

Research Note

**Partying at Nightclubs in Kolkata: A Search for
'Nirvana' in Everyday Life**

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India Today 3rd April 2017 reports:

Woman molested in front of husband in posh Park Street Night Club: The young couple say they went to M-Bar on Park Street on Saturday night to meet another couple who were their friends. When they sat in the reserved area to meet their friends, the perpetrator, whom they identified as the son of a prominent Kolkata businessman came and assaulted them. It was after the intervention of the club owners and bouncers that the couple could manage to escape.¹

A reporter writes:

There are teenagers with pocketful of money looking for fun. There are middle aged travelling sales person looking for one-night stand. Then there are married businessmen who leave their wives behind and look for easy prey. There are poor housewives who are on the look out to make money from these predators. Also, there are college and office girls who bring their revealing dress in a bag and go for a quick changeover in the evening and go inside these discos. Yes, Park Street does all that in the night on hourly basis.²

The above two incidences have been cited with reference to probing deep into the inside story of partying at nightclubs. Kolkata's nightlife has witnessed a massive spurt from 2000 onwards. Popular nightclubs like Tantra, Roxy, Underground, The Myx, M Bar Kitchen have huge footfalls where the crowd enters the salvation zone with loud music and grooving to their favourite numbers. People shimmy round in glimmer putting on their party shoes with 'Abhi toh party shuru huyi hai!!!' (The party has just

begun). Such scenes are very common and it seems that everyone there is just trying to find their innate enjoyment within the crowd.

But one wonders what could be the source of 'enjoyment'? I have preferred to term the experience as 'nirvana' which literally means liberation or 'mukti' from the repeating cycle of birth, life and death. Here the term 'nirvana' has been deliberately used to refer to the liberation from the daily chores of life, which begins from the morning, continues within the busy schedules and probably would not give a chance to the individual for relief. Club and pub crawlers find it an easy option to release their everyday stresses within the colourful and soaring ambience out there.

Kolkata has a long history of accommodating people of various tastes- from club goers to music lovers. The average Kolkattans are not much unaware about the club culture. But what is striking is the dramatic change of tastes whereby people increasingly flock to the new age nightclubs whereas colonial and vintage clubs like Tollygunge Club, Calcutta Club, Calcutta Cricket and Football Club, Royal Calcutta Golf club bear a nostalgic and vintage flavour with selected crowds. Today's nightclubs' social character is marked by loud music, wild consumption of alcohol. Added to the fact, different generations are amazed by the colourful and glossy projections of party life in Page 3 of various city newspapers- be it the English or the vernaculars and are often curious about the inside story of night life.

An obvious question that comes to mind is what are the probable ways through which people search for 'nirvana' within nightlife? The answer might lie in the fact that they provide an excellent and fascinating avenue to individuals of different genders with 'a promise of wonderful experience on every visit. For women, nightclubs are a great place to dance with your friends and meet guys. The prospect of meeting attractive women is primarily what drives men to night clubs, and the atmosphere and experience cultivated by a nightclub is designed with these factors in mind.'³

In the second place, the concept of active nightlife is taking a new turn, whereby the urban youth of both sexes, step up with peppy music, unfurling themselves in the company of their 'friends'. The increased stress level is giving way to an active social life that an individual craves for after a weeklong mundane routine. 'The night-clubs became a delightful respite after a hectic week...Now the clubs are the soul and space of many workaholics' comments Priya, an IT company employee. 'Without party, nightclubs, I will go crazy if I cannot vent out the stresses of 12-15 hours of

work', confesses Aditi, a housewife. On being asked the reasons for partying she replied, 'You know the status and the toil of a housewife in our society is always unrecognized. At least meeting up some of your friends here and letting yourself free up here provides some kind of peace at the end of the day and a relief from unfixed working hours (laughs loud) for your family members who ends up without acknowledging your labour.' Abhirup, a legal adviser in an MNC says, 'I love dancing, and this is a fantastic place to unwind... I cannot manage for attending aerobic classes, yoga classes, or gyms from my busy schedules. This is a perfect place for keeping yourself merry while shredding off some calories, or at least your day's anxiety.' Put simply, it is fun that are driving the Kolkatans for more music, dance and colours of nightlife. It is the perfect place which lets one with a sensorial experience of forgetfulness about who he/she is supposed to be and the things he/she is supposed to do.

Adding to the fact is the argument that partying at nightclubs provides a great opportunity for socialising. Put from the view of symbolic interactionism, it explains how people attach meanings during the course of interaction based upon their 'idiosyncratic or subjective understanding' which may not necessarily reflect the interpretation of that particular interaction process by another person. Very common practices associated with the process include buying a drink, requesting for a dance, sharing drink tables, etc. Even introvert people might find nightclub as a perfect destination point for initiating conversations with a stranger, which otherwise would not have been possible.⁴

Nightclubs are also 'little powerhouses of status validation'. People now increasingly see clubbing as an important lifestyle statement. When the social networking sites gets flooded with 'likes' on posting a party picture, it somewhat brings about a feeling of elevated status or accomplishment within the individual. This altered attitude goes well with the increasing power for expenditure. With the shrinking size of the family, 'the disposable incomes have multiplied, changing the middle-class notions about entertainment.' This stands at par with Bourdieu's notion according to whom society is not only stratified by wealth but also by status. Nightclubs present itself as an arena for display of one's social class, social circles, wealth, taste in terms of fashion, food and art which ultimately plays a key role in the creation of a symbol for display of one's status.

Modern day Kolkatans, while living within the city, are busy in pursuing fast lives, making money within short span of time, chasing after rising graph of career, realising aims and dreams and thus are easily falling prey

to doses of stresses and strains in everyday life. For them, party or nightclubs are actually gateways for relaxation. They find enjoyment, companionship, even peace in a place surrounded by loud music. But does that bring out the entire picture into the forefront or is something left behind at the background? Drawing back references towards first two quotations, it seems that there is much left behind which is the cornerstone of the present paper.

Besides frivolous spending on alcohol, smoking, unhealthy food, it has been observed that health impact account much more than the economic expenditure. For example, though it is presumed the habit of drinking helps one in temporary relief from distress, but the fact is that people can sense much more distress, guilty, shame and a sense of being left out the next day after their hangover. Many of them experience a bad mood or a feeling of hollowness. This is often referred to 'post-party depression'.

Depression has been alarmingly on the rise; around 350 million people suffer from depression across the globe.⁵ Dysthymia refers to persistent depressive order which is a continuous long term (chronic form) of depression. Many party goers have been found to be experiencing dysthymia and they resort to drinking in nightclubs and hanging round in parties as 'a route to escape'. But they admit that they end up with more aggression, emotional breakdowns or weeping for hours at the end. Even after returning back home, they suffer from feeling of extreme loneliness, desertion and next day self criticising for previous night's behaviour, invoking a new chapter of self hatred and criticism. This phenomenon can be termed as 'propensity for destructive escapism'.

Millennials in Kolkata are found in a state of confusion when in an effort towards escaping from everyday stresses and strains, they prefer to indulge themselves in partying but end up with increased feeling of loneliness, irritation, frustration, loneliness. Many of such individuals in search for companions attend these places but feel devastated when falling prey to fraud individuals or cheaters. Incidences are not very uncommon where we find females are too often victimised and are emotionally deceived or molested or being stalked or victimised in flesh trade rackets. Even male counterparts are dragged towards drug addiction, alcoholism, or often targeted to false concocted situations and are blackmailed thereafter. Since, many a times, youngsters visit nightclubs and party with people without informing their parents or families, landing up in a world of troubles over there make them feel absolutely broken. They feel they are left with no one with whom they can share their sorrows and problems as they feel being absolutely deserted.

Factors like the breakdown of joint families, gradual extinction of ‘para culture’ where people of more or less same age formed groups and engaged themselves in ‘adda’ (informal friendly conversation) after returning back from workplace on almost countless topics or the absolute fetish for ‘posting’ pictures on walls of social networking sites as evidences of elevated status, altogether combine to make the present-day Kolkata’s millennials feel all alone. Added to this, the promising projections of colourful life on *Page 3* of city newspapers about the ‘world of nirvana’ in nightclubs omit the fact that the negative impacts can outweigh positive impacts in the long run. These factors culminate together to coerce the individuals psychologically while dragging them towards the hypnotic ‘world of nirvana’. They might be enjoying the momentary happiness, fun and entertainment but one cannot ignore the fact that depression gradually and systematically engulfs them. Ultimately, I ponder over two unresolved questions- can the *nirvanic* world of nightclubs be termed as ‘temporary band-aids’ providing momentary relief to Kolkata’s partygoers and nightclubbers from everyday stresses and strains, and if so, how long can it sustain its present efficacy? Or are we going to see that the party going people will be giving up the habit of partying just as the millennials in USA and UK are now increasingly abandoning nightclubs due to different reasons. Perhaps the possible conclusions can be reached at in near future through further insights and researches.

Notes and References

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