview with comedian Shankar Chugani



Stand-up and Improv artist Abel Matthews



At a show at That Comedy Club

Transcriptions

1. Praveen Kumar- Comedian

Q: How did you get into stand-up comedy and how were you introduced to it in the first place?

A: What happened was, I was doing comedy mimes in college when I was in BITS Pillani, I was doing comedy mimes. Mimes as in, it's like Mad-Ads kind of a thing, where sound comes from backstage and you act on the front stage. So basically, I did about what 20 mimes in the college and it was super fulfilling performing in front of 1500 people. And then after I passed out there was a void, like I always wanted to do something related to comedy and to put up a comedy mime, you need people with a similar mindset. But after we passed out all of us went in different directions. So, there was a void for about six/seven years. I wanted to do something related to comedy, I got married. And after I got married, I started getting material for stand-up. Then in 2008 November, I read an article on stand-up comedy by Papa CJ. He was visiting Bangalore and I read an article on him and I thought "okay, stand-up comedy is something new and I can do it without depending on anybody else. I don't need a team to do a stand-up comedy act, I can do it on my own". So, I randomly went on-stage in December 2008 for my college alumni night. It was a disaster, horrible. People were laughing but at me, not at my jokes. It was so horrible, but then it was my first time, I didn't know how the whole thing works, I had not seen anybody perform. So, it was good. And then the next year, in 2009, Vir Das started coming to Bangalore. He started coming to Bangalore and he used to have open mic competitions. So, we used to get two minutes time. So, if we win that competition, then next time, we would get four-minute slots. They came four times and I won twice. And that was the beginning. And that's when I met Sandeep Rao, in 2009. After that we were little lazy, me and Sandeep. We kept on waiting for Vir Das to come again and again to have a skit on stage. Then in 2010, Sanjay Manaktala from US, he was deputed in India for some work. So, he attended an open mic there, I met him there and Sandeep also had met him there. So, we decided to do something instead of waiting for Vir Das to come, we started on our own. So, Sanjay's friend's friend called Bacus gave us a venue two Sundays a month when we were nobody. So that's where it all started. And then the whole journey continued after 2010.

Q: What kind of work did the three of you do? Did you work together or...?

A: No, we didn't do open mics initially. We started doing shows, free shows. And then only three of us were there and then there was a guy Sal Yusuf. He is right now doing voice-overs and he is a part of The Improv with Sarth and Danish. So, four of us did for one year, two Sundays a month. 24 shows we did, free entry. And then we realised we need an open mic to develop the scene. Otherwise we would have been four people who were doing comedy. So, what we did was we started to do open mics, one in the same venue- Bacus and one is Urban Solace also. That's still running every Wednesday. So, Perry from Urban Solace was so kind enough to give us the space every Wednesday for six years its happening till now. So, two open mics we started. That's when all these guys started, in Bacus, Kenny, Ahmed Sharif and in Urban Solace Kanan Gill, Biswa everybody started the scene. Then the turning point in India started when Comedy Store opened a branch in Bombay. So, we used to go from here for five-minute open spots. So, we spent our money for travel, accommodation everything, we stayed there for three-four days, did five-minute spots and came back. Then that five minutes became fifteen, then became twenty, then thirty, then became paid spots. Slowly the whole thing started developing and a lot of stand-up comedians started. Parallely Bangalore scene also was developing because a lot of open mics also started. And then the whole thing... right now we have about what fifty-sixty comedians in Bangalore doing open mics and shows.

Q: So why do you think open mics are this important to stand-up comedy?

A: Open mics are most important to stand-up comedy, the reason being, open mics are the platform for first-timer, amateurs and also for experienced comics to try out their new stuff. If you don't have open mics, what will happen is, if you directly go and perform in a show, right, if I want to do stand-up for the first time and I don't know what to do, I go and do a show. People pay for me, to come and watch me, 300-400 bucks. The quality won't be good. The quality won't be good at all. So instead, what we do is we encourage people to start from open mic and then continue performing there because open mic audience don't pay money. It's a free entry. So, the expectations will be low. And we already tell them that it's an open mic night, there will be new comics trying out new stuff, it can be good, it may not be good. They are okay with it because they have not paid money. So that's why we start with an open mic audience. Typically, growth of a comic will be, if the comic is extremely good, extremely talented, within one/one-and-a-half years, he will move to the next level from open

mics. Otherwise it's going to take time, you have to be patient enough to move from open mics to the next level.

Q: how do you think the city that you're in impacts this growth, as in how would you compare how stand-up comedy is in say, Mumbai and Bangalore?

A: Bangalore is everything for me in the sense that Bangalore is cosmopolitan. Any kind of joke works here. Any kind of jokes. See, Bombay, Delhi, I don't want to comment anything. But Bangalore you can do any kind of joke, in the sense even the north-Indians will enjoy, even the south-Indians will enjoy equally. Everybody will enjoy the kind of jokes you do. When you compare to Delhi, there are a lot of Hindi comedians, right, lot of people who do Hindi comedy which will work well with audience there. No comparison but in Bangalore you can do Hindi comedy as well as English comedy as well as regional comedy, anything works in Bangalore. That's a really very good thing about Bangalore.

Q: So how much does the audience response matter? When you're structuring your content for a performance, do you modify your content based on the audience reaction?

A: Correct. So, audience response is the instant feedback you get. Other than writing an exam and waiting for three months for the result, we know instantly "okay this joke is working". I'll tell you an example. Last Saturday I did a show in Hyderabad. It was a full-length Tamil show. Tamil show in Hyderabad. So, I was doing the jokes, some jokes were extremely Tamil, you know what I'm saying. The word-play, you have to know the language properly to understand the jokes. And a lot of audience members who came just know Tamil. They were born and brought up in Hyderabad, they don't know Tamil in-depth. They just know the language, not to the extent to enjoy the jokes. I tried two jokes, that didn't work. So, continuing further, I avoided all the word-play jokes. I know this is not going to work, because they are not that kind of audience who would enjoy this kind of jokes. So, I completely avoided those jokes and continued with the other non-word play jokes which are general and anybody who knows little Tamil also can understand. So, it comes with experience. on the fly you should start thinking and you should be able to modify your jokes.

Another instance is if there are a lot of older people in the audience and if you talk about snapchat or tinder, that might not go well. So, you see the response, one joke you crack and if it's not coming out well, you should be able to pull out other material which might work well for older people, like a marriage joke or a corporate joke. So, if you have a bank of jokes, you will be able to get it instantly.

Q: So, speaking of the languages that you perform in...what languages do you perform in?
you mentioned Tamil, so do you also do English?

A: I was doing only English till now. I just ventured out into Tamil. My first Tamil special I did recently, which I'm still touring for. As of now, I'm only doing English and Tamil because those are the only languages I know.

Q: So, we had an interview with Mr. Satish Perumal yesterday and he mentioned that you think in Tamil, you write in Tamil and then you translate it to English when you're performing. So how do you decide which show should be in English and Tamil? And why do you translate it to English at all?

A: See, I do English shows to reach a wider audience. There are a lot of non-Tamilians in Bangalore who look up to me for entertainment. So, I have to satisfy them. And Tamil I am happy with, I am doing it for myself. Because I think in Tamil, I find it easier to write a Tamil joke than an English joke. I'm doing it for myself. In the meanwhile, I'm establishing a market on my own. There's no one who did Tamil solo specials so far. So, I'm going on that path, as well as I have to satisfy this audience also, so I'm continuing on this path also. So, I'm doing both.

Q: That process of translation, would you say it's challenging at all? Do you have any problems when you're trying to translate a joke, in terms of the humour aspect? Is there anything that gets lost when you're translating?

A: Makes sense, yes. See, if I started in Tamil and then moved into English, that would have been one hell of a job. But I started in English. So, I know the dynamics of how English stand-up works. Tamil was, I thought it was extremely easy, but it was not. It took about two to three months to get into the zone of Tamil comedy. I started in March this year and this show was in August. So, a one-hour show I wrote in four months, and I thought I would write it in two months. So basically, I thought it was easy, but it was not. Now again, I've started writing in English. I wanted to do a bilingual show, in which let's say four o'clock I have an English show, same jokes in Tamil at seven o'clock. So, people who want to watch the English show can come at four o'clock and people who want to watch a Tamil show can come later. So, I can cater to both audience groups.

Q: What is the process of creating content for your shows? Do you have any techniques that you use onstage? Are you more spontaneous and leave room for improvisation?

A: I am not a guy who talks to audience, I have a host who will do the job. And I will go and do the job. And I will go and do my content. But in case anyone heckles, I will give it back to them because that spoils the entire flow of the show. But I stick onto my content mostly.

Q: do you have a script before you go onstage?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you leave room to be spontaneous or do you stick to the script?

A: I stick to the script mostly and in case if anything unexpected happens like a heckler or somebody comes in late or somebody leaves or something happens, like somebody drops something, so I have to be thinking off my feet and tell something funny.

Q: Why do you think a certain joke might fail in some situations?

A: It depends on the audience, right. So, snapchat joke for older audience- it won't work. If the joke is written intelligently and tried and tested for at least five or six open mics, where everywhere it worked, there's very less chances of that joke bombing if it is performed to the right audience. So, unless you've tried it out, you won't know. See, when I write a joke, it'll be funny for me, I'll laugh, roll on the floor and laugh but audience won't because, you know, different people. That's why we insist on open mics to test it out to a live audience to see if a joke is actually funny, not funny only to you. perform it to them, if they laugh perform it at a paid show. Still there are chances of it not working. Again, it depends on the audience and what kind of jokes you impose on them.

Q: And what is the impact of a failed joke on you as a performer? Because like you said, the feedback is instant...

A: There are a lot of instances of a failed joke. But only I know I tried to crack a joke and it didn't happen. So, I should act as if nothing has happened and move on to the next joke. Audience should only think "okay, next, next". I'll only think "okay, it didn't work" and say "okay, moving on...", you know. Go instantly to the next topic without making the audience think, "why, was he cracking a joke or only making a playing statement". Don't give them time to think, move on to the next joke.

Q: You said you don't do a lot of audience interaction. So, why is that? Because a lot of comedians choose to do that.

A: That's why. It's getting monotonous, right. See, I'm not too comfortable in the sense if there is a host, okay, that guy talks to the audience. Already they know the audience set up and all that. If I go again and talk to the same people... see they have come to watch my

show, they don't want to answer to whatever I'm asking... which is a good thing but my target audience is a little older audience. And I don't know if they will be comfortable talking and being made fun of.

Q: So, you perform for a lot of corporate shows as well. How would you say that is different from performing at, say a pub or a café or something like that?

A: Huge difference in the sense in a pub or a café or an auditorium, people pay money to come and watch you. So, they are already liable to laugh. They have come there to laugh. But corporate shows what happens, they come for a different reason. They want to chill out, they want to spend time with their friends, they want to have free drinks. Most of the time that is the reason-they want to have free drinks. And we go over there and ask them to close the bar during the performance. Already the hostile feeling is there. "You make us laugh, let's see". That kind of feeling will be there. So, to win over them and making them laugh is going to be extremely challenging. So, what I do is I do some basic jokes to begin with, which you don't want to think at all. Making intelligent jokes at the beginning of a corporate show is very bad idea. Because they don't want to think, they have come to relax. Putting the stress on their head and making them think is going to be bad for you. So, to begin them, to win over them, use some basic jokes to get into the mood for five to seven minutes. Once you win over them, then you do whatever you want.

Q: Do you do more corporate shows than say, performing at a pub or café?

A: I do both equally but I do a lot of corporate shows because my content is clean. Even if I'm performing at a pub, my content is clean. I don't have to change my content for a pub or a corporate or anything. Everything is going to be the same, unlike most comedians who have to write a separate clean set only for the corporate. For me, every set is a clean set. So probably that's why I get to do a lot of corporate shows.

Q: You mentioned that you close the bar at a corporate show. Why is that?

A: Because when the bar is open, people tend to move around the bar, they keep talking, they won't come and sit. Even if they come and sit, they'll go for a refill. That will spoil the entire thing. See, for doing comedy, you need undivided attention. Even if somebody wants to listen to you and people are moving around you, that gets distracting. So, the whole show goes for a toss. So, we insist on closing the bar because everybody has to sit in one place and the focus should be on the stage rather than moving around and disturbing others who want to listen.

Q: What about in a café or a pub, when a comedian is performing, there is food, there are drinks, people are at their own tables...

A: That is fine because people don't move around. Most of the time, we ask them to not serve during the show. So, we keep announcing before the show "the show is starting, please place your order now". Max to max, the order will be served, they won't take a fresh order during the show. And then we give a break in a pub just for them to refill the glass or use the restroom and all that, just to avoid them moving around.

Q: You mentioned something about clean content. So, what do you mean by clean content exactly?

A: Clean content in the sense which you can watch with your parents without cringing or squirming in your seat. You will enjoy separately, your parents may enjoy separately, but if you are coming together, that awkward feeling will be there. That is what I want to avoid. So, when I do a show, I publicize it as a clean show so that the entire family can come. My show will be 6 years and above. Below 6 years can also come, they won't understand but they will be making noise, that's why we avoid them.

Q: Do you think certain or most stand-up comedians tend to avoid certain topics because there is a lot of tension around it? Because stand-up comedy can be seen as a form of social commentary sometimes.

A: Correct. So, it depends on every comedian's style. Some comedians would want to do this in the sense "I am here to talk, there are people who are listening to me, I have to give them the good thing to take out from this". I like to talk mostly about my personal stories, where nobody gets offended, except for me. If I am joking, making a joke about myself, I should only get offended. But there are other comedians who are doing a great job like Kunal Kamra. He does a lot of political jokes and he is really good at it. Unless you are extremely good like him, I don't think it is necessary to go and do it for the heck of it. If you are good at it, do it. If not, don't do it for the sake of it.

Q: So, in your opinion, do you feel like these stand-up comedians have the ability to initiate social change or have an impact?

A: Yes, but in India, not right now. Probably, it is going to take time because the stand-up comedy scene is still raw in India. Maybe after some ten-twenty years when there are a lot of comedians, people take less offense. Once people start taking less offense, then maybe. But right now, no. If you see twitter, one joke goes wrong, full pouncing happens. It's going to

take time for people to understand that a comedian is trying to tell something serious, rather than just a joke and to not get offended. If you don't like a topic which he is talking about, keep quiet rather than getting offended. So, it's going to take some more time for people and the audience to get mature and once that change comes, I think it should be okay.

Q: And regarding the audience, do you think that stand-up comedy is limited to a certain class of people or do you think it is accessible to all?

A: It is accessible to everybody if they know the language. Everybody. So, that's why I am opening out a different market so people who don't understand English can come and watch my show. So, a lot of people are bringing their parents. They are saying "it's clean comedy and it is in Tamil, so I am happy to bring my parents". Because how many movies they will take them and how many movies are watchable now? So, they want to take them to some live entertainment and happy entertainment. So, they want to take their parents out and this they chose to be the right platform because their parents can understand the language.

Q: How much do you think the venue matters when you are performing? The setting, the arrangement- all the minor details, how much do you think it matters?

A: A lot. It matters a lot. That's why we have separate comedy clubs. A comedy club- have you seen That Comedy Club? So, that place is dedicated to comedy. And that guy has taken a lot of pains, in the sense that sound has to be extremely good, lighting has to be good, the set-up has to be good, the background needs to be there and the lighting and the focus-light on the performer has to be good, the audience should be in the dark. Everything needs to be perfect. Only in a comedy club, you will be able find that because other places have some other interests, like a bar or a dance club. They might rearrange the chairs and put lighting and all but nothing can beat a comedy club.

Q: So, all of those aspects that you just mentioned, why do you think that for stand-up comedy, it has to be in that certain way?

A: I'll tell you the reason. Number one, the focus-light needs to be good. Number two, you want the audience to see the expression of the comedian. Some jokes will just be body language. Like Kenny does a lot of body language jokes. Sumukhi does a lot of body language jokes. That might get missed out if the lighting is not clear. And the audience lighting needs to be dark because if it is in a dark environment, they will have less inhibitions. They won't have inhibitions to laugh, probably at an adult joke, right. I'll be conscious if people are looking at me if I am laughing at an adult joke. But if it is dark, I will

be less inhibited to go and laugh. I'll be like "ah! Let's enjoy!". So, that is one reason why audience light needs to be dimmed. Definitely the sound has to be good for the audience to listen to the jokes. And set-up gives you a good feeling, say when there is a brick background like a typical comedy club. That gives you a good feeling. In US and other countries, they have a brick background as a template for the comedy club. All these things come together to form a good experience for the audience as well as the performer.

Q: So, in a comedy club, you don't have to worry about the setting because everything is taken care of but when you are performing at a café, do you give them specifications about how you want it to be?

A: Correct, we have to. And then, see, there is a rule of the distance between the stage and the front row also. But in any place other than a comedy club, something has to be compromised. But we try to have as less a compromise as possible. Because sometimes there won't be a mic if it is a small place. So, we have to do without a mic. Even if there is a mic, they will keep a very small speaker. There will be a lot of feedback. Audience feedback will be there and this feedback will be there, so many feedbacks will happen. And it is a compromise to do a show outside of a comedy club. But we'll have to see how much is the compromise.

Q: How financially sustainable is this line of work?

A: It is only after some years. If you are expecting money in the first two years, then you won't get. I'm being very frank, you won't get money. You have to start doing corporate shows, you have to do private shows or you have to be extremely famous to get that much money in a public show. Otherwise, if you are just doing public shows and if you are not famous, it will be okay. But if you are running a family, if you are the breadwinner of your family, then you will have to do more. You have to be extremely famous like a Kenny or a Biswa to earn that much money in a corporate show as in a public show itself. Then you don't have to worry about corporate shows. There is a demand, people like you, they will be ready to pay you more. So, to reach that level, it's a lot of struggle which they have gone through. People expect money directly seeing "oh Kenny is earning so much money, let me also go do it". No. he has gone through so many struggles before he reached that level. You have to be ready to go through all those levels and wait patiently to reach that level. He took about five-six years, somebody might take ten years also. You cannot expect to grow in six-seven months. Then you're being stupid.

Q: So, in terms of the economic workings when you are working with a venue, do you have a say in ticket prices? Do you approach the venue directly or do you have a manager or an agency? How does that process happen?

A: See, in Bangalore, there are three-four producers who are comics as well. So, they go and talk to the venue and they sort all the set-up and everything out. They will have a deal with every venue that first Saturday of every month I'll do a show. So, if they agree, this producer will reach out to the comics to say "Okay, let's do a three comedian show and if I'm doing a solo show this month, you can do it next month, next Saturday". So, he reaches out and this guy is the middle man, so he gets his cut. Venue takes its cut, this guy takes his cut and whatever little is remaining, comes to the comic. You know what I'm saying. And the audience pays about what three hundred or four hundred bucks, and it's a fifty-seater. You calculate how much money an artist can make in the show. Hardly thousand-thousand five hundred bucks. But still people do it for stage time. so, this guy is the middle man, who is a comic himself. He'll put himself also on the line-up. So, this guy is the middle man, and then there's the venue, so the artist's job is to forget everything, go perform and come. This guy takes all the headache, like light or the set-up or the sound or book my show.

Q: Do you usually have any say in how much the ticket cost should be?

A: Yeah. If you reach to the level where you are doing a solo show, then you know how much your audience will be able to spend, right. I cannot keep my solo show priced at thousand rupees, I know definitely nobody will come. So, I can tell them saying probably four hundred rupees, people will come. So that, if you start doing solo shows, you can tell.

Q: What are the challenges of this profession for you? In your experience, what are the challenges you have faced?

A: Lot of challenges, like audience not laughing is one. But now there are a lot of younger comics who are trying to become famous without putting in the hard work. So, there's a problem within the fraternity only. But the major problem comes from marketing. Number one, there are a lot of shows happening in Bangalore. So, we are competing among ourselves only. Right, if there are two shows happening on the same day, we are competing with ourselves only. Audience won't know where to go. And one more problem I personally feel now is, audience is moving to a different level- from going to a comedy show, now they are going to a comedian's show, you know what I'm saying. Earlier, they used to go to a comedy show. Now they will think "Do I know that guy? Do I like that guy? Do I watch his videos?"

Do I like his videos? Then I'll go and watch". So now, because there are a lot of comedians, because there are a lot of comedians who are famous now, there are fans of comedians rather than fans of comedy. See, like a Kenny- Kenny's fan- wherever Kenny has a show, they will go and they may not go for any other comedian's show, right, so it's like that.

Q: A lot of stand-up comedians are very active on their YouTube channel. And apart from just videos of their stand-up comedy, they also are making sketch videos etc. So, how important do you think an online presence is to a stand-up comedian's career?

A: Whether we like it or not, that is hundred percent necessary now. Take any famous comedian in India, everybody is famous through YouTube. Nobody is famous only on live shows, right. Everybody, every single person, is famous because of being online, whether YouTube or Facebook. So, it is hundred percent necessary whether we like it or not. Some people's videos might not translate well online. Unless they put out their entire show, which they might not. Some people's jokes, just five minutes continuously, will work well and go viral. So, it depends on the content you write and what kind of jokes work well online. That joke may be very funny live, but that might not translate as that funny online. So, there's always a balance there.

Q: Where do you see stand-up comedy in India? Do you see it growing further or do you see it growing further or do you see it...

A: Yeah, definitely growing further. We are on the right track. See, if we compare India to how it was five years back- five years back it was hardly some twenty comedians, in India, not in any one place. Right now, I would say at least some- Bombay I heard some 250 comics are there. At least there will be some 500+ comics in India today. From 20 to 500 in five years, growth is exponential. I don't think you'll ask me the same question in ten years. After ten years you may ask, "When will this growth stop, I can't tolerate this growth". So that kind of thing may happen.

2. Shrirupa Sengupta- Comedian

Q: Just to get started, how did you get into stand-up comedy? What were you doing before stand-up and how did you get into it?

A: I did my Masters in Social work and my specialization was in Criminology and Justice and I was an on- campus recruit for the government of India. I was working in their department of AIDS control as a contractual employee. It's called NACO (National AIDS

Control Organisation), so I was doing policy and strategy for HIV-AIDS, the five -year plan, looking at implementation, technical support. I did that for four years and then I took a sabbatical. During the sabbatical, I had gone through a lot of shit in life, I had a nervous breakdown and when I had the nervous breakdown, I forgot how to speak, I forgot how to write, I forgot how to drive, I had panic attacks all the time, like I would be crying at the vegetable vendors. After a while, I went through therapy and all of that, and I decided that I had to reclaim my life. I have a theatre background like I've done theatre in school. So, I've done theatre professionally as well as theatre as an amateur. But theatre was too overwhelming for me at that time. I went in because stand-up is easier. It's just one person so you don't need to interact with too many people. So, you just go up, do your thing and come back, right. It's just you and the mic and the audience. So, I was like let's try stand-up. I was exposed to the stand-up scene when I was staying in Delhi because I was an open-mic regular. I used to go and watch, I was an audience member. In Delhi open mics used to happen at like several venues and there were shows which had been put together and this was in 2010-2014 when the scene was actually growing in Delhi. So, I knew all of these people when they started in comedy. So, I knew there was something called stand-up comedy, it was something that you could do and it was a form of theatre but was slightly different. I had that knowledge, that's what I tapped into. That's how I started with stand-up.

Q: You were in Calcutta and now you're in Bangalore. So how do you compare the scene of stand-up in both the places?

A: Bangalore looks at stand-up more as a profession. Calcutta, the scene is more of something which is a hobby. It's looked at as a hobby because in Calcutta theatre is also big. Theatre is huge in Calcutta. Stand-up is looked at as an extension of theatre, so people are going up and they are trying it out and all so Calcutta is a great place to write. It's a great place to test your jokes because the audience really knows what they are coming in for. They may not come in with the concept of "I am coming in to watch some stand-up comedy maybe I should cut them some slack." They come in to see content. If the content is not good, you will get shot down in Calcutta. The audience will come and give you feedback saying, you know, this part was funny, this part was not funny, and you can work on this. I actually took a break from the Bangalore scene for six months and I was in Calcutta and my writing has improved hugely. But if you look at stand-up as a profession in Calcutta that is not viable. It

is viable in Bangalore, you can be a full-time comic and still pay your bills. That's the major difference.

Q: You were talking about the audience. In your opinion is there in anyway, because of the way stand-up has grown over the years a dilution in audience who comes for stand-up comedy. Like more first-time audience members vs more seasoned audience members?

A: In stand-up any audience is good audience to be very honest. In stand-up, you are trying to break barriers to make people laugh. So, one of the biggest struggles I have in Bangalore is to simplify my material which I don't have to think about in Calcutta. In Calcutta even if it is very complicated, the audience has the patience to listen through the entire piece and be okay if the reward is not that big. Over here, the attention span is like "oh it's a joke, so when do I get to laugh?" Editing is very important in Bangalore. So, you write, edit and simplify a lot. The second thing to come back to dilution is we get a lot of first timers but its venue specific. There are certain venues that only get first timers. They have people who might wander in. They would be just wandering around and then think let me go see what's happening. We call them "walk-ins". And there are people who actually track stand-up. I have people who have been tracking my performance since I started. That is also very encouraging because these are people who come and tell you that "hey, I saw you two years back and this is the change that I saw in you." So, that also helps.

Q: You were talking about structuring your content. What is your writing process like?

A: My writing style is sometimes very observational and sometimes very introspective. I kind of connect everything to me, I'm a very self-centred person [laughs]. But I connect everything to me so if I'm talking about stalking, it'll probably start out with me talking about stalking and then go into observations about stalking. If I'm talking about people and how they text, like one of the things that frustrates me the most and it is a very common experience, a lot of people talk about it, is when you see someone typing and then it's just like one letter or a smiley. And I'm like what were you doing for so long. And you're watching, and you feel like a creep because you're like "*kuch toh aayega*, when is this coming?" Again, that's my experience but I might extrapolate that into how people text, what are they thinking when they are texting? For example, I take a lot of cabs because in Bangalore public transport is not the best and for me driving in the city with the way traffic is, I'm like "park your car at home and get a cab" I'm that kind. And silly things right like after getting into the cab, the first thing I tell the cab driver is, "*samne vale seat thoda aage*

karengy?” like the person who has got down from the front seat, who was beside the cab driver, he was probably sleeping in the cab. Now these are quirks that I have but when I extrapolate it, it will probably end up being something about cabs in different cities and how cabs function and I might go into something else altogether. So that’s where it starts, it starts with me and then kind of shoots off.

Q: Do you think that stand-up is limited to a certain class in India?

A: Not anymore. Because people are doing stand-up in every language possible, there are jokes about everything possible, there are certain jokes that we will not find funny but somebody else might find funny. And I don’t even know if it’s a class thing or a perspective thing. That’s something that even I myself am very confused about. I look at something like ‘The Great Indian Laughter Challenge’ and this time there are some amazing stand-up comics, and these are comedians that we know from our days in the circuit. The material that they do there (circuit) and the material that they do on ‘The Great India Laughter Challenge’ is sometimes different. According to the audience, we shift across cities also, we perform different material in a Tier 1 city versus a Tier 2 city and a Tier 3 city.

Q: That was one of our questions. Does your content change based on the city that you visit?

A: It used to, but now I have reached a point where my content has become more generic, so I am able to use it in different cities. For instance, there are certain jokes that I had set aside to do only in Calcutta or to do only in Delhi or Bombay and certain stuff for Bangalore. But your content evolves with you, you grow and you learn how to do comedy, you go for workshops and you learn different things. So, now it is more generic. But I know for a fact that there are many comics who write fresh content for every city they go to.

Q: What about language? A lot of people when they go to one place they perform in Hindi but if they come to maybe Bangalore or something, I know Bangalore also people perform in Hindi a lot, but they might switch to English or something like that.

A: For me primarily it is English because that is the language I am most comfortable in. Hindi, yes here and there, Bengali not so much. When I started off there were certain pieces that I would do in Bengali because it is tough to translate certain sentences and there are certain expressions which are tough to translate. But then I realized that I spent more time explaining what that meant than getting to the actual joke, so I was like let’s not make it into a Bengali class. So, I would stick to Hindi and English.

Q: You're a part of Evam right? Could you tell us a little bit about that because we know they are super popular in South India, but we haven't been able to understand the Evam scene.

A: Evam was cofounded by Karthik and Sunil and they started as a theatre company and I think they had other founders as well. You'll find out on the website. But the two of them are still there and they started off in training. They have something called "trading sideways" which is where you don't do the traditional way of training, but you do the theatre based training and then they also started doing stand-up a couple years back. Karthik is somebody who has also worked in the movies and he is somebody popular and a lot of people in the team have very strong theatre backgrounds. They are fabulous on stage literally. They are based out of Chennai and they perform across the globe, wherever they want to put a footprint. Bangalore is a city where they started signing on comics I think sometime last year. So, Praveen Kumar is someone who is signed up with Evam, Sneha Suhas is signed up with Evam, Pooja Vijay just joined us and there is Anu Menon. Do you all remember Lola Kutti on Tv? Yeah, that was Anu Menon. She does stand-up comedy as well and she is signed on with Evam as well. Early on, when Evam started off, Naveen Richards who is right now with OML, Aravind Esse were in Evam. So, all these people started out doing theatre but found their niche in comedy. Evam does shows across India but mostly Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad, Coimbatore and mostly south of India but they do Bombay also. It's like a production house, the rules are not like if you work with Evam then you only work with Evam, it's a beautiful supportive ecosystem. So, you get help with writing, production, brain-storming, backing you. Sometimes, we go to cities and we see our material is not working. We know that there are other Evam comics there that we can reach out to even in the middle of the night. I have reached out and said nothing is working, what do I do, and I've got some great feedback. It always helps.

Q: In stand-up, there is a serious lack of representation of women. Personally, why do you think that is? Is it because the industry is unfriendly or is there a lot more at work?

A: It's a lot of things and it's very difficult to simplify. This might come across as complex so stop me whenever you can't follow something. One of the things is that as women, and I don't know if you've faced it personally, but as women we are brought up to think that if we make jokes we will not be taken seriously. We are brought up to be very serious about life and our jokes are confined to closed spaces. The second thing is this whole thing about putting yourself out there. Like if you put yourself out there you are inviting attention. I

personally, when I started and there were people who asked me about it, I was like I came from a space where I had lost everything, I had nothing more to lose. When I went out there and people were like what are people thinking, you are in bars and pubs, I was like I have nothing to lose. My past is so messy that it's all gone. For me, that was something that gave me the strength to do stand-up. But for somebody who has to go back home, who has everything else, for those women and girls, stand-up might be a risk that they might not be willing to take. Because you are performing at really late hours, you are performing in spaces that have mostly men, performing in spaces where even the women who come are not willing to come forward, they are with a male companion or with groups. That's one part of it. Second is, how many stand-up comedians do you see? I saw Aditi and Neeti because I was in Delhi. For me, that never really struck me that there were so few women in comedy until I started doing it. Because I was in Delhi and I was looking at Neeti and Aditi doing open mics and Aditi was in Bombay then, but she would keep flying into Delhi to do open mics. I saw that they were respected, and they were trusted, and they were like one of the gang. So, it didn't strike. But now when I look at younger and younger women coming up and sometimes they come for the women only open mics. One of the things they say is that it's so good to see so many women here that I saw you and felt like I could do it. That's so overwhelming that for women, for us, as girls we need to see something to believe that we can do it. How messed up are we in our heads that unless we see it happen, unless we see someone else overcome it then we are like ok yeah let me try it too. The third thing is in humour women and men see the world very differently. It's not just women and men, you can see women, men and trans people, all of us, our lens is very gendered. I mean, dick jokes are funny to both men and women. But how funny would menstruation be? And then there are a lot of this feedback going which is like you don't have to talk about menstruation. But the point is that, me as a woman, five days of the month, that is what is happening to my body. And five days before and five days later, there are effects and that depends on how I choose my wardrobe, who I meet, what I eat, whether I go to wax or not, whether I take cabs or not, what my expenses are. I have a menstruation expense, that's 15 days in a month so that's what six months in a year. Imagine that's the impact that it has and it's my lived experience. But I'm not allowed to talk about it. If I'm a stand-up comedian talking about it, I turn off my audience like that [snaps] unless it's funny. And it's not just menstruation. A lot of women's experiences are stuff that we can't talk about. So, if you have this many ifs and buts, stand-up

just becomes very complicated for women. Like forget getting shows, forget spaces being friendly. I still remember when I first started out in comedy, I was hardly a month or two old, I had written to Aditi Mittal, and I said this is what I think, can I talk about it? She snapped and the first thing she said to me was why are you even asking? You are a comedian, you go ahead and talk about whatever you want. That helped. Looking back, if she had not said that, if she had said ifs and buts and dos and don'ts like most other comics tell other comics, and they say it in a good way, they come from a good place, like when a male comic tells you, "hey you know what, all girls talk about feminism so why are you talking about feminism?" they say from a space that maybe you will be shut down, maybe the crowd won't like you, you won't get shows, you won't get popular. It's not like they are trying to cut you down, that's just their perspective. But how many women stand up to that and say, "hey, feminism is important to me because I'm the one getting fucked. I'm the one getting screwed over and over again, so I want to talk about it." How many women have the spine to say that? This is the entire thing. So, now you actually have a lot of women coming up, doing stand-up. I remember there was this journalist who asked me that do you think that there are so many women-oriented shows, women-oriented spaces and women-themed comedy things happening because feminism is in fashion? I was like if it is in fashion then it's great, I don't care if it's superficial or real, I'm just happy it's there and most things start that way.

Q: You had done that show "Prim and Improper" last December. That was only women was that a conscious choice that you guys made or was that just something that happened?

A: That actually comes from Vasu's special. She had a special called "Prim and Improper" because Vasu Primalani is her name and that was her word-play. Sneha and I were invited to do the show. So, it was probably conceptualized in that way. But women only shows there are several. There's "Bras and a Beard" which Aamer was a host. So, we had a male host and all female comics and for us we had a blast, it was like tipping the table, I'm just telling you secretly ok [laughs]. For us, it was so much of fun, because usually you have this like token female and five men. This time we were like ha ha, let us do this [laughs]. And Aamer was super amazing, of course. These guys have seen us go through shit and they have grown with us, we have all grown together in this scene. So, there's that. There was a show that we did yesterday it was called "Hysterical Hormones" and it was sold out and I went all the way to Jayanagar for it, so that's my pet peeve.

Q: We heard about this show but by that time it was already 6 o'clock and we couldn't come.

A: Yeah, so it was sold out by afternoon. We didn't expect that it would get sold out. We were like it's raining, walk-ins will happen and it's an all-women's show. And we had a blast. Sejal was hosting and she did a great job and then there were a bunch of us. So, women only shows and spaces the experience is very different. Even when "Bras and a Beard" was there and Aamer was hosting [laughs], you can talk about so many things. There was Ramya and Pragya and all of these people and they talk about boobs and how the size of boobs is so important in girls' schools. And you had men in the audience going "*acha*". And we were like, "ok, we literally live on different planets dude, what is this?"

Q: Stand-up is said to be a tool for social commentary. So, do you think that stand-up in India has the potential to do that or is doing that?

A: Of course. It is doing that in certain spaces. it's not in certain spaces. See, it also depends on who are the people doing stand-up. Because stand-up ultimately... it's not like theatre. You're not learning a script and performing. I personally find stand-up easier than theatre, a lot of people say otherwise. For me, for the simple reason that my memory is shit. I mean to learn up a script it used to be like I'm dying why am I doing this. But stand-up is actually you, who you are or who you pretend to be. Because a lot of stand-up comedians project certain characters and that's okay, ultimately you want to make people laugh. So, that's a choice an individual stand-up comedian makes. So, especially if you look at Bombay, you will see people like Kunal Kamra make a specific choice to do social commentary. But then you will also see other people who talk about other experiences. Whether they connect it to social commentary is again a choice. So, stuff like that yeah. I mean it has the potential, yes. Are people doing it? Yes. Will they continue doing it? Obviously, because we all live in a society. But will people actually make it an agenda? That depends on person to person.

Q: Also, social commentary with the way censorship is in India, that has a negative impact on what comedians can say, do you think that that's why a lot more comedians choose to just talk about personal experiences?

A: Um...yes. There is. but personally, I love the fact that there is censorship because it challenges you to think differently. How do you do a joke which is going to be offensive, but you create that bridge where it is not offensive, and it is funny. Stand-up is a lot of mental exercise and thought processes. It's actually using your brain and it's when you have challenges that you are using that the most. And I find that very exciting. Like if you look at-

have you guys seen Kanan's special? Did you see what he did with the cow? Yeah. That's intelligent writing and a fabulous performance.

Q: So, sometimes performances don't go according to the plan. Most times it's because someone is heckling while you are performing. So, how do you deal with that?

A: I personally am very nice to hecklers. I am extremely- which is why many people in the circuit call me motherly- but I'm extremely nice to the hecklers. I'll be like "yes, tell me, what is your opinion?".

Q: What was your worst experience?

A: My worst experience was in Calcutta where this person was heckling, and he was drunk. And I couldn't get through my set, I really couldn't. I did halfway, and I tried talking to him and I realised that he is very drunk, so I left the stage. I walked off. Because there was no point in continuing the performance. And there was no way to put him down. So, the person was someone who had paid the cover and entered. So, then what happens is that the power is with the restaurant or the venue. So, the venue has to take a call. There are certain venues where the bartender or the server or the chef will come forward and escort them out. But you can't be on the mic and say "*isko bahar nikalo*".

Q: And going back to representation of women, have you seen any venues put in special efforts to bring in more women comedians?

A: Oh my god, yes. Urban Solace. They are an insanely supportive space. Perry was the first to do an all-women open mic. Very very supportive of all the women doing comedy. I still remember getting scolded by him when I was considering dropping out. There was this one point where I was like "this is all too overwhelming, there is too much of don't do this, don't do that". there is this entire like- so I don't know if you realise this, but guys have this automatic bro code thing that happens. Women need to create that, it doesn't come automatically. So, when I started out, it was a very lonely space for me. I mean, the guys were exceptionally nice to me, they were fabulously amazing to me. But there's still this space where you feel out of place. so that happened- so gendered *na* society?

Q: Also, just talking about venues, how important do you think the venue is to the performance in terms of lighting, sound, seating arrangement etc?

A: Depends on the performer. So, for example there are these guys who have also done dark room comedy and they have killed. Dark room comedy is when all the lights are off, nobody can see anybody, and you are one person talking. And they have destroyed. Then there are

performers who perform well only if there is light. I would bomb at dark room comedy. Because I, like I told you, I don't remember lines. So, a lot of my set is expressions, just standing there and going "What the f**k?" types. So, that's one. And seating is very important. If your audience is uncomfortable or too comfortable, they will not laugh. too comfortable also, you know if there are those big couches where your audience just curls up with a plate of fries, you're like "I've lost you there". Then if you don't have an aisle in between for people to move. One guy who has tried to understand all of this in Bangalore is Ahmed Sharif. Because he used to produce a lot of shows. And he kind of like figured out what lights, the power of the bulb, spacing of the chairs, in case you have an aisle, how should it be, where should the door be and stuff like that. he is somebody who did that and studied it.

Q: Could you elaborate on dark room comedy?

A: So, stand-up has this subset called 'Concept' shows. So, basically if you look at concept shows, you create a show where you either create handicaps, like a dark room where nobody can see you, they can only hear you. So, your challenge is to make them laugh and have a good time. So, you can't see the audience, the audience can't see you. Then you have these concept shows which are like three minutes. So, there's this timer going off in the back. After a while, even the audience starts counting, so they are not listening to you, they're like "ten...nine...eight" and you're like "oh my god, kill me now!" So, your challenge is to make them laugh. And you literally have two minutes, fifty seconds. It's like comic after comic after comic. Then you have concept shows which are theme based. For example, here we had the 90's show, there's weddings which is a very popular concept show happening in Bangalore right now where different people come up and talk about their married life experiences. So, stuff like that. so, concept shows are essentially where you design a show and a generic comedy show is where people would go, do their set and come back. A concept show has rules which will influence your material. So, if you are a comedian, technically you would ask "okay, tell me more about the concept" because they might require you to write fresh material, they might tell you that your jokes have to be only puns.

Q: So, we've spoken to a lot of comedians and a lot of them have certain routines that they do before a show, so, what's your routine? Like, people have told me they smoke before going for a show...

A: I make sure I'm very sober before I go for a show. I'm very sober on stage. Because I'm like, "Let me be responsible for what I say here so if I'm arrested, I know what it is for." My specialisation was criminology, so, I am very good at this. Routine-wise, one thing I always do is I stay very calm. I conserve all my energy. I am very high energy on stage. I am very theatrical, lot of gestures and all that. I am not like, say, Anirban Dasgupta, who will be here throughout, and everyone is laughing and howling. I mean, I can't, that's too much pressure for me. I have to like walk around the stage, I jump around, I flay my hands, I'm very expressive. So, for me, conserving energy is very important. I practise. It's very important for me to at least write my set down fully. The third thing is, to remember, I generally talk to at least a friend of mine who may or may not be a comedian to tell her my bits. So, I can know if one is connected to the other. And even if they are random, it should finish and not float.

Practise is ninety percent of comedy, you need a lot of practice.

Q: So, we've met comedians who have one thought in their brain and they will just go on stage and perform or there are people who write down their entire set and rehearse it and then go on. So, do you leave room for spontaneity and improvisation on stage?

A: Yes, yes. Because I am an improviser. I did improv for almost a year. At that point I was doing more improv. So, I do a lot of audience interactions. I am very interactive. I love interacting with the audience. Like, in the middle there's somebody ordering, and I'll pause my set and introduce the waiter. So, there is a lot of space for spontaneity, but I at least avoid whenever possible to perform un-rehearsed thoughts on stage. So, thoughts that have been open mic'd at least thrice, I'll probably do that at a show. If the audience is having fun, even if I've rehearsed it twice, I'll do it. at open mics, I don't write. I generally go in with a thought and play it by the ear. That's where a lot of my material develops. I'll start off, it'll go somewhere, and I'll see where the audience takes it. then I will bring it back, rewrite and edit and bring it to the next open mic. But when it is a paid show, or even a show where I may not be getting paid but the audience have paid, there it'll only be stuff that is practised and written out.

Q: Do you draw a line when making a joke?

A: I go to great lengths to not hurt anyone's sentiments. One of the most common things said about me is that I talk in questions. Which is very true. Drawing the line, there are things that- and it probably comes from being in social work- but I am hypersensitive about stuff that can be taken as abusive. And when I say abusive, I don't just mean words, I mean

emotions and sentiments. So, I am very careful about this. And this is something that I will step back and give feedback about even if it is not required or asked for. I do that.

Q: Also, open mics, of course, a lot of comedians go to try out their new material. What happens when a joke fails? Initially, when you started out, what was your reaction to a failed joke?

A: Um... depends actually. Depends on the open mic, depends on the mental space that I was in. Jagriti used to have open mics and it was a very difficult room because people who came there were not always interested and they were not very kind. And at that point of time, I would make it a point to hit every open mic because I was starting out and I had to learn and test material and that's the only way you do it. so, I was going to Jagriti regularly and I was failing Jagriti. Like, I would sometimes get a pity laugh. I think of all the open mics I did at Jagriti, one went well. And I'm talking about almost a year that this went on. Then finally there was this one point where I went there and there was some interaction which happened with the others who were around there, and I came home, and I cried. I called up my partner and he is from here, he's a Kannadiga, he's a Mangalorean brahmin. The reason I say Mangalorean brahmin is not to bring up the caste thing but just to give you a picture of this individual. He's a super conservative guy. I called him, and I was like I don't care where you are I don't care what you're doing you are coming home now. He was like ok then. I think I scared the hell out of him. So, he came and I remember we were sitting on the balcony and I was sobbing my heart out. I was like screw any seating arrangement I am sitting on the floor. I told him a lot of stuff, I ripped his community apart because some of the people I had an interaction with were from his community; they were Mangalorean Brahmins. So, I ripped his community apart and he didn't know what to do because he was finding it funny but at the same time here is this woman who is crying and telling him stuff and I told him some very mean stuff. At one point, I was like when the tsunami hit you guys should have been wiped away. Like your entire generations and all prospective generations should have been off the face of the earth. That was just one of the things I told him. I was like you all are bullies, you're like schoolyard bullies and this is what you are, and this is your culture. And I'm a Bong so once I start into the culture zone you're gone like I will bring up everything that Bengali's have ever done, not done, thought of. So, that hit me badly. He was standing there and after a while he was like listen is this over. He didn't know what to say. He was feeling bad for me, he was feeling angry because he is very protective. He's a decade older to me so

he's hyper protective because that also comes from being older than the person. And he was like in this very weird state because he was also getting super offended because he's like this is my culture and my country and we are amazing people and here I was ripping him apart.

So, that's what happened. That's how I used to get like I would try and keep trying. I'm somebody who doesn't give up the first attempt which is why I never learn my lessons. I'm like if I have made a mistake let me make it better, let me make better mistakes. So, this is like how I generally react to life. So, Jagriti was like that it was... after that I never went back to that open mic, I still haven't even though they've shifted and all I'm like I am not doing that. That's a space I am not doing and he's abroad now so calling him and yelling at him is too expensive so that's what happened

Q: Since you brought it up, do you think stand-up will ever address the north and south cultural divide?

A: It has. If you look at it a lot of guys do that stuff. There's a guy called Vikas Paul. He's an Evam comic and his entire premise, his entire set is based on the fact that he's a North Indian staying in Chennai. He was I think, not sure, born and brought up in Calcutta but he also started out in Calcutta, so he lived in Calcutta for a while. He talks and you [looks at interviewer from Calcutta] will know that people who move to Calcutta they become Calcuttans. It's very weird they go into a transition and they come out as Calcuttans, doesn't matter whether you're Bengali/ not Bengali, wherever you're from so he's one of those types. Esse Aravind if you look at his special he has this bit of North India – South India thing. Lot of people do it, especially in Bangalore you'll have a lot because there are so many North Indians here.

Q: How much of an impact does online presence have? What was your experience after putting up online videos like the amount of outreach you had before and after that, what change you saw?

A: So, this is a very... you'll get a lot of mixed accounts for this. Before I get into it, I need to tell you guys that Comedy is not only stand-up comedy, you have Sketch Comedy, there's something called Concept comedy shows which is not just stand up its like in the comedy show you can have theatre you can have musical and you create an entire concept show. You bring in a lot of genres and do it. It also matters what you're putting out there. You can put out stand-up video after stand-up video. What happens with stand-up video is that you become open to criticism completely. There are different genres of comedy, so it depends on

what you are putting out there. Improv videos do very well irrespective of everything else because people are amazed that you are creating something on the spot and they are getting to watch it later. Stand-up on the other hand has a 50-50. It's very dicey cause people come in with their own mental thing. It might be a great video, but they had a bad day. So, you get dissed, but they won't remember that they had a bad day. So, they dissed you they will only remember that they didn't like you, so you lose your audience there. Those will be the people who won't recommend you like, they may NOT recommend you, they may go into that channel of thinking. Then, you might also have these people who are watching the video, who are tracking you, tracking your growth and they feel like, "hey, I'm very familiar with this person so let me go watch the show." If you look at converting to ticket sales, if a video gets over a million views only then it converts into ticket sales till before that you are not somebody who... if you have a thousand views it's not like you will have ticket sales but it will increase your social media eminence. For example, if you are a comedian who puts out a video and even if five people watch it and they recommend it to ten more people, you will get at least two new followers on twitter, you will get a few more Facebook reach so it's really layered, and you don't know where it is going. But YouTube has really helped. I personally feel that it makes more sense to use YouTube as a means to reach out to people who you directly want to talk to than just putting out videos. Putting out videos is great but YouTube also gives you the opportunity to do vlogs right which are video blogs and that gives the audience a slice of your life saying that this is who I am as a human being, this is my perspective and this is what I write about.

Q: Very general question, but what's the future of stand-up comedy in India?

A: I don't have the thought formed so it may not make sense, but I'll just put it out there. If you looked at journalism and earlier on when we had only Doordarshan, this was before you guys were born. I had to do an age thing sorry [laughs]. So, when you had this Doordarshan and all of that, that time journalism was very nascent in India. Nowadays we have moved to social media journalism where you have crowd inputs. You have people coming in and weighing in with what they saw and what happened. A lot of news is made like that. Now if you look at journalism and the entire concept of journalism it's come into every pathway of life. For example, if you are doing social work you have a journalistic aspect to it. We have something called Public Health journalism where what you are doing is talking about news in the public health sector. So, how that has helped is information has become more accessible.

What I look at comedy in the future is comedy can become social commentary which is more acceptable and more accessible. So instead of doing just Rahul Gandhi and Modi stuff, comedy could actually mature into looking at social policy. I love what is happening today with the potholes thing. If you have been following, especially in Bombay and Bangalore, you have RJs who have taken up the pothole issue and they are the ones pushing the envelope. And that is amazing because they have reach, they are using humour, they are using skits and everything and they are solving a problem which causes actual accidents on the road so honestly this is where I see comedy going and I am super optimistic as a human being. So that is where I think comedy should go in the future.

Q: A lot of people we have spoken to have said that comedy is a very “honest” art form that’s the word they have used. So why do you think that is what do you think makes it such an honest art form?

A: Because it’s just you and the mic. That’s something- and I learnt this in improv and I applied it to stand -up and I realized that a lot of people are applying this to stand up- in improv there’s this concept called “being truth in Comedy” so you are being truthful in the moment and comedy is born out of that truth. If you are feeling out of place or awkward on stage that is what is funny and you own it, you own your truth. You don’t go up and try and be cocky, unless you are cocky, if you are cocky and being cocky that’s funny too. You actually don’t have anywhere to hide. You can rehearse and rehearse for years and you can go up and do a speech. But that becomes a Ted talk. So, you have no other choice but to be honest so that’s how things are.

3. Perry Menzies- Venue Owner (Urban Solace)

Q: So, we just wanted to start with how this place came about, and what was your original idea for Urban Solace?

A: So, Urban Solace will soon be 8 years old, and we are, what we would like to call Bangalore and India's First "cultural cafe destination," and the whole experience of Urban Solace is built around the school of thought that there are 13 energy fields through which one can experience the inner outer self. And any time anyone comes in contact with these energy fields, who you are is no more the same. So, we have chosen creative self-expression as the medium for transference of energy. And hence we have a whole series of experiences that we

have curated. On Tuesdays we have poetry, on Wednesdays we have stand-up comedy, on Fridays we have unplugged music and on Sundays we have spiritual Sundays. Those events happen right through the year and some of the events are also monthly events. So, we have a very active book club which has been around for almost 7 plus years, we have biker club, that meets on the last Saturday of every month. And in between, because of the energy Urban Solace has, we attract lots of other event people to come and do their events over here. And Stand-up comedy is one of the things that we first started in Bangalore, it's close to 7 years that we've been doing stand-up comedy, and when we started stand-up comedy, people didn't know what stand-up comedy was and it was a huge challenge to get anyone to come and watch a comedian perform. And even if they came to the cafe for dinner, and we said, there's a comedy show, they'd say, "Oh, no. We don't know what it is." So, it was a huge uphill challenge till this, you know, happened in the market.

Q: So, what gave you the idea of using the 13 energy fields in a cafe setting?

A: So, we needed to be different from the-when we started 8 years ago, there was hardly any stand-alone cafes on itself. So, all you had were the chain cafes. And that experience was sort of a mature business model. And, I come from Advertising as a background, and so we wanted explore possibilities and build a brand from zero to nothing. So, like the first event we ever did was on a Tuesday night and we did poetry, on Tuesday. We came up with this brand called "Tuesdays with the Bard" at Urban Solace. Everyone said, "You're crazy. Nobody's going to come on a Tuesday to listen to poetry." And we've done, we've taken-we're currently on sabbatical when it comes to poetry, but we stopped at 249 evenings of poetry. And poets came out of the woodwork. Basically, there are so many talented poets out there, who have never had the opportunity to express their, share their poetry with anyone. And getting published is an absolute no-no. Nobody wants to publish poetry. So, this was a very unique and beautiful opportunity for poets to come and share their work. And we have poets from, say 14 years old, and the oldest poet was 84 years old when he read. And both of them had never read their poetry in their lives to a live audience. So, it's been one amazing journey.

Q: So, we had read an interview where you talked about the poetry and how people laughed at you when you told them that you're going to do poetry on a Tuesday night. So, in terms of

that, what do you think is, like, responsible for the artistic resurgence in Bangalore, not just in terms of poetry but also stand-up comedy, that made people, like you said, suddenly come out of the woodwork and you know, want to actually perform their poetry?

A: I don't know, I think there's no single reason one can pinpoint, neither can we take credit entirely for it. I think there was a whole lot of creative energy that was just lying dormant, you know, in the underbelly of Bangalore. And they were just waiting for Urban Solace to emerge. And honestly, we did hardly any marketing of the event- in terms of marketing to get people to come and attend and watch and provide an audience for performers. We hardly went out saying, "Hey, there's a slot open today, do you want to perform?" So, we didn't go about it in that way. It was just something that happened organically, and I think media at that point in time played a large role in contributing to building an awareness. So, all the publications wrote about these experiences. One, because it was new; nobody had, like, experienced live poetry, nobody had experienced stand-up comedy, and unplugged music also was new. Even bands who have been around for a long time, they were into amplified sound; but when you strip all that amplification and ask them to just play with acoustic guitars and sing, it's a completely different challenge for them. We were blessed that we had a large share of media that supported that side. Some of the poets are also highly connected; more than comedians and musicians, the poets were the ones in high places, quite a few of them, who would never share their poetry, but when they heard there is a platform where they can come and share their poetry, they leveraged their networks and their contacts with media to get stories about themselves. And all of those things together were responsible. We started off with poetry first, then we did music, and then Sanjay Manaktala and Sandeep had seen the coverage we were getting for poetry. Sanjay was posted in Bangalore at the time, he heard, and said, "Hey, you do live poetry, I don't believe it." I said, "Come over." So, he came over, one Tuesday evening and he said, "I love the energy, I love what you're doing. Can we do comedy over here?" I said, "Yeah." Next week, next Wednesday we started with comedy. It just happened, magically. I mean, there was no great planning and stuff like that. Hats off to Sanjay, the comedy scene of what it is in Bangalore and the contribution that he's made is largely due to the first four comedians- Sanjay Manaktala, Sandeep Rao, Praveen Kumar and there was another comedian-I don't think he's on the circuit now-Sal, by the name of Sal. But, I think eighty percent goes to Sanjay, because he had such commitment which was so unique,

I mean, having grown up in the US, his commitment to his word was impeccable. He would perform if there were two guests, like there were two hundred people in the house, or if the house was full. I mean that magic was delivered to anybody. And I think that is what lured new comedians to come up. Week after week we did it, whether we had an audience or not. But I think the lowest was about 4 people or something-2 people once. There was nobody who showed up for comedy, but there were 2 guests for dinner, and I said like, "Please, we have a great comedian, why don't you come and listen to him?" And they just enjoyed the evening completely. And then word spread, and media contributed and then younger people like Kanan and Kenneth Sebastian, Biswa and all of them used to come and hang out over here, writing content, trying it out with each other and stuff like that. And they came with their own set of skills and expertise, where they could leverage technology and other skills that they had in mass media to experiment with variance of just live performances, and that made a big difference. I think, when they started putting up their clips on YouTube, and gaining more momentum. So, we're proud and happy and delighted, because, you know, 5 of the "senior" or whatever, famous comedians in India, started off here in Urban Solace. Sumukhi, for example. I think she's one of the funniest females that we have in India, and she can just create magic.

Q: So, do you see Urban Solace primarily as a space where people come perform, or do you see it more as a cafe? Or, how do you-

A: So, there are two sides to Urban Solace- one is the experiences that we curate, and the other is the product. And the product helps keep the experiences alive. But, for us it's like, I mean, eighty percent of our energy is thrown in the curation and managing the events that we do, because we have like, on an average, anywhere between 30-40 events a month, over here. And, yeah, so, of which nearly 25-30 are our own events, which we curate and about 10 are other events that people just use us as a space partner to do their events. So, yeah, the products help keep the energy alive.

Q: So, when you're, suppose you're having a comedian perform here, what is the economic working, what is the process-do you get in touch directly with the comedian, do they have a

manager, do they have an agency that speaks to you, do they approach you, or do you approach them. How does that work?

A: Okay so, in the early part of the journey there was nobody who-or any of these things didn't exist; in terms of artist management, none of them existed. Because everyone was just exploring and you know, sort of perfecting their art, at being a comedian. I don't think many comedians who are currently in Bangalore still have an artist manager. But the first people to move into getting artist management were Kanan, Kenneth Sebastian and Biswa-they were the first three that went to Bombay, and then they went places, you know, having moved away from their own comfort zone into a new market, having somebody manage their gigs, somebody manage their PR, it worked fantastically. Shortly after that Naveen Richard and Sumukhi, they also moved to Bombay. I think after that nobody has moved into the Bombay market, you know, playing the national and international scene. And they are the only ones who have somebody managing them. The comedians in Bangalore, over the last, say, year, have tried to move into some kind of self-management, because there's nobody doing artist management over here. So, yeah, there are semi-senior kind of people like Rajesh Hinduja, who started his own banner called "Break-Out Comedy," so he does, you know, corporate and public shows and ticketed shows around the city. But as far as I'm aware, I don't think there's anyone doing artist management for any of the comedians currently in Bangalore.

Q: So, just to move back again to Urban Solace as a space, when you said it tried to cater to the 5 senses-you use like, different table cloths, the frames and all of that-how do you think-how do you know- what inspired this idea and how do you know its effective? And also, if you do that, do you ever do that for stand-up, do you ever change the venue setting for stand-up?

A: With comedy, not so much. So, we also fall in the category of providing experiential dining. So, like when one comes for like a creative experience or a cultural experience, they can also have food and wine while they are experiencing that. So stand-up comedy fits well into that format, right. You don't need to be totally glued to the artist. It's sort of a casual sort of feel. You don't need to put everything down and just look at the stage or whatever. So, we don't do too much when it comes to- about the experience- when it comes to regular stand-up

shows, but if you're doing a special, like last year we did "Stars of Urban Solace" as a special event so then we go whole hog, I mean, we have separate branding, separate take-aways, bookmarks which we give away to customers who come for that event, special banner and the whole works on that. So, if it's a special event then we use- we try to appeal to people on multi-levels of-you know, give them a more wholesome experience than just coming for a show.

Q: And you said you do music events and poetry and you do stand-up. So, how does say the setting, arrangement of the venue- does it remain the same for all these kinds of events or does it change? Does stand-up comedy have some specific type of setting that it requires?

A: No, actually, they don't, but it depends from show to show. Like if you're doing a specific show-say a single artist-then mostly we would like to have more people come and sit, so we move the tables out and we do only seating, when it comes to set shows. So, until about two months ago we didn't have this space upstairs, but because of the need for more space to do specially curated events and help artists who are still in Bangalore move to their next level of becoming professional comedians. So, what has happened, like, it takes people a long time to really refine their script and multiple performances to know whether this works, and what kind of audience will it appeal to. And so, they keep on tweaking it. Some people, like Kanan and all had a natural gift, I would say, for writing scripts. They could see something funny in just about anything. But a lot of people actually have to work on being funny and actually work on their script and work on their deliveries. I mean we have about, anywhere between 10-15 comedians currently in Bangalore who have content for a 20-minute show. So, there is not real place where they can do a 20-minute show. I mean, who would come for just a 20-minute show. So, small partnerships have started evolving, where 2-3 comedians come together, they create a theme, but then they don't have a venue, so then we provide them, we fill that space, and that's what we created this place for. And it's been 2-3 months now since we've started doing these special events, with 2-3 comedians and now this month we're going to do I think, 3 comedians doing 1 hour each. So, it's really very beautiful to have seen them, you know, start-off with one joke, for example, and then run off, even if they were given 5 minutes to now being confident and deliver a whole hour.

Q: So, you host a lot of open mic events, from what we've spoken to the-from what we've gathered, from the comedians, we know open mic events help comedians because they get to try new work and learn through their mistakes. So how does that benefit you as a venue?

Since people mostly don't really pay a fee to come for open mics, or they pay a really minimal fee, so how does that help your venue?

A: So, financially we are a disaster. But I think we have carved a niche for ourselves in the creative underbelly of Bangalore. Because mostly, all our events are free. So, whether it comes to poetry, or music, or comedy, they are all free. And we just depend on the generosity of the guests to order something, so that we can stay alive.

Q: So, do you prefer, say an open mic event, or do you prefer having an established comedian, because you know there is going to be a big audience for an established comedian, for an open mic it will probably always be undecided. So, as a venue, would you prefer having more established comedians' performances than open mics?

A: One is we don't sit and judge any creative form, as a part of our philosophy, what we stand for. But, definitely, for us anyone who comes to us, we host them. But who are the big comedians left in Bangalore? So, it's difficult to say if I'd prefer this over that when there is no real choice. I think we are especially lucky. Because there are people like Kanan or Kenneth who started off over here. So, every time they are in Bangalore, they come and they give us a call like, "Hey, Perry, I want a slot in the open mic today." So, they come and perform. And sometimes we have the fortune of announcing it on Facebook, sometimes we can't, because of other factors. But I don't think a venue like ours can be very choosy about preference, you know, "I will host a, you know, established comedian." Then the dynamic won't work out, I mean, how much do you pay them, to do that? It just cannot work in our format. We're too small a space to have even x amount of money, to commit, we don't know. It's a tough call. And we're happy we haven't come to that crossroad where we have to make that kind of a choice.

Q: So, would you say that one of the reasons for, I mean, a lot of the people we have spoken to have cited Bombay and Bangalore as the biggest hubs for stand-up comedy. Would you

say that that is due to the close nature of the circuit, you know like in the stand-up comedy circuit, everyone seems to know everyone, everyone's always referring to everyone. Would you say that the reason for places like Urban Solace and maybe a couple of other cafes- if there are any- the reason for them growing and building is because of this sort of, like close circuit of comedy, or would you say that there are other factors involved?

A: Complex, very complex question, I think one cannot isolate and say, you know, "These are the key drivers which move comedy," because there's so many levels at work at the same time. Definitely there's a huge number of comedians. So, as a venue, about a year ago we just couldn't handle the number of people who wanted to perform. So, like in an hour and a half or two-hour slot, you can have 10-15 comedians max, With a host. You have about 8-10 minutes for each comedian. We used to get around 40 people who used to come to sign in that list. We used to open that list initially at 6 o'clock, and the cafe would be packed with people with people waiting to enter that list and it would be uncomfortable. And then that list kept going right up till we are open. 11 o'clock in the morning we have comedians who have already come to sign on a list for a show that's going to start at 8 o'clock. And then you know they're here the entire day. It's very stressful for everybody. So, we were forced to move out of that, you know, manual list format, where people come and first come, first serve kind of thing. So, we moved that online. So, registrations for the show happen online. So, people can go and choose which week they want to, and fill it up.

Q: So, in terms of that, when you say that stand-up actually affected the footfall in Urban Solace?

A: Yeah. It ate into our footfall. People would come see the cafe packed with a whole lot of unruly people, and leave. The design of the cafe is like its spaces unfold into spaces. So, the front part of it gets crowded, people come and say, "Oh, it's too crowded, " and then they go. So, we lost a lot of business because of that. So that was working against us. So, we were forced to, you know, the community did not like the fact that it's an online registration, but we had to take a call, or we had to stop comedy itself, because it was so badly affecting us. So, then we spoke to Sanjay and all, like, that this is a genuine concern, like we can't continue doing this and this and have it eat into our regular customers who want to come into the cafe.

Because at 3 o'clock and 4 o'clock you have no space for new guests, people are waiting. But yeah, it's been a great learning, how to deal with people.

Q: So, in terms of the event itself, do ever have any restrictions in terms of content and things like that? Do you ever tell the comedian, to like-

A: Chill down?

Q: Yeah, like relax.

A: Not really, I think. So, in the early days we used to have kind of a debriefing, like you don't know who the audience is at an open mic. So, if there are younger people in the audience, we tell them to be sensitive to that. Or we speak to the parents, Or the parents have brought say a 14-year-old kid along with them, and they'll ask us, you know, "Is it okay to bring our child? We're like, "You know, it's entirely your call." Many people have left because they didn't want to take a risk, because sometimes we don't know what the comedian is going to - I mean, they want to try new content most of the time, so we don't know, like, is he going to say this, or this, or this. And so, we have no control of both the elements. I think the word has spread and there's a balance now, like if they're performing at a college, then they go free flow with whatever they want to say. But by and large, I think, we've not had a complaint from a customer like, "Oh, it's too much, too in-your-face," kind of thing. Never had that situation.

4. Shunkar Chugani- Comedian

Q: So how did you get into stand-up comedy? Like what made you get into this field?

A: So, I came to Bangalore in 2010 and I was working for Tech Support and I used to work on the weekends and also in the graveyard shift. So, I would work from 10 in the night to 7 in the morning. There was not much work throughout the night so you couldn't download anything but you could watch, to a certain extent you could watch but not a lot. So, I started watching stand up, and just the sheer numbers of performers that have done stand up over the

years from the time it started. I was completely taken by the art form so I started watching as much as I could, complete one hour shows. And after one and a half years I started seeing if there were any Indian comedians. Then I saw there were two Indian comedians on YouTube. Then I found out if there are any comedians in Bangalore doing stand-up. Then I found out that are venues that have comics and then I started writing down things that I thought were funny, and in 2013, I did my first open mic. And I've been doing open mics and doing shows from that time onwards. So, I guess watching so much comedians got me like, even I want to do this. I wasn't sure I was able to do it, I wasn't sure if I would do it as much as I'm doing it now, to me it was amazing to watch someone just with a mic make an entire audience laugh.

So that is what got me into stand-up.

Q: So, you were doing tech and then advertising. Are you doing Stand-up Comedy full time now?

A: Yes, I am doing Stand-up comedy full time. I come from a background where I don't have the leverage to quit my job and then look for another job. I have to constantly keep my income going, so when I was in tech support I realized that if I quit my job, I have to apply to another tech support company. I cannot suddenly overnight switch to advertising because no one will take me. So, for about 7-8 months I was doing tech support in the morning 6-3 shift and in the evening I would go to an ad agency and be an unpaid intern to learn copywriting. That was the 18-hour work shift. I left home at 5 in the morning and came back at 11 in the night. That would continue for 6-7 months but thankfully for that within a matter of 4-5 days, I switched from tech support to working in an advertising agency with the same income. To me it was a huge sigh of relief because it completely took away the whole corporate working.

The way the corporate machine works is it's a part of a wheel that's connected to a bigger wheel which is connected to an even bigger wheel. So, you do your job and you leave. But in an ad agency, you're writing, you're contributing more than just your 9 hours. Sometimes you work from home and sometimes you think and write it down. And that was amazing to me. And I remember in tech support you have a half an hour lunch break, which is you have to hit a code in your machine, go finish lunch, come back and hit the code and it should be less than half an hour. And if it's not then they cut some salary from you. So, when I started working at the ad agency the first day I asked them, "How long is our lunch break?", and they

said as soon as you finish lunch, we'll come back. And then I was like, isn't there a time limit? They said no. And that blew my mind, that I can step outside, have lunch, come back. So quite a few things that were different in a corporate environment and different in an ad agency got me the liberty to think of doing more things. From there I decided to go further more into wanting to do stand-up the moment I started working in the agency. So, I started writing more and I started attending more open mics as often as I could. From the ad agency I did the same thing that I did with the tech support ad agency evening hours. I did the exact same thing with the theatre. It's a theatre in Whitefield called Jagriti for about 8 months I used to volunteer at the theatre over the weekend at the evening hours, handle latecomers and ushering. And that gave me the footing to work at the theatre full time. I shifted from tech support to ad agency to theatre. With an income and doing stand-up. Slowly the idea that this is work started fading away. And now, I only do stand-up. There's no such thing as work. All I need is money for my rent, that's all I'm looking for. And apart from that I'm happy just writing. I don't know if I've answered your question or not.

Q: So, you work at Jagriti now right? With an improv group?

A: Jagriti is a theatre space. I don't know if you've gone to Prithvi theatre in Bombay, it's an intimate space, just a stage like Prithvi, in Whitefield. It's very intimate, it's a theatre where you don't need mics and all, if you talk at the lowest decibel and if there's pin drop silence, everyone can hear what you're saying. It's one of the best theatre spaces in the country. Apart from that there's also an improv group that I'm a part of, called Improv Comedy Bangalore.

Rehearsals for that happen over the weekend on Sundays.

Q: You're doing improv and stand up at the same time, how does that work? Is there one you like better?

A: I would always call myself a stand-up comedian that's also doing improv. I would not call myself an improv comedian. Because there's a completely different skill set that needs to be sharpened for you to do improv, and by the way of the craft both of them are different. In stand-up you need to have jokes. I can't just go on stage and talk for 6 minutes and not have a joke. It isn't going to work. I have to have jokes as often as I can and laughs per minute. But

in improv, people are laughing at the spontaneous moment you're creating on stage. I cannot go in with a joke. If I go in with jokes, people will know that it's forced. Improv is living in the moment. Improv is burning yourself and watching people laugh at what you're doing, failing, tumbling but stand-up is very well thought of and very well crafted. Sometimes you also do something that's spontaneous, but you still have an idea of where you're going. In improv you play off of another performer. So, everything is supporting, there is no main act.

There is an invisible ball and nobody's holding the ball for too long, and the story keeps creating. I like stand-up more than improv because I would want to be identified as a stand-up comic. If you've to put it like that, I would choose stand-up, but improv itself is very liberating because you clear your mind and you make a fool out of yourself. Sometimes people laugh, sometimes they don't. That's completely okay, so it kind of helps me when I'm doing stand-up as well, thinking on my feet. Very, very, very, very rarely does stand up help in improv. It helps in a sense of timing, when I'm performing at a time when I have to say something, and I say it at the right time, that might get a laugh. But I don't necessarily use jokes that I've used in stand up in improv. They're very different and I would always want to be called a stand-up comedian.

Q: So, you spoke about like writing content for like stand up, it's a process, right? And in open mics we've learnt that it's a space for comedians to come and try out new material. You also recently released 'Selling Myself Short' which is a special so what was the difference in the writing process?

A: Firstly, 'Selling Myself Short' is not a special, it's a solo show. You can call it anything, it's not going to change what it is, but the reason I'm keen on calling it a solo show is that a solo special is when a comedian has worked enough to find his voice and do material that people know is written by him. Like you watch some of the greatest comedians, like when you're listening or somebody else tells you the joke, you have a good idea that this is written by that comedian. That's when you write a special. I've been doing comedy for 4 years, I barely have enough stage time to do an hour's show. So I cannot call it as a special, because that's all the material that I've worked for. I still have to figure out my voice and many other things, so it's a solo show. The writing is not different, you just try and put the material together that works in the best way possible, as a start from the head to the end of the show.

It's basically the longest set I've done. So I don't approach it differently. I just try and see that I do all the bits that I have and by the end of the show it should be close to 60 mins and I'll be happy with it. It's going to take a lot more for me to do a show that's strong enough to be called a one hour special or a special show. So over time you go on from doing 10 mins to 20 mins to half an hour. So before this show called 'Selling Myself Short', I've done the longest bit of 45 mins. So I had to see if I can start in a certain way and end in a joke that I like the most and try and fill the middle and not have a haphazard line up, like I shouldn't be talking about apples and then butterflies that are flying. It should be a certain narrative so that it's a show and people are not like 'this is the next joke'. I'm still at a point where I'm figuring that out. I still don't know if I'm answering your questions, or just talking on camera. But its more scary for a one hour show because for a show when you're performing with other comedians you only have pressure for your time, but for solo shows, you're the only performer. I remember very clearly when I was doing my first one hour show it looked like I was entering a cave, and I didn't know, like a tunnel, and I didn't know how far the exit is from the tunnel, so I don't think I'll be able but once you get through it, it's such an overwhelming feeling that you just go to sleep peacefully for like 14 hours.

Q: You spoke about how you structure your sets, so how do you structure your jokes themselves? We were at your open mic the other day at That Comedy Club, and you cracked a joke about "however and by the way", so how do you structure that kind of joke?

A: So, like I said it takes a lot of time for a comedian to get strong with his material. When you get a thought that you think is funny, when you write it down and try to put it in the best way possible, then you try and see how you can extend that to another linear thought, and when you do that enough, you have a few minutes where there are jokes and then you try and see from that what will try and work for another joke which is like a 'callback' so you say something that's funny, you say a few other things and later on you say something that you've said earlier also makes sense to the next joke so that's how you try and increase your set. That's very mediocre writing because you should reach a point where you don't say anything you've said before and still get the laugh. In a decade or so I'll try to reach that point. For now, if you say something and get a laugh, you try and deviate the crowd from that joke and then later on when you bring that joke back, people tend to laugh at the fact that

you've used a joke that you've already laughed at before so I'm really calling it a crowd all the time and telling them that 'this you laughed at, now laugh at this again'. It takes a while, you have a joke, you write it down, it goes on for two mins and you try hard to see how you can extend it. Later on, you try and get another thought and see if you can work with that. It's like playing with Lego. You just keep making and you present it to one of your comic friends and they're like, this is shit – you should throw this out. And then you restructure it and present it, it's an ongoing process. Like the starting month you write a joke and in 3 months, the joke is completely different from what it used to be. I don't know if I can quote another comedian, there's another comedian I worked with called Kjeld Shresth. He has a joke that I'm going to try and say. The joke was rich people are the reason that he didn't avocado and butter fruit were the same fruit. But this joke when he started writing, he started writing it by saying that avocado sounds like an insult to your sister. I don't know in which language, but that was his initial joke. But today he has about 4 and a half to 5 mins on that, as a joke. So when you're working on it, you try and discover something and it starts feeling overwhelming to yourself and you're trying to put everything together and when it doesn't work you try and take out a few pieces and then you put more together. So it's an ongoing transformers game that you play.

Q: In terms of content, do you have any influences, like do you draw and even in terms of how you perform on stage, is there anybody you look up to and draw from their performances?

A: Stand up didn't happen to me until I was in my 20s so whatever influence I have from comedy before that is all very hugely Johnny Lever that you watch in movies. There's a comedian called Kumar Sharif, who I used to watch. He does stage plays. He's in Pakistan, but I used to watch his plays a lot. We used to get CDs and cassettes, so I used to watch a lot of that. That's what got me thinking of making people laugh. In terms of influence, I try and see as many comedians as I possibly can, there's no one particular comedian that I would want to relate to as someone who influences me. I also can tell that there's no comedian that I work towards because all the comedians that you look up to are so far beyond your sight that there's no way you can try and see to work like them. But there are comedians that have different styles, like there is Bryan Callen who's very energetic. There's Dev Chapell who's

also amazing. There's Patrice O'Neal. There's so many comedians, so the moment you try and see, there's no way I can choose one. There are 25-30 comedians that are untouchable. They're so far into the distance, they're about 800,000 lightyears ahead from what you can ever reach. So I'm still thinking how to answer your question. Like I said, Johnny Lever, Kumar Sharif. Recently I discovered Buster Keaton, he was one of the 3 silent movie legends in the early 1900s. So Charlie Chaplin is one, there's another one, and the 3rd one is Buster Keaton. He's called the 'Great Stone Face'. And the main thing about Buster Keaton is there's a lot of his movies on YouTube that you can watch. What he does in many of his movies, he goes through like crockery and he'll fall through a lot, but he'll have a stone face with no reaction and it's hilarious to watch. I discovered that I was blown away just by the sheer genius of Buster Keaton. I try and see if I can draw influences from everyone that I see. Like I said I can't pick one. There's Richard Pryor who's one of the greatest comedians. His 1-hour special called live in concert is something that I watch as often as I can. So yeah that's my answer.

Q: So you were talking about structuring your jokes and audience response. How much does that affect your content? Is that all? Is that the only criteria?

A: When you start out, the first thing you want is a laugh and when you don't get the laugh you try as hard as you can to get the laugh. But over time when you do and get a few laughs, you're getting a laugh at something that you're not really meaning or you're saying something that is a stereotype perhaps or that is just widely accepted which is not supposed to be accepted. Like I wouldn't want to do a joke where I say women drivers are bad. I wouldn't want to do any joke that would hint that. So when I'm performing and if I don't get a laugh, I don't change that completely. I try and see what I can do to make it sound better, so I get the laugh on that particular. That's an ongoing process that you try and take out anything that's not working at all and try and add more jokes that work all the time, but I don't think over time the audience's response has influenced the way that I write. I just write and it's always just an attempt to make people laugh at these jokes. If it doesn't work, I come back and I'll be like, maybe this is not as funny to the audience as it was to me because I'm not saying it in the right way. That's the only thing I'll change. I still have bits that all the comedians say I should not ever do in front of other people, but I still have stuff that I'm going to do sometime because these are jokes that made me laugh. The moment I understand how I can

make people laugh at this, I'm going to do it once on stage. In the sense I'm not going to serve audience members what they want to hear. I'm going to tell people what I think, and hopefully there will be perhaps a laugh or two in that as well.

Q: So at the open mic, you were kind of interacting with the audience a lot. So is that something you do for every show? Do you build a rapport with your audience?

A: No at That Comedy Club, I was hosting the open mic. So as a host, your job is kind of to try and make sure that all the comedians who get on stage, get on stage to a crowd that's warm for a comedy set. Like, I don't want to go on stage, perform, do my best jokes and then call on the next act because the audience is there to watch the comedians. Not to watch me. So I talk to the crowd to try and see if everyone's doing okay. So I'm there just to serve the ball and the comedian is supposed to hit it. I can't hit the ball and then give it to the comedian. So audience interaction, audience talking to the crowd, I only do when I'm hosting so I make sure everybody in the room is comfortable and then I give that to the comedian who performs. If the comedian doesn't have a good set for some reason, I have to go back and do a little joke so that people come back to the ambience of a stand-up comedy show and then again I give it to the comic. So as a host, you try and do some of your best jokes and you get the crowd laughing and they're clapping, if they ever start clapping. After 40 minutes the crowd is going to get tired. They need a break, they can't go on and with an open mic you have about 12-15 comedians, so by the end of the night the audience is going to be so tired that no matter what you do, you know, they're not going to laugh. So your job is to give the comedian a 5 minutes, you go back up and try and talk make sure everybody's okay. So that's the job of the host. So I do audience interaction only when I'm hosting. When performing also you tend to do a little bit, but not much. It doesn't affect the set. Sometimes just to get into a particular set and ask the crowd something, I'll make a point and do more jokes.

Q: In terms of a venue like TCC, how much do you think the setting matters? Like proximity to the audience? Do you think it makes a huge impact?

A: Well it does. You have to have a particular setting that is conducive to comedy, otherwise it's just straining. Like for example this interview, it works pretty well because you've got the

camera right here and you're talking to me. You could bloody well be sitting at the end of the row and you could still talk but you would not be able to interact as easily as possible.

Comedy works best in an intimate setting. Even if it's a large crowd, the moment everybody's in as one group as an intimate group, it works best. I wouldn't say the setting has to be of a particular standard, it just has to be without any distractions. It just has to have clear audio so the comic doesn't have to strain. Sometimes what happens is some venues don't have the best audio as compared to the other venues so while performing, the comedian sometimes understands that what I'm saying is not as clear to the audience as I'm saying it so he tries to move the mic so that is something that can be avoided completely. Just to make sure that whatever you're saying through the channel is not lost. Like right now, if I start whispering, you guys will start straining to try and listen to me.

Q: Do you prefer performing in like a café or bar? Like is there any difference?

A: Eventually there is no difference in stand up. You're trying to tell a joke to a crowd and getting them to understand the joke and making them laugh. But the difference is with intimacy. Some cafes don't have mics. They have a space and you perform. Then, I'm talking as animated as I'm talking right now but with a mic and a light, you're still talking, but there's a different approach to it. You always have a mic in hand, your movement is restricted. With cafes the thing is that you can walk all over the space that you have. And you can still talk to the crowd and it's more intimate, it's more cosy with a café. But with a mic you get the idea of what it is performing with a mic on stage with the audience sitting in an auditorium or in a theatre and watching you perform. With a café it's a little informal and I always get the sense that if I'm bombing, I don't sweat too much but if I have a spotlight on me and a mic and I'm bombing, then I want to kill myself.

Q: Does the setting affect your content as well? Like, in a place like TCC the audience is dedicated to you but if it's like a café you're not the most important thing there, so like-

A: I like how she was like, "You're not important. You're not." [laughs]

Q: Only in a café. But yeah, does your content change according to your venue?

A: Your content only changes when you get a corporate show because corporate crowds don't want to listen to opinions. They want you to make them laugh. And a corporate setting is very – there's tension in the crowd at all times because nobody goes to office to laugh and especially if the number of people increases, the seriousness goes more and more. So if you tell them something that's hard hitting and opinionated it has a certain point that you're trying to make with a joke, the audiences won't accept that openly. But when you tell them a joke that's very relatable and very basic, they try and laugh more at that. So that's what a corporate show would want. I wouldn't be talking about sexism and racism at a corporate show. I mean you cannot talk about religion, you cannot talk about politics. So when you go there you try and perform just to make them laugh. But doing a show for an audience in an open mic, regardless of a café or anything, there's no restriction and there's nothing I would change.

Q: Do you believe like the culture of your audience has an impact on your content? Like would you change your content depending on like in Bangalore do you have a piece that works with a Bangalore audience but if you go to Bombay, it might bomb?

A: Well, I think that is true to a certain extent, but that is also true to the kind of audience that comes to watch. Like, if I go to Bombay I'm pretty sure I can find a certain group of people that will laugh at the same joke I'm doing and the chance is that if I go to a certain area in Bombay, I might not I might get a crowd that'll completely not get what I'm saying. Same thing is likely to happen here in Bangalore. Koramangala and Indiranagar are more metropolitan and cosmopolitan places. If I go down to South Bangalore, its more regional. It's filled more with the Kannadiga crowd. Over there when I go, I'm not saying it'll not relate completely but there is a good chunk that might get skipped when I'm performing there. So I think apart from references, there's no joke that I would change for Bombay or Delhi but there are chances it would work. The same kind of people would be there in every city so a joke that I'm doing here will work in Bombay but there's a slightly higher chance that it'll bomb in Bombay than it'll bomb in Bangalore because there's a sense of familiarity for me. Once I get to that point, it's a matter of changing names. If I have to do a joke about a particular place in Bangalore. If I can happen to change names, it'll be similar to work in Bombay. But, I performed a couple of times in Bombay, there's certainly a new response

because firstly for you it's a new city, you're performing in Bombay, you'll be little more sceptical than you are in Bangalore. But, to an extent, the crowds across India are the same. I haven't performed in Delhi, I don't think my material will work the best in Delhi because that is more of a hilly spring crowd? My jokes have a little bit of Hindi but not a lot. So, let's see

I'm not sure.

Q: Also, at that open mic, you mentioned in passing that you are a feminist, so I want to know what it's like, you incorporate sexist jokes, not sexist jokes, jokes addressing sexism in your content?

A: I would certainly want to do more of it. I don't necessarily go out of my way to go and express something if I get something funny that addresses sexism I do it for sure. I don't think I'm a good enough comedian yet to try and pick a topic and try and attack a topic in a way that I would like and make it funny. At this point I would say that my main objective is to make people laugh. having said that I can't make people laugh with sexist jokes. I can do it by addressing sexism. I have 1-2 jokes that address or have a joke about it. But I don't think I still have a lot about it to make a point.

Q: But do you think stand-up could be a way of you know, comedy has been seen as a form of social commentary, so do you think stand up in India has a chance to like make a difference or whether it can or even if it does?

A: It does. But we still are at least I don't know how to give a certain timeline. comedy in India is still at a very nascent stage. when I started 4 years back, I started looking at comedians abroad and I thought I can try this but I'm never going to be able to do this. I would fail miserably looking at the latest comedians I thought I'm no way going to do that. So I think, given the last decade, comedy is just now starting so in the longer run, there will be people who'll do more, and there'll be younger people who'll want to do stand-up. but it'll still take a while for the intent age to accept stand up as an art form that'll have a particular voice and that'll make points and to understand that laughing at a joke is not laughing at the issue. like when I make a joke about sexism, I'm not mocking women or I'm not trying to be sexist towards men, I'm making a point, for that to happen I think we're still are a little, we're

getting there but we'll still take a while before the majority of the audience understands that he's making sense and he's not just making a joke. So, that way Indian audiences are very naive, they are wanting to laugh. I have been told by comedians that come from abroad, from UK and Europe and US, audiences are very hostile, if you don't make a joke you will quit over time. So, we still need to get to a point where comedy can make a difference. It'll definitely make a difference but we still have a little while to go to fully reach that.

Q: Do you think that comedy is like sort of restrictive to a certain class in India or do you think its accessible?

A: Well, I wish I was a guy who could answer that question. I think it is as accessible as any other art form. It's like the way theatre and movies are. There are comedians who have a particular ticket price that you need to afford to go and watch them and there are comedians who perform at a basic ticket price and there are comedians who perform at an open mic.

Depending on the audience that wants to watch stand-up, there are cafes, places and comedians who you can watch by paying pretty much nothing to something as pricey at 2000. So awareness about it is still a little lacking. I think over time we'll get more and more aware of places that are having stand-up. But Bangalore has come to a point where almost everybody can watch stand-up. There are many cafes and places and comedians who want to give it a shot. I think I'll just stop at that.

Q: What are the challenges you face as a stand-up comedian in India?

A: First challenge is that I'm not famous enough for people to recognise me as a stand-up comic in India. There are no challenges. You just have to make an audience laugh- that's it.

Regardless of how noble your thought is or how much of a difference you want to make, unless you make people laugh, you're not getting anywhere. That's as simple as it gets. There have been times when the crowd has gotten a little hostile. There has been a time when one drunk audience member tried to throw me off stage because he was drunk and huge. But apart from one or two issues, there's nothing more. It's just you trying to address a crowd that has come for comedy. I don't think that as a guy who's trying to make people laugh, there are any challenges that I face. The only challenge is I should try and write more jokes and become funnier which is always a challenge.

Q: So you were speaking about how not enough people know you. Do you think that an online presence would help with that? We noticed that you don't post much online.

A: It would help. But putting an online video that I think is not ready is like sharing the first draft of your movie with your audience. It's like "hey I shot this romantic scene with Shah Rukh Khan in the alps, what do you think of it?" And people are like "Its good but what's your..?" And it takes a while before each joke gets to a good place where you know the joke will do well. Having said that, it's not like I have funny thoughts every hour and I'm throwing them away like I don't want them. You try and write jokes and you get to a point where you're like I need these jokes to perform for an hour. Once I have enough material, then I can give it out to the people. If people like it, they'll come and watch me. I can't have 40 minutes and throw away 5 and then starve for the rest of my life. I can't afford to do that. I don't think my material is ready to be put online. When you watch some of the comedians who are been performing for as long as you have abroad and they're way ahead. Comedy has been going on in the US and the UK for 60 years. It started in India less than a decade ago. In New York, you have a comedian who will go to 6 venues to do stand-up and by the end of the night he will have a bit that he knows is working better. His way of getting a joke to work better is at least 800 times faster than a comedian in India. I cannot be complacent and say, this is a joke and I'm giving it out and I'm happy if people come and watch it. I've to still write more to try and see if I can get a joke to a certain point where I cannot make it any better and I can put that out. I'm waiting to put one or two videos out; but also putting a video up costs money. So as a broke comedian, you sometimes try and wonder if you can afford it. If you record it once, and it doesn't come out well, you have to record it again. So I don't want to and can't afford the luxury of trying to see if I can record something 10 times and put it out. For now, I can only afford to do more shows and over time I'll try and see if I can record a particular set and put it up. I think I should've just answered this by saying I'm not ready yet and you would've gotten the whole gist of everything. You don't give comedians a chance to talk – you shouldn't.

Q: What do you think the future of stand-up comedy is in India?

A: You're asking the wrong guy this question. At this point, I just want to say that the future of stand-up comedy in India is me. That's the only future that is there. But I don't know what the future looks like. Before it comes to a point where I cannot do stand-up anymore, I want to do enough stand-up that I can be happy that I got to do it and also not starve while doing it. Honestly, apart from that, I don't care what the future looks like because I'm not here to try and see if I can like huddle all the comedians and be like "let's get this". Each one is for himself because as a comic, you're alone on stage. Other comedians will try to make suggestions but at the end of the day, it's your own craft and you have to get to it. For me, the future looks very dicey. I think it looks very scary and dark with clouds all over it and some drowning. It got too dark too soon. But I'd say that there's still a long way to go. We've just gotten a stand-up special on Netflix by Aditi Mittal. We've got some comedians with Amazon prime specials, but these are comedians who started doing stand-up first. They've put in 6 or 7 years of effort to get a show and put it out. But it's not like over time, the number of joke you write is going to go up. It possibly is for other comedians, but for me that isn't the case. I've to still get to a point where I can have enough to give away. Stand-up only goes up when you try and have good specials. I think that in a few years, we'll be able to have some really good comedians that can come from India but we have to have comedians who work day in day out and only do this to try and get to that point.

Q: Financially, would you say that this is a viable career option?

A: I would want to say that arts across the boards in different streams are not viable to pursue if you're looking at your pocket. Out of 1000 people, there maybe 1 or 5 guys who will be able to sustain and make a living because we're just starting to realise that live performance can be a full-time job. What I want to say is going to sound pretentious because it is – but 4 or 5 decades ago, an average Indian was still trying to get their first car. The number of cars or vehicles that you see today was in no way the same as it was in the 70s. But in the developed countries in the 70s, there were vehicles even back then. Because of the way the internet connected everyone so quickly, everybody went from being an underdeveloped nation in the 50s and 60s to suddenly becoming one of the superpowers. We've got the most population, number of vehicles that can fit in the place that we have. The amount of technology and infrastructure that India offers and the sheer power that India has in terms of

potential and resources shows us that we need to realise that it's okay to be a performer and live and sustain that in India itself. Abroad, they have theatre groups that have professional actors who only do theatre and survive. In India, they starve. They go out and lose money out of their pocket. They do something else to sustain this career. The good thing is that the turn over for stand-up is more because you're just yourself. You don't have a crew or a set. You just need a mic and you're sorted. So if you put in effort, you'll be able to sustain. But I would want other people not to do stand-up because that would mean more competition. Performing any art form full time is not going to be a cake walk. You just have to cut down your expenses drastically and get to a point where you can sustain your monthly expenses and be comfortable for a while.

Q: In Bangalore specifically there was a susceptible increase in the number of stand-up comedians. Do you think there was a factor that helped with that sudden upsurge?

A: It all has to do with YouTube being the one thing that people watch. There's been an increase in stand-up comedians but the increase in good stand-up comedians hasn't been there at all. We just have more people trying stand-up but for someone to be really good, it takes time. In the last 8 months, I would say that at least 150 people would've tried their hand at stand-up but only about 8 to 10 are wanting to do that for the boom. I might be cutting that a little short. I think only about 20 people want to do that. Out for that, only half of them want to do that to get to a famous point very soon and 10 of them want to see if they can get good at stand-up comedy. YouTube is one of the reasons people look at a video and say "hey, I can do this, I can totally do this" but it's not just do that once. You've to do that almost every day. I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing. I hope that it brings in more of a crowd that understands and appreciates comedians who've given up their jobs and are doing this for them. It's a daily grind for them where they wait all day doing nothing for that 5 to 7 minutes they get at the end of the day to try and get better. Apart from the fact that it doesn't pay, that's the only thing on your mind. Coming back to the question you asked - YouTube is the reason a lot of people are trying stand-up. It's the in thing now. About a decade ago, it was trying to be on a dance reality show; everybody wanted to be on DID or Boogie Woogie. I've auditioned for DID and I've failed miserably. I walked up thinking that I'm totally going to blow people's minds off and no I'm not. But now everybody's doing stand-up. There are

reality shows doing stand-up, there are cafes, there are corporates, there are people who've birthday parties looking for a stand-up comedian. So suddenly there's been a big demand for stand-up and that's why people are trying to fill in. but over time, it'll fit around and the comedians who are trying to do this full time and make a career out of it will try and see if they can survive in it.



The New Kiddin' Town