Editor's report

October 2022

It is my pleasure to present the 12th issue of Explorations. The present issue consists of thirteen papers published under the 'Articles' category, one research in progress, and two book reviews.

The first paper, titled ***Negotiating Career, Childlessness and the Demands of Reproductive Technologies: A Study based in India*** by Ruby Bhardwaj, focuses on the lived experiences of childless career women and their decisive engagement with IVF (In-vitro fertilization) to revoke their condition. There is a dearth of sociological literature that approaches ART (Assisted Reproductive Technology) from the perspective of experiential accounts of women, especially in the Indian context. Legal, ethical, and policy issues related to surrogacy form the basis of most studies conducted in India. This study seeks to focus on the pivotal element of all ART interventions i.e. the women whose bodies and minds bear the brunt of childlessness and IVF invasions. Childlessness is often conflated with infertility and motherhood with femininity. The experiential accounts of the women in the study demonstrate their dilemmas, choices, and constraints in engagement with IVF technology.

The second paper, titled ***Analyzing the concept of 'home' from the perspective of the LGBTQIA+ community*** Bristi Sen Benerjee aimed to understand the concept of 'home' and 'homely spaces' from the point of view of individuals not conforming to the hetero-normative order or structure of the society. Given the overt and covert forms of discrimination practiced against people of alternative sexual orientation, sexual minorities face hostile atmospheres within the family by their family members. This article complicates the notion of 'home' as 'safe spaces' from the lived experiences of sexual minorities.

The third paper, titled ***"Making Sense of Collaborative Writing and Co-authorship: Linking Feminist Pedagogy with Praxis***" by Anurekha Chari, is a reflective analysis of the collaborative academic article written by a group of seven students with their teachers on the teacher-student relationship in a university classroom. Using a mixed method, which includes autoethnography, classroom teaching observation, and reflexive notes by student authors, the paper addresses a wide range of issues, which includes, the dominant teaching-learning practices in the classroom; the engagement of the student in the process of knowledge creation; how to creatively engage with feminist pedagogy within university academic institutions and the dynamics of publishing within the academic field that neglect feminist collaborative writings.

The fourth paper, titled ***Community as a Network of Care: Feminist Mothering among the Pnars of Meghalaya*** by Upasana, focuses on motherhood as an institution while searching for feminist subjects among the Pnars in Meghalaya. It offers a critique of the commonsensical readings of motherhood as a patriarchal institution by examining the different forms of lived experiences of mothering in this matrilineal community.

The fifth paper, titled *Gendered Labour Market and Persistent Precarity: A Longitudinal Study of Women Construction Workers* by Kuldeepsingh Rajput, Jagan Karade, and Sakshi Rajput, explores several dimensions of the precarity of migrant women construction workers. Their precarious work in the construction sector functions as the primary contributor to a precarious life. Migrant women in general – and construction workers in particular – are overlooked by urban governance, while development policies have failed to recognize them as productive human resources and important stakeholders in the city's development. Women migrant construction workers are important to the construction sector as they are the ones behind the scenes who provide a major helping hand to the male workers. These women workers have specific precariousness and vulnerabilities that exacerbate their woes and grief.

The sixth paper, titled *Women Entrepreneurs and Their Problems in Nagaland: An Empirical Exploration* **by** Yongkongnukla Ozukum and Biswambhar Panda, analyses the nature and significance of the problems of women entrepreneurs as they pursue their career in entrepreneurship in Nagaland.

The seventh paper, titled *Disappearing Urban Commons and Emerging Public Spaces: A case study of wetlands in Guwahati city, Northeast India* by Natasha Hazarika and Chandan Kumar Sharma, compares wetlands as urban commons in Guwahati city, considered the gateway of the Northeastern region of India. This paper draws on the experience of the wetlands within the city. It discusses the impact of urban planning on them to bring forth the debilitating condition of the city's urban commons. It also elaborates on the process of conversion of urban commons into public spaces and analyses the exclusionary form of governance that emanates from the rubric of urban development for the 'public'.

The eighth paper, titled *Issues and Challenges of Sanitary Workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic in India* by J. Rani Ratna Prabha, G Padmaja, Appa Rao.T, and O. Maruthi discusses the role and responsibilities of sanitary workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. It examines the critical situations of sanitary workers from a global perspective and their work nature as they directly deal with the health and hygiene of society, especially in the urban setup. The study argues that, due to the poor economic status, thousands of families in India are forced to do these menial jobs continuing by generation. The need of the hour is to create awareness about the importance of sanitary workers for a healthy society.

The ninth paper, titled *Caste, Power and Representational Claims in Modern India* by Dhiraj Kumar Nite and Bidhan Chandra Dash article outlines the shifting meanings and modalities, relational and governmental aspects, of caste, power, and representation claims in modern India. Based on the selected publications as means of sociological analysis, the authors highlight the shift from the mobilisation of ranked identities to unranked identities advanced in the Republic of India. These shifts ensured caste as a source of identity remained conspicuously persistent while attenuating as an axis of inequality. Although the constitution outlawed untouchability, to some publicists of social justice, the reservation law, alongside the personal laws, unnecessarily consecrated caste and religion; others maintain that parliamentary democracy brought about an irreversible rupture in the tradition of castes.

The tenth paper, titled *Exploring the Ahom's Assertion of Indigeneity and Demands for Scheduled Tribe Status in Assam* by Hare Krishna Doley**,** examines the Ahom's ongoing

demands for Scheduled Tribe status in Assam. Proliferated in recent years, it has ensued contentious politics associated with redrawing of ethnic boundaries and augmenting political turmoil in the region. Largely related to the indigenous status, such demands entail frequent negotiations with the state over social, cultural, political, and territorial rights, which are intrinsically connected to issues of recognition and entitlements. Given these multiple issues, this paper examines the contemporary nature of the ethnic struggle and traces the historical genealogy of such claims. It specifically looks at All Tai-Ahom Students Union's demands for constitutional identity and means and modes of negotiations with the state. The study argues that cultural elements and genealogy of ethnic groups play significant roles in ascertaining the identity and negotiation processes.

The eleventh paper, titled ***Linguistic Nations and Indian Nationalism: An Exposition of Divergence*** by Abhishek Juneja, attempts to understand two structurally complex and ever-evolving human inventions, linguistic nations and nationalism. It attempts to understand the role of language in constituting a social and political consciousness in humans before it proceeds to explore the trajectories that linguistic and non-linguistic nationalisms have undertaken in South Asian countries.

The twelfth paper, titled ***Monday Morning at School: A Sociological Discourse from Self to Habitus*** *by* Bhavya Kumar, analyses interactions that happen within the classroom of a private school in Kharghar, Navi Mumbai. The private school caters to demography which may be described as a particular section of India's New Middle Class.

The thirteenth paper, titled ***From Preferring to Choosing: Unfolding the School Choice Process among Households in Kerala*** by Sethunath, explores the process of school choice from the perspective of parents in the context of a well-established and inclusive public schooling system in the state of Kerala and critiques the neo-liberal construct of school choice in Indian context as a straightforward selection of superior-quality and cheap private schooling as against poor-quality public schooling. Guided by the *landscape of choice* approach, it proposes that school choice is a complex process through which the parent's preference for a particular type of school gets transformed into the choice of a specific school, mediated through the specific socio-political-economic context. It highlights the role of persuading and constraining factors in shaping preference and choice at the household level based on a study conducted in four different villages of the state. It recognizes parents as active choosers and calls for a greater role for parents while formulating schooling policies in the local context.

Research in Progress

A Paper titled ***Sociology of Health and Illness: A Comparative Study of Kerala and Bihar*** *by* Sandeep Mokanpally and Gurram Ashok discusses the sociology of health in India. Based on three decades of NFHS survey data, the paper highlights the health inequalities across the social categories in the states of Kerala and Bihar. The study found that the children, women, and men from SC, ST, and OBC categories suffer from nutritional deficiencies.

Moreover, women are the primary victims of epidemiological transition in both states. The lack of a sociological approach to health and economic policies endangers public health. Though Kerala's health index is better than Bihar, it still witnesses the reversal of the progress in undernutrition and anemic status.

Book Review

The book review section consists of two reviews.

Book Review: Dev Nath Pathak**,** *In Defence of the Ordinary: Everyday Awakenings,* New Delhi: Bloomsbury, 2021, pp. xxvi+249, ₹ 1299 (hardcover): Saheed Meo.

Rekha Koul, Geeta Verma, Vanashri Nargund-Joshi, Science Education in India: Philosophical, Historical, and Contemporary Conversations. Singapore: Springer Publications, XXV+242 pp., 2019,₹ 7061(Paperback). ISBN: 978-981-13-9592-5: Aniruddha Naik

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

All the articles reflect diverse sociological interpretations of social facts across the states in India. I sincerely thank all the authors for choosing the explorations for publishing their articles. I am sure that the explorations enrich scholars' sociological imaginations across India's states.

Thanks & Best Wishes

Prof Nagaraju Gundemeda
Department of Sociology,
University of Hyderabad,
Editor, *Explorations*
Email: explorationsiss@gmail.com

Negotiating Career, Childlessness and the Demands of Reproductive Technologies: A Study based in India

---Ruby Bharadwaj

Abstract

The paper is based on experiential accounts of childless women in India who negotiate the demands of career, finances and cultural constraints, in the pursuit of IVF as a process. It unravels individualistically constructed meanings of reproductive technologies as a means to accomplish personal intents associated with mothering. Adopting feminist approach that assigns centrality of focus to the experiences of women, the paper highlights the despair of childless women at the deprivation of performative roles associated with mothering and examines their rationales and struggles at claiming it through IVF. In doing so, the participants demonstrated astute planning, decision making and foresight. The study situates IVF in the patriarchal, pro-natal and pro-genetic ideologies prevalent in India that rest excessive significance to pregnancy. The lure of IVF lies in protecting childless women from the ignominy of infertility by enabling pregnancy through assured gestational and genetic links to the child. Thus concealing reproductive failings and projecting an exterior of normality along with facilitating the perpetuation of performative roles associated with pregnancy, childbirth, followed by mothering.

Keywords: Career, Childlessness, IVF, Cultural Constraints, Performative Roles

The study focuses on the lived experiences of childless career women and their decisive engagement with IVF (In-vitro fertilization) to revoke their condition. There is a dearth of sociological literature that approaches ART (Assisted Reproductive Technology) from the perspective of experiential accounts of women, especially in the Indian context. Legal, ethical, and policy issues related to surrogacy form the basis of most studies conducted in India. This study seeks to focus on the pivotal element of all ART interventions i.e. the women whose body and minds bear the brunt of childlessness and IVF invasions. Childlessness is often conflated with infertility and motherhood with femininity. The experiential accounts of the women in the study demonstrate their dilemmas, choices, and constraints in engagement with IVF technology.

Simoni et. al.'s study has shown that career-focused women generally have lower fertility rates accompanied by a high desire for motherhood, resulting in what is described as 'competing devotions' (2017, p. 2072). Low fertility is a global concern and questions are being raised about whether it is the new demographic crisis of the twenty-first century. Globally, age at first birth is on the rise. Studies have shown that in the last nearly fifty years, the average age at first motherhood in the USA has gone up from twenty-two to twenty-eight

years and women are eight times more likely to delay the first child till the age of thirty-five years (Simoni et.al., 2017). Data from OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries reveals that the average age at which women give birth is thirty years. It is even higher for countries like Japan, Korea, Italy, and Spain. Between 1970 and 2017 the mean age of women in childbirth increased by two to five years in OECD countries (OECD, 2017). In consonance with global trends, India too has witnessed a decline in fertility rates. This has been attributed both to use of contraceptives and the rise in age at marriage. According to the Ernst and Young Report, contraceptive use increased from forty-five per cent in 1988 to fifty-nine per cent in 2015. It is further expected to increase to sixty-two per cent by 2020. Effective age at marriage has increased from 17.7 years in 1971 to 20.7 years in 2009. With the increase in the proportion of women in reproductive age (20-44 years), along with a skew towards those aged between 30-44 years, the prevalence of infertility is projected to increase in 2020 (the latest data confirming these projections after 2020 is not available). Nearly ten to fifteen percent of the married couples in India or roughly 27.5 million couples are infertile. Female factor accounts for forty to fifty percent, while male infertility accounts for thirty to forty per cent among married couples. Furthermore, India faces the challenge of high infertility rates with low treatment rates (Ernst &Young, 2015).

Since women are born with a finite number of oocytes, an increase in age results in a progressive reduction in the ovarian follicular pool. The chances of spontaneous conception decrease with advancing age, from twenty-eight to twenty per cent and to ten per cent at age of twenty-five, thirty-three, and forty-four respectively. Older women have fewer eggs, and of diminished quality which makes natural conception difficult. Age profile of women undergoing ART varies with time and place. The largest cohort of women attending ART in 2105 was thirty-five to forty years in the United States of America. In the United Kingdom, women between the age of thirty to forty accounted for only thirty-seven per cent of usage (Pierce & Mocanu, 2108, pp.1-2).

Women experience myriad impacts of infertility. For some, childlessness ushers in a life cycle crisis, others bear lifelong guilt and low self-esteem, and yet others who are privileged, try to redress the problem through ART. Childless women display high levels of emotional distress on account of 'discrepancy between the potential identity (biological mother) and the actual identity (infertile woman) (Loftus & Namaste, 2011, p. 37). Ironically, many women who don't have children are not infertile. In case they are unable to conceive at a stage in their reproductive career when they decide to have children or when society expects them to, they are labelled as infertile. Infertility defies the boundaries of the physiological body, it may be diagnosed in the male body and the medical intervention is still directed at the female body. Infertility remains a much neglected public health issue, especially in overpopulated countries where it is often considered an antidote to population explosion (Ryan, 2009). However, it is under conditions of high fertility that 'barrenness amidst plenty' (Inhorn, 2002, p.7) assumes grave connotations.

As a procreative technology, IVF has sociological, legal, and ethical reverberations. The distinction between IVF as a *procedure*, and IVF as a *process* is crucial to the understanding of its technological and sociological bearings (Throsby, 2004, p.12). As a *procedure,* it refers to the techniques involved in fertilization of gametes in the petri-dish and the transfer of the embryo into the womb. Although the same procedure forms the basis for the genetic engineering of embryos, the participants in the present study utilised it as a treatment for infertility only. To facilitate IVF as a medical *procedure,* the couples have to engage in a *process* that involves advanced planning and decision-making with respect to the management of finances, time, and those pertaining to making their decision public or concealing it, as the case may be. IVF as a *procedure* impinges on the everyday existential routine of the women seeking interventions. But more importantly like all technology, IVF is socially constructed.

Infertility, its consequences, and 'treatment' are decidedly gendered. Feminists have therefore deeply debated and theorized on the issue of involuntary childlessness. Radical feminists have been ambivalent in lending support to women seeking infertility treatment because they believe that such recourse would imply reiteration of conventional gendered roles and associated subjugation (Thompson, 2002). The feminists deemed medical technology as 'masculinist' that serves to subjugate the women and control them through surveillance and technological invasion and therefore advocated the reclamation of natural childbirth. In the West, the mid-seventies were marked by protests against excessive medicalization of reproduction. IVF was relegated as a 'technical fix' for the social condition of childlessness rather than the biological condition of infertility (Crowe, 1985, p.547). In her scathing attack on IVF, Rowland refers to it as a procedure that uses women's bodies as living laboratories and invades their lives and their sense of self (1992, pp.78-79). Feminists were also opposed to the structural inequalities embodied in the differential access to ART. Rapp (2001) referring to it as stratified reproduction draws attention to hierarchies and the class dimension involved in approaching reproductive technologies.

With the shift in the genre of feminist writings that valorised women's experiences and gendered roles premised on care, woman's intrinsic desire to have children came to be acknowledged as genuine and substantial, rather than attributing patriarchal motives to it (Sandelowski, 1993). This served as a turning point for feminists to dwell upon childless women's desire to reproduce and to introduce the discourse on assisted reproductive technologies that attributed agency to infertile women (Thompson, 2002). Feminists who support reproductive technology do so because they hold promise for those who would otherwise have been childless. These include not only childless heterosexual couples but also same-sex couples and single persons (1992, Chokr).

The 'right to choice' has always been central to the liberal feminist discourse on reproduction. Such an approach asserts that 'the right *not* to be pregnant, or to be able to control when to become pregnant, is essential to the

achievement of equality in the public sphere' (Throsby, 2004, p.30). With the arrival of new IVF based technologies, these choices become more challenging, demanding extensive planning of resources. This dialectic of choice in the context of societal and cultural constraints is crucial to the proliferation of ART.

This study is in conformity with Throsby's feminist approach that imparts centrality of focus to the experiences of women with IVF. It highlights the socially-lived experiences of career women that demonstrates their agency and expenditure of resources both material and corporeal to attain the status of mothers. IVF as a *process* is integral to the discussion in this paper.

Methods and Approaches

The study adopts a micro-level qualitative approach to analyse the perceptions of twelve childless career women and their travails to surmount their predicament. It adopts feminist perspective to demonstrate the women's construction of meaning of IVF in relation to their mothering motivations.

The most challenging part of the research was the recruitment of the sample. Neither fertility clinics nor gynaecologists were willing to share any information about their patients on account of confidentiality issues. In India, secrecy shrouds fertility treatment, hence those who had successfully borne a child through IVF refrained from divulging information, and others with unsuccessful interventions, avoided raking up distressing memories. Either way, there was reluctance to accept and openly discuss one's infertility issues. After tapping friends and relatives, eight women were convinced to consent to participating in the research on the condition of complete anonymity. Gradually the snowball effect took over, two of these eight participants put me on to others. After obtaining verbal consent, in-depth accounts of participants were collected through unstructured interviews with a focus on IVF experiences. They were encouraged to share their motivations for undergoing IVF and the decision-making involved in its planning.

The sample comprised upper-middle-class women who were highly educated and well-placed in their careers. Three of them were doctorate and research degree holders. Another four were professionals in the field of medicine and para-medics, finance, and business administration. Besides this, there were two post-graduates working as school teachers and four graduates with specialized diplomas working in corporate firms. All twelve were gainfully employed in their careers at the time of taking the decision to undertake IVF intervention. Five of them- Gauri, Kanika, Leena, Pooja, and Sukanya had successful interventions. Seven others, i.e. Neeti, Mehak, Mamta, Julie, Vrinda, Anu, and Shweta, could not bear a child through IVF. Out of the twelve women, eleven were married and had undergone IVF treatment for infertility without relying on donor gametes, and only one single woman relied upon donor sperm.

As an exploratory research probing into the decision making process that surrounds career women confronted with involuntary childlessness, it investigates into the circumstances under which choice and agency is exercised amidst the constraints of familial and societal pressures that serve as cultural givens. Some of the questions that pertain to issues of decision-making and agency include: What are the motives that drive women to seek IVF interventions? Are they driven by the compulsions of cultural mandate on motherhood? Who makes decisions about the selection of doctors and fertility clinics? Who plans the processes involved in IVF? How are the everyday existential demands of career and IVF procedure navigated? In the case of failed IVF how are the options to remain childless and those suggesting alternatives such as adoption and surrogacy deliberated? How is technology constructed in relation to childless women's motives to alleviate their condition? Are the motives of IVF directed only towards the attainment of mothering needs or do they fulfill other needs of women as well?

 Phenomenological analysis approach was adopted to focus on the lived experiences of women whose subjectivities imparted meanings to childlessness and reproductive technologies. Prolonged and in-depth interviews formed the basis of data. Such an approach helped focus on their lived realities while simultaneously contextualizing them in the familial and cultural milieu. It helped identify the motivations to mothering that stemmed from pro-natal and pro-genetic ideologies that operate in the Indian cultural context. The data was recorded verbatim and common themes that emerged from the narratives of the participants were thematically organised. All participants have been assigned pseudonyms. In order to further conceal their identity, their bio-briefs are not discussed.

Encountering childlessness: Loss of control and attempts at restoration

Anxieties of childlessness

Each of the participants expressed a strong yearning to bear a biological 'child of her own' or 'to have a child of their own flesh and blood'. It was not just the urge to fulfill maternal instinct but the urge to bear a genetically related child and the desire to 'experience conception and pregnancy' that overwhelmed them.

Childlessness was perceived as a form of deprivation, inadequacy, failure and abnormality that was stigmatising. Inability to bear a child through 'normal course' caused 'distress', 'agony', 'pain' and other forms of emotional and psychological distress. Neeti, who described herself as 'desperate to get pregnant' narrated :

Childlessness is not only a source of emotional psychological stress and anxiety, but a social embarrassment at my failure to deliver a baby that I am so desperate for. My only desire and hope for the last nine years has been to become pregnant. I envy every other woman who is pregnant and aspires to be

lucky like her. Somehow, I get through the day, but whenever I am alone, my heart aches and pains for a baby.

Discussing her 'trauma of childlessness' Mehak was exasperated and exhausted after many failed attempts at IVF. She expressed her desperation, saying:

One has to be childless to know how tough and painful it is. Your body's failure to perform a basic biological function consumes you day and night. It is emotionally draining. Life comes to a standstill waiting for this dream to fructify. Every future plan is kept on hold….. Just hoping for a miracle.

Gauri informed that 'never did I think that I will confront a problem that I will not be able to surmount'. Vrinda felt 'incomplete without a child'. She narrated:

I feel hurt and humiliated when friends and relatives ask me why I don't have a child. Not being able to bear a child naturally was perhaps my life's only test that I have failed. I felt betrayed by my own body. I felt incomplete and left out from my friends' circle who have children. Their lives revolve around them and organising activities like birthday parties and picnics.

Gauri was unable to relate with her friends' 'child-centric preoccupations'. She started to withdraw and feel alienated from her circle of friends. She bemoaned at her 'double loss' – being childless, and not being able to enjoy the company of her friends. Leena felt a deep urge to belong to 'someone her own'. She started avoiding family gatherings because the inquisitive questions about the delay in her pregnancy 'hit her like barbs'. Her mother-in-law's persistent appeal to make her a *daadi* (paternal grandmother) was another source of anxiety for her.

Recalling her decision to undergo IVF, Geeta said that she always 'craved to cuddle a child of her own'. Her desire was compounded by familial pressure to produce an heir for the family because her husband's elder brother had decided to remain single. She construed her inability to bear a child as disruption of 'normality' in biological self and at the life course that she had envisioned. Childlessness was perceived as a personal failure, a blow to confidence and existing friendships, disruption of normality of life course, and as an obstruction to new roles for self and family members. Studies in other parts of the world confirm that infertility has the most pervasive and adverse ramifications on the social and emotional wellbeing of childless women. It ensues responses such as anxiety, trauma, blame, social ridicule, ostracism and stigma (Balen & Inhorn 2002, p.9). Inability to bear children destabilises social and emotional wellbeing of the participants. Motivations to birth a child through IVF were driven by a decision to revoke the cultural and personal interpretations associated with childlessness.

Preparing and Planning : Negotiating Career with demands of IVF

Nearly all women expressed that they were drawn towards higher education and employment in their quest for gender parity and independence and that they had delayed marriage and childbirth to consolidate their careers. This delay was considered as a possible cause of interfertility by most of the women in the study. The decision to seek IVF intervention was a considered one, backed by informed choice and detailed planning.

IVF involves four main interrelated steps, each prone to failure risks. First step involves drug-induced hyper-stimulation of the woman's ovaries to produce multiple eggs, instead of a single egg is released during the menstrual cycle, followed by extraction of eggs through an ultrasound guided surgical process, performed under anaesthesia. Thirdly, the eggs are fertilized with sperm under laboratory conditions for the growth into embryos. The final stage involves implantation of embryos into the woman's uterus.

Women, who have experienced IVF as a *procedure*, regarded it as demanding in terms of investment of time, finances and corporeal commitment to bear with invasive interventions. Mehak opined, 'IVF is extremely demanding, besides the financial commitment, there is a commitment to slow down, to de-stress and above all to be immensely patient'. Extensive blood and urine tests to ascertain hormonal levels, invasive transvaginal ultrasounds and many other interventions require repeated and regular visits to the fertility clinics. The participants recalled the anxiety and pain involved in the daily monitoring of body temperatures and hormonal injections that were administered at odd hours by the local doctor, prior to the extraction of eggs. Julie, who could self-administer her injections, recalled how she would set an alarm to inject herself and then try going back to sleep.

The decision about when to embark upon IVF as a procedure was guided by the demands of career and cost-benefit analysis of health and financial risks. Some of the participants who were in high stress jobs had been advised to quit work in order to facilitate conception, as high levels of stress interfered with the success of the treatment. Julie who had a very hectic job narrated:

My job required me to be on my toes from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. which was an added stressor. I was advised to quit to reduce my stress levels. It was a tough decision. I desperately wanted a child and my time to get pregnant was now. It was my call to prioritize. I gave up my job for the sake of IVF treatment which eventually was not successful.

Gauri had been a successful entrepreneur for nine years before she decided to wind up her venture to enable IVF treatment. Sukanya, a chartered accountant, gave up her practice to be able to remain stress-free for successful intervention of IVF. Neeti and Mehak who worked in the corporate sector could not afford to quit working altogether. They needed the money to finance the treatment and yet wanted to devote time for IVF based interventions. Neeti traded her permanent profile for an ad hoc teaching position so that she had more spare time to visit fertility clinics. Mehak sacrificed her permanent position in the corporate sector for a less paying teaching assignment. Out of the twelve

career-focussed women, two quit their careers completely, another two started to work at a much lower wage in a less demanding job, four took an unpaid break and quit later, after having children. The other four who worked in educational institutions enrolled for IVF sessions during long summer vacations. The participants did not let their employers know about their medical interventions and hence cooking up excuses for repeated absence from work, created additional stress. The need for better health coverage for fertility related interventions was expressed by all participants. The results of the study conducted by Crowe in Australia showed that the IVF program interfered with opportunities for paid work outside home. The participants expressed being in a 'double bind' in this regard (Crowe, 1985, p.551).

The elective decisions of the participants regarding career adjustments in order to accommodate IVF should be assessed in terms of its economic costs and out of pocket expenditure. The participants informed that most ART clinics operate as commercial enterprises where each IVF cycle costs between 1 to 2.5 lakhs Rupees and that there are barely any clinics offering services at subsidized rates. Though the cost of IVF is about three to four times lower than in the US, yet nearly eighty per cent of the population is unable to afford them. The average household income of nearly twenty one per cent of the households is less than Rupees 2 lakhs per annum. With the success rate of IVF pitched between thirty to forty per cent, it generally takes up to three or more cycles to conceive, causing multifold cost escalation. In the present research, except for two participants, all others had to undergo multiple cycles. At present neither private nor public health insurers (except Employees State Insurance Corporation) fully cover fertility procedures under their insurance plans (Ernst and Young, 2015).

Some insurance policies partially cover diagnostics without including drugs essential for the procedure. In the absence of insurance cover, only one per cent of the infertile couples are able to seek treatment since the others are unable to afford the expenditure involved. ART lobby is demanding comprehensive insurance cover for inclusion of fertility treatment.

Research has reiterated the beneficial impact of insurance cover on women's education, employability and placements. A study conducted by Kroger and Mattina (2017) in the United States of America, found that the mandates to cover IVF and ART improved women's participation in professional degree programmes, illustrating that policies that can help women push back childbirth till later in their careers can improve their participation in professional occupations. A similar health policy adopted in 1994 by the government of Israel helped career women delay marriage and focus on their careers. Overtime, the option to use IVF in the future created a shift in women's choice in favour of higher education and attainment of prestigious jobs. This has contributed towards bridging the gender gap and improving gender equality (Gershoni & Low, 2015).

Revoking childlessness to experience motherhood: Choice and agency in decision making

Decisions and Dilemmas

While the role of societal and cultural norms cannot be ignored in driving women towards motherhood, it's not as though the participants lacked agency, choice or the acumen to take decisions. They did not resign to the fate of being childless, nor were they overtly coerced into IVF by their partners or family members.

The women who formed part of the study were educated, independent and proud of their professional accomplishments but at the same time dismayed at being deprived of the pleasures associated with mothering. It was a conscious decision on their part to revoke childlessness and the pejoratives associated with it. In doing so, they garnered their resources and made 'all out efforts' to revoke childlessness through assisted conception technologies. While they acknowledged the support of their spouses, the final decision to undergo treatment was their own. They informed that neither the treatment nor the experts were forced upon them. Some of them disclosed that although their husbands had consented on IVF treatment, they were not always cooperative. Husbands of Neeti, Mamta and Gauri were initially resistant to getting their tests done to rule out male infertility. Anu, Mehak, Shweta, Neeti and Julie confided that their husbands resented the protocol mandated by the fertility experts for their contribution to the procedure.

Further, the participants disclosed that they had been proactive in commencing enquiry and search in the direction. This included internet search about the IVF procedure, costs involved selecting the fertility clinic and doctor. They also consulted friends or close relatives who had experienced such interventions. Shweta narrated:

After exhausting all options we decided to take my gynaecologist's advice to try IVF seriously. Though, I researched on the internet, but was extremely apprehensive, I needed to speak to someone who had first-hand experience. The gynaecologist put me onto one of her patients. Though she was helpful, I was still very nervous about whether the baby would be healthy. It was the most difficult decision and the longest one to bear results.

Leena recalled:

It was a tough call. We had tried every tip that our well-wishers offered in order to conceive but nothing worked. I was advised IVF by my gynaecologist. So I checked on the internet to learn about the process. It sounded simple but I was still not convinced. But the day, a lady whom I befriended at my gynaecologist's clinic, had a baby through IVF; I was determined to try out. We had to wait for a couple of years to save up for the

costs involved. After about two years I was all set for my secret mission.

The decision to seek IVF interventions were carefully planned and deliberated upon. After exhausting all options to cure her husband's low sperm count, Gauri waited for nine years to feel convinced about IVF. Sukanya deferred child bearing and subsequently IVF till she felt 'that she was ready for it'. She decided to go back to her hometown after quitting work so that she had the support of her mother during the procedure. Neeti and Mehak waited till they earned and saved enough for the treatment while they were still in their corporate placements. They did not want to be solely dependent upon their husbands for financing the IVF bills. Pooja waited for her divorce proceedings to culminate before commencing on IVF with sperm donation in order to ensure that her former husband would not lay any claim on her child. She had walked out of a bad marriage and was confident of pursuing her goals independently of a 'man in her life'. She construed IVF as a way to stay out of marriage and yet birth a genetically and gestationally linked child. It fulfilled her desire to become a mother while choosing to remain single. On the other hand, Kanika's decision not to wait for more than a year after marriage was practical because she had married at the age of 49 years.

Only Gauri and Sukanya were lucky to conceive after the first cycle. Julie quit after the first. Most participants had to undergo multiple IVF cycles. Those like Neeti and Mehak who suffered multiple failures, changed doctors in the hope of better results. Neeti had changed doctors because she discovered unethical practices at the first clinic and therefore decided to start her treatment all over again at another clinic. Mehak too changed three fertility clinics between the two cities. After successive failed attempts at IVF, her doctor advised that she should give up IVF and try surrogacy. At this point she took a break from the treatment though she was not willing to quit. She then moved to another metropolitan city where she started the interventions all over again after a gap of two years.

In seeking IVF treatment, women encountered frequent dilemmas. These were compounded in the case of those confronting unsuccessful IVF interventions for they faced the dilemma regarding when to stop and exit out of the procedure. Most challenging predicament was to choose between remaining childless, or to have a child through surrogacy or adoption. The following section demonstrates the choices and decisions pertaining to the same.

Experiences of unsuccessful IVF: Annihilation of hope and to decision to quit

The decision to enter the IVF programme is ridden with excitement. Perseverance and strength to bear with the invasive interventions is fuelled by hope. For those who bore a child after IVF, the exit from the treatment was a happy and a fruitful one. But others who had to contend with repeated failures, found themselves distraught at not being able to stop despite the doctor's advice on trying alternate routes. Shweta, had developed severe iatrogenic complications, her exit was therefore, painful but straight forward.

Neeti recalled that after each unsuccessful cycle she felt 'emotionally, physically and financially drained'. She finally terminated the treatment on being advised to try surrogacy. After her first cycle, Julie felt despaired at the 'invasion of her privacy and dignity'. Due to her prior health condition, she was informed by the fertility expert that the chances of success were only five per cent. The combination of dehumanizing experience along with potentially poor success rate were important considerations that helped consolidate her decision to pull out of the procedure after the first cycle itself.

Mehak who had gone through multiple failed cycles narrated:

I did not want to give it up because either I wanted a baby or an answer as to why I can't have one since the doctors had dismissed me as a case of unexplained infertility saying that 'there is nothing to fix'! It was very tough-- not being able to stop because it had become like an addiction and taken a toll on my relationships. After the initial failed cycles, my husband had reconciled to remaining without a child and wanted me to quit because it was impacting health and sanity adversely. I was advised to go in for surrogacy but neither of us wanted to adopt or have a child through surrogacy.

The decision to exit the IVF programme is symbolic of annihilation of hope, therefore a harrowing one. Sandelowski's respondents perceived quitting the pursuit of infertility as 'unheroic', submission to adversity and 'giving up on [the] body' (1991, p.41). She explains the persistent pursuit of conceptive technologies on the part of couples by drawing attention to the 'never enough' property that conflates good treatment for infertility with quantity of treatment (1991, p.31).

Discussing the dilemma of termination of IVF procedures after failed attempts, Throsby notes that in the case of successful treatment, it is easy to establish 'just enough' cycles but when treatment fails, the boundary between 'enough' and 'too much' is blurred and very often the couples decision to stop the treatment is construed as an act of 'weakness or lack of resolve' (2004, pp.81-82). The decision to exit the treatment is not only more challenging than initiating the treatment but also fraught with remorse, guilt and despair.

More decision making: Quitting and after

The decision to terminate the IVF programme was considered a challenge in itself; an even bigger challenge is to live without hope. What are the options for childless women after unsuccessful IVF? How do they cope? Mehak felt that she was at a crossroads again with most roads already blocked for her. She decided against surrogacy because it would not bestow her with the experience of being pregnant. Both she and her husband felt that they could not 'connect with an adopted child'. In order to cope with her emotions and to come to terms with her state, she decided to seek counseling to 'pull herself out of shambles' She was remorseful about the fact that no one had warned her about the trauma involved in the IVF and therefore decided to be part of this

research in the hope that her experience may be of help to others. Mehak has now taken childlessness in her stride. She conveyed:

I am learning to cope. I am reinventing myself, meditating and learning to cherish what I have. Also trying very hard to guard myself from situations that may take my wounds that have not yet healed, I have stopped attending baby showers and prefer to hang out with couples who don't have children. The void still remains….I still hope and hold on to my dream.

Neeti has taken a conscious decision not to go in for surrogacy. She narrated:

I have always been pining to become pregnant and to experience everything associated with it including morning sickness. Very often I find myself stuffing a pillow into my shirt and standing in front of the mirror just to imagine what I would look like if my biggest wish is granted (she sobbed as she narrated). Surrogacy was not going to help me experience the joys of pregnancy. I have decided to move on by adopting a baby.

Julie and Shweta were also advised to try out surrogacy. However, both preferred adoption. Shweta felt that surrogacy would deprive her of a 'sense of accomplishment' nor would it absolve Julie of the 'trauma of being infertile' in the eyes of others. Besides this, they were not prepared to commit more finances towards the procedure. Both decided to settle for adoption. To her bewilderment, Julie conceived naturally without any assistance, despite her doctor having declared that her ova was of poor quality. She narrated how throughout her pregnancy she was overwhelmed with disbelief despite multiple tests that assured her of pregnancy and well-being of the foetus. Ultimately she delivered a healthy baby before her turn for adoption came through. Shweta was in a state of shock when she discovered that she was pregnant seven years after she had adopted a baby. Such instances ratify the argument that childlessness is not to be conflated with infertility.

After unsuccessful attempts at IVF, Neeti, Julie, Mehak and Shweta assessed their routes to motherhood. They eliminated surrogacy as an option because it was expensive and yet not an assured way to have a baby. To be able to bear a child and experience pregnancy was of crucial significance to these four women. Surrogacy would deny the subjective lived-in experience of maternity. The 'embodiment of maternity' is critical for the social recognition of fertility and maternity (Brakman & Scholz, 2006). Pregnancy imparts visibility to fertility, crucial to validating a woman's role and function as mothers. Pregnancy is also symbolic of 'normal' motherhood and a source of fulfillment (Petropanagos, 2017, p.123). Ultimately only Mamta decided in favour of surrogacy because her husband insisted on the genetic link with the child. It had more to do with salvaging her marriage than to satisfy her mothering motivation.

The decision against surrogacy was consistent with the motivations for mothering and the availability of financial resources. Though surrogacy is much cheaper in India compared to the other parts of the world, it costs about

five lakhs over and above the medical procedures. In many cases, the surrogacy is not successful in the first attempt because the embryo may not implant itself in the surrogate's womb at the first go. Every stage that throws up dilemmas and choices is countered by the resolute responses that are exercised to suit individualistic needs and motives.

Discussion

Most sociological debates allege that IVF is a means of imposing patriarchal and pro-natalist agenda upon women who have no real choice. Crowe contends that choice is 'always mediated by social circumstances' and questions the veracity of 'choice' in a situation where women face personal condemnation and social stigma on account of infertility and where motherhood necessitates biological relationship (Crowe, 1985, p.552). This study presents a perspective that is derived from the standpoint of women's agency and exercise of choice that further enriches the debates surrounding IVF. It has unravelled individualistically constructed meanings of reproductive technologies as a means to attain personal intents associated with mothering. The participants navigated through the cultural constraints –the three Ps that mark the Indian society i.e. Patriarchy, Pronatalism and Pro-genetics. In a patriarchal society where pronatalism is deeply ingrained in philosophy, religion and culture, a woman's most valued role is that of a wife and mother. Pro-genetic ideology advocates that the genetic links are natural and hence superior and desirable. These ideologies are perpetuated through overt and covert socialization of girls into gender roles of wife and mother through the celebration of rituals and festivals (Dube, 1996). They deeply influence the perception of normality of life course and its disruption. Pro-natal ideology enshrined in the Hindu scriptures such as the Upanishads is perpetuated by cultural practices that uphold children (read sons) as essential to the attainment of spiritual goals and salvation of men (Black, 2007, p.142). Elizabeth Bartholet coined the term 'biological bias', to refer to the constraints against adoption that simultaneously propel the ART industry (Brakman & Scholz, 2006, p.64). IVF was preferred because it replicates the natural process where the genetic and gestational links coincide. At the onset, 'biological bias' pushed women towards medical intervention to 'birth children of their own' rather than adopting one. But after unsuccessful attempts at IVF, when surrogacy was advised, most women preferred adoption over surrogacy arguing that it would deprive them of experience of pregnancy, a crucial motive for mothering. Surrogacy enables genetic ties but denies the gestational link. In the case of adoption both genetic and gestational links are absent. Those choosing adoption, transcended the mandate of pro-genetics, demonstrating that they were actively engaged in furthering the route to motherhood that they desired, defined, decided because it is premised upon *experiential and performative* attributes of mothering roles.

The focus on the experiential aspect of IVF underscores the significance of 'doing gender' (West, 1987). It is evident from the experiences of the childless women that the 'doing gender' comes across as the most compelling rationale for seeking assisted conception because the motivations for motherhood were

influenced by the desire to perform roles and relationships associated with it. Women who expressed feeling 'incomplete' or 'not feminine enough' or 'less of a woman' did so because they were deprived of *performing* roles that conflate femininity with motherhood. Women who felt isolated among friends who had children did so because they could not *participate* in activities and functions that were children-centric, nor could they *engage* in discussions on child rearing or other issues pertaining to children. The ability to *perform, participate* and *engage* in concerns related to children are interactional aspects of gender. The failure to perform them was experienced as an affront to femininity. Mehak and Julie's disdain for baby shower ceremonies are also an aspect of inability of 'doing gender' because in India, such ceremonies are marked by the pregnant woman receiving blessings and gifts from those who have been blessed with children. Childless women feel awkward at such ceremonies that celebrate motherhood.

The idea of gender as *performative* expounds the rationale of women who adopt IVF as technology to assist pregnancy. Those who did not benefit from IVF chose the route to motherhood that was consistent with the attainment of their mothering motivations. Neeti, Vrinda, Julie, Mehak and Shewta decided against surrogacy because it would not help them attain their motive of 'experiencing pregnancy' nor would it give them a sense of achievement or self -fulfilment that pregnancy assures. Neeti wanted to experience morning sickness, Julie wanted to feel the kicking of the foetus, Mehak wanted to experience all the pampering that goes into making a pregnant woman feel special. Vrinda wanted to 'experience the glow of pregnancy'. A common theme that runs through the narratives was to enjoy the experience of pregnancy and the desire to perform feminine roles associated with it. Pregnancy is regarded as the epitome of fertility and femininity because it imparts visibility to fertility that absolves the childless women from the ignominy of infertility. As a visual embodiment of motherhood, pregnancy marks a transition to the social status of a mother and is therefore accompanied by special rites and rituals in India. Pregnancy serves to normalise and naturalise motherhood and hence remains crucial to performing gender roles.

Pregnancy as an experience is also embodied in *doing* pregnancy i.e. it entails a performance and is perceived as an accomplishment. This is achieved through everyday practices that signify the status of the body as pregnant. Neiterman regards pregnancy as a social and cultural transition. Bodily practices have to accommodate the changes generated by biological and physiological processes accompanying pregnancy. Pregnant women are constantly adjusting to morning sickness, fatigue, changing gait and size of their bodies. Doing pregnancy also involves inscribing on the body culturally prescribed or proscribed practices (Neiterman, 2012).

The study identifies the significant role of self-actualization and self-determination in decisions related to reproductive choices. Although cultural socialization into pronatalism is a significant imperative to procreate, it is not the sole socialization received by the women in this study. The women in the

study are highly educated and well placed in their careers. They are also empowered with education and financial resources, crucial to decision making with respect to IVF. These women have also been socialized into the virtues of performance and achievement that are consistent with modern education and professions. They are trained and expected to overcome challenges and turn adversities into opportunities. The decision to transcend the 'givens' is to be contextualized in their ability to claim what has been denied to them. The narratives of the women highlight that they did not passively accept their childless status as given, but made efforts at investing their resources to counter childlessness and attain motherhood revealing astute planning, farsightedness and agency. They have shown prowess in actively engaging with decisions to micro-manage the demands of IVF and careers. Their responses represent the conjunction of feminine identity with that of career focussed women who are conscious of the expectations from both.

Such findings are consistent with those of Griel who argues that 'infertile women do not respond passively to medical definitions of them but react actively and strategically, they work the system and try to push medical treatment in the direction they want it to go. Rather, they are problem solvers, operating creatively within a system they do not control' (Griel, 2002, p.103). The study also ratifies Gupta's conception that ART can be considered as a means of escaping the constraints of the 'given'. These technologies are used by women to their advantage and can therefore be perceived as an of aspect of 'pro-choice' and right to self-determination (Gupta, 2006, p.33).

Conclusion

The study confirms sociological findings that conflate motherhood with femininity and highlights the significance of motherhood in establishing women's sense of self and social identity. According to Whitehead the pursuit of motherhood is not only a gendered goal but also a gendered entitlement (Whitehead, 2016). What appealed to the participants was the fusion of gestational and genetic link as enabled by IVF assisted pregnancy that imparted appearance of normality, concealing the interventions from the outside world. It also enabled and endorsed the performative roles associated with gender rights through pregnancy, childbirth followed by mothering. The credence assigned to 'doing gender' was of paramount concern to the participants. In choosing to undergo IVF, women have *used* technology as consumers making decisive choices rather than blindly accepting it. It is their engagement that imbues meaning to technology. Through this study an attempt has been made to cognise IVF as a *process* involving multiple decisions of diverse nature. The study has its limitations on account of the size of the sample. Besides this, the individualistic experiences may provide insights into the motivations of the concerned women, it would be inappropriate to draw generalizations from the same.

References

Black, B. (2007). *The Character of the self in ancient India: priests kings and women in the early Upanishads.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Brakman, S. & S. Scholz (2006). Adoption, ART, and reconception the maternal body: toward embodied maternity. *Hypatia, 21*(1), 54-73.

Chokr, N. (1992). Feminist perspectives on reproductive technologies: the politics of motherhood. *Technology in Society, 14*, 317- 333.

Crowe, C. (1985). "Women want it": In vitro fertilization and women's motivations for participation. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 8 (6), 547-552.

Dube, L. (1996). Caste and Women. In M. Srinivas, *Caste: its twentieth century avatar,* pp. 1-27. New Delhi: Penguin.

Ernst and Young. (2105). *Call for action: Expanding IVF in India.*

Gershoni, N. & C. Low. (2021). The power of time: the impact of free IVF on women's human capital investment. *European Economic Review, 133 (103645)*, 1-25.

Griel, A. (2002). Infertile bodies: medicalization, metaphor and agency. In M. Inhorn & F. Balen, *New thinking on childlessness, gender, and reproductive technologies* (pp. 101-118). Berkley: University of California Press.

Gupta, J. (2006). Towards transnational feminisms. *Europeon Journal of Women Studies 13* (1), 23-38.

Inhorn, M. (2002). *Infertility around the globe: new thinking on childlessness, gender and reproductive technolgies.* Berkley: University of California Press.

Kroeger, S. & G. Mattina. (2017). Assisted reproductive technology and women's choice to pursue professional career. *Journal of Population Economics* (30), 723-769.

Neiterman, E. (2012). Doing pregnancy: pregnant embodiment as performance. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 35(5), 372-83.

OECD. (2017). *OECD Family Database, Social Policy Division - Directorate of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs*. Retrieved May 10th, 2021, from http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm

Petropanagos, A. (2017). Pronatalism, geneticism and ART. *International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics , 10* (1)*,* 119-147.

Phan, L. (2013). Women's empowerment and fertility changes. *International Journal of Sociology of the Family , 39* (1/2) 49-75.

Pierce, N. (2018). Female and age assisted reproductive technology. *Global Reproductive Health*, 3:e09.

Rapp, R.(2001). Gender, body, biomedicine: how some feminist concerns dragged reproduction to the center of social theory. *Medical Anthroplogy Quarterly, 15(4)*, 466-477.

Rowland, R.(1992). *Living laboratories: Women and reproductive technology.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Ryan, M. (2009). Doing pregnancy: pregnant embodiment as performance. *Signs*, 34 (4) 805-825.

Sandelowski, M.(1991). The never-enough quality of conceptive technology. *Medical Anthroplogy Quarterly*, 5(1), 29-47.

Sandelowski, M. (1993). *With a child in mind: studies of the personal encounter infertility. .* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Sandelowski, M. (2002). Uses of a "Disease": infertility as rhetorical vehicle. In Inhorn, M. & F. Balen, *New thinking on childlessness, gender, and reproductive technologies* (pp. 33-51). Berkley: University of California Press.

Simoni, Micheal L. Mu. & S. Collins. (2017). Women's career priority is associated with attitudes towards family planning and ethical acceptance of reproductive technologies *Human Reproduction,32,*(10), 2069-2075.

Thompson, C. (2002). Fertile ground: feminists theorize infertility. In Inhorn, M.& F.Balen, *Infertility around the globe: new thinking on childlessness, gender, and reproductive technologies.* (pp. 57-78). Berkley: California University Press.

Throsby, K. (2004). *When IVF Fails: feminism, infertility and the negotiation of normality.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

West, C. & D. Zimmerman.(1987). "Doing gender". *Gender and Society,* 1(2), 25-52

Whitehead, K.(2016). The experiential accounts of the women in the study demonstrate their dilemmas, choices and constraints in their engagement with IVF technology. *Canadian Review of Sociology*, 53(1), 94-122

23

Ruby Bhardwaj, *is an Associate Professor at Department of Sociology, Janki Devi Memorial College, University of Delhi.*

Email id: ruby@jdm.du.ac.in

Analyzing the concept of 'home' from the perspective of the LGBTQIA+ Community

---Brishti Sen Banerjee

Abstract

This article would aim at understanding the concept of 'home' and 'homely spaces' from the point of view of individuals not conforming to the hetero-normative order or structure of society. In many instances, these individuals because of their sexual identity are not accepted by their family members; hence they perceive the concept of 'home' as going beyond its structural and geographical definition. This article would aim at exploring the perception of 'home' and what they understand by 'safe spaces' with the help of the narratives of individuals belonging to the community of sexual minorities. The findings suggest the respondent's view of 'home' as a concept goes beyond its relation to blood family.

Keywords: Home, Sexual minority, Family, Safe space, Violence

Introduction

This study will try to delve into how home or homely spaces can be imagined and interpreted by individuals. It will particularly focus on how individuals, who don't conform to the heterosexual normative order of the society, i.e individuals of alternative sexuality, perceive the concept of 'home'. In the range of literature I reviewed to understand the conceptualisation of home, there exists literature equating home with a safe place, a site of protection and 'home' has been mostly correlated with blood family and biological kins. Going beyond it, there has been literature challenging or questioning this understanding of home, substantiating the same with narratives of violence experienced by children belonging to alternative sexuality. Based on my fieldwork, I would like to enhance the understanding of 'home' by problematising the popular narratives assigned with the same and providing an insight into its conceptualisation based on qualitative research.

Kath Weston (1997) has stated in her book 'The families we choose' that individuals of alternative sexuality prefer disclosing their sexuality to their family members despite the risk of being rejected. They venture that risk with the hope and eagerness of receiving acceptance from their loved ones. But Weston (1997) also mentions that in most cases they are threatened to be institutionalized or have to sever ties with their families. The sensitivity they expect from their family members proves to be pretty infrequent and inadequate in occurrence. According to generally accepted notions, individuals correlate 'home' with family, specifically blood relatives. Instead of perceiving home as

a mere space, they view and experience it as an emotion.

In my paper, I would like to unfurl what their ideas of 'home' are, where in most cases it has been observed that they are disowned by their 'so-called homes'. Unlike popular notions of home as a 'safe haven' by many scholars including Gaston Bachelard (1958), do they also consider their homes to be a safe place? To strengthen my argument further, this paper would also try to look into the socio-economic background of the individuals, not conforming to the hetero normative order, and would try to enquire whether these factors play a substantiate role in influencing the decision-making process of the family members.

Methodology

This paper aimed at deconstructing the notion of 'homely spaces' and has tried to look at how individuals who don't conform to the order imagine the concept of 'home' and how they perceive it. This research has been conducted using interview schedules as the research tool and interviews were conducted either face-face or over the telephone. It has been conducted on individuals living in the city of Kolkata, though one of the respondents originally belongs to Kolkata but is currently residing in Hyderabad for educational purposes. I have chosen snowball sampling as my sampling method and the sample size was twelve. I intentionally chose six individuals who are biologically male and six individuals who are biologically female, so that this research would be able to capture both the experiences of the opposite sexes. Among the sample size, three individuals identified themselves as gay, two individuals identified themselves as lesbians, six individuals identified themselves as bisexuals, and one individual identified as transgender. All the respondents were students belonging to different educational institutions located in the city of Kolkata, such as Jadavpur University, St. Xavier's College, Presidency University, etc. As the LGBTQIA+ community is a heterogeneous community consisting of individuals belonging to different classes, castes, and religious positions, it is important to understand how their social positions shape their lived experiences. Due to the limited scope of the paper, I have focused only on the economic and cultural capital posed by the individuals which refers to their class position and level of formal education. I have prioritized these aspects as I think these might have the most distinct and visible effects and influences on the experiences of the individuals.

Through this research, I have attempted to understand how the individuals non-confirming of the heterosexual normative order conceptualise the notion of home or homely spaces and whether they perceive it as a safe space or not. I would further try to comprehend the role of the economic and cultural capital of the family in their decision towards accepting or rejecting the sexuality of the child.

Discussion:

SECTION I: 'Home' or 'Homely spaces'

Home is a multidimensional concept that refers to places, relations, and feelings and is often interrelated with the idea of family. Families often form the core of the idea of home due to the caring practices associated with the relations of the family members. Home also refers to one's 'own space' where they have a sense of autonomy and agency. It also aligns with the feelings of freedom and comfort one can enjoy when one is at home. Hence, rather than perceiving it as a strict physical space, most literature defines it by relationships constituting the space. (Campo et al. 2020)

Shelley Mallet (2004), a scholar from the University of Melbourne perceives the term 'home' as a highly contested one. 'Home' according to Mallet has often been conflated with the concepts of family, household, and shelter and has also been observed by many as an ideological construct or simply a place of residence.

The respondents on being asked what comes to their minds listening to the word home, most of them didn't align it to a particular space and perceived home as much more than just a physical space. One of them, a student of St.Xavier's College said that

> *"Home means where you sleep without any fears. Home can comfort you after a long day. Or become the last place you'd want to go to after spending hours outside. Home to me is somewhere you should look forward to and look forward to meeting those who make that home. The cure of every illness".*

As the home has been conceptualised as relating to the concept of family and the idea of being a safe place, we will explore both these correlations separately in the following segment of the paper.

1. *'Homely spaces' and Family*

Family as an institution is legally referred to as connected through marriage and blood and whose purpose is to provide resources for those connected by blood or marriage. The family has always been a topic of interest in Sociology and hence has been taken up by many theorists. The term 'family' (Shah, 1964) has been used in several senses, as a household, as a group consisting of parents and children, as people related by blood and affinity, and as individuals descended from a common ancestor. G.P. Murdock (1969) describes a family as a "social group characterised by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction." Two forms of families are popularly talked about in the literature, elementary and joint families. The term

'elementary family' refers to a group consisting of a man, wife, and children and it is assumed that the members of this elementary family live together in the same household. But sociologists and anthropologists based on empirical evidence have shown that in practice they might not always live together.

In India, among the Nayar caste in Kerala, the husband resides with his matrilineal kin but not with his wife or children. T. N. Madan (1981) mentions the existence of 'non-familial households' which constitute a man and his adopted son or a widow or a childless couple. Murdock (1969) explains a type of elementary family where apart from the parents and children, another person may stay who doesn't belong to that particular elementary family. Other than elementary families, the other form of family existing is the joint family which comprises two or more elementary families. Later the term 'joint family' has been substituted by 'extended family' which refers to an extension of the parent-child relationship. Mandelbaum (1948) in his paper defines the joint family as all men being related by blood as fathers, grandfathers, brothers, and grandsons and the women present in the household as wives, daughters, and widows. Though Mandelbaum focuses on the three-generation formula, he mentions that these large joint families have been replaced later by small joint families.

Contradicting these definitions and conceptualisations of family, Desai (1956) argues that co-residence and commensaility cannot be considered reliable criteria for understanding the type of family. He states that family and household shouldn't be used interchangeably as concepts. A household may constitute an elementary family but in terms of functions can be a joint family. Bailey (1957) also in his work refers to the joint family not as a household group but as a group consisting of coparceners who have a right to maintenance from the common property.

Going further beyond this conceptualisation of family, Carol Smart in her book 'Personal Life' (2007) looks at the concept of family as a form of ideology rather than a descriptive concept. Though she also considers family to be a problematic concept as it has historically sustained women's subordination. Smart, like other feminists, prefers using the term 'personal life' over the family as the former term unlike the latter applies to family forms, relations, and reconfigured kinship networks. The term 'personal life' is all-inclusive unlike 'family', and doesn't prioritize relations with biological kins or marital bonds and tries to dissolve the hierarchical boundaries present between friends and kins. Adding to this, Carsten (2003) in her work on kinship argues it as a realm of possibilities beyond blood relations and obligations.

Kath Weston (1991), in her book, states how familial relationships are widely understood as unbroken, natural, inherited blood ties, and therefore its legitimacy seems to lie in heterosexual intercourse and

biological procreation. However, she complicates and reconstructs this notion of family by drawing upon fieldwork that she conducted in the San Francisco Bay area to explore the ways in which gay men and lesbians are constructing their notions of kinship by drawing on the symbolism of love, friendship, and biology. Weston argues they are not inherently 'anti-family' which can be understood by how much importance the gay men and lesbians put on their families and how eager they are to receive their acceptance. Most of the narratives imply that even after knowing the risks of being disowned by their families or getting institutionalized, they still preferred to disclose their identities (which is referred to as 'coming out of the closet) to their family members.

Contrary to this idealistic version, there was a distinct divide between the responses where few essentially associated home with biological kins, and the others perceived it as a much broader space incorporating even friends. One of the respondents perceived home as

> *"A space which I share with my dad, sister, and my cat. Since my ma is working she stays in our hometown so that she can keep working in her school there. My hometown is my home. This city is not my home. Home is that place where my entire family comes together and eats. So when I'm eating in a restaurant, that's home right there".*

Through the responses, it was clear that the majority of the individuals didn't restrict their imaginations to the conservative understanding of home as a physical space that is occupied by the biological kins, but instead imagined the concept through a wide spectrum.

To understand whether a family's acceptance influences or shapes the respondent understands of home or not, the respondents were enquired regarding the same. Seven respondents out of twelve have come out of the closet to their family members, while the rest didn't because they were either afraid that their family members won't accept them or were waiting to break the news when they are financially independent. Among the seven respondents who disclosed their identity, one only disclosed to her sister but never planned to speak up to her parents as she is sure of their disapproval. Though it was interesting to note, most of the family members accepted their children's identities gradually with time. At first in most families, the parents treated homosexuality as a disease or a phase that will go away with time, but through continuous efforts by the children to make them aware of the concept, they gradually came to terms with it. Though some of them became well-read about the subject and accepted homosexuality as a whole, few others accepted it just for the sake of their child but didn't approve of the larger issue. One of the respondents stated that

"I want to break it to my parents once I'm well settled in life. My parents are progressive beings but they've also been raised in a manner. So I don't blame them for not understanding alternative sexualities. However, parental homophobia oddly stems from fear of what their child may have to face when she or he comes out. Therefore, once I'm well settled and they know I have a grip on my life, I'll break it to them."

It was observed that the few individuals who referred to their existing residential spaces and biological family members as 'home' ultimately got some kind of acceptance in their family. Whereas the majority who didn't treat the home as their existing residential spaces either didn't at all come out of the closet or were not accepted by their family members. Hence, the perception of home strongly varied with the family's attitude towards the children's sexuality.

Later, delving deeper into this issue when the respondents were asked how much the acceptance of the family members meant to them, almost all the respondents thought they mean a lot but if their parents don't accept them at all they are ready to move out of their houses and live alone. Hence, it becomes very evident that their sexual identities are of such importance to them, that they are ready to even sacrifice their family for it. Also when they were enquired about whether they felt that they would have been treated differently if they were heterosexuals, six interviewees believed that life would have been much easier if they were heterosexuals, and four of them didn't think they would have been treated any differently, while two of the respondents stated that they were unsure of the fact as their parents are still unaware of their sexual identities.

2. *Family as a 'safe haven'*

The concept of safe space has been used in sociological literature through decades referring to small-scale settings within communities which don't have contact with the dominant group and constitute voluntary participants. (Polletta, 1999) Mostly the concept of safe space has been used in the domain of social movements and movemental spaces. It is considered to be a powerful site that has allowed the development of radical identities and ideologies. Safe spaces are considered to be necessary for any democratic social movement, (Evans and Boyte, 1986) A safe space can also refer to a physical space, (Simon, 2017) which can be a room, a neighborhood, or even a digital space. It is a space where by being physically present the individuals feel a sense of bodily safety. The general goal of a safe space is to create a community, forging positive relationships, and maintain an open-minded perspective. But this idea of safe spaces has been criticized by Polletta (1999). Polletta argues that the term refers to not only a physical space rather the ties constituting the space. She argues safe spaces provide a form of shelter from dominant groups and

ideologies by creating a space that can be virtual or physical for like-minded people to interact and engage in dialogue.

The idea of a safe space is often assigned with the concept of home consisting of family members and primary kin. The dominant conception is that a child's home needs to be a space. Children tend to emphasise safety as an important aspect of what constitutes a 'good home'. (Weitz, 2022) By safety individuals refer to different meanings like protection from physical and emotional harm, being oneself, and not being judged. (Campo, Fehlberg, Natalier and Smyth, 2020). Whether this private and intimate space of family can be considered a safe space universally or not is debatable as the narratives of queer persons highlight experiences of violence within the same. The blood families (Shah, 2020) often act as a source of violence and abuse. Also, the practice of disinheritance has been reportedly common from the will of the person in charge of the property if the child doesn't conform to the heterosexual social order. Queer people owing to the dissonance between what is considered 'normal' or 'normative' contradict and challenge the institution of family by questioning monogamous heterosexual coupling as well as blood connection. Due to the non-acceptance and violence situated in the family, queer persons mostly form their own family and communities which becomes a refuge for others looking for someone like themselves. Queer relationships are non-reproducing ones and don't fit into the framework of the binary gender system and hence challenge the practices of sexuality that have been normalised in the present social order.

In the chapter 'Families we live with', Smart provided an analysis of 'home' which skilfully debunked the 'rosy picture' of home as a safe place and highlighted the problem that it consists of. In this chapter, with the help of certain narratives, Smart explained the problems of being embedded in a set of relationships, which even when turned violent, cannot be so easily escaped. The narratives of children who spoke of the violence they experienced in their 'homes' are certainly proof that connectedness and embeddedness cannot always be regarded as a priori good things. Agreeing with Smart's argument, Van Gillies (2003) also in his essay on family and intimate relationships challenged the implicit assumption of a family as the site of harmonious social interactions and aimed at re-framing the private space. Adding to that, Weston (1991) discusses how families may not always be the sight of comfort or protection. Weston further explains this with the help of narratives of individuals being 'kicked out' of their homes or are treated as 'abnormal' and are advised to 'leave until you get your senses together.

Contrary to Smart, Gaston Bachelard (1958) provides a positive picture of the home by treating it as a site of integration of dreams, thoughts, and memories of humankind. Bachelard personalizes the concept of a house by calling it 'the direct product of the heart and the soul.' The

house is perceived in this essay as an amalgamation of diversity and unity as well as an embodiment of dreams and is repeatedly portrayed as a protective sphere.

The interviewees were asked to share their ideas on the concept of a safe place, and a majority of them described it more as an abstract concept than a concrete physical space. The explanations ranged from

> _"A safe place is where oppression is the least. A safe space is where I can be myself without holding certain things"_ to _"Where you don't hesitate to place a peck on the cheek of your partner, still sipping coffee in a cafe. Where you enter the home and do not lie to your parents about doing some project work, after attending the Pride Walk. Where girls or boys or trans or me or any living being will walk in their city's streets not feeling apologetic for their appearance, the way they walk or present themselves._

_"_Many of them also stated the queer community as their safe place as there they can be themselves without any inhibitions. A respondent stated that the commune places that are created for queer people as most of them face violence in their residential spaces can be perceived as a safe place. He also gave an example of another safe place created by the hijra community, the adda which makes sex work which is one of the most important means of livelihood for the hijras, a legitimized occupation that takes place in hygienic places and gets particular protection which they otherwise are devoid of. The queer people are also constructing safe places in their ways in different places, such as cafes like Amra Odbhut (situated in Jadavpur, Kolkata) which has become a place where queer individuals can share their experiences and form a solidarity group. Apart from all these views, there were a handful of exceptions who still conformed to the idea of home as a safe place and regarded their residential spaces and their biological family members as their safe places.

Most of the respondents didn't perceive their residential places as their safe places because of the violence and non-acceptance faced by their family members. The interviewees were asked whether they were bullied and how they dealt with it. Each of the respondents has been bullied because of their non-conforming attitude to the hetero-normative order in some phase of their lives. But interestingly most of the respondents have been bullied not exactly by their family members, but by their peer group. A respondent stated that he has experienced physical abuse in his school years due to his effeminate behaviour. Another respondent who identifies as bisexual is an extremely religious individual and visits the church every week. She stated experiences where her church peer group bullied her by calling her names, and even the priest tried to convert her to a straight person. She had to withdraw from going to church for several years to deal with

this trauma. Many of the respondents stated that they avoid going to family gatherings so that they are not confronted with uncomfortable questions.

But though most of the incidents clearly state that the individuals have been bullied more in their peer group, still all of them stated that they are more comfortable being with their friends rather than with their biological family members. This strongly emphasizes the role played by the peer group in their lives. Peer group for these individuals is a site where they receive both acceptance as well as humiliation. Though they have experienced bullying in their peer groups, still most of them perceive that as their safe place, and some also perceive some particular person as her or their safe place where she or he feels protected.

SECTION II: Sexuality

A: Theorizing Sexuality

The domain of sexuality owes much of its development to the renowned scholar Michael Foucault. His book, the history of sexuality (1978) is celebrated worldwide and is one of the most influential texts in constructing a discourse on sexuality. In this book, Foucault traces the journey of sexuality and emphasizes the relationship between sex and power. Foucault begins the discussion by taking into account the hypothesis of repression and how we should liberate ourselves from this repressive theory that we have internalized from the Victorian age but later suggests that this hypothesis might be abandoned as an explosion of unorthodox sexualities has been witnessed through time.

In another book "Friendship as a way of life" (2012) Michael Foucault tries to produce an anti-confessional, post-sexuality discourse of friendship through the course of a letter. Foucault's entire discussion aims at going beyond sexuality as he believes by toppling the 'monarchy of sex' individuals would be able to free themselves from bio-politically administered identities. Further stressing specifically the issue of homosexuality, Foucault states that becoming homosexual can never be an end in itself, rather it paves the way for future becoming s that goes beyond the sexual domain. He also believes that the bonds which are a product of these practices may in some way try to forge new modes of life as the existing institutional codes cannot validate these relations. However though Foucault believed that these relational identities are a way of challenging the traditional, patriarchal structure of friendship present in the prevalent society, still he expresses his problem with labeling a person gay or lesbian. Foucault anticipates that by using these labels, there emerges a risk of reifying the very categories that have a historically disciplined same-sex desire. This predetermined identity consisted of stereotypes and pathologies, repressing rather than instigating the movements of revolt. Hence

Foucault believes by reusing these labels, we are continuing to conform to the existing social structure.

Jeffrey Weeks in his book 'Sex, Politics, and Society: The Regulations of Sexuality Since 1800' (1981) gives an insight into the history of sexuality and how the concept of sexuality became such a big phenomenon. Until the 1970s the only theories talking about sexuality regarded it as a basic biological mandate ignoring entirely its socio-cultural perspectives. These theories emphasizing the naturalness of natural man were challenged later in the work of Gagon and Simon (1973), 'Sexual Conduct' where they treated sexuality as a 'socio-cultural moulding to a degree surpassed by few other forms of human behaviour'. In this context, Michael Foucault has also been an active voice in challenging these essentialist views of sexuality. In his introductory volume of 'The history of sexuality,' he redefined the concept of sexuality by looking at it as a historical apparatus and instead of conceptualizing sex as a product of nature, defined it as a 'complex idea that was formed within the deployment of sexuality.' This new approach viewed sexuality as a historical construct rather than naturally given, and it further encouraged the emergence of terms such as 'heterosexuality', 'homosexuality', and other new definitions along the lines of gender and sexuality in the late nineteenth century.

Further delving deeper into the concept of sexuality, the text 'Erotic Habitus' (Adam, 2008) aims to focus on the much-neglected domain of sexuality, that of sexual desires from both micro and macro-level perspectives. The existing theories have been critiqued because they have been inattentive to 'what we desire'. The author mentions the development of scripting theory as a response to the thoughts of Freud and Kinsey (Germone, 2008), both of whom conceptualized sexuality by detaching it from the social context and meanings attached to it. Gagon and Simon through this theory tried to establish the concept of sexual excitation as a 'learned behaviour'. They believe that the actors 'enact' or perform social scripts while undergoing sexual actions. The theory in totality tries to provide a view of sexual practice being perceived as a complex set of norms, meanings, desires, and interactions. In the course of the discussion, the author criticizes the tripartite structure of the scripting theory on the ground that it failed to provide a sufficient account of the substance of sexual fantasy and the process of its development.

Another scholar Brian Heaphy (2008) in her article 'The sociology of lesbian and gay reflexivity or reflexive sociology' attempts to conceptualize lesbian and gay sexualities as reflexive forms of existence. She also criticizes the available sociological narratives in the contemporary world for being partial in their approach toward sexuality. These narratives according to Heaphy tends to neglect the significance of difference and power in shaping diverse gay and lesbian experiences and also appear to be an overly affirmative and

normative project which rather than dealing with how their lives are, tries to put forward how their lives should be. This article also refers to Anthony Giddens who spoke in favour of alternative sexuality by stating LGBT as new personal freedom in late modernity. He viewed LGBT as a forum that can disrupt the heterosexual paranoma and challenge the norms and values of the hetero-normative culture present in the society and also considered this form of sexuality to be more egalitarian. This egalitarian approach has further been challenged by many scholars by recognizing the power relations present within these relationships which will fail to make it egalitarian.

B. India and experiences of Sexuality

Indian society has never been welcoming to the concepts of alternative sexuality, specifically homosexuality which can be best justified by the existence of section 377 till 2018, which criminalizes sexual activities 'against the order of nature'. Sibaji Bandyopadhyay in a chapter in the book 'Phobic and the Erotic' states the issue of the release of the film Fire and how it revolutionizes the entire Indian scenario. The release of Fire for the first time made the citizens aware of the concept of alternative sexuality and also a public dispute on the issue of homosexuality was witnessed. The much-closeted identity of lesbianism came to the surface and called for a critical public discussion. In another article, Nivedita Menon talks about Section 377 and its painful assumption that normality springs from nature. She repeatedly asserts that sexuality is a cultural construct and individuals have to deal with this uncomfortable idea that sexuality is a human construct and not something that occurs naturally. Menon states that if sexuality was such a natural construct, all these codes of conduct (eg: gendered dress codes) wouldn't have been required to keep in place the sexual identities. On the same issue, Ruth Vanita attempts to normalize the issue of same-sex marriage by stating evidence that ensures their presence in pre-modern societies. She believes that this unnecessary and inappropriate focus on sex in the present times results in reducing relationships to sexual acts only. To the surprise of many, she states that unlike in modern times, there was no single documented act of homophobia (for example execution for same-sex marriage) in pre-modern Indian society.

The experiences of the sexual minority in the Indian scenario, specifically in the context of the family have been explored by several authors. Ranade (2018) in her book attempts to explore the experiences of growing up among lesbian and gay individuals. She focuses on their journey of finding themselves living in a heteronormative social structure. Her findings suggest that these individuals feel they are treated as being 'different' while growing up and have been constantly advised on the correct ways of being and behaving in a heteronormative social structure.

Adding to that, in the book titled "No Outlaws in the Gender Galaxy" (2015), the authors argue that the major source of despair in the case of individuals not belonging to the heteronormative social structure is the inability to find support from their natal family members. Birth families are considered to be the primary social structures specifically in the initial stages of growing up. Hence to understand the lives of the individuals, it becomes crucial to comprehend the engagement of these individuals with their families. The individuals identifying themselves as gay or lesbian reported stories of violence related to their non-normative choices regarding gender and sexuality. The practice of violence taking place in the institution of family questions the nature of the institution and further calls for an inquiry into the same.

In the context of this research, the respondents were asked regarding what they think becomes a factor that influences the decision-making of their family members (acceptance or nonacceptance) in the Indian scenario. Most of the individuals stated that being socially aware plays a huge role in influencing decision-making. Many even stated that at first, the family members were hesitant, but with time after reading up enough on the concept of homosexuality, they began to accept and normalize it. However, all of the respondents who perceived being aware as an influential factor didn't correlate being aware with more educational qualifications or being literate. Many even stated that they have seen numerous individuals who are very highly educated from elitist institutions but still didn't accept homosexuality and treated it as a deviant form.

Another important determinant factor that shapes the experiences of individuals is the class one is born in. Individuals born in an affluent class are given certain privileges while individuals belonging to an economically marginalized population lead to a cumulative cycle of deprivation due to their caste, class as well as non-normative positions regarding sexuality. Hence it becomes interesting to see the role class as an economic factor plays in shaping the experiences of individuals non-conforming to the heteronormative order.

But contradicting the literature, all the respondents of this research except one stated that class doesn't play any role in the decision-making process. Only one individual, a student of Jadavpur University stated that the middle class experiences the most problems with this concept. He stated that the two extreme classes- the lower class and the upper class don't pay much heed to the practices of sexuality. According to him, the economic conditions of the lower classes are so hand-to-mouth that other concerns regarding sexuality don't seem of importance to them. On the other hand, the higher classes through their financial power and social status can suppress the sexuality of their children from coming out. The middle class however is the most affected as the notion of respectability is attached to the middle class and hence going against the norms of society affects the middle-class

mentality as they are very much bothered about the social expectations. Analyzing the responses, keeping their economic and social background in mind, it was interesting to note that in no way do these factors play any role in the decision-making process.

Conclusion

To sum it up, the main streams of thought brought about by the discipline's stalwarts have effectively covered up the areas of research, though there has been a scarcity in the availability of literature specifically dealing with the perception of homely spaces from the perspective of an individual recognising themselves to be of alternative sexuality, as most texts conceptualising 'home' conform to the prevalent dominant, hetero-normative order.

In conclusion, it can be inferred from the arguments made throughout this paper that the majority of the respondents didn't consider home to be a mere geographical boundary. Also, they don't associate 'home' with biological kinship. Most of the interviewees have an abstract perception of the idea of a 'safe place ' and can relate to it more readily concerning their queer community or peer group rather than their biological kins. Surprisingly it was also found that the level of education (in terms of degree) and socioeconomic status made no difference in the level of acceptance or rejection of the same.

References

Bachelard, Gaston .(1958). *The poetics of space.* Boston, Massachusetts: Presses Universitaires de France. Bailey, F. G. (1957). *Caste and the economic frontier: A village in highland Orissa.* Manchester University Press.

Bose, B., & Bhattacharyya, S. (Eds.). (2007). *The phobic and the erotic: The politics of sexualities in contemporary India*. Seagull Books London Limited.

Campo, M., Fehlberg, B., Natalier, K., & Smyth, B. (2020). The meaning of home for children and young people after separation. Journal of social welfare and family law, 42(3), 299-318.

Desai, I. P. (1956). The joint family in India—An analysis. *Sociological bulletin*, *5*(2), 144-156.

Fetner, T., Elafros, A., Bortolin, S., & Drechsler, C. (2012). Safe spaces: Gay- straight alliances in high schools. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie*, *49*(2), 188-207.

Foucault, Michael .(1978). *The history of sexuality.* USA: Pantheon books. Gagnon, J. H., & Simon, W. (2017). *Sexual conduct: The social sources of human sexuality*. Routledge.

Germon, J. E. (2008). Kinsey and the politics of bisexual authenticity. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *8*(3-4), 243-258.

Gillies, V. (2003). *Family and intimate relationships: A review of the sociological research*. Families & Social Capital Research Group, South Bank University.

Green, A. I. (2008). Erotic habitus: Toward a sociology of desire. *Theory and society*, *37*(6), 597-626.

Heaphy, B. (2008). The sociology of lesbian and gay reflexivity or reflexive sociology?. *Sociological Research Online*, *13*(1), 188-199.

Kumar, Pushpesh, and Chayanika Shah . (2022). "Family beyond Blood and Marriage." Essay. In *Sexuality, Abjection and Queer Existence in Contemporary India*. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Madan, T. N. (1981). For a sociology of India. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, *15*(1-2), 405-418.

Mallett, S. (2004). Understanding home: a critical review of the literature. *The sociological review*, *52*(1), 62-89.

Mandelbaum, D. G. (1948). The family in India. *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, *4*(2), 123-139.

Murdock, George Peter. *Social Structure*. New York: Macmillan, 1969.

Polletta, F. (1999). " Free spaces" in collective action. *Theory and society*, *28*(1), 1-38.

Ranade, K. (2018). *Growing up gay in urban India*. Springer Singapore.

Rogers, Joel, Sara M. Evans, and Harry C. Boyte (1987). "Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Change in America." *Contemporary Sociology* 16, no. 5 . https://doi.org/10.2307/2069771.

Roach, T. (2012). *Friendship as a way of life: Foucault, AIDS, and the politics of shared estrangement*. SUNY Press.

Shah, A. M. (1964). Basic terms and concepts in the study of family in India. *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, *1*(3), 1-36.

Shah, C., Merchant, R., Mahajan, S., & Nevatia, S. (2015). *No outlaws in the gender galaxy*. Zubaan.

Simon, A. (2017). Safe Spaces: Their Construction and Their Purpose.

Smart, Carol (2007). *Personal life new directions in sociological thinking.* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Weeks, Jeffrey (1981). *Sex politics and society.* Longman group Ltd.

Spånberger Weitz, Y. (2022). "The home isn't like a safe space for them"—Ideals of home and family relationships in children's talk about family adversity and help-seeking. Children & society.

Weston, Kath .(1991). *Families we choose.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Brishti Sen Banerjee *is a PhD Scholar at the Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur*

Email id: brishti.sbanerjee@gmail.com

Making Sense of Collaborative Writing and Co-authorship: Linking Feminist Pedagogy with Praxis

---Anurekha Chari Wagh

Abstract: Collaborative writing and co-authorship in academic fields have generally been met with skepticism. This cynicism is compounded when the collaboration is between teachers and students writing about the teacher-student relationship in the classroom. This paper attempts to make sense of one such journey of collaborative writing and co-authorship of a teacher with her students. The insights are drawn from three sources; one is the experience of writing collaboratively with seven sociology of gender course students (2021), Department of Sociology, University of Hyderabad, on the Teacher-Student relationship. It has been published (February 2022) in the online discussion platform of Confluence Journal of Indian Academy of Sciences - http://confluence.ias.ac.in/tag/mentor-mentee-relationship/. Two, reflexive notes were shared post-publication by five co-authors of the article. Three, insights from my observation notes of the process and my responses either by email of chats in the what's-app group formed for the collaborative writing initiative. Based on the above, this paper raises three issues; One, teaching-learning practices where students are perceived as passive in the process of knowledge creation; Two, how to the challenges of linking collaborative feminist pedagogy in the classroom with praxis, reflected as teacher-student co-authorship of academic writing and three, raising questions about academic practices that emphasise single author publication that neglect feminist collaborative pedagogies.

Key words: Collaborative Writing; Co-authorship; Feminist Pedagogy; Classroom; Teacher -Student; Shared Experience

Introduction

> '*Collaborative writing as a pedagogical practice certainly holds significant valence not only in reshaping and reconfiguring the dynamics of teacher-students relationships but also in terms of laying out the ground for a very engaging process of mutual co-learning. For our article on teacher-student relationship and classroom dynamics, I have found the process extremely enriching on many fronts*' (Nabanita Samanta, Reflexive Note, March 2022)

> "*We addressed the marginality of the students, the question of language, and importantly mental health which was my area of contribution. Talking about the mental health perspective is really important and we addressed it. I have been silent for most of the time in the classroom in my whole student life as a consequence of several limitations like social background, mental health, language... I could*

address this problem in the writing (Sunil Kumar CM, Email April 2022)

Collaborative writing and co-authorship in academic fields have generally been met with skepticism. This cynicism is compounded when the collaboration is between teachers and students writing about the teacher-student relationship in the classroom. This paper attempts to make sense of one such journey of collaborative writing and co-authorship of a teacher with her students. The insights are drawn from three sources; one is the experience of writing collaboratively with seven sociology of gender course students (2021), Department of Sociology, University of Hyderabad, on the Teacher-Student relationship. It has been published (February 2022) in the online discussion platform of Confluence Journal of Indian Academy of Sciences - http://confluence.ias.ac.in/tag/mentor-mentee-relationship/. Two, reflexive notes shared post-publication by five co-authors of the article. Three, insights from my observation notes of the process and my responses either by email of chats in the what's-app group formed for the collaborative writing initiative. Based on the above, this paper raises three issues; One, teaching-learning practices where students are perceived passive in the process of knowledge creation; Two, how to the challenges of linking collaborative feminist pedagogy in the classroom with praxis, reflected as teacher-student co-authorship of academic writing and three, raising questions about academic practices that emphasise single author publication that neglect feminist collaborative writings.

For doing this, the questions engaged with in this paper, include what was the process of collaborative writing like? Was it experienced differently by the teacher and students, and if yes, how? What is it that one learnt through the process? How can one motivate others to follow this initiate? How is this collaboration building upon feminist pedagogy of teachers and students as co-creators of knowledge? Would our shared experiences of collaborative and co-authored writing nudge the dominant notions of what it means to be valued as a worthy, respected academic?

In general, most of the arguments about collaborative writing highlight the camaraderie within an established group, mostly peers working on similar areas and through collaboration built on the trust and relationship it has sustained. But this collaborative group – the Confluence Initiative emerged as a response to a call for paper on teacher student's relationship in a classroom. In this context, the collaboration was specific; newly established within a classroom space comprising teacher, students, and peers. Such a collaboration was challenging because not only one was addressing the power dynamics of teachers and students writing together but we were also conceptualising and addressing teacher student relationship in the classroom. This group had to gradually build trust and accountability among themselves. What helped us was how we build up on the feminist pedagogical principles of teaching and

learning, that the course sociology of gender was based upon. Feminist pedagogy, among many other things emphasises teachers and students as equal collaborators in knowledge production; builds upon an awareness of collective learning from shared experience, and ensures a reflexive engagement with power, authority, and vulnerability that teachers and students hold in a classroom. Though this was discussed and engaged with in the classroom, the writing collaboration provided us an opportunity to apply it in a practical manner.

On further reflection, two other contexts began to make sense; one, in the debate on making sociology as a discipline relevant, Bairy (2004) argued that one needs to listen to the student voices. Through this attempt at collaborative writing with students, we hoped to address the gap where the experiences of at least some of the students would be highlighted by way of a self-reflexive process in partnership with their teacher. Two, to reconnect with students by engaging with learning process reflexively and collaboratively, in a world shaken up by the pandemic, where LeBel at al., (2022) argue 'we find ourselves connected to our students and each other via mediated screens and asynchronous and synchronous conversations'. In retrospect, one could argue that this collective emerged during the pandemic and provided us a platform to be connected to each other in an intellectually stimulating and emotionally rewarding

The paper is divided into three sections. The first section engages with a brief review on collaborative writing, particularly feminist engagement with collaborative writing as a creative pedagogical tool and critical writing strategy Section two presents a discussion on why and how the collaborative writing initiative was undertaken in the author's classroom. Section three highlights what we gained from the collaborative initiative. These are followed by the conclusion.

Section 1: interrogating Collaborative Writing

An overview of the research analysing collaborative writing emphasizes, four aspects; one, challenging the established methodological and theoretical paradigms of scientific work. This is best represented by the Memory as a method developed by German feminist Frigga Haug (1980, 'Female Sexualization: A Collective Work of Memory'), who states that it is a feminist research method that breaks down the barriers between the subject and object of research. What is interesting is that it involves collective analysis of individual written memories. But as Onyx and Small (2001) argue such a method of collective analysis raises questions of practical, theoretical, and ethical issues.

Two, the subversive nature of such academic work, as these efforts questions the hierarchialised, market-oriented, and neo-liberal practices of contemporary

academic institutions. Other works that have referred to collaborative writing's subversive nature include Clairborne et al., 2015, Nagar 2006 and Karach and Roach 1992. The scholarship by Sangthin writers and Richa Nagar, who in their book, 'Playing with Fire Feminist Thought and Activism through Seven lives in India' engaged with what they referred to as collaborative methodology. In this book, the seven grassroots workers and district organisers from an NGO form a collective called Sangthin, and documented collectively about class, gender, and caste hierarchy within donor funded NGO. Murthy (2007: 454), writes, 'this approach to knowledge production and dissemination challenges the usual appropriation of experiences and knowledge of grassroots workers by elite authors. Mohanty (2006: XI), argues that the method where the auto-biographers begin by writing about their own individual childhood, adolescence, women hood and sexuality; then they collectively and reflexively examine the different meanings of 'poverty, communalism, and elitism' in their own lives' is a powerful methodological engagement, because it challenges the binary between experience and theory. Sangthin collective by collectively theorising their own experiences, transformed the dominant and hegemonic mode of knowledge production based on exclusionary principles. Such scholarship has the potential to transform knowledge hierarchies and build towards a much more democratic forms of knowledge construction.

Karach and Roach (1992) engages with the question whether such writing is part of resistance, especially when 'academic writing' is part of the hierarchical structure, with a single author publishing being one of the most important factors for evaluating one's research and teaching capabilities. Further with little scope for engaging with creative, time consuming collaborative pedagogic efforts, writing collaboratively or as a collective has enabled the authors to become more critically conscious of and challenge the individualistic, competitive, elitist ethos of higher education (Karach and Roach 1992: 304). Clairborne et al., (2015) engages with the question of transformative possibilities of collaborative research. According to them working collaboratively was a challenging task within academic settings that still has a strong tendency to emphasise the production of individually authored research outputs in timely fashion.

Three, analysis that highlights collaborative writing as a practical feminist method of knowledge making (Karach and Roach 1992). Scholars tend to feel alienated from higher education systems and institutions, get skeptical at what they perceive to be knowledge so distanced from themselves and/or their real lived experiences and subjective knowledges. Further, as Storch (2005), argues within the feminist pedagogical practices learners are encouraged to claim their space of knowledge creation and also focus on the process of writing collaboratively. As Karach and Roach (1992; 308) state that for

teachers collaborative writing would surely make teaching and learning a more interesting, stimulating, and challenging process.

Four, questioning the nature of writing. The argument made by Miranda et al., (2020) in their work, which is titled, 'Yes, we all count equally', states that collaborative writing raises important questions with regards to 'writing as a solitary process'. They argue that 'as junior scholars who frequently collaborate, we question the institutional importance placed on sole authorship within cultural anthropology'. They demand a critical reexamination of co-authorship as a powerful, exciting, and radical space akin to the broader collaborative turn in anthropology. Such analysis while highlighting the potential of collaborative writing to be transformative also emphasises upon the process of collaboration and co-authorship. To be able to challenge to an extent established exclusionary practices of academic engagement, the process of building the collaboration is as crucial as the idea itself. It is clear from the above discussions that there exists a binary between writing as exclusionary practice and writing as collaborative practice. Research has identified collaborative writing spaces as feminist and empowering, situated in the writers'/scholars' social and academic location. In such cases it is crucial to address the process of collaborative writing so as to evaluate its potentiality to challenge and break the binary between individual and collective writing within the academic world.

Section 2: The Process: Addressing the Why and How of Collaborative Writing

In the above section, it was clear that the analytical literature on collaborative writing usually highlighted how organically the collective emerged and how such writing could be perceived as strategies of resistance. I am not sure whether one could refer to our collaborative writing endeavour now referred to as 'Confluence Initiative' (it is the name we assigned to the google collective draft and the what's app group) as subversive or as a strategy of resistance. I argue that collaborative writing cannot be analysed based on the singular axis of either resistance and/or subversion. Each aspect of collaborative writing and the dynamics of co-authorship are distinct and different and thus has to be located in the context of its emergence.

As discussed in our paper, the confluence initiative grew out of the specific location of our classroom. We argued that,

> '*In the Covid times, where education has been modelled by the demands posed by the pandemic, our classroom is no different. The course 'Sociology of Gender' offered as an elective by the Department of Sociology, University of Hyderabad takes place in the virtual mode. The virtual space as a classroom is occupied by teacher and 46[i], third Semester post graduate students... the intersectionality of identities is marked not only by disciplinary backgrounds, but also by class, caste,*

gender, religion, region, language and disability…the feminist pedagogy[ii] adopted in the classroom tries to bring together this diversity and a conscious attempt is made to address the power dynamics at play in the interactions…this collaborative writing endeavour also is to be located within the larger feminist pedagogical framework structuring our classrooms' (Banerjee et al., 2022).

Reflecting back on the Confluence Initiative journey, it is clear that it did not evolve out of a long-term association built on shared interests. It was a self-choice project that students voluntarily joined, with a specific time bound goal in mind. While all students of the elective (forty-six of them) were given the chance to join the group, but within the stipulated time seven students, of different disciplinary backgrounds (Sociology, Women's Studies, and Political Science) gave consent and thus formed the Confluence Initiative. Though there is immense work on writing as a method of inquiry, an emergent research method, the attempt at collaborative writing undertaken by this group did not emerge out of a conscious attempt to engage with writing as enquiry, but rather with the fixed aim of publishing together.

Initially the idea seemed interesting only in relation to two aspects; one, writing in collaboration with Masters students, and two, teacher and students writing collaboratively about teacher-student relationship in a classroom. It was unlike any collaborative writing strategies that scholars wrote about, as discussed in previous section. It is interesting that though we wrote collectively, reflections about the process were submitted individually and only by five of the authors. Two authors despite reminders and requests did not submit their reflexives notes. It was almost as if once the article was published, the spirit of collaboration came to its logical end. Despite that, I believe it was an experience worth engaging in. It is only in retrospect that the emergence of the collaboration could be observed in; one, the need to connect with students during the pandemic times, when classrooms had become digital and two, to address the teacher and student dynamics in the classroom in a collaborative and collective manner. To critically engage with collaborative writing as a critical research and pedagogic enquiry started only after we published the article and started reflecting on it.

Miranda el at., (2020) argued that collaborative writing was a long process that relied on vulnerability, shared responsibility, and communication. By intellectually vulnerability, the authors refer to the process where one would be able to say no, your argument makes more sense than mine, and put ourselves there for critique from peers. The process for me was intellectually vulnerable process, because I was putting myself out there with my students (not research students but Masters) for their evaluation and assessment. I realised that they would be able to evaluate my writing skills, my confusion, and the messiness that goes into any writing process. The idea of being evaluated by the students was terrifying. For the students, also it was a

vulnerable process as they had to share their experiences, their language, and writing skills, and their ideas. In hindsight, it was clear that we all were taking immense risk and therefore needed to build trust and respect for each other.

In addition to trust and respect, a third feature that the Confluence Initiative was built upon was shared responsibility. As Nitish Kumar, one of the co-authors shared in his reflexive note,

> '*first of all to kickstart our initiative we had a brainstorming session, where all of us shared our experiences about teaching and learning, drawbacks of the system, the future of pedagogy, and many other things. We also discussed our plan on how to proceed ahead in this initiative*' (Reflexive Note, March 2022).

We first established a what's app group and started meeting regularly every two to three days for approximately 1.5 hours to discuss our ideas, share our experiences and listen to the ideas in the context of the teacher-student relationship in the classroom. Once we had broad ideas, we started mapping out categories, focusing on three to four ideas that could be engaged with in detail in the paper. We then divided ourselves into groups and each had to discuss, read and write on that topic. To facilitate writing we shared an online document, so that everyone could edit it, and gradually we could develop a workable draft.

It was interesting and challenging because students had to manage classes, internal evaluations, readings, and household responsibilities, and the teacher had to balance classes, evaluations, assignments, child care, household responsibilities but still managed to be available for meetings which would sometimes go on till late evenings. We communicated with each other using emails, what's app group, and through Google Meet. The Confluence Initiative started on the 18th of September 2021 and we submitted our paper on the 16th October of 2021. It was a challenging initiative to write collaboratively within a stipulated deadline. We all realised that it was an unusual group, who barely knew each other but all sharing the goal of writing together. Sometimes it was a frustrating exercise, and I was also under pressure to conform to the academic conventions of higher education, which emphasized upon single author peer-reviewed articles in UGC Care-listed journals[iii].

The other challenge was how to list our names as authors. We did realise that all of us had contributed equally. So, in the end, we settled on the standard academic practice of alphabetical order, with the teacher's name in the end. As far as authorship citation was concerned, we did not discuss at length as to how this collaborative writing and co-authorship might impact broader disciplinary trends in authorship and citation politics. I proposed and everyone accepted; either because it seemed logical and rational or may be because the

teacher proposed it. I still don't have an answer to this, as even in the reflexive notes none of them have addressed it.

After its publication, one could observe two interesting responses to it from the academic community. First, though the piece was editorially reviewed and changes were made subsequent to editorial comments, since the piece was not published in a peer-reviewed journal, the academic viability of such writing was questioned. I distinctly recall a student asking me,

> *'whether I am not concerned about decreasing my own academic standards by publishing with students as co-authors'* (Classroom discussion, Research Methods II 2022; Department of Sociology, UoH).

Second, what was interesting was that it did not find much interest either from the other students' side or from colleagues and friends (with some exceptions), and the piece was met with silence. It was puzzling as the article did raise some interesting arguments with regard to teacher student relationship in the classroom, which we in the collective believed would interest many. Such a response maybe reflects the institutionalised practice of single author peer reviewed academic articles being the dominant way of academic process and it is difficult to crack despite the potentiality of collaborative writing to be empowering[iv].

Section 3: What we gained from the collaborative initiative?

To argue for co-authored collaborative writing as intellectually powerful and productive endeavour, it is important to interrogate the collaboration. At the outset, it needs to answer the question, how did the collaboration impact teacher -student dynamics in the classroom? I would respond by saying that it made audible the silent voices of students with regard to classroom dynamics. Within the virtual classrooms, this collaboration provided a network to meet, discuss, listen, share and engage in a mutually intellectual productive journey. With the digital medium so alienating, this collaboration provided some form of support.

Additionally, most of the time academic writing is a private act and the published form does not highlight the messiness of the writing process. But this collaboration helped us to address our insecurities, our fears, build confidence and nurture solidarity amongst us. It also made it clear that we all had joint responsibility over the production of the text, so were mutually accountable to each other. Specifically, as a feminist sociologist the experience of putting in practice a core principle of feminist pedagogy., that is students and teachers are co-creators of knowledge was crucial. This was reflected in some of the observations I received from colleagues where they shared that, such an initiative was a 'critical piece shaped in collaboration with students (Colleague from Women's Studies Centre, UoH) and 'what is heartening is to see the students-teachers coming together to share experiences

in the classroom. Rarely do we see, this kind of meaningful partnership (colleague from Regional Studies Centre, UoH). One does not deny that there were also the usual silences.

As mentioned in the introduction this paper is trying to make sense of the collaboration. Thus, based on the experiences of writing together, my notes of the exercise, and on the reflexive notes shared by five of the co-authors, one can identify six aspects to the Confluence Initiative. These six aspects, is related in multiple intersecting ways to the issues of collaborative writing as highlighted in section one of this paper.

1. **The initiative helped nurture a joint academic platform**

   > '*I also saw this initiative as an opportunity to connect with my peers and get to know them because the online teaching mode thus far deprived us of meaningful interactions… Moreover, the best part for me was listening to my fellow collaborators*' (Nitish Kumar, Reflexive Note, March 2022).

The motive behind this initiative when it started was to connect to the students, who were I believe becoming increasingly disinterested in the process of learning. After almost one and a half years of lockdown, this was the batch who were in their third semester without even being in the university campus. Teaching the Sociology of Gender paper was becoming a challenge because the fatigue, the disinterest, and the silence among the students was overpowering While the collaborative turn in academic has focused on it being subversive and resistance to dominant academic practices, we have used the space differently. The collaborative writing space can open up alternatives that go beyond the conventional ideas pertaining to publication and become a journey of liberation, even if temporary, from the hard grip of lockdowns, virtual classrooms, and pandemic-related uncertainties. So, when I had the opportunity to write on a topic that I believed would interest students, such as teacher student relationship in a classroom I knew I could not let it go. I was disappointed when only seven students agreed to collaborate, but I still held on to it. As mentioned in the above section, we had our meetings and discussions, but while it was a powerful space for me, I was not sure of the students. So, reading their reflexive notes, was liberating, as Rose Maria writes,

   > ''*The virtual mode had totally taken away the understanding that we usually have of a classroom; this was brought back through the collaboration and the writing exercise. Writing is usually seen as a reflective exercise and collaborative writing I believe adds more understanding to that reflection…The exercise helped make more meaning out of the virtual mode of education given the discussions and the engagement we had for the article*''' (Reflexive Note, March 2022).

The fact that at least for a few students this collaborative space could emerge as a safe space where they could share their personal experiences, listen to

each other, and share their journeys was extremely important, because the digital medium of classroom was erasing away that connection between the teachers and students and between students themselves. Though the group was set up as a writing group, I believe at some moments it transformed into a much-valued space. As Nabanita Samanta writes,

> *"The discussions, albeit in virtual mode, were pretty much open-ended as we could open up and share our personal experiences, reflections, thoughts on various aspects of classroom pedagogy and academic life in general'* (Reflexive Note March 2022). This is also shared by Shreya, *"This was a refreshing exercise, especially during online classes, when we barely had any interaction in classes. Since this exercise was based on interaction all of us had to speak out and share our inputs…since I was from a different department, I also took it as an opportunity to interact with people from a different department and learn their ways of doing things… Meaningful relations were formed during the course of this exercise and some of them are still part of my friend's circle'* (Reflexive Note, March 2022)

2. Co-creating knowledge by teacher and students

The collaborative writing facilitated in small but significant ways the addressing of the power hierarchy, through the process of co creating knowledge by teacher and students. What did the article on teacher and student relationship in a classroom address? In analysing the relationship between teachers and students in the classroom, four themes were identified and analysed in the article on teacher-student relationship. One, the need for teachers and students to address the experiences of diversity and marginalisations in the classroom. Two, the classroom should be sensitive to the questions of language, particularly ability to express and articulate in English. Three, the need for teachers and students to be sensitive to mental health concerns among them. Four, the importance of building collaboration with teachers and students to nurture engaged learning experience (Banerjee, et al., 2022). One of the questions is that whether these questions seem to have a different meaning during the pandemic and the onset of virtual classrooms? A quick response is yes, but to address it is beyond the scope of this paper.

These ideas were powerful in the sense that they emerged out of the personal experiences of the students. To be able to share, without censure, with care was not only powerful but enriching, as there seemed to be a seed of possibility of co-creating meaning within the classroom. As Shreya writes,

> '*It was the first time I was a part of such an endeavour, and therefore sharing the platform with my professor added to the delight. Before this initiative, I used to think that students and teachers share a hierarchical relationship, and it is clearly visible at the school level,*

but in higher education, that hierarchy manifests itself implicitly and differently' (Shreya K Sugathan, Reflexive Note, March 2022)

Over the period that we were writing together it did feel that somewhere a start could be made of rewriting teacher student relationship; maybe move away from hierarchy to a more mutually cooperative relationship, at least in some spaces. The experiences of Nabanita and Sunil also address this issue. Nabanita states,

> *'It also attends to the power-dynamics, as such collaboration surely destabilises, at least to some extent, the entrenched hierarchy between the students and the teacher by bringing them together in shared space of mutual learning and co-production of knowledge'* (Nabanita Samanta, Reflexive Note, March 2022).

> "*This is a unique experiment to include both students and their teacher in advocating teacher and student relationship. Usually works on pedagogy are addressed either from the teacher's viewpoint or from the student's point of view. Our work is a collaboration of both teacher and students to bring in a holistic perspective. Though we all could not meet in person, we made efforts to meet online and could express our views and insights about the initiative. In these meetings, we all shared our personal experiences about the teacher-student relationship, flaws in the system, the gap between a teacher and students*" (Sunil Kumar C M, Email, April 2022).

Reading the notes leads me to believe that though the digital medium in certain ways decreased connectivity of students with teachers, it also in some ways shifted the institutionalised hierarchy between the teachers and students. Many teachers will agree, when I say that the students non-response in the classroom, switching off their videos, not responding when asked for a comment or observation, leaving the class abruptly, somewhere did shift the relationship. After a long time, it was clear that the teachers were not in absolute control over their classrooms. Though initially, it was challenging, but as an afterthought, I believe it shook our complacency of taking the classroom or the students for granted.

3. Part of a self-reflexive learning as a collective

> *'Students are eager to share their experiences and one could sense that they desire a safe platform, where they could share their vulnerabilities and fears, without being judged. It is important to nurture a welcoming space?'* (Observation Notes, 20th September 2021).

Reading my observation notes of the discussion sessions I could see that the group were sharing their experiences with their peers, teachers, about classroom interaction in their school and colleges and how it had a huge

impact on their understanding of a classroom even in the university spaces. It was no surprise that many of the co-authors had written about the self-reflexive learning that the collaboration space had provided. As Nitish, writes,

> '*In other words, whatever my colleagues and I were writing very much conveyed our social locations. I believe that a good teaching and learning process also means constant questioning, which involves questioning the existing ideas, examining our positions and beliefs, and even evaluating the whole pedagogical framework. And, such writings provide that platform to reflect on our thoughts. These collaborative efforts also involve the exchange of ideas, and I certainly believe that synthesising different ideas from different standpoints is epistemologically also a sound activity*' (Nitish Kumar, Reflexive Note March 2022)

Adding to it, Nabanita shares,

> '*It is pertinent to note that the group (comprising of students from different backgrounds and the teacher) has been a heterogenous one- with different markers of heterogeneities; yet as we engaged with the reflective exercise, the process helped in negotiating with the heterogeneities without essentializing our differences. In fact, in our initial drafts which we jotted down in a shared Google document (in which we shared our individual ideas and later the nuggets were put together), we all duly acknowledged our positionality in terms of locating ourselves, and this is something which I find quite crucial for accounting for the differences while still trying to forge a sense of solidarity and togetherness… a*lso we had a deadline to meet for the completion of the exercise, and it called for prudent engagement without going much overboard- and this was another challenge as there has been (and it is supposed to be so) so much more to reflect on and keep deliberating upon*' (Nabanita Samanta, Reflexive Note, March 2022).

Such an experience was also reiterated by Shreya, who states that

> '*I was clueless as to how this will work out. I was doubtful as to whether such a large group would agree on points that could be published as one single paper. The biggest takeaway that I had was those discussions, more often than not, lead to mutually agreed upon conclusions*' (Shreya K Sugathan, Reflexive Note, March 2022) and by Rose, '*Such a platform of collaborative writing with peers and the teacher helped me understand and explore power dimensions and even think about and voice out about the ought to be dimension of a classroom to a teacher. While understanding and exploring this dimension and putting forth our opinions, we were traversing the path to that ought to the classroom. Even while rereading the piece, it feels*

like the voices of all of us can be heard with none of it overshadowing or overpowering the others' (Rose Maria, Reflexive Note, March 2022).

4. Collaborative writing space emerged as a confidence building platform

Instilled confidence as it challenged not only the experience of writing as a lonely journey but through collaborative writing, challenged the teaching-learning process, that celebrated ethics of individualism, competition, and hierarchy among knowledge producers.

> *'For me, it was a very significant experience as this was the first time that I could share with some others some aspects of the many challenges that I had faced (and I continue to face while striving to overcome these) throughout the tedious journey as a university student. In fact, before this, I had mostly refrained from sharing my experiences with even my classmates (not to say, the teachers who, I had thought must have been supposed to remain as inaccessible in most cases!), perhaps because there had been much fear and trepidation when it comes to the question of sharing one's own vulnerabilities and struggles with others'* (Nabanita Samanta, Reflexive Note, March 2022).

Teaching academic writing to research scholars of the department of sociology, University of Hyderabad, since 2019 has to a large extent helped me to deal with my fear of writing, especially academic writing. Writing for publishing either in a peer-reviewed journal, book chapter, academic blog, e-content or any other is most of the times a daunting task. Over time I have realised that there are two misconceptions about academic writing; one, it is natural, some are born to be good writers and therefore everyone cannot write and two, we should share our writing only when it is perfect. While teaching academic writing I learnt, that the key to writing is building one's confidence of believing that our ideas, intuitions, hunches emerge either from our experiences, reading, observation, or any such aspect. So, we need to respect, engage and build on it by reading to construct arguments. Additionally writing is a skill, that can be learnt, it is possible for each one of us to train ourselves to be a writer. Whether we are good or not requires reading and practice of writing. Unfortunately, the fear of writing has rendered writing as a very lonely journey. Through this collaborative writing, one hoped that together one could deal with the pressure of academic writing and publishing one's work.

As Rose, highlights,

> *'The team element and the discussions empower you with a voice and instill confidence which take away and practice thereafter. For instance, the second internal of the course which had an autoethnographic dimension and reflexivity became an easier task for*

me once I was done with the paper. Because by then I had come out of the barriers of the virtual mode and had discussions with my classmates and in addition I came to realise through my reflections that I am in a safe classroom. This helped me share and be vulnerable in presenting my views as part of the internal' (Rose Maria, Reflexive Note, March 2022).

The collaboration to a certain extent helped us to deal with our fear, as Nabanita shares,

'*Our discussion- sessions as part of the collaborative exercise have pushed me to get over (at least, to some extent) the deeply entrenched apprehensions of mine, as I could open up (even if, a bit) and share my reflections while at the same time listening to and learning from others as they shared their own experiences'* (Nabanita Samanta, Reflexive Note, March 2022) and also emphasised the importance of collective and collaborative exercise, '*Usually we do our assignments alone. Collaborative writing endeavors rarely happen…academic spaces limit itself to training students to write exams. To indulge in creative thoughts and attempting to put them down on paper is rarely encouraged. There are certain styles of writing that you adhere to while writing to publish. Students in Indian academia rarely get an opportunity to explore the same. This exercise managed to shed some light on otherwise the inscrutable process of writing and publishing. Though I have published articles on several platforms, I haven't had published any papers as such. This was my first experience. I think for people like me, who haven't had a chance to explore how to write a paper, this opportunity was like the first step in a long journey'* (Shreya K Sugathan, Reflexive Note, March 2022).

As Nitish shares, these sessions also helped in building confidence, which is a critical element in writing in any form, '*This confluence writing initiative was an experience of its own, and it was a great feeling to see my name in the published writing along with my fellow collaborators'* (Nitish Kumar, Reflexive Note, March 2022).

5. Focused on linking feminist pedagogy with praxis

'*The feminist pedagogy that we followed from the start of the course,[v] in designing the course line was just seen as an innovation but not given much thought till I started thinking for the paper. It is when I started writing on locating the classroom, that many dimensions that we discussed in the paper (sociology of gender) started making sense and seemed relevant'* (Rose Maria, Reflexive Note, March 2022).

Engaging in feminist pedagogy is core to teaching gender studies. In the course, feminist pedagogy is addressed, in teaching and writing around questions of power, representation, and voice which not only has diverse

voices, but also students sharing their concerns on teaching and learning practices, pedagogies, and strategies used by teachers in the classrooms). The effort is to think of diverse ways that one can foreground feminist pedagogy with praxis. The confluence initiative was thought of as one way to link feminist pedagogy with praxis. As this writing was not part of any assignment or evaluation and students had to decide for themselves whether to be part of the writing group, it provided the perfect base to observe whether in practice what are the challenges that would emerge.

Commenting on feminist pedagogy and collaborative writing, Rose writes,

> '*Definitely, collaborative writing is doing a lot more than a conventional classroom can do in terms of knowledge sharing, brainstorming, clash of opinions, and negotiations of positions. A healthy discussion can be fostered through these practices as those who share similar interest come together*' (Rose Maria, Reflexive Note, March 2022). Such a feeling is also shared by, Shreya, who writes, '*I do think that it is an innovative pedagogy, at least in the Indian academic space. Professors and students have to put in extra efforts to make something like this happen. The end result of this exercise would make the effort worthwhile…while in classrooms your education usually gets reduced to a single dimension of learning and writing for examinations. If knowledge creation means a wholesome growth through interaction with different people and improving your understanding of the world, then this exercise indeed played a small role in it''* (Shreya K Sugathan, Reflexive Note, March 2022).

Without glorifying the collaborative exercise, Nabanita, argues,

> '*We tried to put together something which is not quite exhaustive or comprehensive but it is just about opening up a space for further reflections, discussions, deliberations and taking the ideas forward in terms of striving towards reshaping the classroom dynamics, and the collaborative exercise certainly sets a right precedent in this direction …The epistemological value of such an exercise, the most important aspect is that quite often the classroom operates in a manner that renders the student's as mere 'receivers' (mostly passive roles): and the initiative like ours certainly unsettles the status quo as it engages the students as active agents in the very process of knowledge creation* (Nabanita Samanta, Reflexive Note, March 2022).

The emphasis of feminist pedagogy in sensitizing students to recognise diversity of experiences and participate in the learning process as co-creators of knowledge as hooks argues, was reflected in the words of Nitish, when he states, '*Collaborative writing also allowed me to observe my colleagues writing style and structure in a way that reflected the different standpoints*' (Nitish Kumar, Reflexive Note, March 2022).

Reiterated by Sunil,

'*We addressed obstacles in teacher-student relationship and the ways forward to improvise on this…Including reflections of both students and teachers is necessary while talking about teacher and students' relationship. Giving students a role and representation to put their concerns and opinions forward is an innovative practice*" (Sunil Kumar CM, Email April 2022), highlights how given a chance and a space collaborating writing and co-authorship of teachers and students can be a transformative exercise in teaching and learning, making it more accountable and shared. As Shreya, writes, *'Each person was encouraged to speak. Nobody interrupted while a person was talking. Disagreements were respectfully addressed. The exercise teaches you that you don't necessarily have to agree on everything and that you can disagree respectfully and find a middle ground'* (Shreya K Sugathan, Reflexive Note March 2022).

6.   Collaborative writing and co-authoring as challenging hierarchical knowledge structures

A realisation that while the effort was to make each one equal, some ideas get better represented, leading to a feeling of being left out in the journey. It thus highlighted the limitations of the collaborative exercise institutionalized (practices?) within already existing hierarchical knowledge structures. How much can collaborative writing and co-authoring do in dismantling structures of hierarchy**?**

One does realise the limits of collaborative writing and co-authorship in dismantling and dislodging years of internalized hierarchy in knowledge formation. As Sunil rightly comments,

'*Power relations and hierarchy are embodied in a typical teacher and student relationship. This situation is visualized more explicitly in regular schools and colleges. This exists in progressive academic spaces such as the University of Hyderabad too but is comparatively minimal and different…Exercising power in the teacher-student relationship should be minimal to work collaboratively for this kind of initiative. Student collaborators must be seen at par level as co-authors and be given the liberty to induce their thoughts. We succeeded in this part to a great extent. We, student authors, exercised the liberty to freely express our opinions and thoughts and could reflect the same in our writing"* (Sunil Kumar CM, Email April 2022).

While writing of their critical assessment of the collaborative work, the comments shared by the co-authors include diverse thoughts.

As Shreya, comments,

'*Such collaboration usually works in small classrooms. In bigger classroom, either you have to select a few people or create smaller groups'* (Shreya K Sugathan, Reflexive Note, March 2022). The feeling of being rejected, sidelined, and excluded from the collaboration, was experienced by Sunil, who writes,

'*But at times this heterogeneity may also lead to unwarranted confrontations while working on sensitive topics, for example caste and reservation. In a similar vein, some collaborators might also feel agitated if their part does not feature prominently or as per their expectations in the final draft. For example, I also felt restless when some part of my piece was removed from the primary draft even without informing me. But that's part of such collaborative projects because you can't include everything*' (Nitish Kumar, Reflexive Note, March 2022).

Further as Rose, argues, can we really dismantle inequality. For her, '*The question of marginality that we explore in terms of language, access, and even the silences must have been the reasons behind the limited number of people in the team from a classroom of 46. So, collaborative writing can bring together people but do we really get to overturn and overcome the barriers mentioned in the paper just through collaborative writing is again a question...it needs to be explored further..while a healthy discussion can be fostered through these practices as those who share similar interests come together. However, the inbuilt thought that we are working with the teacher guides our conduct to some extent when we try to negotiate the power dimension. This is because of our socialization which is hard to break off from.* (Rose Maria, Reflexive Note March 2022)

As the person who had the most authority in the group, it is challenging. I am also concerned as to why the other two authors did not respond to the appeal and share their experiences. There could be many reasons for their silences, but it does raise the question of whether and to what extent such collaborative exercises can work. It has been some time since the article has been published, and unfortunately one can observe that the platform that one had built kind of faded away. This exercise has taught one that these groups need nurturing, and constant building up but without everyone feeling connected or accountable, the potential of a such collaborative writing group to be transformative and develop into a long-term meaningful space is limited.

In Conclusion:

The exercise is not only about collaboration but also the challenge of writing on the subject of teacher-student relationship in a classroom itself,

collaboratively with students as co-authors. The words of Nabanita make sense when she states,

> ''*Indeed, such an exercise entails many different challenges, as bringing different ideas and reflections together while knitting them in a running thread of continuity calls from careful and conscious efforts on part of everyone involved in the exercise. Furthermore, the theme we have engaged with has multi-faceted dimensions with many nuances encapsulated in each strand, and it was indeed challenging to bring the varied aspects under broader thematic thrusts and present the nuances within the specified space of the brief article*' (Reflexive Note, March 2022).

The fact that the classroom was a digitally mediated space was also daunting as Sunil Kumar CM highlights,

> "*We were part of a class that happened completely online mode and we could never happen to meet in person. We located our classroom as a class that happened virtually. Thus was challenging for us to talk about the dynamics of a classroom with this background. Having a regular class mode and interactions would have helped us to articulate issues with more efficiency. Nevertheless, we did our best to bring all our concerns into it though we were restricted to the online mode of teaching*" (Email April 2022).

What are then the take aways from this collaborative endeavour? One, students writing about teacher student relationship in classroom, sharing their insecurities, concerns, vulnerabilities and addressing ways in which teachers could be more sensitive, accountable and responsive in classrooms was powerful and timely. Two, collaborative spaces have different meanings in different contexts. In this Confluence initiative, the space emerged as a safe space, providing relief and succor from the painful, fearful and uncertainty during lockdown and alienating experience of virtual classrooms. Three, collaborative writing highlighted the importance of diversity, not only in terms of positions of authority but also in terms of identity within the classroom. Recognition of such diverse nature, not only enhances group dynamics but also enriches academic writing as was reflected in our collaborative writing exercise. Finally, collaborative writing in our specific case also helped each one of us to deal head on with our own fear of academic writing. Teaching a course on academic writing and dealing with the publishing world, has highlighted that academic writing for many of us is a challenge. By writing collaboratively we drew upon each other's strengths, supported each other, and developed confidence in our own voices and arguments.

One would not know for certain, but the fact that the pandemic and its heightened sense of being lonely and isolated, made many teachers and students start thinking about how to reconnect, and this collaborative space gave that meaning to some of us. In the introduction, I referred to how this

platform emerged as intellectually stimulating and emotionally rewarding, but it was time specific and contextual to the pandemic situation. For some time at least, meeting (albeit through an online medium), discussions, debates, sharing of our vulnerabilities, and personal trails made us stronger together. Over time it did show that such collaboration is limited, as once the article was published, we lost that connect and the shared space. On the other hand, as some of the co-authors shared, this experience of collaborative writing and co-authorship undeniably did change some aspects of the power and hierarchy between teachers and students, that none of us can deny. Is it enough, of course not, but is it an important start, the answer is unequivocally, YES.

---

[i] On an average 25 students attend the classes, which is recorded and shared in the google classroom (GCR) so that students who for some reason cannot attend classes can access the lectures and discussions. The readings are also shared in the GCR. The course also has a What's App group to facilitate communication and every week an office hour (approx. 1.30 hrs) is scheduled to meet the teacher and to discuss matters of interest.

[ii] Feminist pedagogy involves an enduring connectedness to the living and the concrete, an emphasis on participation and interaction, collaboration and cooperation, teaching with a vision and not applied knowledge but historical perspective on knowledge (Rege 2003).

[iii] I recognise that ironically now I am in the process of writing about the collaborative writing as a single author, hoping to get it published in a peer reviewed UGC Care listed journal.

[iv] This point was raised by Dr. Renu Vinod.

[v] In the Sociology of Gender course (an elective paper), the course outline was initially shared with the students and based on students' responses, some topics and readings were also added to the course outline. For example, in the Gender paper 2021, dept of Sociology, UoH a module on 'Sexuality, Trans Identities and Gender Queer' was added. The final decision rests with the teacher, as to how to incorporate the suggestions. It could either be added as a module, or a topic for group discussion or even as part of an assignment.

References

Bachelard, Gaston. *The poetics of space.* Boston, Massachusetts: Presses Universitaires de France. 1958.

Bailey, F. G. (1957). *Caste and the economic frontier: A village in highland Orissa*. Manchester University Press.

Bose, B., & Bhattacharyya, S. (Eds.). (2007). *The phobic and the erotic: The politics of sexualities in contemporary India*. Seagull Books London Limited.

Campo, M., Fehlberg, B., Natalier, K., & Smyth, B. (2020). The meaning of home for children and young people after separation. Journal of social welfare and family law, 42(3), 299-318.

Desai, I. P. (1956). The joint family in India—An analysis. *Sociological bulletin*, *5*(2), 144-156.

Fetner, T., Elafros, A., Bortolin, S., & Drechsler, C. (2012). Safe spaces: Gay straight alliances in high schools. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie*, *49*(2), 188-207.

Foucault, Michael. *The history of sexuality.* USA: Pantheon books. 1978.

Gagnon, J. H., & Simon, W. (2017). *Sexual conduct: The social sources of human sexuality*. Routledge.

Germon, J. E. (2008). Kinsey and the politics of bisexual authenticity. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *8*(3-4), 243-258.

Gillies, V. (2003). *Family and intimate relationships: A review of the sociological research*. Families & Social Capital Research Group, South Bank University.

Green, A. I. (2008). Erotic habitus: Toward a sociology of desire. *Theory and society*, *37*(6), 597-626.

Heaphy, B. (2008). The sociology of lesbian and gay reflexivity or reflexive sociology?. *Sociological Research Online*, *13*(1), 188-199.

Kumar, Pushpesh, and Chayanika Shah. "Family beyond Blood and Marriage." Essay. In *Sexuality, Abjection and Queer Existence in Contemporary India*. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2022.

Madan, T. N. (1981). For a sociology of India. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, *15*(1-2), 405-418.

Mallett, S. (2004). Understanding home: a critical review of the literature. *The sociological review*, *52*(1), 62-89.

Mandelbaum, D. G. (1948). The family in India. *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, *4*(2), 123-139.

Murdock, George Peter. *Social Structure*. New York: Macmillan, 1969.

Polletta, F. (1999). " Free spaces" in collective action. *Theory and society*, *28*(1), 1-38.

Ranade, K. (2018). *Growing up gay in urban India*. Springer Singapore.

Rogers, Joel, Sara M. Evans, and Harry C. Boyte. "Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Change in America." *Contemporary Sociology* 16, no. 5 (1987) https://doi.org/10.2307/2069771.

Roach, T. (2012). *Friendship as a way of life: Foucault, AIDS, and the politics of shared estrangement*. SUNY Press.

Shah, A. M. (1964). Basic terms and concepts in the study of family in India. *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, *1*(3), 1-36.

Shah, C., Merchant, R., Mahajan, S., & Nevatia, S. (2015). *No outlaws in the gender galaxy*. Zubaan.

Simon, A. (2017). Safe Spaces: Their Construction and Their Purpose.

Smart, Carol. *Personal life new directions in sociological thinking.* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press. 2007.

Weeks, Jeffrey. *Sex politics and society.* Longman group Ltd. 1981.

Spånberger Weitz, Y. (2022). "The home isn't like a safe space for them"— Ideals of home and family relationships in children's talk about family adversity and help-seeking. Children & society.

Weston, Kath. *Families we choose.* New York: Columbia University Press. 1991.

Anurekha Chari Wagh *is an Associate Professor at Department of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad*

Email id: anurekha@uohyd.ac.in

Community as a Network of Care: Feminist Mothering among the Pnars of Meghalaya

--- Upashana Khanikar

Abstract

Since the National Green Tribunal banned rat-hole coal mining in Meghalaya in 2014, mothers in the Pnar community have faced enormous hardship amidst an economy of decline. This paper considers the Pnar domestic sphere as the site of inquiry to unpack the changing dynamics of motherhood as a social institution. It first maps the networks of care in the Pnar social milieu to argue that Pnars practice communal mothering allowing the women to be economically and sexually mobile. Simultaneously, by taking lived experiences of Pnar mothers into account, it builds a conversation with Euro-American feminist thought on motherhood and mothering to pluralise the concept of feminist mothering. Through a discovery of Pnar mothers as feminist subjects, it finally alludes to scholarship emerging from the Global South to argue that Pnar matriliny and communal mothering subverts the idea that motherhood is essentially an oppressive institution for women.

Keywords: Motherhood, feminist mothering, communal mothering, matripotency, Jaintia Hills, Pnar matriliny

Introduction

This paper focuses on motherhood as an institution while searching for feminist subjects among the Pnars in Meghalaya. It offers a critique of the common sense readings of motherhood as a patriarchal institution by examining the different forms of lived experiences of mothering in this matrilineal community. My interactions with the inhabitants of *Jalaphet Bri Sutnga* village in the Pnar Hills suggest that through the varying practices of mothering Pnar women acquire a certain degree of economic mobility as well as freedom of decision-making in their everyday life. Thus, it subverts the idea that motherhood is essentially a patriarchal institution. In a critical conversation with Adrienne Rich's conceptual distinction between motherhood and mothering and engaging with Andrea O'Reilly's extrapolation of the idea of feminist mothering, this paper explores the various dynamics of mothering among Pnar women. Rich argues that motherhood is essentially a patriarchal institution wherein mothering as a practice leads to "chaining of women in links of love and guilt (Rich, 1976, p. 281)." She further suggests that the role of mothers has become weakened under the invisible institution of motherhood as women often suffer in silence and agony within the unstated regulations of the institution.[1] Similarly, while acknowledging Adrienne Rich's argument, Andrea

O'Reilly contends that all those forms of mothering that subverts the traditionally assigned gender roles in a patriarchal organization of the domestic space constitute feminist mothering (O'Reilly, 2008). However, this body of scholarship emerging from the lived experiences of the Euro-American life worlds subscribes to an assumed universality of patriarchy as a social institution. Effectively they fail to attend to the lived experiences of a matrilineal society. Therefore, this paper presents a critique of such readings of motherhood as a social institution and everyday practices of mothering by foregrounding the experiences of Pnar matrifocality and women's dynamic role and status in it.

In the context of South Asia, the scholarship on motherhood and mothering practices has developed along the lines of conversation on Hindu mythologies and the discursive formations of the embodied practices of motherhood. Maithreyi Krishnaraj has alluded to the process of 'sacralisation' of mothers and motherhood in Indian mythological texts to argue that in spite of the glorification of mothers in such texts mothers in the subcontinent remain subordinated within the institution of patriarchy (Krishnaraj, 2010). Similarly, Anu Aneja and Shubhangi Vaidya has directed our attention towards the embodied practices of motherhood in the South Asian urban contexts to argue that "patriarchal motherhood ideologies" inscribed in both deified and contemporary consumerists cultures hint at "distinctive narratives of oppression, resistance, and revisioning (Aneja & Vaidya, 2016, p. xv)." On the other hand, writing about feminist mothering in urban South Asia, Shilpa Phadke probes into a pertinent question, what does it mean to be the feminist mother in twenty-first century urban India? Phadke pays attention to the culture of mothering daughters in urban India and the question of risk and the contradictions of morals associated with it to argue that there is a need to reflect on feminist mothering thinking through how feminist ideas are perceived (Phadke, 2013). Thus, in contemporary scholarship in South Asia, the debates on motherhood and mothering have remained centered either on the deified glorification of motherhood or the experiences of mothers in urban South Asia living within a patriarchal organization of the domestic space. Similarly, the discourse on feminist mothering has often been centered around conversations on the urban middle-class population that strenuously stresses maternal presence making reproductive labour burdensome for women in general.

However, such readings of motherhood and mothering practices do not fit into the lived experiences of Pnar mothers. On the contrary, the case of the Pnar mothers allows room to decenter the conversation from the assumed universality of patriarchy by introducing discussions on experiences of motherhood in a matrilineal society. Simultaneously, it offers a space to discuss the institution of motherhood by moving away from the urban settings and locates it in relation to an economy of

decline in a peripheral and non-caste society of contemporary South Asia. Thus, the Pnar mothering experience finds a parallel with the Dalit experience in India. Kancha Ilaiah shows us that Dalit working-class families share the responsibilities of intimate labour equally than *Dwija* families. Ilaiah highlights the everyday ethics, social solidarity, brotherhood, and social support that sustains the culture of care in the 'dalitwada' or Dalit neighborhoods (Ilaiah, 2002). Therein also lies an alternative ethics of care that informs the central argument of this paper. Writing on the ethics of care and the necessity to develop new networks of it, Rohini Hensman develops a socialist feminist critique of marriage, family, and community to promote the necessity of an alternative ethics of care (Hensman, 2012, p. 712). As this paper undertakes the project of analyzing the ethics of care and the practices of feminist mothering, it constitutes the ground to draw a distinction between the varying notions of feminist mothering through a discovery of the feminist subject among the Pnars (Collins, 2000).[2]

This paper shows that the practices of mothering among the Pnar women offer a degree of mobility to the mothers, particularly in the case of the single and separated mothers after the legal sanctions on coal mining in Pnar Hills in 2014. Among the Pnars, mothering is not the sole responsibility of the mothers, as the community gets involved in the practices of raising children. In other words, the intimate labour of raising children becomes a shared responsibility that involves immediate and extended kin members of the mothers. In fact, there are numerous examples wherein the neighbours make significant contributions to the informal care network. This can be termed communal mothering or clan mothering. Thus, among the Pnars, it establishes a sensorial intimate space.[3] It is an intimacy shared by neighbours with one another because of the close proximity and familiarity. As a result, Pnar women are neither readily left disenfranchised nor disempowered due to the labour of mothering. Therefore, explaining motherhood and mothering practices among the Pnars requires a departure from the hitherto existing discourse in the field. The lived experiences of the Pnar women contradict the idea that motherhood and mothering is essentially a patriarchal institution. Rather the ethnographic evidence presented in this paper suggests that mothering among the Pnars is an enterprise organized around a gynocentric perception and therefore, it is not readily oppressive to Pnar women.

The networks of care

As morning dawned upon *Jalaphet Bri Sutnga* Bri Sutnga Village, I was sitting on the front porch of the Chymrang family's ancestral homestead. They hosted me during my fieldwork in the village as I conducted my ethnographic research for almost two years. It was 5.30 am in the morning. I saw people entering the shop adjacent to the front

courtyard of the house where *Beimen* (grandmother) was busy making *Tpu sein* (rice cakes) hoping to make a sale for the day. I entered the shop waiting for her morning cup of black tea. Suddenly, *Kong*[4] Beauty rushed into the shop asking *Beimen* to pack some *Tpu sein*. *Beimen* frantically wrapped some in a banana leaf handing it over to *Kong* Beauty who then gave her twenty rupees and offered *kwai pathi*[5] to *Beimen*. They then engaged in a short conversation and *Kong* Beauty informed *Beimen* that she would visit her daughter Fida in Jowai town who stayed with her neighbour's family member, *Kong* Rida. Her daughter studied at *Kiang Nangbah* Government College pursuing her graduation. *Kong* Rida paid the expenses of *Kong* Beauty's daughter. *Kong* Rida informed me that Fida's mother is a single mother of seven children who earned her livelihood by selling *kyiad*[6] to the coal miners in *Jalaphet Bri Sutnga* village. She further told me that she had recently started cohabiting with her third partner, a man belonging to the Karbi community from the Chirang district in Assam. I asked *Kong* Rida, "Are you related to *Kong* Beauty?" *Kong* Rida replied to my question as follows:

She is not from my clan. She is from a different clan. But we are from the same village. Fida's mother sells *kyiad* in Niau Kilo locality near the coal mines. Fida's father was a Nepali man. He went back to Nepal after coal mining was banned in the village. Now, Fida's mother, Kong Beauty cohabits with a Karbi man from Niau Kilo area. It has been a year since they had a baby boy. Fida's mother now lives in the Niau Kilo locality with her newborn baby and her new partner. Kong Beauty's new *kurim* does mining in Niau Kilo. Fida's mother asked her to stay with me. So, I pay for her food and education. Fida looks after my three months old baby boy.

I further inquired, "Is Fida a maidservant in your house?" In her response, *Kong* Rida shrugged her shoulders. With disconcerting bewilderment, she insisted that Fida was not her maidservant. Instead, she said that Fida was like her *chi iung* (family) and she was Fida's *beikhian* (aunt).

In my first encounter with such a social arrangement, I struggled to decipher the meaning of different forms of entanglements associated with it. This ethnographic moment exposed the limits of my upbringing and socialization in an urban middle-class social milieu of a caste-society in South Asia. My lived experience is distinctly different from the organization of the care network among the Pnars. The relationship of exchange between *Kong* Beauty and Fida does not immediately fit into the usual norms between a household head and a domestic help the way it operates in urban South Asia. Even in rural South Asia, the network of care that sustains the mothering practices only extends to the immediate kinship ties. The striking part of this relationship was the financial investment made by *Kong* Beauty in

Fida's education while Fida took care of her children. This relationship is governed by mutual labor dependency. But the care networks that bind it are beyond the material relationship of domestic help. Simultaneously, Fida's accommodation in *Kong* Beauty's household allows Fida's mother to find sexual agency and autonomy. Therefore, these complex series of relationships invite a reconceptualisation of the idea of care and the practices of mothering.

Considering the complexities embedded in relationships that *Kong* Beauty, Fida, and Fida's mother shares, this study proposes a form of alterity to the hitherto existing theorization in sociology of care networks. It facilitates a mode of rethinking of social intimacies and the practices of mothering by considering the social networks in a rural matrilineal context. The distinctive nature of the Pnar way of coexistence enables community parenting of children beyond the boundaries of the primary contacts between kith and kins. This in turn provides mobility to mothers especially single mothers, widowed, divorced, or otherwise to seek economic sufficiency and expressive female sexual autonomy. In both these processes, the matrifocality of the Pnar social milieu characterized by a strong sense of belonging facilitates social intimacy and accountability towards one's maternal kins, extended relatives, and support from neighbours and friends. Matrifocality along with close kin and communal ties enables support for Pnar mothers. It eventually sustains a unique form of mothering practice that I conceptualize as feminist mothering. I consider Pnar mothers as feminist mothers as they do not facilitate child-rearing through helicopter parenting [7] or as Sharon Hays claims, through intensive mothering. [8] However, the idea is not to suggest that Pnar mothers do not go through everyday hardships or difficulties for survival. On the contrary, the idea is to recognize how they are able to maintain a certain degree of autonomy in spite of those hardships. While focusing on Pnar mothers, this paper projects them as feminist mothers as matrifocality enables such practices. It dissects how feminist mothering enabled through community parenting of children corroborates the sensorial intimacy in the Pnar terrain. Simultaneously, it foregrounds the social ties and networks that create the possibility of a community without propinquity (Webber, 1964).[9]

Herein the concept of 'sensorial intimacy' deserves an explanatory note. Janaki Abraham, while conceptualizing the idea of 'sensorial intimacy,' adds to the critical review of how support and legitimacy in a shared space develop a sense of intimacy among its immediate inhabitants. In her comparative analysis of two neighborhoods, one urban and another rural in Thalasseri, North Kerala, she argues that neighbourhoods are a strong influence in everyday life because of its constituent sensorial intimacy. The sights, sounds and smells mean that neighbours often know intimate details about those who live near them, they hear quarrels, smell what is being cooked, see who visits

whom. The sensorial intimacy and a shared sensorial landscape that makes the neighbourhood such a powerful influence in people's everyday life (Abraham, 2018). Similarly, among the Pnars, such sensorial intimate spaces are constituted by a shared collective responsibility and labor contributed towards mothering practices. It in turn constructs an intimate space wherein the inmates of the community collectively internalize motherly care as a required practice for rearing children. Pnar women collectively form a 'sensorial intimacy' emboldened by the matrifocal character of the society that offers primacy on children over mere conjugal intimacies.

In *Jalaphet Bri Sutnga* village, I discovered a sensorial landscape that explains the mutual interactions within the community. With its characteristic sensorial intimacy rooted in the Pnar everydayness, the neighbourhoods in the village substantially constitute a tightly knitted sensorial landscape. This is further supported by the customarily defined matrilocality and matrilineality of the village, both provisioning the presence of extended kin members in the close vicinity of one another along with the neighbours.

Thus, the presence of kins, as well as neighbours who are more like chi iung (family) in the proximity of one another, contributes to the pervasiveness of this sensorial intimacy which in turn engenders a sociality with immense potentiality towards community networks extending way beyond the contours of the village. One such instance of sensorial intimacy was the ritual performance followed by the death of Oscar Bareh from the *Pyrdung* locality who died drowning in the nearby *Thwaikhla* River. The entire village turned out for the funeral ceremony participating in the rituals irrespective of whichever clan they belonged to. Moreover, neighbours from different localities of the village stayed overnight with the dead boy's maternal family expressing their solidarity. I had the opportunity to be there owing to an invitation from one of the respondents. The initial mourning phase was followed immediately by a phase of binge drinking of *kyiad* the very same night. As the night advanced, kins, neighbours, *lok* (friends) alike started raising much hue and cry, gossiping, cracking jokes, and engaging in other forms of animated exchanges. As I sat there in disbelief amidst the clamour of tears and laughter, one of the members of the community approached me and offered me a bowl of *kyiad*. A sense of belonging and reciprocity was evident in these events. The collective practice of mourning offered a shared sense of belonging beyond the intimacy of the household. Thus, the dead boy Oscar Bareh became the child of the community at large.

Image 3.2 This is a picture of Oscar Bareh's funeral ceremony in May 2019.

Among the Pnars the ritual practice of parting with a deceased involves cremation followed by the deposition of the collected bones in the clan ossuary. Clan members and neighbours play indispensable roles in extending emotional and economic support during this liminal phase. Young men helped in setting up the tent for the prayer meeting that was to follow the next day and arranged the tables and chairs mostly supplied by the neighbors' households to serve the food. Older women gathered to discuss matters relating to what food had to be served. Some of them had started chopping onions and grated ginger and garlic for the next day. Every activity was going on smoothly with great coordination. Almost every household had to offer in kind. Some community members extended financial support voluntarily and expressed solidarity with the Bareh family. I asked Nika Chyrmang if she was related to the Bareh family. She replied in negative. I further inquired why she was working at the latter's home. She replied, "The boy who died was like my family even though he was not from the same clan. Don't people do that at your place?" In short, it is such forms of mutual reciprocity that govern Pnar sociality constituting 'sensorial intimacy.'

Similarly, ways of being rooted in Pnar everyday sociality are evident when infants, young children, and teenagers are left in the care of one's neighbours or extended kin members or friends when older members of the domestic unit work in the mines or run a *kyiad* shop. Such 'sensorial intimacy' gives Pnar women a sense of assurance while they leave their children behind at home. This sense of mutuality or belonging also protects women from usual abuses such as domestic violence as the neighbors often keep an eye on one another. I witnessed multiple examples of such 'sensorial intimacy' during my fieldwork. Broi Syrti, a sixteen-year-old girl in the second trimester of

her pregnancy informed me about her reluctance to continue to cohabit with her present partner Inip Langstang. However, she found support from her immediate maternal family. This becomes a possibility among the Pnar due to the matrifocal character of the society. Broi Syrti could not only express her desire to discontinue the relationship even in the fragile condition of teenage pregnancy but also hold onto her decision without facing any moral judgment or social censure.

The 'sensorial intimacy' among the Pnars constitutes a care network that offers women significant agency. Most importantly, one finds such imageries of convivial community coexistence and intimacy even after the deeper integration of Pnar society into the neoliberal political economy in the form of the coal mining industry. Such changing modes of production are also characterized by both inward and outward population migration. Despite such demographic flows, the 'sensorial intimacy' of the community has survived supporting the practices of communal mothering.

I locate the practices of mothering within this 'sensorial intimacy' to extrapolate its peculiar dynamics. In *Jalaphet Bri Sutnga Chnong* in the Pnar hills, the care network that sustains the practices of mothering is primarily governed by the 'sensorial intimacy' of the community. As a result, single mothers are able to carry out their economic activities and express their sexual desires without being chained to the responsibilities of mothering. As they find mobility through the 'sensorial intimacy' of the community, they emerge as feminist subjects who are able to exercise a significant degree of autonomy and agency. Such lived experiences demand a rethinking of the hitherto existing scholarly discourse on feminist mothering. The conceptualisation of feminist mothers often emphasizes the oppositional stance of women against the responsibility of constant maternal presence expected of mothers making reproductive labour burdensome for women in general (O'Reilly, 2008 & 2004).

However, the case of the Pnar mothers, and more specifically single mothers, significantly allows the room to decenter the conversation from the such scholarship. It also constitutes the ground to draw the distinctions between the varying notions of feminist mothering through an engagement with the feminist subjectivities among the Pnars.

3.4 Communal care and mobile mothers

Building on the arguments developed so far, here I will show how the practices of mothering among the Pnar women offer a relative degree of mobility to the mothers, particularly in the case of the single, separated, widowed, and divorced mothers even though they live in an economy of decline after the imposition of legal sanctions on coal mining activities. Among the Pnars, mothering is not the sole

responsibility of the mothers alone. The involvement of the community in raising children makes mothering a shared concern. Thus, the intimate labour of raising children becomes a collective responsibility. There are countless examples wherein the neighbours and the community members make significant contributions to the community care network. This sustains communal mothering in the Pnar social milieu and establishes a sensorial intimate space. As a result, Pnar women are neither readily left disenfranchised nor disempowered due to the labour of mothering. Therefore, at the conceptual level, defining mothering and motherhood among the Pnars requires a departure from the existing scholarship emerging from the Euro-American and urban South Asian contexts. The lived experiences of the Pnar women contradict the idea that motherhood and mothering is essentially patriarchal and oppressive institution or practice. Therefore, this section of the paper explains how shared responsibility and equitable gendered division of intimate labour offer the possibility for the Pnar women to gain mobility from the confines and demands of maternal labour.

Before analyzing the ethnographic accounts of single, separated, widowed, or divorced Pnar mothers, a discussion on the concept of maternal care is necessary. In the 1980s, writing about childcare in the context of Europe Sylvia Walby observed that women had to carry the responsibilities of mothering even after divorce and continued the labour demands that started in marriage. However, Walby recognized that some aspects of the intimate labour were subsequently taken up by the state (Walby, 1989). Moreover, in Western feminist thought, caring has often been defined predominantly as a female activity and its study is rooted in the hetero-patriarchal gendered order. But, definitions of care are quite complex because they are multifaceted. For British feminists and policymakers, care tends to be associated with unpaid services for dependent close kin provided by women (Ungerson, 1990).

Similarly, Hilary Graham's research in the early 1980s played an important role in shaping the terms of reference of feminist thinking on care, especially the idea of caring as a labour of love (Graham, 1983). Graham's focus was on care within families. She defined the case as the home-based, unpaid work by women performed within and for the family. However, this is not to suggest that Graham did not recognise caring relationships in other social contexts. She recognised the formal care networks; the quintessential caring relationship located in the family. The starting point in Graham's concept of care is the social identity of the carer dimension because the gendered carer is her central point of departure. Thus, for Graham, caring is 'transaction of goods and services and the expression of feeling (ibid. p.16).

In recent scholarship, inquiries into the culture of care in the Euro-American world have been more attentive to moral injuries and the ethics of care. Writing in the context of North America, Carol Gilligan argued that recognition of women's version of care has generated a discussion on empathy and care as human strengths. Gilligan considers love as "no small thing and not a private matter" to argue that ethics of care is in itself an ethic of resistance to moral injury (Gillian, 2014, p. 90). Contrary to that, in the urban South Asian context, the question of moral injury becomes problematic if single mothers practice expressive sexuality. Such moves by single mothers become a site of moral scrutiny as a betrayal of love is seen as a betrayal of what is right. On the other hand, the condition of mothers who practice sex work for survival becomes even more precarious.

Considering the entangled nature of mothering practices with moral injury, ethical life, and basic questions of survival, recent studies conducted in the South Asian urban context paint a more complex picture of the idea of care. Discussing brothels as an alternative to heteronormative domesticity, Ashwini Tambe shows that within such residences, familial roles provide a readymade hierarchy that secures the loyalty and obedience of subordinates (Tambe, 2006). On the other hand, in a study of mothers who are sex workers in Kamathipura, Mumbai, McCloskey et al. observe that most mothers participate in sex work compromising their own health and needs so that they can offer a better future to their children. Therefore, they emphasize on the need to "destigmatize the work (McCloskey et al. 2021, p. 58)." This very appeal for destigmatisation hints at the gendered nature of sex work and its entanglements with motherly care.

However, the lived experiences of single, separated, widowed, or divorced Pnar mothers do not fit into the idea of care conceptualized either in Western feminist thought or in the urban South Asian experience. This is primarily because the practice of mothering among the Pnars does not fit into the such categorisation of gender roles as suggested in this body of scholarship. Moreover, Pnar matrifocality allows women to avoid social processes of stigmatization. This is a distinct characteristic of Pnar sociality that often struck me during my fieldwork in *Jalaphet Bri Sutnga* village. Once I asked Jennifer, a young girl about her mother. She replied that her *Bei* (mother) went back to Mukhain. Then I inquired about the purpose of her visit. Jennifer informed me that her mother went to sell *Kyiad.* I also inquired whether her *U Pa* (father) had also gone with her mother. Jennifer replied that "No *Kong, Bei* stays with my youngest brother and Bung's *U Pa.* I do not know where my father is." Jennifer appeared to be quite comfortable about her mother living with someone else's father while she did not even care to know about her own father.

This was not a rare example. I often encountered sexually mobile Pnar mothers in the village. Lack of social scrutiny and family support facilitated such mobility for Pnar mothers. Such accepting and acceptable character of sexual mobility for women among the Pnars allowed mothers to exercise free choices wherein matrifocality to a certain degree blocked the processes of stigmatization.

Simultaneously, it is important to recognize the network of care to which Jennifer belonged to. When I interviewed her, sixteen-year-old Jennifer Chyrmang was visiting her mother *Kong* Molish Chyrmang.[10] She along with her younger brother Sawan Chyrmang live in Mangalore with her maternal aunt *Kong* Yutang Chyrmang who works as a nurse in a private hospital. They were visiting *Jalaphet Village for* almost a year. They stayed with their *beimen* who run a small shop near *Jalaphet Bri Sutnga* Lower Primary School at *Lumsashram*[11] locality. They lived in a one-room concrete house near the school with their grandmother. Both of them were playing with their youngest brother Bung who was just a few months old. Their mother *Kong* Molish had left her seventh child, Bung under the care of her mother.

Thus, Jennifer and Sawan's grandmother had been living with her Nepalese partner. Jennifer informed me that her mother lived in Mukhain near the coal mining areas as she sold *kyiad* there. Jennifer disclosed that her father and *Kong* Molish's first husband was a local Pnar man named Shamla Murong with whom her mother had *Yud Kurim. [12]* They are at present seven brothers and sisters in total, the youngest being *chyndrang.[13]* They are left under the care of their grandmother or their aunts or their maternal uncles whenever their mother moves to her workplace. Unlike in many nuclear family settings, these children were not left in the lurch entirely. Close kinship ties and community networks together structured an arrangement for the communal care of these children. It indirectly offered Molish Chyrmang the desired mobility economically and romantically.

I also encountered such a network of care in the case of an eighteen-year-old girl named Wanris Chyrmang from Lumsharam locality. Wanris was the youngest daughter of her family. When I interviewed her, she was living with *Kong* Praising Shadap, her mother's friend in Khliehriat town. Wanris majored in Economics while pursuing an undergraduate degree in Jaintia Eastern College. I asked Wanris about her relationship with *Kong* Shadap. Wanris said that the relationship was very pleasant as *Kong* Shadap took care of her like her own mother. She said that *Kong* Shadap needed someone to help her with domestic chores and thus, she asked Wanris's mother to let her stay with her. In return, *Kong* Shadap funded her education since Wanris's matriculation. However, there was no financial transaction for Wanris's labour. I was curious about the dynamics of this arrangement.

I then inquired why *Kong* Shadap looked after Wanris like her own children. I was also inquisitive about whether it was because Wanris's mother shared any relationship with *Kong* Shadap. Bemused by my question, Wanris replied in an interrogative mode and wondered whether my mother's friends in my hometown don't look after each other's kids. I then asked how Wanris felt about living with *Kong* Shadap. She said, "Everything that I do in her house is the same as I do in my house—working, eating, study time, loving." She also thanked God for *Kong* Shadap's presence in her life whom she addressed as 'Mom.'

Wanris's lived experience and *Kong* Shadap's motherly care self-evidently unsettles the conventional conceptualisation of care. Focusing my gaze on communal care and the contributions of a Pnar mother's primary kins, clan members, and extended community members that sustain the practices of mothering, I realized that mothering among the Pnars is a shared collective responsibility.

Thus, this paper departs from the hitherto existing scholarship on care and the act of caring as oppressive for women. Instead, it foregrounds the idea of community as a network of care wherein children find a protective space beyond the limits of the immediate family. In fact, in attempting to consolidate care as a shared practice, the evidence from the field substantiates that caring is not entirely the labour to be borne by biological mothers alone. At the same time, among the Pnars, women are able to achieve a greater degree of mobility to unleash themselves from the trials and tribulations of giving care because of communal mothering. This in turn facilitates economic, sexual, and domestic mobility for Pnar mothers in a post-mining landscape that is increasingly constricting to livelihood opportunities. Therefore, I consider Pnar mothers as feminist subjects while they exercise their agency and autonomy both inside and outside the domestic space.

3.5 Communal mothering and the feminist subject

However, it would be naïve to claim that Pnar mothers are fully liberated from the toils of raising children. In their everyday life, they struggle in a rapidly transforming economy of downward transition after the blanket ban on coal mining. In the last two decades, concerns over the material well-being of women in the matrilineal societies of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills have acquired primacy among the scholars studying these social changes from a development studies perspective. In a study conducted at the turn of the century, Tiplut Nongbri explained the relationship between ethnicity, patriarchy, and the state to argue that women in the Khasi hills lived under comparative security although they were not fully free from subordination (Nongbri, 2000 & 2003).[14]

However, more recently, among development studies scholars, the tendency is to suggest that women in the matrilineal societies of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills (particularly the Pnars) have been subjected to visible forms of suffering due to the economic decline. Bitopi Dutta's teleological mapping of Pnar society's encounter with modernity has situated the gendered transitions within a binary frame and therefore, reflected on the "changing idea of agency, empowerment, and disempowerment of women in Meghalaya." (Dutta, 2022, p. 88) However, such an identitarian impulse of the feminist gaze has unfortunately remained trapped with the concern of Meghalaya "getting integrated into the gendered fabric of the region (Dutta, 2022, p. 70)." Since the mapping of the gender question in the field has largely remained entangled with the issue of women's changing status, discussions on practices of mothering have gained no scholarly attention. A conversation on mothering practices not only creates a space to discover the feminist subjects among the Pnar women but also gives a new direction to the way the idea of feminist mothering has been conceptualised in the hitherto existing literature.

To closely engage with different conceptualisations of feminist mothering and to further unpack the idea of communal mothering among the Pnars, let me extrapolate the lived experiences of Pnar mothers. During my fieldwork, I was speaking to Kroin Dkhar, a Pnar mother who was married to a migrant miner named Ramesh Chetry from Nepal. I was curious about how *Kong* Kroin felt about being in a relationship with a perceived outsider of the community. "Aaora Aaori Maia hua Kong uske saath mo. Dar nehi lagta Kong, bahan hein, bhai hein, Nepal nehi jaega mo! (We fell in love and developed intimacy. But I am not worried. I have my brothers and sisters. I don't want to go to Nepal)," Commented Kroin Dkhar, a thirty-four-year-old Pnar mother of six as she sat near the fireplace nursing her eight-month-old *u khon.*[15] Kroin muttered in pain as the conversation started. She had a beef with her sister a day before and her face was swollen from the physical brawl with a cut on her forehead. Kroin further informed me that her younger sister had beaten her over some issue related to their land ownership.

As she sat there in front of me frying *sala* (potato) and *toh* (beans), she was visibly reeling under pain. She then started serving *kyiad* to the first customer of the day early in the morning. Kroin ran a small shop selling *kyiad* and other homemade edibles. Mostly migrant miners working in the nearby mines came to eat in her shop. She divulged that previously she was married to a *'Khasia'* (meaning she had a Pnar husband) named Sibeit Chyrmang who used to work in the mines. Sibeit died suffering from kidney stones, and she ended up as a single mother for nearly two years. She then met and fell in love with a Nepalese worker named Ramesh Chetry who had lived with her for almost five years. She also had two sons with him. Being asked again

whether or not she was worried about the possibility of Ramesh Chetry deserting her. Kroin shook her head stating that she was not. She even remarked that she would not even be sad if he leaves. She asserted that if Ramesh chose to leave her, it was his wish. However, Kroin said that she would never let Ramesh take her children away. Kroin was sure that her family members would look after her children in case something happened to her. However, she lamented that the ban on coal mining had affected her business. Her sale of *kyiad* had dwindled and she was suffering under immense economic duress.

In a nutshell, Kroin Dkhar articulated the embodied practices of mothering in the Pnar society. Kroin's confidence in her family members and the inmates of the community also explained the culture of mothering among the Pnars. She was fully convinced that the future of her kids was secured due to the care network in the family in spite of the economy of decline that had adversely affected her livelihood. Moreover, Kroin affirmed her sense of belonging to the Pnar social milieu by refusing to migrate to Nepal with her partner. The certainty in her voice was rather baffling, as she appeared unbridled and unrestrained by the burden of intimate labour. She felt assured that she could still raise her six children through the support of her primary maternal kins as well as her extended clan members. In other words, such firsthand accounts further consolidate the idea that matri-centric communal upbringing of children strengthens a Pnar mother's understanding of community as a network of care. It also distinguishes the culture of mothering in *Jalaphet* village and the Pnar society at large.

Such a distinctive culture of mothering also posits a critique of the conceptualisation of mothering and motherhood in Euro-American feminist thought. It subverts the idea that motherhood is essentially a patriarchal institution significantly oppressive for women. Adrienne Rich, while writing a critique of gendered oppression in a binary form, argued that:

At certain points in history and in certain cultures, the idea of woman as mother has worked to endow all women with respect, even with awe and to give women some say in the life of a people or a clan. But for most of what we know as the 'mainstream' of recorded history motherhood as an institution has in fact ghettoized and degraded female potentialities (Rich, 1976, p. 13).

However, the culture of mothering among the Pnars constitutes a unique form of care network that compels rethinking of such ideation of mothering and motherhood as an institution. The availability of a care network for Kroin Dkhar liberates her from the perceived dependency on her partner Ramesh Chetry instead of ghettoizing and degrading her 'potentialities.' In fact, the Pnar way of communal

mothering resonates the idea of motherhood the way it has been conceptualized in the Global South by showing us the limitations of Western feminist thought. Writing about the institution of motherhood among the Yoruba in Nigeria, Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí observed that motherhood or *Iya* as an institution is "historically the most consequential category in a social, political, and spiritual organization." Oyěwùmí further argued that, in the Yoruba social context, motherhood is not "originally a gender category."

Therefore, she introduced the concept of 'matripotency,' which means "supremacy of motherhood as a lens through which to appreciate and understand the discounted Yoruba epistemology (Oyěwùmí, 2016, p. 2)."[16] In a similar vein, to appreciate and understand the culture of mothering among Pnars one needs to unpack the 'matripotency' of the institution. Pnar mothers find a way to navigate the world because of the communal practices of mothering without them being subjugated to oppressive forms of intimate labor. Therefore, instead of seeing motherhood and mothering as an oppressive and gendered form of intimate labour, it would only be justified to appreciate it as the consequential category of social and economic organization in Pnar society.

References

Abrams, P. (1978). Neighbourhood Care and Social Policy. Berkhamstead: Volunteer Centre.

Aneja, A. and Vaidya, S. (2016). Embodying Motherhood: Perspectives from Contemporary India. New Delhi: Sage.

Beauvoir, S. (1949). Le Deuxieme Sexe. Paris: Gallimard.

Collins, P. H. (2000). Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment. London: Routledge.

Dutta, B. (2022). Mining, Displacement, and Matriliny in Meghalaya: Gendered Transitions. London and New York: Routledge.

Fineman, M. A. (1995). The Neutered Mother, the Sexual Family and Other Twentieth Century Tragedies. New York: Routledge.

Firestone, S. (2000). The Dialectic of Sex. In B. A. Crow. (Eds.) Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader, New York and London: New York University Press: 90-98.

Gilligan, C. (2014). "Moral Injury and the Ethic of Care: Reframing the Conversation about Differences." Journal of Social Philosophy. 45 (1): 89-106.

Graham, H. (1983). Caring: A Labour of Love. In J. Finch & D. Groves (Eds.) A Labour of Love: Women, Work and Caring. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul: 13-30.

Graham, H. (1991). The Concept of Caring in Feminist Research: The Case of Domestic Service. Sociology. 25 (1): 61-78.

Green, F. J. (2004). Feminist Mothers. In Andrea O'Reilly (Ed). From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's 'Of Woman Born, Albany: State University of New York Press: 125-137.

Hensman, R. (2005). "Revolutionising the Family." Economic and Political Weekly, 40 (8): 709-712.

Ilaiah, K. (2002). Why I am not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy. Calcutta: Samya.

Krishnaraj, M. (2010). Motherhood in India: Glorification Without Empowerment?. New Delhi: Routledge.

McCloskey. J. Karandikar, S., Reno, R., España, M. (2014). "The Feminist Ethic of Care: Mothering Among Sex Workers in Mumbai." Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work. 36 (1): 43-61.

Nongbri, T. (2003). Development Ethnicity and Gender: Select Essays on Tribes in India. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.

Nongbri, T. (2000). Khasi women and matriliny: Transformations in gender relations. Gender, Technology and Development, 4(3), 359-395.

————(2008). Gender, Matriliny, and Entrepreneurship: The Khasis of North-East India. New Delhi: Zubaan.

Oyěwùmí, O. (2016). What Gender is Motherhood? Changing Yoruba Ideals of Power, Procreation, and Identity in the Age of Modernity. New York: Palgrave McMillan.

Phadke, S. (2013). "Feminist Mothering? Some Reflections on Sexuality and Risk from Urban India." 36 (1): 92-106.

Rich, A. (1995). Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution. New York: WW Norton & Company.

Ruddick, S. (1989). Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace. London: Beacon.

Tambe, A. (2006). "Brothels as Families: Reflections on the History of Bomaby's Kothas." International Feminist Journal of Politics, 8 (2): 219-242.

Walby, S. (1989). "Theorising Patriarchy." Sociology, 23 (2): 213-234.

Whisman, V. (2000). Heterosexuality: Lesbian Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia. Ed. Bonnie Zimmerman. New York: Garland, 2000: 364–365.

---

[1] However, Rich alluded to the experiences of the coloured and working-class women and conceded that the idea of motherhood has been often been narrated through the lenses of white urban middle class mothers.

[2] While conceiving the Pnar mothers as feminist subjects, this paper deploys the conceptual paradigm framed by Patricia Hill Collins. Collins' admirable study of black women's everyday resistance in the North American context led her to discover feminist subjectivities in them. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment.* London: Routledge, 2000.

[3] In a well-meaning critique of the material reading of space, Janaki Abraham reconceptualises the idea of neighbourhood and considers it as a "strong sites of legitimacy and social control, while also being spaces of friendship and support." Abraham further argues that in order to understand "the space of neighbourhoods, their influence on everyday life and the ways in which the neighbourhood is a site of legitimacy in everyday life and its transformations," one needs to explain the complex set of relationships that constitutes a sensorial space. Janaki Abraham, "Exploring the Contours of Legitimacy in Neighborhood in North Kerala, India," *Urbanities*, 8 (1), 2018: 32-37.

[4] The term *Kong* is used in Pnar to generically address post pubescent women. It is a salutation used to greet women.

[5] *Kwai pathi* in Pnar refers to betel nut and betel leaf, respectively.

[6] *Kyiad* is the local term for liquor brewed from fermented rice.

[7] The phenomenon popularly referred to as helicopter parenting refers to an over-involvement of parents in their children's lives. This concept has typically been used to describe parents of college-aged young adults. The popular press has tagged these types of parents 'helicopters', 'hovercrafts', 'hummingbirds', and the even more extreme 'stealth fighters' and 'black hawks'. See LeMoyne, T., & Buchanan, T. (2011). Does 'hovering' matter? Helicopter parenting and its effect on wellbeing. *Sociological Spectrum*, 31 (4): 399-418.

[8] Sharon Hays (1996) in her book, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, states that intensive mothering has three key tenets. First, it demands that women continue to be the primary, central caregivers of children. As Hays (1996) argues: "there is an underlying assumption that the child absolutely requires consistent nurture by a single primary caretaker and that the mother is the best person for the job. When the mother is unavailable, it is other women who should serve as temporary substitutes (p. 8)." Second, intensive mothering requires mothers to lavish copious amounts of time and energy on their children. Indeed, Hays argues, intensive mothering is "construed as child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labour-intensive, and financially expensive" (p. 8, italics in the text). Third, intensive mothering takes a logic that separates mothering from professional paid work, which supports the notion that children and the work of mothering are completely outside the scope of market valuation because children are now considered innocent, pure, and 'priceless', deserving special treatment due to their special value within the private sphere of the family (p. 122-129). Thus, Hays argues intensive mothering continues to position all women in the subject position of the all-caring, self-sacrificing ideal 'mother', with limited and constrained agency in the public, professional realm and, importantly,

is the proper ideology of contemporary mothering for women across race and class lines.

[9] See M. Webber "The Urban Place and the Nonplace Urban Realm." in M. Webber et. al. (Eds.) *Exploration into Urban Structure*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964.

[10] This interview was conducted in November, 2018.

[11] There are four localities in *Jalaphet Bri Sutnga* Village namely *Pyrdung, Shur Shur, Lumsashram* and *Mulaid.* These localities are governed by four clubs who oversee the everyday village activities like organising football matches, their religious festivals like Beidenkhlam, Chad Sukra, etc. It's a form of modern institution of socializing in the village.

[12] In Pnar, *Yud* means divorce or separation and *Kurim* means husband, lover or partner. Amongst the Pnars, there is a very distinctive manner in which separation takes place. As gathered from field narratives, during separation between a married Pnar couple, in presence of a witness or two from both the sides of the couple, the husband doles out a one-rupee coin to his wife formalizing the divorce according to traditional Pnar *Ka Niam tre* rituals. Herein, it should be mentioned that *Ka Niam tre* is a religion followed by the Pnars, especially in *Jalaphet Bri Sutnga* village. Despite the increasing influence of Christian missionaries, the Pnars still strictly adhere to their religion. The Pnar indigenous religion is termed ka *Niam* but with Christianization the suffix *Tre* meaning original, is added - so presently it is known as *Ka Niam-Tre* meaning original religion. The Pnar conceived of one Supreme Being i.e., *Blai*. They also refer to this Supreme Being in the plural form as Ki *Blai*. When invoking the Supreme Being in prayer and rituals whether familial or community the dyadic figures *U Blai-Wa Booh-Wa-Thoo* meaning God the Keeper and Creator and *Ka Blai-Synshar* meaning the Ruling Goddess are always mentioned. These two are representatives of the sovereign Being. H.L. Debroy, in his article "The Dominating Motives in Jaintia Religious Life" referred to the Pnar religion as Jaintia animistic. Whether it is animistic or rather naturalistic or even polytheistic, this understanding arose from the way the people prefix the term *Blai* in their prayers. The Pnar indigenous belief is rooted in the following tenets: *Tip Bru Tip-Blai* - meaning respect humans and the Supreme Being. *Tip Kur Tip-Kha* - meaning know your consanguine and affine and *Kamai-ia-ii-Hok* - meaning to earn righteously. See http://kongress-matriarchatspolitik.ch/upload/Valentina-Pakyntein2.pdf, for more information on all the domains of the Pnars.

[13] *Chyndrang* means boy child in Pnar.

[14] Elsewhere, Nongbri has explained why women in Khasi and Jaintia Hills continue to stagnate in spite of substantial time and energy invested in their businesses. She also considered the interplay between women's work, gender ideology, and matriliny to argue that the state reinforces the relationship between the three. Tiplut Longbri, *Gender, Matriliny, and Entrepreneurship: The Khasis of North-East India.* New Delhi: Zubaan, 2008.

[15] *U khon* means baby boy in Pnar.

[16] Oyěwùmí further writes: "In Western societies, focusing on the sexual dimorphism of the human body, gender constructs are introduced as the fundamental way in which the human anatomy is to be understood in the social world. Hence, gender is socially constructed as two hierarchically organized, binarily opposed categories in which the male is superior and dominant, and the female is subordinated and inferior. From this perspective then, motherhood is a paradigmatic gendered institution. The category mother is perceived to be embodied by women who are subordinated wives, weak, powerless, and relatively socially marginalized." Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, *What Gender is Motherhood? Changing Yoruba Ideals of Power, Procreation, and Identity in the Age of Modernity.* New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2016, p.

***Upashana Khanikar** is a PhD Research Scholar at Department of Sociology, Tezpur University*

Email id: khanikar.upashana@gmail.com

Gendered Labour Market and Persistent Precarity: A Longitudinal Study of Women Construction Workers

---Kuldeepsingh Rajput, Jagan Karade, and Sakshi Rajput

Abstract

In the urban construction labour market, the plight of migrant women construction workers is not just coincidental with the after-effects of COVID-19; they have been facing severe gender-based challenges over the years. Lockdowns induced by COVID-19 have had a devastating impact on them. The present research is a longitudinal, mixed-methods study. We compare the pre- and post-lockdown employment situations to examine the impact of the lockdown on migrant women construction workers in Pune, Maharashtra. The study highlights the existing structural gendered characteristics and the precarity of the construction labour market. The aggravated adverse economic impact and the considerable burden of the lockdown have made women construction workers more vulnerable as they already live marginalised lives. It was evident that amid the pandemic women workers were (and are still being) pushed to extreme poverty and the periphery due to a changed wage pattern, wage theft, economic insecurity, and exacerbated employment conditions in the construction labour market.

Keywords: Gendered Labour Market, Precarity, Women Construction Workers, Informal Sector, COVID-19, Longitudinal Study

Introduction

Over the last few decades, Indian cities have experienced massive infrastructure development, privatisation and considerable real estate and housing investments. This has resulted in a dramatic increase in employment in the urban construction sector, a popular and attractive livelihood source for internal migrant workers. The growth and consistency in employment have attracted the rural workforce to the urban construction sector for a long time. As a result, the proportion of women in informal labour in the construction sector has significantly increased. According to the employment and unemployment reports of the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), women's participation in the construction sector was 1.6 per cent in 1999-2000, 1.8 per cent in 2004-2005 and 6 per cent in 2011-2012 (Neetha, 2017). Despite their contribution, migrant women workers remain invisible and discriminated against in the labour workforce (UNESCO & UNICEF, 2013). Women's internal migration in India is shaped primarily by the gendered division of labour and the patriarchal institution, which control their access to economic and social resources

and mobility (Bhagat, 2017). Migrant women workers, especially informal workers in cities, often suffer the consequences of being both migrants and women in addition to those of inherent sociocultural prejudices and economic deprivations (GoI, 2007; Bhagat, 2017; ILO, 2020). The migration process has an inbuilt screening system favouring skilled workers from relatively higher economic and social strata (Kundu & Ray Saraswati, 2012). Being an unskilled or less skilled workforce, women workers experience exclusion, are vulnerable to unemployment and are pushed to the periphery. After migrating to the destination city, the deeply structured gendered inequalities in the labour market do not decrease the woes of women workers even though they have a significant potential to reduce poverty (Behera, 2020).

The pandemic and the catastrophic effects of a sudden lockdown brought an array of new problems to the migrant informal workers (Bhagat et al. 2020; Krishna, 2021; Paltasingh & Bhule, 2021; Sumalatha et al., 2021). They resulted in a mass exodus of migrant labourers. Gendered experiences of the pandemic and the lockdown in the labour market have been shaped by the intersection of inequalities of caste, class, ethnicity, religion and gender (Chakraborty, 2020; Patel, 2021). Unfortunately, the pandemic has deepened the existing structural inequalities and exposed various groups to different levels of vulnerabilities (UN, 2020). It has affected women's economic and productive lives disproportionately – and differently from men – and increased their burden of unpaid work (Foley & Piper, 2020; UN, 2020; Chauhan, 2021). A recently released report shows that the pandemic will push 96 million people into extreme poverty in the next few years, 47 million of whom will be women and girls (UN Women, 2020). Women experience poverty, climate change, food insecurity and lack of healthcare facilities differently than men. They are often more profoundly impacted due to socially designed norms, values, roles, behaviour and attitudes (World Bank, 2011; Papola & Sharma, 2015; Pandey, 2016). Therefore, it is a matter of concern and a question of how the pandemic and lockdown have worsened their employment and other situations and pushed them further to the fringes.

The Study

Women migrants are a distinctive category which constitutes a substantial proportion yet remain scattered across the urban informal labour market. They are poorly documented and hence, go unnoticed in official records. Identifying the motives of women's migration, their socio-economic status and the need for empowerment have been overlooked at different levels. Several global reports have observed that they were the worst hit by the lockdown during the pandemic. As a part of the COVID-Response Task initiated by Centre for Youth Development and Activities (CYDA), a non-profit organisation,

researchers visited these construction workers many times during and after the lockdown. This led to the framing of the central research questions prompting the study on the ground realities of the urban informal labour market in the post-lockdown phase and its impact on migrant women construction workers. Using field evidence, one tries to understand and explore the gendered experiences and gender implications of the lockdown – specifically its socio-economic impact on women construction workers.

Conceptual Framework

There are different definitional approaches to define 'precarity'. The concept was used for the first time by Pierre Bourdieu in 1963 to in the context of the colonial working class in Algeria in the 1950s (Prasad, 2021). In the interdisciplinary field of precarious work studies, the idea that precarious work leads to precarious lives has become a common refrain (Barnes & Weller, 2020). For Butler, precariousness is a common human vulnerability. She further argues that precarity is a politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer more than others from failing social and economic support networks and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death (Butler, 2018). Precarious work is characterised by atypical employment contracts, limited or no social benefits and statutory entitlements, high degree of job insecurities, low job tenure, low wages and high risks of occupational injury and disease (Evans & Gibb, 2009). Guy Standing states:

> *"More crucially, those in the precariat have no secure occupational identity; no occupational narrative they can give to their lives. And they find they have to do a lot of work-for-labour relative to labour, such as work preparation that does not count as work and that is not remunerated; they have to retrain constantly, network, apply for new jobs, and fill out forms of one sort or another. They are exploited outside the workplace as well as in it, and outside paid hours as well as in them (Standing, 2014).*

Precarity has become a norm and accepted as a part of workers' everyday life (Prasad, 2021). Precarious work has made the availability and the quality of jobs riskier and more uncertain (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2018). According to Standing, the rise in precarious work has produced an emerging but distinctive social class – the 'precariat' (Barnes & Weller, 2020). The precarity highlights economic insecurity and a wider affective impact on individual identity that demarcates society, marking some lives as more worthy of being liveable (Steed, 2020). In the present study, the concept of precarity is used to understand the employment and other vulnerabilities among migrant women construction workers.

Methodology

The unit of analysis is migrant women workers engaged in the building and housing construction sector in Pune, Maharashtra. The study is longitudinal and intended to examine the extent of vulnerability and precarity of these women during the pre- and post-lockdown periods. A mixed methodology is used in the present study (Table 1) for a comprehensive picture. The researchers used the sequential research design involving a two-phase project: pre- and post-lockdown study. They collected data from 85 women workers in the pre-lockdown phase by using the field survey method, which employed multistage cluster sampling for the pre-lockdown survey. However, in the post-lockdown phase, the researchers could identify and reach only 17 workers surveyed in the pre-lockdown phase. In addition, a structured questionnaire containing a three-point Likert scale was developed and data was collected for the survey. For the second phase of the survey, the purposive sampling method was used to identify the required sample. Finally, the researchers collected qualitative data by conducting in-depth interviews with eight women to know the complex ground realities of the wage structure, financial crunch and other issues they face.

Table 1: Longitudinal Research Design in the present study	
Pre-lockdown Study	**Post-lockdown Study**
Quantitative Approach	Mixed Method Approach
Survey (N = 85)	Survey (N = 17)
	In-depth Interview = 08

Both quantitative and qualitative datasets were triangulated and compared to enhance the validity of the research.

Result and Discussion
SPPS was used for quantitative data analysis and the thematic analysis approach was used for qualitative data. Both datasets were triangulated to get a comprehensive picture of the impact of the lockdown on migrant women construction workers.

A. **Demographic Profile**
In the present study, the caste composition indicates that most of the women construction workers belong to various socially backward communities, reinforcing the conclusions of previous studies that the participation of disadvantaged groups in the informal sector has been increasing over the years. Our data indicates that 87 per cent of the

sampled women workers belong to socially disadvantaged groups. Among them, women from the ST category were a sizeable group, followed by those from the SC category (Table 2). Structural constraints, caste-based discriminatory practices, low agricultural productivity and limited occupational mobility, have pushed a huge rural workforce towards cities in search of better and decent employment. After migration, they are easily absorbed into the urban informal sector and usually join the construction industry.

Table 2: Education and Caste Profile of Women Workers					
Educational Level	**General**	**OBC**	**SC**	**ST**	**Total N = 85**
Illiterate	00	00	02	08	10
Primary	07	03	11	22	43
Secondary	03	03	05	13	24
Higher Secondary	01	00	02	05	08
Graduation	00	00	0	0	0
Total	11 (12.94 %)	06 (07.05 %)	20 (23.52 %)	48 (56.47 %)	85 (100 %)

Source: Fieldwork

Female literacy rate and educational enrolment have increased throughout the country. However, the academic profile of women construction workers is disappointing, and the data indicates that there has been minimal improvement in it. Only half of the respondents in this study had completed primary education. As the educational level grows, the decline in educational enrolment is visible. Cross-tabulation of the data depicts that lack of education is most significant amongst socially backward women (Table 2). Women workers usually drop out of school due to familial and work responsibilities, the need to earn, early marriages and, sometimes, because of the unfriendly and rigid pattern of formal schooling. The socio-economic disadvantage among these women is primarily due to their educational status. Low levels of literacy and poor education status restrict better employment opportunities for them. As a result, they are less likely to have occupational mobility, especially upward, and remain engaged in low-paid casual jobs.

Place of Origin and Migration Pattern

There is a sizeable number of immigrants in the urban construction sector in Pune. In the study, most women workers migrated from various north Indian states. A substantial proportion comes from Chhattisgarh, followed by Bihar and Jharkhand (Figure 1). The large migration flow from the north Indian states towards Pune highlights

the interstate disparities and imbalances. The backwash effect, industrial concentration and lack of social infrastructure are the key reasons for such regional disparity.
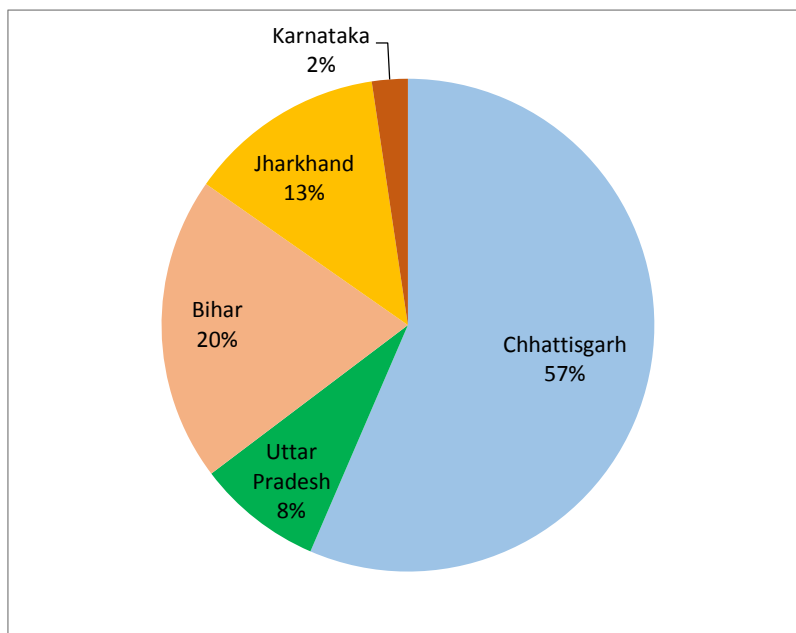

Figure 1: Source State of Women Workers
Source: Fieldwork

Among the respondents, the majority was married and had migrated with their husbands. Very few were unmarried and had migrated with their relatives (Table 3). This is the typical profile of women's labour migration in the construction sector, in which the decision to relocate is usually taken by the man in search of better employment. In contrast, the woman migrates due to marriage. After marriage, women join the urban construction sector with their husbands to provide economic support to the family.

Table 3: Marital Status and Pattern of Women Migration		
Marital Status and Migration	N	%
Unmarried and migrating with relatives	13	15.29
Married and migrating with spouse	72	84.70
Total	85	100

Source: Fieldwork

Single, young male migration is a dominant trend in the construction labour market. However, recent times also indicate a couple migrations taking place. For example, the data depicts that most women bear childcare responsibilities as a sizeable number of them migrate with their children (Table 3, 4). During the discussion with respondents, it

was revealed that children left behind in the migration process were usually independent or school-going, and other relatives looked after them.

Table 4: Children and Migration						
Child rearing responsibility	(N = 72)		Migrating with children to destinations	(N = 66)		
	Yes	**No**		**Yes**	**No**	
	66 (91.66 %)	06 (8.33%)		27 (40.90 %)	39 (59.09 %)	

Source: Fieldwork

On the other hand, some women have to migrate with their children to various destinations as their wards are either highly dependent on them or have no one to look after them at their place of origin (Table 4). Finally, the researchers observed that some children join work along with their parents at the construction site.

B. **Comparative Analysis of the Employment Situations for Women Workers**

To compare employment and livelihood situations during pre- and post-lockdown, the researchers prepared a three-point Likert scale, through which the data was collected and analysed. The mean score was calculated and a comparison was made to understand the statistical significance.

Table 5: Comparison of opinions regarding employment situation					
Statement points	*Pre Lockdown*		*Post Lockdown*		
	Mean	**Standard Deviation**	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**	**Mean Differences**
Satisfied with working hours	1.2353	0.6642	1.8235	0.9510	0.5882
Better Wages	1.2353	0.6642	1.9412	1.0289	0.7059
Regular Wages	1.5882	0.9393	2.5294	0.8744	0.9412
Getting incentives	2.6471	0.7859	3.0000	0.00	0.3529
Paid for overtime work	2.5294	0.8744	3.0000	0.00	0.4706
Saving money	1.2353	0.6642	2.6471	0.7859	1.4118
Sending Remittances	1.2353	0.6642	2.3529	0.9314	1.1176

Source: Fieldwork

The difference in the mean scores of pre- and post-lockdown phases indicates the changed attitude of women construction workers regarding their employment and livelihood conditions. Respondents

were not satisfied with the working hours. They realised that they had to work for a longer duration and, on level, they needed to get more wages. Some respondents mentioned the incentives they used to get before the lockdown. However, in the post-lockdown phase, none of the workers received incentives or any additional wages for their overtime labour. The data indicates a significant difference between the mean scores of saving money and the capacity of sending remittances. The respondents strongly agreed on the impact of the post-lockdown labour construction market on their economic security. Most of the respondents mentioned that they could not save money and, therefore, could not send remittances (Table 5).

C. Economic Impact in Post-Lockdown Phase

The present study examines the economic status and impact of the lockdown on women construction workers in Pune. The results indicate that lockdown-induced poverty has widened the gender poverty gap.

The Wage Theft

Gendered wage patterns and hierarchies are widely prevalent in the urban informal sector. The wage structure depends on the skills and the nature of the work. Labour in the construction sector is orthodoxy and predominantly regarded as a 'man's job'; women are the second fiddle, not breadwinners. Women workers are already subjected to low wages as they are considered the cheapest workforce available in the labour market.

While looking into the work profile of women construction workers, it was found that they were all engaged in low-paid activities. The lockdown had not impacted the nature of their work but had taken a toll on their monetary conditions. These workers are seen as 'helpers' to the male workers and as *bigari*, and categorised as unskilled labour. They are conditioned to work in extremely risky, dingy and hazardous conditions on construction sites without any protective equipment. The precarity of women workers has continued in the post-lockdown phase too. On the other hand, skilled labour such as masonry and plaster- and RCC work is dominated unconditionally by male workers. Work involving a skill set like this is seen as valuable, productive and superior.

The post-lockdown situation has dramatically widened the existing wage gaps between male and women workers in the construction labour market.

Table 6 Wage structure in Pre and Post lockdown				
Type of Labour	*Pre-lockdown* Daily wages (in Rs.)		*Post-lockdown* Daily wages (in Rs.)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Skill Labour	480-550	300	400-500	250-270
Unskilled Labour	280	180	260	150

Source: Fieldwork

Male workers dominate the jobs related to skilled labour, and before the lockdown, they used to draw wages between Rs. 480 and Rs. 550 a day. Among the respondents, woman workers were not engaged in skilled labour jobs. To do unskilled jobs, these women used to get Rs. 180 while their male counterparts received Rs. 280 for the same job. In the post-lockdown period, women workers experienced wage theft (Table 6). The exploitative informal labour market, male domination and vulnerable employment had already created a deplorable situation for women construction workers and, coupled with wage theft in the post-lockdown phase, had further added to their woes.

Leela, a 27-year-old worker at Katraj (Pune) construction site narrates:

> *"Before the lockdown, we received lower wages than our male counterparts, but at least we received some amount. In the post-lockdown period, things worsened wherein we were not even getting work, let alone lesser daily wages. Yet, we continued seeking work so that we could earn some money to do our daily family chores. This unsure situation of employment has created several apprehensions in my mind."*

Such gender-based wages and segregation is perpetuated deliberately by the labour contractors and employers for maximum profit. It is justified and legitimised as masculine tasks, which are better undertaken by male workers. However, such apparent division of labour in the construction sector has subordinated women workers and exploited them systematically. Our qualitative interviews with the respondents revealed that women workers had internalised low aspirations, low self-esteem and 'inferior' identities. Along with the wage theft, it is evident that there is irregularity and delay in paying the women workers their dues. The contractor is the one who indulges in delaying the payment, and these women have no choice but to adjust to it. All these have created an abysmal situation for women workers.

Availability of Work

In the present study, the majority of the respondents (74 per cent) agreed on the impact of the lockdown affecting the availability of work in the construction sector in Pune. Returning to Pune after the lockdown, some women workers (nearly 26 per cent) found that they had lost their previous employment. However, during qualitative interviews, respondents revealed that men would get work easily but women had to wait for days together to join and work at the site.

Lata, a 36-year-old worker at Bhugaon (Pune) construction site states:

> *"On returning to Pune after the lockdown ended, the contractor said the market was down. He pointed out that very meagre opportunities now existed on construction sites, undertaken by male workers, thus leaving almost nothing for the women. We played second fiddle to male workers earlier but at least had some work. However, the new situation left us feeling stranded and abandoned. We wondered how we would earn to run household chores."*

The Vicious Circle of Poverty and Debt

The qualitative interviews revealed that many construction workers who returned to their native places during the lockdown did not come back to Pune due to decreased employment opportunities. In the unlock phases, the work is resuming at a snail's pace. Markets have opened, and the construction sector has gradually resumed operations. However, it is not running at full capacity. However, the decline in the real estate industry has impacted the demand for labour and in-progress construction work is resumed with whatever labour is available. The post-lockdown labour market poses many challenges for returning migrants in terms of shrinking jobs. Respondents revealed that some of them could not communicate with the previous contractor and had to hunt for new work and adjust with a new contractor. These women find themselves in a gloomy situation, where only meagre work opportunities are available. Some contractors have denied work to women workers at their sites and have shown a preference for only male workers.

Pramila, a 36-year-old worker at Shivane (Pune) construction site narrates:

> *"My friend Rupa, working with me for the past four years at the same site, lost her husband during the pandemic. She has returned to her native place and is now working in one of the farms there, earning lesser wages. She wants to come back, but it seems an uphill task where she finds it impossible to migrate without her husband and continue working as she did earlier."*

Sammibai, a 48-year-old worker at Wagholi (Pune) construction site states:

> *"Many did not return to Pune for fear of being stranded again. However, we took the risk of migrating during the pandemic and returned to Pune because there was no work at the source. After migrating to Pune, for some days we searched for work. Our previous Thekedar left the work, and we joined the work with a new one. However, the new Thekedar does not pay us on time, and it is difficult to send money home. We cannot nag him for wages, or we may lose our jobs."*

The employment situation in the post-lockdown has rendered women in the construction industry highly vulnerable and dependent on the contractor and/or employer. The feeling of economic insecurity was expressed by respondents several times during the interviews. Many of them revealed that their monthly expenditure was very high while, in comparison, their earnings were less – making it difficult for them to save money and send it back home. Some of them had borrowed money from the contractor to send remittances in times of emergency to the family members left behind. However, borrowing money makes them work as exploited bonded labour, and they find themselves trapped in this vicious circle of debt and poverty. This economic fallout has intensified the extreme poverty among women workers.

D. Out of Purview of Social Security Framework

The Building and Other Construction Workers (BOCW) Regulation of Employment and Condition of Services Act of 1996 was enacted to regulate employment and to improve construction workers' quality of life. To implement welfare measures, the cess fund – a minimum of one per cent of the construction cost – is collected by the BOCW Welfare Board. Since the lockdown, the central government has announced various welfare measures for the poor, including migrant workers. During the first nationwide lockdown, the Maharashtra government assisted each registered construction worker with Rs. 2000. Along with financial assistance, the government has initiated the 'One Nation, One Ration Card Scheme', providing food grains at subsidised rates to the migrants at their destination.

In the study, however, we found that not a single woman mentioned receiving any benefits under any scheme. We found that none of them was registered with the Welfare Board. Only a few (29 per cent) had essential documents like an Aadhaar card. Along with this documentary pre-requisite for registering with the Welfare Board, workers have to produce 90 days' work certificate from the contractor and/or employer. The local builders and contractors do not provide such documents to avoid legal processes. The Pune Municipal Corporation and labour department are least interested in intervening in such exclusionary mechanisms and violation of labour laws by

builders and contractors. However, urban governance has largely failed to address the concern of many construction workers.

Parvati, a 31-year-old worker engaged at Wagholi (Pune) construction site states:

> *"We did not receive any food grains or benefits from any schemes announced by the government, not even during the lockdown, or earlier. During the lockdown we received no ration but it was the non-government organisations that came to help us. We were unaware of any such schemes of the government."*

The overall picture indicates that the state, the urban governance and the builder-contractor lobby work together and systematically exploit the migrant construction workers while keeping them on the periphery. Utilising their labour for profit-making is an established practice in the construction labour market. The migrants are is such a precarious and vulnerable situation that they cannot raise their voices against their exploitation. As a result, the entire system hits the women workers, explicitly excluding them, and they remain critically the most vulnerable and unprotected segment among migrant workers.

E. **Verbal Abuse, Violence and Stress**

Difficulties and hardships induced in the period of lockdown have taken their toll and further worsened the condition of the women workers. They are subjected to various forms of verbal, physical and sexual abuse and acts of violence, which multiple reports and organisations have also noted. For example, in the pre-lockdown survey for the present study, women workers reported that verbal abuse and ill-treatment, either by their husbands, contractors or other male co-workers at the construction site, was a common practice. This disrespectful behaviour has become a part and parcel of their lives; they accept it and carry on with their lives. It was revealed in the qualitative interviews that loss of employment, changed wage structure, inflation, and overall economic insecurities are significant drivers of violence against women.

Saroj, a 37-year-old construction worker narrates:
> *"In the post-lockdown phase, my husband could not find a proper stable job at the construction site as earlier. Instead, he engaged in petty jobs which did not pay much, and at the same time, there was a feeling of disgust, anguish and insecurity. Its after-effects were seen in various instances where he let out his anger on me in the form of verbal and physical abuse. This ruined the congeniality of married life, leading to severe mental and physical stress for both of us."*

The post-lockdown phase aggravated the situation, resulting in huge stress among workers. The stress – especially among male workers – is released, exposed and directed towards their wives, who are also their counterparts at work, by subjecting them to violence and abuse. This form of displaced frustration is detrimental to these women in their professional and personal lives. The second phase of the lockdown has led to a condition where work on the construction site continued, but these workers live a life of isolation and loneliness.

Conclusion

The study explores several dimensions of the precarity among migrant women construction workers. Their work in the construction sector is the primary contributor to their precarious life. Migrant women in general – and construction workers in particular – are overlooked by urban governance. At the same time, development policies have failed to recognise them as productive human resources and essential stakeholders in the city's development. Women migrant construction workers are vital to the construction sector as they are the ones behind the scenes who provide a primary helping hand to the male workers. These women workers have specific precariousness and vulnerabilities that exacerbate their woes and grief.

There should not be a 'one-size-fits-all' policy to empower these construction workers as they face various issues. The upcoming national policy on migration needs to address their adversity at the core. There is an urgent need to have targeted efforts and gender-sensitive labour policies to help women workers to draw them out of poverty and to promote their full participation in the economy. The legal and social security provisions beyond borders can play a crucial role in protecting them from the shocks of the informal economy and the pandemic. Empowering this vulnerable segment is a long and multidimensional process that brings about inclusive, safe and sustainable development and saves them from living on the margins forever.

Notes

- *'Bigari'* is a termed used for manual helper, a labour category.
- *'Thekedar'* is a labour contractor or middlemen.
- The pseudo names are used in the article.

References

Barnes, T. & Weller, S. (2020). Becoming Precarious? Precarious work and life trajectories after retrenchment. *Current Sociology*. 46(4-5), 527–541.

Behera, M. (2020). Internal migration in India: Issues, policies and road ahead. *Rajagiri Journal of Social Development,* 12(2), 99–114.

Bhagat, R. (2017). Migration, gender and right to the city: he Indian context. *Economic and Political Weekly,* 52(32), 35–40.

Bhagat, R., Reshmi, R. S., Sahoo, H., Roy, A., & Govil, D. (2020). *COVID-19, Migration and livelihood in India.* International Institute for Population Sciences.

Butler, J. (2018). *Notes towards a performative theory of assembly*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Chakraborty, S. (2020). COVID-19 and women informal sector workers in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 55(35), 17–21.

Chauhan, P. (2021). Gendering COVID-19: Impact of the pandemic on women's burden of unpaid work in India. *Gender Issues*, 38(4), 395–419.

Evans, & Gibb, E. (2009). *Moving from precarious work employment to decent work.* (Discussion Paper). ILO: Geneva.

Foley, L., & Piper, N. (2020). *COVID-19 and women migrant workers: Impacts and implications*.

https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/covid19-and-women.pdf

Government of India (GoI)., (2007). *Report on conditions of work and promotion of livelihoods in the unorganized sector*. National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector.

International Labour Organization (ILO)., (2020). *Road map for developing a policy framework for the inclusion of internal migrant workers in India*.

https://www.ilo.org/newdelhi/whatwedo/publications/WCMS_763352/lang--en/index.htm

Kalleberg, A. & Vallas, S. (2018). Precarious Work. *Research in the Sociology of Work*, (31), 1–30.

Krishna, S. (2021). Migrant labour, informal economy and COVID-19 pandemic: narratives on choice between life and livelihood. *Social Action*, 71(02), 164–177.

Kundu, A., & Ray Saraswati, L. (2012). Migration and exclusionary urbanization in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47(26–27), 219–227.

Neetha, N. (2017). Ensuring gender justice in labour. *Yojana*, 61, 21–25.

Paltasingh, T., & Bhue, P. (2021). Labour migration and exclusion: India's experience during COVID-19 pandemic. *Social Action*, 71(02),138–151.

Pandey, A. (2016). Women in cities: Lost in urban maze, *Urban Update*, 3(5), 23–25.

Papola, T. S., & Sharma, A. (2015). Labour and employment in fast growing India: Issues of employment and inclusiveness. In K. Uma (Ed.), *Indian economy since independence* (pp. 523–560). Academic Foundation.

Patel, V. (2021). Gendered experiences of COVID-19: Women, labour, and informal sector. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 56(11).

Prasad, A. (April–June 2021). Cities as exclusionary zones: Labour migration and creation of precarious, unidentifiable and isolated community of workers in Gurgaon. *Social Action*, 71(2), 111–124.

Standing, G. (2014). *A Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens*. London: Bloomsbury.

Steed, L. (2020). Precarity and freedom: Insecure lives and unequal freedom in modern times. (Unpublished thesis). At Massey University, Manawatu. New Zealand.

Sumalatha, B. S., Bhat, L. D., & Chitra, K. P. (2021). Impact of COVID-19 on informal sector: A study of women domestic workers in India. *Indian Economic Journal*, 69(3), 441–461.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, & United Nations Children's Fund (UNESCO & UNICEF). (2013). *Social inclusion of internal migrants in India*. UNESCO.

United Nations (UN). (2020). *The impact of COVID-19 on women*. (Policy Brief).

United Nations (UN) Women. (2020). *COVID-19 and its economic toll on women: The story behind the numbers.*

World Bank (2011). *Perspectives on poverty in India: Stylized facts from survey data*. Oxford University Press.

Kuldeepsingh Rajput *is a Visiting Faculty, Department of Sociology, Savitribai Phule Pune University.*

Email id: rajputkdr@gmail.com

Jagan Karade *is a Professor & Head, Department of Sociology, Shivaji University, Kolhapur.*

Sakshi Rajput *is an Educator and Head, Social Science Department, Millennium National School, Pune, Maharashtra.*

Article: Women Entrepreneurs and Their Problems in Nagaland: An Empirical Exploration

Author(s): Yongkongnukla Ozukum & Biswambhar Panda

Women Entrepreneurs and Their Problems in Nagaland: An Empirical Exploration

---Yongkongnukla Ozukum & Biswambhar Panda

Abstract

Entrepreneurship is considered as an effective tool for the economic development and empowerment of women. Besides achieving economic goals, entrepreneurship helps women entrepreneurs to sharpen their business skills, augment leadership qualities and enable them to make independent decisions. Through entrepreneurship, women not only generate livelihood, become self-reliant but also provide employment opportunities to others. In recent years, there has been a substantial increase of women entrepreneurs in Nagaland, a North-eastern state of India. They are engaged in a variety of traditional as well as non-traditional business enterprises. However, their progress has been hindered by numerous problems. Based on empirical data collected from 120 women entrepreneurs from two urban centers of Nagaland, and drawing insights from theoretical perspectives particularly from the "5M" framework of Brush et al. (2009), the paper analyses the nature and significance of the problems of women entrepreneurs as they pursue their career in entrepreneurship.

Keywords: women entrepreneurs, problems, Nagaland, '5M' framework

Introduction

Entrepreneurship, in the 21st century is widely recognised as 'the engine of economic and social development throughout the world' (Acs & Audretsch, 2010, p. 1). Scholars cutting across disciplines such as economics, commerce, management, sociology, anthropology and psychology have shown enormous interest in studying the diverse aspects of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial behavior. It has also drawn increasing attention from the policy-makers. However, women entrepreneurship as a significant area of study did not develop until the late 1990s to early 2000s; it was subsumed under the broad area of entrepreneurship (Yadav & Unni, 2016, p. 2). The word 'entrepreneur' comes from the French word 'entreprendre', which means 'to do something' (Swedberg, 2000, p. 11). Entrepreneurs are perceived as those potential individuals who carry out the enterprises of diverse nature in order to create resources and opportunities not only for them but also for others. According to Max Weber, 'entrepreneurship means the taking over and organisation of some part of an economy, in which

people's needs are satisfied through exchange, for the sake of making a profit and at one's own economic risk' (as cited in Swedberg, 2000). Bowen and Hisrich articulate entrepreneurship as 'the process of creating something different with value by devoting the necessary time and effort; assuming the accompanying financial, psychic, and social risks; and receiving the resulting rewards of monetary and personal satisfaction' (Bowen & Hisrich, 1986, p. 15).

Prevailing gender stereotypes in the society in many ways deprive women to avail various opportunities and take benefits as they continue to suffer in a patriarchal societal set-up. It is therefore imperative that a concerted effort is made towards their empowerment. The participation of women in the development process and their greater involvement in economic activities are considered important through which they can attain economic independence which in turn can help to achieve gender parity in the society.

Entrepreneurship helps women to gain financial independence, sharpen their leadership skills and enable them to take swift and tough decisions. Besides, it facilitates the creation of effective networks to widen the channels of marketing. In their quest for sustained economic growth, social and economic empowerment, women entrepreneurs, no doubt, devise innovative strategies to excel in their entrepreneurial ventures and achieve the desired goals. Apart, entrepreneurship provides employment opportunities for numerous others who directly or indirectly get involved with various allied activities relating to their entrepreneurship. Therefore, entrepreneurship creates a much-needed platform through which women entrepreneurs develop their business acumen to make entrepreneurship very enterprising and rewarding. 'Women's entrepreneurship is recognised as a crucial way to fight against poverty and gender inequity in society and acts as a vehicle in the promotion of empowerment and leadership for women' (UNIFEM, 2000 as cited in Bushell, 2008, p. 550). As they gain self-confidence and become self-reliant, they also contribute towards the formation of social capital.

Women entrepreneurship in India received recognition only after the 1970s (Sinha, 2003, p. 428). From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards, there has been a considerable shift in the approach towards women's issues i.e., from welfare to development (Lall & Sahai, 2008, p. 400). Since then, the Government of India has formulated various policies, programmes, and schemes towards the growth of entrepreneurship among women, which have encouraged many to choose it as their career option.

As per the Government of India, women entrepreneurship has been defined as an enterprise owned and controlled by women having a minimum financial interest of 51 percent of the capital wherein at least

51 percent of employment generated in the enterprise is given to women (Singha, 2012, p. 210). According to Moore and Buttner (1997, p. 13), 'a female entrepreneur is a woman who has initiated a business, is actively involved in managing it, owns at least 50% of the firm, and has been in operation 1 year or longer'.

The definition of Moore and Buttner has been made use of to develop the operational definition of women entrepreneurs for the present study. Accordingly, women entrepreneurs who fulfill three important criteria have been included in the study. These are:

(i)   Those who have initiated a business and are actively involved in managing their entrepreneurship.

(ii)   Those who own at least 50 per cent of the business.

(iii)   Those whose businesses have been in operation for one year or longer.

Theoretical framework

Various theoretical formulations have tried to analyse and explain diverse aspects of entrepreneurship. Weber (1930) in his seminal work 'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism' established an analytical link between religion and capitalism and argued how religion significantly contributes towards the development of capitalism and entrepreneurship. According to Weber, certain forms of religion- ascetic Protestantism (basically Calvinism, Pietism, Methodism, and Baptism) – create a positive attitude towards work as well as the accumulation of wealth, which in turn facilitate changing attitudes that are favourable towards entrepreneurship.

The Protestant ethic considers work as a virtue and encourages people to earn and accumulate wealth while restraining them from pleasure, merrymaking, and enjoyment. Weber argued that Calvinism supplies the moral energy and drive of the capitalist entrepreneur. Weberian perspective and its contentions are also reflected in the works of Cochran (1971) and Young (1971) where the emphasis has been laid on the importance of sociocultural factors in shaping the entrepreneurial personality. These scholars argued that cultural values, role expectations, social tensions, and inter-group relations in society certainly play crucial roles in influencing the nature and dynamics of entrepreneurship.

It is pertinent in this context to analyse Cochran's (1971) formulation of 'model personality', which argued that entrepreneurs primarily represent society's 'model personality' and that the individual's performance as an entrepreneur is influenced by three important factors. These are: (i) one's own attitudes toward one's occupation, (ii)

the role expectations of sanctioning groups, (iii) the operational requirement of the job. While the first two factors as mentioned above are determined mostly by the society's values, the last factor is primarily influenced by the changes that take place in exogenous variables such as population, technology, and consumer demand.

Young (1971) in his theory of entrepreneurship focuses on 'inter-group relation'. Interpreting individual entrepreneurial characteristics as the 'underside', Young asserted that instead of looking at individuals, one must concentrate on clusters such as ethnic communities, occupational groups, politically oriented factions, or entrepreneurial groups. Stressing the importance of group characteristics, the scholar asserted that entrepreneurial activity is generated by particular family traits, specific socio-economic background, and experiences of the entrepreneur as a member of certain groups who are oriented with certain cultural values. The values embedded by an entrepreneur that stem from the collective entity, prevailing structural factors, and ensuing economic growth are the determinants for thriving entrepreneurship.

Projecting entrepreneurs as 'innovators', Schumpeter (1934) argued that the economic development of entrepreneurs primarily depends on the roles they carry out in their enterprises with innovative approaches and unique strategies. Entrepreneurial behavior according to the scholar, therefore, consists of the introduction of a new good, a new method of production, the opening up of a new market, a new source of supply of raw material, and the creation of a new organisation. For Schumpeter, entrepreneurs are primarily motivated lots who have the desire for power, the willpower to achieve success, and the requisite drive to complete the tasks at hand.

McClelland (1961) in his formulation of 'The Achieving Society' argued that the most distinguishing feature of an entrepreneurial personality is 'achievement motivation' or the 'need for achievement'. According to McClelland, a society with a generally high level of need for achievement produces more energetic entrepreneurs, who in turn facilitate more rapid economic growth. McClelland identified various characteristics that are the hallmark of a successful entrepreneur. These are (i) a desire to take personal responsibility for the decision, (ii) a preference for a decision involving a moderate degree of risk, (iii) an interest in concrete knowledge of the results of the decision.

While these perspectives and formulations have helped to examine the problems of the entrepreneurs, the study particularly has made use of Brush et al.'s '5M' framework to examine the problems and difficulties faced by women entrepreneurs in Nagaland. Building on the 3Ms framework of Bates et al., the '5M' framework of Brush et al.

(2009) added two new constructs to analyse entrepreneurship. It aims to close the gender gap in academic research (Cullen, 2019, p. 2).

Bates et al. describe the '3Ms' (Money, Market, Management) as the fundamental 'building blocks of business viability' (Bates et al**.,** 2007, p. 10). Explaining the 3M model further, the scholars argued that while 'Money' refers to financial capital, 'Market' deals with the supply chain of their commodities, and 'Management' refers to the human and organisational capital (Allen et al**.,** 2010). Viable small businesses can be created if three important criteria are fulfilled. These include (i) the involvement of skilled and capable entrepreneurs, (ii) their access to financial capital to invest in their business ventures, and (iii) their access to markets for the products of their enterprises (Bates et al., 2007, p. 10). Brush et al. (2009) while retaining the components of 3M model, added two more aspects i.e. 'motherhood' and 'meso/macro environment' to formulate their 5M frameworks. Thus, the 5M framework included gender dimension and advocated 'a gender-aware framework' for a holistic understanding of women's entrepreneurship (Brush et al., 2009, p. 8). By deploying the 'motherhood' metaphor, scholars have argued how the household remains the foundation source for resources and social support on which female entrepreneurs rely. Thus, the importance of family assumes significance, which might have a bigger impact on women than men (ibid., p. 9). The 'motherhood' component further assumes significance as it greatly influences the other components of this framework. Therefore, Brush et al. (2009) through their framework convincingly argued that the 'invisible internal family dynamics such as gendered power relations and inequalities, need to be included to develop a systematic and meaningful understanding of women entrepreneurship (Cullen, 2019, p. 2).

Another component i.e., 'macro and meso environment' was added to the 5M frameworks by taking into account the sociocultural factors such as expectations of society and cultural norms (Brush et al., 2009, p. 9). A country's cultural component is crucial for understanding the challenges and barriers to entrepreneurship (Sarasvathy 2004) and constitutes the macro environment (as cited in Hetland, 2013, p.9).

While macro structures of the society i.e., the national level policies, culture, laws, and economy shape gender roles and responsibilities (Brush et al*.,* 2009, p. 11) meso environment i.e., regional support, policies, services, and initiatives (ibid., p. 11) provide a specific orientation to address the gender roles. Stressing the importance of the meso environment, (Cullen 2019, p.2) advocated that culture is a multilayered phenomenon, which can be variously reflected across the different levels of a country (e.g. national, regional), and therefore it is important to examine the level of an entrepreneurial culture within the region or the meso environment (Cullen 2019, p.2). Hence, this

integrative 5M model as displayed in figure 1 shows how all these factors in one way or another contribute to shaping the nature and dynamics of women's entrepreneurship.

Methodology

The study made use of both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data were collected from 100 respondents, fifty each from Mokokchung town and Dimapur city. These two urban centers were selected as both are considered important urban conglomerations in Nagaland. While Mokokchung town is the district headquarters as well as the main urban center of Mokokchung district, Dimapur is the largest city and the major commercial hub in Nagaland. The respondents were selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Due to the absence of any relevant directory or database to prepare the sampling frame, these non-probability sampling techniques were preferred to select the respondents and collect the requisite empirical data. After identifying a few respondents from different strands of entrepreneurship, the remaining respondents were selected with the help of referrals. The empirical data were collected through the techniques of schedule and questionnaire. The case studies were also conducted to obtain deeper insights into hardships and problems faced by entrepreneurs.

Women entrepreneurship in Nagaland

Nagaland, a north-eastern state of India which came into existence on 1st December 1963 as the sixteenth state of the Indian Union, is known for its unique cultural ethos and tradition. It is bounded by Myanmar on the East, Arunachal Pradesh on the North, Assam on the West, and Manipur on the South. The economy of the state is predominantly agricultural through cottage industries such as weaving, woodwork, and pottery are important sources of revenue in the state. According to the Census of India 2011, the total population of Nagaland is 19,78,502, out of which women constitute 9,53,853, which is almost half of the state's population. Despite being a patriarchal society, of late, there has been increasing participation of women in the development domain. Particularly, they have made their presence felt in the tertiary sector through their voluminous participation in diverse economic activities.

Traditionally, the entrepreneurial activities of women in Nagaland were mostly confined to the selling of vegetables and fruits. Of late, with the spread of education and awareness, there has been increasing participation of women in a wide range of economic activities such as jewelry making, fashion designing, handloom and handicrafts, food processing, floriculture, beauty parlors, hotels and restaurants, educational establishments and event management. This implies that

there has been occupational diversity and women entrepreneurs today are ready to take up unconventional areas of occupation indicating significant changes in their professional orientation, occupational choices, and preferences.

Socio-Economic Profile of the Respondents

With 52 percent in Mokokchung and 50 percent in Dimapur respectively, the study observed that the majority of the women entrepreneurs belong to the age group of 30-39. This implies that most of them are young and dynamic with a strong likelihood that they would excel in their entrepreneurial venture. The data on marital status of the respondents indicate that 50 per cent of the respondents from Mokokchung and 38 per cent from Dimapur were married.

Therefore, a sizable number of respondents carry the extra burden of household responsibility to look after the family while at the same time run their enterprises. Nagaland is a fairly literate state with a 79.55 percent literacy rate whereas female literacy was 76.11 percent, as per 2011 census data. Thus, it is not surprising to observe the literacy status of the respondents, which is quite encouraging. This is also indicative of better prospects for women, particularly from the perspective of entrepreneurship. As per the data, 32 percent in Mokokchung and 22 percent in Dimapur have obtained education up to the tenth standard. About 65 percent in Mokokchung and 14 percent in Dimapur have obtained the twelfth standard. The data on the educational qualification of the respondents further revealed that while 38 percent of the respondents in Mokokchung and 66 percent in Dimapur were graduates, 8 percent and 14 percent had obtained post-graduation respectively. Therefore, all the respondents of the study were literate though with varying educational qualifications. This could be one of the reasons for the growing popularity of entrepreneurship as a career option as they find it lucrative.

Women entrepreneurs have taken up diverse activities ranging from the service sector to manufacturing and trade. It was observed that the majority of the women entrepreneurs (66 percent in Mokokchung and 46 percent in Dimapur) were engaged in the trading sector, followed by the service sector (26 percent in Mokokchung and 38 percent in Dimapur) and manufacturing sector (8 percent in Mokokchung and 16 percent in Dimapur).

Problems faced by the women entrepreneurs

Women entrepreneurs in Nagaland are believed to have vast entrepreneurial potential. If nurtured properly, it would certainly generate tremendous growth prospects and yield better dividends. Though the majority of the women entrepreneurs in Nagaland have

sole ownership and manage their enterprises on their own, some of them heavily depend on their families and relatives to manage their enterprises. No doubt, managing an enterprise demands meticulous planning, adequate financial resources, and various logistical support, which at times becomes extremely difficult for them to meet these conditions. The various problems women entrepreneurs have faced in their pursuits have been classified into three categories. Firstly, the problems faced at the initiation stage i.e., at start-up. Secondly, the problems encountered at the execution stage i.e., running the enterprises. Thirdly, the consolidation stage i.e., the stage when the entrepreneurs plan to spring out and widen the business set-up.

At the initial stage of the enterprise, the women entrepreneurs have faced problems in accruing start-up capital, availing requisite manpower, and possessing the requisite knowledge and awareness of entrepreneurship.

The problem of obtaining start-up capital: The study found that during the initial stage of the enterprise, the major problem faced by women entrepreneurs was the difficulty in accessing and acquiring much-needed seed capital. For a significant number of respondents (54 percent in Mokokchung and 40 percent in Dimapur), obtaining start-up capital was the major obstacle, which to a great extent has affected their enthusiasm.

They mostly relied either on their little savings or sought support from their family and relatives to run and sustain their entrepreneurship. When they were unable to generate requisite funds from their acquaintances, they were left with no option but to borrow from private money lenders with high-interest rates to somehow continue with their enterprises. Expressing the frustration, a respondent who owns a pickle business and a restaurant stated, "applying for loans from the banks was such a hassle that I started my business with the little savings that I had and subsequently borrowed from private money lenders. I had to pay interest to them so I faced many problems initially". Belwal et al. (2014) in their study made similar observations and asserted that the financial problems come on the way as most of the women entrepreneurs struggle to generate adequate capital for initial investment.

They manage to establish their business either with their own funds or with those of their families. Pointing out the veracity of this problem, (Still, 2005, p. 58) asserted that gaining access to finance is 'the perennial constraint for all women, most of whom undertake the initial capitalization of their business through personal savings, credit cards or assistance from family and friends. Therefore, institutional support is the key that would facilitate and motivating potential entrepreneurs

to carry forward and widen their entrepreneurial activities who otherwise are unable to do so due to wanting of financial resources.

Lack of information about facilities available for women entrepreneurs: The study found that a substantial number of the respondents (40 percent in Mokokchung and 48 percent in Dimapur) considered the lack of information on various schemes and benefits earmarked for women entrepreneurs as one of the major impediments. Since these respondents were unaware of schemes and other facilities, they could not avail of such benefits. Therefore, efforts need to be maximised both at the government and non-government levels to create awareness among women entrepreneurs. The onus, however, lies with the government to ensure that proper mechanisms are in place so that they will be able to obtain hassle-free guidance, suggestion, and information on entrepreneurship. Stressing the need and importance of awareness, a respondent who runs a bakery business stated, "When I started my business, I was not aware of any facilities provided for women entrepreneurs. I started it without any support from the government." Echoing a similar concern, another respondent who owns a restaurant was of the opinion that "any kind of support from the government would have been very helpful in starting and setting up of my business but I had no information about such things, let alone to avail these benefits".

Unavailability of working place: To begin with their entrepreneurship, entrepreneurs need a suitable space preferably in the areas of their preference and choice. A significant number of respondents were of the view that they faced difficulties and struggled in acquiring a working space for starting up their enterprises. About 24 percent of the respondents in Dimapur and 8 percent in Mokokchung expressed resentment over the unavailability of a working place. Presenting her ordeal, a respondent who owns a clothing store opined, "finding a good location to set up my business was the biggest problem that I faced. All the places in the main market area were occupied and I had no option but to look for space in the peripheries".

Unavailability of skilled labor: Another major problem faced by women entrepreneurs at the initial stages of their entrepreneurship was the unavailability of skilled labor. About 28 percent of the respondents in Dimapur and 16 percent in Mokokchung reported the unavailability of skilled labour. Commenting on this problem, a respondent (fashion designer) stated, "at the beginning, when I started my fashion house, there was a lack of skilled labour so I trained some girls and employed them. Now I have employed around sixteen to eighteen people. However, the lack of skilled labour continues to be a major problem".

The problems that entrepreneurs face are not confined to the initiation stage alone. As they continue with their entrepreneurship venture, they

keep facing various problems at later stages though the nature of the problems remains different from the problems that they faced at the initiation stage. Some of the major challenges faced by women entrepreneurs while running their enterprises include financial issues, handling of dual responsibility, challenges pertaining to marketing, and the difficulties in availing government facilities.

Financial problems: Insufficient financial resources were the major problem to carry forward their entrepreneurial activities. The majority of the respondents i.e., 66 percent in Mokokchung and 70 percent in Dimapur were categorical in their opinion that lack of financial resources to back up their business always creates a sense of uncertainty and involves greater risks. It may be pointed out that the women entrepreneurs in Nagaland are mostly engaged in micro and small-scale enterprises, which generate subsistence income without much surplus. Therefore, they found it extremely challenging to widen and expand their entrepreneurial activities even though many of them are keen to make further investments. Scholars, while analysing the importance of adequate financial resources, argue that the availability of resources motivates entrepreneurs to carry out their entrepreneurial activities with much rigour and greater sense of involvement. Sinha (2003) observed that women entrepreneurs in North-east India suffered from inadequate income generation and thus needed much needed financial support for the growth and expansion of their units. Embran (2003) in a study on women entrepreneurship in Kerala also corroborated the similar observations. Embran's study observed that for an overwhelming number of women entrepreneurs (87.58 per cent) the shortage of funds came on their way to effectively carry out their enterprises.

A significant number of respondents also reported that they had to face various problems in obtaining loans from financial institutions such as banks. About 44 percent in Dimapur and 26 percent in Mokokchung pointed out that they faced difficulties in obtaining loans from the banks primarily due to the absence of collateral security.

A similar observation was made by Sinha wherein it was argued that getting financial support was a major problem for the women entrepreneurs as they were unable to provide collateral security against loans they sought as the property was controlled by their male counterparts (2003, p. 434). In addition, women entrepreneurs also faced challenges due to a lack of awareness and knowledge on the issues relating to financial management. Although all the respondents had obtained some formal education, a vast majority of the respondents did not have business-related training to upgrade and sharpen their skills, orientations, and knowledge. An overwhelming majority of the respondents in Mokokchung (72 percent) had not availed of any training whatsoever before starting their enterprise. Similarly in

Dimapur, 66 percent of the respondents did not undergo training before starting up the enterprise. Even after starting their enterprises, only 6 percent of the respondents from Mokokchung and 14 percent from Dimapur had undergone some training programmes to upgrade their skills and understanding of entrepreneurship. Due to the lack of business-related training, women entrepreneurs struggle to handle financial and managerial tasks. This to a great extent affects them as entrepreneurs and remains a major hurdle to achieving the desired success in their enterprises. Therefore, periodical participation of women entrepreneurs in various training programmes is essential which would help them to augment their skills and knowledge on matters relating to business management. Since they run small and medium enterprises, opportunities need to be provided to them and they should be persistently encouraged by the government and other facilitating agencies besides the associations and forums formed by the entrepreneurs.

*Dual responsibilit*y: Role conflict and dual responsibility to a certain extent have affected the success of entrepreneurs. They had to strike a balance in carrying out various roles at home as well as at the workplace. It is quite evident from the data that the majority of the respondents indeed found it difficult to carry out both responsibilities satisfactorily. At times, they had to compromise either of these responsibilities i.e., taking care of the household chores and addressing the business enterprises, and setting priorities. While 54 percent of the respondents in Mokokchung were very categorical about the difficulties they faced, in Dimapur (60 percent) were candid enough as they attributed their problems to the burden of dual responsibility that they carried along. Maybe the classification of gender-role, gender stereotypes, and dilemma of public-private dichotomy compel them not to ignore household activities even though they are more inclined to their career in entrepreneurship. Dual responsibility has clearly affected the outcome of their entrepreneurship as they struggled to devote adequate time and energy meaningfully to their entrepreneurial ventures.

Pointing out how women entrepreneurs still give utmost importance to their families (Sinha 2003, p. 432) observed that women entrepreneurs were overloaded with domestic roles and most significantly, home came first for them and they considered entrepreneurship as secondary to their home and family. Stressing this problem Coughlin (2002, p. 71) articulated that 'Social expectations of women's role and family responsibilities usually mean that women assume greater responsibility for the household, child care, and dependent care, which can be a burden for women trying to manage and balance these responsibilities while trying to grow their businesses. Corroborating the same observation, Mathew and Panchanatham (2011) argued that the dual roles and the possible conflict that arise from it often restrain women

entrepreneurs to take up any challenging tasks which otherwise could be rewarding and might bring rich dividends for them. Mathew and Panchanatham outlined the multiple roles performed by women and asserted that 'In addition to their challenging entrepreneurial work, many of the women entrepreneurs must also perform several roles in their families that include being a spouse, caretaker, and parent; managing daily household chores and providing services to the community and society. Women also must take care of their own health and other personal activities, which are often neglected because of role overload as well as time limitations. All of these situations lead to the absence of work-life balance and the manifestation of many work-life balance issues' (ibid., p. 80).

Marketing problems: Some of the marketing problems faced by women entrepreneurs include stiff competition, inadequate publicity, and poor knowledge of marketing management.

Stiff competition: While asserting that healthy competition always helps entrepreneurs to remain alert and not to become complacent, the women entrepreneurs found the prevailing competition at times exerts unwanted pressure on them**.** Intense competition and similar entrepreneurial activity carried out often adversely affect promising entrepreneurs. The respondents asserted that this marketing problem should be addressed and possible remedial measures need to be taken by the marketing organisations and concerned authorities. Entrepreneurship mapping, mutual understanding, and a fine balance between supply and demand are some of the measures, which could redress this inevitable problem. When enquired about its intensity and impact on the overall success of their entrepreneurship, 60 percent of the respondents from Dimapur, reported that they have faced stiff competition to some extent while 22 percent reported that it has affected them to a large extent. In Mokokchung, 48 percent of the respondents experienced the problem of stiff competition to some extent and 14 percent experienced it to a large extent. A respondent, who is an owner of a beauty parlour, opined that "there are so many beauty parlours in Dimapur and there is so much competition. We have some regular customers but we need a robust marketing strategy to attract more customers. There has to be some way out to address this problem". Voicing concern over the intense competition and its fall out on other respondents, a respondent (a wedding decorator) stated that, "wedding planning and decorating business is very enterprising and profitable but it is a seasonal business.

Moreover, there are many other competitors in the same field so we always have to keep updating our flower collection and décor items in order to attract customers and meet their demands". A respondent who has been running a garments store for more than 20 years lamented "I have been running my clothing store successfully for almost two

decades but now my business is almost dying because these days everybody buys clothes from online stores and I cannot compete with that. E-commerce has posed serious competition for my business". Longchar (2016, p. 153) addressing the shortcomings stated that technological backwardness is an aspect, which needs to be addressed. They lag behind when it comes to machineries and industries for producing, processing, and up-gradation of goods. Local products such as honey and pickles find it hard to sustain in the competitive market system due to poor packaging as these cannot compete with the popular brands in the main market. 'The women entrepreneurs have cited that the most crucial problem is the substandard packaging they can afford. The local entrepreneurs run small-scale enterprises and they cannot afford to spend more than a limited amount of money for the packaging thus limiting their products when it comes to the competition in the market (ibid. p. 153). Gender stereotype is another reason, which adversely affected women entrepreneurs as they faced stiff competition from their male counterparts. They lagged behind their male entrepreneurs in terms of mobility and effective business networks. Carrim (2016, p. 138) asserted that women entrepreneurs face stiff competition from men operating in the same sector. 'Since few women operate in male-dominated environments, they face sex-based stereotypes of not possessing the characteristics of entrepreneurship and, therefore, experience difficulties in developing business networks, securing resources, and gaining legitimacy for their business ventures' (Carrim 2016, p. 140-141).

Inadequate publicity and poor knowledge on marketing management: A significant number of women entrepreneurs (44 percent in Dimapur and 40 percent in Mokokchung) reported that inadequate advertising and publicity have affected their enterprises. They are also not able to devise appropriate strategies to market their goods and services and reach out to consumers, which have affected the overall turnover of their enterprises. The study observed that a significant number of respondents (54 percent in Dimapur and 40 percent in Mokokchung) have suffered due to their lack of knowledge of marketing strategy and management which has adversely affected their output.

While the above-mentioned problems have affected the effectiveness and achievement of the entrepreneurs, these also have bearing on the expansion of their entrepreneurial venture. Some of the additional problems that stood out and hampered them to widen their business include the increasing demand for travel, lack of a strong network, and their inability towards optimum utilisation of available government benefits.

Frequent traveling: Though entrepreneurship demands frequent traveling for business transactions, women entrepreneurs had constraints to adhere to their travel plans. According to 40 percent of

the respondents in Dimapur and an equal percentage in Mokokchung, they have not been able to travel frequently for their business activities. A respondent, who runs a retail and wholesale business of frozen foods, spelt out the constraints she faced. According to her "women cannot travel freely for days together because they have to attend to their household duties too. It is not always an easy decision to take when I plan to go out even for a short period as I have family liabilities. I shoulder the responsibility to take care of my parents apart from carrying out household chores. Moreover, as an unmarried woman, people often question if I stay away from home and travel alone. These factors often restrict my mobility and hinder my business ambitions". Women in India, due to personal (motherhood), religious, security, and societal restrictions, do not move freely from one region to another or even from one state to another which hinders the growth of their ventures, and are compelled to bear the burden of operational costs (Ibeh, 2009; Saini, 2014; Sharma et al., 2012 as cited in Carrim, 2016, p. 137).

Problems involved in availing government facilities and support: Lack of awareness on available government schemes provided added problems to the entrepreneurs, as they could not avail of the benefits. That apart, corruption and malpractices involved in availing of subsidies, incentives and loans are some of the bottlenecks that often hamper the interests of the entrepreneurs and dampen their enthusiasm.

It was observed that a significant percentage of the respondents (52 per cent in Dimapur and 40 per cent in Mokokchung) were unaware of various government schemes available for women entrepreneurs. This corroborates Shah's study, which highlighted the lack of awareness amongst women on the financial assistance offered (incentives, loans, and schemes) by the institutions in the financial sector as one of the major challenges for the entrepreneurs (Shah, 2013, p. 16). It is pertinent to note here that in spite of financial policies and programmes for women entrepreneurs in India, financial support has reached only a few women entrepreneurs since most of the lending and supporting institutions do not have any awareness-building mechanisms (ibid., p. 16). Longchar's study found that some women could not avail the loans due to the failure to produce land *patta*, which was in the name of their husband, father, or brother (2016, p. 148). Highlighting how the prevailing favoritism and hassles in obtaining support from the government, a respondent (owner of a craft house of home decor and accessories) opined, "I am not aware of schemes or financial aids provided by the government. Some of the financial aids that I have heard of were given only to those who had either some relation with the person in charge or some percentage of the money given to the person.

Thus, I did not seek such aids". Some of the respondents (30 percent in Mokokchung and 26 per cent in Dimapur) pointed out that they were not able to avail of subsidies and loans due to bribery and nepotism. Asserting the problems faced, one of the respondents who run a restaurant stated, "when I tried to apply for loans, I found that there was corruption and bribery and I could not avail any loans". The women entrepreneurs faced challenges due to nepotism, favoritism, political and administrative interference. Those who have links with the higher ups in the government departments are given preference for getting subsidies, grants, platforms to represent the state, national and international trade fairs, supply of equipment for small scale industries, fertilizers etc (Longchar, 2016, pp. 146-147).

Establishing Effective Network

An effective network helps the entrepreneurs on several counts. It helps them to get useful information, procure timely help, modify and reshape their enterprises. All these contribute significantly to make entrepreneurship more promising and achievement oriented. The study observed that the majority of the women entrepreneurs in Nagaland depended on networking of family, relatives, friends, customers and fellow women entrepreneurs. A respondent who owns a beauty parlour stated, "The Sangtam Mother's Association from Sangtam Baptist Church, Dimapur where I am a member, sponsored me to attend a six months training course on hair design and beauty treatments. After the training, I worked in a beauty parlour for some years. Later with the support of my family, I started my own beauty parlour. The initial customers were my family, relatives, friends and members of my Church and through their recommendations other customers visited the parlour. Slowly my regular customers have increased and my business is quite successful today". Carrim (2016) observed that the networks of women entrepreneurs are limited, women obtain information from spouses, family and friends in starting up and sustaining the businesses and hence, women entrepreneurs have little social capital. Therefore, personal networks undoubtedly are important which create socio-cultural capital for them. However, in order to remain successful in the competitive market, women entrepreneurs need to devise appropriate strategies to make their business networks viable and maximize their efforts to make use of these networks.

Conclusion

Of late, there has been a steady rise of women entrepreneurs in Nagaland and they are engaged in various entrepreneurial activities both in traditional and non-traditional sectors. Entrepreneurship has helped them to become economically independent, enhance their socio-economic status and emerged as an effective tool for women empowerment. Some of the entrepreneurs have emerged as role models

for young entrepreneurs who consider entrepreneurship as a viable career option.

The women entrepreneurship admittedly has fostered a new entrepreneurial culture in Nagaland. Despite these promising prospects, the progress of women entrepreneurs has been hindered by numerous problems. At different stages of entrepreneurship such as the initiation, execution and consolidation stages, they have faced diverse problems relating to the different components of 5M framework: money (problems in obtaining start-up capital, financial difficulties for running and expansion of business), market (lack of marketing skills and management, stiff competition), management (difficulties in establishing effective networks, unavailability of skilled labour), macro environment (lack of awareness of government schemes and facilities, lack of institutional support system) meso environment (problems in availing financial aids, constraints in mobility), motherhood (shouldering of dual responsibility, addressing gender stereotypes and perceptions), as a result of which they have struggled to survive in the competitive market system. Some of these problems are indeed the product of an entrenched patriarchal value system and prevailing gendered stereotypes.

'The Naga law of inheritance permits only males to inherit property. Females have no such rights' (Jamir, 2012, p. 24). The absence of any security covers to meet contingencies, the women entrepreneurs are least enthused to take up those entrepreneurial activities, which involve greater risks even though there is every possibility to yield better returns. Despite the diverse challenges and shortcomings the women entrepreneurs have shown the glimpses of resilience in sustaining their entrepreneurial ventures. Perseverance, passion, family support and loyal customers have instilled a sense of confidence in them. Further, flexibility in adjusting to the fluctuations in the market have helped the women entrepreneurs to sustain despite the challenges faced. However, efforts need to be made at various levels to address the concerns of the women entrepreneurs and mitigate their problems.

While at the macro level, wider governmental and institutional support is required to create a supportive and conducive environment for the growth of women entrepreneurship, at micro level massive awareness campaigns need to be initiated. Awareness programs, training initiatives, support from microfinance organisations, networking and access to credit would certainly create a sense of ownership which will have a positive impact on the growth and sustainability of women entrepreneurship in the state. As articulated by McClelland's (1961) needs for achievement would augur well and motivate the women entrepreneurs of Nagaland to pursue their goals despite being restrained by various obstacles.

References

Acs, Zoltan J., & Audretsch, David B. (2010). *Handbook of Entrepreneurship Research: An Interdisciplinary Survey and Introduction (2ⁿᵈ edition)*. New York: Springer.

Allen, E., Brush, C., Bruin, A. & Welter, F. (2010). *Gender Embeddedness of Women Entrepreneurs: An Empirical Test of the "5M" Framework.* Massachusetts: Babson College Entrepreneurship Research Conference.

Bates, T., Jackson, W.E. III & Johnson, J.H. Jr. (2007). Introduction to the special issue on advancing research on minority entrepreneurship. *Annals of the American Academy of Political Science and Social Science*, 613(1), 10-17.

Belwal, Shweta, Belwal, Rakesh & Saidi, Al Fatema. (2014). Characteristics, motivations, and challenges of women entrepreneurs in Oman's Al-Dahira Region. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 10(2), 135-151.

Bowen, D.D., & Hisrich, R.D. (1986). The female entrepreneur: A career development perspective. *Academy of Management Review*, 11(2), 393-407.

Brush, C., de Bruin & Welter, F. (2009). A gender-aware framework for women's entrepreneurship. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, 1(1), 8-24.

Bushell, Brenda. (2008). Women entrepreneurs in Nepal: what prevents them from leading the sector?. *Gender and Development*, 16(3), 549-564.

Carrim, Nasima Mohamed Hoosen. (2016). The gender, racio-ethnic and professional work identity of an Indian woman entrepreneur in South Africa. In Payal Kumar (Ed.), *Indian women as entrepreneurs: An exploration of self-identity* (pp. 133-154). London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Cochran, Thomas C. (1971). The Entrepreneur in Economic Change. In Peter Kilby (Ed.), *Entrepreneurship and Economic Development*. New York: Free Press.

Coughlin, Jeanne Halladay. (2002). *The rise of women entrepreneurs: people, processes and global trends*. London: Quorum Books.

Cullen, Ufi. (2019). An analysis of informal female entrepreneurship in Turkey through the lens of the 5M framework. *British Academy of Management Conference paper.*

Embran, M.K. Krishnan. (2013). *A study on women entrepreneurship in Kerala.* (Doctor of Philosophy), Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam.

Hetland, Ida Jaarvik. (2013). *Understanding the women entrepreneur: The dynamics of starting a business in Norway.* (Master's Thesis). University of Stavanger, Norway.

Jamir, Toshimenla. (2012). *Women and politics in Nagaland: challenges and imperatives*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company Pvt. LTD.

Lall, Madhurima&Sahai, Shikha. (2008). *Entrepreneurship (2ⁿᵈ edition)*. New Delhi: Excel Books.

Longchar, Meyajungla. (2016). *Women entrepreneurship: The case of the Aos in Dimapur, Nagaland.* (Doctor of Philosophy), Gauhati University, Gauhati.

Mathew, Rincy V. & Panchanatham. (2011). An exploratory study on the work-life balance of women entrepreneurs in South India. *Asian Academy of Management Journal,* 16(2), 77-105.

McClelland, David. (1961). *The Achieving Society*. New York: The Free Press.

Moore, Dorothy P. & Buttner, E. Holly. (1997). *Women Entrepreneurs: Moving Beyond the Glass Ceiling*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Schumpeter, Joseph A. (1934). *The Theory of Economic Development*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press

Shah, Hina. (2013). Creating an enabling environment for women's entrepreneurship in India. *Developmental papers*, 1304, 15-25.

Singha, R.K.P.G. (2012). Empowerment of women through entrepreneurship: a study of Mizo women. In Harendra Sinha and J.

Zorema (Eds.), *Empowerment of Women in North East India: Socio-economic perspectives* (pp. 208-217). New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company Pvt Ltd.

Sinha, Poonam. (2003). Women entrepreneurs in the North East India: Motivation, social support and constraints. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, 38(4), 425-443.

Still, Leonie V. (2005). The constraints facing women entering small business ownership. In Sandra L. Fielden & Marilyn J. Davidson (Eds.), *International Handbook of Women and Small Business Entrepreneurship* (pp. 55-65). UK: Edward Elgar.

Swedberg, Richard. (2000). *Entrepreneurship: The Social Science view*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Weber, Max. (1930). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (trans. Talcott Parsons). New York: Routledge.

Yadav, Vanita & Unni, Jeemol. (2016). Women entrepreneurship: research review and future directions. *Journal of Global Entrepreneurship Research,* 6(12), 1-18.

Young, Frank. (1971). A macro sociological interpretation of entrepreneurship. In Peter Kilby (Ed.), *Entrepreneurship and Economic Development* (pp. 139-149). New York: The Free Press.
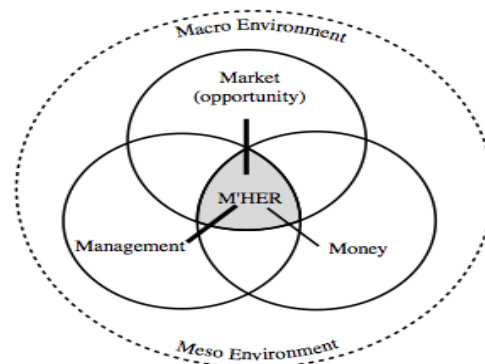
Figure 1: Women's entrepreneurship "5M" framework (Brush et al., 2009, p. 13)

Yongkongnukla Ozukum *is a PhD Scholar, Department of Sociology, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya, India*

Email id: nukozk@gmail.com

Biswambhar Panda *is a Professor at Department of Sociology, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya, India*

Disappearing Urban Commons and Emerging Public Spaces: A case study of wetlands in Guwahati city, Northeast India

--- Natasha Hazarika and Chandan Kumar Sharma

Abstract

With urbanisation advancing at a rapid pace, it becomes imperative to analyse the process of urban planning and governance with regard to the creation of urban spaces. The dichotomy between urban commons and public space creates an interesting distinction in how urban space is conceptualised. This paper focuses on the urban commons (here, wetlands) in Guwahati city, the gateway city in the Northeastern region of India, which have been converted from community spaces to 'public spaces' and are continuing to undergo this transition for its overall development. However, this conversion has led to increased privatisation and regulation of these urban commons which are designed to cater to a specific class of citizens. This paper draws on the experience of the wetlands within the city and discusses the impact of urban planning on them to bring forth the debilitating condition of the city's urban commons. It also elaborates on the process of conversion of urban commons into public spaces and analyses the exclusionary form of governance that emanates from the rubric of urban development for the 'public'.

Keywords: Consumer public, Gentrification, Public space, Urban commons

Introduction

Urbanisation in Northeast India is a relatively new trend but one that is advancing at a fast rate. However, the development process implemented in the region by a neoliberal state reflects the Global North/South binary which underlies a system of hierarchy that segregates patterns of growth and development based on geographical situatedness, with the South always catching up to meet the ideas and discourses produced by the North (Levander & Mignolo, 2011). Though the categories of Global North and South emerged as geo-political concepts, the Global South is not simply a geographical location; it has become synonymous with those regions which need to be 'emancipated' by the Global North. Not taking into consideration regional or local specificities creates a discourse of emancipation for the 'other' whereby the nuances of localised contingencies, be it the political, social or ecological landscape, takes a back seat (Caison & Vormann, 2014).

This pattern can be observed in the process of urbanisation in Northeast India. Characterised by mostly hilly terrains interspersed with valleys and plains, the region constitutes a borderland that

connects the South and the Southeast Asia. It is home to various ethnic groups, many of them being indigenous communities with their unique socio-cultural and livelihood systems. According to the 2011 Census of India, the urban population in the region varies across its 8 states with Mizoram constituting an astounding 52% urban population and Assam constituting only 14% urban population; however, in reality this percentage is more, and one that is on the rise. The areas which have been classified as urban here may have obfuscated the actual urban growth because, as argued by McDuie-Ra (2017), city-level governance is further complicated in this region because the land laws for protection of indigenous communities are not applicable to municipal areas. As such, '…until recently there has been little incentive to expand the territory under municipal authority' (ibid, p.30).

However, we can see the scenario rapidly changing in favour of becoming urban, especially owing to various policies to open up the region, such as Look East[i], Act East [ii], JNNURM [iii], AMRUT [iv], Smart City[v], etc. But the process of adopting such strategic planning policies largely undermines the unique land relations and social systems of the protected indigenous communities in the region (Sharma & Borgohain, 2019). This holds true, even more so, in the case of smart cities in Northeast India. In the case of the upcoming Smart City Projects, as argued by McDuie-Ra and Lai (2019, pp. 68-69), '(T) he smart city bids from Northeast India seek funds for conventional infrastructure in keeping with a long history of dependency, state-led development, and centre-state patronage'; this indicates towards the Global North-South dynamic between the centre (mainland India) and the state (Northeast), whereby a model is espoused and imposed upon the latter. As such, despite the specificities of the region – political, social, cultural or environmental – the region's development process appears to be a result of a developmentalist agenda of the Indian state, following the same linear and standardised model geared towards resource exploitation (see, Sharma 2020).

As a result, the state-led development initiatives in the region often leave serious adverse consequences on its social and physical landscape, which gets obfuscated by the rhetoric of economic progress. This is reflected in the urbanisation process of Guwahati city. Located on the bank of the mighty river Brahmaputra and surrounded by hills on the three sides, Guwahati by virtue of being the gateway to the entire Northeast India, has experienced a tremendous transformation in the last few decades, accompanied by a severe onslaught on its ecology which has serious implications on the overall development of the city. One of the most pressing concerns of Guwahati's urbanisation is the disappearing urban commons (here, wetlands) to meet the burgeoning requirement of urban space, which has not only led to depletion of groundwater resource, but also increasing flash flood frequency. The

settlement of people on the hills around the city has added to this situation as the top soil from the denuded hills has caused heavy siltation in the existing lowlands and the drainage system in the city.

The issue of flash flood has always been treated as a major cause of concern by the state authorities, so much so that there is a 'Mission Flood Free Guwahati' to mitigate the problem of urban flood and to devise a mechanism to tackle the problem. Though multiple projects and schemes are already underway to mitigate the problem of flash floods, not much relief can be seen from this. Sometimes a heavy downpour of just 30 minutes may cause many parts of the city to come to a standstill. The main reason behind these floods, as mentioned above, is the reduced water retention capacity of the existing (and disappearing) wetlands and lowlands, and shrinking open spaces within the city. Further, the city has five broad drainage basins which are ultimately drained into the Brahmaputra River either directly or through various drainage channels and reservoirs. However, the rapid urbanisation witnessed in the last 20 years has caused serious disruption to the drainage channels and encroachment in the wetlands which has compounded the problem of urban flooding [vi].

Even though Guwahati's Master Plan (perspective 2025) as well as the Guwahati Smart City Project discusses the importance of the urban commons of the city and the need to rejuvenate and conserve them, the ground reality presents a different picture. This paper draws on the experience of the wetlands within the city and discusses the impact of urban planning on them to bring forth the debilitating condition of the city's urban commons. The upcoming plans and schemes of development regarding the conservation of the urban commons in Guwahati reflect a neoliberal model of planning; the urban commons would be converted from community spaces to 'public spaces' for its overall development which would serve as a means of revenue generation as well. It is important to note here that urban commons are crucial, not only for their ecological impact, but also as argued by Gidwani and Baviskar (2011, p.43),

…they are critical to economic production in cities, to cultural vibrancy and the cement of community, to "learning" how to do democracy through practices of creating, governing and defending collective resources, to regenerating the sense of place that forms communities and, ultimately, to the reproduction of urban populations and ecosystems.

The paper problematises the approach of development for the 'public' as there needs to be a conceptual distinction within the ambit of urban planning between urban commons and what is considered public space. It explicates the process of conversion of urban commons into public spaces and the exclusionary form of governance that emanates from the rubric of urban development for the 'public'. The present work is

mainly a descriptive and analytical study. It relies on both primary and secondary sources of data and presents a mixed range of data complied through interviews, case study, survey and content analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Guwahati Smart City Limited (GSCL) officials and Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC) Ward Councillors selected through purposive sampling. A case study of Sola beel, a wetland located within the city of Guwahati, was conducted to gauge the plight of urban commons in the city. An observational survey was carried out of the wetlands in the city to understand the claim to public spaces. In addition to this, a content analysis of the Guwahati Smart City Proposal was done to bring forth the changing nature of urban planning and governance.

Defining Urban Commons

Commons can be defined as a '…construct constituted of three main parts: (a) *common* resources, (b) institutions (i.e. *commoning* practices) and (c) the communities (called *commoners*) who are involved in the production and reproduction of commons' (Kip et al., 2015, p.13). As such, commons cannot be considered as just an object or a resource; rather Harvey (2012, p.73) posits it as, '…an unstable and malleable social relation between a particular self-defined social group and those aspects of its actually existing or yet-to-be-created social and/or physical environment deemed crucial to its life and livelihood'. However, when it comes to the governance of commons, we have rather witnessed the dominance of two polarised approaches, one being state intervention for conservation of the commons, while the other being privatisation of those resources for increased efficiency of the commons. Both these approaches are based on the premise of Hardin's (1968) work whereby he argues, through the metaphor of herding, that the finite nature of resources in the world to support its population would suffer from the 'tragedy of commons' because of overpopulation and overuse. As such, Hardin (1978, p.314) argues that there are two models that present a solution to the commons dilemma, namely 'a private enterprise system', on the one hand, or 'socialism', on the other.

Ostrom (1990), however, states that these two dichotomous models justify the intervention of an external coercive force based on the premise of the 'free-rider' problem that individuals face when attempting to achieve collective benefits. Ostrom seeks to move beyond the dichotomy of state and market, by presenting examples of successful CPR institutions which are rich mixtures of public and private instrumentalities; she arrives at the 'eight design principles' for the management of common-pool resources by challenging the 'universal institutional panaceas' imposed by external authorities in favour of '…an adequately specified theory of collective action whereby a group of principals can organize themselves voluntarily to retain the residuals of their own efforts' (ibid, p.25).

Though much of the contemporary scholarship on commons is derived from the Hardin-Ostrom debate, their assumption of commons as a common-pool resource appears to be problematic when applied uncritically to the urban context. Both Hardin and Ostrom, in defining the commons as a common-pool resource, apply an objectified notion of traditional commons that diminishes in value with its usage or appropriation. But in the context of urban commons, the act of consumption increases its value as '…the resources that constitute the commons of the city are contingent on urban actors' ability to use them: whether a wall is an obstacle or central element for a *Parcours* tournament depends on who is standing in front of it' (Kornberger & Borch, 2015, p.8). As such urban commons is fundamentally different from CPRs which diminishes in value due to subtractability; the purpose of CPRs is a given whereas urban commons are the result of consumption and appropriation.

This understanding of urban commons is a derivation of the difference between value creation and appropriation propounded by Ebenezer Howard who argues that, '…the value of the land and buildings is a function of the activity of people: only through their interactions the city becomes a city' (Kornberger & Borch, 2015, p.7). Therefore, urban commons are not simply commons located in a physical space in the city; it is a continually evolving process with a contested character of 'strategic enclosure' and 'ontological openness' which is characterised by ongoing negotiations and fluctuating boundaries owing to the rapidly changing nature of cities (Kip, 2015).

Governance of Urban Commons

With urbanisation advancing at a rapid pace, cities are under pressure to undergo major transformations to accommodate the ever-growing urban population. In a world dictated by neoliberalism, this translates into large-scale commodification of urban space with the expectation of potential profitable investments in the city. One of the most substantive features of a neoliberal state is to generate revenue through redistribution of resources for consumption, which Harvey (2005, p.159) refers to as the process of 'accumulation by dispossession', which among others includes the 'commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations'; 'conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusive private property rights'; 'suppression of rights to the commons', etc.

The impact of this is distinctly visible on urban commons, because unlike CPRs, they are not communally owned spaces; rather, urban commons are under the jurisdiction of the state administration. It is thereby the state's prerogative on how urban spaces and commons will be designed and managed depending on the mandate of development policies, which in the present day are largely influenced by neoliberal

policies of resource exploitation and revenue generation. To generate more revenue is to expand the city limits and make room for the growing population in order to increase consumption. This has led to a situation '…in which cities are more and more subjected to the logic of exploitation without consideration of the quality of life of the majority of their residents' (Kratzwald, 2015, p.27).

This can be witnessed in the case of Sola beel. Divided into Borsola and Sorusola, Sola beel serves as urban commons for the people of its surrounding locality as well as the larger population of the city by virtue of being a storm water reservoir. The wetland is located near one of the busiest commercial areas of the city and seems to have been one of the most impacted wetlands in the city because of its location.

It was found during interviews with members of the *Sola Beel Unnayan Samiti* (Sola Beel Development Committee), henceforth SBUS, that it was the revenue department of Government of Assam that issued land documents (*patta*) to encourage people to settle on the banks of the wetland. But due to increased encroachment and land allotments, on July 18, 1995 a High-level ommittee advocated a resolution on wetland conservation which was to set the precedence for safeguarding Sola beel by curtailing further encroachment and land allotments. Initially, following this directive, the Revenue Department did cancel 30 *bighas* [vii] of land allotment of the wetland area; but over the years this picture has undergone change in the name of development, resulting in shrinkage of the Sola beel. As a matter of growing concern, in 2000, the SBUS filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) against the Revenue Department in the Gauhati High Court for conservation of the wetland. This intervention seemed to be successful as the High Court ordered the State Government to take responsibility for the preservation of the wetlands in the city.

However, discussion with members of the SBUS revealed that despite the court order, in 2006 the Revenue Department allotted land along the Sorusola beel for expansion of an existing college and construction of an eye hospital, and a portion of land along the Borsola was given for development and construction of tourist lodge to the Tourism Department. This also gave leeway to people already residing along its fringes to encroach into the wetland area. The SBUS filed yet another PIL in the High Court that same year against the actions of the administration as an act of contempt of the court. In response, the High Court issued a stay order on the ongoing building projects and future allotments, but by then the Sorusola had already lost 25 bighas out of its total area of 45 bighas and the Borsola had lost 20 bighas out of its 85-90 bighas.

Though the conservation of wetlands in and around the city has found major focus in the Master Plan (perspective 2025) as well as the Guwahati Smart City Project by virtue of being ecologically sensitive

zones, their conservation is contingent upon the development schemes of the state. The plight of Deepor beel, located in the outskirts south-west of Guwahati, bears testimony to this. Deepor beel is a crucial urban common in maintaining the biodiversity of the city and was enlisted as a Ramsar site in 2002. However, encroachment of the wetland area is a major concern here and the state is also responsible for this. One of the most notable impingements on the wetland area is the railway track constructed along the southern boundary of Deepor beel by the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) in 2001. As claimed in the *Report on Visit to Deepor Beel in Assam* (2008)[viii], the wetland area has suffered considerable shrinkage due to the reclamation of land for laying of this railway track. Despite being a Ramsar site, now there will be work on the electrification of the railway tracks, as the Union Government has given permission to proceed with it without seeking permission from the Forest or Wildlife departments [ix].

The wetland area presently also houses two educational institutions, a sprawling hotel and various other business establishments for which the land has been allotted by the state. The eviction drives conducted by the state seem counterintuitive when at the same time land in the wetland area is sanctioned for activities deemed fit under the state's prerogative. As a result, Deepor beel, which stretched over an area of 40.14 sq.km. According to earlier reports, has now shrunk to about 13 to 15 sq.km[x].

Similar is the plight of Silsako beel located in the south-eastern part of the city which has also been appropriated in the name of expansion and development. Silsako plays an important role as an urban common by virtue of being a reservoir basin for the storm water runoff during the monsoon from the nearby hills and Meghalaya. The wetland area which was spread across 120 hectares has reduced to half of its original size as it witnesses the rise of new apartment buildings along with the construction of a multiplex, tennis court, a hotel owned by the Tata Group, a hotel management institute, and a research institute, to name a few (Desai et al., 2014).

Under the jurisdiction of the state, the urban commons in Guwahati have taken on the form of a public space or good that is provided for and managed by the state for the benefit of everyone. Though it is considered that the state is the representation of the 'public', one witnesses how it assumes a private nature in the development of the wetland areas. Highlighting this nature of the state, Kratzwald (2015, p.32) argues,

(T)he state creates the political, social, and legal conditions for the functioning of the capitalist market. It ensures that people internalize the logic and the demands of the market system in their socialization to such an extent that it is even difficult to imagine, let alone implement,

alternatives that do not follow the logic of the market. States have never been protectors of the commons.

This was the case with two wetlands in Guwahati, Hahsora and Damol wetlands, which have disappeared completely owing to state approved land filling for construction activities [xi]. Sonn and Shin (2019) argue that such a form of dispossession, which transfers the users' rights of citizens to private developers, is similar to privatisation of public spaces.

State-regulated Public Spaces

Drawing from the above, it has been witnessed that in the case of the management of urban commons of Guwahati, the state adheres to a neoliberal mandate to fit into the larger paradigm of urban development. The 'development' of urban commons resonates with the pattern of resource exploitation and revenue generation under the auspices of neo-liberal policies. This completely undermines Harvey's (2012) argument about collectivity and non-commodification of urban commons being at the core of the principles of the management of urban commons. He points at this being crucial '…because it helps distinguish between public goods construed as productive state expenditures and a common which is established or used in a completely different way and for a completely different purpose…' (ibid, pp. 73-74). However, the urban planning process of Guwahati does not reflect any such distinction in its conceptualisation, and as a result, this has contributed significantly to the degrading condition of the wetland areas being treated as a public space or good.

When a public resource (here, urban commons) is appropriated by the state, the process of its production and distribution comes under the jurisdiction of the state. By treating urban commons as public spaces, the state authorises itself in determining the accessibility and utilisation of the commons and also for opening up new domains for '…capital accumulation in domains hitherto regarded off-limits to the calculus of profitability' (Harvey, 2005, p.160). This can be seen manifested in the various schemes and projects geared towards the conservation of wetlands in the city.

One such example in case of Sola beel came to light in a discussion with a GMC Ward Councillor of that area. Despite the directive to conserve the wetland, it was during the 33rd National Games organised in Guwahati city in 2007 that Borsola beel was sanctioned by the state to be utilised for the purpose of rowing competitions. She states that this project was approved with the hope of receiving funds in the name of developing an area which is an ecologically sensitive zone. The project was presented as an effort to rejuvenate the wetland by properly clearing it and then demarcating the area. Borsola was cleaned and demarcated, and pavements were constructed alongside

for better accessibility. It was during the construction of these pavements and the fenced boundary that the officials overseeing the project were allegedly bribed to push back the boundary of the wetland so that it did not impinge upon the privately owned properties around the wetland. However, this led to shrinkage of Borsola which then failed to meet the standard measurement requirements for the competition and the wetland was not utilised for the National Games. Thereby, the outcome of this project was further encroachment once the fence was drawn up for the demarcation of the wetland area. With this, the newly encroached area did not overlap with the state sanctioned wetland area and as such it would not be treated as encroachment.

Another such project was the beautification and revitalisation project of the Bharalu rivulet, which encompasses the Sola beel and some portions of its surrounding areas. As stated by a GMC Ward Councillor of that area, the first step undertaken for the implementation of this project was the clearance of Bharalu and Sola beel along with the eviction of encroachers. However, he states that what actually happened during this eviction drive along Sorusola was that only the marginalised section of the local population who were residing on the peripheries of the wetland areas were selectively evicted. The houses of a politician, businessmen and apartment buildings along the same line were left untouched; in fact, this provided an opportunity for them to extend their residential boundaries. In the vicinity of the area, there is also a college which added a new building and further encroached into the wetland without any repercussion. The people who bore the brunt of the eviction were the people who shared a relationship with the wetland; and the people untouched were the ones for whom the wetland area was an upcoming real estate. The role of the state seems to be implicit in such appropriation of the wetland area for consumption, as exclusive private property rights would then drive up the real estate value of that area. This is somewhat similar to the case of reclamation of floodplains by the state in Gangnam, Seoul to facilitate the growth of high-rise apartments by private developers, as discussed by Sonn and Shin (2020).

In this context, what Banerjee-Guha (2009, p.96) argues regarding the urban policies in India seems to be applicable in the case of Guwahati, that these policies are '…resting on an aggressive strategy of politico-economic restructuring of space and regulation of basic services through upscale governance…' which is a material manifestation of neoliberal capitalist expansion. The projects sanctioned for the development and conservation of urban commons under Guwahati Smart City Project (GSCP) are testimonies of this.

Going through the proposal of GSCP gives the impression of a comprehensive plan that will not only rejuvenate the urban commons but will make them the central feature of the city. The focus of the

Area-based projects of the GSCP is to make the city resilient to flood by revitalising the water channels through the development of riverfronts and wetland areas. The proposal is to build contiguous ecological corridors along natural storm water drains connecting to the riverfront. On paper, the urban commons of the city, which includes Brahmaputra Riverfront, Bharalu and Mora Bharalu rivers, Deepor beel and Borsola beel, find special focus. However, during conversations with various GSCL officials it was clear that over time, the emphasis shifts and the visual and aesthetic upgradation of these commons get prioritised over addressing any ecological concerns.

For instance, the template for restoration and preservation of Deepor beel has been designed drawing from Hongkong Wetland Park, Bishan-ang Mo Kio Park in Singapore, and Houtan Park in Shanghai in order to make it an attractive tourist destination. Keeping in line with the same idea, Borsola beel is proposed as a lake-themed attraction for the city comprising of an area of 30 acres. Along with revitalisation of the wetland which is crucial to mitigate the problem of flash floods in the city, the proposal also states that there would be a sluice gate decentralised water treatment decomposter for the treatment of sewage, so that in the absence of an integrated sewerage system, the city's sewage is not directly released into the river. Though such initiatives find mention on paper, conversations with GSCL officials reflect that the main focus is to make the wetland a viable centre of attraction. As such much of this wetland area is planned around aesthetic upgradation and the potential of generating revenue from the wetland area; hence, the space would be designed for public consumption practices. However, the site being shortlisted for this is an already congested area, and such a construction would not only disrupt the nearby localities but would also lead to traffic congestion, displacement and create further imposition on the wetland area. Such a park would be a revenue generating source for the government, but it would make no real contribution to maintaining the biodiversity of the locality or the city.

The most extensive Area-based project under GSCP is the Brahmaputra Riverfront Development with a proposed budget of Rs. 826 crores. Under this project, the riverfront road would stretch over an expanse of 11kms with promenades running along the river comprising of an urban park with the main attraction being the riverside leisure activities. This riverfront would also provide better connectivity through river shuttle between North-South and East-West parts of the city. It would also provide better connection with the twin city, North Guwahati using cable cars which would also be a tourist attraction. This stretch currently comprises of easily accessible parks and open spaces, fish and vegetable markets, and accessibility to the river as well. As far as riverside activities and better connectivity through the river are concerned, such provisions already exist; though

these need major improvement, it does not require complete uphauling of the existing riverfront.

For this project to be underway, the first step would be to clear out these spaces so as to accommodate the amenities proposed. With the upcoming project, the first people to be affected would be the existing vendors in the Kachari Ghat and Uzan Bazaar area who would have to vacate their spot, but at the same time would have limited access or hardly any requirement for the amenities that would be imposed. Such a change in the area would affect even the local residential communities as the landscape would undergo massive change and may even lead to disruption of their everyday life. As of now, the existing riverfront has an open nature accessible to all, but with the upscale development of this stretch, this space would be open only to those who engage in and encourage consumption practices. As Smith (2002, p.443) argues, the influence of global economy under neoliberalism has led to a generalised gentrification of urban spaces, which is facilitated by strategic appropriation of urban spaces by the state and '…finds its most developed expression in the language of urban regeneration'.

Though each of the above urban commons has its own ecological and social specificity, the project plans resonate the same standard model of development through 'emancipation' which enables the state to dictate the terms of use of these urban commons, geared toward revenue generation once converted to public space. As such, though the term 'public' in the process of planning and governance is considered representational of that which is owned, maintained and provided for the public by the state, but what the state does in actuality is create the conditions for the functioning of the neoliberal market through the paradigm of development for the public.

Urban Commons vs. Public Space

It may be noted that the role of the state in planning the development of a city is to ensure the welfare of the public; however, there is a conceptual problem while structuring the plans for the city with everything centered around development for the 'public'. What is of concern here in the case of Guwahati city is that in the process of creation of 'public' spaces, urban commons are rapidly diminishing in its essence to make way for state-regulated spaces. Though the development propaganda may suggest that conversion of urban commons into public spaces is the only way for conservation, Harvey (2012, p.72) argues,

(T)here is an important distinction here between public spaces and public goods, on the one hand, and the commons on the other. Public spaces and public goods in the city have always been a matter of state

power and public administration, and such spaces and goods do not necessarily a commons make.

When such urban commons are converted into state-regulated public spaces, the purpose of utilisation for these spaces is defined by the state which gets ingrained in its design. This defeats the appropriation of these spaces by the people for other purposes than those prescribed by the state. Taking the example of Deepor beel, in 2005, three years after its declaration as a Ramsar site, GMC approved a 24-hectare dumping site in Boragaon which lies in the eastern corner of Deepor beel. The untreated waste (refinery waste, industrial and hospital waste as well as sewage discharge) disposed here has only compounded over the years because of the increasing population of the city, which seeps into the beel during monsoon further deteriorating its water quality.

This has had an adverse impact on the wetland ecosystem which has severely impinged upon the lives of around 1200 families of the nearby 14 villages, comprising of the Karbis, a Scheduled Tribe (ST) as well as Kaibarttas, a Scheduled Caste (SC) community who are predominantly dependent upon the wetland ecology for their livelihood and survival, and they maintained a symbiotic relationship with the beel (Saikia, 2019). Now under GSCP, the plan for the rejuvenation of Deepor beel does not cater to the ecological and community needs, rather it sets up the wetland as a viable tourist destination at their expense.

On paper, the efforts for conservation of urban commons seem to be of utmost importance. The Assam Hill Land and Ecological Sites (Prevention and Management) Act, 2006 empowers the government to provide for preservation, protection, regulation, acquisition, and maintenance of hill land and other ecological sites of the state and more specifically those that lie within the jurisdiction of the Municipal Corporation. The Guwahati Water-Bodies (Preservation and Conservation) Act, 2008 mandates the protection and conservation of the wetlands in the city against degradation resulting from pollution and encroachment. The implementation of development schemes should be in accordance with these Acts, the violation of which is considered a punishable offense. However, the various projects and schemes for the conservation and rejuvenation of the urban commons in the city have led to their further decline and increased exploitation.

The present condition of Sola beel bears testimony to this. At first sight, this wetland looks like a broad drain running through the city covered in garbage and siltation. However, this is the result of state's claim over the wetland by virtue of multiple development projects, most of which are abandoned midway leaving the wetland area stagnated. State intervention and conversion of the wetland into a 'public space' gives state agencies claim over a particular space; this then dispossesses the local population, not only from communal

ownership, but also from its usage. The conversion of a space from urban commons to public space alienates the local people and the 'public space' becomes a state appropriated resource. The area around Sola beel has a very mixed population in terms of community and class background. Some residents opined that the wetland and the development around it should benefit all these various sections of the population. Most of them said that such projects do not concern them as it does not benefit them in anyway, but only create more chaos in the neighbourhood through intermittent construction work. To quote a local resident,

Such construction activities disrupt our daily routes. Our lanes are occupied by tents of construction workers. And the constant dirt and sound also affect us… Nobody comes to clean the beel and its surrounding areas. These projects just give us headache, nothing else… We have heard for so many years now that the condition of the beel will improve but nothing has happened.

Evidently, once the urban commons are claimed for 'public' use, their symbiotic relationship with the local population is adversely affected. Now the same people who previously had easy access to such commons are described as encroachers. For any development project to be underway, the first step is eviction of encroachment. However, during such eviction drives it is the local poor people residing on the peripheries of the wetlands who bear the brunt. The land acquired through such action serves the purpose of revenue generation for the state, without considering the fact that for continued preservation of such commons, the symbiotic relationship between the environment and the local community is a sine qua non.

According to some residents in the Sola beel area, the eviction of the settlements of the marginalised population comprising of non-concrete simple houses are used as an excuse by the implementing agencies to show that definitive steps are being taken to combat the ecological destruction of the wetlands. However, nothing is done about the illegal encroachment of the financially and politically influential people who have constructed concretised permanent structures on land which is part of the wetland. Instances such as the abovementioned expansion of the local college, construction of the eye hospital and encroachment through expansion of concrete structures of a politician and other economically well-off residents were reiterated during interviews. A household help and a local resident stated,

Whenever a new project is about to start, we get evicted from our *kuchha* (non-concrete) houses… we even have GMC house no. and electricity connection. But still only we are treated as the encroachers! Rich people can bribe and extend their boundary wall, and nobody says or does anything… When there is flood and the beel is full, the water overflows and destroys our houses but nothing happens to the people

living in buildings… The beel needs to be cleaned and that will solve our problems. Otherwise these projects are useless.

The larger local population in this wetland area seems to feel alienated from such development schemes as it does not cater to their needs; rather it impinges upon their community space. Sola beel was used by the local population as a commons space where the community came together on various occasions, and as a source of water for their daily use; as such they ensured its maintenance. A septuagenarian local resident lamented,

Now we have no place left to sit, relax, and interact with our neighbours. Earlier we used to sit along the beel and have afternoon *addas* (chat sessions) with our friends and neighbours… Now the sidewalk is broken, the water is dirty and smelly, and there is always one or the other so-called development project work going on.

The continued encroachment through construction activities, expansion by filling up the wetland, and pollution resulting from garbage dumping has not only led to drastic reduction in the size of Sola beel, but has also severely reduced its water-retention and carrying capacity. The pollution and shrinkage have disrupted the natural channels linking the wetland with the Brahmaputra River through its tributary Bharalu. Despite Guwahati's natural network of stormwater drainage, flash floods are a common occurrence owing to the debilitating condition of the wetlands, which results in prolonged rain-induced water logging and inundation in many nearby areas. Considering the recent floods in the city this year, it was proposed that digging up of new ponds or lakes would help in mediating the problem [xii]. However, rather than preserving the ecology of the existing urban commons, such a move provides more jurisdiction to the state to exercise further control over urban spaces and dictate the terms of its utilisation.

The plight of urban commons in Guwahati is somewhat like Baviskar's (2011) study on the plight of Yamuna in Delhi and its surrounding areas. Yamuna was treated as a 'non-place' occupied by 'non-people' who were evicted to reinvent the space to make the riverfront visible and desirable, inviting investment. The high court order for the eviction of squatters indicated concern for the high level of pollution of the river as justification, which however did not seem to raise any such ecological concern when it came to approval of capital-intensive construction projects along the river. Such instances highlight the exclusionary practices of the state, which in the process of development does not only design the utilisation of a particular urban space but also determines its accessibility. As such it can be argued that urban commons and public spaces are not interchangeable as both have varied contribution to maintaining the social fabric of the city.

The urban commons are woven into the structural fabric of the city by virtue of its appropriation based on the ever-evolving and changing nature of the city. However, with development projects underway, the urban commons lose its essence when converted to 'public' spaces for the development of the city which, as argued by Banerjee-Guha, are '…undergoing drastic transformations in their form and governance to become equipped to function as incubators of neo-liberal strategies in the Global South' (Banerjee-Guha, 2009, p.96). This leads to commodification of urban commons in the name of conversion to 'public spaces' at the cost of welfare and inclusivity. As we have seen above, the urban commons of Guwahati are also undergoing this transition and are turning into largely privatised or state-regulated spaces, which have had severe impact on the ecology of the city and have created a class dynamic in accessibility to urban space. Such commodification has led to an increased role of privatisation and gentrification of urban spaces which leads to an exclusionary form of governance based on a consumerist nature. Under this paradigm of governance, the 'consumer' has access and right to the space. Such a form of exclusionary governance, even though seemingly indirect, visibly favours the 'consumer-citizen' (Harriss, 2007). As Zhang (2017, p. 3472) argues,

A series of urban spaces, such as shopping malls, cafes and theme parks, provide opportunities to spend and make money as well as take in social activities and public events at the same time. These consumerist spaces, on one hand, need to be public to facilitate spending; but, on the other hand, these public spaces are restricted to people with the means to buy what is on sale.

With the existing and upcoming parks (under GSCP), along with shopping malls and stores replacing local markets, there is emerging an increasingly privatised nature of public space. This visibility granted by the space to a certain section of the consumer population then constitutes the 'public' whose concerns and aspirations are the only concerns that become visible. Such a skewed representation then justifies an exclusive paradigm of development with selective schemes and policies which only this section of population can aspire for. As Harriss (2007, p.2722) argues,

(I)t is organisation of and for the "consumer-citizen" subjects of the neoliberal state, and much of the activity that it sustains is directed at disciplining the urban poor rather than supporting their struggles over rights to housing, livelihood and protection, or their self-realisation.

As such, the abovementioned projects under GSCP are justified on the aspirations of the 'consumer-citizen', thereby making way for increasing privatisation of urban commons and public spaces to cater to these needs to those who can afford to pay. This is the pattern of development observed in the Global South which is geared towards

revenue generation under a neoliberal paradigm; and those who do not fit into the aesthetics of this development paradigm are rendered invisible. This study is a testimony to this process of 'emancipation' and 'development' as seen in the case of Guwahati, which leads to polarisation of the urban social fabric through privatisation and gentrification of urban spaces.

Conclusion

As discussed earlier, urban commons are not ecological hotspots owing simply to its nature and location but because of how it is interwoven into the continually evolving network of the city. When urban commons, such as the wetlands of Guwahati, are treated in isolation divested from the ground reality and converted into 'public space', it severs the fabric of the network of relations that constitute them. The state argues that regulation of these urban commons as public space is crucial for their conservation, but what that does is that it empowers the state to exercise control and dictate the terms of utilisation of these spaces.

Though on paper, the plans for these development projects seem to cater to the ecological conservation of the city, such an approach, as Baviskar (2020, p.111) explains, can be termed as 'bourgeois environmentalism' which is characterised by a contradiction '… between elite citizens' claims to civic responsibility and environmental concern and the simultaneous rise of consumerism in the same social stratum…', the brunt of which is unequally placed upon the marginalised whose mere presence is treated as pollution. With the city's public institutionally and structurally polarised into *marginal public* and *consumer public*, a coherent urban identity and urban politics become difficult to emerge and sustain. Such an approach appropriates urban commons and urban spaces in the city for the development of the 'public' and in turn creates state-regulated public spaces with docile subjects consumed by the commercial and aesthetic façade of urban development. This facilitates the hegemony of the neoliberal market and poses no challenge to a neoliberal state.

This paper emphasizes the need to bring urban commons into the forum of discussion of urban planning to problematise the concept of 'public' in a neoliberal world so as to raise question on the state control over the social order of urban spaces. This warrants that the concept of 'development for the public' is contested to retrieve the discourse of inclusive urban governance.

REFERENCES

Banerjee-Guha, S. (2009). Neoliberalising the 'urban': New geographies of power and injustice in Indian cities. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *44*(22), 95-107.

Baviskar, A. (2011). The Yamuna in the imagination of Delhi: What the eye does not see. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *46*(50), 45-53.

Baviskar, A. (2020). *Uncivil city: Ecology, equity and the commons in Delhi*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Caison, G., and Vormann, B. (2014). The logics and logistics of urban progress: Contradictions and conceptual challenges of the global north-south divide. *The Global South*, *8*(2), 65-83.

Desai, R., Mahadevia, D., and Mishra, A. (2014). *City profile: Guwahati* (CUE Working Paper 24). Ahmedabad: CEPT University.

Gidwani, V., and Baviskar, A. (2011). Urban commons. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *46*(50), 42-43.

Hardin, G. (1968). The tragedy of the commons. *Science, New Series*, *162*(3859), 1243-1248.

Harriss, J. (2007). Antinomies of empowerment: Observations on civil society, politics and urban governance in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *42*(26), 2716-2724.

Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Harvey, D. (2012). *Rebel cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*. New York: Verso.

Kip, M. (2015). Moving beyond the city: Conceptualizing urban commons from a critical urban studies perspective. In M. Dellenbaugh, M. Kip, M. Bieniok, A. K. Müller and M. Schwegmann (Eds), *Urban commons: Moving beyond state and market* (pp. 42-59). Berlin: Bauverlag.

Kip, M., Bieniok, M., Dellenbaugh, M., Müller, A. K., and Schwegmann, M. (2015). Seizing the (every) day: Welcome to the urban commons! In M. Dellenbaugh, M. Kip, M. Bieniok, A. K. Müller and M. Schwegmann (Eds), *Urban commons: Moving beyond state and market* (pp. 9-25). Berlin: Bauverlag.

Kornberger, M., and Borch, C. (2015). Introduction: Urban commons. In C. Borch and M. Kornberger (Eds), *Urban commons: Rethinking the city* (pp. 1-21). London & New York: Routledge.

Kratzwald, B. (2015). Urban commons – Dissident practices in emancipatory spaces. In M. Dellenbaugh, M. Kip, M. Bieniok, A. K. Müller and M. Schwegmann (Eds), *Urban commons: Moving beyond state and market* (pp. 26-41). Berlin: Bauverlag.

Levander, C., and Mignolo, W. (2011). The global south and world dis/order. *The Global South*, *5*(1), 1-11.

McDuie-Ra, D. (2017). Learning to love the city in Northeast India. *The Focus: The Newsletter (IIAS)*, *77*, 29-31.

McDuie-Ra, D., and Lai, L. (2019). Smart cities, backward frontiers: Digital urbanism in India's North-East. *Contemporary South Asia*, *27*(3), 358-372.

Ostrom, E. (1990). *Governing the commons: The evolution of institutions for collective action*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Saikia, J. L. (2019). Deepor beel wetland: Threats to ecosystem services, their importance to dependent communities and possible management measures. *Natural Resources and Conservation*, *7*(2), 9-24.

Sharma, C. K. (2020). Contextualizing social development in Northeast India. In A. Pankaj, A. Sarma, and A. Borah (Eds), *Social sector development in North-East India* (pp. 37-63). Delhi: Sage Publishing.

Sharma, C. K., and Borgohain, B. (2019). The New Land Settlement Act in Arunachal Pradesh. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *54*(23), 17-20.

Smith, N. (2002). New globalism, new urbanism: Gentrification as global urban strategy. *Antipode.* Retrieved on 17 July, 2021 from https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8330.00249

Sonn, J. W., and Shin, H. B. (2020). Contextualizing accumulation by dispossession: The state and high-rise apartment clusters in Gangnam, Seoul. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, *110*(3), 864-881.

Zhang, X. (2017). Identifying consumerist privately owned public spaces: The ideal type of mass private property. *Urban Studies*, *54*(15), 3464-3479.

Notes:

[i] Look East Policy of India was launched in 1991 by the Government of India (GoI) to boost India's economic relations with Southeast Asia.

[ii] It is a new avatar of the Look East Policy after the later was rechristened in 2014.

[iii] Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) was launched in 2005 under Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty, GoI, focusing on providing housing and basic services to the urban poor.

[iv] Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) was launched in 2015 under Ministry of Urban Development, GoI, to establish infrastructure for ensuring adequate sewerage networks and water supply for urban transformation.

[v] The concept of Smart City was introduced in India by the present Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, during his 2014 election campaign which included development or rather upgradation of 100 select Indian cities into smart cities.

[vi]   Retrieved   on   21   March,   2022   from https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/guwahati-floods-will-worsenforce-people-to-abandon-city/articleshow/82003356.cms

[vii] One bigha is equal to 0.6198347106 acre / 0.2508382079 hectare.

[viii]   Retrieved   on   8   June,   2021   from https://niti.gov.in/planningcommission.gov.in/docs/reports/E_F/Deepor Beel.pdf

[ix]   Retrieved   on   28   May,   2022   from https://www.guwahatiplus.com/guwahati/guwahati-locals-protest-asnf-railway-starts-electrification-work-through-deepor-beel

[x]   Retrieved   on   18   July,   2021   from https://frontline.thehindu.com/environment/deepor-beel-the-riverinewetland-in-lower-brahmaputra-valley-on-the-brink/article34108353.ece

[xi] As stated by a member of Brihattar Guwahati Mati Patta Dabi Samiti.

[xii]   Retrieved   on   7   July,   2022   from https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/city-flooding-can-be-solved-if-people-cooperate-sarma/articleshow/92398125.cms

145

Natasha Hazarika *is a Ph.D. Research Scholar in the Department of Sociology, Tezpur University.*

Email id: natashahazarika23@gmail.com

Chandan Kumar Sharma *is Professor in the Department of Sociology, Tezpur University.*

Email id: kumarsharma.chandan@gmail.com

Issues and Challenges of Sanitary Workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic in India

--- Rani Ratna Prabha J, Padmaja G, Apparao T, Maruthi. O

Abstract

Pandemics are not new to the world. However, the recent pandemic in the form of COVID-19 has shaken the globe, causing millions of deaths and unprecedented challenges to public health services. With the sudden outbreak of this neo-viral infection, the government and other administrative bodies employed a war path to curb the deadly virus. From a small town, the virus swiftly spread across the countries, affecting the livelihood of human beings irrespective of region, religion, caste, gender, and age. The partial or complete lockdown was the immediate response across the globe. Its impact on all kinds of social gatherings and economic activities created chaos in the regular activities of citizens. Nevertheless, the degree of the effect varies from developed to poor underdeveloped/developing nations. The initiatives of the respective governments to evolve the necessary mechanisms played a significant role. In this crucial situation, the health workers, including doctors and nursing staff, police and other security forces, and sanitary workers, turned up as soldiers in disguise to fight against the dangerous virus outbreak. In this background, the current paper discusses the role and responsibilities of sanitary workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. It examines the critical situations of sanitary workers and their work nature from a global perspective as they directly deal with the health and hygiene of society, especially in the urban setup.

Keywords: Sanitary workers, COVID-19 Pandemic, India.

Introduction

The outbreak of a new kind of respiratory disorder was reported in Wuhan city in the Hubei province of China in December 2019. Detailed investigation of the infected samples and the genome analysis diagnosed that the virus belongs to the SARS-CoV family and is responsible for this new threat to human life. Hence, it was named the Novel Coronavirus -2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Ciotte et.al., 2020). Within no time, this Novel Coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2) has spread across the globe, caused millions of deaths, and affected the immune system of people (Khanna et.al., 2020). Within three months of its first case in China, by the beginning of March, it had severely impacted human lives across the countries, irrespective of region, religion, caste, creed, gender, and age.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) assessed the potentiality of the Novel Coronavirus-2 and, on 12th March 2020, declared it a 'pandemic'. The symptoms of this infection, according to the World Health Organisation,

> *"Most people infected with the virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. However, some will become seriously ill and require medical attention. Older people and those with underlying medical conditions like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, or cancer are more likely to develop serious illnesses. Anyone can get sick with COVID-19 and become seriously ill or die at any age."*

(World Health Organisation, 2021)

The virus outbreak exposed countries' preparedness to tackle the unexpected battle against the pandemic. The countries also responded variedly according to their health and hygiene system advancement. Vaccines were not available for the new viral infection. Thus, all the countries adopted extensive precautionary measures:

1. Following the health and hygiene protocol of maintaining the cleanliness of the human body and surroundings.

2. Face masks and shields to avoid contact with infectious objects and the environment.

3. Avoiding the community spread by imposing restrictions on social gatherings and other get-together events.

The government, non-government, and private organizations created awareness of the need for social or physical distancing. The infected persons were advised to stay under home quarantine or use public quarantine facilities to avoid further spreading the pandemic.

India is the second-largest populated country in the world after China. Due to its geographical location, the country is rapidly affected by the Novel Coronavirus or COVID-19. The first incident in India, where three cases were diagnosed with COVID-19 infection in the Kerala state on 30th January and 3rd February. They travelled from Wuhan City, China. Since then, India reached one lakh COVID-19 infections by 18th May 2020, and by the first week of July, the number of infections had reached 8.5 lakhs (Gosh et.al., 2020). The spread of COVID-19 has affected the human immune system and social immunity. It badly affected the country's economic system and created psychological illness by worsening the conditions of unemployment, hunger, and mortality.

India also took the necessary measures to curb the spread of the virus. Initially, international visitors were kept under quarantine for 14 days. The Government of India issued a circular to the state governments to invoke Section 2 of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 to initiate the necessary mechanisms to quarantine and arrange the treatment centres for highly infectious patients. All the healthcare centres were advised to respond as the emergency cells for the COVID-19 treatment. Government institutions, colleges, and railway coaches were converted into containment centres. To address the queries related to COVID-19, a fully functioning control room was set up at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) headquarters. The impact of COVID-19 on India differs from developed nations such as the United Nations and the United Kingdom. In the case of India, the economy has slid down, and GDP hit a low. Therefore, it became necessary for India to lift the national lockdown to avoid the detrimental effects of the COVID-19 situation.

The country amplified the tests in the red zones, the highly contagious areas of infection. Due to its research and development, India has developed a solid system to fight against the COVID-19 situation. However, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is not limited to human health but variedly impacted the lives of people from various professions. One of the worst affected groups is the sanitary workers, for their association with cleanliness and hygiene management.

In this background, the study deals with the following objectives:

- To understand the role and responsibilities of sanitary workers in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- To analyze the problems of sanitary workers during the COVID-19 pandemic in India.

- To assess the impact of COVID-19 on the livelihoods of sanitary workers in India.

- To offer suggestions for the development of sanitary workers.

Methodology

The current study is qualitative and based on secondary sources, including various Books, Journal articles, Reports, and working papers from various organizations, including World Health Organisation (WHO), International Labour Organisation (ILO), and others. In addition, the study also collected data and reviewed literature from various websites, blogs, and student papers. Finally, the study also included general observations on the studies of the conditions of sanitary workers in India.

Sanitary Workers: A Historical Perspective

"Sanitation workers are those who work in any part of the sanitation chain. They ensure that our contact with human waste ends when we leave the toilet, one of the essential jobs in society, and yet they remain mostly unseen and unappreciated" (UMC & WAI, 2021).

Sanitation work has a long, complicated history in the United States of America (USA) and worldwide. The key challenges that encompass sanitary work include occupational and environmental safety, health and hygiene, weak legal rights, financial insecurity, social stigma, and discrimination. In the evolution and development of human civilization, urbanization and its impacts are also increasing along with the process. Therefore, waste management places a vital role in the urbanization process. Globally, the waste management system varies from country to country. Developed nations have strong waste management policies, but developing, and underdeveloped nations still need strong sanitary policies.

Gulland's work (2019) states that access to safe and basic facilities varies from country to country. He mentioned that the population of Australia and New Zealand are reported as having 100 percent access to a safely managed sanitary system. North American and European countries are at 97 percent, western Asia and Northern Africa at 86 percent, Latin America and Caribbean countries at 85 percent, East and South East Asia at 77 percent, Central and South Asia at 50 percent, Oceania at 36 percent and finally Sub-Saharan Africa equipped with 28 percent of safe sanitation system to its population. Here, one can demarcate the level of advancement in accessing sanitation services between the developed and developing countries in the world (Truong et.al., 2014).

The role of sanitary workers in this system plays an important role. The State's responsibility is to protect the sanitary workers' interests, safety, and health. The job nature of the sanitary worker includes cleaning toilets, emptying pits and septic tanks, cleaning the sewers, and maintaining manholes and other treatment plants, which contributes a lot to public health and hygiene. Nevertheless, they are stepping into unacceptable health risks (UMC & WAI, 2021). Sanitary workers have directly come into contact with hazardous elements such as toxic gasses like Ammonia, Carbon Monoxide, Sulphur Dioxide, human excreta, infected needles, and other malicious things. Exposure to these elements often causes severe diseases, resulting in the death of sanitary workers in the workplace. Usually, these kinds of incidents will not happen in the countries such as Australia, New Zealand, America, and other European countries as their sanitation policies are

firm. However, sanitary workers from developing and underdeveloped nations are facing severe threats to their lives.

A sanitation worker is a person, who is responsible for collecting domestic waste, cleaning public toilets, sweeping roads, and being involved at any step of the sanitation chain. Sanitation workers in India particularly women workers provide an essential service but often at the cost of their safety and security. Many of these women sanitation workers come from the most depressed and backward communities and are often migrant workers. They are the most vulnerable worker and face many challenges in their work lives. In many metro cities, they work odd working hours mostly during mid-nights. Sanitation workers are exposed to serious occupational and health hazards risking their life. While sanitation workers already face several health and safety risks, financial challenges, abuse and social stigma due to the nature of their work and caste-based discrimination, the corona (COVID-19) pandemic has further added to their issues, challenges, and difficulties.

Sanitary Workers in India: A Statistical Review

Indian population has crossed 1.3 billion, according to the latest census. Managing a safe, sanitary system is a herculean task for the government, and the situation also varies from region to region. The Indian government proclaimed it an Open Defecation Free (ODF) country in 2019. Indeed, 30.8 percent of rural households are defecating openly. At this juncture, the Swatch Bharat Mission 2014-19 played a vital role in reducing the rate of open defecated zones in India. According to the estimates, 110 million toilets were constructed during this phase. However, in the entire country, only 51 percent of the Indian population uses the safely managed sanitation facility. In addition to this, a small part of the Indian household had a connection with major sewer channels. As a result, there must be manual scavenging in clearing those manholes. It has become the only option for the two third population of the country.

The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993. Nevertheless, it remains a significant concern of the state. A survey by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in 2019 revealed that there are nearly 54,130 persons engaged in manual scavenging from 170 districts across 18 states. The census of 2011 revealed that about 1,82,505 families are working in the manual scavenging occupation. Later, in 2013, the parliament enacted 'The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act'. Several advocacy campaigns have also been initiated and encouraged by various governments.

Despite these attempts, there needs to be more progress in the conditions of sanitary workers in India. Numerous incidents make shocking revelations regarding the pitiful conditions of sanitary workers, particularly those who engaged in manual scavenging. These manual scavengers frequently experience premature deaths, severe respiratory conditions, and other illnesses due to their hazardous work. Although there are inadequate data on the global statistics of the ill effects of sanitary work conditions, it has been reported by WHO that

> *"Millions of sanitation workers in the developing world are forced to work in conditions that endanger their health and lives, and violate their dignity and human rights"* (UMC & WAI, 2021).

It reveals the plight of sanitary workers. On average, one death of a sanitary worker occurred every five days in India between 2017 and 2018 (Raghavendra & Kumar, 2022). Sanitary workers suffer from social stigma, job insecurity, and low wages in employment.

The pandemic has raised concerns and the need for sanitary workers to maintain cleanliness and hygiene. As per the statistics of the government in 2021, India estimated that approximately five million sanitary workers were employed in nine different categories of sanitation work, including sweepers, hospital cleaners, and sewage cleaners (Haque, 2021). These sanitary workers have risked their lives against possible death. They have come across many hurdles during this challenging phase. When the entire country was under lockdown and shut its doors for fear of a deadly virus, these sanitary workers stepped out like soldiers in the war field to protect humankind. Thus, they are regarded as the frontline worriers of the COVID-19 situation. The following section deals with the problems associated with the work conditions of the sanitary workers during the COVID-19 lockdown in India.

Problems of Sanitary workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a massive global crisis. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020), during its preliminary assessment of the possible impact of COVID-19 on work culture, states that the crisis would impact 40-70 percent of the world's population. The impact of COVID-19 varies across populations' age, sex, income, and social status. In such a situation, many nations imposed lockdowns to curb the virus spread as there was no vaccine.

In India, sanitary workers played a significant role in controlling the spread of coronavirus on par with the other frontline warriors, such as doctors, paramedical staff, and police. However, their role differs from

the other front liners. Their work ensures curbing the spread of the virus. Nevertheless, overcrowded cities often pose challenges for sanitary workers. Managing human waste is a vital concern in such a situation. It needs good infrastructure and maintenance mechanisms. The sanitation workers are engaged in various tasks, including sweeping, household garbage collection, toilet maintenance, and garbage disposal pits maintenance. They play a crucial role during the pandemic while putting their lives at risk to safeguard the interests of society. Nevertheless, several concerns of sanitary workers are not adequately addressed. Bhatnagar (2022) identified the following areas of concern for the COVID-19 sanitation workers: health, income, and compassion; a lack of policy advancement; incompatible protective measures; social stigma; non-prioritization of sanitary worker financing; and residents' behavioural approaches.

Social Stigma of Untouchability

Occupational specialization is a significant feature of the Indian caste system. Among many occupations, cleaning or sweeping and removing human excreta is considered the most downgraded occupation. The feudal nature of the caste system forces a few castes responsible for keeping the environment clean. The people associated with it are treated as impure in the caste system. They were kept out of the caste system and labeled as the Panchamas (the fifth Varna). They live in ghettos far from the actual residential areas. They have been treated as untouchables and denied all kinds of rights. Historically, they were deprived of livelihoods, including agricultural land, industrial occupations, and quality education. As a result, they are involved in all kinds of sanitary work. However, sanitary workers face stigma and discrimination due to their unclean work nature. These untouchability practices manifested in different forms during the pandemic. In response to the hatred in social media on Dalits and Adivasis during COVID-19, Ingole and Banerjee said, "Coronavirus may have no religion and race, but it certainly will have caste in the Indian context" (Ingole & Banerjee, 2020).

Health

The job profile of sanitary workers is highly prone to diseases. Compared to the average life expectancy of 70 years, the life expectancy of sanitary workers was reduced to 40–45 years. Sanitary workers were required to control the situation during this unforeseen coronavirus attack, but they lacked the necessary safety training.

According to Akhilesh (2021), there have been over a million estimated deaths of sanitary workers in the last fifty years in India. At least 347 sanitation workers died across India in the last five years, with the highest number recorded in Uttar Pradesh. Ramdas Athawale, the union minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment, said on 16th September 2020.

> '*The Government of India maintains no data on sanitation workers, who have died due to health and safety hazards related to cleaning hospitals and medical waste during the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic'* (Chature & Gupta, 2020).

A study by Water Aid and Urban Management Centre on Sanitary workers revealed that 80 percent of sanitary workers commonly suffered from cold, cough, and fever during the COVID period, and only five percent of them were unaware of any of the precautionary measures to protect themselves. Health has become a luxury they cannot afford during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Behavioral Changes

The COVID-19 situation has created mixed behavior toward sanitary workers from the residents and other people. They have been appreciated by all, including their employers, urban municipal representatives, and other authorities during the pandemic. Several organizations across the country felicitated and treated them respectfully for their work contribution and for risking their lives in hazardous conditions. Improving workplace conditions and safety has become significant attention only during and post-COVID-19. On the other hand, they are stigmatized in the name of social distancing. They were denied access to drinking water from local households and public taps. The conditions of those who were working in containment zones were much worse. They were denied entry to the other zones. In many instances, their family members also treated them in isolation due to their hazardous working nature.

Gender Discrimination

As per the data provided by the UN Press (2021), COVID-19 is expected to push 47 million women and girls into extreme poverty (UN Press. 2021, July 11). In addition, gender-based violence intensified during the COVID-19 lockdown period. In India, undue socio-economic dependency on men and their instability posed a threat. The COVID situation also fortified the chances of sexual abuse.

Moreover, it destroyed the networking system of women. The higher representation of women's employment can be seen in the informal sector, and its shutdown due to the lockdown disproportionately impacted the livelihood and income of the women in India. In the case of sanitary workers, the women were highly burdened with the additional workload during the pandemic, alongside other household responsibilities. The situation of widowed, separated, and single-mother families was worsened than others.

Protective Measures and Welfare Initiatives

COVID-19 has introduced a new kind of protective gear to the globe which never heard of and experienced before. In considering the safety and risk management of the people, these precautionary measures are vital to avoid one-to-one contact and community transmission. Therefore, all the countries worked to provide their citizens with the maximum supply of protective gear. However, the degree of preparation is varied between developed and developing or underdeveloped countries.

In the Indian subcontinent, where only 51 percent of safe, sanitary management is available, sanitary workers perform their job with little and no protective measures (India Water Portal, 2020). Due to this, they have been exposed to five kinds of significant health impacts;

1. Disease burden includes asthma, cholera, skin burn, and eye problems.

2. Risk of chemical hazards such as Ammonia, Sulphur Dioxide, and Carbon Monoxide.

3. Risk of microbiological exposure, which affects the body with bacterial and fungal diseases.

4. Risk of muscular disorder due to their heavy work nature.

5. Risk of injuries and infections due to the poor waste management system.

The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, which upholds the spirit of

> *'No person, local authority or any agency shall engage or employ, either directly or indirectly any person for hazardous cleaning of a sewer or a septic tank.'*

The solid waste management rule of 2016 orders the urban local bodies to provide personnel protection equipment, including uniforms, fluorescent jackets, hand gloves, raincoats, appropriate footwear, and

masks to all sanitary workers. However, the pandemic has exposed the violations of safety rules and regulations.

In the Indian context, Water Aid and WHO observed that the financial constraint is the primary reason for risking the lives of sanitary workers. According to their observation, 93 percent of sanitary workers have access to PPE kits, gloves, masks, gumboots, jackets, and other types of equipment. It reflects that only some sanitary workers have the supply of protective material, as mentioned by the solid waste management rules. The study also mentioned that Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits are not user-friendly as they cause discomfits due to sweat, suffocation, wrong size, and the nature of the work profile (Water Aid India, 2021).

Lack of health insurance is one of the significant problems. According to a survey conducted in five states and two metropolitan cities during Corona Crisis, 90 percent of sanitary workers did not have health insurance. About 23 sanitary workers employed in Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) who were both contractual and government employees tested positive for COVID-19, and one died. It also states that 9 in 10 workers were not offered proper health checkups during COVID-19. Even in post-COVID situations, contractual workers are not provided insurance benefits. In various instances, contractual sanitary workers in Karnataka and other states have protested demanding the health insurance facility (Paliath, 2020).

Financial Underpaid

Sanitary workers are the most vulnerable regarding their financial status in the country. Sanitary workers are predominantly from marginalized communities such as the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). Despite modernization and technological advancement, humans are still employed to clean human excreta. Nevertheless, sanitary work is the most underpaid job in India. The contractual sanitary workers were not paid regularly, and their salary was not reasonable to their work nature. Few sanitary workers were choosing additional jobs such as household work and working in small and petty shops before or after their working hours. They also depend upon borrowings, pawnbroker shops, and other sources to manage their financial constraints. There express grievances to the government through protests (Suresh, 2019), despite the lack of significant change in wages and work conditions.

"Unlike in past crises where typically men's employment has suffered more, early evidence on COVID-19 reflects disproportionate impacts on women's employment, working hours, and wages relative to those of men. The COVID-19 crisis has not (yet, at least) generated an

'added worker effect' common in non-pandemic economic shocks and instead worsened existing gender inequalities in employment outcomes in many countries like India. Social norms that position women as secondary wage earners within households or place the burden of increased care work on women likely factor into the reasons women have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 crisis" (Megan, 2021).

Conclusion

Positive health, the safety of life, and dignity in society are the three vital requirements of a person belonging to a civilized society. However, these requirements can vary based on the degree of development of a country and its social structure. We can observe that society is sometimes divided into classes, whereas in India, caste is the primary factor that follows purity, pollution, and hierarchical arrangement. Traditionally, a few communities were denied all the benefits and rights for hundreds of years. Sanitary workers are those communities who remain neglected. Whatever the development and benefits reaching these communities are only because of the rights guaranteed and enshrined in the Indian constitution. The COVID-19 pandemic has both positive and negative impacts. On the positive side, it exposed all the lacunas in maintaining hygiene and neglected attitude toward the welfare of sanitary workers. The working conditions are improved, although marginally. The world realized the importance of sanitary workers and regarded them as the frontline worriers. The workers who are usually stigmatized with derogatory words have experienced respectful acts such as garlanding and felicitation for their heroic effort and extra workload to curb the virus's effect and save people. On the flip side, the impact of such acts is not sustaining. The conditions of sanitary workers have deteriorated in the post-COVID-19 period. Though the government has initiated many regulations, the implementation is sheer negligence. Even today, sanitary workers across the country demand social justice and dignity of labor.

The study suggests a few solutions for the empowerment of sanitary workers. Firstly, the government must be committed to the development and welfare of sanitary workers and set aside sizeable funding to implement adequate protective measures. Women sanitary

workers need help with access to basic amenities at the workplace. Secondly, there should be compulsory and appropriate training for those involved in sanitary works, and necessary to introduce an advanced sanitary system. Thirdly, since sanitary work is considered risky, especially after the COVID-19 outbreak, there is a need to provide health benefits and insurance. Fourthly, sanitary contract workers become the most vulnerable among all. It is because of their low wages and absence of all the policy benefits. There is a need to provide wages and other benefits on par with permanent employees. Finally, sanitary work in India is not a desirable and respectful job. However, due to the poor economic status, thousands of families in India are forced to do menial jobs, often hereditary occupations. The lack of education and other skills and the social stigma are the reasons. Hence, awareness about free and compulsory education and facilitating it to the families of sanitary workers is essential. Moreover, it is the need of the hour to make society aware of the importance of sanitary workers for a healthy society.

References

Akhilesh, P. (2021, 14th August). Why are so many sanitation worker deaths uncounted? *The Indian Express*.

As COVID-19 Pushes 47 Million Women, Girls into Extreme Poverty, Secretary-General Calls for Upholding Reproductive Health Rights, in World Population Day Message | UN Press. (2021, July 11). https://press.un.org/en/2021/sgsm20822.doc.htm

Badhuri, A., & Mehta, S. (2020). *Sanitation workers amid the pandemic*. India Water Portal. https://www.indiawaterportal.org/articles/sanitation-workers-amid-pandemic

Behel, D. (2022). *Sanitation workers: They clean our poop and face a lot of dangers; here is how*. Down to Earth. https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/water/sanitation-workers-they-clean-our-poop-and-face-a-lot-of-dangers-here-is-how-82109

Bhatnagar, I. S. (2022, 20th July). 347 sanitation workers died in last 5 yrs across India; UP highest: Govt data. *Hindustan Times*.

Chature, P., & Gupta, E. (2020). *Sanitation workers on COVID-19 front lines: How to save the warriors?* Down to Earth.

Ciotti, M., Ciccozzi, M., Terrinoni, A., Jiang, W. C., Wang, C. B., & Bernardini, S. (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic. *Critical reviews in clinical laboratory sciences*, *57*(6), 365-388.

Ghosh, A., Nundy, S., & Mallick, T. K. (2020). How India is dealing with COVID-19 pandemic. *Sensors International*, *1*, 100021.

Gulland, J. (2019). *Gender, work and social control: A century of disability benefits*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Haleem, A., Javaid, M., & Vaishya, R. (2020). Effects of COVID-19 pandemic in daily life. *Current medicine research and practice*, *10*(2), 78.

Haque, H. (2021). *Sanitation workers: the forgotten frontline workers of the COVID-19 pandemic*. Water Aid Global. https://washmatters.wateraid.org/publications/sanitation-workers-forgotten-frontline-workers-covid-19-world-toilet-day

Harapan, H., Itoh, N., Yufika, A., Winardi, W., Keam, S., Te, H., Megawati, D., Hayati, Z., Wagner, A. L., & Mudatsir, M. (2020). Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): A literature review. *Journal of infection and public health*, *13*(5), 667–673.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jiph.2020.03.019

IFC (2020). *The Impact of COVID-19 on the Water and Sanitation Sector*. International Finance Corporations.

https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/126b1a18-23d9-46f3-beb7-047c20885bf6/The+Impact+of+COVID_Water%26Sanitation_final_web.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=ncaG-hA

Sanitation workers amid the pandemic | India Water Portal. (2020).

https://www.indiawaterportal.org/articles/sanitation-workers-amid-pandemic

Ingole, P., & Banerjee, D. (2020). *Coronavirus and Caste: Is Our Response to the Pandemic Casteist?* The Quint. https://www.thequint.com/voices/blogs/coronavirus-outbreak-india-social-distancing-caste.

International Initiative for Impact Evolution. (2020, 1st October). *The impact of COVID-19 on sanitation behavior in lower-income settings* [Video]. YouTube.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9LiZbC62ZG0&ab_channel=3ie

Khanna, R. C., Cicinelli, M. V., Gilbert, S. S., Honavar, S. G., & Murthy, G. S. V. (2020). COVID-19 pandemic: Lessons learned and future directions. *Indian Journal of Ophthalmology*, *68*(5), 703–710. https://doi.org/10.4103/ijo.IJO_843_20

Madhavan,V. K. (2022). *National WASH Conclave 2022*. Water Aid.

https://www.wateraid.org/in/national-wash-conclave-2022

Megan O'Donnell, Mayra Buvinic, Charles Kenny, Shelby Bourgault, and George Yang (2021). "How is Women's and Girls' Economic Empowerment Impacted by the COVID Crisis?". Center for Global Development (2021).

Nigam, D., & Dubey, S. (2020). Condition of sanitation workers in India: A survey during COVID-19 and lockdown. Research Gate.

Paliath, S. (2020). *CORONAVIRUS CRISIS*. Scroll.in. https://scroll.in/article/969017/in-india-90-sanitation-workers-dont-have-health-insurance-even-amid-the-coronavirus-crisis

Raghavendra, R. H., & Kumar, R. A. (2022). Sanitation Workers: A Neglected Community of Indian Civilized Society. *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, *0*(0).

https://doi.org/10.1177/2455328X211069683

Salve, P. S., & Jungari, S. (2020). Sanitation workers at the frontline: work and vulnerability in response to COVID-19. *LOCAL ENVIRONMENT*.

https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2020.1792430

Sambodhi. (2021). (rep.). *Impact of COVID -19 Pandemic on Medical Healthcare Workers in Mumbai City, India*. Noida, Uttar Pradesh.

Sanitation workers: A repository | Importance of Sanitation | WaterAid India. (2021). https://www.wateraid.org/in/sanitation-workers-a-repository

Shiva , R., & Saha, S. (2020). *Health and safety of sanitation workers during the pandemic*. IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre. https://www.ircwash.org/blog/health-and-safety-sanitation-workers-during-pandemic

Singh, K., & Somani, P. (2020). Health, Safety and Social Security Challenges of Sanitation Workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic in India (p. 32) [Rapid Assessment Report]. Urban Management Centre & Water Aid, India.

https://www.wateraid.org/in/sites/g/files/jkxoof336/files/health-safety-and-social-security-challenges-of-sanitation-workers-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-in-india.pdf

Suresh, Y. (2019, July 11). Denied Wages and Dignity, Sanitation Workers in Bangalore Protest. The Wire. https://thewire.in/labour/denied-wages-and-dignity-sanitation-workers-in-bangalore-protest

Truong, T. D., Gasper, D., Handmaker, J., & Bergh, S. I. (2014). *Migration, gender and social justice: perspectives on human insecurity* (p. 408). Springer Nature.

WHO (2022). *World Health Statistics 2022: Monitoring health for the SDGs Sustainable Development Goals*. World Health Organization. (WHO, 2022)

WHO, & ILO (2020). *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)*.

https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-HCW_advice-2021-1

Wilson, D. C., Rodic, L., Modak, P., Soos, R., Carpintero, A., Velis, K., ... & Simonett, O. (2015). *Global waste management outlook*. UNEP.

World Health Organization. (2021). *Covid-19: Occupational Health and Safety for Health Workers: Interim Guidance, 2nd February 2021*. World Health Organization. Retrieved 24th October 2022, from https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-HCW_advice-2021-1

P.S.: endnotes are added after the conclusion and before the references.

Rani Ratna Prabha J *is an Associate Professor at the Center for Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, University of Hyderabad*
Email id: raninsuresh@gmail.com

Padmaja G *is an Associate Professor at the Center for Health Psychology, University of Hyderabad,*

Apparao T *is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology, University of Hyderabad*

Maruthi. O *is a Ph.D. Research Scholar in the Center for Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, University of Hyderabad*

Caste, Power, and Representational Claims in Modern India

--- Dhiraj Kumar Nite & Bidhan Chandra Dash

Abstract

This article outlines the shifting meanings and modalities, relational and governmental aspects, of caste, power, and representation claims in modern and contemporary India. Beyond the questions of exclusion, humiliation, protest, and caste reforms, it extends the engagement with this subject to India's development path, experiences of capitalist modernisation, the functioning of colonial institutions, and parliamentary democracy and labour relations. The recent publications examined here suggest that the shift from the mobilisation of ranked identities to unranked identities advanced in the Republic of India, accompanying the change from patrimonial to the participatory polity. These twin shifts ensured that caste as a source of identity remained conspicuously persistent while attenuating as an axis of inequality. Although the constitution outlawed untouchability, to some publicists of social justice, the reservation law, alongside the personal laws, unnecessarily consecrated caste and religion; others maintain that parliamentary democracy brought about an irreversible rupture in the tradition of castes.

Keywords: Caste, Power, Representation claim, Social justice, Parliamentary democracy, Capitalist modernisation.

Introduction

The representation of caste, class and power has arrived at a crossroads in India. While caste hierarchy is being repudiated in India's public life, caste-related concerns are pervasive in the political terrain. This present scenario contrasts with the initial decades of the Republic of India, when the political realm brimmed with economic nationalism and class concerns, while caste-based injustice was painfully rampant in the socio-economic domain (Simpson *et al* 2018: 58-89; Guha 2013: 212). Noticeably, some caste groups – Pallars, Kudumbar, Devendrakulathar, Pannadi, Mooppar, and Kaladi – in Tamil Nadu are demanding to be grouped under the common name of 'Devendrakula Vellalar' and to be removed from the Scheduled Castes (SCs) list (Kopalan 2019; Naig 2021). They consider it necessary for their emancipation from the stigma and contempt inflicted on the SCs. This demand, self-evidently, swims against the ethos of social justice politics known to define the democratic churning from the 1920s. The state policy of reservation for the 'Economically Weaker Sections' (henceforth, EWS) of traditionally privileged castes adopted on the eve of the parliamentary election in 2019 exemplifies the 'universalisation' of the technology of governance – reservation scheme – sought after by social justice politics. It is decidedly not the culmination of the

rhetorical race to 'backwardness' in the quota politics among Jats, Marathas, Patidars and others (Deshpande and Ramachandran 2017, 2019). Instead, it embodies the de-stigmatisation of quotas, intending to outweigh the original purpose of representation claims made by the subaltern castes against social disabilities and deprivation. These developments augur a new constellation between caste, class, and representation claims. This article considers the articulation of caste, class, and representation claims through four recent publications by Lee (2020), Sen (2018), Teltumbde (2018), and Ilaiah & Karuppusamy (2021).

Historical-sociological studies on this subject have become voluminous over the last four decades. This scholarly proliferation has been a response to the circumstances: The forceful assertions of Dalits against caste violence, and that of other backward classes against a stark deficit in their participation in government employment, education, and legislative-cum-executive bodies; a recognition of the inadequacy of conceptual frameworks centered around class, nation and post-colonial modernisation (Menon and Nigam 2007: 15-35). The extant literature on this subject has concentrated chiefly on the issues of exclusion, humiliation, and the question of protests and caste reform (Sarkar and Sarkar 2014). Some recent discussions have foregrounded the transformative agency – as opposed to the image of passive victims – of the unprivileged castes to shape India's development (Jangam 2017: 5). Caste is no longer treated as a premodern vestige. Nor are the modern, market economy and caste treated as antithetical to each other (Mosse 2020). On the contrary, the struggles of unprivileged castes – emphasising social equality, human dignity, and participation – epitomise an alternative imagination of nation and nationalism (Jangam 2017: 172). The new publications in this article foreground the conjoining of caste, power, and representation claims in modern India's narrative of development, identity formation, knowledge economy, labour relations, and parliamentary democracy. Lee (2020) explains the shift from the mobilisation of ranked identities to unranked identities, and its connection with educational and political developments in twentieth- and twenty-first-century India. Sen (2018) outlines the case of autonomous and separate Dalit politics. Finally, we have Teltumbde (2018) and Ilaiah *et al.* (2021), who critically elaborate on the connection between castes, capitalist modernisation, and parliamentary democracy in India. The last three works mentioned above elucidate an alternative universal of freedom from and practical insubordination to the dominant, caste-imbued Dharma.

Electoral polity, affirmative actions, and mobilisation of unranked identities

The mobilisation of ranked and unranked identities for recognition, redistribution, and power is known to have significantly shaped the

modern history of the Indian subcontinent. Indeed, Lee (2020: 3-4) suggests a momentous shift from the mobilisation of ranked caste identities to unranked ethnified identities in twentieth-century India. The mobilisation of ranked identities aimed at social mobility within the hierarchical caste order. It was a reasonably popular method in the colonial age. Srinivas (1962:48) has called it sanskritisation, that is, emulation by the lower castes of the normative codes of behaviour and rituals associated with the upper castes, whereas Bandyopadhyay (2004: 63, 121, 151, 162) has described it as a social assertion or self-respect protests under the hegemony of Vedic Brahmanical worldview. [1] Unranked mobilisation challenged caste hierarchy, advanced substantialised ethnicities, and encouraging self-respect amongst unprivileged castes.

The mobilisation of unranked identities was wedded to a combination of factors: the spread of education, the establishment and expansion of suffrage and legislative institutions, the demand for affirmative actions, and some economic mobility. It intensified after independence following the expansion of primary education, electoral democracy, and reservation policies, argues Lee (2020: 3, 21, 110, 111). Lee's array of factors follows the Cambridge Historiography of the colonial world, highlighting a decisive motivation of narrow economic and power interests and factionalism in ethnicised groups (Washbrook 2007; Baker 2007).[2] Lee (2020: 15, 42) argues that leaders of the lower castes were the 'rent-seekers', who aimed to succeed in competitive electoral politics against upper-caste leaders and gain political power and material advantages. Their followers aspired for clientelistic access to political power and scarce state resources.

Lee's argument overlooks the counter-thesis, which has foregrounded discursive arenas and strategies – the dual registers of political equalisation and cultural exception–adopted by leaders of the self-respect movement and unranked mobilisation (Pandian 2007: chapters 4-6; Rao 2009: 23, 39-159, 275; Viswanath 2014:274-93). Dwaipayan Sen's study (2018), discussed below, shows that unranked mobilisation undertaken by the leaders like Jogendranath Mandal combined the concerns of agrarian masses and the fishing community in Bengal along with his politics of recognition and representation. [3] Subaltern castes have also articulated egalitarian ideals – the conceptions of justice, dignity, honour, and equality – in their claims to public spaces, properties, and against stigmatisation (Roy 2016; Jangam 2017). These struggles–to end untouchability and discrimination, for affirmative provisions to access education and jobs, electoral reforms, and legislative representation – were geared towards democratisation of opportunities and emancipation from humiliating stigmatisation. The success of such struggles and inclusive provisions thereof for socio-economic opportunities and suffrage institutions have equally been recognised as an institutional underpinning of sustained growth within specific regions in India and other parts of the world (Rajan 2021;

Subramanian 2020; Dreze and Sen 2013: 79-80, 175-77; Engerman and Sokoloff 2012; Acemoglu and Robinson 2012).

Ranked identity and its mobilisation were wedded to the patrimonial polity, whereas the participatory polity was associated with the mobilisation of unranked identity, suggests Lee (2020: 56, 72, 117). The decline in the patrimonial polity was associated with an increase in caste activism and a rejection of hierarchical norms in twentieth-century India. However, the patrimonial institutions, hierarchical norms, ranked identities, and its mobilisation were persistently resilient amidst weak state institutions even after independence in regions like Bihar (Ibid: 122-31). Lee's correlation between patrimonial institutions, ranked identities, and weak states in this study does not appear empirically sound. Nor is it elucidated. Jaffrelot (2003: 185-253, 493-94) has shown, for instance, that the formation and mobilisation of unranked identities progressed in north India after independence, leading to struggles for affirmative programmes for the other backward classes. [4] Indeed, Roy (2016: 88-100) has identified the endogenous source of the emergence and deployment of egalitarian protocols in the unranked mobilisation between the subaltern groups in contemporary Bihar. With the help of Sen's study (2018), it could be said that Lee's thesis underestimates the role played by the 'under-/unprivileged castes' mobilisation towards a shift away from the patrimonial polity, and in the very democratisation and dynamics of participatory institutions. Lee's thesis does not stand to the fact that unranked identity mobilisation already began in the anti-caste movement led by Jotirao Phule in the mid-nineteenth century, and members of the Mahar caste around the turn of the twentieth century in western India and Central provinces. Beginning with Phule, many reformers opposed the caste order, framed caste hierarchy as a form of exclusion and inequality, and by the 1920s, translated it into terms such as 'public exclusion,' 'segregation,' and 'civic disability' (Rao 2009: 14, 39-80; O'Hanlon 1985). These crusaders of anti-caste began their campaigns against the patrimonial institutions despite the little spread of education and few participatory institutions.[5]

Lee (2020) claims to have applied a constructivist and ethnic theory to studying caste: Far from being primordial and static, caste's meaning and relational aspects have been shifting and politically constructed. [6] It is a critique of the approach of cultural structuralism – the function of Brahmin-centred religious traditions (Dumont 1980: 222-26), and that of the materialist approach – for the necessity of cheap and servile labour (Habib 2007: 235; Beteille 1974).

Simultaneously, Lee's critique moves beyond Dirk's view (1989) that has emphasised the role of colonial modes of knowledge and political power. Here, caste as a source of identity and axis of inequality is bifurcated in twentieth-century India: While the former remains conspicuous by its persistence, the latter recedes under the pressure of

successful unranked mobilisation and affirmative action programmes. Reservations have reduced, continues Lee (2020: 173), the incentives to claim a high-ranked status, leading to a rhetorical race to the bottom of the status hierarchy among even relatively advantaged caste groups. In the face of quota agitations organised by Patidars, Jats, and Marathas, this observation is intriguing at its best. These agitating groups seemingly claim both: higher social status and the utility of the affirmative programme to meet the perception of threats posed by upwardly mobile members of unprivileged castes. This logic underlies the newly stipulated provision of EWS reservation.

Autonomous Dalit politics and the scope of its appropriation

Sen's (2018) study of Dalit politics under the notable leadership of Jogendranath Mandal in twentieth-century Bengal unearths an extraordinary case of the mobilisation of unranked identity. It critiques scholarship that treats Dalit politics as instrumentalist identitarianism, propped up by the vindictive colonial state. Jogendranath Mandal, a Dalit activist and member of the Namasudra caste, organised struggles for recognition and redistribution. Mandal's politics was born of the concerns of the agrarian masses, initially focused on promoting education in the rural areas in Barisal, and the amendment to the tenancy act for strengthening the occupancy of raiyats, suggests Sen (2018: 75, 122). Mandal articulated a labour theory of value in conjunction with the social world of caste, identifying the country's true producers with Dalits and the exploitation of this labour with the upper castes. He related the theft of productive labour to the exploitative nature of untouchability that defrauds Dalits through intellectual and economic force. It was a capsular Phule-Esque conceptual account of the upper castes, suggests Sen (2018: 132-33). However, the discussion on agrarian struggle lurks loosely and appears more as an assertion in Sen's narrative made to counter the identitarian charge against Mandal.

Mandal maintained that the condition of Dalits might improve and survive with respect as human beings only through political means (Sen 2018: 132-33). He championed an independent voice of the Dalit, calling for separate and autonomous politics of representation and power. In Tamilnadu, the very land of the successful journey of the Non-Brahmin movement, some Dalit publicists have begun to champion separate, autonomous, and transformative politics vis-a-vis the tendencies of Brahmin and Non-Brahman politics at the turn of the twenty-first century: '…as the Dalit freedom without wanting to become a crypto-Brahmin or a drudging Dalit…. Let us be human beings, not bound by domination and subordination.'[7] In his discussion on the nation and its outcastes, Chatterjee (1993: 194-97) has pointed out the problem of the failure of Dalits to construct an alternative universal, an urge for freedom and practical insubordination to the dominant Dharma. Sen's account of Mandal's political assertion

represents a refreshing counterpoint to the problem framed by Chatterjee.

The last time Dalit power had any independent political presence was during the late colonial period from the later 1930s to 1947, maintains Sen. This appears as a distinctive and intriguing frame of Sen's narrative. The 1932 constitutional reform, and its adaptation through the Poona Pact, dealt a resounding blow, argues Sen (2018: 25), to the privileged access to social and political power the upper castes enjoyed throughout the construction and development of the colonial rule. Mandal sought to secure welfare measures – increased educational allocation and reform – by forging deep ties with the emancipatory hand of the British (Ibid:101). Similarly, Mandal, through an alliance with Krisak Praja Party (KPP) and Muslim League, sought the promotion of the majority welfare of cultivators and fishermen and undermined inherited privilege (Ibid:102).

This observation of Sen is in sharp contrast to the argument formulated by Omvedt (2014: Chapter 6) in her discussion on the transformation within Dalit politics: the change from Independent Labour Party to the All India Scheduled caste Federation during late colonialism was a transformation from revolution to reformation. 'It was a step backward from the radicalism of the 1930s' as it foreclosed any possibility of radical politics. What was the scope of welfare politics within the late colonial period? The conventional view has maintained, for instance, that the 1943 Bengal famine, in particular, and widespread poverty and deprivation resulted from colonial institutions and policies (Bagchi 2010, 1981). Another scholarship has underscored that these colonial institutions and policies had reinforced and revived the village servant system, which placed members of the depressed castes in a condition of semi-servility and dependency. Ambedkar actively agitated to dismantle institutions that forced village servants (Baluta system) into servile dependence and beggary in the 1930s (Guha 2015: 105-12; Rao 2009: 113-14). Against this backdrop, did the late colonial period offer a new possibility of welfare politics and social emancipation? Mandal considered it affirmatively, and Sen's narrative decidedly carries forward Mandal's terms. There is little critical assessment of the constraints that the colonial institutional matrix exerted on the politics of welfare and substantive freedom. Sen's assessment differs from Bandopadhyay's (2000) view that the autonomous Dalit politics was 'patronised' by the colonial state, which reached a crisis point during the 'transfer of power.'

Through a sustained and scathing analysis, Sen deprecates the role played by Hindu nationalists in perpetuating caste-based deprivation, and stigmatisation, and obstructing some of the proposals of reform adopted by Mandal's politics. The same critical approach surfaces in fits and starts toward the adverse function of the colonial state. It underlines the nexus between caste Hindus and colonial bureaucracy at

work in cases of suppressing the number of Namasudras and returning them as Hindus in the 1941 Census (Sen 2018: 86-87). The caste-state nexus was also at work in 1946-47 against the claims of the All India Scheduled Caste Federation, rejecting the representative status of the Federation in the discussion on the transfer of power (Ibid: 149). Sen is familiar with the thesis of caste–state nexus formulated by Viswanath (2014: 64, 113) in her study of the perpetuation of agrestic slavery of Pariahs in colonial India. However, its application in Sen's narrative does not remain consistent.

Sen (2018: 139) argues that the Partition of Bengal in 1947 occurred in the context of political power in Calcutta being wielded by the representatives of the socio-economically most disadvantaged communities. A provincial government, formed through the alliance between the KPP/Muslim League and the Federation, and led by Mandal, was in power. Mandal and the Federation campaigned against the partition of Bengal and called for a united Bengal. They presciently argued that, in divided Bengal, Dalits would be at the mercy of the majority in East Bengal, and in the thraldom of caste Hindus in West Bengal (Ibid: 172). The upper-caste Hindus of Bengal overwhelmingly rallied in support of partition; the same was not entirely true of Dalits (Ibid:180). Through partition, upper-caste Hindus sought a nationalist resolution to the caste question: the fear of independent political power wielded by Dalits in alliance with Muslims. Anticolonial nationalism entailed the conscious subduing of caste radicalism in late-colonial Bengal, continues Sen (2018: 182).

Sen (2018) debunks Bandyopadhyay's observation that Dalits joined the partition politics, an informed struggle for power access in the imminent, emerging post-colonial Indian polity. Bandyopadhyay (2004: 73, 236-37) cites the active participation of Dalits in communal rioting as correlating to their desire for power, their Hinduised social aspiration, and the nationalist pressure of an inclusive nation. For Sen, the Partition of Bengal was a devastating and anti-Dalit event. Sen (2018: 86) clubs together the Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress on the caste question. He reinforces the view that communalism, including revivalist nationalism, is about caste, a deflection of the violence and inegalitarianism within Hindu society (Ibid: 134-6).[8]

The clubbing of the Hindu Mahasabha's politics and that of the National Congress may appear reasonable around the specificity of partition and the attendant caste question in Bengal. However, a note of wariness is in order against its generalisation. The National Congress had already formally denounced, and sought to remove untouchability since its annual session in 1917; it was known as one of the hallmarks of emerging Gandhian nationalism. The latter undertook a concerted drive to actualise it in the 1930s in the face of caste radicalism represented by Ambedkar. Keeping this in sight, Pantham

(2009: 205) maintains that a collective effort and joint authorship represented by Gandhian [plural] nationalism and Ambedkar's anti-caste [liberal] radicalism together contributed to the eventual prohibition of untouchability and discrimination against any citizen on the grounds of caste, religion, race, sex, place of birth or any other form, which the Indian Constitution later adopted.

Sen's narrative spans the divide between the late colonial and post-colonial eras. In absence of support and sympathy from caste-Hindus, solidarities between Dalits and the KPP, membered overwhelmingly by Muslims in the context of undivided Bengal, were advantageous, continues Sen (2018). However, it crumbled in the irrevocably transformed conditions of divided Bengal. Mandal's extraordinary decision to join the ministry and seek the common welfare of Dalits and socio-economically disadvantaged Muslims in Pakistan shortly ran out of promises. His subsequent migration to India and striving for Dalit welfarist politics proved crucifying. Why and how? Mandal found Dalits facing state-sponsored violence in Pakistan and legal erasure in India, argues Sen (2018: 192). Despite the constitutional ban on untouchability, the subversion of the reservation policy and continued caste discrimination were painfully challenging (Ibid: 247). Both Dalit representatives, Ambedkar and Mandal, resigned from the helm of the law ministry respectively in India and Pakistan, dismayed by the insincerity of those they served.

In the Republic of India, Mandal looked at the decision of the Dandakaranya resettlement project, starting in 1958-59, as squeezing out primarily Dalit refugees from West Bengal. He regarded it as the comprehensive betrayal of promises of rehabilitation that had been extended many times over. Through such a policy, the Congress and, later, Communist governments effectively struck at the possibility of the Namasudras' political reconsolidation in that state (Ibid: 212). This whole scheme revealed that security for the upper castes of Bengal at the Dalits' expense was the nationalist resolution of the refugee question in West Bengal, suggests Sen (2018: 236). How was the communist government, starting its first term in 1978, responsible for adopting and enforcing the Dandakaranya project? Sen's narrative technique of bashing the Congress and the Communists has precluded any illuminating interpolation to our understanding of institutional dynamics responsible for a strangulating influence on Dalits' social well-being. Nor does Sen Care to explain that Dalits (Namasudras) tilted towards the Left in Independent India (Bandopadhyay 2012: 60).

Sen's narrative brings forth a novel and stimulating observation: The decline of the caste question occurred in Bengal under the post-colonial polity. The slow and gradual ascendency of Dalit politics in state power and its autonomous presence from the later 1930s to mid-1947 suffered a blow and diminished by the 1950s–60s. The potential for Dalits' autonomous and separate politics dwindled amidst the

systematic subversion of affirmative programmes, and conspicuous instances of humiliating stigmatisation and discrimination in Bengal (Sen 2018: 247). The decline was, suggests Sen (2018: 1, 16, 138), a result of the deployment of multipronged coercion that the upper-caste leaders inflicted against the desire for recognition and redistribution expressed by the Namasudras and Dalit refugees from the late 1940s to the 1960s.

The so-called integration of Dalits into mainstream Indian nationalism was born because the Congress and the Hindu revivalists exploited the electoral mechanisms laid down under the Poona Pact to thwart the emergence of non-Congress Dalit candidates during the crucial 1946 elections. Additionally, they deployed electoral fraud, violence, and bribery to ensure the success of those they sponsored (Ibid: 138-42). Through this, the revivalist nationalists sought to manufacture the semblance of representativeness in the face of yawning contradictions to achieve the long-sought Hindu communal unity.[9] The defeat of Ambedkarism and the ascendancy of the upper-caste Left was also a product of similar political chicanery in later 1960s Bengal (Ibid: 239). Sen's plot represents a virtuous, crucified image of Mandal, his mentor, Ambedkar, and Dalit politics, on one side, and the cunning, coercive image of the upper castes in its triumvirate of communal conservatives, liberals, and the communists, on the other. In Sen's employment, the caste question and politics of Dalits / Namasudras are coterminous. The connection and transaction between Dalits (unprivileged caste) and middle castes (underprivileged), and the dynamics of such intercourse do not receive sufficient attention. A discussion on this intercourse comes to the fore in the section below.

Reservations, welfare, and caste capitalism

What has been the connection between caste and capitalist modernisation? How has the constitution adopted by post-colonial India, with its prohibition of untouchability and its reservation programme, shaped the dynamics of caste and class? Teltumbe (2018) and the collection of essays edited by Ilaiah and Karrupusamy (2021) reinforce the observation that castes have remained tenacious even beneath the veneer of a modern, developing market economy and parliamentary democracy. However, the modality of its expression, alongside its meanings, relational and governance aspects, have undergone specific shifts. The linkage between castes, occupations, and rituals positively loosened in the later twentieth century.

The slow expansion of capitalist institutions – the rule of private property, market-based exchanges, contract systems, and the pull of competitive industrial and urban economies – proved conducive to this favourable shift in such a linkage. The land reforms, however limited they were, and the Green Revolution under the aegis of the post-colonial state improved the socio-economic standing of those whom

Ilaiah *et al.* (2021: 188-89) describe as the landowning 'upper Shudras'. And yet, stigmatisation and contempt for Dalits and 'lower Shudras,' and the instances of humiliation and discrimination inflicted on them have been frequent. Caste prejudices informed a score of violent assaults, including massacres inflicted on rural Dalits and poor Shudras, who demanded a better share in the agricultural output, a recognition of their dignity, and citizenry rights. Temltumbde (2018: 151-80) argues that the green revolution sharpened the class contradiction between the 'feudal-capitalist' class, consisting of the middle castes and Dalits as agricultural labourers. The administrative apparatus of modern law enforcement, under the control of the tormenting castes, frequently shared social and cultural bonds with the dominant castes and created substantial hurdles against the delivery of justice to victims. Consequently, the culprits of caste violence enjoyed a sense of impunity (see also Jangam 2017: 197-203).

While caste violence has been conspicuous and intermittent, other instances of caste observance have slowly become subtle and private, suggests Temtumbde (2018: 94-95). It is especially the case concerning commensality and consanguinity, which equally encapsulates the affective aspect of caste (Lee 2021).[10] Additionally, some Dalit and Shudra communities now valorise their primordial subcastes to make a genealogical claim to a relatively respectable status and inverting the mark of inferiority hurled on them. Such valorisation is the unprivileged castes' effort to celebrate difference and express integration pessimism. To Teltumbde, this modality of articulation of castes amongst unprivileged groups is far from an act of what Pandian (2014) has termed as 'one step outside modernity' and, simultaneously, 'one step ahead of modernity.' The valorisation of primordial subcastes may seem to fit well with the concept of rebellion shared by Nandy (2009: 55): Remaining a slave is the ultimate meaning of rebellion, and the guarantee of the destruction of the master-slave relationship, not the glib talk of equality and justice. In Teltumbde's (2018) narrative, such a modality of caste articulation is counterproductive to the necessity of 'annihilation of castes' and promotion of congruous fraternisation.

The Republic of India has been constructed on the foundation of castes, argues Teltumbde (Ibid: 20). Parliamentary democracy in India saw that untouchability was outlawed but not castes. Consequently, inequality and identity remained entwined with caste and religion. The constitution's reservation and personal law consecrated caste and religion under the 'pretext' of delivering social justice to the lower castes. Being an aspect of caste, untouchability would not disappear unless castes were destroyed. Reservations, such as affirmative action or the scheme of positive discrimination, did not require caste, continues Teltumbde (2018: 53). Caste has also been wedded to education and health inequality. The ignorance of the masses has been the most significant insurance for the ruling classes of all times. The

intricate contrivance of a caste system shut the doors of education to most of its population until the colonial period. Since then, the alibi of scarce resources meant that the majority of people were still locked out. In the Republic of India, they have been made to suffer from unequal, deficient schooling (Ibid: 315-16). Observances of caste ritual and the enduring evil of uncleanliness have equally been entangled. So long the caste group of scavengers are charged with the responsibility of clearing the filth generated with impunity by all others, and the same people are treated worse than shit and exploited to the hilt, the blitz of Swacch Bharat would have a narrow result, and the country is destined to remain unclean, observes Teltumbde (2018: 320-39).

Ilaiah *et al.* (2021) maintain a celebratory take on the establishment and outcome of parliamentary democracy for the scope of social justice. They affirm the gains made from the prohibition of untouchability, institutionalisation of reservations to mitigate the pains of historically inherited injustice borne by Dalits and Shudras, and the prospect of social reforms under the aegis of parliamentary rule. They hold the absence of Shudras in the corridor of power–political, media, educational institutions, and corporates – as one of the circumstances conducive to the weak political will and, hence, an inability to put in effect the real constitutional mandate (Ibid:36-63).

The concept of caste capitalism, and its association with the surge in neo-conservatism, known as Hindutva, occupies a central place in the works of Teltumbde (2018) and Ilaiah *et al*. (2021). They argue that caste and capitalism have amalgamated in India, even though wherever capitalist modernisation has reached, the configuration of caste has changed (Teltumbde 2018: 20, 105; Ilaiah *et al.* 2021: 180-90). Capitalist development integrated castes as a practical divider among productive classes (Teltumbde 2018: 238). This technique acted as an obstacle to the possibility of unison among and the collective struggle of the working classes for social democracy. Caste and class have been mainly entwined to constitute a modern form of inequality: Ownership of industrial and finance capital continued to remain predominantly in the hands of mercantile castes. In contrast, primarily English-educated members of privileged castes populated the modern management of both public and private firms (Ilaiah *et al*. 2021). The momentous success of software professionals from India in global capitalism has strengthened the interlocking between mercantile castes and English-educated privileged castes, described as the Bania-Brahmin nexus. The latter have now regarded themselves as free from the sense of inferiority inherited from colonial subordination, and expressing newly gained self-reassurance in the form of pride in the Hindu customs. This tendency has fed into neo-liberal Darwinist policies and resurgent caste consciousness, suggest Teltumbde (2018: 235-36, 393) and Ilaiah *et al*. (2021).

Temltumbde and Ilaiah et al. bring two quite different propositions on caste capitalism. Teltumbde is hesitant to locate the solution of deprivation and stigmatisation borne by the unprivileged castes in capitalist modernisation. Indeed, he (2019: 236) shys away from celebrating the rise of a Dalit bourgeoisie organised in the Dalit Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI). He juxtaopposes the latter with the concentration of vast Dalits in rural areas and urban slums, who are victims of the elitist and social Darwinist policies of neoliberalism. By contrast, Ilaiah *et al.* (2021) advocate shudrasation of the ownership and management of capital as a way forward. Here, an implicit assumption is shared that if shudrasiation of capital succeeds, it would unravel the Bania-Brahmin nexus, leading to secularisation and democratisation of the capitalist mechanism. Such an assumption looks sideways at the problems of exploitation, oppression, discipline, and estrangement in capitalist modernisation (Nite 2021).

The works of Teltumbde (2018) and Ilaiah *et al.* (2021) appear as book-length political tracts and public sociology, intending to run conscientising campaigns of social reform. They are passionately involved in the advocacy of policies that are sometimes at odds with each other. Let us consider a few of them. The reservation scheme has not been a measure of social justice but participation, maintains Teltumbde (2018: 59). Reservation as a policy of affirmative action does not need caste. Those families who have benefited from such a policy in one generation need to give way to the excluded families of target social groups (Ibid, Ilaiah *et al.* 2021: 167-75).

Furthermore, Teltumbde (2018: 56, 317) calls for an alternative to caste-infused reservations in the form of state-funded universal, quality schooling for all up to eighteen, when girls and boys may choose to continue with either higher education or explore economic opportunities. Similarly, the public fund needs to provide universal, quality health care. The annihilation of castes and the recognition of the human rights of scavengers are necessary for the success of decent cleanliness in India. Against this background, proposes Teltumbde (2018. 19), there is a necessity for closeness between Dalits and Left movements for social revolution.

On reservation as affirmative action, Ilaiah *et al.* (2021: xx, 78-81) advocate the necessity of its expansion for the promotion of education, employment, and representation amongst Shudras. Additionally, they call for installing Shudras' political power, which would be suitably vigilant of the proper implementation of affirmative action. They encourage the emergence of English-educated Shudra philosophers and leaders in the national arena (Ibid: xxxi, 42-63). Ilaiah *et al.* are silent on the overlap of caste with class, and overlook the historical fact that certain 'upper Shudras' claim to be Kshatriyas. They chastise the negative portrayal by the Left of the agrarian kulaks belonging to the

upper Shudras. They appear to fill a void where the Shudra is not regarded as an emancipatory reference point, unlike Dalits, in the anti-caste campaign.

Ilaiah *et al*. positively take cognisance of the conflict between landowning upper Shudras and landless Dalits in contemporary India. [11] In response, they moralise the former to overcome their caste prejudices and adopt a compassionate, integrationist attitude towards Dalits for a collective project of social justice and vibrant democracy. Their conscientising appeal harps on a materialist view that Shudras, along with Dalits, are together the productive classes of India; therefore, these social groups need to shoulder the responsibility of liberating the entire society (Ibid: xxi-xxiii, 114, 176-94).[12] The appeal equally harks back to the spiritual tradition prevalent among them to reverently relate to their godly ancestors embodying the spirit of production/fertility and protection (Ibid: 115-35).[13] Ilaiah *et al.* (2021: 37) reinforce the call, initially articulated by Ambedkar, for the abolition of caste; in the same breath, they urge Shudras to reclaim the idea of the Indian nation as a vibrant, united country, which Jotirao Phule initially talked about (Ibid: 5).[14] Ilaiah *et al.* (2021: 86-96) present a celebratory account of some of the Shudra women, including Savitribai Phule and Tarabai Shinde, who undertook the earliest feminist initiatives for the upliftment of Indian women as a whole in the later nineteenth century.[15] They cherish the installation of parliamentary democracy in post-colonial India and urge Shudras to grow as capital owners, control the management of modern enterprises, lead the policy-making parliament, and philosophise the discourses of socially-just development. These necessary moves would lead to the formation of a prosperous, powerful India.

Conclusion

The article elucidates the shifting meanings and relational and governmental aspects of caste, class, and representation claims in modern and contemporary India. It illuminates the contending modalities of articulation of caste, power, and representation. It shows that the shift from the mobilisation of ranked identities to unranked identities unfolded in the Republic of India. These two forms of mobilisation have been associated with the patrimonial and participatory polity dynamics. Unranked mobilisation contributed to undermining the patrimonial polity and investment in participatory institutions. The shift saw caste as a source of identity and an axis of inequality split: Here, the former remained conspicuously persistent and the latter attenuated. In this discussion, the viewpoint of Lee (2020) terming lower caste leaders as the rent-seekers appears a misleading characterisation, and untenable in light of other studies.

The roles played by leaders like Jogendranath Mandal covered struggles for equal recognition, redistributive justice, and welfare

growth. He championed separate and autonomous Dalit politics. Now, we have a historical narrative pointing to this brand of Dalits politics concretely sharing the state power in colonial Bengal during 1937-47. Through the partition of Bengal in 1947, privileged caste-Hindus sought a nationalist resolution of the caste question: the fears of independent political power wielded by Dalit representatives in alliance with that of Muslim peasants. Dalit representatives, like Mandal, campaigned for a united Bengal. In the Republic of India, the nationalist resolution of the refugee question in West Bengal prioritised the security of 'upper-castes' in this province through forced relocation of mostly the Dalit/Namasudra refugees outside of this province; thus, it struck at the possibility of the Dalits' political reconsolidation in that province. This narrative further argues that the combination of multipronged coercion and electoral frauds, as deployed by privileged caste politicians, struck a defeat to the Dalits' desire for equal recognition, redistribution, and power.

Among publicists and advocates of social upliftment, assessment of and judgement on the performance of capitalist modernisation, parliamentary democracy, and redistributive justice in the Republic of India have varied. The reservation law, alongside the personal laws, is seen by some as consecrating caste and religion, even though the constitution outlawed untouchability. To some others, parliamentary democracy brought about an irreversible rupture in the tradition of caste relations. However, capitalist modernisation and caste have amalgamated in specific ways. To some, in the face of it, the response lies in unison amongst and collective struggles of working peoples for a social revolution, including public-funded universal, quality education and health care for all. To some others, shudraisation of ownership and managerial authority of capital should develop, which would usher in the unravelling of Bania-Brahmin domination and their neo-conservatism.

The rise in conflicting interests has marked the socio-economic relationship between the landlords, including those of middle castes (upper Shudras), and working Dalits in the wake of land reform and the green revolution in rural India. In the face of it, a conscientising appeal for the Shudras has come to the fore to foster the ethics of compassionate, caring and integrationist spirit towards all productive social groups. This appeal considers it necessary for these productive social groups to reclaim the Indian nation, and usher it into a vibrant, prosperous and mighty country in the world.

These advocacies and resolutions, it could be said, offer an alternative universal for freedom from and practical insubordination to the caste-infused Dharma. They passionately respond to the challenge posed by the ascendant force of neo-conservatism and the caste Dharma in contemporary India. Whether their imagination of an alternative universal will succeed in gaining hegemonic traction, remains to be

seen in the immediate future. Nevertheless, our discussions illuminate the contemporary situation of fervent repudiation of caste in India's public life, whereas caste-related concerns remain pervasive in its political realm.

References

Acemoglu, D., & Robinson, J. A. (2012). *Why nations fail: The origins of power, prosperity, and poverty*. Currency.

Bagchi, A. K., & Kumar, B. A. (1982). *The political economy of underdevelopment*. Cambridge University Press.

Bandyopadhyay, S. (2000). Transfer of power and the crisis of Dalit politics in India, 1945–47. *Modern Asian Studies*, *34*(4), 893-942.

Bandyopadhyay, S. (2004). *Caste, culture and hegemony: Social dominance in colonial Bengal*. Sage.

Bandyopadyay, S. (2012). *Decolonisation in South Asia: Meanings of Freedom in Post-independence West Bengal, 1947-52*, Delhi: Orient Blackswan.

Benbabaali, D. (2018). Caste dominance and territory in South India: Understanding Kammas' socio-spatial mobility. *Modern Asian Studies*, *52*(6), 1938-1976.

Beteille, A. (1974). *Studies in Agrarian Social Structure*, Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Bheenaveni, R.S, (2021). 'Production and Protection as Spirituality among Shudras,' in Ilaiah and Karuppusamy (eds), *The Shudras: Vision for a New Path,* pp. 1-13, New Delhi: Vintage Books. pp. 115-35.

Chatterjee, P. (1993). *The nation and its fragments: Colonial and postcolonial histories* (Vol. 4). Princeton University Press.

Christopher John Baker, C.J. (2007). *The Politics of South India 1920–37,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Deshpande, A., & Ramachandran, R. (2017). Dominant or backward? Political economy of demand for quotas by Jats, Patels, and Marathas. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *52*(19), 81-92.

Deshpande, A., & Ramachandran, R. (2019). The 10% quota is caste still an indicator of backwardness?. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *54*(13), 27-32.

Dirks, N. B. (1989). The original caste: Power, history and hierarchy in South Asia. *Contributions to Indian sociology*, *23*(1), 59-77.

Dreze, J. and Sen, A. (2013). *Un Certain Glory of India: Indian and its Contradictions,* Delhi: Penguin.

Dumont, L. (1980). *Homo hierarchicus: The caste system and its implications*. University of Chicago Press.

Sen, D. (2018). *The decline of the caste question: Jogendranath Mandal and the defeat of Dalit politics in Bengal*. Cambridge University Press.

Engerman, S. L., & Sokoloff, K. L. (2012). *Economic development in the Americas since 1500: endowments and institutions*. Cambridge University Press.

Guha, S. (2013). *Beyond caste: Identity and power in South Asia, past and present*. Brill.

Habib, I, (2017). *Essays in Indian History: Towards a Marxist Perspective,* Delhi: Tulika.

Shepherd, K. I., & Karuppusamy, K. R. (2021). *The Shudra: Vision for a new path*. Penguin Random House India Private Limited.

Jaffrelot, C. (2003). *India's silent revolution: the rise of the lower castes in North India*. Orient Blackswan.

Jangam, C. (2017). *Dalits and the making of modern India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Kopalan, B. (2019). *In caste-sensitive Tamil Nadu, six communities want to be delisted from SC/ST list*, The Hindu, October 19. https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/opinion-tamil-brahmin-emigration-was-driven-opportunity-not-socialism-or-identity-politics, accessed on 24th May 2022.

Kumar, A. (2021). *The Nation and its Shudras*, in Ilaiah and Karuppusamy (eds), *The Shudras: Vision for a New Path,* pp. 1-13, New Delhi: Vintage Books.

Lee, A. (2020). *From Hierarchy to Ethnicity: The Politics of Caste in Twentieth-Century India*. Cambridge University Press.

Lee, J. (2021). Disgust and untouchability: towards an affective theory of caste. *South Asian History and Culture*, *12*(2-3), 310-327.

Menon, N., & Nigam, A. (2007). *Power and contestation: India since 1989*. Zed Books.

Menon, D. (2006). The Blindness of Insight: Why Communalism Is About Caste & Other Essays.

Mosse, D. (2020). The modernity of caste and the market economy. *Modern Asian Studies*, *54*(4), 1225-1271.

Naig, U. 2021, 'Loyalties of Devendrakula Velalars spread out, The Hindu, December 02, https://www.thehindu.com/elections/tamil-nadu-assembly/loyalties-of-devendrakula-velalars-spread-out/article61924516.ece, accessed on 24th May 2022.

Nandy, A. (2009). *Humiliation: Politics and the Cultural Psychology of the Limits of Human Degradation,* in Guru (eds.), *Humiliation: Claims and Context*, pp. 41- 57, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Nite, D. K. (2021). The aspiration of a "civilised","human", and "dignified" life: An enquiry into sociability, sociality, and wellbeing of migrants in an Indian coalfield. In *Home, Belonging and Memory in Migration* (pp. 29-58). Routledge India.

O'Halon, R. (1985). *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and the Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth Century Western India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

O'hanlon, R. (2017). Caste and its Histories in Colonial India: A reappraisal. *Modern Asian Studies*, *51*(2), 432-461.

Omvedt, G. (2014). *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and The Dalit Movement in Colonial India*, Delhi: Sage Publication.

Pandian, M.S.S, (2014). 'One Step Outside Modernity: Caste, Identity Politics, and the Public Sphere,' in Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar (eds.), *Caste in Modern India, Vol. II*, pp. 162-381, New Delhi: Permanent Black.

Pandian, M. S. S. (2007). *Brahmin and non-Brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil political present*. Permanent Black.

Pantham, T. (2009). Against untouchability: the discourses of Gandhi and Ambedkar. *Humiliation: Claims and context*, 179-208.

Patil, P. 'The Question of Bahujan Women,', in Ilaiah and Karuppusamy (eds.), *The Shudras: Vision for a New Path,* pp. 1-13, New Delhi: Vintage Books, pp. 86-96.

Rajan, P.T, 2020, Opinion: Tamil Brahmin emigration was driven by opportunity, not socialism or identity politics, The News Minute, https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/opinion-tamil-brahmin-emigration-was-driven-opportunity-not-socialism-or-identity-politics, accessed on 31st March 2021.

Rao, A. (2009). *The caste question: Dalits and the politics of modern India*. Univ of California Press.

Rawat, R. S. (2003). Making claims for power: a new agenda in dalit politics of Uttar Pradesh, 1946-48. *Modern Asian Studies*, *37*(3), 585-612.

Roy, I. (2016). Equality against hierarchy: Imagining modernity in subaltern India. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, *50*(1), 80-107.

Sarkar, S. and Sarkar T. eds. (2014). Caste *in Modern India, Vol. 1 and II,* Delhi: Permanent Black.

Sarkar, S. (2002). *Beyond Nationalist Frames: Postmodernism, Hindu Fundamentalism, History*. Delhi: Permanent Black.

Sen, D. (2018). *The decline of the caste question: Jogendranath Mandal and the defeat of Dalit politics in Bengal*. Cambridge University Press.

Simpson, E., Tilche, A., Sbriccoli, T., Jeffery, P., & Otten, T. (2018). A brief history of incivility in rural postcolonial India: caste, religion, and anthropology. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *60*(1), 58-89.

Special Correspondent, 2021, Parliament proceedings: Lok Sabha passes bill to place seven castes under Devendrakula Vellalars in Tamil Nadu, The Hindu, March 19.

Srinivas, M. N. (1962). Caste in modern India and other essays. *Caste in modern India and other essays.*

Subramanian, N. (2020). From Bondage to Citizenship: A Comparison of African American and Indian Lower-Caste Mobilization in Two Regions of Deep Inequality. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *62*(4), 770-809.

Teltumbde, A. (2018). *Republic of caste: Thinking equality in the time of neoliberal Hindutva*. Navayana.

Viswanath, R. (2014). The Pariah Problem. In *The Pariah Problem.* Columbia University Press.

Washbrook D. A. (2007). *The Emergence of Provincial Politics: The Madras Presidency 1870–1920*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Endnotes

[1] Bandyopadhyay (2004: 121, 151) argues that sanskritisation was not outside the process of modernisation, but rather a consequence of a convoluted colonial modernity, which on the one hand privileged individualism, hereditary property rights and social mobility, but on the other sanctified a Brahmanical view of culture with its interlocking system of symbols signifying status in ritual terms.

[2] Here, within such a framework, the making of identities has to be discredited or discounted.

[3] Also see, Pandian (2016: Chapter 6). Bandyopadhyay (2004: 64-65) argues that the roots of authority to enforce social conformity are in economic and political power of the Rajas and Pundits over others. In their response to it, the modern caste associations addressed the question of power in a pronounced manner in the twentieth century. It included the demand for political representation.

[4] South India already witnessed the way low caste groups started to emancipate themselves from the hierarchical logic of Indian society from the late nineteenth- and early tweintieth-centuries. The two causes prompted it were British orientalism and the affirmative programme since World War I. By contrast, in North India, sanskritisation ethos was a predominant tendency (Jaffrelot 2003: 493). The change began to occur in the wake of the emergence of the quota politics and kisan politics since the 1950s-60s.

[5] In her recent study, O'Hanlon (2017: 443-44) relates its origin to the legacy of caste radicalism drawn from the Deccan Sultanate in medieval period under Bahmani and Ahmadnagar rules, the anti-Brahaman Bhakti tradition and Sufi heterodox traditions.

[6] It appears in league of Guha's (2015) stress on the contestation for socio-political power and its materiality.

[7] The statement of Raj Gowthaman, quoted in Pandian (2016: Chapter – Epilogue).

[8] For a similar discussion, see also, Sarkar (2002) and Menon (2006).

[9] See also, Rawat (2003: 585-612; 2002: 111-39).

[10] Joel Lee (2021: 310-17) locates it within the affective aspect of caste, that is, caste-imbued sensibility.

[11] This issue has increasingly attracted attention. See Benbabaali (2018).

[12] This historical tendency is briefly documented in Nite (2021).

[13] Ram Shepherd Bheenaveni (2021: 115-35).

[14] Arvind Kumar (2021: 1-13).

[15] Prachi Patil (2021: 86-96).

Dhiraj Kumar Nite *is Faculty at School of Liberal Studies, Ambedkar University Delhi.*

Email id: dhiraj@aud.ac.in, dhirajnite@gmail.com

Bidhan Chandra Dash *is Faculty –at School of Liberal Studies, Ambedkar University Delhi.*

Email id: bidhan@aud.ac.in

Exploring the Ahom's Assertion of Indigeneity and Demands for Scheduled Tribe Status in Assam

---Hare Krishna Doley

Abstract

This paper examines the Ahom's on-going demands for Scheduled Tribe status in Assam. Proliferated in recent years, it has ensued contentious politics associated with redrawing of ethnic boundaries, and augmenting political turmoil in the region. Largely related to the indigenous status, such demands entails frequent negotiations with the state over social, cultural, political, and territorial rights which is intrinsically connected to issues of recognition and entitlements. Given these multiple issues, this paper examines the contemporary nature of ethnic struggle and traces the historical genealogy of such claims. It specifically looks at All Tai-Ahom Students Union while analysing their demands amidst frequent challenges and negotiations with the state. The study uses ethnographic methods to analyse the dynamics of their struggle and responses of the state. It demonstrates that cultural elements and genealogy of ethnic groups are significant aspects to acquire preferential treatment from the state and also to preserve their ethnic identity.

Keywords: Ahom, Assertion, Demand, Indigeneity, Scheduled Tribe.

Introduction

Framing the Scene

Socially and ethically Assam is indeed one of the most diverse states in the country. The diversity has enriched the cultural heritage of the state, as well as brought forth antagonistic relationships amongst the ethnic groups in terms of resource distribution. A recurrent phenomenon like demand for Scheduled Tribe status in Assam by various groups has reflected unfulfilled aspirations for a prolonged period which is continued in the post-colonial period.[i] It has further fuelled the quest for attaining indigenous status, reflecting an ever-present struggle seeking identification from the state. Writing on a similar process Jenkins claims 'many current battles over rights and recognition are disputes over the state's identification of groups in society (Jenkins, 2003, p. 1). Issues of identity and ethnicity are intrinsically connected to twin concerns for recognition and redistribution. Fraser (1998) argues that social justice demands for redistribution and recognition have a mutual relationship. For her, both conditions form a new constellation of claims, which was solely centered on distribution (p. 1). Facilitated by the introduction of such policies, social justice claims enmesh itself more closely with politics

of recognition than redistributive justice. Baruah (2003) has rightly remarked 'Northeast India is a region where the politics of protective discrimination for Scheduled Tribe today raises some of the most difficult issues of justice, fairness and costs on system legitimacy' (p. 1624). The colonial legacy of categorisation and the process of inclusive development projects initiated in the post-colonial period have further augmented struggles for various autonomy movements. Launched by different ethnic groups such as the Ahom, Koch-Rajbongshi, Moran, Matak, Chutia, and Tea tribes the demand for Scheduled Tribe status is symptomatic of this current assertion in Assam.

Officially classified as Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Ahom's demand has raised pertinent questions regarding tribal identity as it highlights the changing and evolving conception of tribe and indigeneity at present. Perpetuated through time and space these demands are determined not only by subalternity and marginality but are conditioned by the deeper quest for political empowerment in Assam (Arora, 2007, p. 216).

Divided into five sections, the first part of the paper elucidates the theoretical and methodological frameworks employed in the study. The second section discusses Tai-Ahom's history followed by the third section which details the politics of indigeneity unfolding within this emergent discourse. Finally, the fourth section analyses the activities of the Tai-Ahom associations to realise their demands. It further discusses the proliferation of ethnic cleavages and its impact on the larger socio-political fabric of Assam. Lastly, the paper will delve into the role of the state in dealing with the issue. Drawing references from the existing literature and observations it demonstrates how the state manages ethnic demands through the means of appeasement politics. It takes into account the varied level of contestations emanating from the opposition levied by the existing Scheduled Tribe groups and its impact on the present recognition struggle of the Ahom.

Methods

The data for this paper were collected through an ethnographic study conducted in the district of Dhemaji in Assam. According to the 2011 census, the district's total population is 686,133. Out of this, the population of Ahom in the Dhemaji district is approximately 3 lakhs. Primarily based on qualitative methods this article investigates the complex process of ethnic struggle amongst the Ahom in Assam. Further, the paper draws from other primary and secondary sources to elucidate the topic. The research draws data from in-depth interviews carried out with Ahom leaders. It engages with the Ahom Association called All Assam Tai-Ahom Students' Union (AATASU) which is at the forefront of the demand for recognition. During the course of

fieldwork, observations were carried out in natural settings such as protest events, strikes, rallies, etc. Apart from this, pamphlets and posters used in the process of their demand were also collected alongside interviews. Interviews were conducted with the office bearers along with other personalities of the Ahom community. Besides this, discussions with the Coordination Committee of the Tribal Organisation of Assam (CCTOA) who have been opposing the current demands of Ahom were also conducted to reveal their views.[ii] The paper also uses ethnic literature, official documents, and memorandums submitted by the Ahom association, further complimented by secondary sources such as books, journals, newspapers, and magazines.

Tribe and Indigeneity: Locating Ahom in Assam

The question of tribe and indigeneity is an inalienable part of academic and public discourses in Northeast India. An ever-increasing number of social groups claim indigenous status and adopt autochthonous demands as an integral part of their rights campaigns in this region. Irrespective of the existence of tribal states, there are increasing demands to recognise new social groups as indigenous to the land (Kikon, 2017, p. 315). In such a context, the category of tribe assumes great significance, because it furnishes a sense of belongingness.

Therefore, the narrative and discourses of recognition as a Scheduled Tribe are accentuated with the claims of indigeneity which acts as the chief determining marker of tribal identity and further secures the ethnic groups in their region of predominance (Rycroft & Dasgupta, 2011, p. 2). Moreover, its use in various platforms gained wide currency after 1993 with the declaration of that year as the international year of the Indigenous People (Xaxa, 2008, p. 30). Internationalisation of the concept of indigeneity further gained significance amongst ethnic groups in different parts of the world. Hence, becoming indigenous is a new politics of asserting one's belongingness in the nation-state which can be aptly related to what Karlsson (2003) calls the 'indigenous slot' (p. 404). Internalisation and expression of indigenous identity have been greatly structured by the state's definition of indigenous tribal communities who possess distinct dialects, perform animism, and are predominantly found to be geographically isolated (Beteille, 1998, p. 189). The concept of 'indigenous peoples' or the way it is perceived is a contentious issue in India. The position of the Indian government regarding the determination of indigenous is ambiguous and complicated by the fact of migration histories of divergent groups. While it does not accept its applicability to any group in the Indian context, irrespective of Scheduled Tribe or Scheduled Caste, at the same time it considers all Indians as indigenous which is contradictory in its substance. But in the popular conception, the Scheduled Tribe is considered as the

indigenous people, particularly in Northeast India (Karlsson & Subba, 2016, p. 5). It has become an internationally accepted category to assert rights and demands in the political arena belonging to tribes. Apparently, the politics surrounding the category of indigeneity and its use by different agents is entangled with state structure which can be equated with Alpa Shah's term 'dark side of indigeneity' which finds expression as tensions between claims for protection and assimilation of India's indigenous peoples (Shah, 2007, p. 1806). Owing to such factors, becoming indigenous seemed to have assured protection both at the national and transnational level, thereby forming the content for ethnic bargaining in the contemporary identity struggles across groups.

As noted by Schendel (2011) being indigenous is a claim to rights that have been denied and it involves claims to reparation and compensation; because it highlights aspects of belongingness on the basis of history and the sense of being oppressed by later arrivals into their territory and exploited by post-colonial states (p. 25). Through his study in Darjeeling, on similar claims and ethnic revival by certain groups Chhetri (2016) argues that the developmental strategy adopted by the state government through the constitution of development boards for groups such as Lepcha, Tamang, Sherpa, and Bhutia has caused a further proliferation of these demands (p. 1). The ethnographic case study by Kapila, (2008) on 'Gaddi' also throws light on the issues of recognition. She argues that redistributive justice as a fundamental right in the Constitution has enunciated various recognition politics in contemporary Indian society, giving birth to a cultural sphere that was not perhaps anticipated in the imagined national community of post-colonial India (p. 129).

Considering the above cases, we can argue that the ongoing demand for Scheduled Tribe status in Assam reflects claims for autochthonous and original inhabitants of the region. Proliferating within these claims is a deeper quest to frame a distinct ethnic identity and enhance their sense of belongingness. It involves reconstruction and recreation of myths of origin to legitimize their status as indigenous in the place of their predominance. To meet this, ethnic leaders use metaphors of cultural significance and anchor the rhetoric of exclusivity within the discourses of indigeneity. Correspondingly, the ethnopolitics of Ahom is apparent in the struggle for Scheduled Tribe status which can be related to the politics of recognition and redistribution of resources correlated with the rights of indigenous people.

A brief note on the Ahom

An event which changed the entire course of Assam's history was the invasion of a group of people called the Tai-Ahom. They belonged to the larger Tai-speaking group which spread across southern China, northern Vietnam, and northern Burma and migrated to Assam in

periodic cycles (Terwiel, 1996, p. 276). Beginning in the early years of the 13ᵗʰ century they were led by a leader called Sukapha who crossed the Patkai range located in the South-East Asia of Assam (Barpujari, 1960, p. 2). They exercised uninterrupted sovereignty in the Brahmaputra valley for nearly six hundred years which was possible by incorporating non-Ahom into their fold through intermarriage with the earlier settlers like Chutia, Borahi, Moran, etc (Bhuyan, 1933: xviii). No historical dates can be ascertained about their migration to the Assam valley and even the Shan chronicles contain no reference to Sukapha, the first Ahom King's invasion of Assam (Acharyya, 1957, p. 47). Scholars and historians generally agree that Ahom entered Assam around 1228 A.D. They extended their boundary from the Patkai Hills in the east to the Manas River in the west, covering the north and south banks of the Brahmaputra (Barpujari, 1960, p. 1). After taking control of the Assam valley, they brought huge swaths of land under their direct administration. Their revenue settlement was based on corvee services and other payments by Paiks (Sharma, 2011, p. 33).[iii] The socio-economic structure of Ahom faced profound changes generated by the neo-Vaishnavite movement sponsored by Sankardeva and his disciple Madhavdeva in the sixteenth century (ibid: 2). Considerable rise of Hindu influence began during the reign of king Suhungmung in the 14ᵗʰ century, who later adopted a Hindu title Swarga Narayan and thenceforth it became the official Title of the Ahom kings (Baruah, 2004, p. 357). After hinduisation, the religious and cultural ceremonies of Tai-Ahom took a great turn and transformed the entire Ahom social life. The year 1654 A.D. thus marks the beginning of the Hindu period in the Ahom dynasty (Gogoi, 1976, p. 17). Moreover, with the adoption of the Hindu culture, the Ahom language called Tai became obsolete in the subsequent years of expansion toward west Assam (Terweil, 1996, p. 277). It was an effort on the part of the Ahom rulers to make an inclusive society by adopting language and culture for the greater interest of the society.

Gradually, they lost most of their traditions and cultural traits due to the assimilation of other groups and acculturation within the Hindu fold. In fact, it was an administrative measure of the Ahom's to expand their territory by accepting certain cultural traditions of earlier inhabitants while discarding some of their own to make a composite Assamese society. Though not rigid in structure, caste in Assam had a considerable impact on the social relationships that change their social structure and religious institutions. Another significant reason was their propensity to embrace certain caste attributes that penetrated into their social, political, and religious life. The ritual status, the social prestige, and the economic power of the Brahmins were attractive enough to dissolve the cultural distinctiveness of the Ahom that governs their social life. As a result, the Ahom easily subscribed to the Brahmin ideologies and abandoned many of their earlier practices of

everyday life. However, it is believed that they brought with them their own indigenous sacrificial religion, traces of which can still be found in the modern Hindu Ahom culture today (Terwiel, 1981, p. 39). After their advent in the Brahmaputra valley, the Ahom practiced religious ceremonies which were a combination of animism, and Hinayana Buddhism, and involved worshiping a number of gods and goddesses usually during sacrifices (Sharma, 2010, p. 243).

The Ahom religion was based on certain fundamental beliefs in supernatural powers. By this virtue, they worship their ancestors with elaborate ceremonies. *Lengdon, Hkun-Long,* and *Hkun-Lai* are the most significant ancestors worshiped by the Tai-Ahom who are believed to be descended from Heaven (Gogoi, 1976, p. 1). Some of the major religious ceremonies of the Tai-Ahom are *Om-pha, Sai-pha and Rik-khan* and involve offering to spirits related to paddy fields, forests, and rivers. *Om-pha* was said to be the worship of *Lengdon.* The Ahom king used to perform this with considerable grandeur with considerable animal sacrifices. *Sai-pha* was a congregational worship performed by the general people and *Rik-khan* was a kind of State ceremony performed as a victory of celebration. They also perform pujas like *phuralong* a variant of the Buddhist religion (ibid, p. 15-16). The celebration of *Me-dam-me-phi* (the placing of ancestor spirits) emerged as another important public event and is annually performed to commemorate the *Phuralong* religion, which prioritized the worship of ancestors (Saikia, 2006, p. 45).

The life event rituals amongst Ahom are a complex phenomenon and consist of numerous performances starting from the birth of a child. It involves magical means to expedite a birth which usually takes place at home. According to Ahom in the early days, the strongest means of facilitating a delivery is water mixed with powdered rhinoceros horn, which should be drunk by the expecting lady. It is followed by the cutting of the umbilical cord, disposal of the placenta after birth, and lying near a fire of the mother to strengthen and to help with the process of 'drying up the abdomen. To provide the child with magical protection, a strong thread made up of a metal cylinder is given to wear around the wrist the upper arm, or the neck; this is followed by first hair shaving, the practice of which differs from male to female (Terwiel, 1981, p. 29-39).

Traditionally, the Ahom used to bury their dead, but after the Hindu influence, the practice was transformed into cremation. However, the burial custom is still prevalent amongst the priestly classes like the *Mohan, Deodhai,* and *Bailung.* It suggests that some practices are still carried out in the present day within Ahom society (Gogoi, 1976, p. 88). However, the life cycle ceremonies of the Ahom have transformed to a great extent over the periods of time due to the

influence of the Hindu religion and the intermingling with the earlier inhabitants after they migrated from their original homeland.

The Ahom remained unchallenged till the annexation of Assam by the British East India Company in 1826 AD following the Yandaboo treaty (Baruah, 1993, p. 1).[iv] The treaty was a product of the outbreak of the Anglo-Burmese war which gave legitimacy to the British to bring Assam under its control. This event in history brought an end to the rule of the Ahom kingdom and ushered in British imperial rule in the state (Deka & Gogoi, 2021, p. 95). The annexation of Assam was driven by the expansionist policy of the British which led to the overthrow of the Burmese who had invaded and conquered Assam Valley (Barpujari, 1960, p. 16). The invasion took place due to an agreement signed between the Ahom king Badan Chandra Phukan and the Burmese King Bagyidaw to control the internal disputes of the kingdom.[v] The annexation deteriorated Ahom's economic and political condition, further deprived of administrative positions and educational opportunities (Das, 2015, p. 82). It brought forth new currents of morality and the economic reform further transformed public life in Assam (Sharma, 2011, p. 27).

Post-Colonial Scenario: Ethnic Associations and Early Demands of Ahom

India has witnessed several demands for Scheduled Tribe status in recent decades; the demands have escalated in volume and volatility (Middleton, 2013, p. 13). Such demands were accelerated in the immediate aftermath of independence and with the implementation of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe List (modification) Order, 1956, and the introduction of various accords designed to provide autonomy on ethnic lines. But controversies emerged due to the inconsistencies in granting the status across groups, the cause of which was the colonial nature of institutionalizing legal categories (Karlsson, 2010, p. 11).

Hence, the colonial legacy in South Asia determines manifold processes of ethnic identity in the contemporary period. Various other factors such as colonial modernity, and the gradual development of the Assamese middle class mainly composed of high-caste Hindus are also responsible for the proliferation of assertions and claims for distinct ethnic identity. They have successfully consolidated their position and exerted uninterrupted hegemony over the other ethnic groups (Das, 2005, p. 893). Official recognition of the Assamese language in 1960 compounded by large-scale immigration till the 1970s further created fragmentation among social groups (Goswami, 2001, p. 129). It led to linguistic and demographic predominance that became the major concern of the Assamese-speaking people overpowered by the Hindu Bengalis. The rising Assamese nationalism as a counter-hegemonic

movement further added to the apprehension of ethnic minorities (Baruah, 1989, p. 2089). The rhetoric of generic Assamese identity failed to fulfill the aspirations of numerous ethnic groups, particularly the Tai-Ahom. Therefore, various ethnic communities within the Assamese caste Hindu society started to demand tribal status in order to get the benefits provided to the tribes (Gohain, 1997, p. 391).

Consequently, the Ahom have emerged to mobilise against the caste Hindu groups, because they consider themselves to be outside the caste system. Such demands have proliferated in later years for separate representation on ethnic lines (Saikia, 2006, p. 40). The impetus grew out of the introduction of various political and economic measures such as reserved seats in various institutions for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Middleton & Shneiderman, 2008, p. 40). Such policy measures have persuaded ethnic groups like Ahom to seek recognition as a Scheduled Tribe.

Therefore, their case becomes significant owing to their historical legacy and the dynamics of their identity construction. Their demand as a tribe involves the processes of the invention; reinvention and resurrection of historical genealogies. Given this process, the use of cultural symbols for attaining rights over state-sponsored development measures becomes inevitable and most enterprising but not without generating a tussle between the existing Scheduled Tribe groups.

It should be noted that the Ahom belonged to the larger clans of Tai namely, *Tai Khamti, Tai Aiton, Tai Phake, Tai Khamyang,* and *Tai Turung* who enjoyed the benefits of a Scheduled Tribe. This has created resentment among the Ahoms and has led to a situation of relative deprivation. Several other reasons are also responsible for their deprivation; turning down their opportunity to be listed as a Scheduled Tribe in the 1950s by the Indian state, marginalistion due to assimilation into Assamese society, and the abolition of the Paik system by the British government. They could no longer reap any advantage from the British administration due to discriminatory policies (Lahon, 2001, p. 99). Gradually, the Ahom faced the greatest loss among others after the annexation by the British and was pushed to the margins of the social hierarchy (Das, 2015, p. 107). This transition culminated in the form of various associations and organisations among the Ahom community.

Within the changed political structure an elite section was formed among the Tai-Ahom. Ethnic consciousness among the newly educated elite amongst the Tai-Ahom and they organised to form distinct ethnic identities. Padmanath Gohain Baruah was the most prominent figure of the Ahom's struggle for rights which they had lost at the hands of the upper caste Hindus and the British. Pioneered by Baruah, the resentments against the British eventually took the shape of Ahom

Sabha on 13 May 1893. This was the first socio-political organization of the Ahom, later renamed as Ahom Association in 1910. The association started opposing the generic identity of Assamese under the banner of Tai-Ahom (Saikia, 2006, p. 34). In the 1980s, numerous associations and organizations emerged within the Tai-Ahom group such as *Sodou Ahom Tai Yuva Chatra Parishad* (1981), *Purbanchal Tai Sahitya Sabha* (1981), *Tai Ahom Council, Ahom Jatiya Sanmilan, All Assam Tai Ahom Society,* etc.

These organisations were instrumental in putting forward the grievances of the entire Ahom population in the post-colonial period. According to historical records, in the 1930s attempts were made to be recognized as a special minority group based on language and demography (Terwiel, 1996, p. 278). Until 1931 the Ahom were classified in the Indian Census as a special sub-caste. Notwithstanding their own formal requests to be recognized as a 'Scheduled Caste', the category 'Ahom' is no longer used in the modern Indian Census (ibid, 1996, p. 277). Discarding them to be a distinct community, they were replaced with the newly constructed term and a group called "Assamese" (Saikia, 2006, p. 39).

Under this circumstance, the Ahom failed to occupy a prominent place in the British administration which hindered their prosperity and development despite having a long history of rule (Phukan, 2003, p. 121). This indicates the process of misrecognition at the political level in which a certain social group is subordinated and impeded to participate in the institutionalized patterns of cultural value (Fraser, 1998, p. 4). Therefore, the form of misrecognition was constituted as a form of institutionalized subordination by the colonial power by adjusting them into the Hindu fold without acknowledging their distinctiveness.

Hence, the claim for recognition of tribal identity by the Ahom is in order to overcome the subordination at the hands of the Hindus and preservation of their distinct culture. Continuing this legacy, the Tai-Ahom have been asserting at various levels to revive their own customs, traditions, and other cultural elements. The larger objective is to demonstrate themselves as an authentic tribe to preserve their distinctiveness within the larger Assamese society.[vi]

In this regard one of the ATASU leaders Rajani (named changed) stated that:

> *The Ahom were never Hindu by birth and no indigenous groups can be called Hindu in Assam except the Marwari, Bengali, and Oriya. The indigenous communities of Assam do not consider themselves Hindu. Their way of living, food habits,*

> *dress patterns, etc are completely different from the Hindu*
> *people.*

Their demand for parity of status with the existing Scheduled Tribe arose in large part because of the significant opportunities. The first group of Ahom who demanded Scheduled Tribe status was the Buddhist Ahom in 1979. Later, in 1981, a memorandum was submitted to the Prime Minister of India by the All Assam Tai-Ahom Society (AATAS) demanding the recognition of Scheduled Tribe to the Tai-Ahom and other Tai groups of the state (Das, 2015). Subsequently, similar demands were placed by *Tai Ahom Juba Chatra Parishad* (1982), All Tai-Ahom Students Union (1989), Assam Furalung Council (1992), Tai Ahom Council (1996), and All Assam Ahom Association (2005), respectively. Currently, their demand is being spearheaded by the All Tai-Ahom Students Union (ATASU) which was formed in 1988.

5. Movements of Ahom in the Post-Independence period

Establishment	Name of the major ethnic associations	Major Demands
1893	Ahom Sabha or All Assam Ahom Association	Inclusion of the Ahom in the list of ST under the constitution of India on 21st May, 2005 to the then Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi.
1955	Tai Historical and Cutural Society of Assam	Demand for the grant of ST status to the Tai Ahoms
1963	Buddhist Society of Furalung Culture	To grant ST status to the Buddhist Ahoms and other Tai Ahoms.
1964	All Assam Tai Student's Union	To reorganize Assam, provide compulsory scholarship to Tai Ahom students, revive and improve Tai socio-culture, preserve historical monuments, etc.
1967	All Tai Ahom Organisations Co-ordination Committee	For a separate identity, inclusion in the sixth schedule and ST list.
1967	Ahom Tai Mongolian State Council	A separate autonomous unit of upper Assam Districts of Lakhimpur and Sivsagar.

1975	All Assam Furalung Council	Demand for ST status
1981	Tai Ahom Council	ST status along with the other groups such as Moran, Matak, Chutia, Konch Rajbongshi and the Tea tribes
1981	All Assam Tai Ahom Society	To protect, conserve and develop the language, culture and economy. To provide sixteen Bidhan Sabha Constituencies and two Lok Sabha Constituencies by including the Tai Ahom dominated areas of upper Assam.
1988	All Tai Ahom Students Union	Creation of separate provisions to protect and preserve social, economic and political aspects of the Tai Ahoms. Reservation of seats, in higher educational institutions, scholarships, construction of separate hostels, etc for Tai Ahom students. Later, the major demand ST status. With this objective they submitted a memorandum to Prime Minister V.P Singh on 12th September, 1989.

Source: Compiled from various ethnic literatures of the Tai-Ahom.

ATASU being the most pioneering student union has been relentlessly demanding the cause of the overall development of the Tai-Ahom. It is a non-registered and non-political organization that is locally termed as *"Sodou Asom Tai Ahom Chatra Santha"*. Besides the ATASU, other Ahom associations are engaged in various welfare activities. They provide financial assistance to economically disadvantaged students, farmers, etc. Constituted by the elite section of the community the association helps in shaping the narrative of the group, to structure the demand for attaining the desired Scheduled Tribe status. Ethnic associations thus act as productive sites within which to observe the relationships between state policy and subjectivity that constitute the dialectic of ethnicisation (Shneiderman, 2015, p. 133).

During the study, it was found that the major demand of this union in the contemporary time is the recognition of Scheduled Tribe status through democratic means. They consider that only such status can

save their distinctiveness as Tai-Ahom, and have been struggling for decades to meet their demand. Meetings are often held with the top bureaucratic and political leaders, both at the central and state level as stated by the leaders of the ATASU. Periodically, they have submitted memorandums, carried out strikes, called bandhs, burned effigies, organized the half-naked strike, held press meet, etc. Ethnic food festivals, workshops at the national and international levels, etc are some of the important events organised by the associations to mobilise and create awareness amongst the public to gain larger support for their struggle.

Being Indigenous in Assam: The Case of the Ahom

Central to the waves of mobilisation amongst the Ahom has been the issues of indigeneity. Among the hosts of factors, the crucial one is the developmental benefits that accrue to the Scheduled Tribe in the form of a developmental council, protection of land, etc. Drawing on indigeneity claims become one of the major tactics to press the demand for Scheduled Tribe status and self-determination to gain resources as approved by the state. Povinelli (2002) has argued that those who are classified under indigeneity must identify wholly with a particular cultural heritage 'to gain access to public sympathy and state resources' (p. 33). Ahom's case can be contextualised with the above argument by looking at the nature of their articulation since it provides a sense of belongingness. But, such a conventional idea of tribes in this region is quite problematic. The distinction between indigenous and non-indigenous people does not necessarily correspond to the distinction between tribal and non-tribal due to the assertion of the non-tribal Assamese of the Brahmaputra valley to be indigenous (Baruah, 1989, p. 2087).

They are closely interrelated concepts used by various actors in local, national, and international arenas. Although no community in India is officially declared indigenous, the central and state governments grant constitutional and political concessions to certain tribal communities in the northeast, recognising their claims to indigeneity (Srikanth, 2014, p. 41). This has empowered marginalised 'tribal people from asserting themselves as indigenous and claim rights on the basis of their identity (Karlsson, 2003, p. 403). Claims of indigeneity were premised also on the colonial policies of inclusion and exclusion.

By this, the articulation of indigeneity can be associated with the dichotomy of insider and outsider associated with the issue of immigration (Baruah, 2008, p. 16). Tribes in Assam are bestowed with certain legal rights over a land called tribal 'belts and blocs' a provision to prevent alienation of tribal lands.[vii] Initially, tribes of Northeast India were protected under the colonial spatial order termed 'excluded' and 'partially excluded areas'.[viii] It aimed at providing

autonomy to preserve the tribal society and culture from external aggression which is in correspondence with the rights affirmed in the international forum for the indigenous people. Therefore, attaining tribal status is related to the concerns for protecting land and other associated resources.

Indigeneity assertions by the Ahom have also taken cultural forms, demonstrated through various institutionalized means. For instance, the *Ban Ok Pup Lik Mioung Tai* (BOMPT) or Eastern Tai Literary Organization established in 1981 in the Dhemaji district has strived to preserve their racial existence through the medium of culture. It helped in producing textbooks, popular history books, and publications in the unique Tai-Ahom script for use in religious services (Terweil, 1996, p. 279). Tracing genealogy and retaining their original religious beliefs and customs are also significant aspects of the Ahom to make claims and assertions for the distinct ethnic group.

The practices of animism and primitivism are some of the important aspects to demonstrate their identity as a distinct and authentic tribe. Considering these aspects as the core of tribal trait, they often perform their rituals which involve offerings of animal and bird sacrifices, use of liquor, ancestor worship, etc to equate with the tribal practices. In this context, as observed in the field a death ritual was performed with traditional Ahom style where the priests used to recite prayers in the Tai language, and pork and duck meat was offered to the ancestors along with rice beer called *Lao/Rohi*. From such an instance, we can notice how the Ahom retained certain traditional rituals and customs in their everyday life. Such practices are a potent force in the preservation of distinct cultures in a plural society like Assam. In this context, I met a priest of the Tai-Ahom Padmadhar (name changed) who used to preside over the death rituals narrated:

> *Every ritual is performed by nature worship headed by three priestly classes called Mohan, Deodhai, and Bailing.[ix] In course of time, such a priestly class has vanished due to the conversion to Hinduism. Citing the example of the Missing tribe, the priest said that the rituals of the Ahom are also similar to theirs. Sacrifices of birds and animals are involved in offering prayers to the forefathers. The brewing of rice beer, the wearing of distinctive clothing, and the observance of a particular Ahom form of marriage called Chak-Long, in particular, are some of the specific customs and traditions performed at present.*

While making claims, negotiation with the state is often combined with the submission of memorandums to the state officials to express their grievances. In a memorandum submitted to the governor of Assam in

the year 2016, the ATASU has put forward various demands and major being the Scheduled Tribe status. The memorandum stated:

> *"Like successive governments, the present government to is not showing any positive sign to solve their problems and demand, instead it reflects the doing of politics with the issues". Therefore, the top priority of their struggle is to grant them the status of Scheduled Tribe within 2016 as mentioned in the memorandum. Other demands were to preserve the historical monuments of the Ahom and to curtail the decision to grant citizenship to the Hindu-Bengali.[x]*

They substituted their backwardness experienced due to the British conquest, further aggravated by the upper caste Hindus. Therefore, they shape their ethnic identity by resurrecting their historical genealogies and crafting their identity as indigenous (*Bhumiputra*) and tribal
(*Janajati*).

Intra and Inter-Group Dynamics: Role of State.

Granting Scheduled Tribe status to the Ahom continues to remain uncertain owing to the political will of successive governments. While the issue is supposed to be resolved by the principles laid down by the Constitution through the provisions of Articles 341 and 342, it has become a political tool used by different political parties for furthering their political agenda.[xi] Ahom's case is significant in response to the prevailing socio-political scenario in Assam. With strong opposition to the demand, the Assam Government as well as the Central Government has made promises on various occasions to grant them the status. The Assam government has repeatedly forwarded the case to the Centre, but the Registrar General of India (RGI) has rejected the proposal. Seemingly, the demand has the support of both the ruling government and opposition political parties.

Recently, a Bill was moved by the BJP-led government in the Lok Sabha regarding Scheduled Tribe status for six communities in Assam. The bill was passed to the Rajya Sabha. The announcement to grant Scheduled Tribe status to the six communities of Assam was made by the Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh in the Lok Sabha on 9th January 2019. The Union Tribal Affairs Minister Jual Oram also moved the Bill to further amend the constitution Scheduled Tribe order, 1950 to include certain communities in the Scheduled Tribe list in relation to Assam amidst great political strife over the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016. [xii] Earlier, the matter was also discussed in the parliamentary debate, and on several occasions. A recommendation was made on the basis of the report of Amar Rai Pradhani in 2004 to

include the groups in the list of Scheduled Tribe (Talukdar, 2007). In 2006 and 2008, the ministry of tribal affairs sought additional justification from the State Government of Assam regarding the proposal for the inclusion of six communities including the Ahom. The proposal was submitted by Sarbananda Sonowal, the then Member of Parliament (MP).[xiii] Another M.P. Rajen Gohain also made a similar proposal in the year 2010 by stating that the matter has been recommended by the Governor of Assam and the State Government.[xiv] In a recent development, the National Commission for Scheduled Tribe held a meeting on 7th January 2018, to discuss the proposal for granting Scheduled Tribe status to the six communities with the RGI. The Commission perused the office of the RGI and supported the proposal for the inclusion of communities in the lists of Scheduled Tribes of Assam. However, the issue has not been resolved to date and has accelerated ethnic mobilisation over the years. Thus, the government's response to the issue is structured by electoral gains without a real effort to manage the aspirations of ethnic groups.

On many occasions, various groups have been successful in attaining status and are enjoying the benefits of the state. Evidently, the Gaddi (pastoral group in North India) were successful in forcing the Indian state to reclassify them as Scheduled Tribe in 2002, thereby granting those specific entitlements and rights with regard to aid, education, and jobs (Kapila, 2008, p. 117). But frictional forces are visible in the case of Assam because of opposition from the existing tribal groups. They are vocal in stating that Ahom lacks the criteria for inclusion in the Scheduled Tribe list and are also advanced in education and economic aspects, with numerical strength. During a conversation with one of the tribal leaders Golap (name changed) mentioned the implication of granting Scheduled Tribe to the Konch-Rajbongshis of Assam and narrated:

> *When the Konch-Rajbongshi community was granted Scheduled Tribe status for six months in the year 1996 and they took away the majority share of the Scheduled Tribe quota in college admissions within a short span of time. Therefore, if more groups are included in the Scheduled Tribe list, the existing tribal groups will be further deprived of resources provided by the state. He also stated that the demand of the six communities lacked mass support but was politically motivated.*

Apprehension of losing their share of benefits and inability to compete with the advanced groups has led to protests against the demands. Protests and counter-protests have intensified strong reactions against the state's responses over the issue, often causing violent and non-violent clashes among groups. Usually, both sides call for economic blockades through bandhs and take to the streets as a part of the protest. Counter Arguments from both groups usually take place, each

alleging the other as politically engineered. Hence, it brings forth bases for self-perpetuation of group differences that have existed since the past.

Conclusion

Ahom's demand for Scheduled Tribe shows how the politics of identity in South Asia has acquired importance for rights and entitlements on the grounds of tribe and indigeneity in Assam. The Ahom associations and organizations, constituted by the ethnic elite provide the catalyst to further mobilise the people to claim distinctiveness. Pioneered by the ATASU, the struggle has been gaining considerable significance in the contemporary period. Opposition from the existing tribal communities and the failure of the governments to resolve the issue have ignited controversies over the issue of recognition. Given this political entanglement, aggravated by inter-ethnic tensions, the recognition struggle is fraught with new challenges within the changing political discourse. Considering the hosts of issues, it can be argued that the category of the tribe is at the crossroads of multiple ethnic cleavages saturated by the politics of cultural rights and affirmative policies in South Asia. In a diverse state like Assam, the case of the Ahom indicates that ethnic identity and its associated demands may proliferate further aggravating ethnic conflicts as long as resource distribution is continued on ethnic lines.

Notes:

[i] Scheduled Tribe enjoys different welfare measures enshrined in the constitution such as reservations in jobs, educational institutions, and political shares in the state Assemblies (Article 16(4), Article 46, and Article 335 of the Indian Constitution).

[ii] It is an umbrella organisation formed in 2012, which vehemently opposes the demand for Scheduled Tribe status by the Tai-Aom. The CCTOA includes all the existing Scheduled Tribe groups such as the Bodo, Missing, Deori, Sonowal, Rabha, etc.

[iii] The whole adult population, who were liable to render service to the State during the Ahom rule, was known as Paiks. The population was divided into Khels of 1000 to 5000 persons and those again were subdivided into gots or Rayats of three Paiks each. A got originally contained four or three Paiks and each got was obliged to be present, in rotation, for such work as might be required of him and during his absence from home, the other members were expected to cultivate his land and keep his family supplied with food. As a reward for his

services to the State, each Paik was allowed two pura (nearly three acres) of rice land free of rent. Thus the land in Assam during the Ahom rule was tenured by the Paik system which supplied regular services to the state. However, the British rulers abolished the land tenure system of the Ahoms, and lands were given away to those who were found in actual possession, the Paiks (Gait, 2008).

[iv] There shall be perpetual peace and friendship between the Honorable Company on the one part, and His Majesty the King of Ava on the other, (Article I). His Majesty of the King of Ava renounces all claims upon, and will abstain from all future interference with, the principality of Assam and its dependencies, and also with the contiguous petty States of Cachar and Jayantia. With regard to Munnipoor, it is stipulated, that should Ghumbheer Singh desire to return to that country, he shall be recognized by the King of Ava as Rajah thereof, (Article II). Agreement was also made to allow an exchange of diplomatic representatives between Ava and Calcutta. A sign of a commercial treaty between the two regions in due course was accomplished. www.assamtimes.org.

[v] The conflict between Ahom officials Badan Chandra Phukan and Purnananda Burhagohain due to internal political turmoil paved the way for Burmese to invade Assam. Unsatisfied with Badan Chandra Phukan under whom frequent unrest, caused by maomariya revolt emerged in the upper part of Assam, Purnananda Burhagohain, a general in the lower western part of Assam ordered the arrest of Badan Chandra Borphukan. Knowing this, he fled to Burma to seek the Burmese king Bagyidaw's help in conquering Assam. Thus it began the invasion of the Burmese king in Assam, after little resistance from the unprepared Ahom army, and started unprecedented atrocities and massacres of the Assamese people (Deka & Gogoi, 2021).

[vi] Assamese is a generic term that means a collective socio-political, cultural, and ethnic-linguistic community composed of different races of people assimilated with the locals till recent times. It is commonly understood as people speaking a vernacular language called 'Assamese' within the territory of the state called Assam., (Sengupta, 2006). This identity is challenged by the Ahom and demarcates them from the larger Assamese category. Taking it to the international level, the Ahom have associated their history with Thai history and culture and the Ahom leaders made their enterprise exotic and different from that of the Assamese. These newly found connections have provided the impetus to mix and match different strands of religion like Buddhism and newly minted Phra-lung rituals and to demand ST status, (Saikia, 2006).

[vii] Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, 1886 (Regulation I of 1886). http://legislative.assam.gov.in.

[viii] Excluded and Partially Excluded areas are directly administered by the Governor, and the elected Ministry have no jurisdiction over them. Introduced by the British administration it was applied in the Northeastern region of India for the purpose of ruling efficiently (Reid, 1944).

[ix] Mohan, Deodhai, and Bailung refer to the priests of the old Ahom religion who held a high position in the social structure as they performed every socio-religious activity.

[x] Memorandum Submitted by All Tai-Ahom Students Union in the year 2016, Central Committee, Assam.

[xi] Article 341 and 342 defines a scheduled caste or tribe as a community that has been notified as such by the president. For more details see Backward Classes Commission, Kaka Kalelkar, 1955, the Advisory Committee on Revision of SC/ST.

[xii] National Commission for Scheduled Tribes. Minutes of the 110th meeting held on (07.01.2019).

[xiii] Loksabha Debates: A Need to include six tribes of Assam into the list of Scheduled Tribes on 14 August, 2006 & 2008. Indiankanoon.org.

[xiv] Lok Sabha Debates: Need to recognize ahom community as Scheduled Tribes on 21 August, 2010. Title: Need to recognize Ahom community as Scheduled Tribes. Indiankanoon.org.

REFERENCES

Arora, V. (2007). Assertive identities, indigeneity, and the politics of recognition as a tribe: The Bhutias, the Lepchas and the Limbus of Sikkim. *Sociological bulletin*, *56*(2), 195-220.

Acharyya, N. N. (1957). *The history of mediaeval Assam,(AD 1228 to 1603)* (Doctoral dissertation, SOAS University of London).

Baruah, C. (2004, January). HINDUISATION OF THE AHOM COURT IN THE MEDIEVAL ASSAM. In *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* (Vol. 65, pp. 357-361). Indian History Congress.

Baruah, S. (2008). Territoriality, indigeneity and rights in the north-east India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 15-19.

Baruah, S. (1989). Minority policy in the Northeast: Achievements and dangers [Special Issue]. *Economic and Political Weekly, 24*(27), 2087-2091.

Baruah, S.L. (1993). *Last days of Ahom Monarchy: A history of Assam from 1769 to 1826.* Mushiram Manoharlal Publishers.

Barpujari, H.K. (1960). *Political History of Assam,* Government of Assam, Dispur.

Betellie, A. (1986). The concept of tribe with special reference to India. *European Journal of Sociology, 26*(2), 297-318.

Beteille, A. (1998). The idea of indigenous people. *Current Anthropology, 39*(2) 187-192.

Bhuyan, S.K. (1933). *Tungkhungia buranji or a history of Assam: 1681-1826 A.D. An old assamese chronicle of the tungkhungia dynasty of ahom sovereigns.* Oxford University Press.

Chhetri, N. (2016). "Restructuring the past, reimagining the future: Ethnic renewal process and claims for recognition as Scheduled Tribes in Darjeeling." *Asian Ethnicity* 1-18. doi:10.1080/14631369.2016.1198227.

Das, J.K. (2005). Assam: the post-colonial political developments. *The Indian Journal of Political Science, 66*(4), 873-900.

Das, M. (2015). *Janajatikaranar dabi aru janajatiya andulon.* Guwahati: Assam Book Trust.

Deka & Gogoi. (2021). The Treaty of Yandaboo and the Question of Self- Determination in Assam from the perspective of International Legal Regimes *Journal of Polity & Society 13*, (95-107).

Fraser, N. (1998). *Social justice in the age of identity politics: Redistribution, recognition, participation.* Retrieved from http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-126247

Gogoi, P. (1976). *Tai-Ahom religion and customs.* Publication Board, Assam: Giwahati.

Gohain, H. (1997). Ethnic unrest in the Northeast. *Economic and Political Weekly, 32*(8), 389-392.

Goswami, S. (2001). Ethnic conflict in Assam. *The Indian Journal of Political Science, 6*(1), 123-137.

Jenkins, L.D. (2003). *Identity and identification in India: Defining the disadvantage.* Routledge.

Kapila, K. (2008). The measure of a tribe: The cultural politics of constitutional reclassification in North India. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 14*(1), 117-134.

Karlsson, B.G. (2003). Anthropology and the 'indigenous slot': Claims to and debates about indigenous peoples' status in India. *Critique of Anthropology, 23*(4), 403-423.

Karlsson, B.G. (2010). Indigenous politics: Community formation and indigenous peoples' struggle for self-determination in northeast India. *Global Studies in Culture and Power.* Chicago.

Karlsson, B.G., & Subba, T.B. (Eds.) (2016). *Indigeneity in India.* Routledge.

Kikon, D. (2017). "Jackfruit seeds from Jharkhand: Being adivasi in Assam." *Contributions to Indian Sociology, 51*(3), 313–337. doi:10.1177%2F0069966717720575.

Lahon, T. (2001). *The ethnic identity of the Ahoms: A historical perspective,* In K.M. Deka & K.N. Phukan (Eds), Ethnicity in Assam. Centre for Northeast Studies : Dibrugrah University.

Middleton, T. (2013). Scheduling tribes: A view from inside India's ethnographic state. *Focaal Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology, 65*, 13-22.

Middleton, T & Shneiderman, S (2008). Reservations, federalism and the politics of recognition in Nepal. *Economic & Political Weekly.* 39-45.

Phukan, G. (2003). *Ethnicisation of politics in Northeast India.* South Asian Publishers: New Delhi.

Povinelli, E.A. (2002). *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism.* Duke University Press.

Rycroft, D.J & Dasgupta, S. (2011). *"Indigenous Past and the Politics of Belonging."* In the Politics of Belonging In India: Becoming Adivasi, edited by D.J, Rycroft, and S, Dasgupta. 2-13. London and New York: Routledge,

Saikia, Y. (2006). Religion, nostalgia and memory: Making and ancient and recent tai-ahom identity in Assam and Thailand. *The Journal of Asian Studies, 65*(1), 33-60.

Schendel, W. V. (Eds.). (2011). *"The dangers of Belonging: Tribes, indigenous peoples and homelands in South Asia."* In D.J., Rycroft and S. Dasgupta. (Eds), The politics of belonging in India: Becoming adivasi (pp. 19-43). London: Routledge,

Sharma, D.K. (2011). Religious transformations of the Ahom rulers in the crossroad of making a unified society. *Indian History Congress, 71,* 243-247.

Shah, A. (2007). The dark side of indigeneity? Indigenous people, rights and development in India, *History Compass* 5/6, 1806–1832, Blackwell Publishers.

Shneiderman, S. (2015). *Rituals of ethnicity: Thangmi identities between Nepal and India.* University of Pensilvania Press.

Srikanth, H. (2014). Who in Northeast India are indigenous? *Economic and Political Weekly, 49*(20), 41-45.

Talukdar, S. (2007, December 21). Tribal turmoil. *Frontline: India's National Magazine.*

Terwiel, B.J. (1996). Recreating the past: Revivalism in Northeast India. KITLV, *Brill, 152*(2), 275-292.

Terwiel, B.J. (1981). *The Tai of Assam and ancient Tai ritual: sacrifices and time reckoning*, Volume-II. Centre for South East Asian Studies. The South East Asian Review Office: Gaya, Bihar.

Xaxa, V. (2008). *State, Society, and Tribes: Issues in Post-Colonial India.* Pearson: Longman.

Hare Krishna Doley *is a PhD Research Scholar School of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Mandi, Himachal Pradesh*

Email id: d19069@students.iitmandi.ac.in

Linguistic Nations and Indian Nationalism: An Exposition of Divergence

---Abhishek Juneja

Abstract

This article attempts to understand two structurally complex and ever-evolving human inventions, linguistic nations and nationalism. It then hopes to understand the role language plays in constituting a social and political consciousness in humans, before it proceeds to explore the trajectories that linguistic and non-linguistic nationalisms have undertaken in our South Asian milieu. It is imperative that any sincere work of research lays out at the outset the impossibility of using the terms Nation, State, Nation-State and country interchangeably.

Keywords: Nation, Indian Nationalism, Federalism, Language.

Introduction

This paper is drawn from the author's doctoral thesis on Nation, Caste and Federalism. A clear framework of post-colonial nationalism, meaning how India developed its national character - clearly adversarial towards the British colonialists in its imagination, yet borrowing the idea of 'nation' and 'nationhood' largely from the same group of people – is pivotal to any discourse on post-independence politics. Indian nationalism contained two broad strands, first a process to engender a feeling of national unity, and second, to direct this force against the imperialists. But the bigger question remained - how does make a nation out of a manifestly different set of peoples? Ambedkar had said that the most basic feature of caste was that it disallowed a sense of fraternity and a feeling of nationhood (Ambedkar,1979, 50). Many years later, sociologist D.L. Sheth (1989) spoke about India being a special case of state-nation, as opposed to the western idea of nation-state. He meant it was the state, the centralized political structure emerging from the constitution which had endeavoured to create a nation through its many institutions, policies and other devices. Althusser (1971) termed many such devices as apparatuses, in which he included the armed forces, police, bureaucracy, courts etc.

This paper attempts to understand two structurally complex and ever-evolving human inventions, linguistic nations and nationalism. It then hopes to understand the role language plays in constituting a social and political consciousness in humans before it proceeds to explore the trajectories that linguistic and non-linguistic nationalisms have undertaken in our South Asian milieu. There are four discernible inadequacies in the narratives laid down by historians and political scientists in their analysis on Indian nationalism.

The first is their consistent obfuscation of perhaps the most deeply entrenched and inhumane social system of South Asia, the caste system. Various phenomena outlining social differences, inequalities and marginalization are analysed discursively at great length, with a view to present the socio-political landscape, but with little cognizance of the caste system. The second is perhaps a more unconscious rendering of some of the oldest abiding languages into manifestly inferior categories of vernacular and regional. The obvious and dangerous fallout of this exercise is that it elevates Sanskrit (and to a small extent, Persian) not only to the position of a master language, but also de-historicizes the complex ways through which languages shaped identities and a sense of fraternity in pre-colonial India. Thirdly, in limiting the role of caste and language as mentioned in the points above, the scholars over-determine the role of religion which in turn obstructs any reasonable historical examination in two ways – one, they liken vastly dissimilar faith practices of disparate groups and integrate them within an abstract umbrella of Hinduism, and two, in making this European contraption of religion the master signifier of South Asian identity, they unironically allow many more Eurocentric categories a safe passage to South Asian pasts. The final limitation of those narratives is that in conceptualizing the modern Indian state as anti-imperial in its source and design, it overstates this largely locally concentrated, insular set of forces aimed at their materially immediacy as something far greater than the sum of its parts.

A large corpus of literature begins from the point that Hinduism has existed for anywhere between 3500 and 2000 years. Irrespective of the claims that it has evolved like other religions due to cultural influences that resulted from migrations, alongside other transformations that reflected the changing political economy, this standpoint sees Hinduism in its continuity, however incidental it may have been. This continuity weaves into its narrative the hierarchical arrangements of classes called the Varna system, and it contends that the caste system is a degenerate present-day manifestation of the same varna system. Orientalism - the narrative based on the purported ontological difference between the geographical west and east – and the theorizations following this eponymous work by Edward said (1978), form the centrepiece of postcolonial theory today alongside the use of Gramsci's re-interpretive Marxism.

The relationship between religion and caste has been discussed in both orientalist and postcolonial scholarship at great length. A structural limitation with the idea of decoloniality in general and postcolonial and postmodern literature in particular is that the broad contours of all critiques of knowledge produced from colonial interactions are essentially circumscribed within the categories produced by the same colonial administrators, ethnographers and scholars. For example, the ways in which the ontological and epistemological categories of

religion and ethnicity have come to absorb pre-existing categories of faith, communication, and co-existence - however diffused, loosely coded and non-formalized. The postmodern turn in the social sciences also meant that the gendered nature of certain words, or their racist etymology got far more attention than the structural questions on the use of certain languages in homogenizing patently non-identical ethnic groups, such as Hindi in Northern and Eastern India, and Urdu in Pakistan and in pre-1971 East Bengal. There has been a steady insistence that language in political terms be understood as a vehicle of ideas or an instrument to establish a set of desirable values. Yet, despite historical factors like caste inhibiting access to literature, and a poor record of literacy programmes until very recently, scholars have afforded textual literature an unquestionable pre-eminence in their analyses of linguistic politics.

Linguism and Beyond

Language politics today is predominantly understood in terms of how a language community (which is a set of people sharing their first language), often in a numerical minority, negotiates with power that lies in the hands of the language community that is in a numerical majority. Linguists, unlike laymen, understand mutual intelligibility not in absolute terms but in terms of degrees of symmetry, ranging from completely mutually intelligible to asymmetric intelligibility. Multiple factors affect this complex matrix of similitude – shared geographies or a history of spatial proximity, substantial flow of in and out migration for matters such as trade, political factors such as dictates of imperial or bureaucratic powers, religious compulsions originating in centres of authority, and lastly ecological factors necessitating a whole array of biological and social adaptations. Sociolinguists employ the metric of 'prestige' to understand the ascription of positive and negative values to certain languages, which often results in creating a gradient between the said languages. While all languages can be learned with training, often language shift and language attrition have occurred in history due to a multitude of factors mentioned above.

Occasionally, this has led to glottophagy, or language death. From a linguist's perspectives, it may suffice to discuss the disappearance, attrition, or acculturation of a language (and its speakers) in normative terms, but for populations in the range of hundreds of thousands to millions, as is the case in India, the state-engineered disenfranchisement that has occurred since 1947 must be studied both in policy-terms and from the lens of an internal imperialism. It is usually the concerns of people lying at the geographical margins of India that are foregrounded during discussions on ethno-nationalism, regionalism or secessionism. In truth, it is the heartland of the Indian state that pays the largest price for the language policies and extra-

legal conventions that have been institutionalized in the past seven and a half decades.

The logical corollary of the Marxian adage that all value is socially produced (Marx 1957), is that all knowledge, too, is socially produced, and socially distributed, one may add. The evolution of humans as a thinking species capable of recursion, is predicated on their ability to translate thoughts into actions using speech, text, other symbolic gestures along with a whole gamut of expressions now broadly termed art. The term culture is often used with abandon without clear regard to the fact that it is language and its collectivized repository of knowledge schemas that produce and reproduce inter-generational tools for survival and growth. The reduction of language and language-relations to the realm of superstructure, in Marxian terms, is unreasonable. In pre-modern economies, language was perhaps the only way to create a collective memory – memory of land use, of water, of natural resources and their productive use – by one generation to its succeeding one. In modern economies, language leads to education, which leads to skills and jobs. The death of a language kills also the productive potential of those who communicate in that language. The ascriptive hierarchy that is put around languages, placing scripts and textual forms above oral traditions ensures language is always understood as a store of ideas alone, and not of material. Postmodernism's textual over-determinism, reflected has resulted in the de-materialization of language, rendering it ineffectual for anything beyond ideas and concepts.

Scholars of political science today give little importance to language beyond the symbolism associated with elections, use of rhetoric in speech and the use of popular class signifiers. Political linguists too are largely concerned with the nature of language-use in propaganda and policy strategizing. The political implications of language use become more pronounced and visible in the case of colonialism and the exercise of authority in a non-native language. But if politics were to be understood in its more quotidian form, one bereft of excesses, it would be true that the most harmless of utterances manifest uniquely in how they relate with the instrumentalization of power. Our own understanding of how we use language may be abstract, but it is far less instinctual and intuitive than we imagine. Whether it is church's use of Latin by the holy roman empire, the church and the scholars in the late medieval period in Europe, or the exclusionist use of Sanskrit by Agraharas, ancient schools denied to non-brahmins, the use of language as a political tool of social differentiation has many dimensions.

This article's primary focus is on language's historical role in the creation of a community, essentially a speech-community, which has marked a significant phase with the rise of nations. An equally

significant reflection would see the relationship that nation, principally a language community, shares with the modern states, more specifically the Indian union. It is also worth deconstructing whether in India's case, the language communities organically fused to create a politically sovereign structure, both in the past and present, or whether the state with its modern institutions and machinations is working to precipitate a certain kind of language community. Nation, a modern formalization of a political community, and language, an ancient formalization of audio-textual codes, connect on various levels much before they become central to the study of states and their policies. Furthermore, they share an equivocal relationship with socio-economic classes, in how they co-constitute and reproduce each other. The complex levels of technological advancements, a hallmark of modernity, are often attributed to the Renaissance, Scientific Revolution and Industrial Revolution periods in Europe. But in the absence of a commensurate advancement in the linguistic abilities of human beings, it would have been impossible to translate advanced thoughts into action. One can certainly argue that language and material advancement share a dialectical relationship, and to lay causality to any one of those would be logically unsound.

Language allows for both a vertical integration of classes and other social groups as well as a horizontal integration between members of the same region, tribe, clan etc. If democracy is the central virtue around which modern societies must organize themselves, language alone provides a community the recourse to collectively construct, manoeuvre and evolve. Moreover, language defies any possible comparison between different speech community, something other identities like religion, caste, and race are often criticized for. Rupert Emerson contends, "leaving aside the fascinating if unanswerable query as to the extent to which each particular language both mirrors and fashions unique patterns of thought and thus reflects and moulds a distinctive national soul it is evident that language is the primary instrument of social communication" (Emerson, 1970, 133).

Nation and Nationalism – An Uneasy Association in History

Man constantly juggles with his two identities, one of selfhood and markedly individuated, the other social, defined in terms of how he situates his selfhood within a societal arrangement, whether family, clan, caste or tribe. This journey between two identities is a constant feature of his negotiations with different forms of power. As one charts the course of evolution from hunter-gatherer to pastoral to agricultural and industrial, the sense of identification, both distinct and situated, possibly evolves too, but not in a linear or deterministic way. Nation and nationalism, the two phenomena, share a relationship in which the arrow of causality is suspect, and in which spatial and temporal coordinates determine the extent to which the two may be realized.

Nations, in the absence of state power find it difficult to justify their legitimacy. Nations backed by ascendant markers of power - such as 16th century Protestantism, liberal constitutional democracy, and print capitalism backed by new modes of production – and assisted by secularization and humanization of the civic sphere; find it easy to their claim nationhood. Such claims lead to capture of state power (and formation of nation-states), in cases where the nation community forms the numerical majority. In case of numerical inferiority, they are condemned to negotiate for concessions from the dominant territorial nation. Despite being always conceived in terms of modernity, nationalism is contingent on a past that must be historically put together to both constitute the present and push towards a future. And because nation, unlike any other form of identity, is erected on a sense of territoriality, the past-present dynamic often requires sudden and violent ruptures in the form of militant expansionism, as seen in the case of fascism. There seems to be no contradiction in this universal reproduction of the ideology of nationalism and its philosophical poverty, as Anderson (1983) has pointed out.

Historians who place the genesis of nation-states to the peace of Westphalia of 1648 tend to trace the subsequent evolution in the liberal revolutions, starting from the glorious revolution in 1688 to the American Revolution in 1776 and ending in the French revolution of 1789. A glaring oversight - partly due to eurocentrism of this model and partly due to the unfailing tendency of the colonial gaze to hegemonize all discourses on modernity – leaves out the similar political developments in the American colonies after 1492 and the Haitian revolution of 1804. Since these developments were aimed at the imperial powers and did not grow out from the diffusion of imperial Europe's ideas of modernity, post-colonial scholarship, too, tends to view it with scepticism. The relation between colonialism and nationalism is, thus, seen to be attached by the umbilical cord of modernity – experienced first-hand by the core, i.e., Western Europe and United States of America, and second-hand or in a received sense by the peripheral world largely comprising the colonies. French revolution, the unification of Germany and Italy are the three most prominent examples of linguistically homogenous groups coming together to form a state. But for neighbouring regions, the process of nation-building played out rather dismally. The events leading up to, and those transpiring in the interwar years and after the Second World War, threw up discomforting truths about the perceived European progressiveness.

The role of mass literacy programmes, whether initiated voluntarily by organized groups or in most cases, resulting from legal interventions played a big part in engendering a sense of nationalism. Educational reforms, that extended the fruits of modern science and technology and legal uniformity that saw all people as one, followed from this new

spirit of literacy. The progression from a civic sphere to a political sphere rode on mass education and was guided by this beacon of equality. Print capitalism is said to have been central to two key mutually reinforcing processes in early modern history of Europe – first, in producing a linguistic cohesion, a sense of self or identity-formation and second, in nation building or in bringing the nation into social action. In the case of India, the 19th century saw minimal expansion in literacy rates, or in the production of newspapers or journals outside Bengal. While the European stages of nation-building may not have completely bypassed India, it certainly produced little awakening among peasants, artisans and other working masses. On the opposite end of the imperial spectrum, the plunder resulting from the growth in transportation and communication technology and the modes and strategies of warcraft, had accelerated the pace of depletion, both of resources and autonomy.

In Henri Lefebvre's (1974) seminal text, the production of space, he argues that capitalism and its most dominant political instrument, the state, had a compelling tendency to produce space – a territory necessary to exploit the physical and human resource and extract value from. Building on the argument one may extrapolate that the construction of such a space through administrative and cultural means often requires and is greatly aided by a certain kind of chauvinistic historiography. The political construction of India in a territorial sense ran parallel to the production of Hinduism in response to the missionary ideals of Christianity. It found in this land's past, a veritable 'other' in Buddhism, from which it possible sundered in antiquity. While the role of capitalism in the production of the India in its territoriality may be limited by the British empire's ambivalence and the dual nature of its economic policies, the sutures that the new Indian elite, aspiring to be a new bourgeoisie, sought in tying south Asia's semi-feudal economy with East India company's extractive model looked imminently possible in this new design.

Sanskrit - Imagining India and Hinduism

By according Sanskrit pre-eminence in lingual matters and Sanskritic texts a privileged status, Hinduism and India both achieved a metaphysical domain that remained largely uncontested until very recently. The designs of present-day Hindu rashtra and the irredentist claims for akhand bharat betray the anxieties of what Lefebvre termed as the simultaneous generation of infra and supra spaces, which is both short of and beyond what the present crisis of space presents. One of the problems of post-colonial literature that has emerged after Edward Said's orientalism is that it often accords too much agency to the colonizer and too little to the colonized subjects, picturing them as passive recipient of the changing power relations. Historically, it has been impossible for any external power, before or during the age of

colonialism, to erect a completely novel and unique line of hierarchy. In most cases, the existing hierarchies are appropriated, and the incumbent ruling class co-opted into the new framework.

The colonial framework that formalized Sanskrit literature into modern, legal codes was often basing itself on a comparative study between 'Hindu' texts and the Bible. William Jones, in founding the Asiatik society, was looking for relevant indigenous knowledge to help him in the dispensation of his duties as a Supreme Court judge (King, 2013, 102). As King points out, Dharmasastras formed the foundational text for jones, allowing Brahmin priests both a window of opportunity in judicial matters and elevating their status among the white elite (King, 2013, 102). Through their control over knowledge, in Frykenberg's words, the Brahmins were allowed an unprecedented, all-India level consciousness and opportunity to imagine a past, present and future, hitherto unknown to them (Bayly, 1989, 162). Both, in recent works on computational linguistics, and in some populist media spaces, a hypothesis has been pushed that presents Sanskrit as the most grammatically and syntactically sound language. This claim may not possibly be verified sociologically, but a historical sense informs us that a language's purity and unadulterated nature points towards its insularity and parochialism.

Historically, Sanskrit in India has been a means of communication, but additionally a tool for community-building and community-preservation among the Brahmins. Sanskrit language almost exclusively codifies the communal interests of Brahmins across geographically stratified regions in the subcontinent. Additionally, it may be argued that it is Sanskrit that allowed a sense of nationhood to flourish among Brahmins in the 18th and 19th centuries. The pertinent question is this: if Sanskrit was a language spoken by a small minority of population, the brahmins (three percent according to the recent census (2011), which translates to a proportional figure in the past unless one argues that the said caste has multiplied at a far slower rate than the rest of the castes), and if the imaginary of a glorious ancient past as embodied in the ritualistic and non-ritualistic literature (right from the Vedas to the most recent Upanishads and Shastras) existed in textual and oral traditions which were patently unavailable to the rest of the population, how does the construction of India as a nation then represent the will of the entire demography of this land?

Pollock's (2011) insistence that Sanskrit be seen in its entirety, composed of ritualistic and non-ritualistic roles, is based on the language's flight to South East Asian regions, present-day Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia, and in influencing native vernaculars and cultures beyond the Indian imaginary, colonial or indigenous. Indeed, this cross-cutting nature of Sanskrit language and its wide outreach are pertinent, but the resulting genealogy is often fraught with dangerous

approximations, not very different from those around the word 'Hindu' following its first documented use in sixth century B.C. by Darius of Persia (Pollock, 2011). In Fitzgerald's pronouncement of the 'religion' category as empty and theologically overloaded, he inadvertently addresses the concerns of many anti-caste historians who feel undermined by the constant metaphysical invocations in matters that represent largely ontological and epistemological concerns of the marginalized (Pennington, 2005, 179).

W.C. Smith's crucial reminder on the spatial-temporal limitation of the category 'religion' is instructive, but it has a history of generating two contradictory responses – the first that boasts of an ethos of multiculturalism and syncretism in the social thread, painting it as essentially 'Indian' in all of its spiritual and metaphysical sense, the second which relegates South Asian faith systems to the domain of parochial, disputing its self-awareness (Pennington, 2005, 180). Ironically, critiques attacking the essentialized representation of Hinduism only end up in helping with the legitimization and re-constitution and the ideology.

The traditionally ruling classes - whose relationship with the colonial governing authorities and intellectuals can be understood to be a dual one – an unmistakable subordination in procedural matters pertaining to administration, yet pivotal to the exercises in knowledge compilation – have consistently shown two tendencies. The first has been of inserting Sanskrit in south Indian languages, many of those today deemed as classical, namely Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, Telugu, Marathi and Odia. The second has been an underhand, yet ubiquitous backdating of Sanskrit texts, pushing them closer to antiquity. As Aloysius (2010) has noted, the colonial construction of India required the historicization of what largely mythical – the glorious Vedic past with no slavery, with claims on scientific achievements and advancements in philosophy. The present-day ruling class's irredentist ambitions of Akhand Bharat demand a historical project that needs to weave in everything from Indus Valley civilization to the Tamil Sangam epoch. Therefore, the demands of self-determination from Kashmir, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and the North Eastern States are condemned to measure up to such ambitions.

Hindi – Indian nationalism in practice

Formulating a national language was not entirely the handiwork of the local elite. The ignominious dismissal of the natives for their ability to engender fraternal ties and develop a sense of national identity, as seen in Seeley (1883) and Strachey (1894), produced a curious response among the founders of congress party. While some agreed that people intrinsically lacked a sense of oneness in past and present, others reacted to such affront with myths of a golden antiquity. The cloak of

reforms had in it, a latent spirit of revivalism. For the Muslim elite it meant an invocation of their medieval glory, for the Brahmin and other Forward caste elites, it meant aggrandizement of the Vedic past and an opportunity to imagine a religion on Semitic lines – one with a single text and a common god. Hindi's formulation greatly coincided with the birth of a de-Sanskritized and hyper-Arabized language of the Muslim elite sections called Urdu. While Hindi to its detractors was manufactured in the laboratory of J.B. Gilchrist towards the end of 18th century, for the rest it worked as a repository of the nationalist pursuits of a new aspirational class employed in British bureaucracy in large numbers, comprising mostly Brahmins (Kidwai, 1972). Thus, the communalization of the Indian freedom movement was foreshadowed with this antagonistic development in the cultural sphere, a good seven decades earlier.

In the aftermath of 1947, Hindi has come to occupy a similar position in the 'national' imagination, but it shares a far more complex relationship for at least two reasons. One, it enjoys constitutional recognition in its role as a lingua franca, thus its use-value and spread and determined by policies of the state. Two, its recent origins and the uneasy relationship it bears with many languages of Northern and Eastern India (most of which have been relegated to the uncertainties of regional, vernacular, dialects) means that the processes of appropriation it undertakes are often laden with possibilities of cultural, communal and political marginalization. In structuring Hindi as an *ausbau* language, one risks forsaking the autonomy of other languages in its dialect continuum. *Dachsprache*, or roofing language (Ammon and Klaus, 1987) perhaps better describes Hindi's relation with the rest. There is a good degree of irony in how Hindi today acts as a register of Hindustani language in its de-arabized, hyper sanskritized form. This is because Hindustani itself is looked at by many linguists to be one of more enduring successors of Apabhramsa Prakrit, literally meaning a polluted language, etymologically linked to Sanskrit by way of its comparative inferiority.

The internal frictions within the Sanskrit-Hindi umbrella of languages spoken largely in northern India are neither exceptional not without parallel. Standard Chinese, or standard Northern Mandarin, poses similar problems to speakers of numerically smaller variations. But there are two fundamental differences between the case of Hindi and standard Chinese. One, unlike Chinese, Hindi's rise was a result of the communal politics of the late 19th and early 20th century where ruling caste elites, both Hindu and Muslim, aspired to sanitize existing vernaculars of what they deemed as 'foreign'. Two, contestations for the political space of Hindi comes from both within its dialectal continuum and outside. In understanding how Hindi has decapitated the communicative and productive potential of languages deemed today as its dialects – Haryanvi, Awadhi, Braj, Bundeli, Chhattisgarhi,

Rajasthani, Maithili, Magahi/Magadhi, Garhwali, Kumauni, among others - it is important not just to focus on the constitutional or legal status these languages enjoy but at the shrinking public sphere these languages are able to command and make use of. While the aforementioned languages have helped Hindi legitimize its pre-eminence in a very wide geography thus making it the single-largest spoken language in India, they themselves have only suffered a gradual decline, which today resembles a virtual museumization. Paul brass (1974) has shown how Hindi over the past century has hegemonized all public discourses happening in non-elite, non-English spaces, giving off the impression that it is the language of masses, whereas the truth is that speakers of Maithili, Punjabi, and Urdu – considered among those for whom Hindi is most intelligible among Indian languages – have found their agency compromised.

Non-Hindi nations inside India

South Asia's trouble in defining nationhood in concrete, non-orientalist ideas can be witnessed in the congress party's shift in stance after independence, where two decades after creating 21 provincial congress committees on linguistic basis and going to the extent of passing resolutions for creating four linguistic provinces – Andhra, Karnataka, Sindh and Utkal – it reneged on these principles both in constituent assembly debates and legislative and executive policies post-1947 (Karat, 1973,22). Over a year before submitting the final draft of the Indian constitution, a linguistic provinces commission formed to adjudicate on the matter of provincial reorganization under independent India had concluded its report using the deterministic logic that conceding statehood to any language would allow minority dialects of that language to demand statehood in the future. In its view, this would trigger a chain of never-ending sub-nationhood within each province, hurting the integrity of the union in effect.

There have been interesting developments in the last few decades, some in the form of state policy, and a few initiated by officially unaffiliated cultural organizations. One, since the three-language formula was adopted in 1967, while most schools south of Vidhya's have offered Hindi as a third language, the northern states have largely chosen to teach as the third language Sanskrit, and in many cases languages such as French and Spanish. Two, there has been a marked increase in the number of central and state universities offering Sanskrit courses. This is despite successive decadal census figures (2011) not showing any substantial increase in the number of speakers returning Sanskrit as their first, second and third languages. Three, the question of English (which is beyond the scope of this article) has split opinion even within the ranks of subaltern mass leaders and intellectuals. While many including Kancha Ilaiah shepherd (2021) have spoken on the subaltern's need to embrace English for its

employability potential, mass leaders such as Mulayam Singh Yadav have opposed English for its history of subordination (Amita Verma, 2013).

Despite inheriting a vicious communal legacy of partition, the first twenty years of free India saw mass violence not on the question of religion but language. The madras state, before and after the state reorganization, saw thousands arrested and hundreds dead, before finally culminating in the creation of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and a tectonic shift in sub-continental politics. It requires explicit spelling out that the D.M.K movement, and before it the Dravida Nadu and the justice party movements were anti-Brahmanical and anti-Hindi imposition at the same time, and there was no inconsistency or incongruence in the two assertions. Soon after 1947, Ambedkar is known to have advised H.S. Bajwa and other members of the Akali dal to re-formulate the demand for Punjab Suba, making it a Punjabi-speaking state in place of the Sikh state (Grewal and Banga, 1997, 252).

Post-independence, the rationale developed by the 1956 state reorganization commission has largely formed the centrefold of the union's policy-response to this complex question of linguistic and ethnic autonomy. Despite various other commissions that came before and after 1956, the union has met most new demands with suspicion, and the legislative response has hinged mostly on strategic and electoral expediency. This can be seen with a near-uniform repetition of a template response wherein the same sections of the governing classes – whether political parties, pressure groups, unions or sections of bureaucracy – that were principally against the formation of new states such as Jharkhand, Uttarakhand and Telangana are now not only devout advocates for these states' existence but also in positions of power inside them. As a holding-together federation, the role of the Indian union in the past seven and a half decades has been of three kinds. First, it has de-radicalized many rebellious demands and co-opted the milder sections from the dissenting groups. Second, it has clubbed together a wide spectrum of visibly substantive demands into narrow, pliable claims. Third, through bureaucratic and procedural channels it has delayed its policy action, and this has often resulted in blunting the immediacy of the matter.

It is important to draw a distinction between two different kinds of assertions for autonomy, the first being a territorial one on the broad question of cultural distinctiveness, i.e., ethnic-nationalist, and linguistic-nationalist movements, and other termed as identity politics which brings into equation wholly different variables of caste and religion. Even though this line of distinction blurs in case of Kashmiri nationalism and Punjabi nationalism that can easily be conflated as Islamic and Sikh nationalisms respectively, it is crucial to view Tamil,

Telugu, Kannada, Naga, Mizo and other such nationalisms in their historical wholeness. One must also question why the category of ethnicity and ethno-nationalism has been used almost exclusively for the north-eastern states of India. The same linguistic diversities cutting across tribal lines exist in the mainland too, with a belt from West Bengal to Kerala, conspicuously called the red corridor, running across the mainland.

While many reasonable demands for statehood have been attributed to and are said to have been accentuated by a democratic deficit, for instance with the use of armed forces special powers act in the north east, or due to lack of infrastructural development which is true for most regions in India inhabited by tribal communities, the truth remains that these two shortcomings fall within the governance paradigm.

It is amply clear that conceptualizing a region in South Asia is impossible as long as it is not backed by a firm linguistic base. The oft overlooked and vilified demands of Gorkhaland in West Bengal and Bodos in Assam are also founded on the subversion of Gorkhali by Bangla and Bodo by Assamese respectively. One of the reasons why similar demands inside Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have not sustained beyond intermittent electoral rhetoric is because their linguistic base is ambiguous. More interesting developments have seen, on the one hand, mobilizations in Karnataka over the right to have a state flag, thus agonizing the union, and on the other hand, shrill noises being made over autonomy and statehood demands within Karnataka, for instance in the Kodagu region over Kodava language. There are two ironies here – one, Karnataka was formed as a linguistic state by including Kannada speaking regions into Mysore; two, the support for Kodava is largely from the same right-wing forces within and outside Karnataka that are principally opposed to Karnataka's demand for state flag.

Within the limited space made available to language politics in India, a large share is occupied by a facile anti-English surge that periodically works as a disruption to more meaningful demands of the linguistically marginalized people. This allows for policymakers to deflect matters of internal hegemony and subjugation, and ostensibly focus on resisting the external, neo-imperial hegemony of English. Indian union's broad reaction to such matters has also been shaped by similar events that have unfolded in South Asia. The case of Bangladesh is a glaring evidence of language trumping over other orders of identity and representation – religion, geography and ethnicity - in shaping a distinct but abiding sense of sovereignty. In Myanmar, the Rohingyas, the ethnic minority in Rakhine state faced a similar iron-fisted response from the military junta government. In Pakistan, the calls for autonomy in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have elicited a similarly

heavy-handed military response. The split of Soviet Union in 1991 and intra-soviet tensions in the preceding seven decades have been ascribed by advocates of liberal democracy to communism's inherent authoritarianism, and by the leftists to influence of big capital's perverse pulls. The oft-overlooked aspect to this disintegration has been the underlying friction of different linguistic identities coalescing into nationalities asserting for self-respect and self-determination. This is evident in how none of the fourteen post-soviet states outside Russia, except Belarus, have chosen Russian as their official language, Ukraine being the other exception with its widespread use of Russian. Stalin's coercive policy against ethnic nationalisms within Union of Soviet Socialist Republics despite his reservations about Marr's theory, one may add, was not in line with Lenin's aversion to state's use of a single compulsory official language (Stalin, 1894, 19).

Aside from the unrelenting political turmoil in the Balkans through the decades on 1990s and 2000s, the west's association with the problems of ethnic or linguistic nationalism appears to have given way to a new set of discourses and consternations around the question of sovereignty. This shift in concern could be felt in India in the last three decades that were marked by the triadic expansion of the economic policies of liberalization, privatization and globalization. The negative fallout of being a state-nation, or a state aspiring to create a nation, is that for the Indian union, matters of international importance - defence, strategic neutrality, building up of soft power and use of diplomacy for clout – tend to take precedence over matters of internal autonomy. Being surrounded by Myanmar and China, the legitimate concerns of Manipuri, Naga and Bodo peoples are often weighed against the union's bilateral ties in its neighbourhood. Likewise, the cause of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka was constantly made subservient to justify India's purported neutrality in issues that concern internal sovereignty.

Conclusion

In this article two related subjects have been examined and argued for - the first, of analysing the role played by Sanskrit and Hindi in sedimenting the Indian identity during the colonial and post-independence periods respectively, and the second, of reviewing the nature and working of nationalism over the past three centuries in South Asia and rest of the world. In questioning the use of the category 'religion' in delineating civic concerns in general and Hinduism in India's case in particular, a case for paying greater attention to caste has been made. Two polemics greatly complicate the concept of linguistic nations. The first is of bilingualism or multilingualism that argues for people's innate ability to communicate in more languages than one and hence become a probable participant in multiple nations. The second is vernacularisation and the possibilities of translation that allow a multiplicity of speech communities to interact meaningfully.

Both these arguments miss one crucial point. A language is essentially carried forward by speakers who exclusively speak that language, not the ones who are well-versed in multiple languages. To those for whom a particular language is the only means to communicate, both for reciprocity of ideas and matter, is in truth the custodian of that language. To everyone else, that language is expendable, replaceable, or an ancillary mode of communication. It is precisely this reason why many languages have become extinct in the last century – due to the demise of the community that exclusively spoke them.

To conclude, one of Ambedkar's central arguments needs a brief revisiting. In positing that castes were innately incapable of producing a fraternal sense, or a sense of nationhood, he only goes half the distance in laying bare the essential character of castes as restrictive, inward-looking social systems. A more radically inventive inference would have been that not only was each caste like a nation-unto-itself, each caste was also ontologically far closer to being a religion in-itself. Scholars who vouch for other ascriptive identities such as religion, caste or race to be prioritized over language in imagining a community for political ends overlook a crucial aspect. No sense of fraternity can be espoused, established or transmitted within or across space and time in the absence of a language that organically develops from patterns of material exchanges and intersubjectivities arising from symbiotic co-existence. Political scientists who commend civic nationalism over ethnic nationalism on the grounds that the former is inclusive and more accommodative of diversity while the latter promotes localism miss how history has shaped different parts of the world differently. Civic nationalism is an outcome of this fundamental sine qua non of free market capitalism. Contemporary events such as Brexit, the 2016 United States of America elections, and the general right-ward shift in large parts of Europe most notably in France and Netherlands, show the unease resulting from multiculturalism.

It is evident that constitutional and other extra-legislative changes, whether executed from the apex of the political ecosystem or emerging from below, aimed towards the deepening of democracy often both appear and function as a threat to regional aspirations. Ambedkar's unique way of articulating the relevance of nationalism was encapsulated in the phrase 'consciousness of kind' (Ambedkar,1979, 50), which he saw as carrying the potential to create both a fraternal, positive internal identity and the key to distinguish one's own kind from the other. This required a positive sense of memory, which Indians thoroughly lacked due to caste, and an ability to forget and wilfully push into oblivion the minor differences.

References

Aloysius, G. (1998). *Nationalism without a Nation in India*. Oxford University Press.

Althusser, Louis. (1971). "*Ideology and ideological state apparatuses*", Lenin and Philosophy and other essays, Monthly Review Press, pp. 142-176.

Ambedkar, B.R. (1979). "*Annihilation of Caste*", Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, Vol 1,Government of Maharashtra,Bombay,1979.[First published in 1936]

Ammon, Ulrich, Norbert Dittmar, and Klaus J. Mattheier. (2006). Sociolinguistic*s: An International Handbook of the Science of Language and Society*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin.

Anderson, Benedict R. O. G .(2016). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, New York [First Published in 1983].

Bayly, C A. (1989). *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World*, 1780-1830, Longman, London.

Brass, Paul R . (1974). *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*, Cambridge University Press, London.

Census. (2011), "*Primary Census Abstracts*", Registrar General of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi.

Emerson, Rupert. (1970). *From Empire to Nation*, Scientific Book Agency (Indian Reprint), Calcutta.

Grewal, J S, and Indu Banga. (1997). *Five Punjabi Centuries: Policy, Economy, Society, and Culture*, C. 1500-1990: Essays for J.S. Grewal, Manohar, New Delhi.

Karat, Prakash. (1973). *Language and Nationality Politics in India*, Orient Longman, New Delhi.

Kidwai, Sadiqur R. (1972). *Gilchrist and the 'language of Hindoostan'*, 'by Sadiqur-Rahman Kidwai, Rachna Prakashan, New Delhi.

King, Richard. (2013). *Orientalism and Religion: Post-colonial Theory, India and "the Mystic East"*, Routledge, London.

Lefebvre, Henri. (1974). *The Production of Space =: La Production De L'espace*, Blackwell, Oxford.

Marx, Karl. (1957). *Capital: Vol. 1*, Dent, London.

Migge, B. and Leglise, I. (2007). *"Language and Colonialism: Applied Linguistics in the context of Creole Communities"*, Language and Communication: Diversity and Change. Handbook of Applied Linguistics, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, pp 297-338.

Orsini, Francesca. (2000). *The Hindu Public Sphere: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, Delhi.

Pennington, Brian K. (2005). *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and Colonial Construction of Religion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Pollock, Sheldon I. (2011). *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet.

Seeley, John R. (1883). *The Expansion of England: Two Courses of Lectures*, Bernhard Tauchnitz, Leipzig.

Shepherd, Kancha I. and Karuppusamy, K.R. (2021). *The Shudras: Vision for a New Path* (Rethinking India, 5*),* Vintage Penguin Random House, New Delhi.

Said, Edward W. (1978). *Orientalism*, Pantheon Books, New York.

Sheth, D.L. (1989). "*State, Nation and Ethnicity- Experience of Third World Countries*", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 24, No. 12, pp. 619-626.

Stalin, Joseph. (1950). *Marxism and Linguistics*, Progressive Books and Periodicals, Montreal.

Strachey, John (1894), India: Its Administration and Progress, London.

Verma, Amita. (2013). "*Mulayam demands ban on English in Parliament, calls for promotion of Hindi*", *Deccan Chronicle*, Published November 18, 2013, extracted January 15, 2022.

Accessible at https://www.deccanchronicle.com/131117/news-current-affairs/article/mulayam-demands-ban-english-parliament

Abhishek Juneja is an Assistant Professor, School of Liberal Arts, IMS Unison University Dehradun and PhD Scholar, Glocal University, Saharanpur

E-mail: abhishekjuneja87@gmail.com

Article: Monday Morning at School: A Sociological Discourse from Self to Habitus

Author(s): Bhavya Kumar

Monday Morning at School: A Sociological Discourse from Self to Habitus

---Bhavya Kumar

Abstract

This paper is a sociological enquiry into the field of education using symbolic interactionist approach, operationalising it via data collected during field study and then pushing its boundaries to amalgamate it with a battery of concepts best recognised as 'Bourdieun' concepts like habitus, capital, field. The paper analyses interactions which happen within the classroom of a private school in Kharghar, Navi Mumbai. The private school caters to a demographic which may be described as a section of India's New Middle Class. While emphasising on classroom interactions primarily between two classmates, the text draws attention to systematic embeddedness of structural connotations in seemingly personal and private conversations. Over the course of this paper, these conversations are cross examined using a combination of Symbolic Interactionism and Bourdieun concepts to capture the manner in which 'self' of these students is being negotiated, especially in educational spaces like schools.

Keywords: Self, Habitus, Sociology of Education, Classroom, Symbolic Interactionism

Introduction

On a Monday morning, Anjali walks into her classroom; class 6-D. A group of her classmates begin shouting and laughing:

'The earth is shaking! Anjali, you giant, you elephant! Look what you are doing!'

Anjali walks past them, chin up. She paces up deliberately to ignore the offences hurled at her, sits down in her seat and begins talking to her friends. The exchange between her and the students who teased her is cut short and their attention is diverted. Anjali Vijay is one of the thirty-two students of class 6-D. She is the tallest in class, and has a healthy build. She has caramel skin, wears her hair short and is bespectacled. Anjali is also one of the 'top performers' in class.

As Anjali takes her seat, she and her friends begin writing a coveted guest list for her birthday next week. Names are mentioned, names are written down, some names are rejected, while some are deemed exceptionally important. Of the names rejected, one was of Eesha, who sits at stone's throw from Anjali. One of Anjali's friends suggests inviting her

'let us at least ask eesha. She is sitting right ahead of us! We talk to her occasionally. This is very embarrassing.'

To which Anjali replies

'No! Eesha is too weird. I do not think it is such a good idea'

Eesha, who was listening all along, stops what she was doing and turns to the window she sits beside, wraps herself into the protection of the curtains and loses herself in the world outside the class, till the teacher calls the class to order. Eesha Kale is another student of 6-D. Teachers describes her as 'shy'. She does not have any friends in class, except for one or two girls who engage with her occasionally during lunch and other group activities. She spends most of her time by the window seat, shrouded by curtains, looking outside. She is short, wears her hair long, in two braids and has caramel skin, maybe a shade darker than others. Her performance in class is often a cause of worry for teachers and her parents.

Anjali's and Essha's style of dealing with ridicule and exclusion in the classroom is starkly different from each other's and worth noting as distinct reactions to similar stimuli. Anjali takes things head-on. She is conscious of the opinions of her classmates and understands that her presence is not pleasantly welcome in all groups and factions of the class. This does not diminish her confidence in any way. She maintains a solemn, strong face in the 'front' [i]. Eesha too is conscious of everyone's opinions, but she responds by keeping herself aloof from the collective. Her withdrawal from the class, and its peer group, is symptomatic of her resignation. Eesha is more likely to lose herself in her thoughts and day-dream in class rather than confront others.

Anjali and Eesha represent two opposite axis in the group of students in a single classroom, in terms of their reactions and also social, cultural and economic backgrounds.

Anjali's immediate family consists of her father, mother and a younger brother. Anjali's father is Vice President at a reputed IT firm in Mumbai and her mother is a teacher in the school where Anjali studies. Her family traces its roots to Tamil Nadu but has travelled and lived in distinct parts of India owing to service-class occupations of her grandparents. Currently, she resides in Navi Mumbai, which has become home to migrants of distinct socio-economic-cultural locations from various parts of the country. She belongs to an upper-middle-class family that can at best be described using characteristics of Leela Fernandes's new Indian middle class. Fernandes conceptualises the 'new middle class' as a category of white-collar, English-speaking, segment of Indians whose origins as a group can be traced back in history as benefiting from the British-introduced English education. Leela Fernandes (2006) in her book India's New Middle Class:

Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform analyses four primary fields to locate those who identify themselves with or aspire to be the middle class: (1) the media and public sphere, (2) the labor market, (3) urban neighbourhoods, and (4) democratic politics. Together, these intertwine to form the basis of distinction of the New Middle Class from other classes.

"This occurs through a dynamic and interactive process in which individuals and groups accumulate resources, seek to convert these resources into strategies designed to further their social standing, and respond to and draw on historically produced inequalities." (Fernandes, 2006, p. 31)

The new middle class displays its exclusive classness by overemphasising their ability to speak English proficiently since, English continues to guarantee access to niche professions, economic benefits and cultural reproduction. Likewise, Anjali, takes pride in her 'flawless English' and more so on the fact that despite having roots in Tamil Nadu and staying in Maharashtra, her English accent does not have hints of a regional accent. This happens to be a dominant personality trait encouraged by teachers, parents and close friends alike. Modhumita Roy writes

"The ability to speak English, and above all speak it without a trace of regional accent is prized by parents, educators and employees." (Roy, 1993, p. 57)

Despite being studied intensively in the past and by numerous social scientists, it is difficult to place the new middle class in a box, as a closed, definitive and homogenous category. India's new middle class is a varied social canvas. If Anajli and eesha symbolise opposite ends of the spectrum.

Eesha identifies herself as a 'half buddhist'[ii],[iii] (eesha's parents later clarified that they are neo-Buddhists, in the process of embracing Buddhism and have not fully been able to make the transition from Hindu festivals and rituals to those of Buddhism). Her father used to work as a cook/chef in a local restaurant until recently. He switched to a corporate white-collar job for financial security. Her mother runs a beauty parlour, also very close to the school, and has catered many of eesha's classmate's mothers with home services.

 It is essential to understand where Eesha and Anjali come from because observation of lived experiences of students and the nature of the socio-cultural baggage they carry to classrooms, bridges the abstract distance between that which is projected as reality in educational spaces and that which is experienced and hence imbibed within individuals.

"In understanding educational experience, it is essential to focus on individual educational experiences so that, as researchers we may go behind the veils that obfuscate our understanding of what it means to be a student, a person, studying particular kinds of texts, taking part in the educational experience of the institution, rebelling, accepting and expressing emotions and feelings in the articulation of that remembered experience".(Thappan, 2004, p. 334)

Rooted in the pool of one's experience, reinforced in time and space is where one's idea or concept of 'self' develops. Observing students and their interactions with their social-cultural baggage with each other can provide a rich account of how their 'self' develops in educational spaces like schools.

Methodology:

The paper has been written using data collected for the purpose of the writer's PhD thesis. It employs a qualitative approach. Doing so permits the exploration of meanings and subjectivities of the field. Data was collected from a particular classroom (VI-D) of a school which caters to the upper middle class of Kharghar [iv]. The field was visited thrice a week for a period of six months ranging from September 2019- February 2020. Timings of field visits were subject to permission granted by individual school authorities, final exam schedules, holidays etc.

Respondents have been selected on the basis of categorization and labeling of students witnessed in classrooms; that is, as per categories revealed by the specific field locations themselves. As mentioned before, context is an important pivot in terms of the different categories likely to emerge out of different contexts.

Symbolic Interactionist framework and a battery of Bourdieun concepts such as habitus, field etc have been operationalised to interpret roles taken over by individuals while interacting with different actors within specific social contexts. For this purpose, students' responses and gestures have been observed while with peers and teachers or with parents. 'Self', in this study, becomes a reflection of their social identity, various attributes of self-image, meaning creation and interpretation of social situations and social issues.

In the course of this research, ethical precautions were taken so as to maintain confidentiality of respondents, their friends and families. The effort has also been to keep participants duly and fully informed of the procedure of the research.

Educational Space:

Educational spaces may be envisioned as interplay of material-built space and intangible spread of rules concerning social proximity, conduct etc, which relates to the reinforcement and modification of one's notion of self.

In accordance with the 'ideal type' understanding, most educational spaces are characterised as sacrosanct, neutral, knowledge dispensing centres/sources, obtaining an aura distinct from other social institutions and spaces. Quite often, this mystification turns them into 'black box[v]', devoid of transparency; reduced to 'academic' arenas that function solely on an objective input-output model. However, it is important to note that giving-receiving of knowledge is not their sole purpose. Their aesthetic is marked by non-academic attributes like 'identity', 'culture', 'politics' among others; issues that Hidden Curriculum deals with in detail. Issues of power, control and conflict emerge as central to the very act of education and hence, the long-held notion of education being objective and neutral ceases to stand. In the context of this paper, the 'distinction' of educational spaces, is therefore understood to have been derived from the exclusivity of social interactions, communications and exchanges more than other factors. Educational spaces are built by individuals just as importantly as they are built by rules, regulations and systematic structures. Schools control and discipline the individual by singling out their dispositions, interactional patterns, behaviour etc and then correcting them. Apart from the very essential act of engaging students in academics, the process of education constructs a sense of self in the individual students as well, because schools provide a major exposure to students other than that their families provide them with; in terms of experiences, encounters and memories. It tends to socially ground student's sense of identity by enabling them to answer questions like: Who are they? What do they stand for? What are their strengths and weaknesses? The following section is devoted to understanding similar questions.

OPERATIONALISING THE SELF IN EDUCATIONAL SPACES

Anajli's and Eesha's narratives of time spent in the classroom help operationalise 'self' as a by- product of experiences and interactions in classrooms in particular and schools in general.

The most striking feature about Anjali according to herself is her fluent English and the fact that she has answers to all questions asked in class, though not everyone in the class has answers to her questions. Anajli however isn't very popular among the peer group and has a small yet tight set of friends. Anajli's constant urge for asking questions and wanting to answer all questions provokes the majority of the class to call her names and boo her. What her teachers term as

'inquisitiveness', her peer group calls 'show-off'. How does this impact Anjali? She claims to live her life according to the 'Anjali Law', a theory formed by Anjali that guides her behaviour in general, especially at school. According to the law, she believes she is 'above' most of her classmates and mature to pay attention to what they think about her and how they tease her. She has formulated this law by listening to her teachers and parents who have attributed the severe class teasing and name-calling to her classmates' jealousy.

Eesha on the other hand sees herself as being 'misunderstood' by the majority of the class. She is subject to name-calling, bullying and fighting and is hence; extremely aware of the 'mismatch' she is to her peer group. Since this opinion is reinforced by teachers due to her irregular and erratic performance in class, there seems to be a very limited possibility of Eesha believing in alternative views of her, at least within the school. When in school, Eesha assumes the role of the 'outsider', who all students ridicule and gossip about. Her demeanour in most instances is a function of her interactions and experiences with them. Over the course, it becomes evident how her classmates, especially, boys teasing, bullying and fighting with her deeply impacted her behaviour in class. Her mood elevates when some of them acknowledge her presence positively and plummets when they dismiss her. The latter is of more acute nature and frequency. She often reacts by putting her head down on her arms and resting on the desk, or hiding behind the curtains and getting lost in her thoughts.

In both cases it is observed, interactions within school play a part in deciding the quality of one's experiences, memories and performance (in academics and otherwise) and ultimately also directs them to think about them-selves in a particular way.

To sociologically operationalise the concept of 'self', as laid down by G.H Mead, consider certain significant characteristics of self as propounded by Mead himself: The self is reflexive, social and dynamic in nature. All the more, observing these characteristics on the field allow us to explore the continuum between individual actions, gestures and the collective, social structure. These characteristics of 'self' emerged repeatedly and significantly on the field thereby drawing a parallel between their mention in text and presence on the field.

THE REFLEXIVE SELF:

G.H Mead (1934) highlighted the significance of reflexivity of self. Reflexivity enables the self to be both, 'object and subject' to itself; that is, in deciphering its self's perception in the organised other, the reflexive self has the ability to enter into the experience of itself. The self-as-object arises out of the individual's experience of other-selves outside of itself. According to Mead, the 'turning back of the individual upon himself' is what constitutes reflexivity.

"The self has the characteristic that it is an object to itself, and that characteristic distinguishes it from other objects and from the body. It is perfectly true that the eye can see the foot, but it does not see the body as a whole." (Mead, 1934, p. 137).

Mead highlights the self's ability to be involved in a social experience, be conscious of it and also be self-conscious of the interaction processes and the repercussions it has on its own character. Reflexivity [vi] is achieved on the basis of the dialogic process between I & Me and must not be confused with Bourdieu's usage of 'reflexive sociology'. Mead's reflexivity separates 'self' into two parts: I and Me. "The "I" is the response of the organism to the attitudes of the others; the "me" is the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes. The attitudes of the others constitute the organized "me," and then one reacts toward that as an "I." (Mead, 1934, p. 175).

Consider Anjali's story. Anjali is subject to name-calling, teasing and ridicule by a group of boys and girls, who dominate peer relations within class 6-D. The name-calling is focused on her physique. She is mostly ridiculed and called 'hathi' (elephant), 'dharti pe bojh' (a Hindi slang used to mock weight or merely perceived uselessness of a person in a group) more often than her own name. She is also mocked as kaali (black) for being brown-skinned. Anjali is most vehemently called out for being exceptionally outspoken. Her urge to speak up instantly, even without being asked by the teacher irks the dominant group in class. It is when she speaks, that she is met with remarks like hathi, kaali,(elephant-like, black) etc. Anjali rarely takes these remarks lying down. She has a classic 'I don't care, I am anyway much better than all you people put together' response to every ridicule hurled at her.

It is evident; Anjali's self has not turned out to be a simple mirror reflection of how others (her classmates mostly) see her: a huge, dark-skinned burden. Her self-perception is played out in conversations between her I &Me. She negotiates between the views and opinions she must keep and those which must be rejected. She does so by 'turning back upon herself' and weighing the significance of each word said to her in praise or ridicule, segregating the actions, opinions and gestures of others from those of her significant others. She comes to the conclusion that 'she is much better than all her classmates put together' because she has been told so by her parents and favourite teachers every time she turned to them for help. Therefore she refutes and rebels against the dominant view of the peer group. This mutiny within herself is symptomatic of the reflexivity of self. The notions about herself, given to Anjali by her significant others are positive and have helped her in developing self-confidence and high self-esteem. When herself does turn back upon herself, she does not see what her classmates see, instead sees what her parents and teachers see.

THE SOCIAL SELF

Mead grounds the 'self' and its related process within the social milieu, establishing a relation between the individual and the surroundings. This begins with a consciousness of the environment like attributes of colour, emotional value etc; mostly in terms of physiological sensitivity. Since an interrelation is established between the individual and environment by virtue of consciousness, hence, the life processes of individuals must be adequately understood in terms of this interrelation. In order for the self to develop, it is preceded by the development of a 'mind'[vii]which is required for individuals to make sense of the world around them, interpret it and come up with 'meanings' and hence convert their ecology into social ecology. to outline the social genesis of 'mind', it is important to note when meanings (in terms of the organised response of individuals) are attached to physical objects or encounters it implies that those objects and encounters exist in the form of meanings attached to them in a person's experience and less as the physical object itself. Mead writes:

"Experienced objects have definite meanings for the individuals thinking about them."

Consider the following incident. On one occasion, Eesha opens her drawing copy and turns to a page where she drew a picture of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar. Written in blue, on top of his picture is the popular slogan Jai Bheem. She gives the picture final touches. Anjali who sits behind Eesha gets up to peek. She smirks and comments

'What is all this weird stuff you're into Eesha? At least draw something that will get you a ticket to the art club of the school. Who is this and what is all this that you have written?'

Eesha, with a frown on her forehead strikes back at Anjali

You comment on me all day long Anjali! I do not say a word in response because I feel you are joking with me. But this is my God I am trying to draw. I will not take any insult against him. Do I insult your family or your God? It is best you do not repeat this.

The otherwise shy, introverted girl decides to speak up when she feels a definitive line is crossed. The teasing hits her where it hurts the most; an aspect of her group identity. In the absence of any significant relations at school, Eesha has forged very strong bonds with her family, often skipping school for family functions, discussing every detail of her time at school with her father especially. Her parents, who identify themselves as dalit, have been working towards providing a more promising future by investing primarily in their education [viii]. Eesha's reaction to the insinuation is in response to a ridicule that strikes the 'social' (group) aspect of her self-concept. In the time she

spends with family, Eesha, early off has been made conscious of the sacredness Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar holds, especially within many dalit communities. She is not aware of B.R. Ambedkar's factual contribution towards the emancipation of the depressed classes or the process of nation-building, and social work and neither is she aware of his full name.

But, she knows him as Bhim, the God who emancipated her ancestors from age-old exploitation and continues to protect them. Brought up in the social environment provided to her by the community, Eesha learns to accord definitive meanings to objects, people and situations. Anajli does not recognise the picture of B.R Ambedkar and goes on to make fun of it. In terms of social experience, she is yet to encounter B.R. Ambedkar, therefore, there is no meaning attached to his image, apart from the being a funny caricature in Deesha's scrapbook. Anjali's exposure as a child growing up in a metropolis familiarises her with international pop bands, influencers etc. this mostly happens via the circles she moves within and via social media platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook etc which formulate her own notion of popular culture. B.R. Ambedkar does not figure in the social and cultural canvas of Anjali, at least not till she begins a rigorous study of political science in higher classes and familiarises herself with the contextual relevance of B.R. Ambedkar in the public sphere. But would she ever know him in a manner similar to Eesha, remains a question at large.

THE DYNAMIC SELF

The 'self' is hardly constant; it is in a state of dynamism. That is, it is constantly imbibing and shedding on the basis of social experiences of various fields. For example, Eesha displays a sense of dynamism in her 'self', this being contingent on the field she operates in and the actors she interacts with. She manifests differently while within her school from how she is outside school. Consider the following instances:

On any given day when a teacher throws a question at the class, those who know the answer become restless with the excitement of garnering praise from the teacher and peers. Some students lie low because they do not know the answer. But Eesha lets out feeble responses, barely escaping her mouth, eyes brimming with self-doubt. Even though her answer is right, and she knows it is indeed right, Eesha only whispers her answers. This has been observed not once but quite often. She says

"Why to shout out loud, when I know the answer!"

But there are days when Eesha has been called out by the teacher to answer a question. She has successfully replied to the same, with the right answer, and a confident smile. When she proceeds to sit back complacently, a couple of boys sitting behind her dismiss her response

by saying that she takes private tuitions and she herself would never know the answer in a hundred years! Eesha winces at the students and returns to her notebook. Eesha didn't answer any of the teachers the following week. It was observed that she pays noteworthy attention to the opinions of her classmates, and more prominently the 'dominant group of the class', which consists mostly of boys. Their friendships matter to her more than that of the girls, and so does their opinion. Eesha's self is highly responsive to the expectations of certain significant others that she earmarks in various fields she operates in. At school, (classroom as a space for socialisation) Eesha has judged boys in her class as significant others. As significant others, they have an important influence in shaping her behaviour. Her mood elevates when some of them acknowledge her presence positively and plummets when they dismiss her. A striking trait she developed as a sign of internalisation of the distress she experiences at school is that whenever she was upset or felt dismissed, Eesha would wrap herself behind the drapes and talk to herself or simply be lost in her thoughts, withdrawing to a world of herself and her thoughts, absenting herself despite being physically present.

However, when observed outside school, she appears to be different from how she is in class. As school gets over, Eesha usually walks to her mother's place of work: her beauty parlor. Later in the evening, mother and daughter go back home together. On one of the days, Eesha walks back after school and from the moment she embarked on the walk, a significant change in Eesha's bodily dispositions became evident. She speaks with utmost eloquence, wears her brightest smile and her eyes sparkled with the anticipation of the time which she would now spend. Eesha skips ahead. To the observer, it would seem as though, the child who hid herself behind the protection of the drapes had freed herself of all that pulls her back and had catapulted herself into a space where there was utmost comfort in being herself unapologetically.

What are these changes about? Are these changes restricted to the confines of the mind (the cognitive thinking head space)? These changes show signs of a self that changes in response to situations and social contexts: a dynamic self. The self displays the potential of not letting definite words, experiences and mannerism latch to it. It has the ability to shrug them off and maneuver as per the social context. This social context takes into account an individual's actions, life journey or social history and biography. A psychological manifestation of embodied social structures. What is seen as 'self' is an individualised, mentally-processed, unique expression of one's reception of the social. At this juncture, it is inevitable that we introduce Bourdieu to the canvas of Symbolic Interactionism. An anti-dualist, Bourdieu elegantly provides us with an epistemological grounding for understanding this complex 'self' (individual social actor)[ix].

BOURDIEU- HABITUS, CAPITAL & FIELD

Bourdieu's concepts have been widely referenced within Sociology of Education; evidence of their practical use is scarce. This may partly be attributed to the fact that these are not stand-alone concepts, rather a battery of concepts that stand in relation to one another and hence must be operationalised and applied together. The collusion of his concepts, along with critical insights gained from field observation can enable us to interrogate taken-for-granted principles and practices of the subject matter at hand. In the following section stories of Anjali and eesha help us understand the significance of concepts like habitus, capital and field towards establishing a compelling idea of 'self' amongst individuals and also to further the applicability of symbolic interactionism.

Habitus can be defined as

"the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them" (Wacquant 2005, p. 316)

Habitus is that which is 'deep seated' in people. It is acquired through imitation, experience and conscious socialisation of individuals. Since it is a learned disposition, it is also reflective of how group culture shapes personal history. Naturally, these dispositions are the product of the interaction of various structures which are objective and obvious. Perhaps it will make itself known through individuals' reflections on their everyday experiences, or maybe in their ways of talking, dressing or moving. In the context of schooling, it makes itself known via analysis of interactions within the process of schooling, like those between teacher-teacher, student-student and teacher-student. Consider Eesha, whose interactions in class revolve around instances of name calling like 'aunty', 'behenji' etc. may be read as a function of 'deposited dispositions, capacities, propensities'.

Eesha spends hours after school at her mother's beauty parlour, engaging in conversations with older women, and listening to them gossip. They become part of her social ecology. The hours after school which most of her classmates spend resting, playing, or studying with their parents or others of their age; Eesha spends amidst grown-up women in parlours. Beauty parlors are distinct social-cultural spaces dedicated to the production of women's appearances and identities in accordance with normative standards of beauty and fashion. It is also a space of 'sisterly identification', where women engage in deep, personal, and intimate conversations which are often clubbed as being discreet, effeminate, and confidential. Traditionally, in many contexts, they may not be considered 'age appropriate. Given that Eesha spends substantial time in the above-mentioned ecology she is likely to imitate

or even role model some of the women she meets there. This time spent, ritually over two years now subconsciously sediments itself in eesha's conduct. In class she stands out in her bodily dispositions; her actions and gestures are more effeminate than other girls of her age. Her classmates interpret this as Eesha being an 'aunty'. In the words of most of the girls

'she is such a behenji (someone lacking the sense of style)'

'more like an aunty, I'll say'

Her parents are aware of the problem this setup has created for eesha's time in school. But in order to get their two children through school, it is essential that her mother runs the parlour and looks after Eesha at the same time. Eesha's father had to switch three jobs in the last two years, after he decided to give up his occupation as a cook in a restaurant nearby. Their income from the beauty parlour was what kept them afloat. The fact that Eesha must spend time in her mother's parlour and also bear the brunt of its outcomes amidst her peer group is a consequence of the family's socio-economic situation.

Eesha's habitus develops in response to these unconventional experiences out of school and constant bullying within the school. Her behaviour, ingrained dispositions, responses, habits, and skills are products of experiences which are not only different in a matter to cause wonderment among fellow students but, different in the sense that it makes her uncomfortable in the field of formal education. Her story deviates from the norm as her family is unable to secure for their children a conventionally stable environment outside of school, which is a prerequisite for a successful stint at schools. Eesha's self seems to have developed amidst chaos. She experiences too much that is too different from her peers. The result of this supposed chaos, dissimilarity in experienced culture is that Eesha is unable to 'ground' herself in experiences deemed important by her peer group. Though her 'self' concept is developing in response to interactions at home and school, it seems to be splintered. Her 'self' develops in a manner that is unique to Eesha and Eesha only, it is contingent on how she engages in symbolic interaction but it grows and develops in the aegis of certain objective structural situations. But it is unable to help her in developing the cultural capital required for surviving in the classroom. She also has not been able to develop a group of friends to develop an alternative cultural space in the classroom.

In another incident related to Anjali it is noted that habitus is created through a social (which is a collectivity of individual biographies), rather than individual process leading to patterns that are enduring if they transfer or modify from one context to another. Since it is enduring, it is also visible to the researcher in the form of patterns that can be documented. In one of her interviews, she mentioned a certain

'Anjali Law'. This emerges as embodiment of social processes that manifest themselves in the form of patterns of behaviour displayed by Anjali. Anjali claims to live her life according to the 'Anjali Law'. She believes she is 'above' most of her classmates and matured to pay attention to what they think about her and how they tease her. She has formulated this law by listening to her teachers and parents who have attributed the severe class teasing and name-calling to her classmates' jealousy.

Hence, the Anjali Law has been fashioned as an internalisation of and in response to the social situation of teasing, bullying, name-calling, and labelling of Anjali. If and when she finds herself in situations that are likely to leave indelible imprints on her idea of herself', she refers to this law. In one of the incidents, Anjali wins a chess game against a classmate. Chess, as a game, is associated less with 'fun' and 'physical rigour' than with 'wit' and 'intelligence'. For many, it is said to imbibe in its players qualities like 'foresight', 'circumspection', and 'caution'; this is resonated in popular belief as well. Quite many parents who send their children to the same school as Anjali have shown a preference for training their children in chess as compared to other in-door games.

The outcome of the game was that Anjali had not only won, but she had also 'defeated' someone. It was important for her to internalise the opponent's acceptance of loss which would translate into her mind as gain. This is an archetypal example of how Anjali feeds into the Anjali Law and how the law feeds into her. On her way back to class, she repeats to all her classmates the story of how she defeated Sanskruti and how it led to her victory, she received a positive response from only her best friend and an acknowledgment from the teacher who put down her name for inter school competition. Most of her classmates were either busy in their own games or deliberately chose to ignore her. She applies the Anjali Law to the situation and finds a meaning for it. Here she is operating in a field of intellect which appreciates the cultural capital Anajli brings with her. She is aware of the rules that govern this field, and according to this 'winning over somebody' is proof of her resilience and dominance in the field. While others operate in the same field as her for the duration of the game, they are unable to capitalise on the situation at hand.

Within her mind, she builds a version of social reality. She makes the conclusion that her victory was significant within the contours of her habitus, which gives great importance to 'winning' and to 'being in the good books of her teachers and other elders', who also happen to be her significant others. This habitus is intangible and exists only within her mind, where she makes mental projections of her lived social reality which is changeable according to the 'significance' they hold. That means, even if a person or their opinions exist in the real physical

world, in her habitus she reserves the right to omit them or accept them as per their significance when it comes to her mental projections. Her habits, skills, dispositions etc which she gains through interactions and past experiences govern her movement within this habitus. The Anjali Law is one by-product of her habitus. It governs her thought process. She has donned the armour of indifference, which she wears as a shield against the attacks of the other children. When the armour is pierced, she strikes back with a trenchant, caustic wit. Her intention being to alienate other children so that they would leave her alone or accept her dominance in the least. Her 'self' can be viewed as evolving within the contours of her habitus and resides within the habitus in the form of its nucleus.

However, these patterns of behaviour are not averse to change. They shift in relation to specific contexts and over time:

"Habitus is not fixed or permanent, and can be changed under unexpected situations or over a long historical period". (Navarro, 2006, p. 16)

As mentioned before, Bourdieu's concepts are relational and hence must be understood together. Anjali does not always act in accordance with the Law. There are occasions where her carefully curated system breaks down, causing confusion. At one point she speaks of its limitations. She said that there were limits to how much and what nature of ridicule she could bear with and recalls getting into a physical fight,

'Keeping quiet was not an option, so I pranked the child who made fun of my appearance in front of a special friend. But the prank went out of hand and the child got hurt. You see, I had never ever pranked anyone before, so I didn't know what to do, I was caught off guard. I was reported to the principal and ended up crying a lot after that.'

Such is the dependency on habitus. Her deeply ingrained habits like sophistication, balance and maturity couldn't equip her appropriately to maneuver herself through the situation. A student who has the ability to be rougher, and burlier is more likely to maneuver through these situations.

This incident acts as a subtle reminder of the fact that classrooms may not exist as homogeneous spaces. They are composed of differing fields. Fields can be conceptualised as structural spaces within a larger social space that are organised around specific kinds of capital. For Bourdieu, fields denote arenas of production, circulation, and appropriation and exchange of goods, services, knowledge, or status, and the competitive positions held by actors in their struggle to accumulate, exchange, and monopolize different kinds of power resources (capitals). In this classroom being studied, there might be the

following kinds of fields that coexist: field of academics, the field of sports, the field of peer relations and socialisation among others. Each of which is excelled in or dominated by different students holding differing sets of abilities. A person's habitus and behaviour sprouting out of habitus operate within such fields. It negotiates its presence, accumulates and modifies, learns and unlearns within these fields and hence it is prudent if the habitus of individuals is observed in tandem with the various fields they operate within. Habituses might show themselves better when it comes in contact with different fields as they are visible through their attempts to come to terms with the informal and implicit rules of the new environment. Gayna Davey (2009) demonstrates this visibility of habitus by studying three students who face transition from one school to another.

"We glimpse the habitus as it comes into contact with the field, and we see this through the narratives of school change as each student reflects on entering a new place within the educational field. Habitus is exposed through their attempts to understand the informal, unspoken rules of the new environment. Anchoring habitus to cultural capital, I interpret it through the students' confidence and knowledge of the academic environment, its hierarchies and their place relative to other students." (Davey, 2009, p. 277)

In the classroom, Anjali, like most students assumes roles of actors who are constantly strategising and struggling over the pool of capital they possess. Not all forms of capital will be valued at all instances within classrooms at all points. When it comes to strategising her position amongst peer group, Anjali fails often or is simply not as well equipped as others to enmesh her with others. Behavioral traits and dispositions acquired by past experiences prevent her in a manner to believe she is better than everyone else, different and hence not one of them. Hence when it comes to confrontations with fellow classmates, Anjali fails to excel the way she does in everything else. To draw the contrast that comes with the coexistence of the field and its relation to aspects of self, consider the following example: In English literature class, not all students are patient with lofty words and lengthy poems. While there may be an assortment of 'bright', 'intelligent' and 'hardworking' students, and they are duly appreciated for their efforts by the class teacher, the 'field' is often dominated by the students who possess a 'flare' for literature and are able to inculcate a 'taste' for it and appreciate it. Anjali has immense knowledge of English and flaunts it through the lessons. Her effort is recognised and lauded by the teacher. However, the same flare for English literature has rarely worked as currency to become popular or cultivate strong relations in the peer group. Anjali, unmoved by the lack of support, believes her flare for English sets her apart from the rest of her class.

'English is what will take us ahead in and distinguishes us from the crowd'

Says Anjali when asked why she 'loves' talking in English and why she thinks her flawless spoken English is one of her greatest assets. She attributes her ease with the language to a year spent in London upon her parent's transfer, and this experience seems to have given her an upper hand in terms of exposure. Additionally, Anjali belongs to a Tamil family who has lived in Mumbai for almost two generations. There is an avid culture of conversing in English at home. Anjali's mother believes that Tamil families lay immense emphasis on English speaking. While Tamil is their first language, English is their second language and must be learnt well to gain a respectable rank in society.

Linking the concepts of habitus and field is the concept of capital. Capital is valued in relation to the field, with individuals' stock of capital providing currency for establishing oneself and sustaining oneself within a field. The nature in which one is able to operationalise their assortment of capital indicates how favourably they avail their habitus to their advantage (to gain a powerful position). This rather careful maneuvering of capital, habitus and field is indeed an essential and commonplace act of our everyday, our everyday attempt at 'becoming insiders' to certain significant spaces, subspaces and institutions. Without appropriate and desirable projection of one's habitus, one runs the risk of being labelled the 'outsider', 'deviant', 'other' etc. Bourdieu (1991:11) states:

"One can physically occupy a locale without inhabiting it properly if one does not dispose of the means tacitly required for that, beginning with the proper habitus… In sum, it is the habitus that makes the habitat, through the social uses, more or less adequate, to which it inclines us and which it enables."

Eesha's ostracization, mentioned earlier in the paper, reflects Bourdieu's views. Eesha is currently operating in the intersection of two sub-fields: one is where the students and teacher operate together, that is the field of intellect and knowledge; where students like Anjali and many others hold greater command. The other is that of sociability, which requires traits like popularity, coolness, and approval of fellow peers. Eesha lacks the currency to establish herself in either subfield. According to her class teacher, Eesha is 'outlandish'. Her class teacher believes,

'Eesha does not hold values like agility, determination, diligence. She is not a go-getter in any subject, be it art, pottery, academics etc. she is too complacent in a comfort zone her parents have built her. She is absent from class on most days. Her parents do not respond to our notes. To add to the situation, she doesn't even have a friend who can help her peers learn.'

She is outlandish not only because she fails to excel academically, but also because she does not know where she stands with respect to the peer group. She has failed to display cultural dispositions that are appreciated by schools catering to the new middle class'; a demographic description which best suits the composition of her school teachers and students. As a result of eesha's past experiences of having been bullied all through kindergarten up to grade six has contributed immensely to her habitus. She recounts

'When it all started in school, my parents asked me to ignore the remarks, since it was insignificant. Teachers helped me only when they thought the situation was getting out of hand. So that is what I try to do. But I cannot stop myself from feeling bad. I cannot ignore this feeling, can I?'

She has occupied the position of the 'misfit' in class for a prolonged time period. Even though she occupies the physical locale that their 'school' is, she is unable to deploy her habitus in a manner as to construct a habitat. As a result, she resigns to her position in class as a misfit and internalises the conceptions and views of the 'significant other' she found in school.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, the symbolic interactionist paradigm along with Bourdieuian concepts like habitus, space, field, capital, etc have been operationalised so as to gain a deeper understanding of the individual 'self' in the context of educational spaces. It was noted that the 'self' occupies the core of this intersection. In the journey of evolution of their 'self', individuals must use or transfer capital accumulated over time, like a savings account. Bourdieu's concept of capital is pivotal in describing 'distinction' within society. Distinctions between individuals or groups mainly occur in material relations and symbolic relationships, namely objective status position and internal ideas and tastes (different combinations of these two together form "habitus"). Each distinct social group (who Bourdieu talks about in terms of class mostly) shares a common nature and common material living conditions. He proposes using economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital to analyse the individual's external living conditions in the social space, with habitus analysing internalized personal characteristics. Habitus defines how much value one lays on various fields and space. It may be important for one student to perform well in school, while not significant for the other.

"Individuals and classes use a variety of forms of capital in the social space to struggle with each other and to defend or take an advantageous social position. The same social position will result in the same or similar living conditions, thus shaping a similar class habitus." (Hong & Zhao, 2015, p. 4)

With individual habituses developing with relation to amount and kind of capital available in a cross-section of fields, a schematic algorithm emerges which lends methodological sophistication to studying individuals as social products. It helps make sense of the interrelation between factors like educational achievement (or the lack of it), self-doubt, self-esteem, etc, and the individual actor who embodies these. In Anjali's case her educational achievement and academic brilliance are appreciated both in school (by teachers and close friends) and at home (by parents) to boost her concept of self. Eesha's low performance in class has labelled her as a 'nonstarter' by teachers and students supplemented by lack of ability to make friends. A lack of cultural capital (in favour of academic excellence) from her family only adds to her problems in school.

Their 'self' bears evidence of being negotiated in the actions, gestures and interactions, experiences of every day in classrooms. 'Self', therefore emerges as a cardinal methodological tool for sociological inquiry into everyday social interactions. Social interactions form an essential part of every day of individuals and upon deeper analysis reveal the embeddedness of social reality, structures, and systems in the microcosms of society. This analysis is made possible by the application of concepts like habitus and 'self' in conjunction with each other. In the context of this paper, it enables looking at educational spaces as a cross-section of action, interaction, power, politics, and culture. It enables tracing the how and whys behind the development of a self within individuals. The concept of habitus enables interrogation of the 'seemingly unimpeachable' and 'seemingly mundane' aspects of schooling. What may be termed as 'natural' might actually be 'learned' behaviour which is in turn subject to one's social, cultural, economic, and gender-based location within the social fabric?

'Self' which is sociological a marker of one's personality, can be viewed as an 'evolving' entity within one's habitus. It derives from the habitus, and also lends to it in terms of scope of change, which happens in the form of I & Me dialogue within the self. The stories of Anjali and Eeshadisplay it in terms of their experiences. Their 'selves' are being negotiated and constructed via experiences within schools. Their response to the similar stimuli of 'bullying' in school is evidently different from each other because of the differences in their respective habitus. Their 'self' at once becomes a function of structural social reality. The impact of culture, power, social group membership (class and caste), and gender becomes evident in the journey of their 'self'. The 'self' may then be viewed at the heart of the abstract whirlpool of social fact, the recipient of the centripetal force directed towards it.

REFERENCES

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of social capital. *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*, 241-258.

Bourdieu, P. (2018). Social space and the genesis of appropriated physical space. *International journal of urban and regional research*, *42*(1), 106-114.

Davey, G. (2009). Using Bourdieu's concept of habitus to explore narratives of transition. *European Educational Research Journal*, *8*(2), 276-284.

Fernandes, L. (2006). *India's new middle class: Democratic politics in an era of economic reform* (p. 320). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press.

Giroux, H. (2001). Theory and Resistance in Education Westport. *Conneticut: Bergin & Garvey*.

Goffman, E. (1956). The presentation of self in everyday life (Monograph no. 2). *Edinburgh, UK: University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Center*.

Gokhale, J. B. (1986). The sociopolitical effects of ideological change: The Buddhist conversion of Maharashtrian Untouchables. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, *45*(2), 269-292.

Hałas, E. (2004). Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the politics of symbolization and symbolic interactionism. In *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* (Vol. 27, pp. 235-257). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Haller, A. O., & Woelfel, J. (1972). *Significant others and their expectations: Concepts and instruments to measure interpersonal influence on status aspirations*. Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin.

Hong, Y., & Zhao, Y. (2015). From capital to habitus: class differentiation of family educational patterns in urban China. *The Journal of Chinese Sociology*, *2*(1), 1-18.

Karabel, J., & Halsey, A. H. (1977). Power and ideology in education^ New York: Oxford University Press. *KarabelPower and Ideology in Education1977*.

Mead, G. H., & Schubert, C. (1934). *Mind, self and society* (Vol. 111). Chicago: University of Chicago press.

Navarro, Z. (2006). In search of a cultural interpretation of power: The contribution of Pierre Bourdieu.

Pandey, G. (2006). The time of the Dalit conversion. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1779-1788.

Roy, M. (1993). The Englishing of India: Class formation and social privilege. *Social Scientist*, 36-62.

Thapan, M. (Ed.). (2014). *Ethnographies of schooling in contemporary India*. SAGE Publications India.

Beckert, J., & Zafirovski, M. (2005). *International encyclopedia of economic sociology*. Routledge.

[i] Goffman in Presentation of Self in Everyday Life uses a dramaturgical approach to theorise on the concept of 'self'. An individual's actions and gestures are seen as a part of an act put up in the 'front' section, before an audience, while its preparation or rehearsal is done in the backstage.

[ii] Dalits refer to India's erstwhile untouchable population; 'achuts', 'harijan', scheduled castes, have been few other words used to denote them. The term literally translates to 'crushed', 'downtrodden', is now also used as a term of self-assertion on the part of those oppressed. Dalit conversion refers, in its most likely usage to the mass conversion of dalits to Buddhism in 1956, under the aegis of Dr.B.R. Ambedkar. (Pandey.G., 2006)

[iii] 'the first organised expression of dissatisfaction with the Hindu order that involved the determination to leave it. Ever since it is viewed as an ideological, political and socio-economic change directed at jolting dalits out of centuries old exploitation and disrespect and according them a self-respect, dignity and humanity and also simultaneously uprooting the feeling of self-loathing, dependence and hopelessness attached to the identity of being an Untouchable. (Gokhale.B J. 1986)

[iv] The names and specific locations of schools have not been disclosed keeping ethical considerations in mind. Respondent's names have also been changed for the same reason.

[v] A concept used prolifically by Karabel & Hasely (1977) and Henry Giroux (2001) to point out the gross over-stepping of the experiences of teachers' and students' experiences while paying excessive attention to structural factors like achievement and input-output of information.

[vi] Reflexivity carries distinct meanings for distinct sociologists. Mead describes reflexivity as the ability of the 'self' to turn back on itself and see itself as a whole being. It signifies consciousness of the self in the process of its negotiation.

[vii]Mind, according to Mead, arises within the social process of communication and cannot be understood apart from that process. Mind is essentially a socially constructed part of the social being that develops in relation to the social environment of a given individual. Development of mind also implies the ability of the individual to convey meanings successfully and symbolically to others.

[viii] The school eesha and Anjali study in is one of the only credible and popular ICSE schools in the neighbourhood. It is infrastructurally and pedagogically sophisticated. This sophistication, popularity and rarity of ICSE schools accounts for their 'expensive' fee structure. eesha's parents have often defaulted on school fee payment due to economic hardships. Despite the humiliation attached with late fee payment, eesha's parents realise the significance of sending their daughter to a particular kind of school in order to help her inculcate the necessary social and cultural capital which will help her develop into a successful, independent, working female. This shows the importance they attach to the emancipatory potential of education for upward mobility; pivotal to the social thought of Dr. Ambedkar.

Bhavya Kumar *is a PhD Research Scholar, CSSE, TISS, Mumbai*

Emial id: bhavyakumar31@gmail.com

From Preferring to Choosing: Unfolding the School Choice Process among Households in Kerala

---Sethunath R

Abstract

This paper explores the process of school choice from the perspective of parents in the context of a well-established and inclusive public schooling system in the state of Kerala and critiques the neo-liberal construct of school choice in Indian context as a straightforward selection of superior-quality and cheap private schooling as against poor-quality public schooling. Guided by the *landscape of choice* approach, it proposes that school choice is a complex process through which the parents' preference for a particular type of school gets transformed into the choice of a specific school, mediated through the specific socio-political-economic context. It highlights the role of persuading and constraining factors in shaping the preference and choice at the household level based on a study conducted in four different villages of the state. It recognizers parents as active choosers and calls for a greater role for parents while formulating schooling policies in the local context.

Key Words: Public Schooling, Preference, School Choice, Households, Kerala

Introduction

There has been increased academic engagement over parental choice of private schooling in Indian context since the latter half of 1990s, during which a hitherto unnoticed category of private schools, which were later called low fee private (LFP) or budget schools, reportedly started mushrooming in the country. In the context of growing advocacy for a reduced role of the State in education world over, these pro-private developments in the field of education invited the attention of scholars and advocacy groups alike and led to a surge in research on school choice in the Indian context. This paper examines the dynamics of school choice as it unfolds in the households of four selected villages in the south Indian state of Kerala, a state with a well-established and inclusive public schooling system hailed for its achievements not only in terms of access to schooling but also in respect of addressing the issue of quality of education. The objective of this paper is to explore and analyze the complex process of school choice in the context of a reportedly robust and inclusive public schooling system in the State of Kerala and its impacts on the overall schooling scenario.

Contextualising School Choice in India

In order to contextualise the concept of school choice in India, it is important to understand the nature of the schooling system in the country. Currently, schools in India can be classified into four, namely, government (G), private aided (PA), private unaided recognized (PUR) and private unaided unrecognized (PUUR) (Kingdon 1996a). Of these, the first two share similar characteristics – are publically funded, no tuition fees are charged from students, teachers' salaries are paid by the government, follow a common syllabus within a state and are not supposed to deny admission to any student in normal cases. For the purpose of this study, both these are categorized as public schools. On the other hand, the latter two are privately funded, mainly in the form of fees collected from the students from which the salaries of the teachers are paid. These are categorized as private schools. While the recognized private schools functioned within some state regulations with a formal recognition of either a central board (i.e. ICSE and CBSE) or the respective state board, unrecognized schools often functioned outside the purview of state regulations without any restrictions. In this study, in line with the literature, the author uses the term private *budget* to denote PUUR schools and in a similar vein, introduce the term private *established* to denote PUR schools.

Unlike in the developed countries like the UK and USA, in India, there is no mechanism of catchment areas or allotment of school places in public schooling. Hence, hypothetically, parents are free to choose any public school for their ward from an available pool of schools in their locality or even at a distant place. However, distance turned out to be a major factor in deciding the school (Srivastava 2007) and mostly the neighbourhood public schools catered the educational needs of an average Indian household at least at the primary level. Until the 1990s, the sole exceptions to this were the elite households in urban centers, who had access to fee charging private schooling, mostly of recognized category.

However, they had a negligibly small share in schooling. However, many empirical studies in the 1990s (e.g. Kingdon 1996a) reported the mushrooming of a new category of private schools across the country alike in urban as well as rural areas which were later called low free private (LFP) or budget schools. Almost all these schools started functioning outside the purview of the regulations of the state governments without obtaining recognition from any of the educational boards and hence remained and still continue to remain outside the official statistics in many states. Nevertheless, academic research on LFP schools suggested even socially and economically disadvantaged households accessing them in large numbers across the country. This led to a surge in research studies on parental choice of private schooling focused on LFP schools in the country.

However, with the exception of a few (e.g. Harinath & Gundemeda 2021; Harma 2011; Hill, Samson & Dasgupta 2011; Srivastava 2007), the vast majority of the research in this area (e.g. Kingdon, 1996b; Tooley & Dixon 2003a, 2003b, 2007a, 2007b; Tooley, Dixon & Gomathi 2007, Dixon 2012) which focused on schools as units of study instead of households, ended up glorifying private budget schooling as a better and cheap alternative to low quality public schooling. Instead of engaging seriously with the notion of school choice from the point of views of the households (or rather the parents), who happened to be the ultimate choosers, the latter set of studies simply compared different quantifiable aspects of schooling such as infrastructure facilities, cost incurred including salaries to teachers, performance measured in terms of marks scored by students etc. in public and private schools. By doing so, they simplified the notion of school choice as the selection of superior quality and low cost private schooling by households as against a free but low quality and sometimes altogether dysfunctional public schooling. For example, Tooley and Dixon (2007a, 2007b) and Tooley et al. (2007) invoked the criterion of quality to claim that LFP schools were superior in the slum areas of Delhi and Hyderabad, using some 15 input indicators mainly related to school infrastructure and facilities as proxies for quality.

However, their reliance on aspect such as the availability of fans, tape recorders and televisions rather than teacher-qualification and time-tabled activities, which had a more direct bearing on educational outputs, were critiqued as 'border[ing] on the absurd' (Sarangapani & Winch, 2010, p. 510). These studies were also criticized as attempts by the pro-market advocacy groups as part of their neo-liberal agenda of projecting LFP schools as 'a cost efficient and equitable solution to the education of the poor and as a site for viable business options' (Nambissan, 2012, p 57). As if endorsing this criticism, the sites of enquiries of these studies were regions or States with a traditionally neglected public schooling system both in terms of access and quality which in itself happened to accelerate the cause of private schooling among households.

It is in this backdrop, this study explores the concept of school choice in a region like the State of Kerala, hailed for its achievements in terms of human development. Kerala's progress in respect of two important components of human development, namely health (low IMR & MMR, high life expectancy etc.) and education (high overall literacy rate, high female literacy rate etc.) even with a comparatively low per capita domestic product is often hailed as 'Kerala model' of development (Patnaik 1995) in development literature. The role of a heavily state funded public schooling system in the human development of Kerala has been well recorded. Kerala has positioned itself in a different trajectory proving a strong case in favour of State subsidies in education. Its early achievements can be attributed to the efforts of visionary Travancore-Cochin rulers (Jeffery 1976) and

Christian Missionaries and the demand for education even from lower socio-economic sections of the society generated by social reform movements (Tharakan 1984). Post-Independence, after the formation of the state of Kerala in 1956, a host of factors including the equitable distribution of social services fuelled by public action (Dreze and Sen 2002), enactment and implementation of Kerala Education Act, 1959 and various policy measures of successive governments ensure the continuity of its achievements.

As a result of all these factors Kerala remained at the top of the country in terms of indicators of educational achievements. Here are a few. There was at least one government primary school in every village of erstwhile Travancore at the outset of the twentieth century (George, Zachariah & Kumar 2003). Even in 1945, around 62.7 per cent of the school-going children were enrolled in schools in Travancore (Salim & Nair, 2002). The literacy rates in the three erstwhile constituent units of Kerala – the Princely states of Travancore and Cochin and the Malabar district of Madras Presidency remained much higher than at the national level as early as the second half of the 20th century. In 1951, the literacy rates were as high as 46.7 (Travancore), 43.7 (Cochin) and 30.9 (Malabar) compared to the national average of 16.6. In 1956 at time of its formation, there were 762 high schools, 1589 upper primary schools and 6699 lower primary schools in the public schooling system, which rose respectively to 2814, 3040 and 6788 by 2009-10 (Government of Kerala [GoK], 2010). That there is hardly any substantial increase in the number of primary schools over the years is a clear indication of the level of saturation it has attained in the 1960s itself. This network of public schools was evolved over the years with the active support of various religious and caste organizations and local community efforts especially in Malabar. As a result, even in 1956, almost 60% of the schools in Kerala belonged to the private aided (PA) category of which more than one-third belonged to various Christian denominations. This remains more or less unchanged even now. This well serving network of schools lead to a situation wherein 99% of the school going children get enrolled in schools irrespective of gender and social category and a near 100% retention rate from primary to upper primary level (Government of India [GoI], 2010). Kerala also achieved an envious position among Indian states with the least dropout rate of a mere 0.66% in general and 0.72% and 3.54% among SC and ST community students respectively (GoK, 2010). However, national level school database like District Information System of Education (DISE) and several media reports, especially in regional languages (e.g. Cherukad, 2010) suggested that, as elsewhere in the country, Kerala's schooling system which acted as the backbone of the state's impressive human development comparable with those of developed countries is getting increasingly privatized, with 24.68% of total enrolments at the elementary level in fee charging private sector in 2011-12 (DISE, 2012).

Objectives

In the presence of a well-established public schooling system which has made remarkable achievements in offering quality education (GoI, 2010; Krishnakumar, 2001; National Council of Educational Research and Training [NCERT], 2002), this growth of fee charging in the private sector is something puzzling. This apparent conundrum i.e. the growth of fee paying private schooling even amidst a robust public schooling prompted this research, which tries to answer three fundamental questions. Why do households prefer private schooling even when a robust public schooling is in existence? What are the factors that influence the process of school choice at the household level? And finally, what are the implications of school choice in the public schooling system? It thus reflects and contributes to the ongoing debates in developing country contexts on the role of State in provision of education and private schooling as an alternative to public schooling. The probe was restricted to the primary level (class I to IV in Kerala), as private budget schools mostly catered the educational needs at this level.

Field Setting and Research Methods

The immersive fieldwork for this study was carried out over a period of ten months (June 2015–February 2016) in four revenue villages, namely Chengannur, Mulakuzha (both in Alappuzha district) in southern Kerala, and Beypore (in Kozhikode district) and Kalikavu (in Malappuram district) in northern Kerala. The selection was based on an analysis of secondary raw data collected by the District Information System of Education (DISE) for the year 2012-13. While the Chengannur (urban) and Mulkauzha (rural) villages represented regions with high prevalence of private school enrollments, Beypore (urban) and Kalikavu (rural) represented those with a high prevalence of public school enrollments. Another criterion that informed the choice of villages was the presence of a good enough pool of all type of schools (i.e. G, PA, PUR and PUUR).

During the first round of visits to the villages, the researcher met with the local authorities including the head of the relevant local self-government and its members and functionaries of educational department like Assistant Education Officers (AEOs) and faculty members of District Institutes of Educational Training (DIET) in order to have a sense of the overall schooling atmosphere in the selected villages. These visits also helped to locate the schools in the villages and establish contact with the school authorities. Given the large size of the villages in Kerala, as it was not feasible to conduct a primary survey to create a socio-economic database of households for a representative sampling process, during the second round of visit to the villages, the researcher visited all the 65 schools in these villages having primary sections and collected students' socio-economic data.

This data was analysed and categorized based on four major parameters, namely, school type, medium of instruction, religion and caste. At the next stage, a proportionate sampling procedure was followed and the sample size for each village was fixed first in proportion to the total strength of students in the primary classes and the sample within the village was distributed proportionately by the type of school, medium of instruction, religion and caste.

In the third phase, the randomly selected households were visited after briefly apprising the parents of the study and taking their prior appointment over phone at a mutually convenient date and time. However, all the selected households could not be interviewed, mostly due to the refusal of some parents to participate in the study. Ultimately, 209 parents were interviewed mostly in their homes and a few in their workplaces at a convenient time. Interestingly, some interviews started as late as 7 pm, only after parents returned to the home from workplaces. Each interview lasted up to 1 ½ and 2 1⁄2 hours and comprised two parts. The first was a structured questionnaire covering the socio-economic profile of the households. The second was a semi-structured qualitative component, which explored in detail the nuances and intricacies of school choice in each household. Separate interviews with the headteachers of schools and the managers or administrators in the case of private schools were also conducted using a semi-structured interview schedule. Parallel to this, interviews with LSGI functionaries, educational authorities and some key informants in the villages were also conducted.

As discussed above, this study has adopted a mixed method approach, in which elements of quantitative and qualitative research approaches were combined for ensuring breadth as well as depth of understanding of the problem in hand. To be specific, the study followed an explanatory research design with a participant selection model (Creswell & Clark 2006). In this dual-phase model, the quantitative data collected during the first phase was made use to 'select the participants for a follow-up, in-depth, qualitative study' (pp 74, ibid 2006) in the second phase. While quantitative data was employed for the selection of villages and sample households in the first stage, and to summarise the socio-economic status of the households, qualitative data in the form of subjective perceptions and experiences of individuals were used to explore how the parental preferences were formed and then translated into actual school choice. The following brief provides a broader picture of the sampled households.

In the sample, though Hindu and Muslim households were represented in almost equal share (49% and 45%) respectively, the Christian households' comprised only a meagre 6%. Of the total 102 Hindu households, the forward castes comprised 17%, the OBCs 61% and the SC/STs 22%. In terms of income, while 50% of households can be classified as the lower middle class, 6% belonged to what can be called

as the upper middle class, about 42% belonged to the lower income group, which can be labelled as working class, and just 2% of the households can be classified as upper class. In terms of education, the majority of fathers (68%) and mothers (48%) could not complete secondary education. In terms of employment status, among the fathers, the major occupational groups were those involved in manual labour (32%), petty business (23.42%) and working abroad (16%). Among mothers, while 80% were engaged in household work, those engaged in private office employment (8%) formed the major occupational group.

Conceptual Framework: A Model of School Choice

Taking clue from Harma (2011) and Srivastava (2007), it is proposed that school choice is a complex process involving two levels, first 1) forming a preference towards a particular type of school and then 2) transforming this preference to actual choice of a school mediated through the specific socio-political-economic context. These two interrelated levels of school choice do not operate in vacuum but are the products of a set of interrelated factors. The model proposes that school choice is not a straightforward step taken in haste by the households rather it is a continuous process in which the households first make a preference in favour of a particular type of schooling in the local socio-political-economic context followed by transforming this preference into the actual choice. However, these two processes need not unfold in a linear sequential fashion. Instead, they often overlap or supersede one another, depending on the specific local context. In what permutation and combination different influential factors act together ultimately decides the actual school choice. In most of the cases, the boundaries of preferring and choosing were so blurred making it difficult to distinguish between the two. In this study, the author was guided by the *landscape of choice* approach put forward by Bowe, Gewirtz & Ball (1994) which, rather than simply aggregating the reasons or criteria of parental choice of schooling, suggested to 'capture both the complex interaction of criteria for choice (where they exist), the relative importance of certain reasons and the affective and material aspects of choice-making' (p. 75). Following this approach, the author tried 'to situate individual processes of decision-making within the multi-layered context in which such decisions are made' (p. 75).

Findings and Discussions

The first part of this discussion gives a summary of household preference and choice patterns across the villages and in the second part, the author discusses how the school choice gets unfolded in the households and the role of persuading factors in shaping the preference and that of constraining factors in converting the preference to actual choice.

Household Preference and Choice Patterns

All the households were asked, at the beginning of the interview, first to list three factors which formed the basis of their preference of a particular type of school for their first child, and second, to specify which particular primary school they preferred for this child. On the basis of the category of the preferred school (i.e. public, private budget or privately established), the preference of the households was recorded. Across the sample, less than half (46 per cent) of households preferred public schools for their children (See Table 1).

Table 1: Village Wise Preference for Schooling

Type of School	Urban			Rural			Total
	Chgengannur	Beypore	Total	Mulakuzha	Kalikavu	Total	
Public	1 (3.57)	43 (55.84)	**44 (41.91)**	8 (25)	45 (62.5)	**53 (50.97)**	**97 (46.41)**
Pvt.Established	19 (67.82)	5 (6.49)	**24 (22.86)**	21 (65.63)	5 (6.94)	**26 (25)**	**50 (23.92)**
Pvt.Budget	8 (28.57)	29 (37.66)	**37 (35.24)**	3 (9.38)	22 (30.56)	**25 (24.04)**	**62 (29.67)**
Total	**28 (100)**	**77 (100)**	**105 (100)**	**32 (100)**	**72 (100)**	**104 (100)**	**209 (100)**

However, this percentage was exceptionally low in both the southern villages, while the northern villages show a greater preference for public schools, as high as 63 per cent in Kalikavu. Similarly, a stark difference between south and north is seen in the preference for private established schools. While in the south, the preference is for established schools, in the north, it is for budget schools.

In moving to the actual choice made by households as against the preference they expressed (as given in Table 2),

Table 2 : Actual School Choice Patterns

Type of School	Urban			Rural			Total
	Chgengannur	Beypore	Total	Mulakuzha	Kalikavu	Total	
Public	1 (3.57)	50 (64.94)	**51 (48.57)**	10 (31.25)	58 (80.56)	**68 (65.38)**	**119 (56.94)**
Pvt.Established	12 (42.86)	2 (2.6)	**14 (13.33)**	13 (40.63)	0	**13 (12.50)**	**27 (12.92)**
Pvt.Budget	15 (53.57)	25 (32.47)	**40 (38.10)**	9 (28.13)	14 (19.44)	**23 (22.12)**	**63 (30.14)**
Total	**28 (100)**	**77 (100)**	**105 (100)**	**32 (100)**	**72 (100)**	**104 (100)**	**209 (100)**

the percentage of public schools was found to increase from 46 per cent to 57 percent while that of private schools declined by around 10 per cent correspondingly. Even though in the case of private budget schools, the preference as well as actual choice were the same (around 30 per cent), this does not mean that all those who preferred budget schools chose them. Instead, irrespective of preference, a wide-scale cross choice of schools had occurred in the sample. The plot of preference *Vs* actual choice in Table 3 provides a more detailed understanding of the number of households who had chosen a different school from their preferred option.

Table 3: Preference *Vs* Actual Choice

Actual Choice / Preference	Public	Private Established	Private Budget	Total
Public	93	0	4	**97**
Private Established	6	25	19	**50**
Private Budget	20	0	42	**62**
Total	**119**	**25**	**65**	**209**

From table 3, it becomes clear that just above three-fourth of the households (i.e. 160 out of 209) were able to maintain their original preference while making the final choice. The data reveals that the conversion rate from preference to choice was highest among households who preferred public schools and least among those who preferred private established schools. Of the ninety seven households who preferred public schooling, ninety three ultimately chose that

option and only four chose private budget schools. Of the fifty households who preferred private established schools, only half stuck with that choice, while six chose public schools and nineteen chose private budget schools. And of the sixty two that preferred private budget schooling, twenty ended up choosing public schools. However, none of the households chose a private established school after preferring a public school or private budget school. In other words, the data revealed that the preference for private established schools was least likely to be maintained in actual choice, whereas the default choice across the sample, irrespective of preference, was public schools. In the following section, the author discusses how the preference and in-turn the choice gets shaped in the households.

Unfolding the School Choice Process: From Preferring to Choosing

The data revealed that the twin processes of preferring and choosing were influenced by two different sets of factors, called 'persuading factors' and 'constraining factors' respectively. The initial process of preferring was found to be influenced mostly by the persuading factors, namely (1) parents' perception on quality schooling like (a) teachers' attitude and behaviour, (b) the medium of instruction and (c) the syllabus offered; (2) parental aspirations, (3) affordability of the school and (4) ideology, both religious and political. The author found these persuading factors operated in the backdrop of the specific local socio-historic-political context in the villages in shaping the parental preferences. Generally, these factors were found to attract or positively influence households toward preferring a particular type of schooling. If not influenced by the category of constraining factors at the next level, these preferences got directly translated into actual choice. In most cases, more than one of these factors combined to influence preference and later choice.

Persuading Factors Shaping the Preference

Parental perception on quality of schooling

Parental perception on quality of schooling turned out to be one of the most influential persuading factors in making a preference. Roughly, 56 per cent of the interviewed parents referred to this as the most influential factor, though they differed substantially on what constituted quality. At least three distinct components of quality, namely, teacher's attitude and behavior, medium of instruction and syllabus to which parents subscribed could be found out during the analysis. However, even within these components, one could find parents referring to different aspects mostly on class lines.

Teacher's Attitude and Behaviour

Among working class and middle class parents, in general, a negative perception of the attitude and behaviour of teachers in public schools

emerged as an important persuading factor in creating a preference for private schools. They perceived public school teachers to be not strict and responsible and indifferent to students in the class as against their private counterparts, which in turn persuaded them to prefer private schools. However, in most cases, it was found that parents relied on their own childhood experiences rather than on the prevailing conditions in public schools. Parents having some kind of first-hand experience with the functioning of public schools currently could reflect on the changes in the attitude of the teachers in public schools from being indifferent to the student needs in the past to treating them as their own children nowadays. For example, a grandfather of a student from a public (PA) school in Mulakuzha articulated the current scenario in public schools, and offered some explanation for it

> *'Teachers care for the children well.. Children are safe there.. When I studied, there were 60 children in one class and naturally, teachers were not able to take care of all equally.. But now as there are fewer children, teachers treat them like their own children.. Whatever sweets they make in their home, they bring them to the school and give them to the children.. We have the freedom to ask teachers anything about the child's education.. Of course, that is true for all schools nowadays, but I am just saying'*

This and similar narratives point to a perceived positive change in teachers' attitudes and conduct in public schools, and offer two plausible explanations. First, a reduction in class size in recent years has resulted in more attention paid to children in the classroom. Second, dwindling enrolments may have forced teachers to change their attitudes in order to attract and retain children, in the interest of their own survival.

Parental perception on public schooling also appeared to have been negatively affected by the trend among public school teachers, especially in the two villages in southern Kerala, of sending their wards to private schools. Parents found it rational not to send their children to public schools, when the teachers there themselves refused to do so. A working class parent from Chengannur who enrolled her daughter in a private budget school commented:

'To my personal knowledge, there are around 20 schools in this locality.. Majority of the teachers in public schools are not sending their children to their own schools... They send them to ADS (an established private school in Aranmula, an adjacent locality) or such schools".. What an irony is this? First, teachers should show us examples by sending their children to public schools; they should be the models.. [Otherwise], we will feel that they have no confidence in the syllabus and teaching.. The government is giving them a salary and pension from our taxes.. From the huge amount of money they are

getting, they spend on private schools for their children's education. ..
Not only that, in order to attract the children to their schools, they
spend money on giving bags, umbrellas and sponsoring travel
expenses.. They need not do all this, but only send their children to
their own schools'

In a nutshell, though a perceived negative attitude and behaviour among public school teachers acted as a persuading factor for a substantial number of households to prefer private schooling, in general, parents – irrespective of whether they preferred a private or public school – recognized a change in public school teachers' attitude over time.

English Medium

Though English as the medium of instruction was listed by only a small proportion (less than 10%) of the parents as an influential criterion of school choice, in-depth interviews revealed across class groups and villages, English medium instruction was perhaps the most strongly influential factor in forming school preference irrespective of the public or private nature of schooling. Most of the time, this factor was clubbed together with factors like quality and syllabus, rendering it invisible in the list. A good number of parents asserted that, 'English is important nowadays and is essential for the future' and in the case of middle-class parents, this reflected their own life experiences as under in the words of a father in Beypore:

> *English is essential for life these days.. Wherever we go for a*
> *job, the first question we are asked is whether you know*
> *English or not.. I am saying this from my own personal*
> *experience.. When I went to the Gulf for the first time, I did not*
> *know how to speak English and that affected me a lot.. But now*
> *I speak English well.. Without English, you will not be able to*
> *live outside our country'*

The structural lacunae in the public schooling system, specifically the compulsory switchover to English medium in 11th standard also persuaded a handful of parents to choose English medium for their wards. However, at least thirty seven (around 17 per cent) parents, all from working class backgrounds, openly expressed that they would not be able to help their children with their studies if they were enrolled in English medium, indicating how medium of instruction played an important role in making the preference. Interestingly, the author could also see parents, especially in the two villages in the Northern Kerala deliberately preferring Malayalam medium for their wards as they perceived study of English as a subject from class I itself would be sufficient for getting proficiency over the language.

Syllabus

The data revealed that syllabus turned out to be the third persuading factor though only a negligibly small (less than 5 per cent) percentage of parents specifically mentioned it. Like in the case of medium, this got subsumed in the notion of quality though in-depth probes brought out its importance in making the preference. As parents gained an 'insider' view on syllabus only after their child had experienced a particular syllabus, their perceptions on syllabus mostly appeared to be post-choice rather than pre-preference. This made it difficult to understand its actual influence on preference-making or actual choice. Also, in the absence of any first-hand experience of the syllabus, parents appeared to be driven by the popular discourse in the vernacular media, which vehemently, and at times blindly criticized the adoption of curriculum reforms and child centered pedagogy by the State and ended up glorifying the earlier teacher-centered classroom transactions. Most working class and at least a few middle-class parents were found to have a very narrow and quantitative approach to the question of syllabus, evincing more concern about the volume of the content rather than its quality or the pedagogical approach. Many expressed concerns about the dilution in the volume of content in the State syllabus and failed to appreciate the child-centered pedagogical approach put forward by the Kerala Curriculum Framework (KCF). Conversely, they felt the contents of the private text books taught at the PUR and PUUR schools something so 'thickened' that helped their wards to reach new heights academically.

Many working-class and middle class parents were found to compare the content of the private syllabus with that of the state syllabus and valorizing the syllabus in which their children were taught. Interestingly, many working class parents, even while recognizing the advantages of the child-centric approach by the state syllabus, often found it difficult to help their children in their studies due to lack of sufficient content in the text books for them to refer. One working class mother in Beypore explained as follows:

> *'I am confused about whether or not to send my child to private school.. In private school, everything is taught in the school.. They will make them memorize the subjects.. That is good for small children. But I think the quality is good in government schools.. I will explain from my experience.. When my elder son was in primary classes, books were used from Poorna publications.. Everything in a lesson is given within the book.. For example, if we are studying about Gandhiji, all the details are there in the book – where he was born, who the parents were, etc.. But in Kerala State syllabus textbooks, children are asked to find the details by independently enquiring from others.. Intelligent children can collect this information and study, those with money will go to tuition and get the*

information.. But others will go down in studies.. That is one big problem, I felt.. In private, teachers make them study everything given in the lessons and also take tuitions. In exams, small one-word questions will be given. Here (in govt. school), children cannot study by rote, they need to write answers on their own.. Exam questions are long and it takes them time to understand what is in the questions before they can write answers.. Two hours is not sufficient for all this.. That is the problem"

In a nutshell, the aversion to the State syllabus and inclination for private syllabus among parents with lower levels of educational attainments appeared to arise from two main sources: first, the common perception that the contents of the State syllabus textbooks have been diluted since the implementation of educational reforms, forcing their children into a disadvantaged position vis-a-vis their counterparts in private schools; and second, ordinary parents felt the KFC textbooks which focused on the process rather than the content of education of any use to help their children in studies. By contrast, they found self-sufficient private text books in the older formats more useful. At least a handful of parents of this category also believed that the CBSE or ICSE syllabi were not suitable for their 'not so intelligent' children. On the other hand, many middle-class and upper class parents, however, appreciated the new pedagogical approaches followed by the State syllabus and differentiated it from the so-called private syllabi.

Parental Aspirations

Parental aspirations on their children's future also found a place among the persuading factors, though not so common as other factors mentioned above. Specifically just three households mentioned this as an influencing factor. However, interviews revealed that parents from working-class and middle class groups strived to make their children achieve what they themselves could not achieve in life. Many parents, who studied in Malayalam medium were found enrolling their children either in English medium either in private schools or at least in public schools so that the children didn't face the difficulties due to lack of knowledge of English which they faced in life. They expressed aspirations for a better future for their wards through the English medium of education and were ready to spend money on private education to achieve these goals. One parent in Chengannur said:

'Our children should get a better education than what we got.. They should have higher standards… It is no use simply earning and saving money, education is important nowadays… From my experience in the Army, I have understood this… Many from poor backgrounds are reaching high positions because of a good education… Some parents wonder why they

should spend a lot of money on education instead of saving for their children's marriages, but I don't agree with that… As people in the olden days said, education is money'

Affordability

Affordability turned out to be a pertinent persuading factor in preferring private budget schools among working class and lower-middle class households. At least nineteen working class households preferred private budget schools only because they charged affordable fees. In Kerala, with prevailing high wage rates, even unskilled manual labourers at the bottom of the employment ladder earned between Rs. 600 and Rs. 800 per day on average, and they did not seem to mind spending Rs. 200-300 per month per child in a private budget school. The words of parents in Beypore clearly articulate this stand.

'We don't think that government schools are bad. My sister's daughter is studying in GUN (government school) in English medium and she is doing well. Here, fees are not that much. Only 200 per month.. Every year, they will increase some 10 or 20 rupees. So it is affordable for us'

The schools' leniency in payment schedules, which sprang from a fear of losing students to other budget schools in the locality, also worked in favour of parents. This pattern was clearly evident in the southern villages, where private schools – both established and budget – competed among themselves for survival due to dwindling child population.

Ideology

Both religious and political ideology also turned out to be a persuading factor in making the school preference, especially in the two villages in the north, namely Beypore and Kalikavu. In Beypore, one could see the influence of the three successive Hindu-Muslim riots, which caused rifts in the society on religious basis in making a preference based on ideology. A few parents, in the influence of a secular political ideology, preferred public schools – where students from both the communities intermingled – for the role they played in healing the wounds of the riots. One such response of a parent in Beypore is here:

> *'After the religious riots in the area, this school tried a lot to bridge the gap between Hindus and Muslims.... There have been attempts to increase the communal divide by starting schools exclusively in the name of religions. But this school did a lot to heal the wounds of the Marad riots as children from both the communities show here what communal harmony is and it is the duty of the secular minded persons to promote these kinds of public schools'*

In the same village, the author could also see parents preferring schools run by both Hindu and Muslim religious denominations, which according to them helped their students to imbibe the culture, different from that of the 'other'. The influence of religious ideology on school preference was seen more among households of minority communities who were living in an area dominated by a majority community. In Kalikavu, a Muslim majority village, many parents from Hindu families preferred the lone private school run by the Hindu community as it offered education on religious line. A Hindu father in Kalikavu explained his rationale for choosing a private budget school run by his own community group:

> *'Our children didn't even know the evening prayers then. That's why the school was started under the temple and the name 'Devi' (goddess) was given. Children should acquire our traditional knowledge and know how to respect the older generation.. The younger generation nowadays shows no respect for anyone. But with the opening of this school, things have changed. Children bow and touch our feet before going to school every day. It's a great feeling for us… Also, language here in Malappuram is a problem. The influence of Muslim slang is there even when teachers speak. That affects the speech of our children... If we send children here at least up to 4th standard, I think, they will acquire good language and it can be set right. That's why we thought of sending our child here'*

Similar was the case with Muslim parents in Chengannur (where Muslims are a minority), preferring the school run by their community in the nearby village.

Role of Constraining Factors in Converting the Preference to Actual Choice

 The analysis brought out that of the sampled households, not all could convert their preference for a particular type of school to actual choice. As seen above, in the case of about one-fourth of the households, the author could see the influence of constraining factors, which included (1) distance of the school (2) cost of schooling and (3) religious and social practices which restricted the households from translating their preference into choice.

Distance of the School

Distance of the school turned out to be an important constraining factor in denying households access to a preferred school. Of the forty nine households that had chosen a school other than their preferred school, at least ten, who preferred private established schools had to settle for either private budget schools or public schools in the vicinity due to

ease of physical access. A few households also had to opt for a different private established school in the vicinity though they preferred a school in a locality slightly further away. Distance influenced the decision-making through factors such as travelling expenses, travel time and the timing of school buses. While travelling expenses prevented mostly working class and lower-middle class households from transforming their preference to choice, the upper middle-class and upper class families were concerned with the travel time and logistics related to school bus timings. A parent in Mulakuzha commented:

> *'We had thought of [sending our children to an] ICSE [school], but as they are small children, we couldn't send them that far.. Even now it is difficult. The bus comes at 7.15 am and they return only by 5.30-5.45 pm.. A lot of time is spent on travel.. After coming back, they don't get any time to play'*

The wide catchment area of the private established schools, spread across several nearby villages, necessitated running school buses along several routes and students along a particular route were transported together to the school.

Cost of Schooling

Cost of private schooling, especially in the case of private established schooling, turned out to be a major constraining factor for many working class and lower-middle class parents, effectively stopping them from choosing their preferred school. The cost not only involved the school fees but in most cases also included donations at the time of enrolment, expenses for books and uniforms, and fees for private after-school tuition. Twenty eight households in the sample could not afford the cost of private schooling and had to opt for an affordable private budget or public schooling for their wards. The number of children per household also played an important role in this regard, as more than half of these twenty eight households were found to have three or more children in them. Even a few upper middle-class households with more than two children were refrained from sending all their children to private established schools due to escalating costs.

Religious and Social Practices

In Beypore and Kalikavu, religious and social norms and practices were found to influence the final school choice among Muslim community. A handful of Muslim households in these villages, although preferred private established schools for their wards, ultimately had to settle for local public or private schools, as they wanted them to receive Madrassa education hand-in-hand with the school education. In most cases, the inability to find travelling time to reach the faraway private school after the Madrassa – usually up to

8.30 am in the morning – became the constraint. Schools' restrictions on children wearing the traditional dress stipulated by their religion also constrained households from choosing their school of preference in a few cases.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the process of school choice at the household level in four villages of Chengannur, Mulakuzha, Beypore and Kalikavu in the context of increasing privatization of the schooling system in the state of Kerala. It confirms the importance and necessity of the contextual understanding of the process of school choice in which parents act as active choosers and thus critiques the neo-liberal construct of school choice in Indian context as a straightforward selection of better and cheap private schooling as against low-quality public schooling. The paper establishes the role of persuading and constraining factors in shaping the preference and choice at the household level. It suggests that the reasons for increasing preference for private schooling are to be found in the parents' perceptions on schooling which are moulded on the basis of their own day-to-day experiences within and outside the schooling system rather than lead by the discourse of quality in educational policies. Interestingly, it came out that along with factors which have a direct bearing on the academic performance of students like syllabus and medium of education, non-academic factors like affordability, ideology, distance of schooling and socio-religious practices also played an important role in shaping the preference. The influence of factors like religious ideology on school choice is a cause of concern given its implication for the existence of a pluralistic society like ours. The fact that the preference for private schooling is not uniform across the sampled villages points towards the need for a more contextual understanding of the process of school choice in the local socio-historic-economic-political milieu, which is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, it calls for locality specific policy interventions with the involvement of parents recognizing their stake in the schooling system

References

Ball, S. J., Bowe, R. & Gewirtz, S. (1995). Circuits of schooling: a sociological exploration of parental choice of school in social class contexts. *Sociological Review,* 43(1), 52-78.

Bowe, R., Gewirtz, S., & Ball, S. J. (2006). Captured by the discourse? Issues and concerns in researching 'parental choice'. In Education and Society (pp. 355-374). Routledge.

Cherukad, R. (2010) Pothuvidyabhyasam Pinbenchileyk (Malayalam). Kozhikode: Mathrubhumi

Creswell, J. W., & Clark, P. V. L. (2006). *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Dixon, P. (2012) Why the denial? Low-cost private schools in developing countries and their contributions to education. *Econ Journal Watch*, 9(3), 186-209.

Dreze, J & Sen, A (2002). *India: Development and Participation*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press

District Information System of Education. (2012). *Elementary Education in India: Analytical Tables 2013-13*. New Delhi: NUEPA

George, K. K., Zachariah, G. & Kumar, N. A. (2003). Grants-in-aid policies and practices towards secondary education in Kerala. *Journal of Educational Planning and Administration*, 17(2), 199-226.

George, K. K., & Sunaina, P. (2005) Dynamics of change in Kerala's education system: The socio-economic and political dimensions, *Working Paper No. 12*, Kochi: CSES

Government of India. (2010). *Report of the 11th Joint Review Mission of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.* New Delhi: SSA

Government of Kerala. (2009). *Report on Survey of Unrecognized Schools*. Thiruvananthapuram: Department of Economics and Statistics

Government of Kerala. (2010). *Economic Review 2010*. Thiruvananthapuram: State Planning Board

Government of Kerala. (2011). *Economic Review 2011*. Thiruvananthapuram: State Planning Board

Harinath, S., & Gundemeda, N. (2021). Dalits and choice of schools: a sociological study of private schools in Telangana State. *Sociological Bulletin*, 70 (2), 214–231.

Harma, J. (2011). Low cost private schooling in India: Is it pro poor and equitable? *International Journal of Educational Development*, 31 (4), 350-356

Hill, E., Samson, M., & Dasgupta, S. (2011) Expanding the school market in India: Parental choice and the reproduction of social inequality. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 46(35), 98-105

Jeffery, R. (1976). Temple entry movement in Travancore 1860-1940. *Social Scientist*, 4(8), 3-27

Kingdon, G. (1996a). Private schooling in India: Size, nature and equity-effects. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31(51), 3306-3314

Kingdon, G. (1996b). The quality and efficiency of private and public education: A case study of urban India. *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics*, 58(1), 57-82.

Krishnakumar, R, (2001). Kerala's lessons. *Frontline*, 28, 21-24

Nambissan, G. (2012). Private schools for the poor: Business as usual? *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47(41), 51-58

National Council of Educational Research and Training. (2002). *Seveneth All India School Education Survey*. New Delhi: NCERT

Patnaik, P. (1995). The international context and the "Kerala Model", *Social Scientist*, 23(1-3), 37-49

Salim, A. A. & Nair, P.R.G. (2002). *Educational Development in India*. New Delhi: Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd.

Sarangapani, P. M, & Winch, C. (2010). Tooley, Dixon and Gomathi on Private Education in Hyderabad: A Reply. *Oxford Review of Education*, 36(4), 499-515.

Srivastava, P. (2007) Neither voice nor loyalty: School choice and the low-fee private sector in India. *Research Publications Series, Occasional Paper No. 134*. New York: National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education, Columbia University.

Tooley, J (2007) Could for-profit private education benefit the poor? Some a priori considerations arising from case study research in India. Journal of Educational Policy, 22 (3), 321-342

Tooley, J. & Dixon, P. (2003a) *Private Education is Good for the Poor*. Washington DC: CATO Institute.

Tooley, J. & Dixon, P. (2003b) *Private Schools for the Poor: A Case Study from India*. Reading: Centre for British Teachers

Tooley, J. & Dixon, P. (2007a). Private schooling for low-income families: A census and comparative survey in East Delhi, India. *International Journal of Educational Development* 27(2), 205–219

Tooley, J. & Dixon, P. (2007b). Private schooling serving the poor – A study from Delhi, India. *Working Paper*. New Delhi: Centre for Civil Society

Tooley, J., Dixon, P., & Gomathi, S.V. (2007) Private schools and the millennium development goal of universal primary education: A census and comparative survey in Hyderabad, India. *Oxford Review of Education*, 33(5), 539–560

Tharakan, P.K.M. (1984) Socio-economic factors in educational development: Case of nineteenth century Travancore. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19 (45), 1913-1928

Sethunath R *is a Doctoral Scholar at the Madras Institute of Development Studies*

Email id: sethunathr@gmail.com

Research in Progress: Sociology of Health and Illness: A Comparative Study of Kerala and Bihar

Author(s): Sandeep Mokanpally and Gurram Ashok

Sociology of Health and Illness: A Comparative Study of Kerala and Bihar

---Sandeep Mokanpally and Gurram Ashok

Abstract

The population's health status is one of the important measures of its social and economic well-being. With a variety of initiatives, the Indian government is attempting to guarantee that the population of India will have access to better health through adequate and affordable healthcare services. Shifts in demographic and epidemiological patterns have occurred as a result of improved quality of life and socio-economic constraints. While it is imperative to understand that nutritional deficiencies in the country vary by state, for example, Kerala and Bihar are the best and low performing states in Niti Aayog's Health index (2021) respectively. Three decadal data from NFHS surveys pertaining to these two states has been analysed. Despite Kerala having a strong public health system, it showed an increasing malnutrition and anaemia levels among children and women. Contrary to the conventional perception, the vulnerable section such as SCs, STs, OBCs and women suffer the undernutrition and health issues in Kerala. Health improvement is supported by a wide range of coexisting sociological factors that must be addressed through a variety of programmes. Hence, inter-sectoral activities must be recognised in order to achieve a significant improvement in health in Bihar and Kerala, as well as throughout India.

Keywords: Anaemia, Epidemiological transition, Nutritional status, Public Health

Introduction

The covid-19 pandemic has exposed the health inequalities in India. These inequalities are entangled with the social structures such as class, caste, gender, race, ethnicity and region. Raj & Raj (2004) argue that the caste inequalities and economic disparities adversely impact the people's reproductive choices in the eastern states; Bihar, Bengal and Orissa. Further, education, awareness of health and sense of hygiene and occupation also function as the determinants of the public health. In other words, "disease and inequality are intimately linked. The outcome of the unequal distribution of political, economic and social resources necessary for a healthy life is the social gradient of health" (White, 2016, p.1). Similarly, "WHO (2008) pointed out that illness is becoming increasingly intertwined with poverty and deprivation" (Karvonen et al, 2018, p.2). The politics of public health is embedded in the sociological map of the people who suffer the illness. This is often manifested in terms of the health policies of the

state (Will, 2020). The study on fifteen Asian countries concludes that health care is a necessity good in these countries in the long run (Khan, & Ul Husnain, 2019). In such context, the state's role in providing the health care is a crucial element for a health society in developing countries like India.

The state's measures for public health in contemporary India was observed that:

"at about 1.28% of its gross domestic product (GDP), India's spending on public health (as of 2017-18) is one of the lowest in the world. In the first year after coming to power, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government reduced the health budget by around 15%. The budget allocated for the National Health Mission has declined between 2014 and 2020, and the government's insurance scheme Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PMJAY) continues to be riddled with inefficiencies" (EPW Engage, 2021, Para 1).

Such disparity in the budgetary allocations for health care reveals the vulnerable conditions of public health in India. There have been such academic attempts to analyse Public health interventions at national level but not many studies at the sub-national level in India. This paper presents an analytical approach to the sociology of health and illness. An attempt is made to study understanding the intra-state dynamics within the country by selecting Kerala and Bihar which are the best and low performing states respectively in the health index released by Niti Aayog (2021). Further, the data from five National Family Health Surveys (NFHS) utilised the nutritional and health profile of both states: Kerala and Bihar in their surveys for the last thirty years. NFHS survey uses representative samples of households throughout India which is a multi-round, large scale survey that provides comprehensive data on various health indicators. The significance of the survey is to provide essential data on health and family welfare of the Indian community as required by the ministry of health and family welfare and other civil society organisations for policy making and betterment of society. International institute of population sciences is the nodal agency responsible for providing technical guidance and collaborative actions through Filed Organisations to carry out the NFHS survey.

Nutritional and Anaemic Status in Kerala and Bihar

The nutritional status is studied in terms of "Stunting", "Underweight" and "Wasting" of the children as per WHO guidelines. Joe and Subramanian (2020) identify the alarming situation of increasing levels of stunting in the better performing state, Kerala in the fourth NFHS survey of 2015-16. Similarly, Fig.1 indicates the overall languishing nutritional status among the children in Bihar compared to Kerala. But the fig.1 clearly indicates that, like Kerala, Bihar shows the sustained

declining trend of stunting, underweight and wasting among children from NFHS-2 to NFHS-4. NFHS-5 shows the increasing trend of underweight and Stunting among the children in Kerala while these two fell down in Bihar. The problem of child wasting has risen in Bihar in NFHS-5. Kerala experiences malnutrition despite being a developed state and presumed to be a model of egalitarian society with high levels of literacy rate and mobility. The socio-economic reasons for increasing trend of undernutrition in Kerala can be found that:

"… (1) Kerala is a rapidly urbanizing state with high population and vehicle density (2) being primarily a consumer state; Kerala depends upon other states for most of the food commodities. The association between the nutritional statuses of mothers and children indicates the vulnerability of multiple members from poor households to be malnourished" (Jayalakshmi & Kannan, 2021, p.8).

The above passage provides insight into present children nutritional status and issues for future human resources in Kerala. This invokes the poverty and marginality of the people in Kerala in assessing nutritional food.

The decline trend of stunting, wasting and underweight is observed among the children in Bihar from 2006 to 2020 (Pant et al, 2021, p.9) can be attributed to continuous efforts of state and central governments such as Ankuran Programme and Poshan Abhiyan to end malnutrition in the state. However, Bihar, India's poorest state with low literacy rate (Census, 2011) still faces the challenge of malnutrition with 48.3 percent of children lacking nutritional intake (UNICEF, 2020). The reasons for high levels of undernutrition can be traced to sociological factors. Larson et al (2017) argues that household income, parental education, food deprivation and lack of dietary diversity are the main causes for increasing malnutrition in Bihar.

Fig.1. Child Nutritional Status of Kerala and Bihar
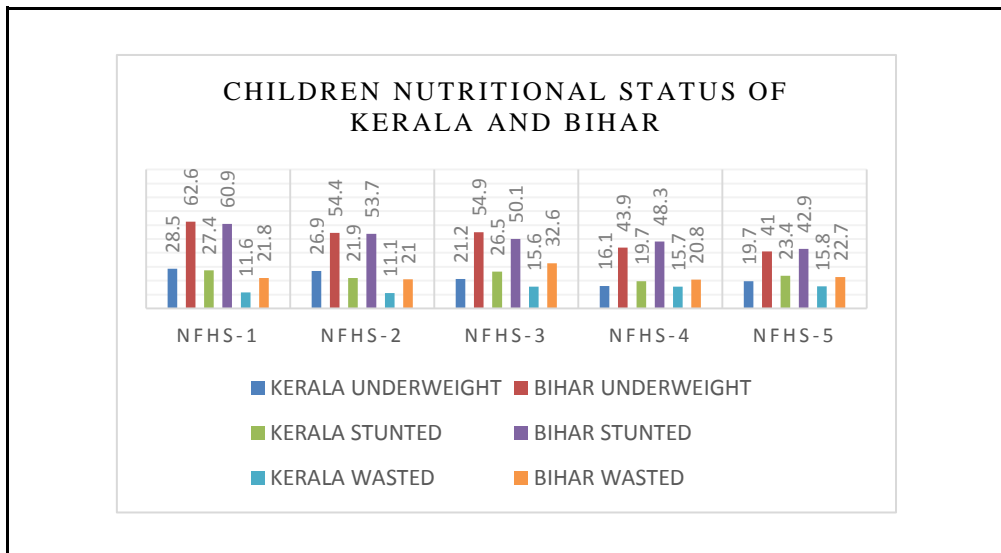
Source: NFHS-1 to 5.

Fig.2. Anaemic status of Children and Adults in Kerala and Bihar
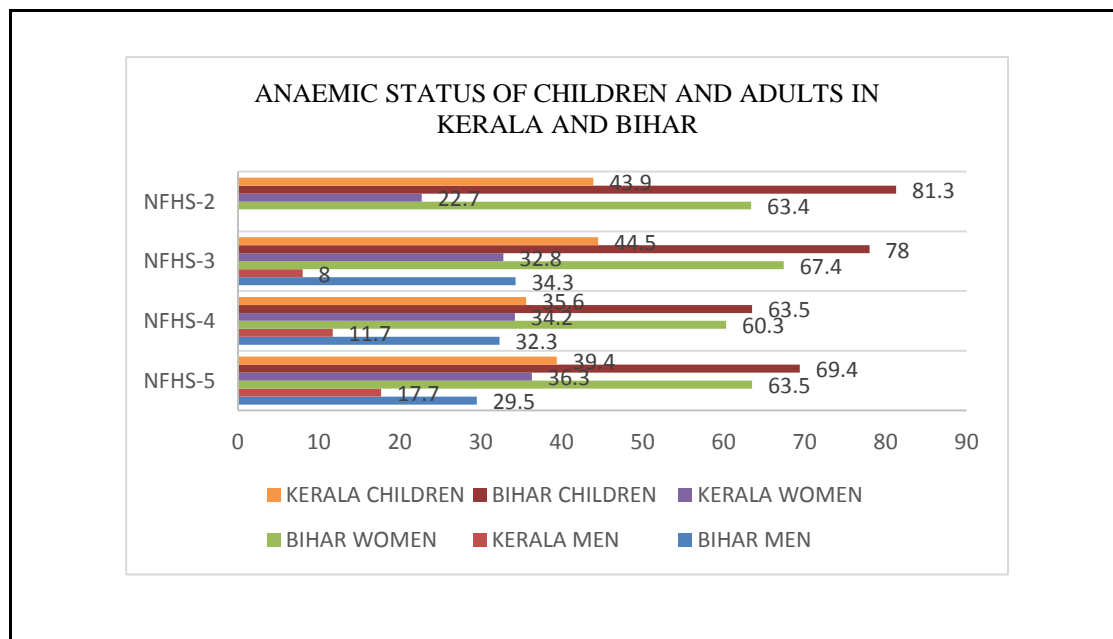
Source: NFHS surveys from 2 to 5. (NFHS-1 data is not available for this specific context).

Both Kerala and Bihar witness the decline of anaemic status among children and women while it is increased among men from NFHS-2 to

NFHS-3. Both states showed the increasing levels of anaemic status for all: children, women and men in both states from NFHS-4 to NFHS-5. Though Kerala is doing better than Bihar in numerical reduction but exhibits the increasing trend of anaemic people in the state. Thus, the fig.1 and fig.2 infer that Kerala's public health is in peril if neglected further.

Table.1. Caste wise Anaemic status in Kerala

	SC			ST			BC			OTHER		
	C	W	M	C	W	M	C	W	M	C	W	M
NFHS-2	36.1	26.8	NA	NA	34.1	NA	38.6	22.3	NA	49.2	22.1	NA
NFHS-3	47.2	37.7	8.8	NA	51.9	NA	44.8	33.4	9.3	43.8	30.8	7.0
NFHS-4	32.3	36.2	11.8	49.9	48.0	13.5	36.0	35.0	11.7	36.0	31.7	11.9
NFHS-5	44.1	41.5	22.6	57.6	52.9	35.4	38.5	35.3	16.3	37.8	35.4	17.0

Source: NFHS survey reports from 2 to 5 (NFHS-1 data is not available).
SC=Scheduled castes, ST= Scheduled Tribes, OBC= Other Backward Castes, Other= Non-SC/ST and OBCs. C= Children, W= women, M=Men.

Table.2. Caste wise anaemic status in Bihar

	SC			ST			BC			OTHER		
	C	W	M	C	W	M	C	W	M	C	W	M
NFHS-2	83.5	67.0	NA	93.5	82.1	NA	80.2	60.9	NA	76.8	58.5	NA
NFHS-3	82.0	71.8	42.5	NA	NA	NA	77.4	67.4	32.3	75.7	64.1	33.1
NFHS-4	67.3	62.9	32.0	68.0	64.4	35.0	62.3	59.7	32.3	60.9	58.2	32.2
NFHS-5	73.6	64.6	30.4	71.1	64.7	20.5	67.8	63.0	28.3	68.5	63.6	34.0

Source: NFHS survey reports from 2 to 5 (NFHS-1 data is not available).
SC=Scheduled castes, ST= Scheduled Tribes, OBC= Other Backward Castes, Other= Non-SC/ST and OBCs. C= Children, W= women, M=Men.

It is evident from Table 1 and Table 2 that the vulnerable sections such as children, women and men from Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) categories suffer more from anaemia than Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and other categories. This amounts to that the health inequalities are contingent on the social inequalities.

The graded inequalities of caste and gender reflected in the public health in both states, Kerala and Bihar. Kerala with its high literacy

rate and HDI (Human Development Index) also failed to end the "hidden hunger" (malnutrition) of the marginalized sections which endangered the public health in the state. The lack of a sociological approach to health and economic policies results in the deprivation of health for marginalised sections.

Understanding the Disease Burden

Amuna & Zotor (2008) argue that developing countries began to witness the epidemiological transition accompanied due to changes in nutritional status. The low levels of nutritional intake leading to a low immune system make the individuals susceptible to communicable diseases. Socioeconomic conditions play a vital role in public health in a country. According to Lee (2003), "the demographic transition, described as an upward shift in population dynamics associated with socio-economic development (i.e. rising incomes, education, employment, improvements in health status and life expectancy and changes in lifestyles), has been said to be accompanied by an epidemiological transition" (Amuna & Zotor, 2008, p.82). Thus, the epidemiological transition is reflected in the shift of disease burden in society. In examining Kerala's public health, Sebastian et al (2021) argue that nutritional status has an impact on "mortality and co-morbidities" among the people in Kerala during the pre-COVID times. The improvement of nutrition will decrease the risk of mortality rate.

The shift from infectious and parasitic diseases to chronic and degenerative diseases of adulthood as the leading cause of death is known as the epidemiological transition (United Nations, 1998). Nutritional shift, health shift, demographic shift, and epidemiological transition all occur simultaneously, making it impossible to say which comes first. All of these shifts are the result of socioeconomic progress and modernity.

India has the world's second-largest population and is going through a demographic and epidemiological transition (Jeyalakshmi et al. 2011). This results in an aged population and an increase in chronic diseases. To offer universal access to high-quality health care, the government has developed a number of plans, programs, and national projects. As part of the Global burden of diseases, Injuries, and Risk factors study (GBD) the India State-level burden of disease research has documented a varied epidemiological transition throughout India's states since 1990 (Dandona et al, 2017 and ICMR, 2017). Notwithstanding advancements in economic and health aspects across the world, particularly in India, substantial discrepancies in economic growth and health status prevail (Marmot, 2005). Despite all of this, several Indian states remain in the high-focus zone. One of the aims of the study is to evaluate the epidemiological transition between Bihar, which has some of the poorest health indicators, and Kerala, which has

some of the best health indicators, using the last few National Family Health Surveys data.

In the state-wide comparison of disease burden between Kerala and Bihar, the rate of self-reported morbidity goes almost entirely in the opposite direction of life expectancy. This is known as "positional objectivity," which means that the individual's "position" (income, education, etc.) matters when responding to surveys concerning self-reported morbidity (Sen, 1993). A further likely interpretation of the disparity between objective health status assessments and self-reported health problems is the varying rates of epidemiological transition between socioeconomic groups. In an intra-nation analogue, the wealthier states are ahead of the impoverished ones in terms of epidemiologic transition.

Three decadal national family health surveys have revealed an epidemiological shift in India. The prevalence of tuberculosis decreased among men in Kerala from 623 (NFHS-2) to 489 (NFHS-5) as compared to Bihar where it decreased from 1170 (NFHS-2) to 412 (NFHS-5) per 1 lakh population. When compared to Bihar, the prevalence of diabetes in both women and men is substantially greater in Kerala in some cases it is more than twice. According to the NFHS-5, the prevalence of diabetes in Bihar and Kerala is 4081 and 1364 for women, respectively, 3987 and 1247 for males per one lakh population. In India, the link between socioeconomic position and Self-reported morbidity was first identified in the case of diabetes mellitus, where one quintile increase in wealth was associated with an OR of 1.31 for self-reported diabetes (Corsi & Subramanian, 2012). In both states, the prevalence of goitre has elevated among women. In contrast, this is significantly higher in Kerala than in Bihar, where it increased from 5744 (NFHS-3) to 8696 (NFHS-5).

Despite a gradual decrease in heart disease prevalence from NFHS-4 to NFHS-5, these states' morbidity rates reflect the disease burden from NCDs. From NFHS-4 to NFHS-5, there is a substantial increase in the prevalence of cancers among men and women in Kerala. For the very first time, the NFHS-4 survey (2015-2016) focused on hypertension (one of the primary causes of cardiovascular disease) and blood glucose levels. There are increasing tendencies of hypertension among men and women in Kerala have higher levels of hypertension than men and women in Bihar. Such hypertension increased among men (from 11.5 percent to 18.2 percent) and women (9.2 percent to 11.9 percent) in Kerala while Bihar showed stabilizing conditions of the same between (NFHS-4) and (NFHS-5). It infers that the so-called developed state, Kerala failed to arrest the growing illness among its population.

However, there is less blood glucose levels among men in Kerala and Bihar while women had the highest blood glucose levels in both states. Women fell victim to increasing blood glucose levels from 2.3 percent to 5.6 percent in Bihar and from 3.9 percent to 5.9 percent in Kerala between NFHS-4 and NFHS-5. This indicates the vulnerable condition of women's health in both states. This clearly demonstrates that the burden of non-communicable diseases is drastically increased in Kerala. Despite having sufficient sanitation and health services to prevent communicable diseases, Kerala's TB disease prevalence remains a public health issue, while NCD rates are growing dramatically.

According to the 2011 census, Bihar has the lowest literacy rate (61.8 percent), whereas Kerala has the highest literacy rate (94 percent). The same pattern is also shown in female literacy rates. "Literacy and health status have a strong correlation, thereby reinforcing that Bihar still lags far behind Kerala in terms of access to equitable health care" (Jana, & Basu, 2017). Kerala is considerably ahead of other states in terms of health care, as evidenced by indicators such as birth rate and life expectancy, in addition to having the lowest death rate. Kerala has the highest percentage of people receiving health care from the public health sector, with 76 percent (NFHS-5). Contrastingly, the fact that Bihar had the lowest rate of use of public health sector facilities for sickness treatment with 19.4% demonstrates the state's public health system's poor performance (NFHS-5). Chronic diseases were found to be more prevalent in Kerala than acute diseases, whereas acute diseases were reported much more commonly in Bihar, with the exception of those in the highest quintile (Prinja et al, 2015). Bihar is still struggling with children's nutritional condition, weight, and anaemia. However, there has been a shift in recent years toward improving maternal and newborn child healthcare quality. According to the most recent statistics from the fifth National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), released in 2019–2020, the percentage of women having institutional births and getting pre-and postnatal care has increased significantly in Bihar. The stark discrepancy between the states of Bihar and Kerala exemplifies India's socioeconomic diversity.

This evidence clearly demonstrates that, in addition to epidemiological transition, Kerala is grappling with a dual burden of diseases. Bihar, on the other hand, which has a weak public health system, has experienced a significant decline in TB disease prevalence, with a progressive rise in the prevalence of NCDs from NFHS-3 to NFHS-5. The constant efforts of the state government, with the help of civil society organisations like Innovators in Health (IIH) in providing continuous support, gathering and processing real-time patient data and operational information, the health care delivery was improved substantially in Bihar (Leon, 2008), as for example, the gradual decline of TB prevalence. Bihar has substantial rates of non-communicable

disease morbidity, implying that it is currently in the early stages of epidemiological transition. Further, Raj & Raj (2014) also noted Bihar's efforts through ASHA workers in creating awareness for institutional births and the safety of both mother and child in Bihar. According to three decadal evidence from national family health surveys, men in India reported lower levels of morbidity than women.

The concern of a revival of communicable diseases, which can only be controlled, not eradicated, has led to reluctance to focus on non-communicable diseases. In the context of epidemiological transition, emerging nations seek an alternate option to shift the attention to adult mortality (Feachem et al, 1992). In the specific examples of Kerala and Bihar, epidemiological transition in wealth-related disparities in self-reported morbidity was studied for cross-sectional analysis (Prinja et al, 2015). Kerala's mortality trends have been matched to those of developed nations with a high prevalence of Non-communicable diseases (Soman et al, 2011). As a result, compared to Bihar, the state is in the advanced stage of epidemiological transition.

Regrettably, a variety of issues remain in Bihar's public health, and the state continues to face intimidating public health challenges on numerous aspects. Deaths in Bihar due to minor and prevalent diseases such as cholera, diarrhea, fever, Nutritional deficiencies and even cough have remained worrying for decades, despite growing understanding on prevention and cure. The lives of people are altered even more wretched by new tropical diseases such as Dengue, encephalitis while non-communicable diseases have also been obtained in a dreadful manner. This implies that Kerala and Bihar require comprehensive strategies to address these issues at their root.

Conclusion

The discussion on the sociology of health and data from three decades of NFHS surveys suggest that the health inequalities are congruent with the social inequalities in both the states, Kerala and Bihar. Children, women and men from SC, ST and OBC categories suffer the brunt of nutritional deficiencies. Moreover, women are the primary victims of epidemiological transition in both states. The lack of a sociological approach to health and economic policies endangers public health.

Though Kerala's health index is better than Bihar's it witnesses the reversal of the progress in undernutrition and anaemic status. Despite the fact that several national health programmes under the umbrella of Poshan Abhiyaan and the National programme for prevention and control of cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and stroke (NPCDCS) have been addressing nutritional deficiencies and NCDs on a constant basis, these health issues have remained dormant for

decades in the states of Bihar and Kerala, as well as throughout India. Based on data patterns revealed by this research, the epidemiological and nutritional transitions in India's states increase in lockstep. Hence, the public health systems of Bihar and Kerala must deploy ground-breaking initiatives while taking into account the diverse socioeconomic backgrounds of both states and within states at the grass-roots level, in order to meet the people's sociological interests in future programmes. The sociological approach to healthcare policies can limit heterogeneousness in the healthcare delivery ecosystem, and create a comprehensive healthcare system that prioritises addressing nutritional deficiencies and the dual burden of disease in these two opposing poles that are in search of a quality of life.

References

Amuna, P., & Zotor, F. B. (2008). Epidemiological and nutrition transition in developing countries: impact on human health and development: the epidemiological and nutrition transition in developing countries: evolving trends and their impact in public health and human development. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*, *67*(1), 82-90.

Corsi, D. J., & Subramanian, S. V. (2012). Association between socioeconomic status and self-reported diabetes in India: a cross-sectional multilevel analysis. *BMJ open*, *2*(4), e000895.

Dandona, L., Dandona, R., Kumar, G. A., Shukla, D. K., Paul, V. K., Balakrishnan, K., ... & Thakur, J. S. (2017). Nations within a nation: variations in epidemiological transition across the states of India, 1990–2016 in the Global Burden of Disease Study. *The Lancet*, *390*(10111), 2437-2460.

Feachem, R. G. (Ed.). (1992). *The health of adults in the developing world* (Vol. 34). World Bank Publications.

ICMR, P. I., & PHFI, I. (2017). India: health of the nation's states: the india state-level disease burden initiative. *New Delhi, India*.

Jana, A., & Basu, R. (2017). Examining the changing health care seeking behavior in the era of health sector reforms in India: evidences from the National Sample Surveys 2004 & 2014. *Global Health Research and Policy*, *2*(1), 1-9.

Jeyalakshmi, S., Chakrabarti, S., & Gupta, N. (2011). Situation analysis of the elderly in India. *Central Statistics Office, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India document*.

Jayalakshmi, R., & Kannan, S., (2021). Nutritional status of socioeconomically disadvantaged children below 5 years: A cross-sectional study from Kerala, India. *World Medical & Health Policy*.

Joe, W. and Subramanian, S., (2020). *NFHS shows stunting increased in 'better-performing' Kerala, Goa. India must not lose focus*. [online] The Print. Available at: https://theprint.in/opinion/nfhs-shows-stunting-increased-in-better-performing-kerala-goa-india-must-not-lose-focus/566319/ (Accessed on 14/02/2022).

Karvonen, S., Kestilä, L. M., & Mäki-Opas, T. E. (2018). Who needs the sociology of health and illness? A new agenda for responsive and interdisciplinary sociology of health and medicine. *Frontiers in Sociology*, *3*, 4.

Khan, M. A., & Ul Husnain, M. I. (2019). Is health care a luxury or necessity good? Evidence from Asian countries. *International journal of health economics and management*, *19*(2), 213-233.

Larson, L. M., Young, M. F., Ramakrishnan, U., Webb Girard, A., Verma, P., Chaudhuri, I., ... & Martorell, R. (2017). A cross-sectional survey in rural Bihar, India, indicates that nutritional status, diet, and stimulation are associated with motor and mental development in young children. *The Journal of nutrition*, *147*(8), 1578-1585.

Lee R (2003) The demographic transition: three centuries of fundamental change. J Econ Perspect 17, 167–190.

Leon, J. (2008). *Manufacturing of the motor mount of the uBox, an intelligent pillbox* (Doctoral dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology).

Marmot, M. (2005). Social determinants of health inequalities. *The lancet*, *365*(9464), 1099-1104.

Pant, A., Scott, S., Singh, S. K., Sarwal, R., Bhatia, N., Johnston, R., ... & Nguyen, P. H. (2021). *State nutrition profile: Bihar* (Vol. 41). Intl Food Policy Res Inst.

Prinja, S., Jeyashree, K., Rana, S., Sharma, A., & Kumar, R. (2015). Wealth related inequalities in self reported morbidity: Positional objectivity or epidemiological transition?. *The Indian journal of medical research*, *141*(4), 438.

Raj, P., & Raj, A. (2004). Caste variations in reproductive health status of women: a study of three eastern states. *Sociological Bulletin*, *53*(3), 326-347.

Raj, A., & Raj, P. (2014). Utilization of maternal health care services in Bihar. *Social Research*, *2*(1),01-11.

Sebastian, I. R., Venkitaraman, S., Syamala, S., Shajan, A., Tennyson, N., & Devi, Y. (2021). Nutritional Status and COVID-19 among Older Persons in Kerala, India. *INQUIRY: The Journal of Health Care Organization, Provision, and Financing*, *58*, 00469580211059738.

Sen, A. (1993). Positional objectivity. *Philosophy & public affairs*, 126-145.

Soman, C. R., Kutty, V. R., Safraj, S., Vijayakumar, K., Rajamohanan, K., Ajayan, K., & PROLIFE Study Group. (2011). All-cause mortality and cardiovascular mortality in Kerala State of India: results from a 5-year follow-up of 161 942 rural community dwelling adults. *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Health*, *23*(6), 896-903.

White, K. (2016). *An introduction to the sociology of health and illness*. Sage.

Will, C. M. (2020). 'And breathe…'? The sociology of health and illness in COVID-19 time. *Sociology of Health & Illness*.

Sandeep Mokanpally *is Masters in Public Health from School of Medical Sciences, University of Hyderabad.*

Email id: Sandeepsandy0081@gmail.com

Gurram Ashok *is a PhD Research Scholar, Dept. of Political Science, School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad.*

Email id: gashok529@gmail.com

Book Review: *Science Education in India: Philosophical, Historical, and Contemporary Conversations* by Rekha Koul, Geeta Verma, Vanashri Nargund-Joshi

Author(s): Aniruddha Naik

BOOK REVIEW

RekhaKoul, Geeta Verma, Vanashri Nargund-Joshi, *Science Education in India: Philosophical, Historical, and Contemporary Conversations*. **Singapore: Springer Publications, XXV+242 pp., 2019, ₹ 7061(Paperback). ISBN:978-981-13-9592-5**

<div align="right">---Aniruddha Naik</div>

School science education is regarded as the foundation for scientific citizenship, preparing future scientists in society. The book under review is a collection of papers on science education in India from multi-disciplinary approaches such as history, philosophy, and sociology. This book focuses on the field of science education in India within the larger context of STEM education, an integral area of study in schools and post-secondary education. This book attempts to engage with the STEM education prevalent in India and tries to bring the reasons for failure and the solutions for the desired science goals of India. The book is divided into four themes; each has several articles on the particular theme. The themes are classified as 1) History and Philosophy Conversations; 2) School Science and Science Teacher Education; 3) Inclusivity and Access in Science Education; and 4) Indigenous Knowledge, Technology, and Innovation. The book's preface acknowledged that to achieve the goals of the science, technology, and innovation policy of 2013, there needs to examine the pre-k-12 education system in India critically. Madhavi analyzes the secondary literature to understand the roots and the nature of science in ancient India with the use and application of various scientific practices in the Pre-Vedic and Vedic times in the diverse field of science such as agriculture, architecture, and so on (P- 10,11). She noted that the Indus people used science and mathematics to sustain a growing population by providing food and shelter.

Tenzin informs that science learning in Tibetian monasteries has two goals: to expand the scope of understanding of the physical world and, secondly, to ensure that science serves humanity (P, 29). He reveals that teaching science in school across cultures is a challenging project for the state, nation, and students, and normative science educational practices are not sufficient to produce the desired results and goals of the state and society by following and appropriating western science education. He stresses that the current Indian science education model relies more on an enculturation process that mostly celebrates and equates with the urban populations' social and cultural values. Gurmeet Kaur noted the activity-based learning in the upper primary science textbooks in NCERT, India. She stresses that writing styles are conventional and present through examples from daily life in secondary school science textbooks writing (P,52). According to her, science textbooks for primary school children are framed from the

children's perspective by challenging their perspective through specific activities, whereas science textbooks in the upper primary and the secondary level, there is missing presenting child ideas; however, it was shown explicitly in some places. According to her, observing, hypothesizing, and questioning are the methods of science that are dominant and represented across all grades and stages of NCERT school science textbooks.

Garima Bansal et al. and Vanshri Joshi et al. stress how the situational factors function in the inquiry-based science teaching approaches while acting as barriers for the science teacher to adopt didactic works of teaching science. Bansal reveals that Pre-service teachers framed their way of teaching based on the training from the Teacher Education program, such as B.Ed training and the school requirements (P,72). She noted that curriculum and instructional practices support scientific inquiry in private schools, whereas it is didactic in govt. School. Therefore she claims that teacher pedagogical orientation is shared by the type of school the teacher is placed in.

In 'Addressing Diversity in Indian Science classrooms,' Rekha Koul argues that the diversity of students based on different variables in Indian schools is the hallmark of Indian society; therefore, the school should use inquiry-based teaching methods to identify students' diversity and abilities (P,130). Sameer et al. paint a picture of students learning science and environmental sustainability with their engagement with community-based practices. They argue that though Indian students show a high level of interest in understanding physical and biological sciences in school, they offer less interest in environmental science due to the fewer syllabi of environmental topics, which is devoid of students' socio-cultural and environmental settings (P,155). Sule argues that the Indian government has various mechanisms to identify talents among the students, such as national talent search examinations, Kishore Vaigyanik ProtsahanYojana, INSPIRE schemes, and National innovation awards. However, there are various shortcomings in identifying the talents, as private coaching plays a significant role in selecting the schemes. She claims that the affirmative action policies in these talent identification programs help to ensure social justice (P,167).In 'Jugaad thinking,' Geeta Verma paints how the ideas of Jugaadare rooted in the culture, social and historical in Indian society, which is sometimes an innovative and integral part of society. She suggests that Indian schools need to use Juggad thinking and Jugaad solutions by incorporating a community of scholars and researchers who can come together to explore various alternatives for school students to excel in STEM learning. Aditi Gupta found that the nature of the Indian classroom has changed significantly, and she emphasizes the usage of mobile devices and

mobile technology as part of learning and teaching science to enhance science learning (P,229).

The book is a first of its kind in science education concerning India and Indian STEM learning and teaching. The book is a collection of research articles written by researchers or educators from the field of science education in particular and education in general from different parts of the globe. This book attempted to engage with the broad spectrum of views on school science education from philosophical, sociological, and historical perspectives. The strength of the book lies in incorporating the diverse aspects of school science education from the theoretical and insights from the field in understanding how school science is practice in Indian schools. The articles and the chapters are essential to engage and to know science education practices in schools in India. It attempts to address the issues and challenges of school science education in India from multiple perspectives. All the chapters or articles in the book systematically tried to present the data from the field to understand the nuanced meaning of science education, which is entirely not found in science education. They tried to underscore the failure of science education in India and how to make it meaningful, accessible, and innovative through various methods or processes. As thebook is a collection of chapters from the empirical investigation, it suggests where and how science education has failed to cultivate the desired objectives of the nation; consequently, it offers various possibilities and thinking to make teaching and learning science more innovative and exciting in Indian schools. Though the book attempt to address the challenges faced in school science education, however, the book fails to address the evolution of science as a subject from precolonial to colonial to contemporary India. The limitation of the book also lies in its failure to highlight why the school in India failed to cultivate scientific temperament among school students. Though diversity is an essential aspect of Indian society, the book maintains a silence over who (which social category) does well in science in school. This book is for policymakers, science educators, and researchers in school education who are trying to engage critically or understand the various aspects of school science education.

Aniruddha Naik *is a PhD Research Scholar in the Department of sociology, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, Telangana.*

Email id: aniruddhanaik.2011@gmail.com

Book Review: *In Defence of the Ordinary: Everyday Awakenings* **by Dev Nath Pathak**

Author(s): Saheed Meo

Source: Explorations, ISS e-journal, Vol. 6 (2), October 2022, pp. 294-298

Published by: Indian Sociological Society

BOOK REVIEW

Dev Nath Pathak, *In Defence of the Ordinary: Everyday Awakenings,* New Delhi: Bloomsbury, 2021, pp. xxvi+249, ₹1299 (hardcover) ISBN: 978-9390358175.

---Saheed Meo

Modern civilization and its materialist undercurrents have been subject to debates across disciplines in social sciences across the globe. Sociology has rather experienced this critical discourse closely as its founding figures like Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, Max Weber and the scholars like Theodore Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Michel Foucault, Jurgen Habermas, among various others relentlessly engaged in evaluating modernity and its developmental trajectories. If industrialization and subsequent advancements in science and technology thoroughly changed society and reshaped human lives across the dawn of modernity, the post-information technology-induced world began to witness more rapid transformations. The values, needs, desires, living, and livelihood have changed overwhelmingly. Notions of truth, taste, and success are reshaped too. In the tide of changed perceptions and the raging materialistic lifestyle, human beings strived to be seen as 'extraordinary' by discarding subtle human qualities such as errors, failure, frugality, and on the whole ' being ordinary'.

The book aptly titled *In Defence of the Ordinary: Everyday Awakenings* by Dev Nath Pathak, is a painstaking exposition on the 'idea of ordinariness'. The author argues that it is the ordinary rather than the extraordinary that is a typical, universal human quality across time and space. He substantiates his arguments by invoking cinema, art, literature, mythology, and folklore from the cultural history of South Asia. The author also examines the role of the state, market forces, and subdued traditional social institutions. Tangentially, though, the author contests the European models of epistemology and psychoanalysis and sees positivism, hermeneutic, and constructivist approach at war about truth claims. He emphasizes that the 'seen' is always in the process of 'becoming' or 'nothing is absolutely seen' (p. 20). Given the provisional status of seen, the book advocates for fluidity, polyphony, and holism of the seeing, and, the author, thus, underscores the temporality of the 'truth' as a process.

The book is divided into five sections, each one engaging with diverse aspects of the 'idea of ordinary', curating a full cycle of human life. The theme of the book and the narratives are set on a wider canvas covering almost every aspect of human lives with copious polemics, arresting phrases, and potent metaphors. One cannot resist an immersion into the depth of discussion, and mesmerizing liveliness of

the narratives that evoke a smile and whisper, saying 'is this not the story of my everyday life too'? The book invites and inspires a deep conversation with oneself as a reader. And it compels us to rethink our everyday obsession with extraordinary success.

The author argues that the 'ordinary' is underplayed and stereotyped. We have swept the idea of ordinary under carpet in order to become extraordinary and unique. Even our age-old practices of joking relationships, sense of humor, and consequently a loss of distinction between 'words of abuse' and 'anti-relational abuse' (such as a troll). Overarching urbane and sanitized sensibilities in this age of smartphones and emoticons give us memes, trolls, and an array of anti-relationship humor. Moreover, sanitized political correctness paves the way for more violent and unbridled reactions in the social spheres. In the same breath, the author presents an account of sexuality, a mostly veiled, repressed, and undermined discourse in South Asia. Employing a metaphor of mud and lotus from the work of the nineteenth-century thinker Sri Aurobindo, and taking cues from the saint Ramakrishna Pramhansa's divinity as well as the classical text Kamasutra, the author discloses the anomalies of sex education in the school. He argues 'instincts are not for suppression (p.56), rather there is a need to bring poetry and art along with biology' (p. 57).

On the other hand, the bureaucratic humbug converts education into an extraordinary entity (p. 106). The simplicity of teachers and learners is compromised in the wake of the neoliberal regime, reducing teachers to mere techno-managerial service providers. The ordinary core of education imagined in the philosophies of Paul Freire and Jiddu Krishnamurti however could be the guiding pole. Unfortunately, teachers too have joined the rat race with irresistible inclinations for awards, show-offs, and recognition. It rather appears like a professional hazard if one says, 'I am nothing just a teacher' (p. 119). In the race for curriculum vitae, the lure for positions, profiteering, and power, the basic ordinary and beautiful job of a teacher is in oblivion. At the level of personhood, the book deals with the struggle in the wake of the hierarchy of emotions, as well as misplaced morals about love and lust. Flirting and having desire are yet ordinary features, which the author succinctly explains by employing the metaphor of *roshandan* (skylight). An unhealthy society blocks all such interests. Likewise, the ordinariness of parenthood has waned since everyone values and enacts the model of a good and infallible father or mother. The cultural configuration of personhood is aimed at an extraordinary in which differences are not tolerated, disagreement discarded, and thus a pathology of sameness prevails upon the beauty of being different. This shows in the matrimonial advertisements, intemperate relationships akin to chocolates.

Moreover, heavy emphasis on the naming of places and roads, and linguistic hegemony dominating vernacular diversities, are among

other examples in the book that speaks of the changing social landscape. Not only the power relation of language (p. 202), it is also a rigid idea of success and failure that thrives on compromised ordinariness. The book invokes Gandhi and Nietzsche at once to discern the problem in the triumph of success. The tide of consumerism and materialistic aspirations has turned human beings into compulsive consumers. In the spree of consuming a quality life, we seldom seek quality- death. We never think of death education nor do we enrich our thinking on sex education. The banality of death and sex both overrides ordinary social life. It is a Kafkaesque changeover in the idea of role models too, disclosing that 'we are closer to a catharsis of fakery' (p. 175). The author enlists many issues, names, and instances rife in everyday life. It all leads to posing a question, why emotions are hierarchies? Even parts of the body are not spared, the mind is preferred over the heart and rational is prioritized over emotional. Alluding to the pragmatism of everyday life, the author unravels an extraordinary concept of *gau-raksha* (cow protection), replete with disharmony, violence, and inter-community distrust. Religion has changed from fluid to rigid, and so has chant (inward journey, unification, and harmony) replaced by rant (violence, exclusion, and fear of 'the other') (p. 161).

In lieu of a conclusion, the author elucidates a deeper longing for the awakening dormant potential of emancipation in everyday social life. At times the author seems to romanticize the ordinary and appears to create a binary of the ordinary and the extraordinary. In this scheme, the personal is squarely related to the public. Childhood memories, folktales, popular cinematic texts, and mythologies profusely curate a kaleidoscope of the social landscape. Deploying a sweeping prognosis of the childcare industry, the catharsis of fakery and seamless comparisons between past and present without deploying necessary caveats, almost suggests that the middle-class experiences or the neat narratives of a metropolitan experience are generalized. This is so in spite of the tangential explication of excruciating caste and gendered inequalities in Indian society. Lastly, though one can be a little cautious of experiential scholarship like this, the book is one of its kind and shall be immensely helpful to scholars and students interested in understanding the finer nuances of everyday life fraught with crisscrossing biographies, history, and society.

Saheed Meo *is Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology, School of Arts and Social Sciences, Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad.*

Email id: saheedmeo@gmail.com

Book Review: *Reading Minorities in India: Forms and Perspectives* **by K.M. Ziyauddin**

Author(s): Mubasheruddin Farooqui

BOOK REVIEW

K M Ziyauddin, *Reading Minorities in India: Forms and Perspectives,*
New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2022, pp. 274, ₹1250 (hardcover)
ISBN: 9788131612774

--- Mubasheruddin Farooqui

Introduction

The task of sociologist and academicians is to read, explore and present those aspects of society which often gets neglected, misunderstood, and lacks public attention. That's why the sociological perspective is different from the common sense and layman Perspective as the former focuses primarily on scientific and objective study than the latter. Power relation affects each aspect of society, hence Academia too. It is because of this that minority community often gets marginalised in research. In this context study of minorities (formed based on caste, class, Religion, gender, etc), their social life and problems, and understanding their perspective become important.

"In the present context study of minorities became crucial and more relevant because of the growing sense of "otherness" among different communities. Misunderstanding also prevails due to the dearth of empirical and objective studies. Communities need to read about each other to come close. The newly published Volume titled "Reading Minorities in India: Forms and Perspectives" edited by K M Ziyauddin is an attempt to look academically into different matters of the Minority community in India."

While reading about the many types of minorities in India, the current volume is an appropriate and well-chosen academic addition to the existing literature. The scope and area of inquiry addressed in the book's numerous chapters are colorful and diverse. In the Indian sociological curriculum, the absence of admirable initiatives in the name of minority studies is particularly noticeable. There is a vast gap in the literature on various minorities under the umbrella of Indian sociology.

This volume gives some satisfaction to fill this present gap, and significant research should be considered when creating the text and material. Imtiaz Ahmad, Zarina Bhatty, Rowena Robinson, Nasreen Fazalbhoy, AR Momin, and other authors in this field must be specifically mentioned, but there are others. This book effectively conveys the importance of recognising differences and variation to develop a group that can demand physical and social space for each member, regardless of whether they are a majority or minority.

The book's scope is broad. The discussion started in this collection locates the issue of ethnicity and minorities through the work of renowned political sociologist and researcher Imtiaz Ahmad. Their ideas require a conceptual re-evaluation of minority discourse. His straightforward query, "Is there any study on minorities in India?" reveals a significant void in Indian sociology.

The editor's ambitious and broad goal is to expand Indian sociology's body of knowledge by incorporating a wide range of research papers. The kind of contribution made and published by the Indian Sociological Society's Research Committee on Minority Studies (RC-26) is the most valuable towards building a broader sociology in India. The research committee on minorities was created in 2014 as an ad hoc body, and in 2018 it received the full endorsement of the ISS, transforming it into a full-fledged research committee. This addition marks a turning point in developing an inclusive research environment on minorities in India and dispels the myth that minorities are only religious minorities.

Since the committee received clearance and these communities of India find practically total representation in Indian sociology through a research committee similar to western sociology, this book is a second edition. The context is conveyed via the many chapters precisely, showing how India is a complex country with many different ethnic and religious groups, each with its own distinct culture, history, and way of life. There has never been a cohesive group of people based on caste, class, religion, geography, ethnicity, or linguistic affiliations in India. Minority issues, which are a result of their race, religion, or language, are frequently misunderstood in interactions and understanding in public contexts. Political engagement affects issues, and polarising politics in India often worsens people's situation.
The topic posed by KM Ziyauddin asks famous scholars like Rowena Robinson to look into whether there is any conversation on ethnicity and minority in modern India, and if so, what it is like.

While these papers provide the conceptual framework for comprehending the topic raised in this book, a variety of documents explore specific concerns relating to ethnic and minority groups worldwide, as well as social, occupational, and political variables and psychological causes. Important development indicators include gender, education, employment, and health, and these variables are also helpful in illustrating differences between social groupings.

The study by Azra Abidi deserves special attention since it exposes the unique characteristics of a particular subgroup of Shia Muslim women to reflect on acute marginalisation among the marginalised while reiterating the variety of deprived and excluded experiences women

generally face. While Sharmistha Bhattacharjee's paper focuses on Muslim women's entrepreneurship as a means of bringing about a change in knowledge, attitude, and practice in access to health care services in rural areas of Nadia district, Tarannum Siddique's paper provides an overview of Islamic feminism in India.

The paper by Nusrath Jahan, which explored the women left behind by their migratory spouses, reflects yet another aspect of gendered reality. The risks of living alone and having obligations are widely known to cause marginalisation and exclusion.

Mohd Tarique Enam looks at the use of contraceptives against the backdrop of religion, and Rabiya Yaseen Bazaz and Mohammad Akram discuss the challenges of education and employment across castes among Muslims in Kashmir. The report by Sarita Kumari on funeral directors who are members of a specific Dom community details occupational concerns. She has carefully drawn attention to the connections between caste and occupation and the ensuing persistence in the occupation. The conversation about migrant workers gives a new perspective to comprehend the essential components of ethnicity and minority. It is depicted in Sreekumar's paper through the health issues of migrant construction workers. Mohd Tabrez Alam's artwork captures yet another aspect of migration. His study deserves special attention since it integrates the topic of residential segregation based on religious identification in urban settings, which has received relatively little attention in the current debate. His reflections about Muslim marginalisation and discrimination in an industrial city are set against this background. Examining migrants across borders presents difficulties, even though migration is an essential background for considering how urban places are changing and workers' conditions. The challenge was accepted, and Mohd Musthafa KT talked about the circumstances facing Rohingyas in India.

Understanding the current social environment requires historical context. By examining the interactions between Metis and Manipuri Muslims in Manipur during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Mohd Chingiz Khan's paper demonstrates this. The documents by Fowzia Afaq and Sheikh Moinuddin painstakingly explore how the social construction of images of Muslims based on stereotypes, prejudices, and political interest influence people's perceptions and attitudes. Systemic violence and the structural marginalisation of minorities become more entrenched as history and politics shape perceptions. In his article, Mohd Afroz made a persuasive argument favoring this. Afroz Alam contests the concept of minority reservations in Telangana.

This book conveys the exclusion, marginalisation, and discrimination that come with being one of India's classified minorities due to

poverty, religious affiliations, gender, and sexual minorities, and ethnic, linguistic, and occupational identity. The book's 21 chapters, which are very logically organised, present the conceptual framework for studying minorities and understanding socio-demographic context, historic-political issues, occupational and health concerns, migration and its effects, gendered intersectionality, and systemic and structural barriers to minority-related issues.

Intriguingly, this collection includes a representative book by authors from around India, including Kashmir in the north and Kerala's extreme south. One empirical study on Muslim women from West Bengal in eastern India contrasts with an anthropological investigation of a particular occupational group in Uttar Pradesh to demonstrate the genuine range of the subject matter on reading minorities.

Lastly, this book should also be read in the context of how religious minorities comprises a large chunk of Indian democracy. Hindus make up the majority of the population (80.5%), while Muslims and Christians make up the minority (13.4 and 2.3%, respectively), according to the demographic denominator, especially the census data. However, the statistics of any single community are meaningless as long as the state promotes the essential concerns of living, livelihood, security, employment, education, health, and communal harmony for nation-building based on the concepts of the Preamble. The Directive Principles are also a part of the route map. Freedom of religion is a fundamental right upheld by the Supreme Court and protected by the Constitution. According to the Preamble of the Indian Constitution, India is a secular state. Still, its citizens also enjoy a fundamental right to peacefully practice and spread their religion (Articles 25-30). How to examine ethnicity and minority issues in contemporary India is still an open question.

This book would be highly intriguing and enlightening for any reader looking for appropriate content and studying current research on minorities in India. A theoretical framework and empirical research on various minorities and their manifestations are also found.

This book will undoubtedly be helpful to all researchers who are motivated to study, comprehend, and search for new content on minorities. Still, it goes beyond that to ask why and how minority studies are lacking. This book would be a valuable resource for policymakers and civil society members interested in understanding society.

The book, however, omits comparisons between the numerous minorities in American and western society. Until recently, academics in India were not influenced by the vast body of work produced in the 1960s and 1970s to research and write on Indian minorities.

Mubasheruddin *is a PhD Research Scholar in the Department of Sociology, School of Arts and Social Sciences, Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad.*

Email id: f.mubashshir97@gmail.com