

From the Editor

Dear colleagues,

It is my pleasure to present the ninth issue of *Explorations*. The present issue consists of eight papers published under the ‘Articles’ category, one paper under ‘Research in Progress’, two commentaries and two book reviews.

The first article titled *Exploring Mall as a Producer and Product of the Spatialisation of India’s New Middle Class* by Kulwinder Kaur forefronts the spatial in understanding how the class differentiations are hierarchised in urban space. The paper explores the shopping mall as both a producer as well as a product of the ‘spatialisation’ of India’s new middle class as articulated in the changing spatial practices of malls.

The second article titled *The Methodological Challenges of School Ethnography: A Fieldwork Reflection* by Bishnu Pratap Mishra is a reflective paper based on ethnographic fieldwork done at a community-participation school based in Jaipur, Rajasthan. The paper shares some of the issues and challenges the researcher faced during his fieldwork and how these challenges were negotiated to conduct school ethnography.

The third article titled *Effect of Visual Media on Theoretical Discussions in Classrooms of Sociology and Anthropology* by Sae Paware focuses on the importance of visual narrative mediums and their ability to transcend linguistic barriers through an analysis of theoretical and pedagogical discussion as well as primary data from interviews of young professionals teaching Sociology or Anthropology in Mumbai and Pune.

The fourth article titled *Nation, Integration and Schism: An Analysis of Ernest Renan and Emile Durkheim’s Views* by Jayapal H R examines the essence of the idea of nation, particularly through the perspectives of two scholars – Ernest Renan and Emile Durkheim.

The fifth article titled *Inter-Caste Marriage: An Untold Saga of Oppression in a Vaishnava Monastery of Assam* by Akhyai Jyoti Mahanta explores the degree of oppression experienced by couples of inter-caste marriages in the *sattras*

institutions of Assam. The paper shows how despite being the progeny of the egalitarian neo-vaishnavite movement, the sattras later on deviated from its original principles and came under the spell of casteism and imposed strict censure on inter-caste marriages.

The sixth article titled *Ethnography among Migrants in a City: Field Experiences in Delhi* by Thanggoulen Kipgen is an account of the researcher's ethnographic fieldwork conducted among the Kuki migrants from Northeast India in Delhi. The paper seeks to read and understand the migrants' everyday life through the researcher's field experiences and encounters in the city.

The seventh article titled *Hurdles of Health Care Services to Women in Rural Areas: An Insight from India* by Shovan Ghosh and Yasmin Khatun provides an analytical discussion on the potential demand side barriers of health care services to women with regard to a rural community development block in West Bengal.

The eighth article titled '*Gender in and Gender of Technology*': *A Sociological Analysis of the Gendered Nature of Technology and its Representation through Advertisements in 21st Century India* by Saheli Chowdhury utilises feminist intersectional approach to assess social transformation through media representation of gendering of technology in 21st century India, primarily through advertisements, which expresses and consolidates power relationship between technology and women, and further accentuates stereotypical representations.

The paper under Research in Progress titled *Exclusion in the Employability: De-skilling and Re-skilling in the Bhadohi Carpet Industry* by Asfiya Karimi highlights the process of exclusion of workers in the carpet industry of Bhadohi due to upgradation of technology owing to the process of globalisation.

The commentary by Anushka Sinha, *Death without Dignity: An Exploration of Dying and Mourning during a Pandemic*, interprets the reconfigured boundaries of life and death by outlining the multi-layered complexities presented by dying and grieving at this moment in history, where a combination of state excesses, strict containment measures and pleas of social distancing from healthcare professionals leave little space for mourning, let alone post-death ceremony.

The commentary by Ramandeep Kaur, *Gujarat Riots (2002): Role of Governmental and Non- Governmental Commission*, highlights the communal

violence of the Godhra riot through a multiplicity of reports by different organisations which conclusively point to the same narrative of apathy of the administration to arrest the lawlessness by allowing the ascendancy of hooligans and indirectly supporting the unjust political games.

This is followed by two book reviews: *The Misinformation Age: How False Beliefs Spread* (2019) reviewed by Manoj Kumar Jena; and, *Rethinking Revolution: Soyabean, Choupals, and the Changing Countryside in Central India* (2016) reviewed by Anand Ranjan.

Explorations invites your contributions for future issues of the journal. We will appreciate your feedback or suggestions on the journal.

Stay safe.

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Article: Exploring Mall as a Producer and Product of the Spatialisation of India's New Middle Class

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Exploring Mall as a Producer and Product of the Spatialisation of India's New Middle Class

--- Kulwinder Kaur

Abstract

Following 'the spatial turn' in urban studies, I propose that sociology of India needs to revise its understanding of social stratification by extending its existing focus from the 'enactment' and 'performance' of class in cultural and political domains to studying how space is equally, if not more, constitutive of identity and difference. Towards this end, this paper forefronts the spatial in understanding how the class differentiations are hierarchised in urban space. It, thus, explores the shopping mall as both a producer as well as a product of the 'spatialisation' of India's new middle class as articulated in the changing 'spatial practices' of malls. Drawing from ethnographic research in Delhi and Gurgaon, the paper argues that the materiality of mall is supported by the heterogeneity of middle class consumers who aid the production of a socio-spatial hierarchy as they stop their patronage of old malls when bigger and newer malls enter into urban space with their promise of a better consumer experience – both sensuous and symbolic.

Key words: Mall, Middle Class, Spatial Hierarchy, Spatialisation, Stratification

Foregrounding the 'Spatial': The Rational

The second half of the 20th century marked the onset of a 'spatial turn' in social sciences and humanities. Consequently, space, instead of time, became the predominant category of knowledge production. This shift from time to space is rightly claimed as a 'paradigm shift ...spanning far beyond the academic disciplines of geography' (Carter, Pugh, Thien, Marres, Featherstone & Griffin, 2009, p. 579), so much so that 'over the past half a century, space has infiltrated most of the social sciences and the humanities: sociology, anthropology, philosophy, history, psychology and psychoanalysis, literary criticism, and legal studies' (Blank & Rosen-Zvi, 2010, p. 3). This can be attributed to the works of several well-known scholars and philosophers of the 20th centuryⁱ who also inspired the adoption of the spatial approach in the study of Indian society and

culture.

Coincidentally, in India, the beginning of the 21st century also marked the onset of ‘the urban turn’ (Prakash, 2002) owing to the phenomena of increasing urbanisation on the one hand, and the advent of neo-liberal capitalism on the other, both of which were driven by cities. The past two decades in India have, thus, witnessed the popularisation of urban studies in a big way, be it in academia, research organisations or the policy think tanks. While this urban turn brought the much needed attention to the erstwhile neglected urban condition in India, the dominant perspective of study remained structural or cultural. This was especially true in case of sociology of India. This paper intends to correct this sociological neglect in the context of class as a form of stratification in India which, till recently, had neglected the ‘spatial’, or at best viewed it as a subtext of the ‘cultural’.

Not that the spatial perspective needs any endorsement, yet it would be pertinent to recapitulate that in social theory,

[V]irtually all the fundamental concepts identifying social institutions have an important spatial component. It is not possible to think about community, neighbourhood, environment, household, work, school, state, or labor markets, to name a few, without at least implicitly assuming their spatial character... Relations of power, structures of inequality, and practices of domination and subordination are embedded in spatial design and relations. Thus spatial arrangements are both products and sources of other forms of inequality (Tickamyer, 2000, p. 807).

Drawing from the conjoining of the ‘spatial turn’ and the ‘urban turn’, this paper foregrounds the ‘spatial’ in understanding the ways in which class differentiations are hierarchisedⁱⁱ in urban space. In my observation, sociology of India has come a long way in recognising and analysing the growing importance of class and its performance as a basis of social stratification, but its focus has largely remained political or cultural, much to the neglect of the ‘spatial’ wherein class identities are embedded in space. In other words, there is a need to evolve a ‘clear understanding of where and how stratifying cultural practices are emplaced and the ways in which status hierarchies may also be expressed as spatial hierarchies’ (Richer, 2015, p. 348). Shopping malls as the ‘citadels of consumption’ (Ritzer,

1999) make for an ideal spatial choice for this purpose.

Towards this end, the paper examines the internal heterogeneities within the new middle class by subjecting a set of carefully chosen malls to a spatial analysis. The study, therefore, explores the shopping mall as both a producer as well as a product of the spatialisation of the middle class. However, malls are not alone in this production process as Dávila (2016) has shown in her study of El Mall in Bogotá. The mall consumers, too, are active in this process as they exercise their ‘judgments of taste’ in giving patronage to certain malls while ignoring others. The representation and socio-spatial hierarchisation is therefore a co-constitutive process between the malls and their patrons. The emerging spatial hierarchies are, however, far from stable. Rather there is fluidity across time and space that this paper seeks to capture ethnographically through a long standing observation of the selected malls in Delhi and Gurgaon.

The Mall: A Frivolous Subject or a Serious Epistemological Category?

In the past two decades, the shopping mall has become a regular feature of urban landscape in India, and yet there is a lack of scholarly attention commensurate with its proliferation. Till recently, the Indian mall figured, at best, as an auxiliary category in the critical accounts of ‘neo-liberal restructuring of urban space’ (Banerjee-Guha, 2002) or in the debates on ‘the global city’ (Dupont, 2011). Sociology of India, perhaps, perceived it as too frivolous a subject to merit scholarly attention in its own right; or else viewed it as an embodied space of ‘*mazza* or play, fun and pleasure’ – which as Anjaria and Anjaria rightly point out are regrettably ‘either overlooked’ or not given any attention unless ‘seen as symbols of something more important’ (2020, p. 232).

However, it became increasingly difficult to ignore these ‘citadels of consumption’ after liberalisation due to the rise of India’s new middle class (Fernandes, 2006) and ensuing explosion of the real estate and retail boomⁱⁱⁱ that occurred between the years 2007 and 2013. Malls articulated a growing demand by the new middle class for an array of consumer goods, services and lifestyles that were suddenly made available and accessible after India experienced unprecedented economic growth following the onset of liberalisation in the 1990s. In fact, the new middle class and its consumer practices attracted a lot of sociological attention but most of these accounts were written within performative or cultural frameworks. The urban spaces, such as shopping malls, that

materialised these practices, were only an incidental presence in these accounts, devoid of any subjectivity.

On the contrary, in other parts of the globe, especially in societies characterised by what may be called as ‘liquid modernity’ (Bauman, 2000), malls have been instrumental in flagging very serious epistemological concerns. For instance, as underlined in another paper^{iv}, malls in Europe and North America are central to the discourse on the ‘privatisation’ and ‘the end of public space’ (Sorkin, 1992; Mitchell, 1995; Zukin, 1998; Voyce, 2003; Low, 2010); the sites of surveillance, order and control of consuming subjects (Koskella, 2000; Staeheli & Mitchell, 2006); shopping as a ‘gendered activity’ (Mathews et al., 2000); the ‘feminisation of flâneur’ (Abaza, 2001); segregation of publics (Erkip, 2003); civic life in the suburban community (Goss, 1993); and the discourse on the ‘right to the city’ (Harvey, 2003) among others.

On a generous note, the paucity of literature in the Indian context may be conceded given the fact that the origin of malls in India is quite a recent historical occurrence. Additionally, the context of their origin and development, too, is quite different from the social history and evolution of malls in other parts of the world (Kaur, 2017). As a global phenomenon, malls have traversed a long historical trajectory, having evolved into this current spatial format from their earliest prototype – the ancient ‘Greek Agora’ to the ‘Eastern Bazaars’, ‘Parisian Arcades’, modern ‘Department Stores’, the post-world war-II ‘American Suburban Mall’ and the Canadian late 20th century’s ‘Regional Shopping and Leisure Centers’ (Coleman, 2006). In the global discourse, the mall features as a very significant spatial text that demonstrates not only the ‘social-spatialisation’ (Shields, 1989) of classes or communities, but also the spatialisation of a variety of pasts and fictional futures to produce a spectacle of material histories of localities, both real or mythical. The study of the ‘West Edmonton Mall’ in Alberta, Canada (Shields, 1989; Crawford, 1992) is an illustrative case in point.

The lack of a similar focus in sociology of India is a reflection of the broader neglect of the spatial as a category of the social as discussed above. However, in the past few years, some works, not necessarily on malls, but on other aspects of cities, have filled this lacuna by making a pronounced use of spatial analysis in their study of Indian urbanism. For instance, the study of the urban visual culture in spaces of consumption (Brosius, 2010); the urban and peri-urban water crisis (Alankar, 2013); spatial equity and justice in urban governance (Biswas, 2015);

subaltern urbanisation (Mukhopadhyay, Zerah & Denis, 2019), gendered mobility and safety (Desai, Parmar & Mahadevia, 2019; Raju & Paul, 2019); appropriation of public space by feminist acts (Phadke, 2020); or the study of the neighbourhood (Jha, Pathak & Das, 2021) to name a few. These studies reiterate the argument that the ‘production of spatiality, offers a rich opportunity to facilitate interdisciplinary dialogue’ (Arias, 2010, p. 75).

With respect to malls, it was Malcolm Voyce (2007) who published the first scholarly paper that drew attention to the shopping malls in India as ‘socially dividing practices’; however, it was conceptual rather than empirical. It was followed by a few ethnographic accounts of the impact of globalisation on consumption patterns of middle class (Jaffrelot & Van der Veer, 2008; Ganguly, Scrase & Scrase, 2008); and representations of the new middle class in the visual culture and elite spaces of consumption (Brosius, 2010); and malls in particular (Mathur, 2014; Srivastava, 2014) which drew the much needed scholarly gaze on malls. Concurrently, it was not uncommon to find studies that attributed class divides and their reproduction to the ‘habitus’ or acquisition of ‘cultural or social capital’ as observed in the everyday performativity (Dickey, 2016).

Returning to the subject of the middle class, it is evident that the study of malls in India is tantamount to studying the new middle class. It would, therefore, be fitting to briefly revisit the trajectory of the middle class from its origin, evolution and transformation before examining its spatialisation through this ethnographic study on Delhi and Gurgaon.

Revisiting the Trajectory of Middle Class to the ‘New Middle Class’

The middle class (sometimes referred to as ‘old’ middle class) has traversed a long history^v. It emerged during colonial rule, after exposure to English language, liberal education, modern capitalism, and subsequent rise of nationalism after Independence (Mishra, 1961). Yet it differs in its ideology and political orientations from the middle class in Europe which has different modern democratic values (Gupta, 2000; Ahmad & Reifeld, 2017). The typical Indian old middle class is portrayed either as an English speaking *Babu* or clerk during the colonial period, or a crusader of nationalism during the post-colonial era. The ‘new’ middle class, on the other hand, unencumbered by the moral, ideological and cultural underpinnings of austerity, scarcity and nationalism, unlike its ‘old’ counterpart, is represented as the cultural icon of Indian modernity

and globality in mass-media (Mankekar, 1999; Scrase, 2002). It constitutes a strong 'civil society' that asserts its citizenship and acts as a 'guardian of bourgeois city' and its public spaces (Anjaria, 2009) by engaging in 'bourgeois environmentalism' (Baviskar, 2011), much to the dismay of the urban poor.

Discursively speaking, either as an assemblage of 'individual consumers' or a community mobilising itself for the goal of 'collective consumption', the new middle class, either way appears rather unified in its aspiration for a 'good life.' However, on a closer observation, it is revealed that it is the variations in these very consumption practices and modes of resistance that fracture and internally differentiate the new middle class as a whole on the basis of different modes of 'becoming' middle class (Donner, 2011). It conjures up the image of a class fraught with anxieties of performing its middle classness, as shown by Baviskar and Ray (2011) in their well-timed volume on the middle class, that captured the intersectionality of the middle class with other traditional social groupings such as caste, religion, gender, region or ethnicity that continue to be a decisive marker of status and honour in the Indian society. The editors and some contributors of the volume have to be credited for having made the first forays into the hitherto unexplored spatial context of the middle class by documenting the acts and practices of becoming middle class in spatially different settings, such as IT industry as a space of work (Upadhayaya, 2011), home as a domestic space (Qayum & Ray, 2011), Akshardham Temple (Srivastava, 2011) and the crowded Indian city street (Baviskar, 2011). The multiple and juxtaposing subjectivities and self-definitions of the middle class, thus, make it very problematic to define the new middle class in absolute terms.

Qualitative disparities notwithstanding, there have been numerous attempts by economists to give an absolute definition of the new middle class in terms of various statistics such as income, purchasing power, household expenditure or possession of immovable and movable assets. The standards of these criteria, for example, the lower and upper limits of income or the purchasing power parity are set, keeping in mind the national or international standards of GDP or poverty lines, etc. The new middle class is also measured and defined in terms of the rural and urban parameters. The estimates of the size of India's new middle class from such studies, thus, vary depending upon the variation in the economic criteria adopted for the purpose^{vi}. There is no doubt that these measures have provided us with a much needed macro and comparative view of the changing socio-economic structure of India's new middle classes, from time to time.

Most of these quantitative studies differentiate the new middle class into economic sub-categories; for instance, ‘lower-middle’, ‘middle-middle’, and ‘upper-middle’, and also between rural and urban categories. Along similar lines, in a longitudinal study, Krishnan and Hatekar (2017), have concluded that the new middle class in India (i.e., those who spend \$2 to \$10 per capita per day), doubled in the period between 2004-2005 and 2011-2012, and it was approximately half of India’s total population. However, they also observed that the majority of this growth was in the ‘lower-middle class’ sub-category which spent \$2 to \$4 per capita per day and was occupationally quite similar to the poor population of India. The social base of the new middle class, according to them, has therefore changed due to the new entry of populations which were earlier characterised as poor, rural, low caste or tribal. Generally speaking, the statistical estimates rightly reveal that the size of the new middle class population has increased considerably during the 7th and 8th Five Year Plan periods when the economic growth rate was also quite high (approximately 8 per cent). This also explains the relationship between economic reforms and the rise of the new middle class in India. However, this growth has neither translated into development nor in the elimination of poverty (Gupta, 2009).

The purpose of the preceding discussion was two-fold: one to reiterate the need to study the new middle class from a spatial perspective, and the other, to capture its heterogeneity. The following section of the paper intends to render explicit the spatial divisions of the complexity of numerous groupings that vie for the ‘new’ middle class status in urban space by eschewing the simple solidarity of a singular middle class. The paper is part of my decade-long ethnographic research to understand and analyse the neo-liberal reshaping of urban space in the National Capital Region (NCR) of Delhi.

Two Sites of Exploration: Vasant Kunj, South Delhi and Gurgaon

There has been an unprecedented proliferation of shopping malls in the NCR after 2005. Currently, there are more than 100 malls in Delhi^{vii}. It may be noted, however, that ‘what a mall is’ has to be understood very cautiously since definitions of the retail industry and self-assertions of individual department stores can be quite contrary to each other (Kaur, 2017, p. 113). Ansal Plaza was the first mall of Delhi that opened in 1999 and since then malls of all sizes and designs have been added to the list. However, it would be erroneous to assume a coinciding rise of a homogenous mass-consuming middle class crowding these

indistinguishable spaces. It can be argued that malls that opened in Delhi were quite diverse and distinct, and this distinctiveness was carefully contrived through the ‘spatial practices’ of mall developers, mall management, store owners and highly skilled marketing personnel (Lefebvre, 1991; Voyce, 2003).

This study focuses on two sites^{viii} of exploration for the current purpose. First site is the Vasant Kunj area of South West Delhi, a posh locality where the top two sub-strata of the new middle class reside in mostly private apartments. It has proximity to the international airport, five-star hotels, and some very important institutions of the city. There is a cluster of three very prominent malls located adjacent to each other, viz. DLF Emporio, DLF Promenade, and Ambience Vasant Kunj at this site. The second site has been selected from the neighbouring city of Gurgaon, the most visible face of India’s globalisation and post-liberalisation economic boom. It is further composed of two sub-sites: the standalone Ambience Mall located right at the border of Delhi and Gurgaon on the National Highway (NH)-8, and two adjacent malls, viz. Sahara Mall and City Centre Mall on the famous Mall Mile of Gurgaon.

Spatial Hierarchy

In the wake of growing competition among these malls, the mall developers have to conceive malls around some unique selling point (USP) that may appeal to its targeted consumers. In a meeting with the Assistant Operational Manager of one of these malls in 2016, I learnt that mall developers hire big consultancy firms to understand the feasibility of such business ventures as the financial stakes are too high. Therefore, the location, catchment area and clientele are very carefully studied decisions that entail many local factors. The three malls in the Vasant Kunj area were designed for upper-middle class groups who would arrive there by private transport, no direct metro line being in the immediate vicinity.

The most expensive of these malls and at top of the hierarchy is the DLF Emporio Mall in Vasant Kunj, also considered as the first luxury mall of India. Designed and conceived to cater only to the rich and upper class, it cannot be termed a mall in the conventional sense. In an interview, one of the managers of the DLF Emporio admitted that the enterprise had deliberately omitted several of the features associated with average malls,

We do not encourage unnecessary foot fall... only premium

customers. We have no food court, no anchor store, no fast food and no open places for visitors to sit and chat freely... Cafes and restaurants in the lobby are quite upscale, designed to give a luxurious experience... we retail designer brands and store rents are too high for middle level brands to sustain.

Clearly, the DLF Emporio is out of reach of the ‘lower-middle’ and ‘middle-middle’ strata of the middle class. Organisation of inner space through design, aesthetics and hiring of immaculately uniformed, English-speaking youngsters trained to measure the economic and cultural capital of consumers, constitute some of the important non-electronic surveillance techniques to filter the visitors. The firm body language and reproachful vibes of the haughty store managers can deter the less eligible visitors from lingering too long in the stores. One of my respondents from East Delhi, who lives in a self-owned two-bedroom apartment in Mayur Vihar, a ‘middle-middle’ class locality of small entrepreneurs and mid-career professionals, was very eloquent about Emporio. She ran a boutique of women’s evening wear from a rented store in her neighbourhood market and prided herself in being a successful entrepreneur. On a visit to her store to conduct this interview, I asked her about her future plans for business growth. I specifically wanted to know if having a store in a place like Emporio was on her wish list. Her denial was very vehement. She informed me rather haughtily that she did not even care to go there as a customer. On being asked, she narrated her experience, thus,

Oh! DLF Emporio! Now that’s a very snobbish place! The sales girl was very rude and reluctant to even show me the saree. She looked me up and down in a condescending manner and told me the exorbitant price of the glittery saree... I had not even asked for the price! ‘These are real Swarovski Crystals’ she told me disparagingly... pata nahi kahan ka accent bana rahi thi... (Don’t know which [English] accent she was making up)... On the contrary, the two girls at my store are very well-mannered and I don’t treat my customers like this... Emporio people don’t have business sense!

The next mall to be opened at this site was the Ambience Mall – Vasant Kunj. It was much bigger in its scale as well as clientele and attracted a diversity of people from the vast middle class publics. This was reflected in its multiple anchor stores

that catered to different segments of middle class buyers, viz. *Lifestyle* and *Pantaloons* for those looking for mid-range goods of local and imported brands. Another store called *Reliance Max* was aimed at the slightly lower-middle class group where one could find mostly local Indian brands. In addition, the *Big Bazaar* catered to the grocery and household needs of the lower-middle and middle-middle class buyers looking for whole sale prices and good bargains on bulk shopping. However, its clever placement in the basement kept these shoppers out of sight, so that what Crawford (1992, pp. 13, 30) calls the ‘artful visual effects’ and the ‘sensory impact’ of the mall were not spoiled for other shoppers on the floors above.

The food court of this mall offered a combination of local street foods of Delhi such as *Khan Chacha* (of Khan Market fame), *Parathe Wali Gali* (of Chandni Chowk) for those with Indian taste; and a few fast food joints and some exotic cuisines such as Lebanese for those looking for variety. For kids, the *Fun City* was a big attraction due to its adventure rides and video games. It was a popular destination for birthday parties as the middle class apartments in Delhi were not big enough to provide ample play areas for kids. I had the occasion to visit Fun City many times during the course of my fieldwork. A couple of times, I purposely chose to escort my daughter to the birthday parties of her school friends when she was in middle school so that I could observe the amusement park in action. The birthday party booking came with a free access to a small room adjacent to the play area where the hosts could organise cake-cutting ceremonies and serve food and refreshments to the invited guests. The cost was calculated per head. I observed that the kids were accompanied by caretakers, mostly females who were made to wait outside, in the corridor of the mall. The hosts offered them specially pre-packed cheaper food such as a burger or sandwich brought in from eateries outside the mall. As one party host shared with me, ‘We have ordered special pre-packaged food for them with the permission of the management’.

On being asked, the Assistant Manager revealed that the arrangement suited the management since it did not adversely affect the business. The caretakers, in the meantime, utilised this opportunity to relax and take in the ‘liminal space’ (Goss, 1993, pp. 27-28) around them. I utilised this visit to strike a conversation with them with an explicit intent to conduct a focus-group interview. They readily agreed and happily gave me permission to also write about this meeting. They admitted they liked the bright and ‘magical’ atmosphere in the mall and these

trips gave them some ‘free time’ to unwind. On being asked if they, too, felt the urge to buy anything from the mall, an amused caretaker replied, ‘*Yeh sab to bade logon ke liye hai...hum nahi khareed sakte*’ (All this is for the big/rich people... we can’t buy). I further probed if the inability to buy made them feel bad about coming to the mall? To this, another one responded, ‘*Nahi... mall bahut achi lagti hai... sab kuch bahut badia hai... rounak hai... bas ek cheez kharab hai... jab kuch log humein aise dekhte hain jaise ki hum kuch hai hi nahi*’ (No...we like the mall very much... there is a vibrancy... only one thing is bad... when some people look at us as if our existence has no value).

A careful mix of anchor stores, consumer brands and other facilities for refreshment, dining and entertainment determine who visits which mall and for what purpose. The third mall at this site is the DLF Promenade Mall, which holds a middle position between DLF Emporio and Ambience Vasant Kunj in the spatial hierarchy. Relatively more upscale than Ambience, the Promenade houses multiple fast fashion stores such as *Zara*, *Mango* and *Lacoste* as well as high fashion designer stores like *Calvin Klein* and *Moschino*. The clientele at these stores in DLF Promenade differs considerably from that at the Ambience mall. With the help of a common acquaintance residing in a posh residential enclave of South Delhi, I arranged to interview a group of four girls who were studying in two premium colleges of south campus of University of Delhi and were friends with each other since their school days. One of these girls was also the daughter of a family friend. I gave them the option to meet me at either DLF Promenade or next door at Ambience mall, Vasant Kunj. Significantly, they chose to meet me at the Starbucks cafe of DLF Promenade as ‘the crowd is much better at Promenade’, they told me.

On further probing their reason to choose Promenade, the second girl from the group elaborated, ‘A lot of small-town boys and girls, who either study or work in Delhi, visit Ambience – Vasant Kunj... so we avoid it’. I asked, ‘How do you make out that they are from a small-town?’ To this, two of them insisted in a chorus, ‘Of course, one can tell!’ And then, the third one added,

It’s the way they are dressed, their language... if they are wearing something trendy, we can tell whether it is an ‘original’ [her emphasis] or not... most of them are wearing dupes... they probably can’t afford otherwise.

The fourth girl elaborated,

DLF Promenade has a wide variety of international cuisines and high quality sit-down restaurants... the fashion brands are so much superior for western wardrobe and there aren't any local 'mass' ethnic brands that are easily available in other street markets, for instance, Biba or Sabhyata; nor are there any over-the-top wedding stores... that type of shopper goes to Ambience.

'What about the design of the mall?' I queried further. The reply was,

DLF Promenade is smaller but its design and layout, and even exterior is more pleasant... for instance, when the weather is good, one can sit outside and watch the fountains; while there are only stairs outside Ambience

Moving on to the second site, Gurgaon, a few miles away there is another Ambience Mall on National Highway 8 on the Delhi-Gurgaon border, only half an hour drive from Delhi's Vasant Kunj. This Ambience has two distinctions: it has eight floors and is one of the biggest malls in the NCR. Along with some very high-end international brands on the first floor, it also houses its own luxury condominium at the back. It was promoted as a complete shopping and entertainment destination, having many anchor stores such as *Home Town, Zara, Marks and Spencer* and other international brands such as *Debenhams, Prada, Armani, Sephora, Bed and Bath*, and a fast fashion brand for the young, viz. *Forever-21*. While *Zara* and *Debenhams* cater to the upper-middle class; *Forever-21* fulfills the fast fashion needs of the youth from the middle-middle class.

In addition to *PVR* complex and the *Fun City*, Ambience-Gurgaon also has a bowling alley, another destination for birthday parties and generally frequented by the youngsters for entertainment, especially on the weekends. In one of the focus-group interviews with some youngsters, I was told that,

Bowling is really fun. It can be played indoors in the air-conditioned environment of the mall. Besides, there is music, food, drinks and a nice seating area. We often come here on the weekends to hang out.

It was obvious that bowling as a leisure practice provided a sense of distinction as it was out of reach of the lower-middle class youth.

The other two malls are located on the famous *Mall Mile* of the ‘new’ Gurgaon^{ix}. The latter’s steel, chrome and glass buildings house offices of several multinational companies and call centers, whose business executives live in equally ‘elite residential complexes’ (Searle, 2013) secured by the private security guards. While the tall residential towers within these complexes compliment their professional status, the malls fulfill the material and symbolic requirements of a lifestyle that is expected of them at their workplace, making them visibly different from their neighbouring residents of the ‘old’ Gurgaon and nearby villages located on the other side of the Delhi-Gurgaon Expressway.

Different malls on this Mall Mile cater to different classes within the middle class. One of the malls in Gurgaon named Sahara Mall had domestic brands and one-stop stores such as *Big Bazaar* which occupied almost its entire floor-length space. It was one of the earliest malls to be opened in Gurgaon in 2001 but gradually lost its appeal as new malls with latest international brands opened in the vicinity. The youth of elite residential complexes did not want to be seen in Sahara Mall, as I learnt from some young boys on a visit to the next door, City Centre Mall. The latter was a popular destination for the generation-X until the launch of Ambience. In a detailed interview over coffee in its food court, three local young boys who were residents in an upscale elite residential complex of DLF and were visiting the mall to watch a Hollywood movie in *Cineplex*, revealed that they could not get the tickets in *PVR* of Ambience-Gurgaon, and hence decided to watch this new Hollywood movie in *Cineplex* of City Centre Mall. I detected a clear spatialisation of the mental hierarchy of these three malls that the boys, unwittingly, expressed when I asked about their personal ratings of the malls in the NCR,

We usually go to Select City Walk in South Delhi or the DLF Promenade at Vasant Kunj... and no... we absolutely never visit the next door Sahara Mall which attracts middle aged ‘uncles’ and ‘aunties’ [their emphasis] who were mainly attracted to the discounts offered on groceries and household stuff in Big Bazaar. It is definitely not our kind of place!

Similarly, the residents of ‘old’ Gurgaon have a love-hate relationship with their

neighbouring ‘new’ Gurgaon, and its malls, in particular. The senior citizens belonging to the dominant castes of Haryana and owners of spacious self-built bungalows in sectors planned by Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) in ‘old’ Gurgaon suffered from a sense of alienation from this surrounding cultural landscape in the ‘new’ Gurgaon. They preferred to eat *desi ghee ka bana ghar ka khana* (local home cooked food in pure clarified butter) rather than the *nayi-nayi kisam ke vilayati khane* (new types of foreign foods) that their children and grandchildren got packed, at times, from these malls. Their children and grandchildren were *becoming* similar to the residents of ‘new’ Gurgaon and often consciously imitated the lifestyle choices of upper elites living in *gated communities* [their emphasis]^x. I realised that both the young and the old alike, self-consciously styled their subjective identities by simulating a carefully chosen mix of status symbols, which were not just objects of personal adornment but expressions of belonging in time, place, and space.

Concluding Remarks

Based on this study of a carefully selected cluster of malls at two sites, *viz.* South West Delhi and Gurgaon, in the NCR, a stiff competition amongst malls to attract their own set of targeted consumers and also to ward off the unwanted ones could be observed ethnographically. This is accomplished through various spatial practices, both material and symbolic, to allow and deter potential visitors from accessing the mall. Malls go for renovation and re-styling of inner space, introduction of new brands and services, innovative promotional strategies and events to attract the middle class consumers, while the consumers constantly upgrade and refine their tastes and aesthetics with the changing global dispositions, due to the constant burden of being or becoming middle class. This conjoint play between the malls and their middle class publics transforms the malls from mere shopping destinations to socially produced spaces of representation with their own unique assortment of publics, products, brands and aesthetic ambience.

This is not to say that these spatial and cultural practices always produce the desired results; nevertheless, a critical observation of these practices has helped unfold the routinely invisible modes of social inclusion and exclusion in these spaces. Not all social classes visit the mall; especially the very poor and very rich are seldom seen in the malls. Malls are spaces for the middle classes. The differentiated strata of new middle classes construct and represent their particular

mode of ‘middle classness’ through a careful choice of malls that they visit. The shoppers or visitors, in their choice of destinations for shopping or meeting people or entertainment, their modes of arrival and their avowed knowledge and familiarity with the nuances of the physical and aesthetic components of the mall, are complicit in the production of a spatial hierarchy. Together these malls and their publics generate stratified spatialities wherein middle classness is performed, represented and countered, on the one hand, and the malls are organised in a contiguous system of spatial hierarchy, on the other.

Notes:

ⁱ Some of them have been very influential in bringing about a spatial turn, especially, in urban studies, for instance, Michel de Certeau (1985), Michel Foucault (1986), Henry Lefebvre (1991), Saskia Sassen (1991), Edward Soja (1998), and David Harvey (2001) to name a few.

ⁱⁱ A reading of hierarchy derived from Dipankar Gupta’s essay *Hierarchy and Difference* attributes hierarchy to caste instead of class. Similarly, for Louis Dumont, too, ritual hierarchy forms the foundation of the caste system in India. Apparently, the rigidity and ritual separation associated with the caste hierarchy cannot be applied to class which is understood to be more open and flexible. However, I argue, that empirically speaking, the class divisions in contemporary urban settings are not mere differences but become as hierarchical as caste. See Gupta, D. (Ed), (1991). *Social stratification*. (pp.1-21). New Delhi: Oxford University Press. Also See, Dumont, L. (1980). *Homo hierarchicus: The caste system and its implications*. University of Chicago Press.

ⁱⁱⁱ Numbering only three, at the turn of the century, and confined mainly to metropolitan cities, malls have since mushroomed in the medium and small towns as well, bringing their count to more than 600 in 2019. Retrieved from https://www.indiaonline.com/article/news-top-story/with-95-operational-malls-delhi-ncr-is-india%E2%80%99s-mall-capital-jll-115051800047_1.html (accessed on 3 February, 2020).

^{iv} This part of the review is drawn from my earlier paper that gives a detailed comparative analysis of the origin of malls in India with that in North America, Europe and other parts of the globe. See Kaur, K. (2017). Malling of urban India: Social history and evolution in a global and comparative framework. *South Asian Anthropologist*, 17(1), 111-19.

^v See *The Indian middle class* by Jodhka & Prakash (2016) for a commentary encapsulating the trajectory of India’s middle class in all its dimensions.

^{vi} See Krishnan & Hatekar (2017) for a review of different economic criteria adopted to estimate the size and scale of the middle class in India.

^{vii} See <https://www.indiaretailing.com/2019/10/09/shopping-centre/the-great-indian-mall-story-the-rise-of-the-shopping-centre-industry/> (accessed on 4 February, 2020).

^{viii} The choice of South Delhi and Gurgaon was arrived at on the basis of popular perception of my informants and the media reports. However, there are several other malls within south Delhi, of which the cluster of three malls in Saket area, viz. MGF Metropolitan, Select City Walk and DLF Place is another very happening junction of malls. I decided not to bring these malls under this study as these form the subject of my research from another perspective, not under purview in this paper.

^{ix} See Tathagata Chatterji (2013) & Shoshanna Goldstein (2016) to understand the planning, development and critique of globalisation of Gurgaon.

^x This is an auto-ethnographic and reflexive insight as I am a regular visitor to a couple of such joint family households in 'old' Gurgaon.

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The Methodological Challenges of School Ethnography: A Fieldwork Reflection

--- Bishnu Pratap Mishra

Abstract

This is a reflective paper based on ethnographic fieldwork done at a community-participation school in the Alwar district, Rajasthan. The school is run by an NGO dedicated to education and is based in Jaipur, Rajasthan. The present paper aims to share some of the issues and challenges the researcher faced during his fieldwork and how these challenges were negotiated to conduct school ethnography. School ethnography has some pertinent aspects which require attention, and with this present paper, the researcher attempts to reflect on these crucial issues of ethnography. Simultaneously, the present paper attempts to share some ideas from the researcher's ethnographic experience for further examination, discussion, and critical investigation. Hence, this paper aims to explore and discuss the methodological challenges of school ethnography.

Key words: Ethnography, Fieldwork, Marginal Nativity, School

Introduction

This reflective paper is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted at a school in the Alwar district, Rajasthan. The school is run by a Jaipur-based NGO, engaged in education, named *Bodh Shiksha Samiti* (BSS). Unlike many public or private schools in India, the school follows the principle of community-participation in which the students from the nearby communities who attend this school are equal stakeholders. According to BSS, these schools, known as *Community Bodhshalas*, are not restricted within the sphere of academic development of the children; rather it is supposed to function as a community-learning institution where teachers are agents of social change, and through their interaction, communities also develop a critical understanding of their situation. At present, as per the information provided on its website, BSS is running forty community schools (thirty-three Rural & seven Urban) with internal structures and practice-based principle of democratic participation and community ownership so as to ensure

accountability and school policy for equitable quality education for all. These community schools have been established with the involvement of community members.

It is essential to understand the idea of community-participation in a specific context. For Ramachandran, ‘community-participation implies the participation of the disempowered; those who have not had access – as a community, as a geographic area or as a gender’ (2001, p. 2244). Nevertheless, in the present study, community-participation unequivocally refers to an act of participation in the decision-making by the communities from where students come to the school; throughout the process, communities’ stakes are considered, opinions are discussed, and suggestions are deliberated. Apart from its emphasis on the social constructivist method of pedagogy, the school organisation gives much scope and access to students and parents in the decision-making process. For Duke, ‘to some, the departure from bureaucratic patterns is the distinguishing feature of modern alternative schools (as cited in Deal & Nolan, 1978, p. 4). At the same time, most of the financial expenditure to run this school is managed by BSS.

Since this paper is based on fieldwork reflection, a brief background will be helpful to develop a perspective. This fieldwork is part of a doctoral research in which I planned for school ethnography as a method to understand the nuances of community-participation in schooling structures and processesⁱ. The fieldwork continued for about six months, i.e., beginning from September 2014 to its culmination in February 2015. During this period, I engaged in classroom observation, interviewed teachers and other stakeholders, and also visited communities from where these children belonged so as to initiate discussions with their parents.

These students come from thirteen different communities and *dhani*, i.e., small groups of households living together based on their kinship relationship. These thirteen communities are located within 20 km radius from the school. These students mostly belonged to unorganised sector family backgrounds, i.e., labourers, farmers, and wage-labour family background. The total number of students at this school is 152. Eleven students, out of 152, belong to the service sector background. Many of the students who do not belong to the unorganised sector family background were wards of employees of the organisation that runs the school. Around 95 per cent of students are first-generation school goers. I did classroom observation with sixty-one students belonging to standards five, six and

seven. Out of these students, twenty-six students (twelve girls and fourteen boys) were from standard five, twenty-one students (six girls and fifteen boys) from standard six, and fourteen students (seven girls and seven boys) from standard seven. These students belonged to age group of seven-thirteen years, i.e., from the primary school years to middle childhood years.

The main aim of this paper is to share some of the issues and challenges encountered during the fieldwork and the ways those issues were negotiated. School ethnography has some pertinent aspects which require attention, and the following sections attempt to reflect on these crucial issues of ethnography. Henceforth, this paper attempts to discuss the two broader aspects of ethnographic fieldwork, that are: (a) conceptual, theoretical, and methodological dimensions of school ethnography which makes it a distinct mode of investigation as well as its continuity and departure from traditional ethnography, and (b) researcher's insight emerged during the fieldwork and the researcher's struggle to maintain marginal nativity during the process of data collection.

The Distinctiveness of School Ethnography

The present work employed an ethnographic method for the data collection. Ethnography is considered as a deliberate inquiry guided by a perspective. It is not merely reporting about the phenomenon and events based on intuitive reflections or set of techniques. The ethnographic research framework is determined by the ethnographer's explicit and implicit questioning process based on prior experiences in the field, situation, and knowledge of previous sociological researches. Fieldwork is profoundly inductive, but there are no pure inductions (Erickson, 1984, p. 51). The ethnographer enters the field with a theoretical orientation and a set of questions, either explicit or implicit. The researcher approaches the field with an open mind, and it can lead to changes of perspective or questions in the field altogether because there is always a possibility of entirely different field-realities. Subsequently, the researcher attempts to arrive at an explanation of (a) consistencies of social phenomenon/event/situation/behaviour/belief in a social circumstance (s)he observed, (b) consistencies of ethnographic experience of those social phenomenon/event/situation/behaviour/belief in the researcher's presence, and (c) the researcher's impression borne out of her/his observation and first-hand experience of those phenomenon/event/situation/behaviour/belief under the framework of the larger perspective of human experiences throughout the world.

According to Gerald D. Berreman, ‘an ethnography comprises, essentially, a statement of a set of rules which describe how people act in their culture’ (2011, p. 159).

In the present scenario, the study of ethnography encompasses a wide range of institutions such as school, family, work-place, factory, etc. for developing an understanding and having a nuanced interpretation of the modus-operandi of these institutions. Ethnography describes not the only social unit of any size as a whole but, simultaneously, attempts to understand events/phenomena/beliefs from the insider’s point of view, i.e., actors participating in the processes. The emphasis on the local aspects and local meaning is the central premise of the ethnography. For Erickson, ‘this emphasis on local meaning is crucial to Malinowski’s definition of ethnography in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*’ (1984, p. 52). We have witnessed many accounts of people and their world written by travellers such as Ibn Battuta (1304-1369 AD), A.V. Humboldt (1769-1859 AD), Marco Polo (1254-1324 AD), and many more. However, ethnography stands out as it attempts to bring the actor’s point of view into consideration for further understanding of the local aspects and meaning of phenomena/events/beliefs.

Sociologists and anthropologists have paid significant attention for understanding schooling’s different aspects. They plunged extensively to interrogate and explain the relationship between school, culture, community, and language, and so forth (Apple, 2002, 2004; Archer, 1984; Bernstein, 1971, 1973, 1975, 1990; Bourdieu, 1974, 1996 [1989]; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, 1979 [1964]; Bowles & Gintis, 2011[1976]; Collins, 1979; Durkheim, 1956, 1961 [1938]; Ilich, 1971; Mannheim & Stewart, 1962; Parsons, 1959; Willis, 1977). Anthropological mode of investigation is heavily influenced by culture and personality school (Benedict, 1934; Kluckhohn & Murray, 1953; Linton, 1945; Mead, 1928, 1935; Sapir, 1949); whereas the debate of structure and agency (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Bourdieu, 1977, 1990; Giddens, 1984), apart from some other dominant sociological discourses, shaped the way and formed the framework sociologists attempted to inquire about schooling processes. These modes of inquiries relied on different methods to capture rich narratives and relevant data for analysing phenomena comprehensively. Some argued for the positivistic bend of inquiry, whereas others found subjective interpretation more helpful to develop perspective. At this juncture, ethnography plays a significant role as a methodological tool.

Educational anthropologists tried to understand the schooling and educational

processes with the help of the ethnography method (Benai, 2009; Clarke, 2001; Delpit, 1988; Srivastava, 1998; Sarangapani, 2003; Thapan, 1991). They attempted to work on a separate ethnography from the traditional one. Traditional ethnography or Malinowskian ethnography seemed inadequate for them to comprehensively look upon the school structure and processes. Nonetheless, here the question arises as to whether there is any need for separate ethnography which distinguishes itself from traditional or classical ethnography for understanding school culture, school organisation, school structure, and school processes. Is so-called traditional ethnography insufficient to capture the data comprehensively; or do peculiarities in the school processes inherently demand some modifications and distinctiveness in ethnographic fieldwork to be done at the school? It must be considered that to do a good ethnography of education requires the kind of participant observation traditionally practiced by anthropologists. In the words of Berreman,

Participant-observation refers to the practice of living among the people one studies, coming to know them, their language and their life ways through intense and continuous interaction with them in their daily lives. This means that the ethnographer converses with the people he studies, works with them, attends their social and ritual functions, visits their homes, invites them to his home - that he is present with them in as many situations as possible, learning to know them in as many settings and moods as he can. Sometimes he interviews for specific kinds of data; always he is alert to whatever information may come his way, ready to follow up and understand any event or fact which is unanticipated or seemingly inexplicable. The methods he derives his data from are often subtle and difficult to define (2011, p. 161).

Here, Berreman distinctively chalks out the nature of participant observation for the successful understanding of the social phenomenon and it is apparent that the abovementioned characteristics are suitable enough to capture the nuances of school processes and school structure.

Thus, it is apparent that participant observation, as an ethnographic method essentially requires a prolonged period of stay in the field; whereas, school ethnographers, mostly, are the scheduled visitors, and non-residents of the community where the school is located. Ogbu states, 'since school people have

their own language or argot, the ethnographer must learn it in order to carry out effective participant observation' (1981, p. 6). Moreover, the school ethnographers are supposed to pay attention to the personal attributes like the way it is required in the other ethnographic pursuits (Berreman, 2011; Beattie, 1965; Freilich, 1970; Peltó & Peltó, 1978). Furthermore, for Ogbu, 'a school ethnographer needs an ethnographic imagination like other anthropologists; that is, he or she needs a good working theory of the social structure of the school and of the wider community in which the school is located' (1981, p. 6).

By its inherent nature of addressing questions at the holistic level, the school ethnography examines issues pertaining to the economy, polity, social structure, and, people and communities' belief systems. The compartmentalisation at the level of addressing questions under the premises of school ethnography can lead to incomplete and inadequate perspectives. According to Ogbu, 'The methodological issues of ethnography such as problems of research design, biases, reliability, data analysis, and interpretation are also experienced by the school ethnographer like traditional ethnographers' (1981, p. 6). These aspects of ethnography depict that school ethnography is not altogether a different and distinct research pursuit as far as the method is concerned.

At the same time, while departing from the conventional ethnographic method, it must be understood that schools have some peculiar characteristics that make it an extended location of social practices at a single place. All socio-cultural and economic practices of given communities could be seen reflecting in a school. Therefore, a school ethnographer must be aware of the community's specificities and peculiarities where the school is located. Jean Piaget (1959) in his famous work *The Language and Thought of the Child* concludes that children think differently from an adult at an individual level. Before Piaget's detailed study of the cognitive development of a child, it was an accepted hypothesis in psychology that children are simply less competent thinkers than adults. With continuous experimentations and studies, Piaget concludes that young children think in outstandingly different ways than adults, and act accordingly. Further, the consideration for the idea of 'Zone of Proximal Development', proposed by Vygotsky (2012), too can be relevant as far as understanding the children is concernedⁱⁱ. It, firstly, represents an alternative approach to the assessment of intelligence of an individual child, and secondly, it helps to understand how intellectual development is shaped and reshaped through social interaction with more skilled partners like family elders and community members.

Elaborating further in this regard, it is appropriately required from school ethnographer to have a comprehensive and holistic approach while working on her/his questions. However, (s)he must also remember that (s)he will have to deal with children as well, and therefore, specificity of children as an individual should also be taken into consideration. Treating children at school just as individuals of the community may not show the full picture, and treating them mechanically like *tabula rasa* can have some different issues regarding getting comprehensive idea of phenomena at the school. Therefore, the school ethnographer must have an understanding of the thoughts and actions of the children at school as her/his supposed participants, who act and behave differently than usual people in the community, and at the same time, are heavily shaped by their social experiences at community as well. School ethnography could come with enriched and relevant episodes of narratives with these sensibilities only, and arrive at useful conclusions.

Further, context is one of the most discussed aspects of social science research. What is distinct about a sociologist or anthropologist from other scholars is that they understand the importance and implications of the context of social phenomena. It is one of the central concepts in the fields of ethnography of communication, linguistics, and anthropology. Duranti and Goodwin point out that,

When the issue of context is raised it is typically argued that the focal event cannot be properly understood, interpreted appropriately, or described in a relevant fashion, unless one look beyond the event itself to other phenomena (for example cultural setting, speech situation, shared background assumptions) within which the event is embedded (1992, p. 4).

Thus, the context, for Goffman (1974), is a frame that surrounds the event being examined and provides resources for its appropriate interpretation (as cited in Duranti & Goodwin, 1992, p. 4). The context helps sociologists and anthropologists ponder upon and work on the qualitative approaches of social inquiry and subsequently develop ethnography as a methodological tool and perspective.

The school is a place where communication between teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil takes place quite frequently. It is quite appropriate for the researcher at

school to understand the context in which pedagogic communication takes placeⁱⁱⁱ. Here, ethnography as a mode of inquiry could be very helpful. School ethnography can help us understand the context in which educational transmission and classroom transaction occurs. Classroom transactions in the form of pedagogic communication inside the classroom take place in the context, and ethnography is one of the best methods to understand the context of communication. There is a separate branch of ethnography of communication that discusses speech community like the classroom and how it could be approached. Nevertheless, school ethnography could also help to locate the context of communication between teacher and student, and explain the episode of incidences at school in a proper perspective. Hence, school ethnography, no doubt an offshoot of conventional ethnography, argues for dealing with comprehensive approach and holistic manner, but, at the same time, to pay attention to the specificities and peculiarities of school as a distinct social institution.

The Ethnographic Experience

The present paper discusses some of the challenges faced during the process of ethnographic fieldwork. It turned out to be a pertinent one, given the importance of methodological aspects of school ethnography. By its nature and design, ethnography posits many challenges to the researcher during data collection. There is a possibility that when the researcher reaches the field, the reality can be of contrasting nature of what it was thought earlier, and (s)he has to do some improvisation in the field itself or change the field and select another field altogether. On the other hand, it is a continuous challenge to maintain objectivity in the field, and in the words of Madan, ‘transforming the familiar into the unfamiliar’ (1975, p. 134).

In the present study, I was easily identified as an outsider and locals seemed curious to inquire about the purpose of my prolonged stay in the remote village. The selection of the fieldwork site was facilitated by the gatekeeper associated with the organisation that runs the school. The organisation has a great reputation here which made it smooth for me to access the facilities required for conducting the fieldwork. Sometimes, the locals mistakenly took me as the organisation-run school teacher. All these aspects of the researcher’s identity come into consideration as far as objectivity and value-neutrality in the ethnographic fieldwork are concerned. In the forthcoming sections, the paper delves into these aspects of fieldwork in a detailed manner.

The Issue of Gatekeeper

It would be appropriate to state the sequences of the events from the initial days of the fieldwork for having a better perspective of the field and situation. Gaining entry to the field is considered to be crucial as it leads to the establishment of the relationship, which would be a cornerstone of the planned research. Hence, there is a need for considering careful planning and execution before gaining entry to the field. It would be suitable to discuss the nature of the researcher's relationship with the organisation's employee, which was used for getting permission for fieldwork. In the ethnographic parlance, this kind of individual is referred to as a Gatekeeper^{iv}. Such gatekeepers, although not always the case, are considered as the ethnographer's initial contact in the field in this kind of research settings. According to Hammersley and Atkinson, 'Gatekeepers may, therefore, attempt to exercise some degree of surveillance and control, either by blocking off certain lines of inquiry or by shepherding the fieldworker in one direction or another' (2007, p. 51).

For the present research I had to deal with two types of gatekeepers, one classified as Primary Gatekeepers and the other as Secondary Gatekeepers. Primary gatekeepers were all those people who facilitated the fieldwork programme at the organisation level, whereas the secondary gatekeeper made things easier at the school-entry level. The primary gatekeepers asked for a written letter detailing the research procedures and the associated planning. Primary gatekeepers included my acquaintance and two of the organisation head office employees. They initiated my case before the director of the organisation, thus, speeding the process of granting permission for the fieldwork. This process of gatekeeping took almost three months. The coordinator of the organisation's rural head office was the secondary gatekeeper for the present study. He discussed the present study among his colleagues and provided me consent for doing fieldwork at school. Although the chosen school for fieldwork, being a model school, comes under the director's supervision, all the school management and logistics are dealt with by the secondary gatekeeper only.

Now, there is a need to pay attention to the aspects of modus operandi by the gatekeeper in a strictly hierarchical organisation. The issue of gatekeeper in an organisation like this is very much complicated because of stringent emphasis on the centralisation of power. The director supervises every aspect of the organisation which makes it quite a centralised bureaucratic structure. I spent

several days for making things smoother at the field level. Often, gatekeepers' demands changed arbitrarily, like sending them a monthly report of fieldwork. The organisation's other officials tried to intervene on behalf of the organisation to know about the purpose and nature of my research. Although these employees did not have any concern with the present research work, and their duties were at the office, but they also took interest in other works. During the last days of the fieldwork, one employee at the organisation's rural office was surprised to see me at the school and asked what I have been doing here for the last six months and why I have not completed the fieldwork yet. I had to clearly mention the research programme to the organisation's employees and gatekeepers many times during the fieldwork stay.

Although the concept of gatekeeper inherently brings the notion of control on the flow of the information sought by the researcher, but here it was very much abrupt and frequent, not at the level of information seeking but at the administrative level. So, it can be seen that the number of gatekeepers make things complicated in the sense that the defined role and responsibilities of gatekeeper get blurred and it may cause disturbance. Therefore, I had to negotiate with them as much as possible and share all information to make fieldwork smoother.

The Idea of Quasi-Teacher

The idea of a quasi-teacher has already been discussed and documented to some extent in earlier research (Sarangapani, 2003, p. 158)^v. Although Sarangapani's characterisation of quasi-teacher is strictly confined to the classroom activities and pedagogic encounters^{vi}, this study aims to extend it to some other dimensions as well. During the present work, I found that the idea of quasi-teacher can include all those individuals like researchers, fellows, and officials in the organisation-run schools who directly or indirectly influence and interfere in the pedagogic activities.

The quasi-teacher brings two dimensions into consideration. First, the impacts and influences they create during the pedagogic processes and pedagogic encounters. Whenever somebody else comes to the school, the students perceive them as teachers or anybody who could influence their pedagogic activities. The first day when I entered the standard seven classroom, the students stood from their seats and greeted as they greet their teacher. At that moment, I told them politely that

they need not greet but instead focus on their usual academic activities. The stringent emphasis on the greetings led me to think about the idea of age and elderly in the school premises. After someday, when the students got comfortable with my presence, they started taking things as usual and asking questions and answers to their curriculum. Could it be argued that the students think who is elder to them necessarily know their curriculum and topics? Whenever I told them the correct answer, some students asked me that why do I not teach rather than study at this age? The second dimension is related to the authority structure inside the school premises. In the Indian education system, the student in the school is situated at the lowest rung. Anyone or everybody, who is older or elder than the students, possesses authority of one kind or other. Whenever I visited communities or nearby markets and talked to students' parents, they considered me as one of the persons accountable for students' performance at the school. The parents often complained to me about their children's not up-to-mark performance in the school. They also suggested that physical punishment should be given to make students understand the topics. Every time I had to clarify that neither did I believe in the idea of physical punishment nor have any kind of authority to do that. The construction of a school ethnographer as a quasi-teacher can have an influence on the routine affair of ethnography.

The present study confirms the understanding that whenever the researcher finds that community and school see the ethnographer as an accountable person for the children's performance, there is the need for a little more alertness and caution for remaining objective and being non-judgmental. The idea of quasi-teacher is a kind of ethnographic illusion and may affect the methodological aspects of the research, i.e., objectivity in the field. Hence, the argument is that the researcher in the school ethnography may get the status of quasi-teacher willingly or unwillingly, and therefore, it is required from the ethnographer to remain vigilant and watchful for maintaining the construct of the marginal nativity.

School-Community-Researcher Relationship

In this paper, I have already discussed my standing in the field as an associate of the organisation. Therefore, it was found that people often complained to me regarding their children's performance. As a researcher, it is a complicated and difficult situation. The researcher is only supposed to know their opinion and point of view. But, many times it was realised that they solicit my opinion too, and whenever I showed any tactful approach to avoid giving an opinion, the

conversation seemed to end abruptly. It addresses an important aspect of the rules of communication in the ethnographic fieldwork framework. In the field, nobody owes anything to the researcher, and it is their discretion if they would like to provide any information. It is not obligatory for them to give their opinion on something or that they will have to answer to every question. In fact, the communication takes place on the equal ground, and the researcher gains this ground with continuous effort in the field. When (s)he gets familiar and mingles with natives, and they accept researchers, they start talking informally.

Formal communication revolves around formal questions and information; the problem is that ethnography seeks more informal and everyday life information than formal ones. Formal information could be gathered from documents and other sources but intricacies of everyday life could only be understood through informal and emphatic conversation. When informal communication takes place, people ask opinions and judgment and regular information at the same time. In the course of this research, it was found that ethnographers need alertness to know about participants' opinions and judgment, without taking any position and always being politically correct. Here as a researcher and coming via the organisation had become a kind of double-edged sword. People gave overdue recognition and remained polite throughout the discussion or conversation, but if people had to complain about their children's academic performance and behaviour at home, they usually picked me on. So, this privilege comes with some caution and responsibilities also.

Simultaneously, it would be of great significance to discuss the relationship between school and community and how a researcher is being posited between them. How the researcher is accepted among the school and community's members and what are their expectations from the researcher? During the present research work, I often had to face the dilemma of choices and struggled to remain neutral and objective. It is already discussed that the school ethnographer gets a position of quasi-teacher, and therefore, family members and parents frequently complained about students' performance at school and suggest the researcher to take an authoritarian position. During the community visit, where the Hindi subject teacher accompanied me to introduce the guardians and parents of students, I found the chance to have communication with parents of the students about their opinion about schooling, education, and this particular school. Every parent/guardian, except one father who is an employee of the organisation that runs this school, and is the father of two girls from the seventh standard,

emphasised physical punishment for learning. They would say it to me sometimes or discuss it with the Hindi subject teacher. Every time the teacher had to make them understand the implications of physical punishment on learning.

At the same time, the school management structure understands the occupational and professional engagements of the students' guardians/parents. Hence, it has introduced a system of 'Sampark' in which one teacher visits a community and meets the parents to discuss and update the performance of the students at the school. Most of the guardians belong to the working class of the unorganised sector and have to leave their home as early as possible. The teacher anyhow manages to tap parents and convey the message about their ward's academic progress. But whenever I visited these communities to have guardians/parents' opinions on their children's schooling, it was very difficult to reach them. Moreover, when I decided to talk with the mother of the students, either they could not say anything substantial or are unable to understand Hindi. My unfamiliarity with their native dialect was apparent. At that moment, the Hindi subject teacher had to play the role of interlocutor but that also could not fetch anything relevant regarding their children's performance or family's perspective on education and schooling.

It clearly shows that although organisation and school management have been putting great effort to engage communities in the overall schooling process, due to parental socio-economic conditions and cultural constraints, it is not becoming fruitful. So, it is apparent here that despite the effort, there is a communication gap between school and community on the issue of schooling of children. In the meantime, whenever these parents accidentally met me in the market or tea-shop, they reinforced the idea that I can use any physical measures to make their children understand the academic contents. Here, there is a need to reiterate that the position of school ethnographer as an objective and neutral observer in the field is always under threat and (s)he has to be very careful about their role and responsibilities, apart from the usual sensibilities demanded by local communities and institutions. The relationship between school-community-researcher is quite tangled because of the community's perceived notion of the researcher as a responsible and authoritarian entity and accountable for the student's performance at the school.

On Maintaining Marginal Nativity in School Ethnography

Lastly, the present paper attempts to discuss another major problem of school ethnographers in the field, i.e., maintaining marginal nativity. The idea of marginal nativity helps us to locate the situation of an ethnographer in which (s)he does fieldwork. It is a research construct to maintain objectivity in the field and at the same time, be able to collect maximum possible data. It is also classified as the Outsider/Insider approach of ethnography. Styles (1979) further elaborates on the nuances of insider/outsider distinction. In the word of Styles,

In essence, outsider myths assert that only outsiders can conduct valid research on a given group; only outsiders, it is held, possesses the needed objectivity and emotional distance. According to outsider myths, insiders invariably present their group in an unrealistically favourable light. Analogously, insider myths assert that only insiders are capable of doing valid research in a particular group and that all outsiders are inherently incapable of appreciating the true character of the group's life. Insider and outsider myths are not empirical generalizations about the relationship between the researcher's social position and the character of the research findings. They are elements in a moral rhetoric that claims exclusive research legitimacy for a particular group (as cited in Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, p. 86).

In fact, Robert Merton (1972) in his article concludes that the distinction between insider and outsider is very much problematic. In her study of African-American communities on the Sea Islands of South Carolina, Beoku-Betts was able to draw on her racial background to build rapport with the Gullah women, but as an educated professional and university academic, she was also sometimes positioned as an outsider (Beoku-Betts, 1994, as cited in Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 87).

In school ethnography, the main emphasis is to gather maximum relevant narratives without compromising our position as a researcher and maintaining methodological requirements. Marginal nativity could be considered as a mental framework that is required to be possessed by the ethnographer whenever (s)he is in the field. The idea of marginal nativity consists of two dimensions – a) marginality – which is required for remaining objective during the process of data

collection, b) nativity – which emphasises on the emphatic nature on the part of the ethnographer in the field. Nativity is an essential criterion which is very useful for the ethnographer while dealing with different socio-cultural realities in the field; but the usual aim throughout is to maintain a more or less marginal position, thereby providing access to participant perspectives and at the same time minimising the danger of over-rapport. The ethnographer needs to be intellectually poised between familiarity and strangeness; and, in overt participant observation, socially he or she will usually be poised between stranger and friend (Powdermaker, 1966, as cited in Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 89). Hence, the idea of marginal nativity is all about being able to remain objective for data collection, and being sensitive enough to comprehend the socio-cultural peculiarities of the field.

It could be assumed that maintaining the construct of the marginal nativity is possible and easy to some extent in those fields where the researcher has physical and social differences. It is quite potential for the researcher to attach and detach in these circumstances. However, it is a little bit difficult in school ethnography because of certain reasons. The researcher is one of the major players in the school ethnography who can shape and influence the school processes and structure altogether. It has been already discussed that I was also considered as an accountable person to some extent in the school. The parents considered me accountable for their children's performance and complained about their activities. The gatekeeper for the present research was one of the senior members of the organisation, which gave people the impression that I was also associated with the organisation despite the continuous clarification from my side regarding my position and status. My proximity and friendliness in the school ethnography complicated the situation. The discussion on the idea of quasi-teacher has revealed how it could be a potential danger as far as being objective and neutral, i.e., maintaining marginal nativity. Subsequently, the imposed category of quasi-teacher may hamper the demand for objectivity.

Any kind of closeness with people in the field may result in a judgmental opinion by the researcher, and subsequently severely affecting the understanding in the proper context. In the present research work, it has been discussed that there was a continuous urge from the guardian/parental side that I should be involved as a responsible and an accountable person with regard to their children's performance at the school level. In case, if it happens, it might have given an impression to some parents that some of the students were given preferential treatment than

others, and might have left them with an opinion that their children's performance could suffer. Hence, it justifies that it is quite difficult for school ethnographers to maintain marginal nativity in the field because of the imposed category of quasi-teacher; it was one of the most difficult challenges which I faced as a researcher during the school ethnography.

Thus, it is implied that the ethnographers have to maintain their methodological status as a researcher and remain on the margin, and whereas being native is required to obtain the rich data without compromising with the quality and quantity of data. So, it can be understood that there is a need for an ethnographer to remain at the intermediate level, by leaving both extremes at a marginal and native level, so that an objective and value-neutral study could take place; it could only happen when the researcher has a clear idea about the specificities and peculiarities of the community in which (s)he is doing fieldwork. The continuous debate of agency and structure in social science research has profound impact on the debate of maintaining marginal nativity in the fieldwork process. It emphasises for the suspension of researcher's personal beliefs and pre-conceived notions, and at the same time, understanding the challenges of distinct social realities without taking any judgemental position.

Conclusion

This paper is an effort to discuss some of the issues and findings of the ethnography of a community-participation school in the light of the conceptual-theoretical backgrounds and fieldwork reflections. It has been obvious from the reflexive note that how classical ethnography needs some modifications and alterations for conducting it successfully at the school. A school is a place which is nothing but an extension of society and launching pad for people's aspirations, and therefore, all socio-economic and cultural aspects can be seen partially or fully at the school level. School ethnographers must have an understanding of all these aspects before arriving at any conclusion. Simultaneously, challenges and issues of school ethnography should be seen in the proper perspective. Classical ethnography argues for holism in approach, but this paper attempts to reflect on some additional aspects as well. This paper deals with some categories introduced in the field and at the same time, attempts to discuss modalities of these categories. These categories could help us further to locate school ethnography in the framework. The issues of nature, context, and categories of quasi-teacher and marginal nativity may help us to remain value-neutral while conducting school

ethnography. Concurrently, there is no doubt that the issues discussed here in this paper need further pondering and reconsideration, and therefore, it should be seen as a starting point rather than a final statement.

Notes:

ⁱ School Structure can be defined as a system in which the school is organised – both academically and administratively. All components in the organisation aim towards effectiveness of learning and of the school itself. Whereas, School Process means the everyday process which entails the school culture – the school values, the ways students learn, the role of teachers, the school’s relation with parents and the community, and the school’s overall goals, etc.

ⁱⁱ Vygotsky was much concerned with child’s potential for intellectual growth through social experience because of his interest in the social origins of an individual’s intellectual functioning. Vygotsky proposed the notion of the ‘zone of proximal development’. The zone of proximal development (ZPD) can be understood as the difference between a child’s ‘actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving’ and the child’s ‘potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers’ (Vygotsky, 2012, pp. 198-200). For Vygotsky, the zone of proximal development of a child is not static in nature.

ⁱⁱⁱ Pedagogic communication, in the present research, is operationally defined as any kind of communication taken place inside or outside of the classroom for the purpose of communicating ideas or points of views by teachers and students both. It includes classroom performances as well as mere conversation among students and teachers. It also includes both verbal and non-verbal communication. The idea of communication remains as an essential feature in the discourse of pedagogy and schooling processes.

^{iv} By Gatekeepers, Atkinson (as cited in Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 27) means: actors with control over key sources and avenues of opportunity. Such gatekeepers exercise control at and during key phases of the research. Such gatekeepers’ functions would actually be carried out by different personnel in different organisational settings.

^v P. Sarangpani mentions the idea of Quasi-Teacher in the form of classroom monitor. Through her ethnographic monograph, she confirms that in every class two children were appointed by the teacher to be monitors. These students wielded a great deal of authority in the classroom and functioned as quasi-teachers, monitoring the conduct, actions, and learning of other students. When the teacher was absent or taking a break, the monitors taught in his place. Their main functions were to maintain discipline and conduct revisions. They did the former by acting as the teacher’s surveillance mechanisms, looking into small acts of students that would otherwise escape the teacher. If they caught anyone disobeying orders, they took action against them. This meant threats, beating, or reporting to the teacher.

^{vi} The concept of Pedagogic Encounter is used by Meenakshi Thapan (1991) in her work on schooling. By ‘pedagogic encounter’ she means the engagement that takes place with persons, textbooks, the media, in diverse domains and situations in which learning takes place, whether this happens in relation to the teacher, the peer group, the family, or society in general.

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Article: Effect of Visual Media on Theoretical Discussions in Classrooms of Sociology and Anthropology

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Effect of Visual Media on Theoretical Discussions in Classrooms of Sociology and Anthropology

--- Sae Pawar

Abstract

As the classical theoretical framework of social sciences struggle to hold the attention of young students, visuals are claiming greater space in collective social discourse. This paper focuses on the importance of visual narrative mediums and their ability to transcend linguistic barriers. The aim of this study is to analyse the ways in which concepts like ‘Thought Experiment’ and ‘Sociological Imagination’ grasp and communicate abstract theoretical ideas of the discipline. The capacity of visual medium to stimulate Sociological Imagination is beginning to be explored. Many educators are choosing to show films and videos in the classroom to initiate discussions, make abstract concepts more relatable. In an attempt to analyse how visual medium is currently being used in academia and its effects, this paper presents analysis of theoretical and pedagogical discussion as well as analysis of primary data from semi-structured qualitative interviews of young professionals teaching Sociology or Anthropology in Mumbai and Pune.

Key words: Abstract concepts, Pedagogy, Sociological Imagination, Theory, Visual medium

Introduction

Understanding and communicating abstract theoretical concepts of social sciences is a challenging task even in college and university classrooms. Most students are disinterested in or shy away from theory as a subject. This paper explores how visual media is being used by teachers in order to effectively communicate complex theories in a short period of time. For this purpose, six college level teachers of Sociology and Anthropology from various colleges in Mumbai and Pune are interviewed. Through the data, two kinds of visual media were seen being utilised by the teachers – free educational videos on YouTube and narrative media like films. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the differences between the two types of visual media, a theoretical analysis of communication

through visual language was attempted. The findings show that short educational videos are focused on singular concepts, e.g. social interaction, and are informative in nature. They are preferred because of their short length and concise nature. A film is shown in the classroom after basic concepts of a theory have been introduced to students. A narrative medium like film is supposed to help students see the theory as something real and understand the possible application of it. After screening, students are usually asked to analyse the film using a particular theory.

Tal S. Shamir in his book *Cinematic Philosophy* (2018) has compared the experience of viewing cinema to thought experiments in traditional philosophy. Thought experiments are used to communicate abstract philosophical concepts. Similar to this, Sociological discourse uses the concept of ‘Sociological Imagination’ introduced by C. W. Mills (2001) to grasp abstract theoretical concepts of the discipline. The capacity of visual medium to stimulate Sociological Imagination is beginning to be explored in academia. This paper uses Paulo Freire’s (2005) model of ‘Problem posing education’ as a desirable outcome of this particular pedagogical practice. It also includes analysis of theoretical and pedagogical discussion as well as analysis of primary data from semi-structured qualitative interviews of young professionals teaching Sociology or Anthropology in Mumbai and Pune. The analysis of primary and secondary data along with theoretical analysis of language of the visual medium shows us that visual medium as a tool for communicating theories can lead to active participation, increased interest and independent application of the concepts by the students.

Objectives

- To analyse whether visual language is a capable, credible and comfortable tool for teachers and students to understand and communicate abstract concepts.
- To understand existing pedagogical practices in disciplines of Sociology and Anthropology in urban areas like Mumbai and Pune.
- To understand the teachers’ perception of the efficacy of the visual media in communicating abstract theoretical concepts.
- To gauge future applications of visual medium in academia.

Methodology

The objective of this paper is to make an argument for the implementation of visual medium like films in the process of understanding and application of abstract concepts and theories. Having established that, this paper is methodologically qualitative. Primary data on the issues of addressing abstract concepts in a college classroom is collected through in depth, semi-structured interviews of college professors.

The scope of this study required respondents who teach Sociological and Anthropological theory in a classroom setting which allowed for screening of visual media followed by a discussion. Educational institutions in metropolitan areas like Mumbai and Pune are targeted as these regions host distinguished higher education institutions in disciplines of Sociology and Anthropology. Furthermore, internet and technical equipment like projectors required for visual media are more readily accessible in urban areas. Thus, using purposive sampling, a total of six professors teaching Sociology and/or Anthropology to graduate level students in Mumbai and Pune were interviewed. All respondents fall under the age of forty and identify as women. They have completed their education and have prior work experience in urban areas. Five out of six respondents come from dominant caste-class backgrounds. The teaching experience of the respondents ranges from two years to ten years. Respondents teach in the following educational institutions:

- St. Xaviers College, Mumbai (2 respondents teach in this institution)
- Wilson College, Mumbai
- Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies or NMIMS (Design School), Mumbai
- Symbiosis School of Liberal Arts, Pune
- Fergusson College, Pune

NMIMS and Symbiosis School of Liberal Arts are private institutions. Students of these institutions come from affluent backgrounds with caste-class privilege. According to the respondents, classroom composition in remaining institutions is diverse but with lower representation of marginalised communities.

Interview schedule was designed to target the following aspects:

- Extent of visual narratives used while addressing an abstract idea.
- Reasons for using visual narratives to teach Sociological/Anthropological theories.
- Efficiency of Visual medium in communicating abstract ideas.

The primary data provides a rough idea of the current pedagogical situation in higher education institutes in urban areas of Mumbai and Pune. It provides the perspective of teachers, who are well versed in the disciplines of Sociology and Anthropology and can offer valuable insights into possible solutions in understanding and communicating abstract theories to students who are relatively new to the discipline.

A significant portion of the paper consists of theoretical discussions analysing the merits of visual narratives to understand and communicate abstract concepts and theories which arguably forms the base of this paper. Conclusions are equally based on these theoretical arguments as on primary data.

Limitations

This research topic calls for a perspective of students who are new to the discipline and are not familiar with the jargon that comes with it. A more sustained argument will require primary data from students studying in a similar urban environment. This topic is interdisciplinary in nature and hence will greatly benefit from theoretical discussions in other disciplines like psychology and philosophy.

Review of Literature

‘Sociological Imagination’ is a concept introduced by C.W. Mills (2001) which largely refers to the ability to see mundane everyday events sociologically and observe how different factors in the society interact and influence each other. Sociological theories learnt in a classroom are meant to offer different perspectives, different ways of seeing the world to students. In a way, they are facilitating a larger Sociological Imagination. Visual medium like Cinema can be used to communicate the concept of Sociological Imagination (Prendergast, 1986). Prendergast, in his study titled *Cinema Sociology: Cultivating Sociological Imagination through Popular Film* (1986), describes the impactful nature of a community film series that was shown to adult residents of a community to offer an understanding of ‘Sociological Imagination’. The implications vary, however,

when we talk about communicating advanced theoretical concepts to students who have a basic understanding of the subject. In this paper, we are trying to see whether visual medium can enhance the phenomenon of Sociological Imagination.

Various domains including Sociology of Education gives us theories about the way people learn and the educational system. Experiential learning is discussed by Kolb in his book titled *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (1984). This study talks about a method of learning whereby students or learners can learn through their direct experiences, without explicitly needing a guide. Constructivism is another approach which states ‘that learning happens when learners construct meaning by interpreting information in the context of their own experiences’ (Gogus, 2012, p. 42). Social interactions play an important role in our cognitive development according to this method.

Education has been linked not only with the process of socialisation, but also with consolidating cultural norms and dynamics of power structure in the society through the hidden curriculum (Bowles & Gintis, 2012). Under Sociology of Education, thinkers like Evan Illich and Paulo Freire put forth a critical yet constructive perspective towards education. Evan Illich in his book *Deschooling Society* (1983) criticises the school system and questions the centrality of teaching. Paulo Freire in his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2005) addresses the issue of accessibility of higher education in depth. As a result of an unfair social order, higher education is not accessible to all sections of the society even today. Caste-class-gender inequalities make the most privileged groups sole custodians of higher education. Language of theoretical jargon unfortunately ends up alienating those without significant social and cultural capital. In her work on Feminist Pedagogies, Sharmila Rege (1995) underlines ‘series of issues pertaining to vulnerability, authority and power in classrooms’ (p. 225). Pedagogies that try to deviate from the existing power structure and address marginalised perspectives need to move away from authoritative power structures of the classroom to be more collaborative and interactive. Rege points out that in order to make this move, ‘concepts should be treated not as “given” but that common vocabularies be built by making explicit connections between theory, research and experience’ (ibid., p. 224). In order to realise this goal, classrooms need to be transformed into a safe space for open and inclusive discussions. Freire’s ‘Problem posing education’ model as opposed to the ‘Banking System of Education’ⁱ gives an ideal teaching-learning format that can be implemented to

bring this shift in pedagogy. Problem posing education emphasises critical thinking, where knowledge is created by a dialogue between students and teacher (Freire, 2005). This very dialogical aspect of it can be enhanced by use of visual medium in a classroom.

There are several articles and blogs that endorse use of visual mediums like short videos and films in a classroom. Online, one can find several clickbait articles, research papers and of course videos on the lines of ‘why videos are an important tool in a classroom’ or ‘how to use videos in the classroom’. Almost all of these strongly support and promote using videos in classrooms. However, all the material one finds on this subject online concerns classrooms in schools and not higher education. Videos are recommended for all subjects including mathematics and languages. What we see here is a more generalised approach towards use of visual material in academia. This paper focuses on the potential of films or videos to understand abstract concepts and theories in higher education, particularly in social sciences like Sociology and Anthropology and hence the said articles are not applicable in their entirety. Nevertheless, we must address them to get a fuller perspective on the larger discourse on the state of visual medium, and because some points put forth by these articles are reflected in the data gathered from the respondents. The articles and videos found online are addressed to teachers and most of them are made in American or western context. The common statements in such articles are listed belowⁱⁱⁱ:

- Videos engage and motivate students.
- Videos help you enhance a point you’re making.
- Videos provide a context to help you understand (Pearson English: Blog).
- You can raise awareness with videos.
- Videos do not replace teachers.

The discussion usually ends with instructions on how to choose the right video for your class and/or how to make your own video. And unsurprisingly, they are accompanied by advertisements for video making or video editing software for educators. Many of the educational videos are made by teachers themselves. The larger proportion however is created by different media organisations. Process of making educational videos and socio-economic-political dynamics in this field is a separate research topic. Several videos and articles as well as online video makers are easily available to help someone make educatory videos. This is a growing market and promises potential large-scale changes in the field of

education in general. Many online platforms of education like Coursera, Udemy, Khan Academy are based entirely on visual media.

There are also quite a few blogs and articles tailored specifically for Sociology classroom. These articles provide a list of films that include sociological concepts and can be productively analysed in a Sociology class. While some offer a straightforward list of the films, others provide a gist of a film or an episode of a TV show in the list and follow it immediately with a theoretical concept it can be linked with. For instance, here is an excerpt from a blogⁱⁱⁱ called *My Top Ten Fictional Films with Sociology Content* by Karl Thompson (2017) where he provides recommendations of films to show in a Sociology class:

Films are a great way to teach sociological theories and concepts – and there's lots of films out there which do just that.

In no particular order... (And links to analysis to follow)

1. *Fight Club – The most obvious reading is of this as a classic critique of the false consciousness and alienation the working classes suffer under consumer capitalism, but no doubt there are other interpretations out there.*
2. *A Bug's Life – Useful for illustrating basic Marxist concepts.*
3. *Black Mirror episode 'The National Anthem – Charlie Brooker's short film' – The Prime Minister has to have sex with a pig live on T.V. to save the life of the nation's princess whose been kidnapped. This is the best film, hands down, to convey the meaning of 'hyperreality'.*

Such websites are becoming popular among teachers and students of social sciences. They offer discursively sound choices of popular films students can relate to. There are also educational videos which address a particular concept directly and are thus different from films. Several YouTube channels provide subject specific short educational video free of cost. These videos are used for different pedagogical purposes than films which will be discussed at length in the section on primary data analysis.

Bergson in his article on *How to Sociologically Read a Movie* (2016), points out that movies embody cultural values like class, gender, religion, etc. and reflect

deeper civilisational assumptions. He is looking at movies as embodiment of concept which gives a balanced argument to the perception-embodiment debate around visual medium^{iv}. An embodied concept is easier for students to gage and relate to. Pedagogical practice of using narrative visual media in the classroom is based on this assumption.

In *Cinematic Sociology: social life in film* (2013) edited by Jean-Anne Sutherland, Kathryn Feltey provides an excellent framework on how to view a film sociologically. It is a collection of fifteen essays that include analysis of various popular films, and perceive different ways in which social life is presented in popular films. The book follows the same structure of argument as that of Coser in his work on *Sociology through Literature* (1963). It essentially views popular films as data on the structure and functioning of present-day society (Sutherland & Feltey, 2013). Cinematic Sociology however does not expand enough on methodological potential of expressing abstract sociological ideas visually. It focuses solely on analysing sociological concepts presented in mainstream western films in context of American society. In order to analyse a diverse society like India one needs to have a wider approach.

Cinematic Philosophy (2018) by Tal S. Shamir is an exceptional work that not only shows how philosophical ideas are expressed through films but also emphasises that cinema on its own is a capable medium to create new philosophical concepts. Shamir claims that films can not only communicate but *do Philosophy*, as they are similar to traditional thought experiments in Philosophy (ibid.). This statement is rather radical and is tested in data analysis. The results show us that in the current academic climate, visual medium on its own cannot produce new concepts, but combined with supplementary text it increases scope and potential of viewing society from different perspectives and innovating new forms of analysis.

Theoretical Framework

Before understanding its pedagogical implications, we need to establish the visual language of a film. As a result of the unique components of a film or a cinema coming from diverse narrative and sensory elements – plot, acting, cinematography, editing, sounds, music, special effects, lighting, mood and colours – a film has a potential to construct a vivid journey oriented by an abstract idea. The pedagogical application of film is being accepted in academic circles on

a larger scale in recent years. Yet, there is also an understanding that films or educatory videos are a mere extension of a blackboard. How do we differentiate showing films or videos to explain an abstract concept in a classroom from using a blackboard for the same purpose? Uniqueness of films as a tool for communicating complex and abstract ideas lies in the fact that through films, we can experience theory. A film can create a universe based on an abstract idea, can cause the audience to empathise with the characters and get involved in the narrative. In this way, the idea becomes embodied, it becomes real.

The extensive use of educational videos available online was not anticipated going into this research. These videos are quite short, usually lasting for 6 to 8 minutes. They focus extensively on one concept rather than trying to cover an entire theoretical framework. Additionally, they are freely available on YouTube and accessible to anyone with internet connection. This makes the educational videos a uniquely efficient tool for teachers. They interest students and do not take up a lot of time. Such videos are also given as homework. This is reflected in the primary data. An overview of the educational videos shows that they overwhelmingly rely on animations or visual effects. There is an overarching narrative that connects these visual effects. In many cases, the narrative tells a story which the viewer can relate to. Even when the narration is only informative, it is written in an attractive and dialogical manner. The narrative is catchy, has jokes in between and upbeat music in the background. In a way, it is meant to hold attention and be more entertaining than a textbook. Despite being different from a film in length and format, there are enough commonalities between films and educational videos. Both are audio-visual in nature and have a narrative that relates to the popular culture. In many cases, educational videos also refer to popular films to elaborate on an idea. Both are complimentary to each other and hence will be analysed together.

It is observed that through film and videos, students can relate to a concept and are more capable of applying the concept to real life situations. Seeing something makes it more real. When an idea becomes real it cannot be easily dismissed or forgotten. Stories stay with students for a long time. Videos or films used in this manner can act as a gateway to view other forms of visual media students use and experience sociologically^v. Platforms like social media also act as a starting point for discussions on theory. Students are more involved and active in a discussion after watching a film or a short video as compared to after a regular lecture. According to Arnheim (1969), visual experience is dynamic. Through visual

medium students experience theories and hence no longer think of them as obsolete. Combining popular visual medium with theories pushes students to think about theoretical concepts as tools to make sense of the world around them. Both visuals and theories on their own are not as impactful. The full potential of films (moving away from solely aesthetic aspects of it) can be realised by applying various theoretical concepts to their narratives and similarly, full potential of theory can be unleashed only when it is applied and expressed through a dynamic and popular medium like films.

Now, question can be raised as to why can't one apply theoretical concepts to the actual events happening around them? Why must one rely on fiction? This question begs for a larger theoretical discussion on our ability to conceive an idea fully only through its extremities. Such extremities can be easily portrayed in a fictional narrative but in real life are extremely gradual processes.

Real must be fictionalised in order to be understood. – Jaque Ranciere (Shamir, 2018, p. 36).

This is especially true for the disciplines of social sciences like Sociology, Anthropology, Political Science, etc. Additionally, visual language and visual culture have become dominant factors in our society today. Establishing them in the academic sphere would further legitimise them.

However, there is also considerable opposition to it. Most of the opposition is based on the epistemic assumption of written word being the superior form of expressing academic or scientific theory or concept. The 'science' part of social sciences like Sociology has always been debatable, mainly because the subject matter of Sociology and Anthropology is conscious human beings, and structures they build to sustain themselves. In other words, our subject matter has agency to dissent from the universal laws unlike that of natural sciences. Thus, reflexivity and dialogue are essential for social sciences. Putting an emphasis on the superiority of formal written word can have severe drawbacks, especially in a multi-lingual society like India. Apart from a few rare exceptions, higher education is conducted in English language. Knowing English language is a cultural capital that many socio-economically backward sections of the society do not have. This language barrier is a major cause for students' aversion to theoretical subjects. Visual media, especially if it is made available in regional languages, can be significant in overcoming the language barrier.

Films have the capacity to show us and make us experience the world from a perspective not our own. This radical capacity gave rise to a movement in the 19th century in the art of filmmaking called ‘Cinema Vérité’. Dziga Vertov, who gave rise to this movement, also coined the term ‘cinematic eye’. According to Vertov, the cinematic eye captures its own reality which is different from human perception, one can say that it evokes non-human and not objective but a thoroughly reflexive perception (Petric, 1978). However, a basic reading of film theory elaborates that subjective aspects like position of a camera, setting of light and sounds, and editing determine what one sees in the final product. Yet, there are factors of objectivity in what we see in a film or a documentary. It has certain advantages over human perception in aspects of attention and memory. What cinema offers is a delicate balance between objectivity and subjectivity. Hence, it is important to include visual narrative mediums like films, documentaries and educatory videos in disciplines like Sociology and Anthropology.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Respondents of this study are six teaching professionals who are currently teaching Sociology or Anthropology at undergraduate level in Mumbai and Pune. All respondents are women under the age of forty years. One respondent is a Ph.D. holder and one has qualified M.Phil. Out of remaining respondents four have a master’s degree in Sociology and one in Anthropology. Teaching experience of the respondents ranges from two years to ten years in these areas – Mumbai and Pune. The data gives an overview of current pedagogical practices implemented by the teachers in these areas.

All respondents, faculty members from the five colleges in Mumbai and Pune as mentioned above, teach at least one paper on Sociological or Anthropological theory. In some institutes like NMIMS or Symbiosis, the focus is on application of the social theory. In others, Sociological or Anthropological theory is a separate course and students are graded on theoretical analysis. In both cases, respondents accepted to have made substantial use of visual medium to communicate complex theoretical ideas to students. Students in all cases have responded positively to films or videos being shown in the classroom. The questions were aimed primarily at three aspects, as mentioned before. Each point will be analysed separately with an aim to synthesise primary qualitative data with existing theoretical arguments.

Extent of visual narratives while addressing an abstract idea:

Duration of one lecture ranges from forty minutes to two hours. Three out of six respondents use films or short educational videos on a regular basis as a part in their classrooms. In case of four respondents, each lecture is structured as follows – teachers begin the class by giving a short introduction of the concept and guidelines on how to view a film sociologically. Then the film or the video is showed in the class. If it is a lengthy film, it is shown in parts. Following the screening, they have a discussion where the theoretical concept is seen through the context of the film or the video. Teachers, then, ask students to write a film review using the said theory. In other words, students are asked to analyse the film sociologically using theoretical concepts. For instance, two respondents here show *The Lego movie* (2014) in the theory class while introducing Durkheim and Marx. One of these respondents, who teaches sociological theory in a design school where the focus is more on application, starts off her course (Introduction to Social theory) with *The Lego movie* (2014) to introduce ideas like functionalism and conflict theory. Later, she gives students an assignment where they are asked to interpret these theories from the film. The aim is to get students to analyse functionalist and conflict theories of Durkheim and Marx respectively by applying them to the narrative of the film. In a similar manner, two of the respondents show the 2003 film *Pinjar* in their course on Gender Studies to explain Veena Das's article on *National Honour as Practical Kinship: Of Unwanted Women and Children* (2015) and Sharmila Rege's take on 'Dalit women's perspective'. The movie *Pinjar* (2003) exactly captures the political dimension of patriarchal practices and their impact on personal lives of women, providing an empathetic portrayal of feminist perspective 'Personal is Political'. These screenings are followed by a classroom discussion where students take initiative and teachers are only responsible for guiding the discussion in the desired direction.

Two respondents out of six said that they do not show films or videos in the classroom as often because they do not have the access to the necessary technical equipment like a projector or speakers. However, they regularly make use of short educational videos available on YouTube and ask students to watch them as a part of their homework. The class begins with a discussion on the video which is then moved in the direction of concerning theoretical arguments. One respondent even takes her students to movie theatre once in a while to show relevant film. She has shown recent feature films like *Article 15* when teaching a unit on caste and

gender. This shows that even when the technical equipment is unavailable, films and videos are a part of the teaching-learning process.

The overall response of students to the visual medium is overwhelmingly positive. The discussions are active and lively when preceded by a film or a video than by an explanatory lecture. Once the discussion is initiated, students use the narrative from the film or the video to put forth arguments and contest opposing ideas. The discussion is productive and students show genuine interest in it. Respondents speculate that visual representation makes it easier for students to relate to a concept or an argument.

When they (students) are visually seeing something and they are linking it to a lot of other things also. If it is something that's relevant to them and even if it is not, the seeing things makes them relate to it a lot more than something else. They are talking more and it is usually a better conversation. Same is case with short videos. (Respondent teaching Anthropological theory at Symbiosis College, Pune)

There are instances when students look at the films shown in class as mere entertainment and do not focus on the theory part of it. But even then, when the discussion comes up, they begin to connect why this film was shown in the class. We can infer that watching a film for the sake of entertainment still provides individuals with theoretical perspectives when a discussion is initiated around the film. The narrative stays with them for longer.

Reasons for using visual narratives to teach theories in Sociology and Anthropology:

When asked the reason for regular use of films or videos in a classroom, the foremost point made by all respondents was students' reduced scope of reading. Some students struggle with the English language. However, even students who know the language are reluctant to read anything that's 'theory heavy' or contains difficult language. Teachers then choose to divide students into groups for group reading. That gives better results. In some cases, even when students are given a text to read on a topic, they prefer to go online and watch a short video on it instead of reading. Hence, many teachers prefer to pick the video students end up watching in any case. Time is another important reason why short videos win

against complex articles. Teachers have to cover several demanding topics in a short period of time. Films and videos provide an easy solution to the time problem.

Five out of six respondents said that students do not read reference articles given by the teachers at all. Students are not able to read long texts, especially students struggling with the language. Many seem to find it monotonous and time consuming. They prefer a short (6-8 minutes) video explaining an issue or the concept. When asked the reason for why students seem more and more reluctant to read and why their attention span has been affected, none of the respondents had definitive answers. Two respondents mentioned that the flawed education system is to blame which has shaped students to understand studying as mugging handed out notes before the exam. Some teachers owed this change to the emerging visual culture and students being more comfortable with screens than books.

Films are an exposure to another kind of reality. Majority of students in the classrooms of our respondents come from a privileged background. Films and documentaries communicate unfamiliar realities more easily than occasional field trips. One of the respondents shows films and documentaries that show students a reality different from their surroundings. As a teacher, she makes sure that the videos in the classroom are informative and not particularly dramatised, and that the presentation is adequate to the concept that is being represented. She uses it across all her courses. For instance, she showed the film *Black Panther* (2018) in her class on Political Anthropology to situate tribal narrative in larger socio-political framework that students are familiar with. Students are more interested in feature films that are a part of popular culture than documentaries. In any case, viewing a narrative about an abstract concept makes the concept real and easier to relate to.

They (films) are great tools. Many times, what is in text gets realised on screen. (Respondent teaching multiple courses on Sociology and Anthropology in St. Xavier's college, Mumbai)

Many times, more technical information does not reach out to students through the jargon of the discipline. According to one of the respondents, the goal of the teacher is to make students interested in the concept being taught. Students use this (visual) medium so often; a concept explained through it is easier for them to

understand.

As film is a popular medium, it is interesting to them. It will help them see the theory in more interesting way. (Respondent teaching multiple courses on Sociology and Anthropology in St. Xavier's college, Mumbai)

Another important reason is that films or videos cut out the formality. Students are relaxed during the screening and enthusiastic in the discussion around it. In an informal environment, students are more comfortable and grasp concepts more easily.

Efficiency of visual medium in communicating abstract ideas – pros and cons:

This section looks at pros and cons of using visual medium in an advanced theory classroom and analyses whether the visual language has potential to communicate theory accurately and effectively.

Time is an important factor in contributing to the efficiency of the visual medium in communicating theories and abstract ideas. All respondents agree that they cannot hold students' attention for long. Videos of films usually take less time than reading an article or chapter from a book. Even an educational video they show students has to be short, approximately 8-10 minutes. Movies can be longer as they have a fuller narrative and other entertaining factors. The fact that it is not a classic format of a classroom, where one person is talking to you for an hour, and you're watching something on screen, that attracts the students. As the videos are short, students pay attention to the entire narrative and are able to get a richer understanding of the concept.

In some cases, other forms of visual medium like a photo also help in holding students' attention for a longer period and make them interested in the topic being taught. For instance, one of the respondents put up a photograph of Herbert Spencer on board in front of the class. Students had to look at his face while studying his entire theory. It is possible that this exercise gave an illusion of Spencer being present in the classroom. She told the class to do this exercise for every thinker. It helped. It showed that theory does not come out of nowhere; it has a context, a time, a place and a social background. We all sometimes forget where these thinkers come from. If you look at them, it humanises them and it

stops becoming just words on a page, it's someone's perspective. It not only helps you to contextualise that, but also helps you remember that it is just another person writing it. Sometimes we put theory on a pedestal and we forget that it was written by other people like us. Such exercise makes them relatable; it makes them real. The thinker and his or her theory is not a mere abstraction. Students were forced to look at Spencer whenever they had an issue with what he was saying. An exercise like this affects the way of criticising. Now instead of attacking a thinker, one can attack the ways these concepts are utilised today. Visualising something paves way for a healthy criticism.

According to a respondent teaching Sociological theory at a design school in Mumbai, visuals are easier to communicate the concept with and more importantly, it is easier to refer back to it – like remembering a particular scene. This makes the communication more efficient. Understanding the concept in itself is easier with a short educational video. But, to understand the application of it, a detailed narrative is needed. The ideal situation for half the respondents would be showing students a short video explaining the concept, then showing them a film that shows application of it and then having a discussion.

There are cases of miscommunication of the concept explained through a film or a video. In case of a lengthy documentary, students do not pay attention. Furthermore, students get involved in the narrative and do not look at the film sociologically. Teachers have to brief students on how to view a film sociologically before showing anything. Visual medium is not sufficient on its own. It needs to be supplemented with a text or a verbal explanation by the teacher. Students have to be instructed on how to spot the respective idea in visual narrative and all students are not able to do it efficiently. Teachers' agenda for the class is for the students to understand a concept or a theory and to take back some pointers. Unless that video was tailored for a particular syllabus or classroom, it is not going to be entirely efficient. Teachers have to contextualise it.

Films or videos are not always able to be one hundred percent effective in a classroom. Videos can be outdated or out of context. Many educational videos and films shown in a classroom are made in western context. There will be gaps in how much of the theory the video is going to communicate. Extra efforts are needed to contextualise them for Indian society. Teachers have to gauge where their students are and how much they already know and also look at the video and see what it is not communicating. In case of feature films, some students get

distracted by the entertainment factor and forget to look at the film conceptually. Yet, some students actively participate in discussions based on the example of the film.

Concluding Remarks – Future Application

Visual medium is something that teachers are going to have to integrate in the classroom. With the advent of internet and social media platforms, visual culture is becoming an integral part of our lives. This change is even more rapid in urban areas, cascading in all spaces including classrooms. But, in the classroom, the responsibility of this change lies with the teacher. They have to choose a film and decide whether it is good enough for a particular class and a particular theory. The data shows that teachers can no longer expect students to read an entire book. They have to introduce them to the ideas and theories that are not limited to the textbook.

Using visual media in the classroom can also be of serious help in overcoming the language barrier. The main issue for respondents is how to communicate a deeper understanding of a primarily textual discipline to a newcomer who may not be familiar with the language and does not prefer extensive reading. Here, visual media in the form of a short video or a film provides a compromise. Supplemented with short text, they prove to be a good starting point for discussion. Teachers are using this medium creatively. In an example from the previous section, a photo of Spencer created an intrigue in students and started a discussion.

One of the respondents called her students a part of the visual generation. The idea of a visual generation entails an understanding of the world around us mediated through different kinds of visuals – photos, videos, memes, films, advertisements, etc. In the classroom, teachers have to keep up with the changing requirements of their students.

This is a visual generation. There is no point in complaining about it, we might as well adapt to it and find new ways to use visuals to connect to the text that you are reading. (Respondent teaching multiple courses in Sociology and Anthropology at Wilson College, Mumbai)

However, this cannot be true for every student. Many students from marginalised communities struggle to reach and complete higher education as a result of skewed power structure and years of gatekeeping by dominant groups. In most parts, the higher education system remains casteist, classist and patriarchal geared towards serving the interests of the privileged sections of the society. Lack of socio-economic capital and language barrier are real obstacles for many students. In order to make the classroom more welcoming and inclusive, teachers are using tools like visual media. Although access to the internet and smartphones is not universal, it is significant enough to change the way classrooms function. Teachers believe that films and educational videos can affect the way students perceive the world and start meaningful discussions in classrooms. A lot of visual media used in classrooms today is in English which again leads us to the same problem. However, more and more avenues for educational videos in regional languages are coming up and are likely to grow in numbers. Even in an unfamiliar language, films are more accessible (through dubbing for example) and communicative than formal written text.

However, understanding a concept visually does not have as much value when students do not have the space to express themselves visually. For, students may not be able to express their visual understanding in words alone. Two of the respondents allow their students to draw comics in exam paper and assignments. One respondent also asks students to write an imaginary dialogue between thinkers they are studying. Teachers interviewed for this study are allowing students to use visuals to make their arguments but not many students take on this opportunity. Students are sceptical about the board system and fear that this will affect their marks. In a classroom, visuals work as a starting point but the discussion that follows happens in text/written format. This transition is confusing for some students. Students should be allowed to express themselves visually if they wish to. We are living in a world driven by visuals. It is being reflected in our classrooms.

Notes:

ⁱ Freire's Banking System of Education refers to the traditional model of education where teachers would deposit knowledge into students. In this model, students are seen as mere empty vessels ready to uncritically contain whatever knowledge given to them.

ⁱⁱ *Benefits for teacher using video in the classroom.* Retrieved from <https://filmora.wondershare.com/video-editing-tips/benefits-for-using-video-in-classroom.html>

Using video content to amplify learning. Retrieved from <https://www.edutopia.org/article/using-video-content-amplify-learning>

Sociology goes to Hollywood (or why we must use Hollywood clips in our sociology classes). Retrieved from <https://www.thesociologicalcinema.com/blog/sociology-goes-to-hollywood-or-why-we-must-use-hollywood-clips-in-our-sociology-classes>

ⁱⁱⁱ My top ten fictional films with sociology content. Retrieved from <https://revisesociology.com/2017/01/25/sociology-films/>

^{iv} Understanding of abstract concepts is heavily dependent on perception. Various factors of a visual narrative structure can affect one's perception of the said concept and hence dilute one's understanding of it or oversimplify the concept. This can be countered with an argument that a story or a narrative embodies an abstract concept making it tangible and easier to gage.

^v Other forms of visual media like photos or memes or emoticons or social media platforms – where a considerable part of social interactions takes place today.

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Article: Nation, Integration and Schism: An Analysis of Ernest Renan and Emile Durkheim's Views

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Nation, Integration and Schism: An Analysis of Ernest Renan and Emile Durkheim's Views

--- Jayapal H R

Abstract

The idea of Nation can neither be explained solely on objective criteria nor on subjective grounds. But nations are stuck in duality of time. Nation as an abstract idea has gripped the imagination and consciousness of people so much so that it is reified in contemporary times. It has become an identity marker, a source of exclusion, a space for dissemination of prejudice, suspicion and justification for violence in societies under transition like India. What is nation then? Is it just a union of people belonging to same race, religion and language? Focal question of this paper is to examine whether the nation as an idea is intrinsically universal and factor of integration; or parochial and results in schism! This paper attempts to find answers by examining the perspectives of two intellects – Ernest Renan and Emile Durkheim.

Key words: Common Past, Common Will, Inclusion, Nation

Introduction

Nations claimed to be having hoary past are only of recent origin and they are tied to specific concrete times. This duality is well captured by scholars. 'Nations, like narratives, lose their origin in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in mind's eye' (Bhabha, 1990, p. 1). Nations are not merely experienced as cultural phenomena but also as structural entity. Nation and nationalism have become such inescapable things that since second world war even 'every successful revolution has defined itself in national terms' and even Marxist ideology which predicts the withering of state could not address and escape from issues of nation. So called universal concepts of Marxism is also caught in the intricate enmesh of the issues of nation as problem. Rather it has become an 'uncomfortable anomaly' (Anderson, 2006, pp. 2-3). Nation as perceived in modern sense cannot be dated back than 18th century. Nation as grouping of individuals cannot be distinguished precisely from other entities 'a priori' and

cannot explain nationhood completely either on objective or subjective criteria grounds as they carry exceptions (Hobsbawn, 2013, pp. 5-6).

For Gellner (1983), nationalism is basically a political principle according to which political and national units have to be congruent; that is to say they have to remain as coterminous. A principal basically refers to an idea which is a shared abstract construct centring which people develop sentiments and feelings. Hence, an idea is not only cognitive in dimension but can also become cathetic. He, therefore, connects nationalism with sentiments and feelings of the people which can also become a social movement. It arises as a sentiment when there is either violation or satisfaction of the principle of congruence between political unit and national unit. Whenever there is violation of this principle, resultant anger amongst the people may manifest and movement may emerge as path to nib the violation. Violation of this principle emanates due to several reasons: when boundary of a political unit could not include all the members of a nation; or when it includes all but also includes those who are not members of 'appropriatenation' or it neither includes all the members of a nation and also includes members who are not part of the nation (ibid, p. 1). This sows the seeds of conflict. Sense of violation of nationalism as a principle is more acutely felt when ruling classes are not from the members of a nation.

Nationality is, whereas, an identity and also membership bestowed to individual from the virtue of being a citizen of nation. Amidst all multiple identities, which individuals carry in their everyday life, nationality rides over other identities of individuals, particularly in situation charged with suspicion, prejudice and stereotypes. In fact, nationality as an identity has become all-pervading and omnipotent which individual cannot eschew or insulate inasmuch as a form of stratification such as caste or gender apparently implying nationality as relatively ascriptive identity. It is not merely the formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept where everyone has or should have nationality like gender but as *sui-generis* which is 'irremediable' (Anderson, 2006, p. 5).

Nations have become new ways of legitimacy for states. Nationalism as ideology and metaphor is conveniently espoused to renew the legitimacy. Regimes which are justified on ideologies have also unleashed tension, war and violence. Nations are smeared with blemish of violence and bloodshed in the name of war and dominance. There is so much literature on nations yet it is 'notoriously difficult to define' (Hobsbawn, 2013, p. 3). Among the three paradoxes perplexing the

theorists of nationalism as listed by Benedict Anderson (2006), the third one has serious repercussions. Third paradox refers to the issue of nationality as a socio-cultural universality versus nationality as *sui generis*. Nationality has become all-pervading ascriptive identity from which one cannot escape like gender, religion and caste. One may change the nationality; but can individual live outside the framework of nation? Of all the repercussions emanating from nationality assuming the form of *sui-generis*, the idea of nation and patriotism being used as tool of oppression and emerging as unalterable attract our attention.

Nation and nationality may become a method and justification for persecuting its own citizens when regimes define and divinise them; it may become a convenient pretext for distorting the diversity and also a medium for homogenisation of diverse roots of tradition. Abstract idea of nation as imagination and consciousness has come to be reified so much so in contemporary times that it has become an identity marker, a source of exclusion, a space for dissemination of prejudice, pretext for suspicion and justification for violence in developing societies like India.

The world has experienced the tides of narrower and hard nationalism built on the lines of religion and race. But such tides appear again convulsing the plural basis of integration where dominant religion, race and language become constituting aspects of nation. Are such tides merely passing in nature? Are they rather dialectics continuously shaping and leaving blemishes on reason and spirit of human beings?

Idea of nation and nationalism may also be invoked as a clever, deliberate and instrumental action to cover the acts of state either in favour of particular groups or business class or for stigmatising and suppressing particular groups. What is nation then? Is it just a union of people belonging to same race, religion and language? This paper attempts to find answers by examining the perspectives of two intellects – Ernest Renan and Emile Durkheim.

Ernest Renan's Perspective on Nation: Fusion and Forgetting

Origin of idea of nation is attributed to Europe, particularly Germany, and specific factors to its development in Europe. Why are nations new in existence? According to Ernest Renan (1990), with decline of Roman Empire, Western Europe emerged with form divided by nations, sharing their respective specific

boundaries wielding influence over each other. Days of empires or dictators expanding their frontiers are gone, Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Russia will remain as individual units and any attempts on part of any nation to dominate over others will lead to coalition and ensuing conflicts that will bring back such nations to their original boundaries. What is nation then? What are its analytical properties? In finding answers to questions, one cannot be blind to contextual aspects on the idea of nation for it emerged as idea and reality out of constant explorations and reflections by intelligentsia of particular nation. In fact, such acts of reasoning, reflections and deliberations carried out by the intelligentsia helped in crafting different variants of nation and nationalism tuned to their contexts.

According to Ernest Renan (1990), essence and process of becoming nation lies in 'fusion and forgetting'. It is the fusion of different categories of population; that is, sociologically speaking different groups. It is also forgetting the past; conflicts and violence. States which have categorised its people separate on their identities cannot become nation. If states in Europe accomplished in becoming nations, whereas those in east, particularly Turkey could not as the distinctiveness between groups remained as they were. Analysing in Western European context, he observes the relationship between conquerors and conquered. Though the process of conquering involved violence, it brought order and was accepted. Moreover, the differences between conquerors and conquered was dissolved. Germanic people accepted Christianity as soon as they came in contact with far Europe, married and mixed with conquered, gave up their language and adopted the language of the conquered. They imposed a mould in France which in fact became a mould of nation. It is apt to quote Renan's words here,

In Bohemia (for instance), the Czech and German elements are superimposed, much like oil and water in a glass. The Turkish policy of separating nationalities according to their religion has had much graver consequences, for it brought about the downfall of the east...No French citizen knows whether he is a Burgundian, an Alan, a Taifale, or a Visigoth, yet every French citizen has to have forgotten the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, or the massacres that took place in the Midi in the thirteenth century (1990, p. 11).

How did this concept of nation emerge then? Modern nation is considered to be 'historical result brought out by a series of convergent facts' [emphasis added].

They were listed as ‘direct will of provinces’, ‘general consciousness’ as rational kernel over the whims of feudalism as manifested in the cases of Italy and Germany. Renan was vocally expressive in asserting the claim that it was France which founded the principle of nationality (1990, pp. 11-12).

Nation as Human Will

But then what is nation? For this, Renan attempts to find answer by articulating what is not nation and through which he tried to dispel the false premises of nation. Nation is above dynasty. Though the creation of territory, its unification and sentiments over it (which is subsumed, integrated, and represented by nation at present) owed to dynasty, it could be erased from the memory of individuals over a period of time. Some nations came into existence without the legacy of dynasty. Transition from monarchy to democracy amplifies this proposition. On similar lines, Renan dismisses racial, religious, ethnic and linguistic bases of nation. Historical factors played an important role in dissolving the components of race as identity marker in Western Europe since the time of Roman Empire. There is no such thing as pure race. Whether it is France, Italy, Britain, and even in Germany, people are mixed. Language converse to religion is not ascriptive and is broader in its scope in uniting the people. That is why, if religion unites people in vertical fashion, language, whereas, integrates people horizontally and hence, more inclusive in nature. But Renan argues that Human Will is above the language. United States and England speak one language (English) and Latin America and Spain speak the same language (Spanish), yet they constitute separate nations. Renan (1990) cites the case of Switzerland consisting of citizens speaking three to four languages and diverse regions which are integrated through understanding and will, which is superior to language.

On talking about religion, Renan is categorical in dismissing it as the base of nation. Religion was important metaphor and means in extension of relationship outside the family. Religion ensembled the group and enshrouded the social life of individuals and state itself. Aspect of structural differentiation resonates in Renan argument. Religion acted once as basis of social identity in providing meaning and making sense of life has ceased to do so now. Renan expressed,

There is no longer a state religion; one can be French, English, or German, and be either Catholic, Protestant, or orthodox Jewish, or else practice no cult at all. Religion has become an individual

matter; it concerns the conscience of each person (1990, p. 18).

Renan's Views on Essence of Nation

Renan's views are unequivocal here, 'Nation is a *soul, a spiritual principle*' (1990, p. 19) [emphasis added]. Two things are essential in making a nation: Past and Present. Past consists of common endeavours, sacrifices and devotion kept alive through memories as legacy. Present, whereas, is manifested in willingness to live together. Nation as entity is based on the shared consensus of its people. In fact, suffering, enjoying and hoping together builds the aura of nation. It is about sharing a past not only of things to be rejoiced but also things suffered. 'Suffering in common unifies more than joy does' (ibid.).

Renan having delineated the essential properties of nation attempted to define nation as,

A nation is, therefore, a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future. It presupposes a past; it is summarized, however, in the present by a tangible fact, namely, consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life (1990, p. 19).

Origin, continuity and decline of a nation are not dependent on any divine, myth, sacred religious symbols. It is none other than people who have desires and needs who have to be consulted before a province or territory being joined to country. In fact, beauty of his argument unfolds when he observes, 'A nation never has any real interest in annexing or holding on to a country against its will. The wish of nation is, all in all, the sole legitimate criterion, the one to which one must always return' (1990, p. 20).

Renan locates the process of becoming nation in forgetting the schisms and past violence. Nations are considered to be in existence where identities of race, religion, ethnicity, geography and language are transcended and forgotten. Existence of nation depends on the existence of *common values* and resultant *space of civil society* (1990, p. 20) [emphasis added].

Scepticisms about Renan's Views

Renan's position which considers Germanic race and Germanic invasion as responsible factors for the emergence of nation and nationality has drawn flaks. Though Renan's famous lecture on nation delivered in 1882 is praised for its voluntarist nature, he was criticised for not adhering to it (Thom, 1990). His view of considering Germanic invasion of France around 5th and 6th century AD and German tribes as sources for the germination and dissemination of idea of nation and nationality is questioned. However voluntarist and universal is his theory of nation, placing primacy on German tribes and crediting them for the idea of nation has brought to the forefront the issue of tribes and their relative role within the debate of nation.

History of French nationalism is mired in two competing interpretations which try to trace the origin of nationalism in France to German and Roman factors. When Germanic race as a tribe came to be credited with development of nation and nationalism in France and Indo-Germanism as perspective became all pervasive explanatory lens griping and influencing the minds of scholars, undercurrents of opposition to the superiority of German race emerged among the intellectual circles of France. Critics point at the scanty evidences about ancient Germans in knowing the social and political identity. Discovery of Tacitus' *Germania* in 15th century at Italy provides information about Germans and about their qualities, particularly, 'the unsullied moral virtues of the ancient Germans, for example, their disregard for precious metal, the chastity of their women, and their warrior spirit, qualities which earned the praise of almost European publicists, from the time of its rediscovery in the fifteenth century' (Thom, 1990, p. 24). But Fustel de Coulanges, teacher of Emile Durkheim, demystified the myth of Germanism. Thinkers like Vico, Abbe Dubos, Thierry, Cattaneo and Fustel de Coulanges took a critical view about the question of Germanic race in France and French nationalism which is in contrast to the views of Comte de Boulainvillers, Renan and Edward Said. The same classical text *Germania* is used to demystify the presence of Germanic currents in French Nationalism. They saw ancient Germans as threat to 'Rome and its settlements, agriculture, law courts and assemblies of civil order' (ibid., p. 26). Illustrating from classic *Germania* itself, Cattaneo attributed the development civilisation at Mediterranean region to the urban traditions of Egypt, Phoenicia and Asia Minor.

According to Eric Hobsbawm (2013), nation cannot be explained completely

either on the basis of objective factor or subjective grounds. Both the strands attempt to eschew from the constraints of a priori objectivism. He dismisses the attempt to define nationalism on consciousness and human will. Though he advocated the necessity of overcoming ‘a priori definition’ of what constitutes nation (ibid., p. 8), his own working definition of nation could not overcome the very limitation he raised. Hobsbawms’ working assumption of nation which reads as ‘any sufficiently large body of people whose members regard themselves as members of a ‘nation’, will be treated as such’ (ibid.) is itself rooted in subjective criterion and consciousness.

French Nationalism and Durkheim’s Scientific Sociology

Criticisms about the relative role and superiority of German race in making of nation and nationalism found expression among several intellects; of them significant were the views of Emile Durkheim which resurrected the space and role of individuals. In fact, Durkheim’s construction of scientific sociology was evolved in the larger context of French nationalism; lack of nation pride and defeat of France at the hands of Prussia. Durkheim’s sociology is ‘viewed to be intrinsically connected to the struggle to consolidate the Third Republic’ (Thom, 1990, p. 35).

In main stream literature of sociology, Durkheim’s views on social reality and society are recognised and appreciated as methodical efforts to lay firm the empirical foundation for the budding discipline and is also well remembered for creating a niche of autonomy for the discipline from other social sciences. Essence of Durkheim’s perspective consists in viewing group existing above individual as collective personality. Just as worshipping of totems and celebration of religion is celebration of powers of society so as placing group or society above individual as collective personality implied the welding of France as coherent and integrated nation. Nation as coherent and nationalism as moulding process is integrating factors of society. Nation as collective identity and nationalism as source of integration is an emergent phenomenon and are specific to societies under organic solidarity. If celebration of the powers of society was through that of religion in simple societies, nationalism is, whereas, in complex societies, *sine qua non* for providing the mould and *raison d’etre* for the solidarity and integration of society.

M. Marion Mitchell who examined Durkheim’s ideas from the lens of nationalism

observes,

Although the raison d'être of his scientific research in sociology was the welding of France into a well-organized and well integrated nation, and although there is a great deal in his thought which is pertinent to an understanding of the national ferment of contemporary times, no one has approached Durkheim's work from the standpoint of his nationalism (1931, p. 87).

Nation and Durkheim's Ontology

Though Durkheim has not explicitly constructed a theory of nation and nationalism, his project of sociology was deeply influenced by the ideas of nationalism. Durkheim's discussion of nation and nationalism can be found in his two principal works: *Division of Labour in Society* (1933) and *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals* (1992). *Division of Labour* was an important lens to analyse the morphological and moral transformation of society. Organised structure and division of labour develop with the disappearance of segmental structure. Increase in volume and density of societies are responsible for the emergence of division of labour. Thus division of labour is not mere division of economic labour; instead, it consists of concomitant and comprehensive changes in social organisation due to division of labour.

Nation as collective personality over individual and as part of society has informed Durkheim's project of ontology, which placed him on trajectory different from that of Comte and Spencer. His ideas are neither speculative like Comte nor organicist with biological reductionism as manifested in Spencer's ideas. Instead, he was realist and sought independence from philosophy, psychology and biology. Also, the issues he approached were empirical whether it may be solidarity, integration, division of labour and suicide whose forms, character and intensity change when societies transit from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity. As the societies became complex in their form and function due to 'rapid growth in the principles of organic solidarity', individuals who hitherto remained attached firmly to the usages of the group are now released from the same implying the relative isolation of individuals from groups and ensuing 'moral isolation'. Consequences of such attenuation of integration of individual from the rest of group has manifested in the forms of increasing suicide rates coupled with industrial and commercial crisis, growing antagonism between

capital and labour heralding which Marion Mitchell observed as ‘economic anarchy equivalent to Hobbes’ description of the state of nature (Mitchel, 1931, p. 93).

To check the growing anarchy, Durkheim found panacea in spirit of association and extensive regulation of individual along with new ideal which arouses and keeps high the spirit of self-sacrifice and devotion to overcome the problems of moral misery and suicide. Organisational restructuring and moral discipline are an important integrating aspects (Mitchel, 1931, p. 93). Professional organisation and nationalism are the two sources of realising the integration. He advocated the formation of professional groups on the basis of reorganisation of occupational groups, which could function within the bound and limitations of the state. Specialised functions would be carried out by them which state is incapable to perform. Such organisations consisting of the persons from same occupation would fill the void between individuals and nation. By extending educational, economic and recreating facilities, ‘with its own manners, traditions, rules and obligations’, professional organisations would bestow ‘social and moral, as well as an economic milieu’ (ibid., p. 95).

Is Nation a Social Fact?

Durkheim’s project of scientific sociology is intimately connected with his philosophy of nationalism. For him, social fact to be treated as things external to individuals with coercive power and society is an all-encompassing entity not only including family, the clan, the tribe, but also city-state, nation, religious group, occupational groups, etc. Nation as such is one of the forms of collective being ‘with personality distinct and superior to that of its individual members’ (Mitchel, 1931, p. 96). Then, what is the nature of nationalism as reflected in his writings? Durkheim considers nationality as the basis of state. He explicates,

A Nationality is ‘a group of human beings’, who for ethnical or perhaps merely for ‘historical reasons’ desire to live under the same laws, and to form a single state; and it is now a recognized principle among civilized peoples that when this common desire has been persistently affirmed it commands respect, and is indeed the ‘only solid basis of a state’ (as cited in Mitchel, 1931, p. 96).

Nation is the extension of the scope of society as it is basically a group of human

beings and superior to its individual members, which is built on shared understanding. Consensus built on such shared interests keeps the nation intact and serves as the source of state. It is observed that whether its nation, people, society or *la patrie*, Durkheim synonymously used such terms to denote a single thing, that is 'collective being with personality distinct from and superior to that of its individual members' (Mitchel, 1931, p. 96). Social Facts, Society and Nation are the different points on same plane of collective being. Underlying them are the collective habits which take the shape of 'political, moral, legal or religious institutions and collective sentiments' manifesting in the forms of 'maxims, laws and language of the group'. Cultural aspects are foundation of 'national society'. Mitchell Marion observes, 'constituent elements of his national society were, therefore, *cultural*, and his nation was largely the product of customs, traditions and beliefs derived from a *common historic past*' (ibid., p. 97) [emphasis added].

Basis of National Integration

Increase in volume and density of society allows individuals to scatter over vast geographical area, with which existing collective conscience becomes indeterminate. It is the struggle for existence and needs which lead to the division of work. Specialisation in functions is the core aspect of division of labour which will keep individuals involved in diverse activities and eliminate the conflict. Division of labour implies specialisation of function which does not merely mean more production 'but it is to enable us to live in new conditions of existence that have been made for us' (1933, p. 275).

If competition places isolated and estranged individuals more in opposition, it is division of labour, whereas, unites at the same time it opposes. Division of labour can exist only in the midst of pre-existing society. If the emerging relations in division of labour is not subject to regulations of power, 'there would be chaos, from which no new order could emerge' (1933, p. 277). Obviously Durkheim is indicating the role of state in preserving and ensuring the order. But regulation by state as an apparatus is not sustainable unless they are powered by ideas and beliefs supplying the moral unity. Durkheim sees in nationalism fulfilment of this function as beliefs and sentiments serving as source of collective conscience and integration in societies which are highly voluminous and dense.

Individuals here are spread over vast area, involved in the sphere of impersonal

competition being atomised and estranged. Nationalism as beliefs and sentiments serve as the new source of collective conscience, which gives the essential mould for the society consisting of anonymous individuals. Thus association and cooperation are crucial factors for ensuring stability. Collective life is not born out of individual life and it is the latter which is the result of former. It is the associations, professional associations to be more precise, which connect individuals with state. Cooperation as a phenomenon is a necessity at advanced division of labour and not at the earlier stage. It is similarities between individuals which tied the individuals in simpler societies. Thus Durkheim remarked 'what is first in knowledge is last in reality' (1933, p. 280). Individuals among whom labour is divided in advanced division of labour may not belong to the same society; they may belong to different nations and nationalities. Division of labour, hence, includes internationalities. Durkheim observed,

Attention will be called to the international division of labor. It seems evident, in this case at least, that individuals among whom labor is divided do not belong to the same society. But it must be recalled that a group can, while keeping its individuality, be enveloped by another, vaster and containing several of the same kind (1933, p. 281).

On examining the ideas of Durkheim further on what holds the nation-society coherent and intact? It is perceived that spirit of association and regulation were the instruments in this regard. How to achieve them when moral isolation is the order in new times of organic solidarity? Durkheim found the answers in professional groups connecting between the anonymous individuals and state. Durkheim observes,

A nation can be maintained only if between the State and the individual, there is intercalated a whole series of secondary groups near enough to the individuals to attract them strongly in their sphere of action and drag them, in this way, into the general torrent of social life (1933, p. 27).

Second was education. Moral discipline underlines both the paths. It is through education that continuity of the society is ensured and best from individuals can be brought out in terms of values and human dignity. Education irrespective of the diversity and specialisation can inculcate certain ideals and aspects essential for

the integration of nation. Durkheim, hence, advocated for the state control of education. Then what was the nature of education as reflected in the writings of Durkheim? Certainly it was not a revivalist of narrow nationalism; instead it was a blend of discipline, love for justice and respect for reason and science vital to any democratic system. Education for Durkheim 'was to be a rational entirely exclusive of ideas borrowed from revealed religion. But above all, individuals must be taught attachment to the group' (Mitchell, 1931, p. 102). Hence, school is a miniature of society, agency of continuity and instrument for bringing the integration of a nation.

For Durkheim, character and content of education should be essentially secular in keeping up the national spirit. 'The moral and intellectual reform of France was, he believed, in large part to be achieved through education...' (Thom, 1990, p. 36). Particular race, tribe or religion was never a focus of Durkheim's perspective on the making of nation. Though his ideas were collectivist and structural in nature, it was not any particular bunch of factors accorded importance such as family, as quintessential properties in the constitution and continuity of nation. It's rather the individuals who were given primacy. As Martin Thom observed, Durkheim used Kant's categorical imperative in order to found a theory of the sacredness of the individual as abstracted from his particular race or class (ibid., p. 38). Individual here is not either oppressed or constrained; rather they are bound by the values and not by material contacts which sounds caution against the organic analogy. Hence, Durkheim's theory of nation is pillared on secular education which binds every one irrespective of the identity to which individuals belong, according importance to individuals who could be the same in their abstract and ideal qualities irrespective of the region and culture, and the bond that exists between them are based on ideal ties.

Durkheim's theory of nationalism sounds more voluntarist in character converging with Renan's theory. But it also differs from Renan's theory by not accepting the superiority of any particular tribe in the making of nation. Hence, ethnology has been given more priority over history in Durkheim's scientific sociology and illustrated the universal significance of values cherished by Australian tribes in his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995) to firmly imply that they could exist outside the Europe. Existence of values, however, universal and noble need not be confined to particular tribe, nation or continent. Hence, celebrating the uniqueness of German race and relationship between conqueror and conquered were rejected as explaining factors in the formation of nation and

nationalism. Durkheim views on nationalism are not only voluntarist but also rejection of parochial factors disguised in the form of appreciating particular tribe or race as unique.

Essence of Durkheim's views on Nationalism

Durkheim rejects hard nationalism; his views on nationalism were sensible, progressive and advises cooperation between nations. For one people to be penetrated by another, it must cease to hold to an 'exclusive patriotism, and learn another which is more comprehensive' (1992, p. 281). Prediction of European Union as international order and cooperation between the nations from Europe can be clearly seen in his writings. Durkheim noted the dawn of collective conscience between European nations. He saw the possibility of European Union in 19th century itself; European union seemed to him a higher order of collective conscience which should be characterised by cooperation, wisdom and free from caprices of monarchies and princess. Rights of each nation shall emanate from the duties of every nation. Durkheim is unequivocal when he articulates about the dysfunctions of hard nationalism that can be cited for the sake of clarity. Inversely, every return to strict nationalism always results in a protectionist spirit, that is, in a tendency of peoples to isolate themselves from one another economically and morally (ibid.).

Division of Labour is not mere mechanical exchange between different nations or societies, which he calls as 'mutualism' (1992, p. 282). Division of labour is higher than mutualism which refers to the aspects of existence, diversification of needs, specialisation increasing the productivity but at the same leading to anonymity, estrangement between individuals; cooperation and professional associations as mechanism to establish the stability between the units and connect the anonymised individuals. It also basically refers to the host of changes taken place among the people encompassing their beliefs, values and actions. Nationalism functions as source of collective conscience for the people in highly voluminous and dense society.

Durkheim rejected Kant's notion of complete autonomy of individual and argued that the autonomy which individuals have is a relative. How much autonomy is required for individual depends on the state of mind of societies. What types of servitude and subordination are legitimate is determined in the spectrum of time. Durkheim sees the rights of individual in the state of evolution and with progress

bound to continue, what seemed luxury is now a definite right. According to him, individual morality is not in antagonistic to the state; instead it is the product of state. In fact, it is the state which is responsible for the gradual liberation of individual and individuation of society. State instead of oppressing individuals, as popularly perceived, redeems individual from society and provides individual the milieu from which she or he develops 'his faculties in freedom'. Hence, Durkheim does not see individual as particular person, instead conceptualises individual as genre or abstract category which is liberated from the nest of collective particularities, who have developed self-interest (1992, p. 68). State while in this process remains no more mystic but individualistic in essence. The fundamental duty of the state is 'calling the individual to a moral way of life'. Durkheim expresses, 'If the cult of the human person is to be the only one destined to survive, as it seems, it must be observed by the State as by the individual equally' (ibid., p. 69). First duty of state in the context of advanced division of labour characterised by international competition and threatening is to preserve the collective entity; 'its goal is *national collectivity* and not the individual' (ibid.).

State which was once outward oriented have to move with inward orientation; it is through state, society as a moral collective entity will be successful in achieving the goal. With societies being more complex, delicate balance have to be achieved and greater energies have to be spent inwards instead of expressing the same in violent demonstrations. Nationalism serves as the tool of integrating the society as a moral collective unit. Individual should be treated as what he deserves, freed from 'unjust and humiliating tutelage' and individual need not sacrifice his individuality while being part of the group (1992, p. 72). Regarding the nature of state which is the source of nationalism, Durkheim observes,

So the State does not inevitably become either simply a spectator of social life (as the economists would have it), in which it intervenes only in a negative way, or [as the socialists would have it], simply a cog in the economic machine. It is above all, supremely the organ of moral discipline. It plays this part at the present time as it did formerly, although the discipline has changed. [Here we see the error of the socialists.] (1992, p. 72).

On discussing patriotism, Durkheim sees two types of conflict between people of equally high minded kinds of sentiment: between 'national ideal and the state

embodies it' and 'human ideal and mankind in general' (1992, p. 72). This conflict is peculiar to modern societies. If former is called as patriotism, whereas, the latter is called as world patriotism (ibid.). Durkheim views, 'patriotism could be regarded simply as survival that would disappear before long' (ibid., p. 73). He visualises the disappearance of particular and movement towards universal as we advance in evolution. Though Durkheim recognises the existence of things as world integration beyond one's nationalism which are at higher plane, universal, more general and sublime, moral significance of nationalism or patriotism is stressed. Patriotism is 'precisely the ideas and feelings as a whole which bind the individual to a certain State' (ibid.). Nationalism, thus serves as the source of moral authority in the absence of which, how will individuals be transformed into a collective force? If there is no clearly defined society with collective conscience, how will individuals then be reminded about their duties and internalise them? This dilemma informs the writings of Durkheim.

Even 'world patriotism' can also become a single unit which becomes individual state, with its own identity and interests. To resolve this tension, Durkheim suggests a way for reconciling the two ideas of patriotism and world patriotism. That is national (patriotism) to merge with human ideal (world patriotism). If states focus inward, that is, aims not to expand or lengthen their border, gives priority over the interior aspects, that is, on moral life of its citizens on higher plane, conflict between patriotism and world patriotism can be avoided. In nutshell, we can cite the words of Durkheim which obviously reflects his views of nationalism.

As long as there are States, so there will be national pride, and nothing can be more warranted. But societies can have their pride, not in being the greatest or the wealthiest, but in being the most just, the best organised and in possessing the best moral constitution. To be sure, we have not yet reached the point when this kind of patriotism could prevail without dissent, if indeed such a time could ever come (1992, p. 75).

Conclusion

Nation and nationalism have emerged not only as the instruments of mobilisation and integration in contemporary times but also a new form of stratification – as a marker of identity, prejudice, discrimination and violence. This paper has made an

attempt to examine the essence of the idea of nation particularly through the perspectives of Ernest Renan and Emile Durkheim. Nation and nationalism today greatly triggers the sentiments of people and has become a most sought after means for mobilising the people. Ideas of nationalism as a process not only involve imagination of particular geographical area but also people and groups to be inhabited. The phenomenon of belonging to a nation also leads to the question of exclusion. Nation and nationalism apart from arousing patriotic feelings and integration of groups have also created prejudices, fears and incidences of violence in societies which are in transition, particularly in the Indian context. One's patriotic spirit is doubted, humiliated, vilified and looked with contempt just because an individual is not from the majority identity. Is nation merely to be equated with religion or race? This question has prompted the author of this paper to go in pursuit of the essence and meaning of nation.

Ernest Renan observes that success of nation lies in forgetting the conflict and violence associated with past. But in the name of nationalism and patriotism, past is invoked and present is lived through it. Shared interests common to all people irrespective of religion, race, and language will bind the people in Renan's model of nation. Instead, diversity which is much celebrated as source of strength is now being projected as anti-national. Nation and patriotism are no more an informed and cultivated opinion, value framework and vision of integration but deformation manifested in the forms of jingoism characterised by concoction of facts, presaging of lies and spreading of hatred. Existence of nation ceases to be based on common interests between diverse people. Though the idea of equating nation with religion and race has been well demystified, the cycle is swinging towards the other side, that is, the revival of religion, race and other parochial factors as source of nationalism and nation. Reason is substituted to prejudices, hatred and violence. Citizenship and civil society as the space for dissent and critical views is easily branded as anti-nationals. Higher is exclusiveness in the defining idea of nation, greater is the schism among people and groups.

For Emile Durkheim, nation is one of the things that could be subsumed under collective entity which is above the individual. Nationalism is an instrument of integration for societies in process of organic solidarity where people are liberated from their traditional collective nests and experience moral isolation. National society is the result of cultural aspects such as customs, traditions and beliefs sharing common past. Common past and interests bind the people. Spirit of association, which is through professional organisations and secular education,

integrates the people. Education is not based on any of the revelations of established religions. For Durkheim, individuals moulded by education are rather abstracted from identities such as religion, race and language and are bound by values. Just as the powers of society is celebrated through religion in simple societies, nation and nationalism are the integrating factors of anonymous and atomised individuals in societies traversing through the process of organic solidarity.

Nation in Renan's and Durkheim's perspectives is above the religion, race, language or any other factors which vertically divide the people. It is the *common interests* in Renan's theory and *common past* in Durkheimian perspective which are the constituting factors of nation and nationalism. Essence of nationalism as reflected in Renan's and Durkheim's perspective is a qualified, meaningful and rational one with no space for parochial elements and schisms. But the present which is being lived finds its existence in not forgetting the past. Aggressive and excluding variants of nationalism have become medium for interpreting the past events through the lens of prejudices born at modern times, that is, fixing the responsibility to present generation for the past mistake that they have not committed. If people do not forget the conflict and violence associated with the past, can they become nation?

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Article: Inter-Caste Marriage: An Untold Saga of Oppression in a Vaishnava Monastery of Assam

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Inter-Caste Marriage: An Untold Saga of Oppression in a Vaishnava Monastery

--- Akhyai Jyoti Mahanta

Abstract

Endogamy is quintessential to Indian caste system as it ensures one's blood purity and thus sustains a pure upper caste lineage. Therefore, sects were formed out of Hinduism in various phases of history to reform the society from the clutches of such brahminical norms. The vision of Srimanta Sankaradeva's *Neo-vaishnavism* in medieval Assam was also similar as he too envisaged building an inclusive society beyond all inequalities. But the *sattras* institutions, despite being the progeny of this movement, could not keep its sectarian ethics longer once it came under the purview of casteism and accordingly, caste endogamy became an order for all without further negotiation. Hence, in the upper caste families of the *sattras*, those who conduct inter-caste marriage are subjugated with alienation, discrimination and humiliation, although lately the conservative treatments have gradually weakened. This study explains the degree of oppression experienced by such couples of inter-caste marriages over the period of time.

Key words: Caste, Intermarry, Oppression, Sattra, Sect

Introduction

A cardinal principle of every stratified social order is that the majority of those marrying shall marry equals.¹

- Kingsley Davis

The caste prejudices and chauvinism have been a multi-faceted story of Indian society. These are often said to be less acute in Assam unlike other states, but the social divisions based on caste, class, religion and gender have always been prevalent in the lifestyle of the people in Assam for centuries. This was because of the pervasive presence of Brahminical Hinduism across the Indian subcontinent, for which Srimanta Sankaradeva (1449-1568), the medieval saint and the social reformer, during the 15th-16th century, introduced the movement of

sectarian Hinduism in Assam called *Neo-vaishnavism* as part of the great Bhakti movement or vaishnavism to cut across the divisive brahminical norms (Bezbaroa, 2004). Bhakti is a liberal creed, as Saha states,

It gave birth to a number of religious communities whose membership cut across caste divisions and used vernacular languages as their primary mode of theological, literary, and ritual expression (2007, p. 299).

Accordingly, the spiritual spectrum of Neo-vaishnavism also aspired to unite the people of different strata into one-fold as a crusade against the prevailing social order based on inequality and superstition. Bezbaroa (2004) writes that although Sankaradeva was not vehement against the contemporary caste system, for him a Chandala can be also superior to a Brahman if he becomes a *hari-bhakti-parayana*, i.e., if he fully devotes himself to Krishna. Such egalitarian outlook eventually led him to establish the platform called *kirtanghar* or *naamghar*ⁱⁱ as the public sphere for community worship as well as socio-democratic governance. This platform gradually took the form of a monastery with growing public participation and settlements around it and this was later termed as *thān* or *sattra*. Thus, the *sattra* institutions appeared as the regional expression of sectarian Hinduism in Assam.

Despite such grounded philosophies, after the death of Sankaradeva the *sattras* began receiving the auspice of the Ahomⁱⁱⁱ Kings (Gohain, 2004), and consequently, authoritarian feudal and caste values surfaced under the supervision of the *Satradhikars* (*sattra* headmen), who skillfully kept the rights of headship among the vaishnavite brahmins and kayasthas by making it a hereditary vocation, especially in the household (*grihasti*) *sattras*^{iv}. The people of these upper caste categories in *sattras* are known as *Gosain* while the other residents are addressed as *Bhakat*. By explaining the historical casteist nature of the Gosains, author Nath remarks, ‘They also acted as protector of the varnasrama dharma and did not approve any form of inter-caste marriage in the society’ (2011, p. 46). Although there is no historical evidence from when the preference over endogamy began, but it could be easily realised that it was a strategy to protect the purity of upper caste and not let the monastic authorship slip from their hands.

Such casteist attitude is still lingering in the minds of many upper caste people in the *sattras* based on the guru-disciple relation^v, and in the name of being guru, the

Satradhikar and his kins always entertain a higher position in the traditional caste hierarchy. This hegemonic caste hierarchy perpetuates not merely by usurpation of the headship but also in terms of unequal sitting arrangements (Bhakats or the lay devotees sitting below), feeding restrictions (not accepting cooked food from the lower caste inmates/devotees) and entertaining privileges by the Gosains in all socio-cultural and governing activities. Although no one inside the monastery vouches for inter-caste marriage, but the practice of intermarry, especially within the upper caste group, has been viewed as a sinful act against the traditional belief system set by the upper castes. Therefore, in the recent decades, although some couples have brought a new paradigm in the social environment of the sattras by breaking away from the tradition of endogamy, but in turn they have also encountered its consequences thereafter. Thus, the undercurrent of caste chauvinism is still alive within the periphery of the vaishanava monastery although it is not overtly visible to all, being an internal issue of the upper caste families. Therefore, this study is an attempt to narrate the unseen episodes of their lives and analyse if any change is witnessed in their experiences in the recent period.

Methodology

The field site where I conducted the study was a monastery called Bor Alengi Bogiai Sattra, Titabar situated in the district of Jorhat, Assam. As my subject of research called for an ethnographic dealing with the universe, a participatory observation was required on my part to do an in-depth study of the subject matter. Hence, an uninterrupted consistent engagement with the population was quite necessary for which the field studies took the entire month of June, 2019.

Besides, dealing with the issue of intermarry is sensitive as the experiences of the respondents are personal, and at the same time, it also reflects the normative nature of the existing social structure of which they have been a part. So, to understand the patterns of casteism within the monastic environment of the sattra, observation of monastic activities and behavioural treatments as well as informal interactions with the inhabitants were very crucial to give this study a methodical start. It did help me to get a vantage point of looking at the caste mechanism within the sattra and the social location of the couples in an invariable socio-religious system.

For this, I first began my conversation with the *Deka Satradhikar* (sub-head

priest) who introduced me to the religious and social importance of the vaishnava monasteries over the masses, and the historical and empirical explanations of the life and activities within their own sattras, continuing till date. These conversations with the priest were needed to get an overview of the presence of casteism within the institution in various forms and how the inmates are treating and negotiating with this in different personal and social situations. Since the issue of inter-caste marriage has been found to be of major concern of debate among the upper caste families of the sattras, the prior conversations with the priest and a few elderly persons helped me to get an image of the prevailing notions of marriage complexity among them. Accordingly, I could prepare myself to go forward with the case studies I was looking for. There were four cases (four couples) of inter-caste marriage in the sattras. Two additional cases were also taken from two nearby sattras namely Kangxopar Borthai Sattras and Chipoha Sattras to verify whether the consequences of inter-caste marriage are similar in other sattras as well.

In every case study efforts had been made to create the ambience feasible for conversation with ordinary talks so that the interviewees (couples) would find it as a natural conversation and feel comfortable to express their personal views and experiences without hesitation. According to Brewer, 'Case studies are defined by the focus on the instance of the phenomenon, not by the method used to study it' (2010, p. 76). So, the prime focus of the case studies was to bring out as much data as possible from their narrations, and thus, drawing a connection with their feelings and opinions was quite necessary instead of doing time-bound structured interviews. During conversations, both husbands and wives were interviewed individually to ensure the truthfulness of the facts given by each individual. The experiences of the women were found more serious and bitter than their husbands. So, reciprocating with their emotional state was very important to bring forth their thoughts into words. Hence, the conversations were more like story-telling with a storyteller (interviewee) and the listener (interviewer) where I had written down and recorded the conversations wherever required. As the interviewees did not feel comfortable to get all of their opinions recorded, I covered only a few parts of these with their consent.

This study basically stands on primary data, but nevertheless the secondary sources have also been very helpful in drawing theoretical and methodological frameworks required to understand the historicity of the vaishnava monastery.

Unheard Voices – A Struggle in Silence

The sectarian social system of the vaishnava monasteries has become a contingent of the brahminical caste values due to the urge for power and prosperity, and consequently, the Mahapurushia^{vi} doctrines are at stake. Despite the vaishnava sect being adhered to the revivalist fervour, it left behind the tint of caste consciousness among the Gosain category and its resultant is expressed through the social stigma ascribed to the couples of non-endogamous unions. Kolenda (1992) writes that among the Hindus a unitary coded particle is programmed into their bodies related to their varna, jati, sex or personality. On a similar note, McKim Marriot and Inden also mention, ‘One may get better particles through right eating, right marriage, and other right exchange and actions’ (1992, p. 62). Thus, in the household satras, endogamy is the normalised form of marriage performed as a traditional practice and people generally stick to this process to avoid societal indignity.

On the contrary, those who challenge the traditional practice of endogamy encounter with alienation and humiliation for breaking the upper caste unitary code of the headman’s family and his kins. The externality may not reflect the internal emotional trauma and experiences these couples go through in their lives, but within their own category they never completely get assimilated and many-a-times they remain physically and mentally excluded from the social closure of the Gosains. The statement of the Deka Satradhikar of the sattra can be quoted in this context,

There are no bad persons like Gosains. If you teach a dog some ethics, it will anyhow keep its original instinctive traits. The Gosains are the same. They always have a conservative mind on the basis of caste.

The process of humiliation and exclusion encountered by the intermarried couples are observable in various circumstances of their domestic and public life. It is relatable with what Bhargava (2004) talks about the internal form of exclusion in a religious group where its members are excluded from its domain of religious liberty and equality, and in this context, this is what these couples experience in diverse situations. Like that of Ghurye’s (1992) opinion, this exclusion is showcased through various means of punishments such as temporary out-casting, fines and feast, physical and mental distancing, and so on.

Othering and Exclusion in the Domestic Sphere

Family, being the basic unit of a society, moulds the fundamental faculties within an individual to become a member of a community or a society. These mental and physical stimuli are developed with the collective effort of all family members, inadequacy of which results in a form of exclusion that forbids their inclusion to the closed social groups as well as the society.

In this context, the domestic sphere refers to family and kinship relation where the state of exclusion is more visible. It is first observed through entry restriction to these couples. The couples are not immediately allowed to enter the boy's residence after marriage for the involuntary elements of pollution they endow upon themselves as well as for diminishing the social status of the family by breaking the restrictive caste marriage laws. The temperament and the durability of such prohibition have been changing with time, but entry restriction is yet not altered. The first inter-caste marriage took place in the sattra in 1989 when the son of the then Satradhikar married a girl from *Kalita*^{vii} caste and the stigma of staining the normative marital tradition of the Gosains was never removed from the couple. The newly wedded couple had to stay for two years under the shelter of the Bhakats in complete separation from the boy's family. Similarly, the entry of the couple marrying in 2010 was prohibited for one and a half months while another couple, married in the year 2011, did not visit home for a few weeks after their marriage.

These unconventional marriages bring a change in the habitual relation of these couples with their family members and the kins which last for a long time or lifetime. According to a male interviewee (aged 38), while visiting a neighbourhood uncle's family after marriage (year 2010), his elderly cousin brother shouted at him saying,

Go outside. Don't step into my boundary. I did not even allow my own brother to come home for twelve years. I can't tolerate all these.

On a similar note, a female respondent, married in 2010, says that her marrying a low caste man created a mental gap from her father who was completely opposed to her decision of intermarry. 'I have this feeling that my father died by carrying this sadness which still hurts me', she laments. Such familial disintegrity not only

happens in one particular sattrā but it is more of a universal phenomenon. A non-endogamous couple of a nearby sattrā has encountered an unhealing pain for lifetime as the woman was cursed by the husband's grand uncle that the couple would not get the pleasure of having children, and coincidentally the woman went through a miscarriage thereafter. The couple never had biological children and they adopted a girl child later on.

The stereotypical notion of marriage is that it happens among people belonging to the same caste. Davis also writes,

Since marriage is an institutional mechanism for rearing children, the requirements of status ascription in a caste order practically require the marriage of equals (1941, p. 378).

In terms of sattrā society, inter-caste marriage is an undesirable case where in the eyes of the stigmatisers, consisting of the sattrā community, the offenders reduce their family status. Therefore, the couples are stigmatised as 'others' within their own category of upper caste people. Moreover, another cause behind this enforced stigma is that such marriages would pollute the upper caste blood, which is pure and distinctive than others because of their definite food habits, which the lower castes certainly do not follow. Hence, the relationship of food habit and caste is another essential factor of this exclusionary process. According to a respondent (aged 65), the Gosains are vegetarian by tradition while others have no restriction on food practice, and they are preferably meat eaters. Therefore, she says, they have hot blood and a nature of aggression while on the contrary the Gosains are cool headed. The intermixing of blood lines of two different castes would contaminate the genealogical pure and cold bloodline of the upper caste. Thus, the couples are to face the consequences of breaking the pure stream of blood. Nath also writes,

Their food habit is also modified from what they had developed at home, meat and drink being totally prohibited in the Sattrā (2011, p. 50).

For this reason, one such couple was asked by their parents not to take food at the daughter-in-law's natal home when they visit there. Actually, such couples are either prohibited or discouraged from visiting the daughter-in-law's natal home after they are accepted by the boy's family.

Family support in inter-caste marriage is therefore a rare phenomenon which results in performance of socially unauthorised marriage (eloping) in most cases. The institutional marriages also have no family consent but are conducted out of circumstantial pressure. Consequently, the outcomes of an unwanted action are faced by the couples for an indefinite period. Thus, the inclusion of the couples to their families is a journey which is slow, gradual and deliberate by design while the exclusion is instantaneous.

Rituals, Status and Exclusion in the Public Sphere

Public sphere is a state of being where people of all sections have accessibility and in this particular context, the presence of others along with the family members are emphasised as a defining factor of public sphere. Here, the exogamous couples are mainly excluded on the ground of ritualistic differences.

The upper caste believes in distinctive ritualistic practices that differentiate their position from other caste groups. According to Weber (1992), the rituals are a defining force of status group along with conventions and laws, and thus the ritualistic impurity of the lower caste people are expiated through religious acts. Therefore, they conduct a ritual of purification (*udharani*) under a Brahman priest in order to release the couples from the clutch of sin and are rehabilitated or rescued to the upper caste identity by providing initiation. In the purification ceremony, the couple kneels in front of the gathering to get blessings and acknowledge their guilt for breaking the traditional rules of marriage. It is said, according to the Deka Satradhikar, decades before such couples were made to drink cow's urine and eat cow dung as punishment and to acquire purity (*suchita*). The offence has to be expiated through the payment of a fine and a feast. Social psychologist J. Crocker (1998) writes,

...stigmatised individuals possess (or are believed to possess) some attribute, or characteristic, that conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context (Crocker, as cited in Link & Phelan, 2001, p. 365).

Nonetheless, the ceremony ensures cleaning the impure particles from their mind and body, ascribed or achieved via low caste birth (for wife) or association (for husband), and thus guarantees their first entry to the house as well as the family. The couples remain in a state of uneasiness during the occasion as everyone's

attention is solely directed towards them. But this ceremony exhibits merely an external image of inclusion as the couples never fully receive due care and dignity in various affairs of private and public life.

The exclusion is also felt individually, either by the husband or the wife, who has not conformed to the upper caste tradition of endogamy. The prevention of participation in the cultural and religious activities of naamghar to one such person manifests the exclusion of offenders in the public sphere of the sattras. But again, this rather implicates the violation of the democratic zeal of naamghar by the upper caste itself. In reality, the ritualistic sophistication seems to be used to symbolise the distinctiveness and elitism of the Satriya life^{viii} as well as a method of creating the feeling of alienation to the couples who have dared to go against the tradition.

The exogamous couples remain in a state of isolation due to the negligence shown to them in the social occasions. Erving Goffman (1963) in his idea of stigma also implies that the stigmatised person is mentally classified by people as an undesirable being and their status is reduced 'from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one' (Goffman, as cited in Link & Phelan, 2001, p. 364). Therefore, the couples avoid visiting sattras and attending wedding ceremonies of the relatives as they are not treated as part of the whole like other endogamous couples. While attending a wedding, one such couple was made to sit in the living room while other relatives sat inside the kitchen to have tea and to chat together. Besides, 'which sattras you belong to?' is a common question asked by the fellow Gosains to these women, and this curiosity of tracing a sattras origin make them uneasy as with this they are bound to reveal the women's non-Gosain background. The couples feel that the Gosains carry an indifferent attitude towards them for which they fail to develop a sense of belongingness to the larger group of upper caste and never grow a familial attachment with them.

The Gosains inhabiting in sattras have many commensalities in the living pattern because of their affiliation to a vaishnava sect and they are bestowed with special reputation among people in and outside the sattras periphery. This combination of religious and caste superiority moves them up to a status group, and accordingly, they form a social closure through practice of endogamy for the persistent pleasure of higher social status (Weber, 1992). A middle aged Gosain woman says that not only her kinsmen but also some other people made insulting remarks on her when their elder son had married a *Chutiya*^{ix} girl. 'She is Bor Gosani; she

does not even drink water at our home. But now her son has married from outside', they remarked. She and her husband broke down on their son's 'misconduct' as this would diminish their social status in the eyes of the Bhakats and other followers. Therefore, they despise the very idea of exogamy. According to their daughter-in-law, her mother-in-law cried before others for her son marrying a lower caste girl and declining the family prestige. Therefore, the boy's family members refrain from maintaining any kind of relation with the daughter-in-law's parents and relatives. In fact, according to one female respondent, while the naamghar is contemplated as the court of law and the most sacred space in the sattrā institution, during the purification ceremony the mother-in-law, instead of blessing, publicly cursed her to die as soon as possible. The woman wonders – what is the relevance of the caste purity while the wife of the Satradhikar utters such evil words in the place of worship. An elderly lady also states that she is conscious and careful about the social identity of being an upper caste and moans that it would be a matter of great pleasure if they could give their daughter to a boy of their own caste.

Thus, this upper caste group creates an exclusionary social closure for the maintenance of social honour. Considering this prevalent order, a young female interviewee (aged 25) never took the decision of eloping with a Kalita boy even after being in a relationship for twelve years. She further laments that their marriage would not take place as she being the only girl child among her father's extended families, her marriage would be a matter of honour for the family members. Although this consciousness of social status and social stigma is narrated as an upshot of social compulsion, but it is actually a constructed reality of the Gosains themselves for protecting and sustaining the age-old caste purity and social privileges.

Reifying Stigma

Not only the couples but also their children are at times affixed the stigma of their parents. In the context of South India, Dube states,

...the offspring of inter-caste unions are said to be assigned a status inferior to the children born of primary unions. The children bear the mother's stigma (2008, p. 473).

The picture is similar to a great extent in this context. While the priest's family

and kins firmly follow the religious practices bestowed by their forefathers and predecessors, they often tend to deviate from their conformity towards these rituals. By norm all religious or ceremonial activities are strictly avoided during someone's death or birth (*suwa loga*), but when the second child was born to the first exogamous couple, the then sub-head priest continued to carry on the naamghar activities and even a wedding ceremony was also organised on the very next day of the child's birth. What it reflects is the power relation that encircles the stigmatisation process and that people with less power cannot voice against this enforced stigma. That is why the couple could not resist such deviated activities despite the violation of tradition by its own makers. Their sons still feel that they would never get similar affection or attention from their father's relatives like that of their cousins.

Responding to the question another couple from a nearby sattrra states that their daughter was in her maternal grandparents' home for five months after her birth, but her paternal grandparents never made a visit during that period. The husband (aged 49) adds that his daughter is never shown any affection by his parents and hardly called by his father. Basically, this happens because of the former low caste identity of the children's mothers, stigma of which prevents the grandparents to willingly embrace their grandchildren. According to another woman, one family relative used to punish his own daughter and make her take bath before entering home if she had played with the woman's little kids. Besides, even during a severe injury that happened to her first baby, his uncle, in spite of sitting near him, did not even care to touch the baby lying on the floor. Thus, the impact of social discrimination and humiliation is extended to their children as well, even though the effect is minimal in nature.

Gendered Treatments of Oppression

In this circumstance, the condition of the married women of lower caste background can be easily understood in a patriarchal caste society where the women are regarded as the point of entrance to the caste system. Chakravarti (1993) opines that in the extreme expression of social stratification in Hinduism, the women and the low castes have been subjected to the humiliating conditions of existence. Similarly, these couples have many experiences of discrimination and subjugation, but the bitter experience of oppression faced by the wives cannot be equated with the husbands.

Being born and brought up with different social and ritualistic principles, these women are mostly made to remain as 'different beings' in the religious environment of the *sattra* and thus the shade of segregation is always attached to their lives. At the outset, although the couples are humiliated with entry restriction to home, but the degree of exclusion is always lesser in case of the husband. Unlike the daughters-in-law, in most cases, their husbands (the sons) maintain a relatively cordial relationship with the family members despite going against the marital principles of their parents. While the first daughter-in-law was not allowed to enter home for twelve years and another daughter-in-law was prohibited for one and half months since marriage, their husbands continued visiting their home without restriction in sometime after their marriage. In the caste system, men have no risk of their blood to be impure and for the sons, being the custodian of perpetuating the pure blood to the next generation, any form of restriction is flexible to them. Moreover, the affinity of being 'own blood' gives relaxation in the norm. The entry restriction to the daughters-in-law and the subsequent display of untouchability are the reflections of this biased practice in the *sattra*.

In the pan-Indian context, untouchability is quite prevalent till today which, however, is relatively low in Assam. So, these women may not be untouchables by caste but are treated in the manner of untouchable beings. While visiting the first daughter-in-law's house, one of her husband's relatives used to walk cautiously lest he would be polluted by the touch of any object. Another kinsman used to wash the *dhari* (mat) with water if sat by this woman. She was highly despised by her brother-in-law and he cut the *maroli*^x into pieces so that his house would not get polluted by her presence in the newly built attached part of the main house. Also, he fenced the path to the backyard pond thinking her touch would pollute the usable water. According to another woman, she was asked by the sister-in-law not to go upstairs of the house lest her presence above would contaminate the father-in-law's room beneath it. She also used to have different set of utensils and separate bathroom while staying with her in-laws. Besides, the elderly Gosains do not transfer or exchange things with them hand to hand but rather thrown from the above. Kolenda (1992) says that the impure particles of lower caste would transform to the upper caste through food, water, touch or contact with the lower caste person's bodily products and these are certain firsthand instances to justify this statement.

The sense of untouchability is more observable in cooking and feeding by the daughters-in-law. The elderly persons who have acquired *bhajana* or *malabostu*^{xi}

refuse to take food touched or cooked by these women. In the pan-Indian caste system, only *kachcha* food (cooked in water) is accepted from the lower castes, while the *pakka* food (cooked in *ghee* or oil) is unacceptable as it would defile the twice-born or the orthodox Hindu (Ghurye, 1992). So, it is the reproduction of this model in the *sattra* institution. Though nowadays *kachcha* food is accepted by many, but by no means is the *pakka* food taken. Therefore, a female interviewee (aged 41) says that initially the members of in-law's family prevented her from telling others that she cooked for her in-laws lest people would laugh at them.

The *bhajaniya* Gosains (those who acquire *bhajana*), because of their unique ritualistic lifestyle, cook for themselves and by norm they should not take food from others unless they are *bhajaniyas* too. The point of purity and pollution may seem irrelevant in this context, but the dichotomous practice of religious purity and caste prejudices are revealed in many cases. It was observed that while some *bhajaniyas* would eat food cooked by the upper caste daughters-in-law, but other daughters-in-law from lower cast background are not allowed to offer cooked food even after belonging to the same family and taking initiation. By principle, the *saraniyas* (those who acquire *sarana*) or *bhajaniyas* should treat all daughters-in-law equally in terms of cooking and feeding as the other daughters-in-law have been brought into the upper caste through *prayaschitta* (expiation), and like their fellow women, they have also been given *sarana* after marriage. Moreover, a feast is organised as part of the purification ceremony where all residential inmates of the *sattra* including the Gosains are to eat food cooked or distributed (if not cooked) by her which symbolises her achievement of the purity status as well as accessibility to the kitchen space. In spite of that, these women hardly get a chance to freely cook and feed the fellow elderly persons. Such contradictory behaviour reveals the rather non-conformist ritualistic practices of the upper caste which are improvised according to their own will so that they are not bound to be in touch with these women. According to a daughter-in-law, the Gosains show over consciousness on cleanliness, and her mother-in-law has never had food cooked by her out of concern for purity, but she ate sweets sold in the hotels without hesitation.

This external display of indignation is expressed not only through different practices but also with verbal abuses and facial expressions. The daughters-in-law have to remain conscious of following all the rules, norms and rituals of the upper caste and yet they have to bear all forms of humiliation unlike their husbands. The brother-in-law of the first woman did not talk to her for over ten years since the

marriage, and remembering her past, she laments,

My mother-in-law sent some medicine so that I and the fetus of my first child got destroyed and she cursed me to die in the time of delivery of my first baby.

In the initial years of marriage, the woman's sight was considered to be a spoiler if a family member prepared to go somewhere. Therefore, her brother-in-law used to enter home from the backyard to avoid the glance of her and the mother-in-law covered her face with the veil if she noticed the daughter-in-law and spitted on the ground to show her disgust. Different ways of humiliation were a means of showing disgust to these women and reminding them their stigmatised social position as lower caste beings.

In the event of social occasions, the wives are looked down upon more than their husbands. The first woman used to be a topic of gossip for the husband's relatives in the family gatherings and they are sometimes accused of being the misfortune for all the troubles that happened in the family. Such revelation of abhorrence creates a feeling of isolation for them despite of being amidst the family members. According to them, their husbands are the only source of mental support and encouragement which works as a dose of relief and companionship and the reason of their perseverance.

Further, two of them had also fallen prey to rumours which re-intensified their already unstable situation. In case of the first daughter-in-law, although the inmates knew the bride to be Hindu, but a rumour went across that her mother was a converted Hindu from Christianity which is still believed to be true by some people. Marital relationship with other religions outside Hinduism is a matter of little toleration for most of the Hindus. In this circumstance, the suspicious religious origin of the woman's mother created a discontent, particularly among the Gosains who were already offended by the marriage. But actually her mother was brought up by the American missionaries because of being a child of a poor family and she had completed her Nursing degree from a missionary institution of Shillong. The inmates being unaware of these facts rumoured her mother's identity as Christian and that might also be another way of diminishing the woman's social status. Another interviewee (aged 33), who was married to a Kalita boy, also says that many of her relatives still think her husband as *Kaibartta*^{xiii} because of his surname *Hazarika* and the dark skin complexion of his

family members. 'Their doubtful thought can be noticed from their connotative expressions itself', she remarks.

The internal exclusion within the boundary of upper caste is thus disparate towards sons and daughters-in-law. The latter encounters both physical and mental exclusion which is not merely because of being a woman but also for coming from a lower caste background. Therefore, Guru (2019) states that caste not only exists in mind but also expressed through sight, touch, hear, etc. From these imposed stigma and injustice, these women start developing indignation towards their in-law's family members and kins. They are naïve and non-resistant to the injustice and stigma imposed upon them but these unfair treatments and ironical character do produce a negative impression on upper caste people among these women. One daughter-in-law has never kept the *Mahanta* surname as a sign of abomination. She considers the Gosains as hypocrites, because while people keep them on a high pedestal being pure and religious, many of them are alcoholic and non-vegetarian in nature which invariably goes against the religious and moral doctrines of this sectarian group. According to these women, the Gosains are considered pure but that is merely in the name of caste but in practice they do not even have the sense of hygiene in their living style. Besides, some of them are people of questionable character and that has altered their old normative view of Gosains as noble beings.

Class overrides Caste

Class and caste often overlap each other, and it is the financial aspect of class that brings flexibility in the rigidity of the caste-based discrimination. In the hierarchy of the caste system, power always lies in the hands of the upper caste, but the economic strength of any individual, family or social group tend to play a major role in overshadowing the caste identity. Therefore, the caste-ridden Gosains seem to be ready to negotiate with the caste hierarchy and discriminations when the economic condition of an individual or family is in a considerable or higher position.

Condemning the Gosains, the husbands (who themselves are Gosains) have stated that they are opportunity seekers by nature and they would ignore all caste, religious or any sort of identity of a person if they see future scope of getting financial profit or prosperity by making proximity with that person. The affirmation of economic security for their sons and daughters has made even the

stubborn parents compromise with the caste dogmas. According to a woman, she was recognised as a daughter-in-law as she was a teacher by profession and belonging to a well-off family who could support her unemployed husband after marriage. Recently, in July 2019, when the elder son of the first couple revealed his relationship with an Ahom girl, a disagreement arose between his father and the elder uncle when the former requested his elder brother to give consent on the marriage. The boy's uncle replied, 'Only having higher education is not enough. One must have moral education as well', which indicates the boy's choosing a low caste girl as an immoral act. But finally, he had found that despite of being Ahom and an orphan, the girl's family is quite educated and well-off and that compelled him to alter his decision and agree on the marriage.

This behavioural change is very pertinent among the upper caste kins once monetary support is guaranteed by these couples in the time of necessity. The first exogamous couple is government school teachers. According to the wife, the couple was never given due importance or attention by the family members, but this attitude to the couple was instantaneously reversed when monetary assistance used to become very important for organising the family functions. But once the purpose was over, the family members, by disregarding everything, neither showed any gratefulness nor acknowledged their help later. She thinks that if she were not a government service holder, the in-laws' family and their kins would not have even considered her as human being. On this, one of the male respondents (husband) reacts,

No matter whether your wife is a dumuni (referred to female Kaibartta) or Bengali, if she can earn some money, feed the family members with good food, gift cloths and all to her sisters-in-law, etc., she automatically becomes a good daughter-in-law. Then they can also take food cooked by her. Most of the Gosains are like this. They don't reveal all these facts.

On the other hand, the couples with relatively poor economic background are vulnerable to more complex situation on certain grounds as they are given less chance of questioning the social order. These couples, being already regarded as polluted, cannot dare to speak against the convictions of expiation said to be forwarded according to *shurti*^{xiii}. According to *shurti*, about which they have no knowledge, a fine and a feast must be given by such couples as part of the purification ceremony on which there is no point of argument. According to a

male respondent, five thousand rupees was imposed upon him as fine without showing any empathy to his monetary and mental helplessness. Another couple was imposed with a fine of twelve thousand rupees which they could pay only with the help of the boy's maternal uncle. The former respondent says, 'The Brahman and the Gosain priests took advantage of my poor and powerless condition at that time'. According to Davis (1941), for Hindus one enters a caste by birth which occurs through institutional marriage, and thus intermarriage is prohibited to maintain the caste distinction. So, it seems that the couples are purposefully made to suffer with the troubles for bypassing and devaluing the age-old marital norms.

Changing Dispositions

The resurrection of humiliation and mental separation, by and large from the upper caste Gosains, sometimes end up in the physical separation from the natal home. The couple from Kangxopar Borthai Sattrā says that being dissatisfied with the family members, they built a separate house for themselves in a different plot of their house compound; another couple being worried about the impact of such narrow mindedness upon the children moved away from the sattrā and settled down in nearby Titabar town. But the ill-treatment continued even to the last day of separation. According to the daughter-in-law, she was made to sit in the backyard of the house with the maidservant and the mother-in-law almost threw a rice plate to her by showing an insulting facial remark. Despite of the continuous hatred, these women remain meek. 'Let them hate us, we shall not question back. We will do what is justified and God will punish them for their misdeeds', they remark. This consistent patience of the women and their effort of adaptability in the new social setting have also gradually tended to discern the faults falling on the part of the dominant family members, and they have eventually become moderate and kind to them. The previous notion of these women being inferior is changed to a great extent and they in turn have become 'perfect daughters-in-law' for the orthodox Gosains.

Besides, the normative view of considering the daughters-in-law as 'outsiders' is now and then criticised even by some 'insiders' who are relatively lenient towards exogamy and other transformative social behavior. It means that there is a distinction on opinions even among the upper caste people. The Deka Satradhikar and another fellow kinsman of the sattrā were the only people from the boy's family who attended the first inter-caste marriage and performed the necessary

marriage rituals in a temple. According to the Deka Satradhikar, the ancient cult figures of Hindu tradition namely Vyasadeva and Lord Krishna had married lower caste women. Besides, by consulting with the heads of Auniati and Dakhinpat Sattra^{xiv}, he confirmed the legality of inter-caste marriage that homayajna purifies the people's sin. So, he finds no difference between the endogamous and exogamous couples and hence attended the marriage. Additionally, many of the Gosain respondents despise their upper caste identity because of the dichotomous attitude and the shallow thoughts of the fellow Gosains. They have opined that the upper caste people are excessively concerned about purity and pollution in every aspect of life and therefore, the persons with liberal outlook are sympathetic to the couples, which eases their struggled life to a great extent. Thus, criticism from within has instigated the conservative ones changing their orthodox outlook to this issue of inter-caste marriage.

Moreover, the decreasing influence of sattras over the masses in the contemporary period as well as the growing number of inter-caste marriages in other sattras and across societies have compelled them to abandon the typical upper caste attitude. Moreover, it is usually seen that inter-caste marriage has never been so permissible act even outside the sattra society as majority of the population in Assam comes under the religious fold of Vaishnavism preached by the sattras. But with the arrival of modernity in all walks of life has motivated the people to liberalise their views towards this cause. Thus, a transformation in the traditionalist view of marriage could also be seen in sattras over decades (1980s-2010s) as the later couples married in 2010s have not faced as severe discrimination as the previous ones. Especially, both old and new daughters-in-law are now leading relatively a comfortable life without dealing with the problem of assimilation. It is very evident in case of the hypogamous couple (married in 2011) who had faced no serious problem as such, and they were easily accepted by the girl's family after marriage. The children of the newly married couples are also loved by the family members. So, the sacrifice of these couples, especially the daughters-in-law, along with self-criticism of some Gosains and the arrival of social change in and out of the sattra institution are the underpinnings of this transformation. Besides, according to the first couple, the academic and other achievements of their children are other additional reasons in drawing attention and importance of the relatives towards them.

The point to be noted here is that although the changing atmosphere is leading to incorporate the excluded members into the upper caste group, but the external

appearance of assimilation reflects a rather shady image of the reality. Of course, the degree of oppression is getting lessened, but people are not yet entirely freed from the deep-rooted prejudices. Now-a-days, they are gradually accepting inter-caste marriage but the moderate attitude towards inter-caste marriage does not imply total consent upon it. In terms of arranged marriage, they would anyhow prefer same caste's boy or girl for their children. But in most cases, the girls are found already engaged with others and in this circumstance, sometimes they are bound to take a step back and look for preferably a Kalita girl with a good economic and familial background. Now Kalita is tended to be justified as upper caste group in their consideration since they are nearest to the Kayasthas and also fall under the same constitutional general caste category. So, it implies that even within the changing dispositions, the hierarchical religious and caste superiority are tried to be kept intact.

Conclusion

As far as my limited observation goes, the sectarian fellowship tends to break caste barriers to a significant extent, and in many respects – except the hard core of caste endogamy (Saha, 2006, p. 235).

Inter-caste marriages with family consent hardly take place in the Gosain families residing inside the sattra institution. Wilson (1959) states that the sects maintain certain behavioural patterns to safeguard their sect values from external influences, and therefore, group endogamy is a primary method of this insulation in the sects. In such context, inter-caste marriage is considered as a betrayal to the sectarian cause and thus the couples are to tackle multiple layers of oppression for polluting the pious status of the upper caste lineage.

The major problems happen in the case of hypogamy where an upper caste boy marries a girl from the lower caste. Social anthropologist Nur Yalman links the sexual purity of women with the purity of the caste, suggesting that female sexuality presents a threat because of the danger in her introducing impure or low caste blood to their lineage (Chakravarty, 1993). Therefore, in this gamut of stigmatising and othering the couples, the wives have to suffer more than their husbands, and analysing the exclusionary treatment of the Gosains, it can be considered that these women go through a form of internal religious exclusion despite becoming a member of the sectarian group (Bhargava, 2004).

Nevertheless, it is found that the prejudicial responses to these couples have reduced to a great extent due to societal change and educational growth among the inmates, and most importantly the realisation of the Gosains through self-criticism helps in moderating their behaviour to the couples. In this changing scenario, the patience of the women must also be considered. Their prolonged patience may not be always entertained, but it is true that this composite and resilient attitude of the women have made the orthodox Gosains leave their arrogance and traditionalistic ideas aside.

So, basically these are newly invented pseudo-brahminical norms and practices in *sattras* in the post-Sankaradeva period which are downright contrary to the definition of sect and socialist philosophy of the Bhakti Movement. Mayur Bora (2013) opined that two main pillars of Brahminical ideology are – strong casteist attitude and arrogance of superiority complex. Although the brahminical caste rigidity is not evident in the monasteries, but the sense of caste superiority does exist in this institution. The continuing denouncement and defamation of caste exogamy is the indication of lurking presence of this antithetical philosophy till date. Considering such gloomy consequences, Ambedkar (1916) thus states that Hindus will hardly go for inter-caste marriage as long as there is casteism in India.

Notes:

ⁱ Davis, K. (1941). Intermarriage in caste societies. *American Anthropologist*. New Series, 43(3), 376-395. Part 1.

ⁱⁱ Kirtanghar or naamghar is a community prayer hall developed by Sirmanta Sankaradeva as a part of Neo-vaishnavism. It was established as a democratic platform of worship accessible to all irrespective of caste, class or religious background.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ahom is an ethnic group of Assam who are descendants of the Tai language community belonging to Southeast Asia. They reached the Brahmaputra valley of Assam in 1228 and ruled over six hundred years until the British took over the charge of Assam in 1826. They come under the Other Backward Class (OBC) category.

^{iv} The *sattra* monasteries are basically of two types – *udashin* (celibate) and *grihasti/bishoyi* (household/non-celibate). In celibate *sattras*, the inmates usually do not marry and remain bachelor till death, while in the non-celibate *sattras*, inmates get married and have their own families.

^v The *sattra* community is based on the guru-disciple relation where the *Satradhikar* is the guru and hence his kins (in household *sattras*) and the others are disciples who may reside inside or outside the monastery. This relation is run on the rites of initiation where the disciples take religious shelter under the *Satradhikar* who is either a Brahmin or a Kayastha in majority of the *sattras*.

^{vi} Mahapurushia doctrines refer to the traditional beliefs and practices attributed to Srimanta Sankaradeva and his disciples.

^{vii} Traditionally, Kalita is an agricultural caste and its sub-castes are engaged in various low earned professions such as potters, barbers, etc. Some of them belong to Kayastha caste as well (Barpujari, 2007). Constitutionally, Kalitas fall into the General caste category and are engaged in all sorts of professions.

^{viii} Satriya life refers to a distinctive living pattern based on the monastic rites and practices one follows being inmate of the sattras institution.

^{ix} Chutiyas are an ethnic group of Assam who are entitled as Other Backward Class (OBC) by the Indian Constitution.

^x Maroli is a length-wise support of a thatch roof (usually of bamboo). It is seen in the cottage like houses.

^{xi} Sarana, bhajana and malabostu are three stages of initiation which the vaishnava pontiffs may acquire to become more devoted towards a religious and spiritual life by giving away the urge for material luxuries.

^{xii} It is said that the Kaibarttas migrated to Assam along with the Aryans in the first millennium (Barpujari, 2007). They are considered the lowest caste group of Assam and given the Scheduled Caste (SC) status by the Indian Constitution.

^{xiii} Shrutis are vedic texts that provide suggestions and remedial punishments to an offender who violates the societal norms set by the sattras institution.

^{xiv} Auniati and Dakhinpat are two prominent monasteries in the island district of Majuli. Both are basically celibate sattras and belonged to the *Brahma Samhati*, one of the four sub-sects of sattras. (Other sub-sects are namely *Nika*, *Purusha* and *Kal*; and Bor Alengi Bogiai Satra comes under the Purusha samhati).

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Ethnography among Migrants in a City: Field Experiences in Delhi

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Abstract

People from Northeast India have been migrating to Delhi in search of work since the last few decades. They are mostly engaged in the service sector jobs such as call centres, retails, hotels, restaurants, beauty salon and so on. Shared accommodation, discriminations in their daily life, social stigma against specific work, role of church and collective celebrations of socio-cultural events and festivities involving community participations are specific to the migrant's experiences and negotiations of the everyday life in the city. This paper is an account of the researcher's ethnographic fieldwork conducted among the Kuki migrants from Northeast India in Delhi. It seeks to read and understand the migrants' everyday life through the researcher's field experiences and encounters in the city.

Key words: Delhi, Ethnography, Field experiences, Kuki, Migrants

Introduction

Human beings have always moved in search of new opportunities, or to escape poverty or conflict, and clearly the last half of the 20th century has been an 'age of migration' (Castles & Miller, 2009). Since the last few decades there have been a growing number of people from Northeast India migrating towards several Indian cities in search of jobs and employment opportunities, particularly in the private sectors. Their movement does not involve the crossing of any international borders, yet, both geographically and culturally, it is a movement into a very different place. It is a movement away from predominantly rural livelihoods with subsistence agriculture and politics revolving around ethnic homelands, with armed struggles and massive human rights violations (Kikon & Karlsson, 2019). Armed struggles, violence, human rights violation accompanied by subsistence livelihood activities at home and the availability of better education and job opportunities in various services have led to large scale migration of people from

the Northeast to Indian cities in the last decade or so. In spite of their economic inclusion into the megacities in a booming urban India, the Northeast migrant faces certain exclusion in the social and cultural milieu. They are stereotyped as ‘backward’, ‘dangerous’, ‘exotic’ and ‘erotic’ (Wouters & Subba, 2013; Nongbri & Shimreiwung, 2017). McDuie-Ra argued that ‘the experiences of Northeast migrants are distinct and reveal different elements of contemporary Indian society as the distance between frontier and heartlands shrink’ (2012, p. 87). They are not viewed as yet another ethnic group in the vast Indian milieu but as an ‘exceptional population’.

For my doctorate research, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork among the Kuki migrants in Delhi who migrated from the Northeastern states of India since the last few decades in search of jobs and opportunities. The Kukis are identified as a Mongoloid racial stock of the Austro-Asiatic group of Tibeto-Burman linguistic family. The term ‘Kuki’ means ‘hill-people or highlanders’ (Reid, 1893, p. 238). In post-colonial era, the Kuki tribes were divided by three international boundaries viz – India, Bangladesh and Myanmar. In India, they are found in the Northeastern states of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. It is believed that the Kuki migration to Delhi had taken place since the 1950s who were chiefly government employees and few students. The volume of student migration for further education increased slowly since the early 1980s. Subsequently, Delhi became one of the most favoured destinations for the Kukis for work and employment, particularly in the post-liberalisation. The migration volume became much bigger in the 21st century with improvement in transport and communication which encouraged many Kuki youths to migrate to Delhi in search of jobs and opportunities (Kipgen & Panda, 2019).

The study basically looks at the Kuki migrants working in the private sector. They are mostly educated youths engaged in different service sectors jobs such as call centres/BPOs, retails, in hospitals as nurses, beauty salon, waiters/waitress in hotels and restaurants and so on (Kipgen & Panda, 2020). Some of them migrated as students and stayed on after completion of their courses and are earning their livelihood in different private sector jobs. The study involved interviewing the migrants and also observing their life through participant observation. The study examines the various factors that led to the out-migration of the Kukis from the Northeast, giving special focus on the role of social networks in this migration process. It also examines the problems and issues that the migrants encounter as they settle in a new environment such as discrimination in accommodation,

racism, language gap, relatively high expenditures, stereotyping as being 'backward' and 'primitive' due to their distinct food habits, and loose and immoral due to their dress and lifestyles and so on. The study also examines the sites where social boundaries are established and where patterns of group identities are constructed and located. It analyses the important sites and the forces at work within them such as the residential space, ethnic stores, social institutions, cultural events, church and death where collective identity and consciousness are located.

The paper is an account of my experiences and encounters in the field site, the personal engagement I formed with the participants and also the ethical decisions I had to make while conducting ethnographic fieldwork. The main theme of the paper is to understand the everyday life of the migrants and their negotiations in the new place of destination through reflections from my field experiences. It is an attempt to present a picture of their everyday life and negotiations in the city. I shared the same space and encountered experiences similar to the migrants on account of common ethnic identity and shared cultural and physical characteristics. Engaging with them in the neighbourhoods and being part of the collectivity has given me ample scope to understand certain meanings and gather true picture of them.

'The Fieldworker and the Field'

Fieldwork as a rigorous scientific method played a major role in social anthropology and sociology for a very long time. Fieldwork is not usually a topic for discussion as most research tends to be focused on the outcome rather than the method and process involved in collecting data (Crisis, 2012). The term 'field' means 'the community of human beings who are being studied' and the 'fieldworker' is the person who conducts research in the field (Srinivas, Shah & Ramaswamy, 2002). The field of research enquiry is not simply a geographic place waiting to be entered, but rather a conceptual space whose boundaries are constantly negotiated and constructed by the fieldworkers and the members (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). This makes the time spend by a fieldworker in the field very crucial to understand the meanings of everyday life of the people.

William Foote Whyte's (1993) ethnographic study of an Italian slum district in the United States provides insights on the fieldworker's role in order to understand the life of the community under study. The fieldworker's lived

experience is a testimony of what is actually happening in the field. A real explanation of how a research is conducted, thus, involves personal account of the researcher's lived experiences during the period of study. Whyte's friendship-making, interview methods such as refraining from arguing with people or pass moral judgments, participation in their everyday life such as games and sports, hanging on the 'street corner', when to ask questions and what questions to ask are vital elements of field method.

M.N. Srinivas also exclusively narrated his encounters while making a study in a rural village in India such as finding accommodation, absence of privacy, dealing with factionalism among villagers, caste conflicts and so on. Based on participant observation, Srinivas was able to capture the various nuances of life in a village. Srinivas was critical of fieldworkers writing reports 'which are impersonal, abundant in sketches and charts and nowadays, also tables' arguing that the reports convey an impression of objectivity which they do not (2002, p. 28). According to him, one's affiliation, class, regional and religious, values and temperament, influence what he sees and how he sees them. In short, fieldworker 'should pay serious attention to presenting their reports in such a way that the subjectivities inherent in their fieldwork are made clear to their readers' (ibid.). A description of the conditions of a fieldworker's encounter while conducting ethnography may give a better picture of local life in the field.

Similarly, A.M. Shah (2002) in the fieldwork in rural Gujarat described the importance of understanding the 'flavour of life in the village' for which reason they 'follow the flow of activities and events' as they occurred in the village. He argued that it was important 'to keep eyes and ears open and observe sensitively whatever happened' (ibid., p. 35). As such, intensive fieldwork has been considered to be the major method in social and cultural anthropology. The method has travelled far since Malinowski did his fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands, both with regard to the methods and techniques used, and the kind of communities and problems studied (Srinivas, 2002, p. 1).

Finally, when a fieldworker conducts ethnographic fieldwork, he or she encounters unexpected experiences and events. Their experiences and challenges may differ from one geographic location to another. In a sprawling metropolis, fieldworkers encounter issues such as where does one (respondents) reside, how to contact them, where to conduct the interview and when to sign them up for interview as they spend very limited time away from their work place (Dorson,

1981; Crinis, 2012). Safety and security concerns are crucial challenges a fieldworker encounters in urban centres. Areas with high levels of violent crime may make travelling short or long distance risky and challenging for a fieldworker (Goldsmith, 2003). Therefore, the hostile and dangerous areas of research pose a great challenge for the fieldworker that can seriously affect the ways in which we approach the field and interpret social phenomena within it (Kovats-Bernat, 2002).

Entering the Field Site

The fieldwork was conducted in Delhi in two phases between 2015 and 2017 lasting for about ten months. Besides, I also visited the field site occasionally lasting up to few weeks as and when certain events and programmes were organised such as festivals and sports events. On my first entry to the field, I stayed at my relative's residence at Dwarka in the South-West corner of the city. For the first few weeks of my fieldwork, I commuted to my field area in the morning and returned home in the evening. As I was new to the city, I did not have proper knowledge on public transport system. So, I had to rely on auto rickshaws for my transportation every day. It became difficult for me to afford the expensive auto rickshaws for my travel anymore. At the same time, Delhi being a big metropolitan centre makes it hard to visit different localities and return back home on the same day. I also realised that it was important for me to spend more time with the people to capture the real picture of their everyday life. So I decided to stay in localities where I can find my respondents. I ended up staying in various localities for up to several weeks and return home for a day or two to rest. In order to comprehend and capture their everyday life in the city, I followed and stay as close as possible with the migrants. I went to attend church with them, celebrate religious events, joined them in sports tournaments, in annual sports meet, freshers meet, shopping, dropping them for work, dinner, etc. I tried to gain access to different locations in any possible ways in order to observe and understand their lives in a regular manner.

Discriminations and Dangers

People from the Northeast are targeted for violence because of their distinct physical features. Their Mongoloid features attracted strong rejections of their citizenship and belonging from the host members. I was also not free from a being target of violence and discriminations because of my look. Since I had to move around mostly at night, the vulnerability to violence and discriminations were

high. Travelling alone was dangerous. When navigating life during days were equally challenging, one can imagine how hard it can be at night. On one occasion at around mid-night, I had just conducted an interview and was returning home. There were few local boys in the corner of the street. As I was passing by, they started calling me ‘chinky’, ‘bahadur’ and ‘nepali’. I knew their intentions were to instigate me. I knew very well that if I retaliate, I could be in trouble. I had to sprint which was the only option and the best way to deal with such a situation. On another occasion in one fine afternoon, I exited from Delhi Metro to visit one of the field sites. I asked one of the auto-rickshaw drivers how much the fare was. I knew the normal rate very well as it was not my first time going there. The driver quoted an amount which was double the normal rate. I told him, ‘I know the normal rate very well. Don’t try to cheat me’. After a few seconds, he approached me and pulled my shirt and said something in Hindi which I couldn’t understand. Therefore, my safety was dependent on my reactions, alertness, and steady watchfulness from potential threats from unexpected dangers at any point of time. Similarly, the everyday life and encounters of the migrants revolves around this feeling of insecurity and discriminations. Whether it was day or night, they were under close watch and they were subjected to various forms of discriminations which may erupt at any point of time.

The Kuki migrants in Delhi were engaged in challenging and stressful jobs with very limited engagement outside their home and workplace. Their life revolves around the duality of home and work place and vice versa. Even on holidays, migrants prefer to relax and have their own time, hang out with friends, and go for shopping if they have time or just remain confined to their rooms. To visit them in the evenings was a common answer to most of my appeals for interviews. As most of the interviews were carried out at night my safety aspect was on many times challenged and tested. Travelling alone in a particular locality and to distant places at night becomes very risky. Despite friends accompanying me on few occasions as a guide during the course of the fieldwork, it became increasingly difficult to always expect their companion as they were all working migrants. So, I had to arrange my own schedule and travel plan. In fact, I had a very individualistic and lonely life during the course of the fieldwork.

I tried avoiding meeting my respondents at night because it was chiefly in the evening or night where violence and harms were expected. But somehow I realised that such drastic decisions will hide certain facts about the migrants I was researching. To understand the migrants’ precarious life, especially for those who

return home from work early morning or late night and who were not accompanied the moment they got off from their company's transportation, or those who went to workplace early in the morning, I thought it will be helpful if I could also see and experience their actual life, the time and the spot where the migrants navigate their life during this time. Curious to know more about the migrants' life, such as those who were returning from work and who were heading for work, I sat at the entrance in one of the neighbourhoods early in the morning before sunrise. I wanted to know answers to questions such as: What were their means of transportation? Who accompanied them? Were they alone? What about women migrants? As I was walking, I encountered groups of people in a very stern mood and the moment they saw me as I walked down, they started making unwelcoming stares. They belonged to different ethnic communities; I could not ascertain their identity at that moment. I became alerted and sensed that something went wrong. I put my head down and walked silently in their midst as I heard some of the guys talking to each other in their dialect. It was only in the afternoon when I asked around what happened in the locality they told me that a serious fight broke out between two ethnic groups in which one of them was seriously injured and needed treatment at Intensive Care Unit (ICU) in one of the hospitals. Throughout the night there was search and counter-search between the communities inside the locality. Therefore, in addition to the fear from the host residents, there were also certain level of fear for violence due to infighting and brawls between ethnic migrants from the Northeast that are sometimes witnessed especially on weekends.

The everyday life of the migrants became more precarious and dangerous particularly for female migrants who have to travel alone even late at night due to the nature of their work. There was nothing much they could do but only to remain alert, careful and cautious. They had no choice but to face these challenges as navigating alone in the night becomes their daily routine. The persistent apprehension that I felt as a result of situations, such as a target for violence, prompted me to take careful decision on my movement around the locality. I would not deny that as I became more concerned with my safety, the pace and flow of my research was badly affected. I had to cancel some of the appointments I had made for interviews which gave a very bad impression as some of them had even cancelled their own prior appointments for my sake. Given their limited free time, it was a big sacrifice they had to make.

Congested Rooms and the Struggle for Space

As housing is expensive in Delhi, the migrants shared rooms with others who may be their siblings, close relative or friends to decrease the burden of high rent. In most cases, the rooms were congested as three or more persons would share a single room. The rooms were overcrowded leading to absence of privacy. However, the migrants seem to adjust well to the situation as they had no other options. At the same time, since the migrants had different work shifts, they hardly stay in their rooms together except on common holidays. For instance, if one of them had afternoon shifts, another one would have night shifts and vice-versa. So their sleeping time and eating schedule, their departure for work and arrival were different. In this way, they did not mind sharing congested room though there were certain difficulties they had to face.

The high expenditures and relatively low income also forced the migrants to share accommodation with others. By sharing accommodation, the migrants could maximise their savings. They cannot afford more rooms which will ultimately affect their remittances back home. Sharing accommodation was therefore crucial for the migrants to survive in the city. This was particularly true among fresh migrants as they remain jobless for certain period of time since their arrival in the city. During this lean period and with limited financial help from home, staying together with friends and relatives becomes necessary to minimise expenditures and also receive assistance from friends while they look out for jobs.

On account of this shared accommodation, I faced hurdles while conducting interviews, especially when the other roommates were present, which made the respondent hesitant to reveal the truth as some questions were related to their economic status, their monthly income, and their lifestyles. I could sense their reservations in expressing their true narratives. The situation made it impossible to obtain free and frank information and the presence of other members made the interviewee to give out stereotyped replies – ones which the interviewee felt enjoyed the sanction of the imposing other members and thereby hiding away their true feelings. Because of such experiences, I decided to find a place where I could have uninterrupted conversations such as parks and other public spaces.

However, these public places were not even safe for me and my respondents, particularly when the interviews were conducted at night. For instance, on one occasion, I and my respondent decided to conduct the interview in a small open

space below an over-bridge that also served as a park in the locality. As we were having a conversation and when the interaction was pacing up, I saw few guys coming towards us and started creating noises and unnecessary attention. My respondent started showing her discomfort and became restless. I knew that if we stayed longer, it can turn ugly so I have to abort the interview for our own safety.

Finding a proper place for an uninterrupted interview was a challenge in a shared accommodation. Parks, ethnic stores and rooftops of buildings were mostly used for conducting interviews in absence of proper places to conduct the same. Most of the times, I used amusement parks to meet and talk to the migrants. These places were fine as far as the respondents were male, even if it was late night.

However, when it comes to female respondents, certain issues might arise. For instance, sitting together in the park at night with a female was uncomfortable as there were also other people, particularly the locals, who visited the park as well. The stares we received and the unintelligible talks we heard from the locals elucidates their unaccepting attitude towards us sitting together and talking in such a place. I tried avoiding conducting interviews at night but the migrants working hours, which made them reach home at night, gave me no other option but to adjust to the situations and be careful as far as possible.

However, most of the times, I had fruitful observations and insights while navigating through the field site at night. In one instance, I came back after an interview around quarter to three in the morning. By the time I reached my friends place where I had to stay for the night, all of them had left for their work and they forgot to leave the key. So I had to call up another friend in the same locality. I asked him if I can sleep for the night. He told me their room is quite small but I can fit in. As I entered the room, I saw three of them sleeping together in a small congested room and another roommate will be back shortly from work. I managed to find small space on the floor enough for my body to lie down. As it was summer, the migrants usually prefer to sleep on the floor as it was much cooler. When I woke up, two of them had left for work and another one had joined us already on the floor. Three or four migrants occupying small rooms was a deliberate coping strategy to get rid of the burden of higher rent fees. In this way, they could save more money to be sent home. In fact, such experience provided me with insights on the migrants' stressful work life, absence of social life and their saving strategies to help their family at home through remittances in a clearer picture.

Finding and Mingling with Migrants

The migrants were engaged in various jobs with varying work routines. Those migrants working in call centres serving European and American customers had a completely reverse daily life cycle because of the different time zones. They had limited time for any other work as they came back tired and weary after work. Tiredness and fatigue made the migrants unwilling for any engagement and to socialise with others on their working days. They wouldn't want to spend their free hours at home doing hard work or going out unless it was necessary. This mental stress seems to be heavier among migrants working in retails and hotels because of their long working hours. For instance, they were not allowed to rest or sit during their working hours except for lunch break. The tough workload made them stressful and fatigued. Therefore, the migrants preferred to have a calm and uninterrupted space free from any serious engagement during their free hours at home. The only day I could meet them with enough time was on their holidays and that too after prior appointments. Due to their rigorous work, the migrants would spare their holidays to fulfill their basic and urgent necessities. They had many things to execute on holidays such as visiting banks, buying groceries, visiting sick friends or relatives, spending some time with their friends, go for shopping and eating together and so on. The days were spent in fulfilling these duties. Therefore, it was mostly in the evening that one can observe their presence around the neighbourhood.

Social life and activities among the migrants seems visible more frequently by the evening especially during summer. On many occasions, I came across migrants telling me how they would love to spend the evenings outside their stuffed rented rooms to relax and to beat the heat and the boredom. Since the migrants, due to their little income, couldn't afford to possess air conditioner, the best way to beat the heat was to get out of their rooms into the open spaces. Therefore, in most of the localities migrants came out during evening hours where they went for a walk, chat in the park and even played sports. In one of the localities, I found that the migrants played volleyball around mid-night which goes till early morning to beat the heat, to relax and also to mingle with their own co-ethnic members. They were just few boys at the beginning which eventually turned into a large crowd after few weeks. Later on, even women teams were formed and informal betting was also done. Slowly the volleyball match became their favourite way of beating the heat, boredom and also meeting each other.

I also formed a team with some of the migrants and joined the competition. Since I was new to the locality I heard some girls whispering about me and why I was there with them. Some of them who had known me told them that I was doing fieldwork in Delhi. Through participation in the game, I met new friends, observed them and even contacted them for interviews. It was after seeing their night life it came to my understanding how I could hardly find people during day time even on holidays. For example, the call centre employees arrived home early in the morning which makes them spend the rest of the day asleep. They would wake up in the late afternoon, get ready for their cab which would pick them up at a stipulated time. They couldn't miss the service cab as their workplaces were very far from their residence.

At another place, migrants were seen playing badminton in the park at night. Even community prayer services in various localities were conducted late in the evening around 10 p.m. as most of the members returned home late from work or were free only during this time of the day. The migrants would come out and visit ethnic stores after dinner where they would also find their co-migrants; they would spend some time together, drink tea and chat for a while before they withdrew to their own respective rooms. Some of them would visit the ethnic stores to have *zarda pan* (mixture of tobacco and betel nut for chewing) which was very popular among the migrants. They would even pack extra pieces to be consumed later at night. However, I am not trying to argue here that there were no activities and life during daytime among the migrants. The migrants, in fact, came out every day to fulfill basic necessities during day time. What I want to argue here is that due to the nature of their work, the daily interactions and group activities of the migrants within neighbourhoods tends to revolve regularly in the evenings and sometimes at night.

Festival, Dress and the Church

Migration to Delhi even at this age of instant communication and cheap travel is still a traumatising experience for the migrants as they become strangers in a new destination with loss of familiar sounds, sights and smells. The expectations of familial and friends support, communicating in native dialect and other social life and expectations enjoyed at home were no longer taken for granted. The migrants seek to create their own communities as they were separated from family and friends, isolated from their old and familiar socio-cultural institutions. They, therefore, try to preserve their cultural practices and maintain their individual as

well as group life. Collective celebrations of socio-cultural events and festivities involving community participations are a reminder to their identity and cultural heritage.

One very prominent marker of cultural expression and identity formation was the dress. Wearing ethnic attires on special occasions such as the festivals were highly visible among the migrants in Delhi. The *Chavang Kut*, a post-harvest festival, represents an important cultural expression among the migrants which is usually celebrated in autumn. The celebration of Chavang Kut in Delhi involves multiple events such as outdoor games and sports competitions, cultural dance, singings, speeches and talent shows, and so on. Traditional dances performed by various cultural troupes and performances by leading artistes from the community invited from home were the main attractions of the event. At the sideline, a display-cum-sales shop is also opened where various traditional items such as handicrafts and shawls and compiled booklets of selected folklore written in local dialect were also made available. However, the most awaited and anticipated component of this festival was the donning of the traditional attire. Every participant would make to the event with fully dressed traditional attire or at least with some traces of traditions on their body. Even the organisers would give advisory on the dressing code for this day. The migrants made it very important to attend this event and some even took leave from work to attend this event. One of them told me, 'I asked my mother at home to send me one *Saipikhup ponve* (female traditional sarong) to wear on the Chavang Kut day. It's a big event we have been waiting for so long. It tells us who we are and where we come from'.

The church was another important site where social life could also be observed. Praying and worshipping together in their native dialect provided the migrants with emotional connection to home as the feeling of lost was immensely felt in the new destination. I could see the migrants going to church regularly on Sundays in spite of their hectic and tiring working days. Some would even travel long distance, sometimes an hour, to attend the church service using various means of transports such as the Delhi Metro, auto-rickshaw and public buses. Migrants from far localities would hire a bus on Sunday so that they could attend the church service and come back home together in group. Sunday was mostly spent away on church related activities. The separation from family, relatives, friends and community was hard which often leads to search for emotional stability, new friends and new connections. Fellowship with co-ethnic members was important to cope with this problem. The church performed this crucial role in making these connections. In

fact, their participation and attendance in the church services provided them the opportunities to fill the psychological void it created and at the same time created a sense of belonging to the new place. It was important for them to go to church, sing and pray with their co-ethnic members. They felt homely as they could sing their own ethnic songs, listen to sermons in their own dialect and ensure conversations with friends after the service over a cup of tea. All these factors made Sunday one of the most awaited days for the migrants.

Moreover, their desire and motivation to own a church and participate in the church activities was not because of the simple need for ethnic fellowship but also by a powerful desire to promote and preserve their identity and culture. A very important marker of this ethnic consciousness was the public visibility of their ethnic attires which was very much evident from the dress of the women migrants. Female migrants simply wouldn't go to the church without wearing the traditional sarong. It was an interesting moment to see these church goers in their beautiful traditional attires. Sometimes it looked like they were competing for the best traditional attire. In fact, the church not only provided spiritual needs of the migrants but also performed social and cultural roles and helped the migrants to create a sense of belonging.

Living at the Edge

There were migrants in a particular profession who seemed to be invisible in public spaces. Since the first phase of my fieldwork, it was a big challenge to find migrants working in 'body spa', a professional service which deals in body massage, foot massage, head massage, back massage and so on, though I heard that fairly a number of them were engaged in this profession. That made me spend much time in trying to understand this complex question. Migrants working in this profession were labeled poorly by the other members of the group. They were thought to earn 'easy' money and the profession was in itself found inappropriate and seen as 'dirty' by many others. On account of this stigma, migrants working in this profession camouflaged themselves as working in call centres, restaurant, beauty parlours or salon just to hide their identity.

But somehow I managed to establish contacts with them in the latter part of the fieldwork. It happened that some of them who had agreed for an interview did so because they were curious about my research. There were times when they knew that I was seeking information from them and that I may not be useful to them in

any concrete way, the interview got disrupted or could not be completed. It was possible that they were suspicious of the data and information that I collect from them as some of the questions were personal and more so because I belong to the same community. There were some who were very much willing to talk and share their life. They shared with me about their status in the society and how they would like to see people to understand their work not as something dirty or immoral. They told me how people should not judge everyone who works in this profession as being dirty or immoral just because of some negative comments somewhere.

I spent a lot of time at the ethnic stores located in various localities and neighbourhoods. At these stores, the migrants would halt to buy their needs on their way back home from work or as they go to their work place. That way I got to know them and sometimes I managed to talk to them. One fine evening, a lady was returning from work and made a stop at the ethnic store as the owner of the store was her good friend. The owner offered her a chair and we all sat together, joking and laughing. After a while I asked her about her work and how is her life in Delhi and so on in a very informal way. She said she worked in a beauty salon. Since I hadn't interviewed anyone working in a beauty salon till that time, I was very keen to talk. As I started enquiring when she can be free and if I can get her interviewed, she suddenly stood up and left the store. I was shocked and I felt very sorry. I asked the owner of the store what went wrong as she told me that 'maybe she didn't like to talk about her work and you know why'; only then did I realise that it was probably because she was working in this particular profession.

In this way, migrants camouflaged themselves as they navigated their life in the city. They would draw themselves into their own confines and avoid public life as much as they can. They would instead form a circle of friends to mingle and share their issues and problems together. Some would even avoid attending prayer services and church programmes. In fact, it tells their existence at the edges of the society they were part of. The stigma and image they received from their peers and members of their group forbids them to have a normal life. However, in spite of the bad images from others, their work is very crucial for them. They were supporting their families back home by sending remittances every month, they were taking care of the medical expenses of their sick parents, education of their younger siblings, buying properties for the family, and so on. From their narratives it was found that these migrants were very hard working with tremendous obligation towards the financial support of the families back home.

Some of them even complained about fatigue and mental stress because of the hard working conditions. They would like to change their job because of its hard labour-intensive character but this job provides them with enough salaries to look after themselves and their families back home.

Conclusion

The paper highlights the experiences and encounters I faced in the field site. I tried to understand the life of the migrants through these accounts and narratives. One important argument is that the social life and friendships among the migrants were mostly carried out in the evening or at night, making life at night an indispensable part of the migrants' life in the city which can be attributed to the nature of their work. The paper also shows how race and racism shapes everyday experiences of the fieldworker and the migrant communities in the city. While the sense of fear of conducting research in a city characterised by hatred and violence was felt immensely, this feeling of vulnerability helped me grasp certain realities of the field better. By truly engaging with the migrants, I was able to position myself to understand certain realities and experiences of the migrants in a deeper sense.

The racial, socio-cultural and ethnic distinctiveness made the migrants extremely difficult to associate with the host residents. The various discriminations bring frustrations and a sense of alienation, which in fact creates wider gap between the migrants and the host members, making regular interaction difficult. In fact, these sense of frustrations and alienations led the migrants to question their citizenship and belonging in the city. The feeling of 'strangeness' and fear of discriminations was constantly there at the back of my mind which in a way hampers the smooth flow of the fieldwork. In other words, ethnographic fieldwork is a time of intense unpredictability and vulnerability especially for young and fresh scholars conducting fieldwork in a place characterised by hatred and discrimination.

By observing the lived experiences of the migrants and by witnessing the everyday life and the challenges they encountered, I was able to discern meanings from it and draw better pictures of their life. My physical proximity combined with persistent anxiety to gain knowledge about the field and the people I studied allowed me to gather raw materials in a very substantial manner. I was able to interpret the experiences of the migrants, their feelings and the way they interpret these meanings. By truly engaging on the everyday practices of the migrants, I

was able to analyse various meanings from these activities and also explore hidden meanings which otherwise might remain unknown.

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Article: Hurdles of Health Care Services to Women in Rural Areas: An Insight from India

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Hurdles of Health Care Services to Women in Rural Areas: An Insight from India

--- Shovan Ghosh & Yasmin Khatun

Abstract

What are the hindrances of health care service to women in rural areas in remote location? Is it economic condition of the women or the socio-cultural tradition of the families? – These questions haunt social scientists when they ponder over the dynamic of barriers to the use of basic health service among women in rural areas. Access to public health services in many developing countries is hardly adequate. The present research seeks to explore the potential demand side barriers of health care services to women in a rural area of India. Hurdles to health care service to women were categorised into three dimensions, *viz.* – Structural, Financial and Cultural barriers. The study reveals that distance and transportation to health facilities, difficulty in paying for health services, securing family permission as well as finding time to go health facilities, and lack of doctors create obstacles in the access of health care services by women.

Key words: Accessibility, Barriers, Health care, Women

Introduction

Health, a crucial indicator of human development, is at a critical juncture at present. Inequalities in health care infrastructure loom large, resulting in poor health outcomes. Access to women health services in many developing countries is hardly adequate. Inadequate health services, long distances to health facilities, lack of effective and efficient transportation system, inadequate health personnel and inability to afford the cost of services act as major hurdles constraining rural women's access to health services. Even though the health service provider or the geographical access is improved, local women may still not use the services unless the provided services meet their demands in terms of quality and cultural norms (Chiang, Higuchi, Mohamed & Ayama, 2013). In other words, demand side barriers are important as supply side factors in deterring people from obtaining appropriate health service among vulnerable groups of population

(Ensor & Cooper, 2004).

India as a nation has been growing economically at a rapid pace particularly after the advent of New Economic Policy of 1991. However, this rapid economic development has not been accompanied by social development, particularly health sector development. Health sector has been accorded very low priority in terms of allocation of resources. Health is socially determined to a considerable extent. Access to health care is almost fully so (Ghuman & Mehta, 2009). Health care service in rural areas is disseminated only in limited manner where most of the people live. Despite improvements in providing access to health care in developing countries, substantial proportions of their populations have limited access (Peters, Garg, Bloom & Walker, 2008). In low and middle income countries, patients often either do not seek care, or do so only when they have access to funds, thus affecting continuity of care (Gilson & McIntyre, 2009). Women's health research rarely focuses on aspects other than family planning (Rutakumwa & Krogman, 2007). Rural people in India in general have their own beliefs and practice regarding health (Patil, Somasundram & Goyal, 2002).

The barriers to health care service of women can be categorised into three broad divisions, such as structural barriers, financial barriers and cultural barriers. Inadequate health services, long distances to health facilities, lack of effective and efficient transportation system, inadequate health personnel and inability to afford the cost of health services act as major hurdles constraining rural people from accessing health services (Sulemana & Dinye, 2014).

The role of geographical accessibility in the overall dynamics of health care access, specifically in the context of women health care needs, is revisited in the present paper. It draws some paradoxical evidences from household survey data from a largely poor community in India and argues for a more in-depth study of the issue. Regarding spatial accessibility, scholars define this in terms of the possible use of the services and their actual use (Mathon, Apparicio & Ugo, 2018). Distance and other geographical factors are often viewed as major intervening aspects for access to medical care and resultant health outcomes specifically for the disadvantaged population in both developed and developing nation (Jordon, Roderick, Martin & Barnett, 2004). Geographical accessibility is one of the factors that can influence 'timely use'. Studies in developing countries have shown that the absence of good roads and lack of proper communication particularly in the poor, remote and the adverse terrain constrain access to health

care, resulting in the poor health outcomes of the population (Barman & Patra, 2015). Nevertheless, an alternate school of thought suggests that role of geographical accessibility hindering health care access differs as per perceived health needs of the population. Therefore, a higher perceived need is often seemed to overcome influence of geographic inaccessibility (Arcury, Gesler, Preisser, Sherman, Spencer & Jamie, 2005). Evidence from India and other developing nations conform to the fact that for child birth and maternal health needs in particular, custom related to care seeking often overpowers geographical accessibility of services (Basu, 1990; Furuta & Salway, 2006).

Accessibility to health care often refers to spatial or physical accessibility and is concerned with the complex relationship between the spatial separation of the population and the supply the health care facilities (Shalini & Sarkar, 2015). Accessibility to health care is so vital to establishing and maintaining quality of health care service (Kennedy, Mathis & Angela, 2007). Lack of adequate communication services also limits access to health care. This obstacle becomes more pertinent in remote areas where communication gets cut off during adverse weather conditions. Remote health centres mean that more time and money is spent on travel related expenditures, all of which act as obstacles to obtaining care, especially for the poor (Wong & Regan, 2009).

Financial access or affordability is considered one of the most important determinants of access and is mostly associated with dimensions of poverty. Besides the direct cost of treatment and informal payments, there are also indirect costs that deter the poor from seeking treatment. Although a lack of financial resources or information can create barriers to accessing services, the causal relationship between access to health services and poverty also runs in the other direction (Peters et al., 2008). Health services of a reasonable quality exist, but few use them. Just as important are the physical and financial accessibility of services, knowledge of what providers offer, education about how to best utilise self and practitioner provided services and cultural norms of treatment (Ensor & Cooper, 2004). Affordability reflects the payments made by the service users including various types of out-of-pocket payments but also indirect payments that make care less affordable and limits access to it. Financial barriers means that even if care is available and appropriate, the child bearing women might be unable to access it because she cannot pay for it (Miteniece, Pavlova, Shangelia & Wim, 2018).

Financial barriers influence health and health care in a number of ways. Income loss or threat of dismissal can result in reduced willingness to take time-off from work to access health care (Murray & Skull, 2004). Socio-cultural barriers from the perspective of child bearing women and health care providers could be critical for learning more about how to promote effective access to and use of skilled maternal health services (Ganle, 2014). The health of Indian women is intrinsically linked to their status in society. Research on women's status has found that the contributions Indian women make for families often are overlooked and instead they are viewed as economic burdens (Kamalapur & Reddy, 2013). In India, 58 per cent of households finance inpatients care through borrowing sale of assets and contribution from friends and relatives (Saikia, 2019).

Acceptability is determined by cultural, traditional and literacy factors that determine whether institutionalised care is accepted by individuals as well as how often it will be sought. Thus, care might be available, appropriate, affordable and approachable, but not acceptable due to cultural, traditional and health literacy aspects in determining the need for institutionalised care (Lama & Krishna, 2014). A lack of health care providers from culturally diverse groups further limits the incorporation of cultural understanding into available health care (Murray & Skull, 2004). Evidence suggests that access to appropriate health care, especially skilled attendance at birth and timely referrals to emergency obstetric care services, is strongly associated with substantial reductions in mortality and morbidity for both mother and newborns (Ganle, Obeng, Segbefia, Mwinyuri, Yeboah & Leonard, 2015).

Against this backdrop, the present paper concentrates on the hurdles of access to health care service for women in a rural setup of India. Hurdles to health care services for women have been categorised into three sections – structural, financial and cultural barriers. This paper has attempted to intricately weave together all these hurdles through this study.

Study Area

South 24 Parganas District encompasses the moribund, mature as well as active parts of the Gangetic delta. Due to peculiar geographical location and the dictates of geography, the means of transport and communication in this region are not well developed. The District of South 24 Parganas came into existence on March 1, 1986. Prior to that date, it was a part of undivided 24 Parganas. The southern

part of the district covers dense mangrove forests and the entire district is characterised by heterogeneity in terms of physical, socio-economic and cultural profiles combined with unique geographical location.

The district is situated in the extreme southern part state of West Bengal, India. South 24 Parganas District possesses 5 sub-divisions, 7 municipalities, 29 blocks, and 312 gram panchayats. Canning I Block, called the gateway of Sundarban, is the headquarters of the Canning sub-division of South 24 Parganas District. The rural community development block, Canning-I (total area 187.87 sq. km) consists of 10 gram panchayats, namely, Bansra, Gopalpur, Matla-I, Taldi, Daria, Hatpukuria, Matla-II, Dighirpar, Itkhola and Nikarighata. As per 2011 Census of India, Canning-I CD block has a total population of 304,724, of which 181,508 are rural and 123,216 are urban. There are 51 per cent males and 49 per cent females. The total literacy in Canning-I CD block is 71 per cent, with female literacy rate at 44 per cent and male literacy rate at 56 per cent. The block possesses 1 rural hospital and 56 sub-centres, spread over various pockets of the block. Below is Canning-I CD block at a glance in terms of health parameters:

Doctor – Population Ratio	1: 12875
Bed – Population Ratio	1: 2630
Medical Institution – Population Ratio	1: 48925
Primary Health Care Centre – Population Ratio	1: 244627
Sub centre – Population Ratio	1: 4368

Methodology

To measure the nodal accessibility, the metalled and main unmetalled roads have been abstracted as a graph, on which ten nodes, i.e., vertices have been identified. It is very difficult to find out nodes in such a region where extreme dearth of metalled road compels most of its parts to remain inaccessible. However, each node has been selected on the basis of the following considerations:

- Each node is a junction (Hagget, 1979) on the intersection on any two routes.
- Nodes are permanent cluster of discrete (Cox, 1972, p. 190) agglomeration of socio-economic and physical activities.
- It is a place where producers and/or suppliers along with consumers interact or transact.

After that, shortest path matrix procedure has been adapted and 10x10 matrices

for i) Topological Distances ii) Connective paths iii) Direct paths have been compared and analysed.

Distance matrix represents the total topological distance (km) one has to travel from one particular node to other remaining nodes. Connective matrix speaks of the total number of steps taken in travelling from one node to all other nodes while direct path matrix gives an account of the direct connections of a node to other nodes. Summation of these matrices gives rise to a vector of net index of nodal accessibility for each node. To boot, special weightage have been assigned to node having transport facilities; bus station scored as 3, regular bus stop as 2, request bus stop as 1. These have been ranked relatively. To explain centrality of location of nodes 'weightage for linkage radiation' have been awarded. Linkage radiation is termed as the number of routes or linkages radiating from a node to different directions. Weightage have been given just inverse to the number of radiating linkages, i.e., 4 directional linkage is weighted as 1, 3 as 2, 2 as 3, 1 as 4. Integrated nodal accessibility (Table I) has been obtained by multiplying composite index of nodes with rank of weightage for linkage radiation for node.

Table I: Nodal Accessibility Index Various GPs of Canning-I block, South 24 Parganas District

GP Name	Node Name	Connective Steps	Rank	Direct path Matrix	Rank	Topological Distance	Rank	Transport facility	Rank	Composite Index	Weightage For Linkage Radiation	Weight	Integrated Index	Rank
Itkhola	A	20	6	5	2	111	10	1	4	6	2	3	18	IX
Nikarighata	B	15	2	5	2	58.2	2	2	3	2.25	2	3	6.75	IV
Dighirpar	C	14	1	6	1	57.7	1	2	3	1.5	4	1	1.5	I
Matla-I	D	22	7	4	3	75.6	8	7	1	4.75	2	3	14.25	VIII
Matla-II	E	17	4	4	3	61.8	5	7	1	3.25	3	2	6.5	III
Taldi	F	17	4	5	2	62.2	6	7	1	3.25	3	2	6.5	III
Gopalpur	G	17	4	4	3	71.5	7	1	4	4.25	2	3	12.75	VI
Hutpukuria	H	15	2	4	3	61.7	4	1	4	3	3	2	6	II
Daria	I	18	5	4	3	58.5	3	1	2	3.5	2	3	10.5	V

Bansra	J	16	3	3	4	107.7	9	4	2	4.5	2	3	13.5	VII
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Source: Computed by authors, 2020

A community-based cross-sectional survey was conducted in villages selected on the basis of accessibility patterns. Data on socio-demographic, healthcare history, and health care services were collected from women of different age groups using structured questionnaire. Multivariate logistic regression analysis was performed to estimate the effect of barriers on use of health care service.

After demarcating the villages as per the accessibility criteria, a cross-sectional study was carried out in four purposively selected villages for relatively high accessible category and seven villages from poor accessible ones. The study comprised 70 women from relatively better accessible areas and 130 women from poor accessible areas. A stratified sampling approach was adopted to study a total of 200 women for the study. Women were selected from three age groups pertaining to less than 20, 20-40, and 40-60 age groups. The weightage to selection among age groups were given more on the age groups between 20-60 years, for this group mainly correspond to the reproductive age of women. Face-to-face interview with all participants were conducted with a structured questionnaire that considered three major parts, namely:

- Women's socio-demographic characteristics included age, education, family structure and family income.
- The types of care used were categorised into two subgroups namely, curative care and maternal health. Curative care was judged through the percentage of patient receiving inpatient care and outpatient care, while the maternal health corresponds to the percentage of women seeking institutional delivery care.
- Six potential barriers to health care were identified: distance to preferred health facilities, transportation to health facilities, payment for health facilities, time allocation, family permission and concern about lack of doctor.

Logistic regression models were used to compute odd ratios (ORS) and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) to access the association between the outcome (regular ANC and use of medical treatment services) and each of the predictor (6 potential perceived barriers) variables. $P < 0.05$ has been taken into account as statistically significant via Wald test. SPSS version 20 was used to perform the statistical analysis.

Results and Discussion

The prime concern of the present research is to articulate the barriers of access and success of health care services to women in dichotomous accessible zones. The paper has been bifurcated into three sections to unfold the dynamicity of barriers. Section I offers a comparative description on the characteristics of women in high and low accessible villages. Section II outlines the issues pertaining to uptake of care for curative needs and institutional delivery by the women across village accessibility parameter and average distance of available health care service across the geographic accessibility. The analysis of barriers of health care access in the context of structural barriers, financial barriers and cultural barriers are the domains of Section III.

Section I: Characteristics of Women in High and Low Accessible Villages: A Comparative Profile

About 65 per cent women were surveyed from low accessible areas while 35 per cent is constituted by areas of relatively better accessibility. In the relatively high accessible villages, (Table II) the mean age of women were 34.12 and ± 10.03 SD years. Most of the women were married and belonged to Muslim and category of OBC (Other Backward Class) community. Women's education registers mostly up to upper primary level. Average number of family member was to the tune of 4. Families were mainly engaged in daily labour activities. The average monthly income was found to be a little high of 6000 Indian rupees; mean value was 6.4 and SD ± 3688 . The families stayed at their own house at least for more than 10 years. So they can be called as permanent residents of the area. Women's preferred mode of transport is motor van. Most of the area is covered by unmetalled road; the average distance of railway station is more than 5 km and the average time spent on travelling to hospital is more than 1 hour. Communication problem in rainy season arises basically due to irregular motor van service. The mean distance to RMP (Rural Medical Practitioners) clinic is 1 km, and average distance to Sub-divisional hospital is close to 5 km.

In a nutshell, it can be said that in relatively high accessible village, people have problems related to distances and access to health care service for metalled road is insufficient, distance to railway station is substantial, problems are more pronounced in rainy season, motor van service is irregular, distance to hospital is far and wide, heavy reliance on RMP and local sub centre for all health services of the women.

Table II: Geographical Characteristics of Women as Per Type of High and Low Accessibility of Village

Name of Variables	High Accessible Village	Low Accessible Village
	Mean	Mean
Age	34.13 (10.03)	33.57 (12.57)
Marital status	2.10 (0.54)	2.26 (0.86)
Religion	1.97 (0.16)	1.26 (0.44)
Caste	3.71 (.801)	1.71 (1.23)
Education qualification	1.69 (0.50)	1.44 (0.55)
No of family members	4.41 (1.27)	4.39 (1.92)
No of working member	1.11 (0.40)	1.43 (0.75)
Occupation	2.20 (1.14)	2.84 (1.88)
Period of work	2.82 (.379)	2.40 (.537)
Monthly income	6.47 (3688.8)	5.70 (3623.25)
Nature of House	1.00 (0.00)	1.00 (0.08)
Duration of stay	2.05 (0.79)	2.06 (1.27)
Prefer mode of transport	4.91 (3.06)	5.11 (3.11)
Types of road	1.84 (0.36)	2.07 (1.25)
Distance to railway station	7.00 (0.00)	7.00 (0.00)
Time spent travelling to health centre	1.27 (0.50)	1.36 (0.64)
Communication problem in rainy season	3.55 (1.93)	2.26 (1.31)
Distance to sub centre	1.02 (.167)	1.25 (0.43)
Distance to RMP Clinic	1.00 (0.00)	1.07 (0.61)
Distance to SD Hospital	4.82 (0.81)	4.90 (0.58)

*The numbers in the parenthesis indicate standard deviation

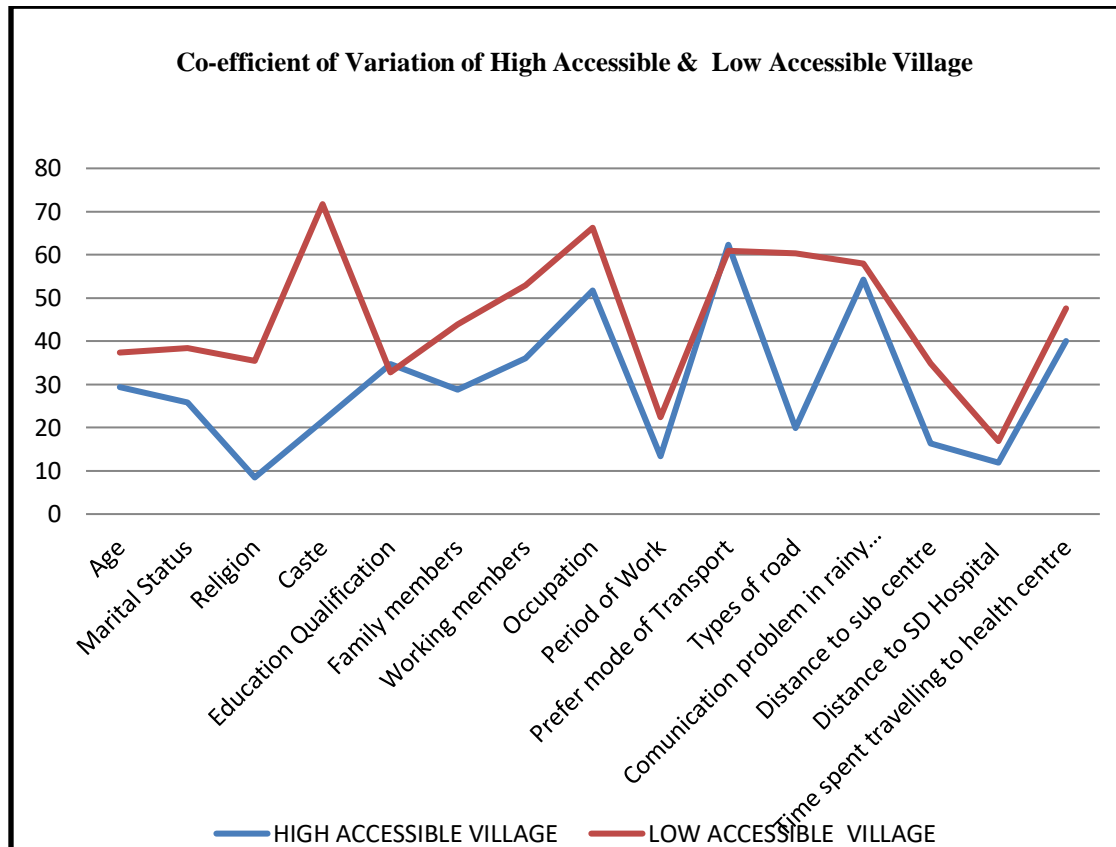
Source: Computed by authors, 2020

The mean age of women (Table II) was found to be 33.57 and ± 12.57 SD years at low accessible village. Most of the women were married and belonged to Hindus

and categorically of SC community. Mostly women's education ceases at primary level. Average number of family member is 4 with mean values of 4.39 and $SD \pm 1.92$. Families mainly have fishing as their occupation. The average monthly income has been 5000 Indian rupees; mean value was 5.70 and $SD \pm 3623$. They stay at their own house, and duration of stay more is than 10 years. The women's prefer road mode of transport is walking. Most of the area has unmetalled road, the average distance of railway station more than 20 km, and the average time spent on travelling to hospital is more than 2 hours. Communication problem in rainy season becomes vigorous. The mean distance to RMP clinic is 1 km and to hospital is 5 km with the highest being 20 km.

In short, it is found that areas of low accessibility register logjam of disadvantages in so far as women's access to health care service is concerned. Paucity of metalled road is there and so as to the unmetalled road also. Distance to railway track is more than 20 km and same tune is echoed in the context of distances to Sub-divisional hospital. Options of communication are very limited, women have to rely heavily on motor van and that too is irregular. Under such circumstances women have to walk miles to get into a secondary health care centre.

In so far as the co-efficient of variation (Fig. II) is concerned, it is observed that all the family background related criteria like age, marital status, religion and caste, family members, working members and occupation, the low accessible villages embrace more variability than the high accessible villages. Differences are more pronounced in the aspect of caste and occupational status. High accessible villages experience a uniform pattern of distribution with regard to family background issues barring education. Educational qualification does not show much more variability in both the regions. Regarding distance parameter, the low accessible areas are more varied particularly with regard to type of road, distance to hospital and sub centre and time spent in travelling to health care services as well.

Figure II: Co-efficient of Variation of High Accessible and Low Accessible Village

Source: Computed by authors, 2020

Section II: Uptake of Care for Curative Needs and Institutional Delivery by the Women across Village Accessibility Parameter

The utilisation of health services (Table III) logically depends on health care needs of any population. Out of 200 women surveyed, about 21 per cent in high accessible area use inpatient care as against 38 per cent in low accessible villages. Same pattern is observed in terms of outpatient care also, whereas accessible village women seeking outpatient care is more than 20 per cent greater than those in high accessible ones. In respect of delivery service, almost one of two women seeks institutional delivery care in high accessible villages, whereas the number is one in every ten women in low accessible one. It is found to be logical since the distance to secondary and tertiary health care service is more than 4 times higher in inaccessible villages (20km) than accessible villages (5km). The rate of institutional delivery was higher for the women of accessible villages (44.28 per

cent), compared to their counter parts (11.51 per cent) from the villages having low accessibility.

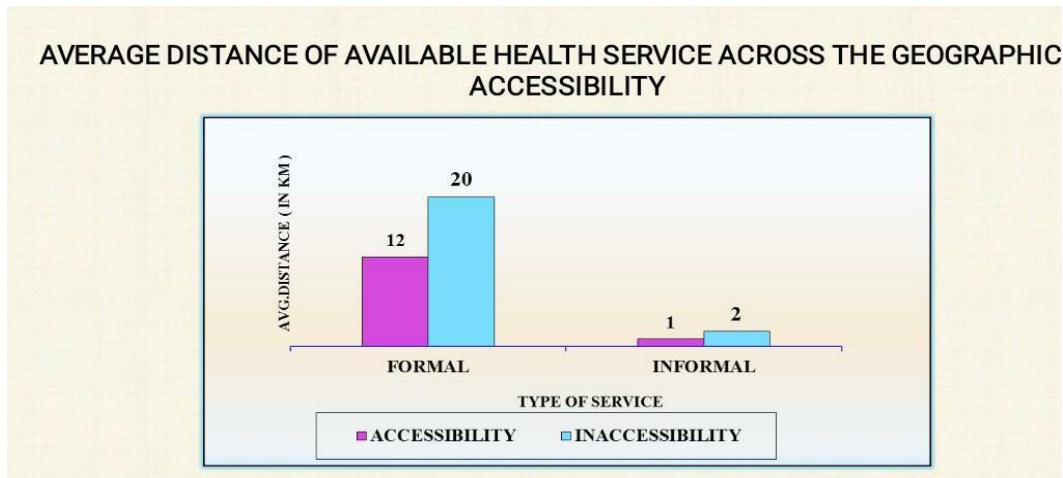
Table III: Uptake of Care for Curative Needs and Institutional Delivery by the Women across Village Accessibility Parameter

Village Types	Types of care used		
	Curative		Maternal health
	In Patient Care (%)	Out Patient Care (%)	Institutional Delivery (%)
High accessible	21.42 (15)	34.28 (24)	44.28 (31)
Low accessible	38.46 (50)	56.15 (65)	11.51 (15)
Average	29.94	45.21	27.83

Source: Field Survey: Computed by authors, 2020

The average distance (Fig. III) to formal care at inaccessible villages (20km) was almost double as compared to their counter part of accessible villages (12km). It is viewed that informal care providers (RMP) overall were found much closer to both types of villages (inaccessible 2km and accessible 1km). Over 50 per cent women were reported to traverse a substantial part of the distance by walking. When they travel through motorised transportation in both the types of village, overall time taken to reach to health service (formal/informal) in case of inaccessible villages was almost 2 hours whereas for accessible villages it was 30 minutes. The above facts together portray higher difficulties faced by the women to access health services when the villages were geographically inaccessible.

Figure III: Average Distance of Available Health Service across the Geographic Accessibility



Source: Computed by authors, 2020

Section III: Barriers of Health Care Access

From the surveyed of high accessible region (Table IV), it had been found that structural barriers were identified through two indicators, namely, distance to health facilities and transportation to health facilities. Over 60 per cent mature women (age > 40 years) told that distance to health facilities was a major hurdle whereas over 70 per cent women who are illiterate consider both distance and transportation to be major barriers towards access to health care service. Most of the women coming from joint family reported distance as a major hurdle. Over 50 per cent married women told that distance and transportation are major problems to health care service. In fact, over 50 per cent women having average monthly income of less than 5000 Indian rupees consider both distance and transportation to be major obstacles in health care access.

The financial barrier corresponds to payment for medical service and time taken to be at the health care units. The problem is pronounced across all age categories, though more in the age group of above 40. Illiterate and married women, including those recently married, felt financial barriers more troubling. The women belonging to nuclear family found both payment and time difficult to be at the health centres. Over 40 per cent women having less than 5000 Indian rupees monthly income consider payment as a major hurdle.

Close to 90 per cent mature women (age > 40 years) consider lack of doctor to be a major constraint to access health care. Both the lack of doctor and getting permission to go become serious problems for those women who are illiterate and are recently married. The cultural problem is more pronounced in both the nuclear and joint family structure whereby getting permission to go health centre is a serious problem.

Table IV: Characteristics of Women who perceived the Six Potential Barriers to use of Health Service of High Accessible Village (N=70)

Category	Structural Barriers			Financial Barriers		Cultural Barriers		
		Distance to health facilities	Transportation to health facilities	Payment for medical service	Allocating time to go	Getting permission to go	Concern about lack of doctor	
	N	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	
Age	<20	9	4 (44.4)	3 (33.3)	3(33.3)	3(33.3)	5(55.5)	7(77.7)
	20-40	40	32(65.3)	25(51.1)	39(79.6)	27(55.1)	28(57.1)	32(65.3)
	>40	21	15(71.4)	14 (66.6)	18(85.7)	15 (71.4)	16(76.1)	19(90.4)
Education	Illiterate	42	31(73.8)	32(76.1)	35(83.3)	36(85.7)	34(80.9)	39(92.8)
	Literate	28	13(46.4)	12(42.8)	15(53.5)	12(42.8)	15(53.5)	12(42.8)
Family structure	Extended	39	31(79.4)	27(69.2)	23(58.9)	25(64.1)	26(66.7)	35(89.7)
	Nuclear	31	23(74.2)	25(80.6)	21(67.7)	25(80.6)	24(77.4)	25(80.6)
Marital status	Recently married	12	6(50)	4(33.3)	5(41.6)	3(25)	7(58.3)	9 (75)
	Married	49	25(51.0)	27(55.1)	26(53.0)	28(57.1)	31(63.2)	34(69.3)
	Divorced	4	2 (50)	1(25)	1 (25)	1(25)	1(25)	3(75)
	Widowed	5	3(60)	3(60)	2(40)	1(20)	1(20)	4(80)
Monthly income	< 5000	15	8(53.3)	9(60)	7(46.7)	6(40)	7(46.7)	12(80)
	5000-10000	35	18(51.4)	16(45.7)	15(42.8)	12(34.2)	14(40)	18(51.4)
	>10000	20	6(30)	8(40)	7(35)	4(20)	7(35)	12(60)
Total		70	43 (61.4)	41(58.5)	43(61.4)	39(55.7)	43(61.4)	52(74.2)

Source: Computed by authors, 2020

The problem of access to health care service (Table V) is vigorous in low accessible area, irrespective to women residing in either joint or nuclear family structure. Every three out of four recently married and married women face difficulty in covering the distance to health care service as well as face hardship in

commuting. The problems of payment for medical services are troublesome to women in general and women belonging to low income families and recently married in particular. Want of doctor in time poses a problem to both married and recently married women while permission to go to health care units is a serious issue to the married women and those with a poor economic background. Sometimes family norms overshadowed the accessibility and financial issues with regard to access to health care service.

Table V: Characteristics of Women who perceived the Six Potential Barriers to use of Health Service of Low Accessible Village (N=130)

Category		Structural Barriers		Financial barriers		Cultural Barriers		
		Distance to health facilities	Transportation to health facilities	Payment for medical service	Allocating time to go	Getting permission to go	Concern about lack of doctor	
		N	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	
Age	<20	35	31(88.5)	34(97.1)	25(71.4)	24(68.5)	26(74.2)	31(88.5)
	20-40	65	61(93.8)	56(86.1)	54(83.0)	57(87.6)	45(69.2)	60(92.3)
	>40	30	20(66.6)	22(73.3)	15(50)	17(56.7)	18(60)	27(90)
Education	Illiterate	110	95(86.3)	85(77.2)	89(80.9)	84(76.3)	74(67.2)	105(95.4)
	Literate	20	14(70)	17(85)	18(90)	15(75)	14(70)	18(90)
Family structure	Extended	85	75(88.2)	62(72.9)	67(78.8)	64(75.2)	63(74.1)	75(88.2)
	Nuclear	45	35(77.7)	37(82.2)	25(55.5)	35(77.7)	24(53.3)	42(93.3)
Marital status	Recently married	25	21(84)	20(80)	23(92)	19(76)	17(68)	23(92)
	Married	75	68(90.7)	65(86.7)	63(84)	61(81.3)	60(80)	70(93)
	Divorced	10	5(50)	7(70)	5(50)	8(80)	7(70)	8(80)
	Widowed	20	16(80)	14(70)	13(65)	17(85)	12(60)	18(90)
Monthly income	< 5000	85	75(88.2)	78(91.7)	69(81.1)	71(83.5)	70(82.3)	76(89.4)
	5000-10000	25	20(80)	21(84)	19(76)	18(72)	16(64)	22(88)
	>10000	20	13(65)	15(75)	16(80)	12(60)	14(70)	18(90)
Total		130	109(84.4)	106(82)	100(77)	100(77)	92(70.7)	118(91.2)

Source: Computed by authors, 2020

The mean transport expenditure was also least for visiting sub centre than any other providers. Out-of-pocket expenditure (Table VI) for seeking care from Sub-divisional hospital was double than seeking care from RMPs. It was also noted

that more than 70 per cent of OPD care is provided by the RMPs and only 30 per cent by Sub-divisional hospital.

For hospitalisation episodes of women in the duration of 30 days (Table VII), the mean distance required to travel for IPD treatment was also least for the RMPs than any other providers. Average transport expenditure was also least for the RMPs and the highest was for the Sub-divisional hospital.

Table VI: Transport and Total Out-of-pocket Expenditure for OPD Treatment of Women in 30 days

Mean Transport Expenditure (Rs)		Mean Total Expenditure (Rs)	
Provider	Total	Provider	Total
RMP	25	RMP	201
SD Hospital	104	SD Hospital	403
Rural Hospital	107	Rural Hospital	265
Sub centre	10	Sub centre	15

Source: Computed by authors, 2020

Table VII: Transport and Total Expenditure for IPD Treatment of Women in 30 days

Mean Transport Expenditure (Rs)		Mean Total Expenditure (Rs)	
Provider	Total	Provider	Total
RMP	50	RMP	310
SD Hospital	170	SD Hospital	512
Rural Hospital	190	Rural Hospital	565
Sub centre	0	Sub centre	0

Source: Computed by authors, 2020

The main source of finance to the health service of women (Table VIII) in the first and second quintile proportion is borrowing from relatives, while for the third quintile proportion is selling household items and animals. Borrowing from

money lenders was found to be the last resort since the households had no capacity to pay the high interest rate. Rather than borrowing from the money lenders they preferred to sell articles. They did not solely depend on one source of finance, rather they were found to use multiple sources.

Table VIII: Main Source of Finance for Health Care Services of Women

Source of Finance	Number of Women in each Wealth Quintile			Total
	Quintile 1 (Poorest) N(28)	Quintile 2 (Poor) N(132)	Quintile 3 (Middle) N(40)	
Own savings	2	7	7	16
Out of regular income	2	19	8	29
Borrowing from relatives	9	53	8	70
Borrowing from money lenders	6	15	6	27
Selling household items and animals	4	27	9	40
Selling land of family	5	11	2	18

Source: Computed by authors, 2020

Along with the issues of physical accessibility, availability and affordability, social acceptability also plays a significant role for low usage of government facilities and high preferences for RMPs. Very high preference for seeking treatment from RMPs for women's ailments, high percentage of home delivery with the assistance of RMP/ *Dai*/ relative also points out to the social acceptability of government health care services. Women also have strong belief on the traditional healers. For example, in case of non-institutional delivery, in 55 per cent of cases, the mother has stated home delivery as family tradition. It might also be the case that the preferences on the informal health care system are guided by historical unavailability of the formal health care providers.

Distance to health facilities and regular antenatal care (ANC) visit for women from high accessible village (Table IX) are significantly associated with each other. 1 km increase in walking distance to nearest health centre resulted in a reduction of odds of regular ANC visit by a factor of 14.70 (COR= 14.70, 95% CI: 3.975 to 54.36). The association between transportation to reach health facilities is noticed. Financial barriers and cultural barriers possess a threat

towards the health care service amongst women in rural areas. Payment for medical service, allocating time to go to health care service and the probability of regular ANC visit are found to be closely associated. Whereas there is increase in amount of expenditure for health service, regular ANC visit of women dwindles down. For every increase of 500 Indian rupees, the odds of regular visit for ANC reduced by a factor of 7.059 (COR= 7.059, 95% CI: .755 to 65.98). Allocating time to go health care centre and regular ANC visit were found to be significant statistically. 1 hour increase in time to go the health centre results in a reduction of odds of regular ANC visit by a factor of 0.125 (COR= .125, 95% CI: .014 to 1.10). The positive association between the husband's or family's permission and regular ANC visit to health care service is a great concern. Always availability of doctor of results in the increase of odds of regular ANC visit by a factor of 5.40 (COR= 5.40, 95% CI: .541 to 53.89).

Significantly, association between distance to health facilities and use of medical service of women are also observed. Increase in walking distance to health facilities results in a reduction of odds of use of medical service. The probability of use of medical service increase by a factor of 2.63 (COR= 2.63, 95% CI: .761 to 9.15) with the change of mode of transport from walking to motor van. The inverse association between payment for medical service and use of medical service is also documented. Cultural barriers also constrain use of medical service to women. Availability of doctors results in the increase of odds of use of medical service by a factor of 9.00 (COR= 9.00, 95% CI: .914 to 88.57).

Table IX: Odds Ratios Derived from Logistic Regression Models of Women's use of Health Services with Potential Barriers of High Accessible Village

Potential Barriers		Regular ANC visit		Use of medical service	
		Crude OR (95% CI)		Crude OR (95% CI)	
Structural	Distance to health facilities	> 5km	14.70 (3.95-54.36)	12.42 (3.53 – 43.66)	
		< 5km	1	1	
	Transportation to health facilities	Motorvan	.828 (.303 - 2.26)	.102 (.013 - .83)	
		Walk	1	1	
Financial	Payment for medical service	No	7.06 (.755 – 65.98)	2.64 (.761 – 9.15)	
		Yes	1	1	

	Allocating time to go	<2 hour	.125 (.014 – 1.10)	.634 (.216 – 1.86)
		>2 hour	1	1
Cultural	Getting permission to go	Husband	1.03(.213 – 4.97)	17.81 (1.95 – 162.15)
		Family	1	1
	Concern about Lack of Doctor	No	5.40 (.54 - 53.89)	9.00 (.914 – 88.57)
		Yes	1	1

* 1= reference category

Source: Computed by authors, 2020

Distance to health facilities and regular antenatal care (ANC) visit for women from low accessible village (Table X) are significantly associated with each other. 1 km increase in walking distance to nearest health centre resulted in a reduction of odds of regular ANC visit by a factor of 0.082 (COR= 0.082, 95% CI: 0.02 to 0.24). The bivariate analysis indicates that there is a significant association between means of transport and regular ANC visit. As regards to the mode of transportation to reach health care facilities, the probabilities of having regular ANC visit increase by factor of 1.57 (COR= 1.57, 95% CI: .491 to 5.05) as the means of transportation changes from walking to motor van service. Apart from the structural barriers, financial barriers also pose a threat towards the basic health service amongst women in rural areas. Payment for medical services and the probability of regular ANC visit are found to be closely associated. In fact with the increases in amount of expenditure for health, the probability of regular ANC visit dwindles down. For every increase of 500 Indian rupees, the odd of regular visit for ANC reduces by a factor of 0.95 (COR= 0.95, 95% CI: .23 to 3.96). The association between the time taken to go health care centre and regular ANC visit is found to be significant statistically. 1 hour increase in time to go to the health centre results in a reduction of odds of regular ANC visit by a factor of 1.867 (COR= 1.867, 95% CI: .420 to 8.30).

Because of social and cultural constraints, women are not able to access appropriate health services. The positive association between the husbands' and the families' and the permission for regular ANC visit testimonies to the fact. Female doctor availability and regular ANC visit has close association. Always availability of doctor results in the increase of odds of regular ANC visit by a factor of 0.54 (COR= 0.54, 95% CI: .013 to 2.16).

Significant association is observed between the distance to health facilities and use of medical service, i.e. increase in walking distance of health facilities result in a reduction of odds of use of medical service. The probability of use of medical service increase by a factor of 1.31 (COR= 1.31, 95% CI: 0.51 to 3.36) as the means of transportation changes from walking to motor van service. Significant association between payment for medical service and use of medical service are also noticed. 1 hour increase in time to go to the health centre results in a reduction of odds of use of medical care by a factor of 2.917 (COR= 2.91, 95% CI: 0.78 to 10.92). Home support also dictates the probability of use of medical service. Cultural barriers constrain use of medical services to women. The availability of doctor helps to augment the use of medical services to women.

Table X: Odds Ratios Derived from Logistic Regression Models of Women's use of Health Services with Potential Barriers of Low Accessible Village

Potential Barriers			Regular ANC visit	Use of medical service
			Crude OR (95% CI)	Crude OR (95% CI)
Structural	Distance to health facilities	> 5km	.082 (.028 - .244)	1.15 (.677 – 1.94)
		< 5km	1	1
	Transportation to health facilities	Motorvan	1.57 (.491 – 5.05)	1.31 (.513 – 3.36)
		Walk	1	1
Financial	Payment for medical service	No	.947 (.227 – 3.95)	4.33 (1.53 – 12.99)
		Yes	1	1
	Allocating time to go	<2 hour	1.87 (.420 – 8.30)	2.92 (.780 – 10.91)
		>2 hour	1	1
Cultural	Getting permission to go	Husband	2.41 (.521 – 11.31)	.139 (.017 – 1.14)
		Family	1	1
	Concern about Lack of Doctor	No	.543 (.136 – 2.16)	1.59 (.462 – 5.47)
		Yes	1	1

* 1= reference category

Source: Computed by authors, 2020

Conclusion

The study provides an analytical discussion on the hurdles of health care services to women with regard to a rural community development block in the Indian state West Bengal. The area suffers from log jam of barriers pertaining to the structural barriers, financial barriers and cultural barriers. Structural barriers like distances and transportation to health care services are more pronounced in low accessible villages. Most of the area witnesses scanty all-weather motorable roads, distance to hospital is substantial, means of transport are very limited; women have to rely heavily on motor van and that too is irregular. The problems of payment for medical services are troublesome to women in general belonging to low income families both in low and high accessible villages. A large number of women depend on traditional family norms which put a hurdle on having institutional facilities in case of delivery. To boot, availability of doctor is found to be inadequate. Getting permission to go to a health centre poses a major problem to a large number of women. The findings from this research might offer an insight into the problems of the health service delivery systems and give the health policy makers some indication about how to make the entire population fully benefit from the health resources of the nation.

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Article: ‘Gender in and Gender of Technology’: A Sociological Analysis of the Gendered Nature of Technology and its Representation through Advertisements in 21st Century India

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**‘Gender in and Gender of Technology’:
A Sociological Analysis of the Gendered Nature of Technology and its
Representation through Advertisements in 21st Century India**

--- Saheli Chowdhury

Abstract

This paper utilises feminist intersectional approach to assess social transformation through media representation of gendering of technology in 21st century India. Feminist critiques have acknowledged gender along with other social variables like class, race, religion, and sexuality as a decisive amalgam of constructing power relations that shape everyday life experiences for women. Feminist researches further advocate that along with these sources of identities other institutions such as science, technology and media symbolise and reconstitute the existing ideologies of gendered practice prevailing in the society. Technology along with media plays an integral role in crafting the knowledge about one’s identity, based on the notion of biological and social differences, and technical expertise – dictating who can get access to technology, what kind of technology one can use, and what kind of technology usage will make one more acceptable within the patriarchal arrangement of social order. However, Indian sociological discourse has been mostly oblivious to the relationship between gender and technology and more specifically to the distorted media depiction of the gendered nature of technology. This paper hence explicates how the present Indian print and audio-visual media culture, primarily through advertisements, expresses and consolidates power relationship between technology (contraceptive, sports and ICTs) and women; secondly, this paper also elucidates how the intersection of gender, class and sexuality accentuate such stereotypical representation.

Key words: Advertisements, Gender, Intersectionality, Media, Science & Technology

Introduction

...those who design technology are simultaneously designing society – Thomas. P. Hughes (1987, p. 1).

Natural sciences and/or scientific knowledge from time immemorial have been perceived as divine, i.e., a superlative, unparalleled body of knowledge ordained to provide a single, unified account of both natural and social world through a universal objective method of investigation. Similarly, media technology (both print and visual) was also considered as a value-neutral institution reflecting the (social) reality as it is. However, such understandings have been vehemently criticised by the feminist social scientists (both in English and Non-English-speaking countries) who from the 1970s consistently claimed how the (social) reality extends beyond the unilinear scope and method of natural sciences; they denounced such knowledge as androcentric, misogynist, oblivious to women's experiences. Feminist studies held scientific research and science-based technologies guilty in the continuing subordination of women through their skewed and gendered method of enquiry. Feminist critics rather advocate that institutions such as science, technology and media symbolise and reconstitute the existing ideologies of gendered practice prevailing in the society.

Furthermore, growing researches within the feminist intellectual arena expanded their theoretical orientation by acknowledging other social variables like class, race, religion, and sexuality along with gender as a decisive amalgam of constructing gender power relations that shape and intensify such everyday life experiences for women. Judy Wajcman (2004) advocates that technology is not a neutral scientific product; rather it bears the imprint of dominant patriarchal knowledge and practices that encroach upon every aspect of public and private lives. Similarly, Dwight E. Brooks and Lisa P. Herbert (2006) posit that the commodified texts produced by media construct notions of self-identity – what it means to be a male or female, heterosexual or homosexual, elite or poor in the larger social context, i.e., it ultimately represents social realities. Therefore, technology along with media plays an integral role in crafting the knowledge about one's class position, sexuality, masculinity and femininity, based on the notion of biological differences, technical expertise – dictating who can get access to technology, what kind of technology one can use, and what kind of technology usage will make one more acceptable within the hegemonic arrangement of social order.

Conversely, Indian sociological discourse has been incognizant of the relationship between gender and technology and more specifically towards the distorted media depiction of the gendered nature of technology. Acceptance of biased representation through media and association through technology not only

validate the dominant cultural practice of commodifying women, but also legitimise the exclusionary and male-centric nature of scientific inquiry. Thus, reinstating the stratified, it maintains the unequal structure of the society with little or no scope for social renovation. This paper, therefore, utilises three dominant feminist approaches, i.e., feminist technology studies, feminist media studies and intersectional approach to analyse the gendered nature of technology and its representation through print and audio-visual advertisements in 21st century India. Additionally, how the intersection of gender, class and sexuality accentuate such stereotypical portrayal has also been discussed.

Methodology

The present paper is grounded on feminist theory; therefore, this study has espoused the method of feminist qualitative content analysis to analyse the Indian audio-visual and print advertisements. Three varieties of technology, i.e., contraceptive technology, sports technology, and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) along with their media representation through advertisements has been examined and an in-depth feminist qualitative analysis of the media content has been done to divulge the covert connotations of these advertisements and acknowledge the silenced issue of interlocking experiences. Finally, SCOTⁱ – Social Construction of Technology perspective within Feminist Technology Studies has been employed in analysing the gendered nature of technology.

According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy, feminist textual analysis uses a feminist lens and allows researchers ‘to ask different questions, approach the data differently, and use their resulting knowledge to effect intellectual, social, and political change’ (2007, p. 236). Besides, feminist content analysis looks at text from the viewpoint of women who may not be otherwise considered important for research. So, analysing the media contents from this empirical viewpoint will help us to unveil the covert messages delivered through advertisements which otherwise has been taken for granted as real or true. Furthermore, the SCOT perspective within feminism has widened its scope of understanding women’s lived experiences in relation to technologies and questions the rationality behind the development of technology. It questions – Is technology gender neutral? Is technology designed for the convenience of humankind or does it have a hidden agenda of reinstating the discriminatory gendered practices? And finally, the intersectional approach promises to unearth the complexity of social identities like

gender, class, age, sexuality, race that entwine to fabricate the reality for individuals. In this research, the intersectional approach is espoused to reveal how the use of technology and its representation create and legitimise differences between people with diverse social identity, i.e., how it determines who is entitled and not entitled to use a technology.

Thus, against this backdrop the main objectives of this study are:

- To understand how the contraceptive, sports and, information & communication technology embody gender identification.
- To analyse how the Indian print and audio-visual advertisements express and consolidate gendered power relationship between these technology and women.
- To elucidate how the intersection of gender, economic class and sexuality accentuate such stereotypical representation.

Technology & Media: Partners

This 21st century human life is undeniably suffused by modern technology and mediated information, both becoming a central component of everyday life experiences and social relations. With its theory of convenience, universality and superiority, science and its technological creations have become an indivisible entity for humankind. Consequently, technology and methods that support and mediate human communication over distances in time and space, popularly known as ‘media’ also play a dynamic role in the social sphere. It not only creates an endless network of parallel relationships, but simultaneously channelises models for appropriate behavior and attitudes that help to define our world. Therefore, both technology and media together reflect and actively shapes the way of life of the people, way of seeing the world, and deliver an underlying message of dominant ideology.

In the 1960s, works of several historians and philosophers of science like Thomas S. Kuhn (1962, 1970), Paul K. Feyerabend (1996, 2011), Bruno Latour (1992), fervently refuted the claim of the supposed universality of scientific norm. They argued that scientific observation/research and science-based technologies are ‘never innocent’ (Keller & Longino, 1996, p. 1), but are pseudo value/gender-neutral, and intimately interact with the prevailing social, cultural context thereby reflecting the prevalent social cultural values. In Thomas Hughes notion, ‘the

nature of relationship between science, technology and society is - a densely interactive seamless web' (1987, p. 55).

These arguments have grown more pressing with the development of social study of technology or SCOT and feminist intervention within this perspective. Feminist social scientists further challenged the institution of science and technology as gendered and how this discipline has been shaped by the historical exclusion of women and deliberate misrepresentation of lives and experiences of women. Therefore, the development of scientific knowledge, methods, technologies cannot be understood confined to the one-dimensional functional aspect of development or objective assemblage of data alone (that aims to unearth the truth of both natural and social sphere); it has to be viewed in relation to the multi-dimensional social reality that shapes the intellectual context of scientific research and in turn the knowledge it produces to sustain the existing social order. Similarly, Trevor Pinch and Wiebe Bijker in their article titled, *The Social Construction of Facts and Artefacts*, argue that 'both science and technology are socially constructed cultures and bring to bear whatever cultural resources are appropriate for the purposes at hand' (1984, p. 21).

Also, Media (print and audio-visual) as an independent institution not only enjoy a similar hegemonic position in relation to the production and dissemination of dominant ideologies, but mediated texts act as a conduit to rationalise the everyday life experiences of social beings. Paul Rosen (1993) points to the importance of media advertising in developing markets for the shape and success of new artefacts. Frequently, it is observed that advertisers draw on social common sense, myths reinforcing the stereotyped notion of social reality to encourage consumers to buy products in a positive light (Mcintosh & Cuklanz, 2014). Kim Sheehan further argues that, 'advertisers use the prevalent idea of the social reality to develop stories, create conflict, provide persuasive imagery even to the extent of portraying men and women differently which in turn brings different perspective to advertisements' (2004, p. 89). Additionally since advertising funds a majority of entertainment media, in the end, the message becomes part of the sales discourse and ultimately reinforces traditional ideas about gender roles (Mcintosh & Cuklanz, 2014, p. 280). For instance, advertisements ranging from baby products to cooking appliances have consistently placed women at the epicenter of the message, highlighting and publicising the stereotypical message to the audience regarding women's role as a care-giver, as a mother and as a wife.

Feminist Media Studies (FMS)ⁱⁱ have questioned this pattern of representation that produce some type of knowledge and meaning which appear ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ in their construction (Macintosh & Cuklanz, 2014). Equally, Feminist Technology Studies (FTS)ⁱⁱⁱ also question the taken for granted association of certain technologies (soft technology) like domestic technology – microwave oven, washing machine, etc. with women, i.e., determining the ‘gender of technology’ (Faulkner, 2001) and their symbolic demonstration through media as marketing strategy. Certain technologies are designed in such a way that they embody gendered relations like sports gear, contraceptives, etc.; these technologies reflect the ‘gender in them’ which too is emblematically represented through the print and visual advertisements. Consequently, both technology and their representation through media reinstates women’s traditional place in the society as well as states where a women’s place ought to be vis-à-vis their male counterparts. FMS & FTS hence query about the dominant cultural norms, ideologies and conceptions that produce gendered identities – constructing notions about self-identity, i.e., how gender, class, sexuality is expressed through technology (design, purpose, application) as well as via media advertisements which upholds the technological frame through its representation (Bijker, 1995).

Therefore, the next section of this article will broadly discuss, through the analysis of the print advertisements of three technologies, namely contraceptive technology, sports technology and ICTs, how media and technology are enmeshed in a symbiotic relationship to reinstate the established gendered and social hierarchy.



Figure 1

Gender of and Gender in Technology^{iv} : Representation through Advertisements

SCOT perspective posits that the social basis of technological artifacts needs to be deconstructed to gather a detailed description of the relevant social groups and define better the function of the artifact with respect to each group (Bijker, Hughes & Pinch, 1987, p. 34). Similarly, deconstructing the advertisements of those artifacts also reveal the rationale on which those artifacts are designed. That is to say, the messages and meanings disseminated through advertisements reveal the ‘gender of’ and ‘gender in’ the advertised technological artifacts. For instance, in present day India, advertisements (both print and audio-visual) on home appliances especially like washing machines, microwave oven, iron, vacuum cleaners, toasters, mixer grinders, etc. continue to associate women/female as their leading face. Like for example, in 2019, Haier India launched a new washing machine with the tagline ‘Low on noise, high on performance’ as the ultimate ‘silent performer’, chose women athletes – Hima Das, Dipa Karmakar and boxer Simranjit Kaur respectively for endorsing the product^v. The advertisement associated the gender of the technology with women who have always been a ‘silent performer/workforce’ within the domestic sphere. Whereas, when it comes to other home appliances like inverters, batteries, etc. which focus on durability, longevity, power and strength – prevalent masculine attributes, the advertisers evidently choose men/male face as their lead. For instance, in 2018, Amaze inverters chose Indian cricketer Virat Kohli as their brand ambassador^{vi}.

Erving Goffman (1987) argues that advertisements do not always depict for us how we actually behave as men and women, but how we think men and women behave. Such depictions serve the agenda of convincing that men and women are differently structured and that they should behave, feel and want to be different not only in relation to themselves but in relation to each other. In fact, Goffman (1979) perceives advertising strategy as a socialisation process through which they orient men and women to the idea of men and women acting in concert with each other, which accomplishes the task of maintaining an essential order, an undisturbed flow of performance, regardless of the actual experience of its participants.

Post-structural feminist, Judith Butler (1990) posits that gender enactment or performance based on social approval does not alone reinstate one’s gender, but ‘constraints’ with regard to confining a group to their socially prescribed

behaviour and attitude also produce gendered identity. Like confining women through the association with certain products (home appliances, kitchen gadgets, baby products) reinforces their gender. As Wendy Faulkner (2001, p. 84) puts it, often, such gendered associations are not merely ‘added on’ by users alone. Designers themselves make gendered assumptions about the user and assumptions ‘designed in’ to the artefact. Likewise, advertisements also portray the gender embedded in technology through its presentation. For example, two-wheeler motor vehicles, like scooter, bike, initially designed for conveyance and private ownership at an affordable price, soon got a feminine version known as ‘scooty’, which especially targeted the female consumers and from then onwards became a symbol of female dominated two-wheeler vehicle in India. Likewise, the designs, colour and the tag lines were also gender specific like focusing on light-weight, soft colours, and moderate mileage, highlighting the feature of investing ‘zero-effort’ and availing an ‘Easy Ride’ – signifying lack of strength, a feminine trait, thus, symbolising the conventional concept of femininity. Consequently, the advertisements related to ‘scooty’ also echoed the gendered message with brand ambassadors belonging to the female sex, delivering different version of reality to the potential consumers and users. Conversely, when it comes to advertising bikes it is conveniently represented by a male figure which highlights ‘fearlessness’, ‘extremity’, ‘performance’ – signifying courage, vigour – predominantly perceived as masculine traits. Oblivious of the fact that consumption is not alone driven on the basis of one’s gender, but also depends upon one’s ability to afford and necessity.

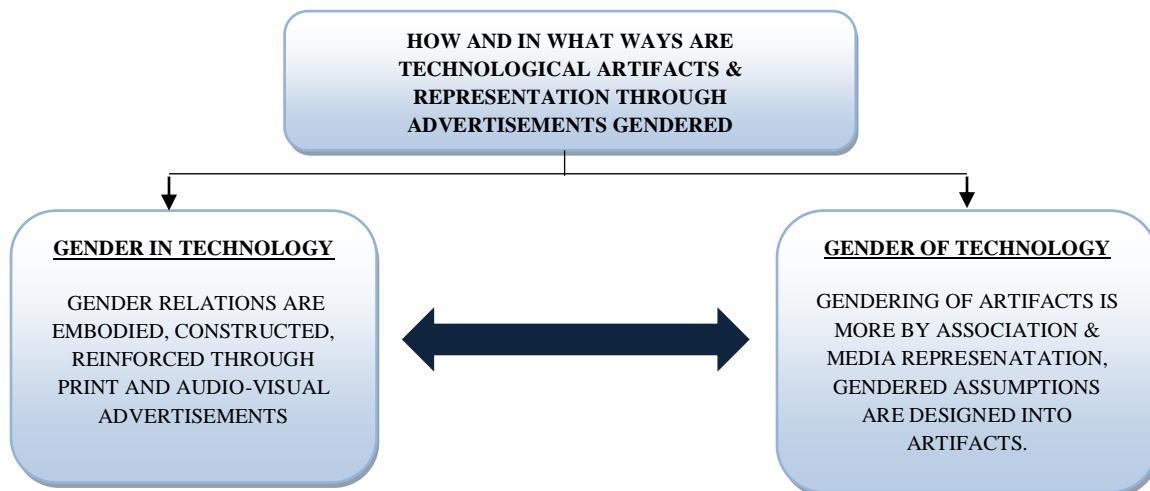


Figure 2: Technological Artifacts & Representation through Advertisements as Gendered

Technological Artifacts & Representation through Advertisements as Gendered

Similar trend has been noticed in contraceptive technology and its related advertisements for both male and female respectively. Leading male contraceptives, mainly condoms in India are sold in various names like ‘Skore’, ‘Manforce’, ‘Masti’, ‘Durex’, ‘Moods’. Not only does the visual representation of these male contraceptive brands reflect the one sided ‘pleasure’ aspect of sexual activity, the names too reflect male supremacy; such sexual activities are not presented as an act of responsibility or pleasure for both the actors but are reduced to a casual (sexual) interaction for fun (like through the brand names – Skore, Masti, Moods), which can be acted anytime anywhere and with anybody irrespective of their consent, marital status or relationship commitments.

Additionally, these advertisements epitomise masculinity as well as heterosexuality using words like ‘force’ in ‘Manforce’ – that reflects strength and violence (over women’s body), ‘Durex’ – that reflects durability and endurance, ideal masculine qualities. Likewise, when it comes to the videographic advertisements of condoms, i.e., male contraceptives, the focus is on sexual freedom, pleasure, performance and excitement of the male counterpart and absence of the sexual and reproductive role of men, i.e., concept of ‘male role’ or ‘caring man’ in being responsible towards family planning, preventing unwanted pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Infections, AIDS (Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome) is consciously averted.

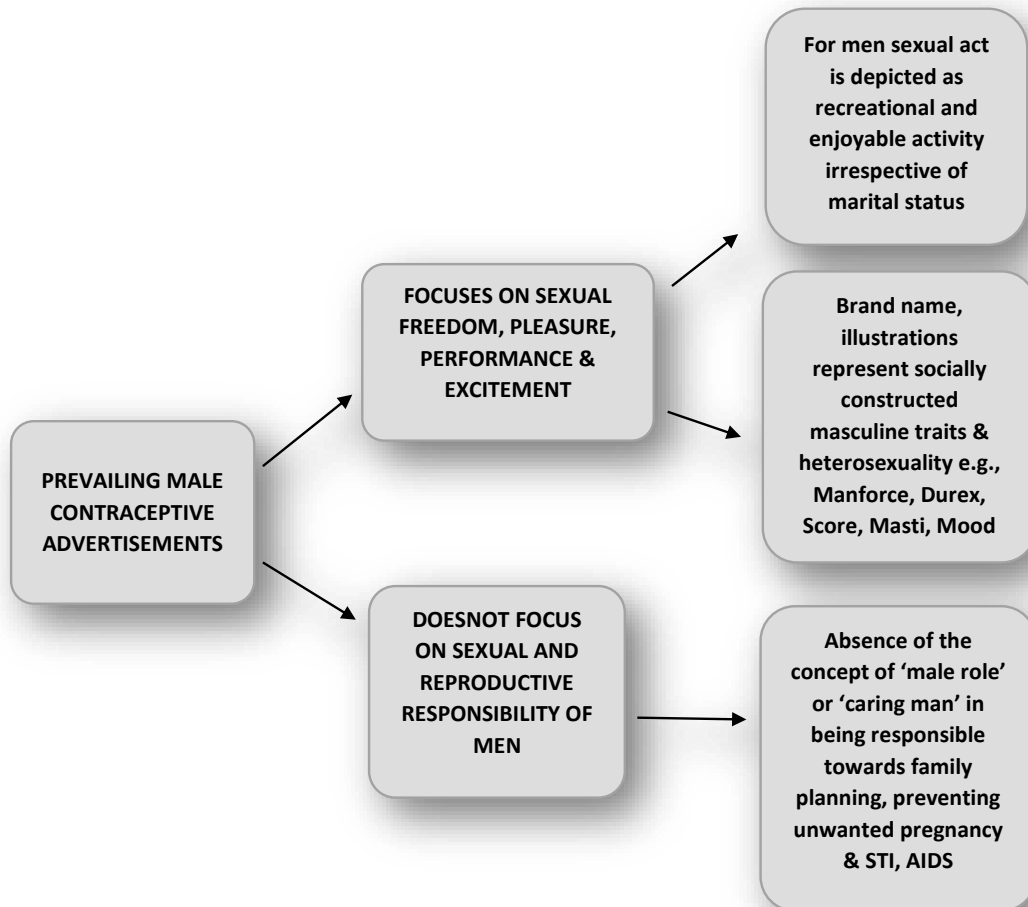


Figure 3

Conversely, when it comes to the representation of female contraceptive along with its rationale, the focus has always been on glorifying the 'responsible', 'caring', and 'submissive' role of women which is synonymous to the predominant, prescribed and expected gender roles for women. Below are some illustrations of prevalent female (oral) contraceptive advertisements. It is intriguing to know that the prevailing female contraceptive advertisements emphasise only on the oral contraceptive pills (OCP) rather than other safe and alternative methods. Despite revealing the harmful effects of OCPs for women, contraceptive technology has failed to deliver a safe and an equivalent alternative method of female contraception. Furthermore, the visual and print advertisements depict the socially expected role of women as 'responsible' and 'caring' (both married & single), emphasising and reinstating the notion of 'gender performativity' through its representation. It overtly states that women are solely

responsible for pregnancy prevention, family planning, safeguarding family prestige, irrespective of side effects of OCPs on health. For instance, the names ‘Take Action’, ‘Unwanted 21’ indicate such stereotypical beliefs.

Additionally, there is a complete silence on the concept of female sexual empowerment, pleasure, excitement and guilt-free sexual encounters in visual representations of female contraceptives. Rather, the visual advertisements make women feel inferior, guilty of having engaged in sexual activities, especially pre-marital with loose moral bindings if become pregnant. For instance, in 2008 India, an audio-visual advertisement of I-pill emergency contraceptive pill depicted the plight of an unmarried young woman after knowing that she has conceived, an outcome of having unprotected sexual encounter. Unable to share her fear with her parents and above all with her sexual partner, the distressed woman confides in one of her female friends and opts for an abortion in a local clinic; the shameful secret all kept to herself and her trustworthy friend. The advertisers consciously not only highlighted the guilt of the woman for not opting to take in the I-pill emergency contraceptive pill but at the same overtly disseminated the message for single women regarding the dire consequences of having casual pre-marital sexual relations, an immoral act. Furthermore, throughout the advertisement the character of ‘male partner’ was missing, which clearly suggests that the responsibility lies exclusively on women for accidentally becoming pregnant.

In other words, these advertisements as well as contraceptive technology together suggests unmarried women to avoid sexual relations (based on morality, customs, manners), to not to be assertive towards male partner to use condoms and if becomes pregnant face stigma alone, feel ashamed & opt for termination of pregnancy. These representations act as agents of social control (constraints, gossip, and ridicule) disciplining mind, body according to the prevailing norms of the society. Even after a decade, the message and representation through advertisements of oral contraceptive pills for women in India has remained consistent when it comes to taking responsibility of ‘unwanted pregnancy’ – still a woman’s job.

Though, such moral prescriptions are noticeably absent when it comes to male contraceptives, the attribute of both the consenting adults being married or unmarried does not become a vital issue when it comes to representing it via mass media, i.e., advertisements. However, such asymmetrical and gendered depiction of contraception can be witnessed globally. For instance, in 2018, the United

Kingdom National Health Service in collaboration with Walsall Healthcare brought forth a poster advertising and advocating for emergency female contraception which suggested that women have to ‘give up’ lipstick and heels if they accidentally fall pregnant. The message through the advertisement not only implied the stereotypical conception of ‘female responsibility’ for unwanted pregnancy, but it also implied that women have to give up heels and lipstick if one becomes a mother, or mothers are not expected to take care of themselves when caring for children^{vii}. Conversely, the same advertisement campaign delivered another poster urging men to use a contraceptive with a contrasting message stating that having a baby is equivalent to ‘falling into a trap of responsibilities’, and in order to escape from the confines of parenthood, one must use a condom^{viii}.

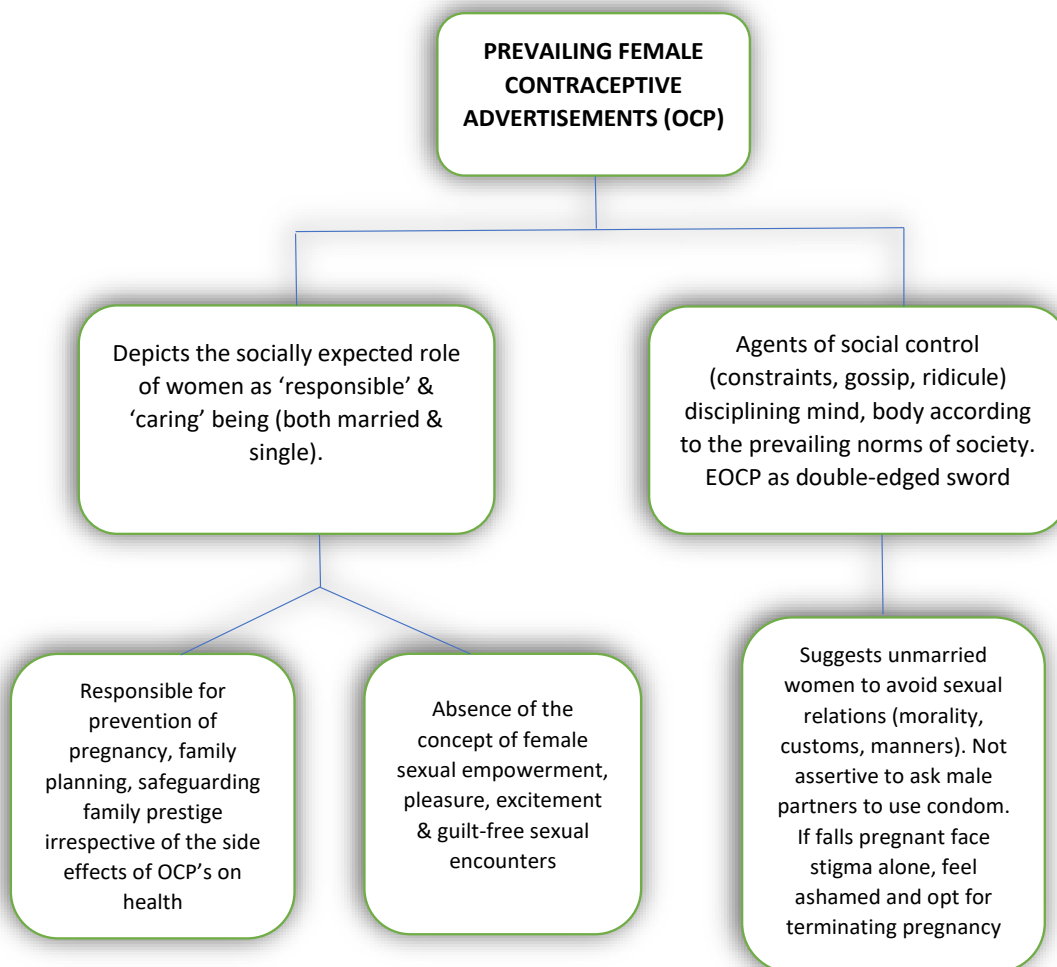
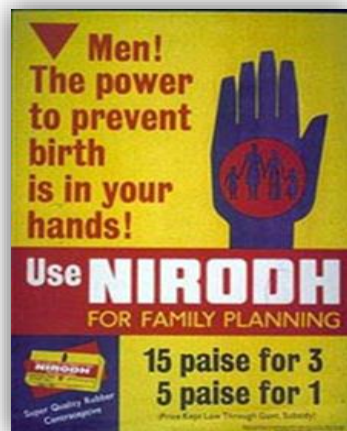


Figure 4

It has been noticed that contraceptive advertisements in India has shifted from state sponsored family planning campaigns to more risqué campaigns with the intervention of private companies in the liberalised market economy in the 1990s. As posited by Mazzarella (2003, p. 85), prior to opening its market to foreign brands, the foundation of Indian advertising was in tune with public service, which justified consumption based on the idea that it would lead to economic growth that would benefit everyone. However, the complete revamp of the marketing strategy based on consumerism glorified sexual freedom using women as the locus of male desire, without a slight reference to its role in ‘family planning’ – a public interest service. Such changes resulted in the remodeling of the concept of male contraception, the rationale for using one other than deriving pleasure from a female body. Similarly, Meghan L. Davison (2008, p. 3) argues that contraception advertising has dramatically changed to resonate with men’s attitudes and men have increasing consumer power in this market to purchase anything, like pleasure, excitement, unrestrained freedom to engage in sexual activities. Consequently, in a neo-liberal market economy, the gradual shift from government sponsored ‘family planning’ campaigns to such consumer and male-oriented sexual representation reflects that women not only lack power as a valued consumer in the market, but also as citizens deserving government health and social services.

1980’s



1990’s

(Picture- 1-1.1)^{ix}

On the contrary, irrespective of celebrated advertisements, a leading Indian English daily, The Times of India published a report on January 2, 2016 titled: *Indian men stay off contraceptives, forcing women into sterilization exposing the reality of contraceptive use among married men and women.*

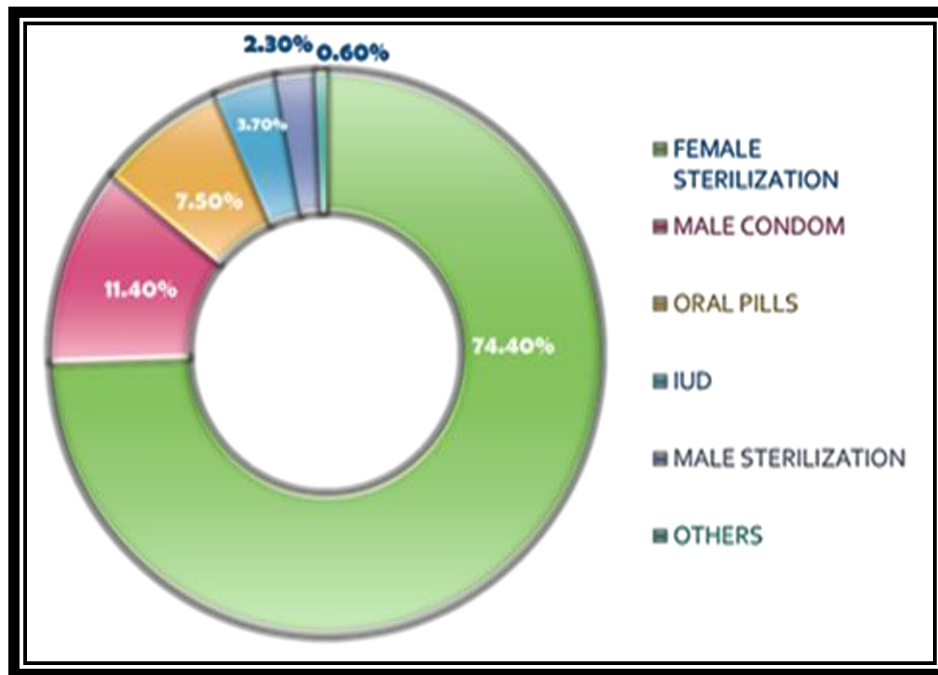


Figure 5^x

According to Laury Oaks (2009, p. 139) the marketing of (new) contraceptive technology has practical and symbolical implications for men and women's sexual and reproductive health, and reproductive responsibilities. New contraceptives must not be seen only as a scientific advancement but perceived as an arena where social, ethical and health questions of both men and women can and must be raised. Furthermore, contraceptive technology along with advertising campaigns (media) must take into consideration to inform and shape the social understanding of men and women's reproductive, sexual responsibility, for e.g., by introducing male oral contraceptive pills. Nelly Oudhshoorn (2003) argues that scientists working on this field labels the male reproductive system complicated than the female reproductive system; hence it is easier to control a female body than the male. Consequently, inspite of numerous studies and experiments on male contraceptive pills, till date it has not been launched for its side effects affecting the male libido and masculinity. Oudhshoorn further asserts that the overwhelming attention by reproductive scientists to reduce side effects of male

pills in contrast to relative lack of such high concern when women's oral pills and intrauterine devices were first marketed is related to the cultural preoccupation with norms of masculinity that can best be summarised as 'no tinkering with male sexuality'.

The next section will focus on sports technology for men and women respectively along with their print and audio-visual advertisement.



Picture 2^{xi}

The above image reflects Reebok sports shoe – 'ReeZig' ad campaign endorsed by men, for men which clearly states that the new technology, i.e., 'ZigTech' and design of the shoe will serve as an 'Energy Drink' for the male users. Whereas, the same Reebok shoe brand launches another sports shoe technology exclusively for its female users by the name of 'ReeTone', which promises to help women tone their 'butts' and 'legs' with every step, but not the 'energy' it promised to deliver for its male users. Picture 3^{xii} represents 'ReeTone' or 'EasyTone' ad campaigns for women.



Picture 3

In India, both EasyTone and ReeZig shoes were launched in the year 2010. The Reebok 'EasyTone' shoe celebrated women's desired body that shows whether they go to gym or not or wherever they go, they are getting a toned body with great toned legs and a great toned butt with every step. That is the rationale of this particular sports technology, not to make woman fit or healthy, rather its aim is to refigure and sculpt women according to the patriarchal desire – the ideal body, a site of male dominance and expectations. On the contrary, 'ReeZig' using the zig-zag technology and tag line 'energy drink for your feet' was designed to transfer energy to the male athlete or users' body, thus making him 'the abled body' always powerful, active, energetic, performer – ideal masculine qualities. In 2011, Reebok President Uli Becker in his interview on relaunching Reebok EasyTone shoes remarked, 'Toning was driven by the insight that women care about their looks, and that insight doesn't change'^{xiii}. Such claims not only reinstate the stereotyped image of and expectation from women but simultaneously construct an image of men which is conceived as a completely different species from women, and held superior by virtue of certain attributes considered to be essential to achieve success. For e.g., achieving success through hard work is appreciated more than having a toned butt.

Some other examples of gender in artifacts and their representation, where designers make gendered assumptions about the users, and media conveys through gendered language are discussed here. Picture 4 shows Nike sportswear for women with the tag line 'sexy back' while Picture 4.1. shows the same company launching sportswear for men with the tag line of being 'invincible'. Picture 5 similarly uses prevalent gender specific phrases like 'powerful', 'ruthlessness', 'aggression' for male sports gears, whereas, for female gears, as depicted in Picture 5.1, such tough descriptive words fail to assume a significant place in the advertisements and related posters. Picture 6 furthers the gendered assumption when female breasts are referred to as one of the 'opponents', which pose challenges, inhibiting smooth athletic performances for female in general and female athletes specifically.



Picture 4^{xiv}



Picture 4.1^{xv}



Picture 5^{xvi}



Picture 5.1^{xvii}



Picture 6^{xviii}

Sports Feminist, Helen Lenskyj (1986) argued that the social rationale supported by the medical rationale dating 16th century considered women as ‘differently wired’ and that their physique was unsuited for any sporting activities. Therefore, her physical vulnerability needs to be perfected and controlled through the medical gaze. The above catchphrase of the advertisement where female breasts has been associated with a ‘barrier’ to athletics has reiterated the fact that the ‘female body’ is still perceived as an imperfect arena, incompatible for any athletic activities unless perfected as per the normative expectation. Susan Bartky (2004, p. 29) from a Foucauldian perspective argues that the female figure varies over time and across culture, and they reflect the cultural obsessions and pre-occupations surrounding the female physique. Consequently, the female body is subjected to diverse disciplinary project of bodily perfection which aims to shape female identity and subjectivity. Like for instance, as Bartky puts it, ‘there are exercises to build the breasts and banish the cellulites’ (ibid.).

Similarly, the medium (in this case advertisements) which aids in disseminating such information acts as a modern technique of surveillance or gaze which intends to control and shape the consciousness of individuals. Significant developments in sports technology when represented through advertisements do not reflect the expected progress when it comes to gender-neutrality. For instance, even after retirement in 2013, Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar continues to endorse branded cricket bats, whereas, women cricketers active at present are still yet to make their mark.

The last section of this paper will analyse the advertisements of Information and Communicative Technology with special reference to ad campaigns of laptops and smart phones.



Picture 7^{xix} & 7.1^{xx} are advertisements for modern day ICT, i.e., laptops

Karen A. Foss and Sonja A. Foss (1991) provided a framework that suggests analysing the following:

- Exigence of the text audience of the text
- Nature of the communicator
- Nature of the text
- Functions of the text
- Nature of the world created

From the above advertisements and the message transported through the rationale of the technology itself, the laptop series 'Envy' directly denotes that its stylish design, light weight, impeccable engineering and efficient performance will make others envy for not owing one. This advertisement also conveys that owing a HP Envy laptop will not only improve performance but will make others feel jealous for not owing one, just like having a slim, fashionable girlfriend makes the other feel deprived or envious. Similarly, what remains unsaid is that the slender, light weight feature is equated with this female model's skinny body (female as a single unit), which also denotes that being light weight and slim is the key to enhance performance. Anything light, slender is associated with the female body, or rather the socially desirable female body which further sculpts, produces and reproduces the schema for the 'ideal female body'. Furthermore, the advertisement also calls attention to the half-exposed slender body of the woman. Conversely, when a male member is endorsing a similar technology, the theme of the campaign remains focused on the performance of the device, i.e., on the actual purpose of the electronic gadget, with a fully dressed male model.

A similar representation can also be witnessed in international advertisement campaigns of laptops. Picture 7.2^{xxi} reflects such advertisement. A skinny, slim female model along with terms like 'thinnest', 'lightest' are used to denote the physical engineering of products. The pictorial depiction also clearly states that the product is so light and weightless that the feeble female body can also hold it with one hand. Affirming the socially constructed stereotyped objectified image of a weak, delicate female body who cannot surpass the bondage of her body, the aspects of ability and competence is completely ignored (Bartky, 1990; Nussbaum, 1995; Langton, 2009). For instance, Nussbaum's (1995, p. 257) one of the seven dimensions of objectification, 'Instrumentality' – indicates the treatment of a person as a tool for the objectifier's purpose, signifies (in these mentioned advertisements) how the desirable attributes of 'femininity and 'masculinity'

respectively were applied as a marketing strategy. Additionally, Langton's (2009, p. 228-229) 'Reduction to body' dimension, which explains the treatment of a person as identified with their body, or body parts, when applied to these cited ad catchphrases indicate how female and male bodies are constructed and represented differently, creating a hierarchy of attributes, one aspect valued over the other. Additionally, these lopsided ad representations do not emphasise on women's technical knowledge but highlights women's lack of technological skills by confining women's competency to her bodily attributes.



Picture 7.2^{xxii}

Similarly, with smart phone advertisements along with applications also reflect the gendered nature of technology and media.



Picture 8^{xxiii} and 8.1^{xxiv} show such prevalent advertisements

The ad campaign illustrated above is promoting the 'Bike mode' application in smart phones instead of 'Drive mode'. The presence of a male figure in the ad who promotes this particular application is mutually shaping gender symbols and technological discourse. The male representation of this ad and application both reflects and reinforces the message that motorbikes are predominantly a male domain and women have nothing to do with this part of technology, dictating who should and should not use this gadget and app. Judy Wajcman (2004) similarly stresses on men's role in monopolising technology, which in-turn reproduces patriarchy through technology. Wajcman (ibid, p. 16) also argues that the taken-for-granted association of technology with men reinstates femininity as incompatible with technological pursuits. Besides, its related representation through advertisement furthers and naturalises the prevalent norm and practice of male superiority and involvement with 'high-tech' 'hard/real' technology vis-à-vis their female counterparts. For example, majority of advertisements promoting four wheelers portray male figures controlling the steering because the performance and the marketing strategy of the car cannot be compromised with a misfit/misrepresentation, i.e., a female lead endorsing a high performing technology which will affect the sales dimension.

Conclusion

Intersectionality and Representation through Advertisements: Making diversity visible

While advertising can be seen as necessary for economic growth, it is not without its social costs (Sasi & Maran, 2012, p. 1).

Thomas S. Kuhn, in his work *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, has identified, 'Normal Science as non-revolutionary puzzle solving or problem solving' (1970, p. 35-36). For Kuhn, scientific progress can be achieved through scientific revolution that is by identifying the crisis within the present scientific paradigm i.e., Normal Science. Kuhn advocated that,

....transformations of the paradigms of physical optics are scientific revolutions, and the successive transition from one paradigm to another via revolution is the usual developmental pattern of mature science (ibid, p. 12).

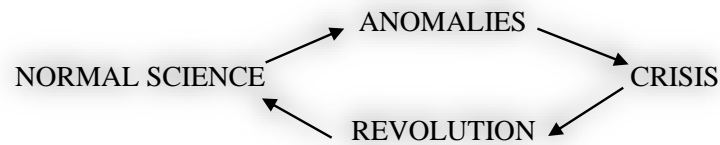


Figure 6

Likewise, feminists espousing the Intersectional perspective have acknowledged the necessity to identify the crisis and the complexity of people's diverse social attributes like gender, race, class, sexuality, religion and related experiences shaped by them. Infact, like Kuhn advocating for transformation of scientific paradigm, feminists, similarly, have broadened their theoretical outlook by embracing intersectionality as an integral component of their sociological imagination, to be cautious against traditional, simplistic, one-dimensional analytical conceptualisation of experiences (Norris, Murphy-Erby & Zajicek, 2007). Similarly, Feminist Media Studies and Feminist Technology Studies espousing the intersectional dimension has critically analysed the manifested paradigm nurtured by the designers of artifacts and media when representing women in commercials by questioning:

- Why do commercials on technological artifacts differently associate women and men with different technologies (questions gender neutrality)?
- Does it represent the rationale of the designers?
- How does these associations influence, shape and reinforce the ideologies of being a female, male, heterosexual and construct dominant cultural ideas?
- Do commercials acknowledge the intersectional realities of everyday life?

FTS has pointed out the crisis & critically analysed this problem-solving nature of Normal Science through three questions:

- Whose problem is acknowledged?
- Are the problems generalised as problem faced by all?
- In the ardent venture of solving problems is it covertly inviting a new problem?

Both FMS and FTS have vehemently criticised technology as a masculine culture – in design, engineering, skill, representation (Wajcman, 1991). They highlighted, 'the two-way mutually shaping relationship between gender and technology in

which technology is both a source and consequence of gender relation and vice versa' (Faulkner, 1999, p. 81). Additionally, what has been further acknowledged is the intersectional aspect of nature of technology design and its representations through media that consolidates the power relationship between various aspects of social identity, media and technology. Intersectional approach has questioned the claim of technology being objective in nature for it does not directly address members (both men and women) of the working, labour class; rather they treat the consumer group as a homogeneous entity.

Consequently, media represents the lifestyle, value system of the elite, upper middle and middle-class citizens, who can afford technology for both leisure and for necessity. Infact it also reflects who cannot afford and what it requires to afford any technology. As argued by Barnum and Zajicek in their work on intersectional analysis of the role of visual media, advertisements have the power to engage and reach diverse social identities to appeal to a wider range of possible consumers (2008, p. 105-106). As a result, they often construct and re-construct the concepts of race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality in such a way as to create an 'illusion that all visible identity markers are equal' (ibid.). They further argue that the false world of the advertisement constructs a reality through the equalisation of the objects of nature, the body, race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and the lack of age and class differences. Like for instance, obsession with weight, toned, fit body never concerned the working-class women. As a result, 'shoes' for them (working class women) were never designed and manufactured. Furthermore, ad campaigns openly highlight the heterosexual relationship and reinforce the message that heterosexuality is the norm and fails to address the homosexual audience (example contraceptive ads, sports gear).

Also, the SCOT perspective explained by Trevor Pinch and Wiebe E. Bijker (1987, p. 31-34) with respect to the necessity, rationale of designing, and marketing the bicycles in the 19th century, provides a critical insight regarding the limitation of the 'problem solving' nature of 'hard science',

...Another question we need to address is whether a provisionally defined social group is homogeneous with respect to the meanings given to the artifact – or is it more effective to describe the developmental process by dividing a rather heterogeneous group into several different social groups? Thus, within the group of cycle-users we discern a separate social group of women cyclists.

During the days of the high-wheeled ordinary women were not supposed to mount a bicycle (ibid.).

Therefore, from the above cited real examples it can be understood that there is an urgent need to revamp the scientific way of conceiving the social reality as a diverse entity, through both scientific revolution and social transformation, instead of providing a monistic, homogeneous interpretation of social world. Similarly, such scientific renovation must also be well-accepted and portrayed through media technology which will ultimately complete the process of social inclusion. Both social scientists and scientists need to identify this crisis within the scientific knowledge as well as the ideology that construes social reality to bring forth social transformation that aims to be more inclusive. Women from different social backgrounds need to be included as/within the ‘relevant social groups’ to influence and add meaning to technological artifacts so that there is scope for improvement or alteration in the designing of technology. Lastly, one of the most far-sighted initiatives was taken by Betty Friedan and the late Nancy Woodhull, when they established the ‘women, men and the media project’ in 1988, aimed to carry regular studies that would track progress, release the findings at symposia that would bring together journalists and media executives with activists and academics. Such endeavour signaled that without dialogue between researchers, activists, radio and television producers, there could be no way out of the impasse in which the debate about gender representation appears to be locked.

Notes:

ⁱ Social construction of technology (also referred to as SCOT) is a theory within the field of Science and Technology Studies. Advocates of SCOT argue that technology does not determine human action, but that rather, human action shapes technology. They also argue that the ways in which a technology is used cannot be understood without understanding how that technology is embedded in its social context. SCOT is a response to technological determinism and is sometimes known as technological constructivism. SCOT holds that those who seek to understand the reasons for acceptance or rejection of a technology should look to the social world. It is not enough, according to SCOT, to explain a technology’s success by saying that it is ‘the best’; researchers must look at how the criteria of being ‘the best’ is defined and what groups and stakeholders participate in defining it.

ⁱⁱ Feminist Media Studies provides a trans-disciplinary, transnational forum for researchers pursuing feminist approaches to the field of media and communication studies, with attention to the historical, philosophical, cultural, social, political, and economic dimensions and analysis of sites including print and electronic media, film and the arts, and new media technologies. Feminist media studies is also a field of study examining how representations of gender, race, sexuality, disability, class, and other forms of identity both produce and are produced by contemporary media text.

iii Feminist technoscience is a trans-disciplinary branch of science studies which emerged from decades of feminist critique on the way gender and other identity markers are entangled in the combined fields of science and technology. The term technoscience, especially regarding the field of feminist technoscience studies seeks to remove the distinction between scientific research and development with applied applications of technology while assuming science is entwined with the common interests of society. As a result, science is suggested to be held to the same level of political and ethical accountability as the technologies which develop from it. Feminist technoscience studies are inspired by social constructionist approaches to gender, sex, intersectionalities, and science, technology and society (STS). It can also be referred to as feminist science studies, feminist STS, feminist cultural studies of science, feminist studies of science and technology, and gender and science.

iv These two terms have been adopted from the article by Wendy Faulkner (2001, p. 83) titled, *The technology question in feminism: A view from feminist technology studies*.

v <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kD8y0bBzBQs>

vi <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMVndYHvFa0>

vii See, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/nhs-slammed-sexist-ad-asking-13241899>

viii <https://metro.co.uk/2018/09/16/another-nhs-advert-slammed-for-warning-men-beware-da-baby-trap-7950024/>

ix https://www.google.com/search?biw=1600&bih=740&tbm=isch&sa=1&ei=xaAvXN2-FJmYvQTAjYeQBO&q=Indian+advertisements+for+male+condoms&oq=Indian+advertisements+for+male+condoms&gs_l=img.3...5626.7982..8281...0.0..0.138.1606.0j12.....1...1..gws-wiz-img.immtCE_OMAs

x <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Men-stay-off-contraceptives-forcing-women-into-sterilisation/articleshow/50412131.cms>

xi <https://www.sportskeeda.com/cricket/ms-dhoni-blew-shahrukh-khan-away-videocon-commercial-says-adman-piyush-pandey>

xii <https://footweartimes.com/reebok-easytone-sales-decline-with-its/>

xiii <https://footwearnews.com/2011/business/news/reebok-plans-toning-relaunch-139988/>

xiv <https://ameliajane39.wordpress.com/are-sportswear-advertisements-too-sexy-2/>

xv <https://in.pinterest.com/pin/306807793338856990/>

xvi <https://in.pinterest.com/pin/353110427013771498/>

xvii <https://www.shape.com/celebrities/news/nikes-ad-oscar-serena-williams-women-getting-called-crazy>

xviii <https://www.behance.net/gallery/18800151/Nike-Women>

xix <https://www.advertgallery.com/newspaper/hp-envy-13-advertisement/>

xx <https://www.google.com/search?tbm=isch&q=acer+laptops+ad+hrihik+roshan&spell=1&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjYk46U3dTfAhWIr48KHWoZC2YQBQg4KAA&biw=1600&bih=740&dpr=1#imgsrc=Y0XFQg62RRTspM>

xxi <https://www.behance.net/gallery/9884591/Acer-Aspire-S7>

xxii <https://www.behance.net/gallery/9884591/Acer-Aspire-S7>

xxiii <https://in.pinterest.com/pin/419608890265571779/>

xxiv https://zeenews.india.com/business/gadgets/gadgets-news/samsung-galaxy-j3-launched-in-india-at-rs-8990-to-be-available-on-snapdeal_1870991.html

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Research in Progress: Exclusion in the Employability: De-skilling and Re-skilling in the Bhadohi Carpet Industry

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Exclusion in the Employability: De-skilling and Re-skilling in the Bhadohi Carpet Industry

--- Asfiya Karimi

Abstract

The paper highlights the process of exclusion due to upgradation of technology in the carpet industry of Bhadohi owing to the process of globalisation. There are many areas in the production process of the carpets in which the old technology is replaced by the new technology, viz. *nakshakari* with CAD (Computer Aided Designing), *kath* with *khaddi* and *bhatta* with boiler dyeing plant respectively, resulting in the process of de-skilling of the workers in the carpet industry. Thus, the replacement of traditional *nakshakari* with CAD has been the focus in the present paper as one of the indicators of the process of exclusion. Introduction of the technology of CAD and the gap in the time period of skilling, de-skilling and re-skilling in the employment market of *nakshakari* for *nakshakars*, painters and tracers has been understood in this paper as being part of the exclusion process till they are re-skilled or they get employed. The arguments in the paper have been buttressed with the help of four case studies and two tables collected by the author from the field.

Key words: De-skilling, Globalisation, Informationalism, Re-skilling, Skilling

Introduction

In an era of globalisation, we are sharing our ideas, culture, arts, goods, etc. through Information and Communication Technology (ICT). While for some globalisation has meant increased competition, marginalisation, and impoverishment, but for some it has meant opportunities, advancement and prosperity. In this light, an effort has been made to study the cause and consequences of globalisation in the present paper by understanding the concept of social exclusion within the framework of Manuel Castells as given in *Information age: Economy society and culture* (2010). According to Castells, globalisation has accelerated the process of production, distribution of goods and its management by shrinking competition not just at the macro level but also in

the micro level network of producers. It has created the space of flows where the global network had created the space for the productivity and competitiveness. These space of flows can be seen not only at the global level but at the micro level too.

There is the connection between the local and the global through the network which was developed because of ICT. The global networks connect places according to their values of network. Sassen (1991) has pointed out that the micro network of the high level decision making process and the macro network of decision implementation was based on ICT that develops communication networks (Castells, 2010, p. 36). In this fast pace of competition, it has brought challenges in various sectors, that can also be witnessed in the carpet industry of Bhadohi. The global market has introduced automation in the manufacturing process of the handicraft industry that has brought redundancy of labour and displacement in the working structure as an outcome. Sen (2000) considers social exclusion in terms of capability deprivation.

The concept [social exclusion] takes us beyond mere descriptions of deprivation, and focuses attention on social relations and the processes and institutions that underlie and are part and parcel of deprivation (Haan, 2001, p. 26).

In this paper, social exclusion is viewed as a process that disfranchises a person as labour in the context of capitalism. Social exclusion is a process, not a condition. Thus its boundaries shift, and who is excluded and included may vary over time, and that depends on various parameters of education, demographical propositions, social prejudices, business practices, and public policies. Furthermore, although the lack of regular work as a source of income is ultimately the key mechanism in social exclusion, how and why individuals and groups are placed under the structural difficulty/impossibility to provide for themselves follow wide avenues of destitution. It is not only a matter of lacking skills or not being able to find a job, but also it may be an illness that strikes in a society without health coverage for a substantial proportion of its members. The injuries of mental illness or of a nervous breakdown placing a person between the psychiatric repression and irresponsible deinstitutionalisation paralyse the soul and cancel the will (Castells, 2010).

Castells (2010) has put forth the argument that a new economy has been created

in this globalised world. In his trilogy, he has discussed about the global economy which is characterised by the flow and exchange of information, capital and cultural communication. He had observed that the information and communication led to the transformation of labour markets and the process of work. In this era of globalisation and the informational economy, the jobs are shifted from unskilled labourers to skilled labourers; as such labour creation dwindles because in place of the labour, technology is being used. In contextualising, it can be observed that there is a transformation of the working structure because of technology.

Research Design

The paper is qualitative in nature and the inductive logic of inquiry has been used for the generation of primary data. It has used quantitative data to buttress the argument for the percentage of response towards the decline and inclination towards CAD. The data in tabular form are collected through the schedule. The response of 125 respondents was recorded with the help of the schedule. The response was collected from the urban areas of the Bhadohi Municipal area of the block Bhadohi in Bhadohi district in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India. The nature of research is inductive which starts from the collection of data to proceed towards generalisations (Blaikie, 2000). The reason behind the use of inductive logic of inquiry is the nature of production distributed widely in the rural and urban areas of production.

The paper has used case studies as a method for data generation and interview as a tool for data collection. Mitchell (1983) is of the view that ‘case study is not just a narrative account of an event or a series of events but it involves analysis against appropriate theoretical framework or in support of theoretical conclusions’ (as cited in Ahuja, 2010, p. 261). The reason for adopting case study as a method to study the issue is to bring out the micro level insights with the effect of globalisation and to know about the embeddedness of the process of social exclusion in the carpet industry in Bhadohi.

Transformation in the Carpet Industry of Bhadohi

Recently, a technological upgradation in the carpet industry of Bhadohi has taken place because of globalisation. Globalisation has compressed the whole world into a single unit. The spread of knowledge and information has picked up acceleration through the Indian Institute of Carpet Technology (IICT). The

process of carpet production has been upgraded with modern technology in its three stages, viz. nakshakari (traditional designing technique used by the nashakars for making the designs) replaced by computer-aided designing (CAD is new method of designing carpets by professional designers), khaddi (a modern frame used for weaving the carpets by the weavers) used in place of kath (a traditional tool used for weaving the carpets), and bhatta (traditional dyeing technique used by the *rangsaaz*) taken over by boiler dyeing plants (modern technique used by the dyer for dyeing the wool).

This paper, however, exclusively emphasises on the designing sector of the carpet industry of Bhadohi. The traditional method of nakshakari (designing) has been replaced with a modern method of designing, i.e., CAD. The paper aims to examine the transformation of the working structure of Bhadohi's carpet industry to stay ahead in the tough competition faced in the globalised world. To reduce the cost of production and increase its efficiency, the carpet industry of Bhadohi has switched from hiring a large number of labourers to upgrading its technology. The paper also sheds light on the process of skilling, de-skilling, and re-skilling of carpet workers due to the involvement of CAD in the process of carpet production. The exclusion of labours in terms of the redundancy of labour has been analysed as an aftermath of the technological revolution in the carpet industry of Bhadohi.

Traditional Working Structure of Designing Carpets (Nakshakari) Verses New Working Structure of Designing Carpets (CAD)

Working Structure of Nakshakari

A nakshakar (traditional designer) is one who makes designs manually as part of a local network of production. Nakshakars work at their homes with the assistance of painters and tracers involved in the business. In every *mohalla* (locality), there are usually more than ten designing offices. Each nakshakar has an assigned office where he/she collaborates with painters and tracers to form naksha. Women too are employed for the work of painting and tracing from their homes, and paid per square feet of the size of each naksha. A master nakshakar is an expert in making manual designs and directs painters and tracers in the tasks of tracing and painting. Tracers are required for the tracing of the naksha paper, and painters are responsible for painting it. The office of a master nakshakar could either be his/her home or a rented room where they receive orders for designing from the exporters. The naksha prepared by nakshakars, tracers, and painters are passed by

the exporters to their buyers. Before the introduction of the Plowright camera, a master nakshakar would make designing plates for the production of naksha manually with the help of designing plates received from exporters on special order. Designing plates were an additional step in the making of designs, but the Plowright camera has eliminated it, thereby increasing the efficiency of the procedure. Post the introduction of CAD, the work of nakshakars has also been affected severely.

Working Structure of CAD

In the previous section, we have seen the working structure of the nakshakars and gained insights on how designs for carpets were made with the help of tracers and painters over a long period of time, prior to the introduction of CAD. We also learnt about the dominating role of CAD in the carpet industry of Bhadohi and the estrangement of tracers and painters from carpet designing as a consequence of technological revolution. We saw that a solo designer can accurately and efficiently produce a variety of designs as per the demand of the buyer with the help of a computer. Not being traditional nakshakars, CAD operators are professional designers with acquired designing skills from various fashion designing institutes, such as the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT). Inferring from the increasing demand of carpet designing skills through CAD, IICT has recently begun offering diploma courses and workshops to traditional nakshakars to help them acquire the skill of operating technology, as carpet designing is their source of livelihood in an ever-evolving globalised world.

Case Study: I

Wajid Ali was a sixty-five year old Muslim man belonging to the Other Backward Class (OBC) category. He was a traditional manual nakshakar by profession and lived in a *pucca* house. Out of his ten children, four daughters and two sons were married. Two of his sons were employed; while one was engaged in the finishing section of carpet-making, the other son was a labourer in the dyeing section of the carpet industry. Thus, the other seven members were dependent on Wajid's income. Despite being the owner of 685 sq. ft. of land where he lived, he did not have amenities such as a refrigerator, cooler and telephone in his house.

Wajid was a highly skilled and widely acclaimed manual nakshakar. He was honoured with many awards by the Handicraft Ministry and was also applauded by foreigners for his calibre. But soon, he was struck by a shock wave upon

discovering the emerging role of computers in designing: a technique preferred by exporters with increasing global competition in the carpet industry. On the ground level, the reason behind such development was that buyers wanted quick and satisfactory delivery of designs from sellers. The exporters from other countries were immediately able to produce new designs to buyers on their webpage with the help of technology. Computers allowed them to make alterations in the shade and pattern of designs instantly as per order requirements, a feature not possible in manual designing. Thus, Indian exporters began seeking trained designers capable of making designs with the help of CAD to compete in the market. Being a traditional manual nakshakar, Wajid began fearing his survival in the market. The company where he worked was also shut down due to its inability to keep up with the new demands in the global market, due to which he was rendered jobless. At his old age, he neither had the option to labour for any other kind of job nor did he have the calibre to acquire the skill of CAD.

Case Study: II

Iqbal Ahmad Ansari, a sixty year old man, was a painter of naksha. He was a Muslim belonging to the OBC category. He lived in a semi-pucca house with six rooms but did not own any land. He was working in an export company on a monthly salary of INR 5000 for the work of painting. Despite being employed there for twenty-two years, Iqbal was fired from his job as the company's owner was in no need of him and had instead hired a designer equipped with the skill of CAD. This made the painter quite upset and he decided to not pass on the skill of painting to his sons for their financial security as he realised the rapid obsolescence of nakshakari in the future of the carpet industry. He shared that it had been fifteen years since the introduction of CAD technology in the carpet industry of Bhadohi, and despite its limited usage, the technology was being accepted by exporters in an effort to survive in the industry.

As buyers put more pressure on the market, designers had no choice but to resort to the technology of CAD. Thus, the researcher observed that the traditional manual nakshakari has been taken over by CAD.

Case Study: III

Abdul Rashid Ansari was a seventy year old manual nakshakar of carpets. He informed the investigator that he held expertise in the designing of carpets and could make high-quality designs of a variety of carpets such as Persian, Hamdan,

Gabe and Abusan among others. His unique designs were highly in demand and also appreciated by foreign buyers as they visited his house with the purpose of personally instructing the details of their designs of choice. Abdul Rashid added that during the 70s and 80s, the demand for carpets he held expertise in was at peak, but the demand gradually declined as the market went down. Contrary to the earlier trend among buyers of visiting the offices of designers to select designs, the invasion of CAD technology transformed the market by making things convenient for the buyers as designs could be selected and modified online. On the downside, traditional manual designers were pushed into a corner due to the decline in their demand. For this very reason, Abdul Rashid decided against encouraging his son to learn the skill of nakshakari, thereby putting an end to occupational heredity.

Case Study: IV

This was a case study of a twenty-six year old man named Shahanwaz belonging to a backward caste of the Muslim community. With an educational qualification of senior secondary school, Shahnawaz did not want to further his studies as his father could not afford it. Additionally, he also needed to lend a helping hand to his ageing father in earning a livelihood for the family. His father was a manual nakshakar, but owing to the developments in the carpet industry, he had acquired the skill of designing with a computer by taking help from his colleagues. He shared that he had planned to obtain a diploma from IICT, for which he was saving up so that he could be a certified designer of CAD.

Table-I: Responses (in percentage) of different Religions and Castes towards the Decline of Nakshakari

Categories	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Don't Know (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Grand Total (%)
The Hindus	4.44	33.33	15.56	40.00	6.67	100.00
General Caste, Hindus	5.88	41.18	11.76	35.29	5.88	100.00
Backward Caste, Hindus	4.00	32.00	16.00	44.00	4.00	100.00

Scheduled Caste, Hindus	0.00	0.00	33.33	33.33	33.33	100.00
The Muslims	11.39	32.91	5.06	44.30	6.33	100.00
General Caste, Muslims	17.65	23.53	5.88	47.06	5.88	100.00
Backward Caste, Muslims	9.68	35.48	4.84	43.55	6.45	100.00
Grand Total	8.87	33.06	8.87	42.74	6.45	100.00

Source: Karimi, 2016, p. 100

Table-I shows the percentage response for the decline of nakshakari from different religion and caste categories of respondents. In the table, 6.67 per cent of Hindus and 6.33 per cent of Muslims strongly agreed towards the declining scope of nakshakari that point towards inclination of data towards the unemployment for the nakshakars. Out of the respondents, 40 per cent of Hindu and 44.30 per cent of Muslim respondents who agreed that there is a decline towards the market of nakshakari. However, 4.44 per cent of Hindu and 11.39 per cent of Muslim respondents strongly disagree with the idea that there is a decline of employment in the market of nakshakari. On the other hand, there is 33.33 per cent of Hindu and 32.91 per cent of Muslim respondents who disagree that there is a decline in the employment market of nakshakari. There is also 15.56 per cent of Hindu and 5.06 per cent of Muslim respondents who have responded that they do not know whether the employment in the market of nakshakari will remain or not, looking the future scope of the CAD. In totality, 42.74 per cent of the total respondents agreed that there is a decline in the employment market of nakshakari.

Thus, it can be concluded from the above table that indeed it is globalisation that has brought the replacement of employment from the nakshakars to the Computer Aided Designers. It is true that the global dynamics, as pointed by Saskia Sassen (1999), due to which the local mode of production changes, the demands, the needs, the practices and customs get articulated because of the impression they get through ICT. It is the effect of globalisation due to which there is the switch in the Bhadohi Carpet Industry from nakshakari approach of designing to CAD, in

which the chance of getting employment gets lessened due to the less requirement of individual labour.

Table-II: Percent Religion/Caste-wise Response towards the use of CAD

Religion/ Category wise	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Don't Know (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Grand Total (%)
The Hindus	0.00	6.67	6.67	66.67	20.00	100.00
General, Hindus	0.00	0.00	5.88	64.71	29.41	100.00
Backward Caste, Hindus	0.00	8.00	8.00	72.00	12.00	100.00
Scheduled Caste, Hindus	0.00	33.33	0.00	33.33	33.33	100.00
The Muslims	3.75	7.50	3.75	63.75	21.25	100.00
General Muslims	5.88	11.76	0.00	70.59	11.76	100.00
Backward Caste, Muslims	3.17	6.35	4.76	61.90	23.81	100.00
Grand Total	2.40	7.20	4.80	64.80	20.80	100.00

Source: Karimi, 2016, p. 98

Table II shows the percentage of religion/caste-wise response for designing with CAD. Out of the respondents, 66.67 per cent of Hindus and 63.75 per cent of Muslims agreed to CAD being a more effective way of designing. 72 per cent of Hindus from Backward Caste categories and 61.90 per cent of Muslims from Backward Caste category agreed that CAD has made the designer more versatile. There is 64.71 per cent of General Hindus and 70.59 per cent of General Muslims who are in the support that CAD has been making the designers more efficient. Among Hindus, there are 33.33 per cent of respondents from Scheduled Caste category who agree that CAD has made the designers more resourceful. However, there is also 6.67 per cent of Hindu respondents and 7.50 per cent of Muslim

respondents who disagree over the idea that CAD has made the designers more versatile.

Conclusion

Globalisation has brought a challenge in the local market of the carpet industry at Bhadohi in an attempt to survive in the global market. The cottage industry of carpets in Bhadohi, with changing time, has changed its method of production from home of the weavers to the in-house premise of the exporters. The paper from the aforementioned case studies and tables has tried to capture the challenges brought about by globalisation in the designing section of the carpet industry. The paper studies the cause-effect relationship between technological developments in the carpet industry and unemployment of the nakshakars (designers), painters, and tracers at the local market. The technological revolution in the carpet industry of Bhadohi has led to a decline in the number of labourers and nakshakars employed for designing. In this paper, redundancy of labour has been highlighted as one of the indicators of the embeddedness of social exclusion of traditional craftspeople in the carpet industry of Bhadohi. The aforementioned four case studies have depicted how the work of nakshakari has been transformed because of the abandonment of the traditional method of producing designs with the help of paint and brush by employing tracers, painters and nakshakars. It has brought down the local market producing carpet designs, i.e., traditional nakshakari which has now been overtaken by the changing methods of producing designs such as computer-aided designing (CAD). Due to this, various nakshakars, painters and tracers have become unemployed and their children are no longer eager to inherit their parents' traditional skills. Thus, the skill of nakshakari is on the verge of extinction.

Globally scaled dynamics such as the global capital markets are embedded in subnational sites and transformed between these scaled practices and organisational forms. The importance of strategic places such as global cities in capturing global processes and the possibility of localities interacting directly with global networks are cases that problematise the notion of a global national duality. This depicts that the global market, directly or indirectly, heavily impacts the local market. The global market and its cut-throat competition demand a change at the local level for survival of carpet producers. Therefore, in the local production system, the exporters have adapted to CAD in place of nakshakari. In this new form of economy, where distance does not matter between the customer

and the buyer, the entire world has been compressed. This has its impact upon the owners of the means of production and consequentially there is a shift from employment to unemployment in the form of skilling and de-skilling, and then inclination towards the adaptation of a new skill in the form of re-skilling. But this new method of producing designs, i.e., CAD, does not require tracers and painters who have been rendered idle permanently. Economic restructuring affects the kinds of jobs available, the rates of pay, incomes and lifestyles of people in places. A study in UK shows that the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism and beyond has taken place within a neo-liberal pathway and that has been associated with rising income and earnings inequalities, an increase in poverty, especially child poverty, increasing social polarisation and social exclusion (Perrons, 2004). Technological upgradation of Bhadohi's carpet industry has created redundancy of labour in the face of increasing the efficiency of work and decreasing the cost of production to save time in the production process.

Thus, as we have discussed, globalisation has brought changes in the process of production, whether it is for the circulation of goods or for the management in production. It has not only brought competition at the global level by introducing a network of production, but has also transformed production at the micro level. Globalisation has introduced competition in the labour market for the survival of carpet producers. Due to this very reason, micro-level labourers like nakshakars are competing in the global labour market with their traditional designing skills. Because of the space of flows in the era of informationalism, the local labourer is facing twice the competition, once from traditional designers, and again from the automated labourers or designers. It was rightly discussed above by Saskia Sassen (1991) that the micro level of production is decided by the macro network of decision implementation who are far away through the information communication technology. The same chronology can be seen in the carpet industry in the case of unemployment of nakshakars which is the consequence of fulfilling the challenges imposed by global buyers.

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Commentary: Death without Dignity: An Exploration of Dying and Mourning during a Pandemic

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**Death without Dignity:
An Exploration of Dying and Mourning during a Pandemic**

--- Anushka Sinha

Commentary

At the time of this writing, the global death toll for COVID-19 has exceeded thirty-five lakhsⁱ with India accounting for several thousands of those deaths. Before moving further, it is useful to acknowledge that the discursive limits of COVID-19 fatalities should be extended to accommodate not just infected individuals but also those who could not make it to the hospitals, death by suicide in fear of disease contraction, domestic abuse victims and a bulk of the migrant population who have succumbed under extraneous conditions. While that may look like an incalculable unit of measure, it is worth noticing how the pandemic has become a springboard for mass suffering and loss of life to dominate everyday language and social order. Consequently, bio-political registers of living and dying bring to fore important dimensions of our existing cultural scripts of grievability, a concept put forward by Butler (2015), along with the extent of bureaucratic control over funerary practices. As the government scrambles to draw up fresh guidelines and videos of dead bodies being tugged, hurled and discarded in multiple Indian districts are circulated on social media (Reuters, 2021), we are obliged to reflect on the deceased as a site of inquiry in contemporary times.

Death is and has always been equal parts biological and social. So, it is no surprise that the meaning-making processes around it have also fluctuated according to systems of morality, religion, inclusion and exclusion. In India, rhetoric around death is markedly different, with contemplations on the finitude of life sometimes taking an overtly spiritual character. However, with respect to death, resorting to the tired binary of the Western world's clinical attitude and our proclivity towards all things sacred would be an oversimplification. In the fullness of time, matters relating to death – its sight, smell and significance have come to be appropriated by the vocabulary of modern medicine. Gorer (1955) found that this development is owed in part to public health interventions that increased life-expectancy and made dying a far less visible phenomenon, except in wars and horror stories. Another aspect of this discourse pertains to 'good' and 'bad' deaths in palliative care management, which also forms the cornerstone of philosophical and religious life in our society. It regards 'good' deaths as characterised by negligible physical discomfort and dying in an intimate environment, preferably one's home, surrounded by loved ones, whereas 'bad' deaths are prolonged, painful and lonely (Semino, Demjen & Koller, 2014).

In this context, I am going to outline the multi-layered complexities presented by dying and grieving at this moment in history where a combination of state excesses, strict containment measures and pleas of social distancing from healthcare professionals leave little space for mourning, let alone post-death ceremony. I hope to be guided by theories on bio-power propounded by Foucault (2008) and necro-politics by Achille Mbembe (2011) to interpret the reconfigured boundaries of life and death while attempting to situate them in the political, cultural and scientific debates of post-pandemic India.

Death as a Possibility for More Death

One of the many indignities of dying during COVID-19 has been the fact that it now increases the odds of other deaths, if viral transmission isn't curbed by safe disposal of bodies. Since the dying body is a site of contagion, even relatives are not allowed to be by the death-bed. The person is divorced from all kin-based attachment and this gets carried over to the performance of last rites as well. As Solomon and Buchbinder (2020) have pointed out, facilitating hundreds of funerals with limited sociability posits a challenge both at the level of labour and logistic. In anticipation, funeral parlours across the nation have been sanitised, large congregations have been prohibited and special areas have been allotted for COVID-19 deaths. Despite this, multiple narratives have emerged from the capital city of New Delhi indicating harassment of family members at the hands of local authorities while obtaining funeral passes and permission letters (The Print, 2020.) This exemplifies how policies that are reinforced for effective administration of mass-produced death can circumvent human rights and crystallise into yet another form of violation. As the state struggles to respond to the challenges posed by egregious health systems and economic precarity; negotiation of necro-power, i.e. who gets to live, who gets to die and how they get to do it often remains neglected.

With funerals and burials stripped down to a calculus and the bereaved left to cope with the profound ethical implications of these changes, grief and grievability too have found new conduits of articulation, often determined by the economic logic of consumption, efficiency and capital accumulation. Take for example, the case of Maharashtra, which has the highest number of cases in India as recorded on 26 April, 2021 (Deccan Herald, 2021). Funeral homes and mortuaries in Mumbai have found themselves overworked, and stringent checks have been placed wherein families cannot touch a loved one, and all rituals have to be performed with barest minimum human-to-human contact. In such a situation, many are conducting funerals over video calls and live streams with still others dedicating mobile-apps to become a one-stop solution to their woes. Recently, a Pune based tech start-up announced its plan to assist the families of both COVID and non-COVID victims in funeral preparations (Press Trust of India, 2020), as more and more people started to feel overwhelmed by the red tape involved. Statistical

enumerations aside, capital has reached all facets of birth and death in a ubiquitous manner through technologies of power and while this is by no means a post-COVID novelty, heightened risk of mortality has differentially exposed and intensified the exclusionary origins of which deaths are grievable and which are not.

Unwitnessed, Unritualised: Dying in the New Normal

Defining what constitutes the terminology of death has a long-standing trajectory and an entire body of literature bears witness to this. Everything from wills, legal records, art and folklore have been examined by social scientists to better comprehend the dubbing of deaths as good or bad as well as the relativistic nature of these assumptions. The earliest credit of having done this rather successfully goes to historian Philippe Aries who in his book *Western Attitudes Toward Death* (1974) traced the various circumstances of death in the English-speaking, Western world for the past 1500 years and the cultural norms surrounding it. He observes how death in the hospital is in and of itself a solitary and cruel act but acknowledges that in the last half of the 20th century, there have been renewed efforts to construct alternative frameworks for end of life experiences. Previously, death and dying has been understood merely as a cessation of physiological processes to the complete exclusion of all psychological and spiritual aspects, resulting in the notion that hospitals often ignored patient and family wishes and therefore became sites of ‘bad’ death. In response to this, Europe and the U.S.A. saw a counter-culture hospice movement in the 1960s and 1970s, and according to Steinhauser and Tulsky (2015), this was led primarily by those who worked in palliative care. The idea was to improve the quality of death and provide ‘good’ deaths with a multi-dimensional model that would not only include medical and nursing techniques of pain mitigation, but also leave time for internal conflict resolution and commiseration from family and friends.

Although there is a lot of empirical work on this, most studies have been conducted with Caucasian subjects and failed to account for the cultural variations regarding death and dying in other parts of the world. Studies on homes, hospitals and hospice settings in India that open up to the imminent sociological approaches toward death have been few and far between, but some scholars like Chopra Chatterjee and Sengupta (2007) have in fact tried to locate ‘Indic approaches to the art of dying’ in a global milieu. Interestingly, even within these studies, the uncritical conflation of India with Hindu religious tenets brings to bear the tension surrounding religious pluralism.

Nevertheless, centuries of plagues and epidemics have set in motion a good deal of research on the principles enshrined in medical nosology and associated spiritual practices. The present crisis builds on that and produces a powerfully modernist discourse of self-identity predicated on risk-

assessment. As COVID-19 induced directives like 6-feet distance, face-masks, sanitisers, etc. become part of quotidian life, we must now look into whether it is feasible any longer to aspire for the standard of ‘good’ death and how it will alter the contours of mourning hereafter.

Firstly, it is worth reiterating that many of these deaths, usually taking place in ICUs, have not only been lonely and painful but also untimely. It is clear from global trends that the disease may be fatal for the elderly but it is not exactly pardoning the young. Data shared by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare at the twenty-fourth high-level committee meeting shows that India’s younger population, aged between 15-44 years and belonging to high disease-burden states, are now at an increased risk of contracting and succumbing to COVID-19 (Mint, 2021). Further, along with the doing away of memorial gatherings, strain on workers in healthcare programs and shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) means neither science nor religion can work to provide satisfactory legitimations of death. This is of course not inherently malevolent, but it is expected to create long-term duress on our social cohesion which is anchored by beliefs in filial piety and community-based mediation. As an addendum to this, it is perhaps worth our while to remember that even though hospital deaths can be alienating, the presupposition of home as a space that integrates the fullest expression of personhood and is consequently the preferred place of death often disregards the abandonment and violence one might face within it. In fact, it has been argued by contemporary scholars of death like Renske (2020) that idealisation of any particular place of death and manner of dying should be avoided because it fails to take cognisance of the highly subjective and temporal nature of such things.

Recasting Bio-politics

In a world where we are distanced from most forms of sociality, discursive representations of death can help us to understand it as part of a broader scope of things that go beyond individual biographies as well as open up more avenues of investigation. By now it is evident that the uneven hierarchies of power that have been further compounded in the wake of COVID-19 also inform the praxis of death. Yet, most of the research has focused on the anatomo-clinical predictors of it, completely ignoring the unique ways in which death is produced, normalised and invisibilised during a pandemic. This represents a possibility for social sciences to move beyond disciplinary silo and examine the taken-for-grantedness of our value systems vis-à-vis dying and grieving. Here, grief should be understood not as an individual and emotional response to a tragedy but as a political act that acknowledges and remembers the suffering of the body. This is not to ignore the already intersecting axes of inequality in the country, namely class, caste, gender, sexual orientation and their expanding relevance during a pandemic, but to point out that the borders dividing normal from pathological, hygienic from polluted, and alive from dead are now more impermeable.

Surely, the nexus of government and private capital has had a role to play in this by invoking a language of risk to justify everything from police brutality to data surveillance; but the ideological machinery cannot function without a statistically produced imagined community of people who not only rely on authorities to safeguard their lives but are also ready to exercise self-discipline. Without losing the specificity of its meaning, it is then possible to draw upon the Foucauldian treatise of power and argue that when people are willing to surrender individual freedom to the state for collective welfare, bio-politics and governmentality find renewed validation. To be clear, epidemiological contention and its impact on life and death manifests in a new kind of regime that is marked by clandestine forms of everyday violence. It is too early to provide a conclusive opinion on the lifespan of COVID-19 and whether or not it is something we will have to learn to live with, but in a very short period of time it has driven cracks into our dominant order, forcing us to imagine a transformative politics of living and dying.

Notes:

ⁱData released by World Health Organisation COVID-19 dashboard as at 3:44 p.m. CEST, 5th April, 2021. <https://covid19.who.int/>

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Commentary: Gujarat Riots (2002): Role of Governmental and Non-Governmental Commission

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**Gujarat Riots (2002):
Role of Governmental and Non- Governmental Commissions**

--- Ramandeep Kaur

Commentary

The preeminent leader of the Indian independence movement, and the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi once said, 'I would say that Hindus and Muslims are the two eyes of mother India. Just as the trouble in one eye affects the other too, similarly, the whole of India suffers when either Hindu or Muslim suffer' (Reddy & Nusserwanji, 1969, p. 56). It is a strange quirk of destiny that a major communal trouble in India happened in Gujarat, the home state of Gandhi. Gujarat seems to have totally failed to learn anything from the teachings of Gandhi, and we all know that in Gujarat, Hindu-Muslim conflict reached the peak in 2002.

It is necessary to look into the past to understand any event fully. Just a cursory glance at the past history of communal riots in Gujarat, one would fully comprehend the communal nature of Gujarat and 2002 riots. Gujarat's communal riots history started in 1969 from Ahmadabad after which, riots recurred in 1985, 1986, during Babri Masjid demolition and after 1992-93 and in 1999, etc. These events throw ample light on the destructive outcome of the communal malevolence in its varied form. This horrifying virus touched the devastating dimensions during 2002 Gujarat riots that pushed the people towards a holocaust.

The story of 2002 holocaust starts from Godhra. A tragic incident of an overcrowded train Sabarmati Express occurred at about one kilometer away from Godhra railway station, in which fifty eight passengers, who were returning from Ramjanmabhumi temple building campaign, Ayodhya, were burnt alive (Engineer, 1990, p. 2). It is still a mystery as to what really happened at Godhra on the 27th of February, 2002. No one knows as to who set fire to the S-6 compartment of Sabarmati Express or whether it was an accidental fire. However, it was assumed by the BJP government that Muslims living in the locality near Godhra railway station deliberately set fire to it to kill the *Karsevaks*. The BJP leaders including the Home Minister L.K. Advani blamed the ISI-Pakistani intelligence service.

The Godhra train tragedy soon turned into a state-wide communal violence. Gujarat became a communal cauldron. A large scale communal violence against the Muslim community shocked the nation. 16 of Gujarat's 24 districts were engulfed in the organised armed mob attacks on Muslims. Over 2000 people were killed in the violence. The shrines, properties and businesses

belonging to the Muslim community were systematically razed to the ground. The situation of Gujarat was compared to Nazi Germany (Rao & Elst, 2003, p. 171). The 2002 riots in Gujarat have created deep scars in the already fragile relations between the Hindus and the Muslims, which are very difficult to heal. These riots have resulted in near complete schisms of two communities and even villages in many parts have not remained untouched by this scourge. The forms and modalities of transaction, associated with the delivery and receipt of services at different levels have seemingly got communalised.

In the wake of the Gujarat genocide, many masqueraders were laid bare one after the other. The main instigators of these riots were presumably the powerful people in the hierarchy of Hindutva ideology as well as in the instrumentalities of governance. Men with inbred aversion and those that fed on lies, gossip and half-truth were let free to have a field day and avenge themselves on the poor, despairing, disconsolate and tearful minority. Since then it has been a dreadful silence on the part of the victims. The sufferers have ended up in ghettos. Fear is deeply engraved in their hearts and minds. They state, directly or indirectly, that there is a haunting fear of a replay. The aftermath of the holocaust has been sickening like no other. The cries of pain and anguish have gone hoarse. Reports, complaints, enquiries, trials are all struck in the labyrinths of the courts. Justice is a far cry and a wishful thing.

The rage and the anger of the media reports regarding the horrific details of the riots forced human rights observers and well-meaning people to raise their voice against the atrocities committed. Subsequently, many human rights organisations and highly independent fact finding missions visited the riot affected areas. These different bodies submitted their reports after conducting thorough investigation by visiting the affected areas and meeting the suffering people. Almost all the reports conclusively point to the same narrative of apathy of the administration to arrest the lawlessness by allowing the ascendancy of thugs and indirectly supporting the dirty political games.

Governmental and Non- Governmental Commissions:

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

NHRC submitted its report on Gujarat violence of 2002, on May 31, 2002. The Commission pointed out the violation of Article 21 of Constitution and other fundamental rights to life, liberty, equality and dignity (Engineer, 2003, p. 281). The state government and its officials violated the provisions of Indian Penal Code, Code of Criminal Procedure, provisions of maintenance of Public Order and Tranquility, the circulars of Home Ministry on maintenance of communal harmony, issued in 1997, and recommendations of Second Police Commission on maintenance of communal peace (ibid., p. 282). The Commission alleged political interference in

the investigating process and also blamed the state government for not being able to identify the culprits in cases of violations in rich urban areas. The Commission was also scathing in its observations regarding the blatantly discriminatory governance displayed by the government of the day – differential rates of compensation and an obdurate refusal to visit the relief camp (1,68,000 persons were forcibly displaced because of the violence and arson) where innocent members of the minority community were housed having been made to ‘pay’ for the ‘heinous’ crime at Godhra (Setalvad, 2013, p. 22). The former Chief Justice, J.S. Verma, who headed the NHRC said,

The Gujarat carnage was nothing short of war in terms of suffering undergone by the affected people. How is it different from war? Are their sufferings any less in war? In war people die while fighting, in Gujarat, innocent and helpless men, women and children, were taken out of their homes and burnt alive for no fault of theirs (Times of India, 2002, August 5).

Human Rights Watch (HRW)

HRW is an international non-governmental organisation that conducts research and advocacy on human rights. In late April 2002, HRW produced a report on communal violence in Gujarat titled, *We have no order to save you: state participation and complicity in communal violence in Gujarat* (Bahl, 2003, p. 174). The basic thrust of the report was, as its author Samita Narula states, ‘What happened in Gujarat was not a spontaneous uprising, it was a carefully orchestrated attack against the Muslims. The attacks were planned in advance and organized with extensive participation of police and state government officials’ (ibid., p. 185). The report stated that the attacks were ‘state sponsored’ and were planned ‘well in advance of Godhra incident’. Virtually, all blame for Gujarat violence was placed on the Sangh Parivar and the BJP government. However, HRW had made many recommendations to state government of Gujarat and central government of India to provide justice to the victims (Dyal, 2002, pp. 354-357).

Concerned Citizens Tribunal – Gujarat 2002

The Concerned Citizens Tribunal, headed by retired Justice of Supreme Court of India V.R. Krishna Iyer with P.B. Swant and Hosbet Suresh as members, observed that the BJP government was responsible for genocide in Gujarat. This report clearly established that Chief Minister Narendra Modi was the chief architect of all that happened in Gujarat after the Godhra train incident on February 27, 2002. The state government under Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, took an active part in leading and sponsoring the violence against the minorities in Gujarat. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) control key functionaries in the state, the Chief Minister himself being an RSS *pracharak*. In the report, it

was clearly written right in the beginning, ‘The post Godhra carnage in Gujarat was an organized crime perpetrated by state’s Chief Minister and his government’ (Concerned Citizen Tribunal, 2002, p. 183).

People’s Union Democratic Rights (PUDR)

PUDR, one of India’s premier human rights organisations, in its report (May, 2002) titled, *Marro, Kaapoo, Baaro: State, Society and Communalism in Gujarat* observed, ‘The whole intent of pogroms has been to reduce Muslims to second class citizens in their own country’. The civil liberties of people were violated. There was absence of rule of law and the state connived in this. Alternately, the BJP state government did not allow the Gujarat police to function properly. The Muslims were killed inside the government and the official buildings and the police killed those who were being attacked by rampaging mobs. FIRs were not properly written. There existed a pre-planned strategy. The report also provides detailed lists of people, named as organisers and attackers. Many of these are functionaries of ruling party, the BJP, VHP and Bajrang Dal. It demanded the dismissal of Narendra Modi government in Gujarat (Gupta, 2004, p. 304).

UK Mission Report

The British High Commission reported to the British Foreign Office in London that the continued violence in Gujarat was aimed at removing Muslim influence from parts of the state. This report damaged the international image of India by stating that post-Godhra the violence in Gujarat was pre-planned and if Sabarmati Express tragedy hadn’t happened, another flashpoint would have been created to justify pre-mediated violence as reaction. Extremely critical of Sangh Parivar’s role, the report identifies the VHP and the Bajrang Dal as the main instruments, for realising the ghettoisation of the Muslims. The report also observed that in some areas, police had been specifically instructed not to act, while in some others, the force was communally polarised and looked the other way, without any prompting by political bosses (Sharma, 2002, pp. 182-83).

Forum Against Oppression of Women (FAOW)

During the violence, women were subjected to rape and other sexual harassment. Different women rights groups came together as an international initiative for justice in Gujarat and after thorough investigation came out with a report of *Forum Against Oppression of women*, Mumbai, 2003. The report points out the deliberate shaming, especially of girls and women, by raping them publicly or in front of other family members (Puniyani, 2010, p. 2). VHP leaflets, openly circulating in Gujarat, signed by the state general secretary, Chinubai Patel, promised, ‘We will cut them and their blood will flow like rivers. We will kill Muslims the way we destroyed Babri

Masjid'. In the course of this violence, women's private parts were mutilated, weapons introduced into them and even the abdomen of a woman was cut to throw the baby in to fire.

Fact Finding Mission of Sahmat

A Fact-finding Mission by the Sahmat organisation, headed by Dr. Kamal Mitra Chenoy, concluded that from the evidence the violence was more akin to ethnic cleansing or a pogrom rather than an instance of communal violence as they would usually be defined. The report said that the violence surpassed other periods of communal violence such as in 1969, 1985, 1989 and 1992, not only in the amount of lives lost, but in the savagery of the attacks (Chenoy, 2002). These riots can be described as ethnic cleansing. The partisan role of the state, the government, police, civil administration, the ruling party, the VHP, the Bajrang Dal and the rest of the Sangh brigade, all point towards this fact of ethnic cleansing being state sponsored.

G.T. Nanavati Commission

This Commission was set up in 2002 by the Gujarat Government to probe both, the fire in Sabarmati Express at Godhra on February 27, 2002 and post-Godhra riots in the state. This Commission submitted one part of the investigation on September 18, 2008 (The Tribune, 2008). The Commission attributes the fire in Sabarmati Express coach no. S-6 to be a pre-planned conspiracy involving 'some individuals'.

The Nanavati Commission report is diametrically opposed to the U.C. Banerjee Commission report, 2005 and Gujarat's Forensic Science Laboratory on the incident of Godhra. The Nanavati Commission report makes it clear that, 'there is absolutely no evidence to show that either Chief Minister or any other Minister in his Council of Ministers or police officers had played any role in Godhra incident'. It gave a clean chit to the government or Narendra Modi on what followed (Indian Express, 2008, p. 8). The commission took twenty four extensions and the second part of the report on post-Godhra violence was submitted on November 18, 2014. The report runs in over 2000 pages and is contained in nine volumes. The report was not made public (Indian Express, 2014).

About Nanavati Shah Commission Dionne, Bunsha said that,

Imagine that you're Narendra Modi. After the riots, the heat is on you, the nation and the world are pushing for your dismissal. They accuse you of being biased during the violence. What do you do? Easy – appoint a Judicial Commission that can't punish, and can only recommend action. Restrict the Commission's terms of reference to only Godhra incident. Then, if human rights activists kick up a fuss,

agree to include the post Godhra violence. Anyway the Commission can't do much, but at least you will have shown the world that you believe in justice as long as it's in your favours. (Bunsha, 2006, p. 159)

Jitubhai Randya, owner of Newsplus channel and also a local Shiv Sena leader, said that, 'this Nanavati Commission is *banavati* (fake) Commission (Bunsha, 2006, p. 161).

Conclusion

So many Commission and Human Rights groups compiled citizen's reports on the extent of violence and its brutality. Almost all pointed to the state government's inability to control the rioters and its apathy in bringing the perpetrators to book (Yagnik & Shath, 2005, p. 286). The BJP government at both the centre and the state shrugged off the criticism as efforts by the 'outsiders' to tarnish the image of Gujarat. Such forces that operate overtly or covertly, impact the social fabric of the life grievously. The Gujarat violence evoked strong response amongst different segments of Indian Society. Actually social reality consists of what people think, believe and experience in a given social situation. The feelings of hatred and suspicion run deep down the society fracturing and fragmenting. The barriers that thus come up between the different communities are not only a setback to the human resources and economy but also violate the human rights, impact the minds of the people leaving them emotionally broken and insecure.

Yet in eighteen years, no accused has been punished so far. When Zakia Nasim Jafri registered her complaint, she said in an interview, 'We can't wait for Judicial Commission report to go on endlessly and become a convenient escape route for government to avoid taking action' (Mukherjee & Sharma, 2002, p. 7). As in previous communal massacres (1984 anti-Sikh riots and 1992-93 Mumbai riots) too, the main culprits escaped punishment. However, Ranganath Mishra Commission and Nanavati Commission reports on 1984 and Shri Krishna Commission report on 1992-93 were released, but no action was taken against the culprits. The first thing is that such Commissions take a long time for investigation and secondly, judicial Commissions have only the power to recommend to the government to take action. They cannot order for any legal action.

The communal riots in Gujarat raise three major questions for the State. First, guarantee and protection of right to life and personal liberties and of properties of the citizens of India by the State machinery; second, provision of immediate relief to the victims and their full rehabilitation in case of an untoward loss to their properties; and third, securing justice for the victims by bringing to book and punishing all those involved in the carnage. These three basic rights of the

citizens are not to be doled out in charity by those in power but are the solemn constitutional obligations of the State in India, in the absence or violation of which the State ceases to be State.

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Book Review: *The Misinformation Age: How False Beliefs Spread* (2019) by
Cailin O' Connor and James Owen Weatherall

Author(s): Manoj Kumar Jena

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BOOK REVIEW

Cailin O' Connor and James Owen Weatherall, *The Misinformation Age: How False Beliefs Spread*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2019, 266 pp., ₹ 3,387 (hardcover). ISBN: 978-0-300-234015.

--- Manoj Kumar Jena

This is quite an interesting book about truth, knowledge, science, evidence and fake news written by two acclaimed scholars, Cailin O' Connor and James Owen Weatherall. They argue: How do we form beliefs – especially false ones? How do they persist? Why do they spread? Why are false beliefs so intransigent, even in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary?

In this context, they argue that we live in an age of misinformation – an age of spin, marketing, and downright lies. Much of this misinformation is in the form of propaganda. They further raise the question: how can propagandists override the weight of evidence from both direct experience and careful scientific inquiry to shape our beliefs?

They initiate the discussion in this volume with reference to a 14th century text which was a travel memoir of Sir John Mandeville and had circulated among the learned of Europe. Mandeville, the text claimed, had travelled through Asia Minor, northern Africa, and into India and had experienced many things unknown in Western Europe. Among these wonders was an Indian tree bearing gourd-like fruit, within which could

be found tiny lambs, complete with flesh and blood. This lamb plant called Vegetable Lamb of Taratary was popular in the medieval European imagination. But it took nearly four centuries after Mandeville's writings appeared for European botanists and biologists to recognise the Vegetable Lamb as a myth. One can understand how Mandeville's fake memoirs that led to the widespread acceptance of the Vegetable Lamb, fake news and fake science remain crucial sources of false beliefs.

The argument in this book is in fact relevant for contemporary social order, where fake news has taken a new critical shape in our everyday life. In the context of fake news, they argue that even if fake news is not new, it can now spread as never before. This makes it far more dangerous. But does anyone actually believe the outrageous stories that get posted, shared, and liked on social media? The fake news has a long history, particularly in the United States. Fake news has been with us for a long time. And yet something has changed gradually over the past decade. They are also of the belief that social factors are essential to understanding the spread of beliefs, including especially false beliefs. They

maintained that perhaps false beliefs are the result of cognitive biases or blind spots, quirks of human psychology that prevent us from drawing reliable inferences from our experience. Or else perhaps they come from a lack of experience or poor education. Or maybe people with false beliefs are simply too stupid to see the truth, even with the evidence right before their eyes.

The argument in this book draws on historical (and recent) examples of false beliefs that have spread through communities of people trying to learn about the world. Furthermore, they assert that we also need to understand how our networks of social interaction have changed, and why those changes have affected our ability, as a group, to form reliable beliefs; how the mass media propaganda has long been a tool of governments to control their own citizens and to influence the political fortunes of their competitors, both domestically and abroad. From political propaganda, to politically motivated media, to scientific research shaped by industrial interests – these play an important role in the origins and spread of false beliefs.

This book comprises of four chapters: the first chapter is about *What is Truth?*; second chapter is on *Polarization and Conformity*; third chapter is on *The Evangelization of Peoples*; and fourth chapter is about *The Social Network*.

In chapter one about *What is Truth ?*, the authors have initiated the discussion with the

question of what is truth and is its relationship with science and scientific knowledge, which is more precisely an analysis of scientific discovery and the notion of truth and false. In the context of scientific truth, they assert that the real threat to science is not the ways in which it is influenced by its cultural context, nor the philosophical and social critiques that draw those influences out. Rather, the real threat comes from those people who would manipulate scientific knowledge for their own interests or obscure it from the policy makers who might act on it. They also discussed how groups of scientists have come to hold false beliefs, and how those beliefs have persisted even as compelling evidence of their falsehood has surfaced.

The second chapter in the context of *Polarization and Conformity*, they opine that the effects of social engagement on our belief and behaviour are myriad and complex. Our social networks are our best source of new evidence and beliefs. But they also open us up to negative social effects. When we try to conform to others in our social networks, we sometimes ignore our best judgment when making decisions, and, in doing so, halt the spread of true belief. This chapter has also analysed about science, scientists and their belief in the light of new evidence. They argue on the question of polarisation and conformity. They further contend that polarisation-like behaviour can arise for very different reasons, which makes it especially hard to evaluate possible interventions. In the conformity case,

disturbing people's social networks and connecting them with different groups should help rehabilitate those with false beliefs. But when people polarise because of mistrust, such an intervention would generally fail – and it might make polarisation worse.

Chapter three regarding *The Evangelization of Peoples* sets up the discussion with a story published in Readers Digest about 'Cancer by the Carton' highlighting the relation between cigarette smoking and cancer. In this context, the authors considered the idea of propaganda about 'The Tobacco Strategy' and how it works, how industry is involved in propaganda, far beyond advertising, and including influence and information campaigns addressed at manipulating scientific research, legislation, political discourse, and public understanding. They further argue that selective sharing and industrial selection can produce a powerful synergy. Propaganda strategies involve the manipulation of evidence.

Chapter four on *The Social Network* initiates the discussion of fake news stories in the U.S. In recent times, fake news is spreading like wildfire and it has taken a precarious turn. One natural response to fake news is to

say that social media sites, web search providers, and news aggregators have a responsibility to identify fake news and stop it.

The authors assert that our social structures have shifted dramatically away from community-level, face-to-face interactions and toward online interactions. Online social media such as Facebook and Twitter dramatically increase the amount of social information we receive and the rapidity with which we receive it, giving social effects an extra edge over other sources of knowledge. They sense that journalists, in order to minimise the social spread of false belief, need to hold themselves to different standards when writing about science and expert opinion. Social media sites should remain vigilant about stopping the spread of fake news on their platforms or, at the very least, try to ensure that such 'news' is clearly labeled as such. They further argue that we have more information than ever before, and it is the abundance of information, shared in novel social contexts, that underlies the problems we face. They underline that it is essential that our policy decisions be informed by the best available evidence. On the whole, it is a wonderful book for the scholars of Sociology and Social science in general.

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Book Review: *Rethinking Revolution: Soyabean, Choupals, and the Changing Countryside in Central India* (2016) by Richa Kumar

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BOOK REVIEW

Richa Kumar, *Rethinking Revolution: Soyabean, Choupals, and the Changing Countryside in Central India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016, xvii+397 pp., ₹ 875 (hardcover). ISBN: 0-19-946533-9.

--- Anand Ranjan

Richa Kumar's ethnographic account of the village of Ranipura and the nearby town of Dhar in Madhya Pradesh provides a vehement critique of technological determinism and insists upon a methodological shift away from the realm of scientific explications of social world. The primary motive for choosing Ranipura and Dhar as a field of enquiry rested on the fact that it was home to the first ever project that sought to use information and communication technology (ICT) to empower farmers by providing them with information on market prices, government schemes, agricultural technologies, health and so on. She started her project in December 2002 and January 2003 when she visited Malwa to study the eChoupals to gauge their financial sustainability and possibilities of empowering farmers through the use of ICT. She then went back to Dhar again in 2005 to trace the course of agrarian change and came up with interesting insights which are summarised in the sections that follow. She embarked on multiple visits with her final visit on April 2012.

Her primary focus was to study the underlying social relationships and historical

forces of rural Malwa over the last forty years that have been made invisible in the singular narratives of revolution; and which in turn, shaped their lived experiences. Furthermore, in each chapter, she clearly narrates her own immersion in the field of enquiry. In several instances, the author's own intervention shaped the course of conversation and made subtle differences in the lives of especially women. Note that, women were considered to have a lower social status than men in Ranipura. Yet, the author's intervention and recommendations were prioritised. This signifies the strength of the author's own positionality: an educated woman from a premier American university.

The author engaged in participant observation; and drafted both structured and unstructured interviews to focus on the quality of information gathered, instead of quantity. However, she initially encountered situations where the respondents felt more comfortable with structured questionnaires since they are accustomed to frequent questioning by 'experts' from all around. Moreover, she also suggests that her connection to reputed persons in their

respective fields in Dhar, elevated her social status to such an extent that all resources were readily accessible. She made sure that she was 'accepted' by the people of Ranipura and Dhar and hence, engaged herself in the domestic chores of the respondents that she visited. Her primary interests were the bullock farmers and not necessarily tractor farmers. She focused upon a plurality of castes, average population size of 500-600 people, with somewhat distributed landholding and not very rich farmers. While preparing for fieldwork in rural Madhya Pradesh, the author realised that it was one of the most under-studied parts of India. There was no analysis of social, political and cultural transformations associated with, and taking place alongside the introduction of soyabean cultivation in the region. Therefore, this ethnographic account is an attempt to contribute towards filling the gap.

Richa Kumar locates her narrative in the everyday interconnections, interdependencies, struggles between nature and science; and does not reconcile in the ultimate triumph of science over nature. Scientific and technological incursions into agriculture have fostered a myriad of relationships between various actors in the value-chain; and she focuses precisely on such network of relationships. In the modernist perspective, technological developments in agriculture is perceived to be the only harbinger of 'revolution' in the form of green and yellow revolutions; but Kumar, comes out of the trope of

'revolution' to make visible, more intricate socio-political processes which undercut such 'revolutionary' events. The 'yellow revolution' which supposedly gave birth to the 'gold' (soyabean) of Malwa came at the cost of other means of survival for the poor like pulses, sorghum and other such crops. However, soyabean itself was 'revolutionary' with its omnipresence as a 'fuel' for the cattle which was intrinsic to the empowerment of the rural economy of western Madhya Pradesh. However, the strength of the book lies in showing that technology was, indeed, *not* the factor behind any increase in productivity. Rather, there were other important factors for instance, heightened responsiveness of the district administration to complaints and so on.

Kumar situates agriculture as 'performance'. Performance brings in the element of 'chance' or contingency into agriculture, which brings in a degree of 'indeterminacy' into the scenario. The 'universe of chance' is reconciled with the notion of vagaries of nature that technology is unable to 'tame' and it is in fact beyond its capacity to do so. Kumar in her book devotes this 'agency' to environment and the role of geography. The initial success of soyabean in Malwa should be attributed to the very soil, the water, the very ecology of the 'place' that contributed towards the attainment of desired results. In my opinion, the 'revolutionary' moment of the book lies in highlighting the role of natural resources in determining institutional factors. This is also a rupture from those

literatures that argue in favour of a triumph of culture over nature. Nature, in fact could not be triumphed upon as can be seen in this enriching ethnography. At this point, in my opinion, she problematises the very idea of situatedness of 'agency' at one or two locations; rather she suggests that there are 'capillaries' of agency present in the form of various 'actors' within the whole structure. She does not anywhere suggest that it is the farmers alone who bring about agrarian transformation but the entire nexus of human, non-human (not only technology) interaction which becomes inevitable in the process of agricultural development.

She later also points out that this entire wave of technologisation of agriculture had eliminated indigenous forms of knowledge, but there was a resurrection of this knowledge during the problem of water scarcity. The productivity of the land is measured in terms of its yield but not in terms of its erstwhile association with water and water table. The relation between water and soil is such that the more the amount of water in it, greater would be the fertility. But that knowledge is removed from collective memory; and the role of pre-colonial institutions such as religious bodies to ensure security in terms of water have also been lost. The over-determination of the discourse of productivity not only hampered the local ecology and local forms of knowledge, but it also debilitated the sources of 'nutrition' present in Malwa. The productivity discourse discounted the

importance of nutrition in the lives of people.

Additionally, the techno-managerial language facilitates an exhibition of change using its vocabulary like empowerment, productivity information, modern techniques and revolution; and masks the presence of power and oppression in the complexities of network. As Kumar writes, this makes agriculture a part of economic enterprise and veils power which in reality is present in the social, economic, cultural and political forms.

The other significant portions of the book lie in deconstructing the category of 'good farmer'. In the colonial times, farmers were identified as progressive or backward on the basis of their knowledge of agriculture and flexibility towards modern methods of cultivation. In Malwa, as Kumar contends, the good farmer is not a fountain of knowledge but someone who is a 'good student' of those who have knowledge instead of being mere docile bodies. The cultivation of soyabean is significant here because the farmers lacked any knowledge about its cultivation and were completely at the behest of the scientists to make sense of the crop and its methods of cultivation.

Moreover, the question of women labour force and their systemic exclusion from the narrative of the good farmer is also a central concern. Access to the fruits of their labour was mediated through men who controlled cash since soyabean was a cash crop in

contrast to food crops. What does the idea of 'revolution' then entail if it does not contribute to break structural forms of inequalities? The so-called yellow revolution, re-instated the already existent forms of inequalities present in Malwa, be it in terms of gender or caste. As it becomes evident further into the book, Kumar enlightens the reader as to how the very idea of 'good farmer' was less to do with a certain 'artifice' or knowhow and more of a discursive strategy to exclude the lower castes from the products of development.

As Kumar shows in her ethnography that the 'good farmers' strategically constructed the category of 'bad farmer' who mostly belonged to poor and low castes, as farmers who did not have the 'faculty' to adapt to the scientific fervour of the new methods of cultivation as fostered by the growth of soyabean. They used the yardstick of productivity as a tool to judge the incapacity of those farmers who could not produce the estimated output from the land and hence, they good farmers contended that these 'unproductive' farmers should leave cultivation altogether. As is evident, the developmentalist narrative creates wider social gaps in society precisely because the 'resourceful' farmers were able to redirect state facilities towards themselves which made the poor farmers to suffer. Considering this scenario, the question that becomes pertinent is what was 'revolutionary' about the 'yellow revolution'?

The book is rich with several ethnographic evidences which question the narrowness of the analysis based on the capitalist idea of change. One such change requires more attention: the question of labour. Labour is a much-discussed element when it comes to agriculture and the agrarian change. Especially, it is the relationship between the field labourers and their farmer employers that has always caught the attention of the scholarship. In a dedicated chapter to labour, Kumar notes that the earlier studies on the labour focus only the social relations between the owner of the field and the labourer, mostly on the basis of exploitation and alienation from the land. While the exploitation of the farm labour has been the reality, Kumar feels the necessity to see such relations in connection with other non-human agents that have significant role in the entire scenario in which exploitation remains no sole practice but where there is a possibility of agential assertiveness too. In the region of Malwa, the Adivasi farm labourers enter into the network of non-human ecological and economic factors which provide them the agency; and chance to negotiate and demand. Kumar calls this complex/network as 'economy of haste'.

Thus, Richa Kumar refuses to trace social change solely in terms of soyabean's 'yellow revolution'; and instead concentrates on the complementarity of yellow revolution, information revolution, heightened responsiveness of the administration and human-nonhuman interaction in the context of Malwa. Finally,

this book is a delightful depiction through ethnographic research methods how invisible aspects of singular narratives of revolution could be 'visibilized'. Moreover, methodologically what I find significant is the idea of 'social respectability'. Through this idea, Kumar has shown that for an ethnographer, it is essential to immerse and accept the patterns of livelihood where the ethnography is being conducted. In Malwa, the women have a lower social position and public interactions are mostly mediated through the presence of a male; and hence,

Kumar required the constant presence of her male chauffeur and male assistant to approach respondents initially. Then it opened up avenues which were erstwhile inaccessible to her. Besides its methodological excellence, this book is a quintessential read for scholars in the field of rural and agrarian studies as it provides critical lens to interrogate the nexus between social relationships, ecology, and economy by focusing on soyabean cultivation, with its unique biophysical properties.

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