## Editor's Report

## December 2023

It is my pleasure to present the 15th issue of Explorations. The present issue comprises eleven papers published under the 'Articles' category, one commentary, one conversation and three book reviews.

The first article, titled "*Market and School Choice: Private Schools in Regional Indian Languages in India*" by Digantaraj Medhi & Dr. Nirmali Goswami, explored the political and social context of education market and school choice in Assam. Based on secondary and primary data, the paper argues that the market reforms of the 1990s have led to significant changes in language policies and politics in Assam. The moral and material values attached to the culture of learning led to the spread of private schools in Assam.

The second article, titled "*Negotiating maternalistic practices in domestic work: Strategies of part-time domestic workers in Guwahati City (Assam)*" by Shruti Talukdar & Kedilezo Kikhi, analyzes the strategies of the domestic worker's power in mediating the everyday social interactions with the household members in Assam. Based on the primary data, the scholars argue that domestic workers are not passive victims of subordination, rather, they actively use their agency to capitalize on informal strategies to manipulate the unequal power relationship and construct a selfhood that affirms their dignity and moral equality.

The third article is titled "*Translating History into Movies: Analysis of Caste Discussions in Contemporary Indian Cinema*" by Swetha. S & Naresh Annem argues that cinema, as a visual medium, has profoundly influenced Indian society. The agency of marginalized people was not explored in Indian cinema. History has been translated into art, such as novels, poems, dramas, and movies. However,

the recent trend in Indian cinema began to document some parts of history that discuss the struggles of the Dalits and Adivasis with due importance. Some films portrayed the history of the oppressed by narrating the history of social protests. This paper analyzes how translating history into movies celebrates the agency of the marginalized community identity in Indian society.

The fourth article, titled *"Religious Beliefs & Practices of Bhils of Malwa: A Sociological Study"* by Pradumn Singh, describes the changing religious beliefs and practices in the Malwa region. It attempts to understand the changing religious worldviews, Gods and Goddesses, rituals and practices, and other dimensions of Bhil's spiritual life. The study observed the growing religiosity among the Bhils. The study found that the Bhil community is slowly but steadily adopting Hindu Gods, Goddesses and Sanskritic rituals in the Malwa region. Another notable observation was that of the Christianisation of the Bhils.

The fifth article, titled "*The Lost Soul of Village India: Exploring the Contours of Field-view in Contemporary Rural Sociology"* by Prabudh Singh & Santosh K. Singh, challenges the dominant discourse on rural studies. It questions the methodological underpinnings of the discipline of rural sociology. By placing the voices of the rural youth at the center, the paper attempts to re-orient the rural subject from the anecdotes and the margins. The paper also problematizes the methodology of epistemology in constructing conceptual vocabularies of rural studies in India.

The sixth article, titled "*Social Impact Of Covid-19 On Rural Residents: Some Evidence From A Telangana Village"* by Sreeramulu Gosikonda, examines the impact of the lockdown on rural Telangana. The paper discussed the issues and challenges that the pandemic-related lockdown caused for rural residents and their livelihoods in Telangana villages. The study found that the lockdown deprived them of livelihood opportunities and pushed them towards pauperization.

The seventh article, titled "*Displaced and Disadvantaged: A Social History of Bru IDPs in Tripura*" by Lalnundika Darlong and Sharmila Chhotaray, explores the social history of the Bru community forcibly displaced due to ethnic clashes with the Mizo community. Based on qualitative research, this study offers a detailed social history and context of the Bru community, which was subjected to displacement and stigmatization. It provides a nuanced analysis of the social and political factors influencing the experiences and aspirations of the displaced Brus community in North-East India.

The eigth article titled "*Can Pre-departure help in better Migration Governance? The case of Indian migrants to Gulf*", by Sadananda Sahoo & Feroz Khan discussed to examine the importance of pre-departure programmes for those migrating to Emigration Check Required (ECR) countries in general and the Gulf in particular. India is a major source of migrant labour in the Gulf. The objectives of the paper is to identify some of the issues and also tries to provide some insights on the migration governance gaps and how they can be tackled through better Pre-departure strategies in the case of India. Based on secondary sources and using content analysis, the paper provides a broad overview of the importance of migration governance and the pre-departure orientation for migrants in the context of the Indian migrants going to GCC countries.

The ninth article, titled "*Netizen Perception on the Burning of 2479 Stockpile Single-Horn Rhino in Assam: A Sociological study of three social media platform*" by Rupa Rani Sonowal and N Atungbou discussed the social media posts related to animals and the social environment companionship. The death of a one-horned rhino emotionally touched the hearts of Assamese people. Social media users have demonstrated their sense of emotional bond to the dead animal by sharing, liking and commenting on the role of the government's action. It

primarily dwells on the social meanings and emotions attached to the animals in society.

The tenth article, titled "***Pride and prejudice of sex reassignment surgery among transgender people: Qualitative explorations from Bhubaneswar, India***" by Prachi Parimita Rout & Pranaya Kumar Swain, discussed the context of gender dysphoria, sex reassignment surgery (SRS) in accomplishing desirable gender transition and the associated socio-psychological comfort among transgender people. The study examines the issues and challenges faced by transgender people in negotiating gender identity disorder and the need for sex reassignment surgery among transgender people in Odisha. The study submits that transgender people face a high degree of marginalization and social discrimination due to their disordered gender identity.

The eleveth article, titled ***"Irregular migration to GCC countries – Determinants and challenges: The case of housemaids from Kerala"*** by Santhini Paul & Antony Palackal, discussed the issues and challenges faced by the Female Migrant Domestic Workers (FMDWs) in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The paper attempts to identify the determinants of the irregular migration of FMDWs from Kerala to GCC. The paper, based on primary and secondary data, argues that female domestic workers from Kerala in GCC were subjected to diverse forms of abuse.

***"The Marginalized Studying The Margin of Law: The Bathos and The Pathos" by*** Sthabir Khora ***shared his*** experiences with academia. As a teacher from a marginalized community, he highlights the criticality of caste as an object and subject of professional and personal life. Using an auto-ethnographic account as a teacher and researcher, he shared his academic journey. He felt a sense of discrimination and marginalization while dealing with sociologically sensitive topics such as atrocities against the scheduled castes.

Conversation with **Prof. R. Indira** highlights the lifeworld of sociologists from a state university. Her professional journey is a source of inspiration for the young sociologists.

This issue of the journal also includes three book review by **Krithika Narayanswamy Iyer, Abhijit Dasgupta** and **Suraj Kumar Tanty.**

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 the explorations enrich scholars' sociological imaginations.

Thanks & Best Wishes

**Prof NagarajuGundemeda**

Department of Sociology,

University of Hyderabad,

Editor, *Explorations* (December 2024)

Email: explorationsiss@gmail.com

## Market and School Choice: Private Schools in Regional Indian Languages in India

--Digantaraj Medhi & Nirmali Goswami

### Abstract

Many commentators seem to believe that the growth of private schools over the last few decades is due to the lure of English and the better life chances that it offers, but the existing data show that more than half of the private schools are in regional Indian languages, and they have remained largely unnoticed. In this paper, an attempt is made to look at these schools from the lens of market and school choice. Using secondary data and drawing from an ongoing field study conducted in one such school in the state of Assam, India, the paper looks at the spread and scale of private schools in regional Indian languages in the country. The paper argues that the market reforms from the 90s has led to a change in the nature of language politics in the country and market forces have capitalised on the demand for private schooling, both in English as well as in Indian languages. Here, an attempt is made to look at some of the nuances of school choice, the probable reasons behind the demand for private schooling in regional languages and also the ideological biases at work that has resulted in such schools becoming invisible from academic discourses.

*Keywords: regional Indian languages, school choice, medium of instruction, English, private schools*

### Introduction

Private schools are now ubiquitous in India and they are found in every nook and corner of the country. For the year 2018-19, almost half ( around 49%) of the school going population was enrolled in a non-government school (UDISE Dashboard, 2018-19). This includes the private aided schools, the unaided schools (recognised as well as the unrecognised ones), and others. The structural changes in the Indian economy from the 90s onwards allowed

private schools to proliferate swiftly and today there's a wide spectrum of such schools, from the elite schools with high fees to the very low-cost ones, catering to all the social classes. It is however, the rapid growth of the latter type of schools that has contributed much to expansion of the private school system (Lahoti and Mukhopadhyay, 2019). In India, starting from the 80s, the "abandonment" of government schools by the urban middle classes was seen and this was followed by the lower middle-class fractions and sections of the working class over the next two decades (Nambissan, 2012, p. 52). That the private schools are sought after not just by the well-to-do classes but also by the lower and the poorer classes have been highlighted by many (Tooley, 2007, 2009, Baird, 2009, Joshi, 2008 etc as cited in Hill et al, 2011). Tooley's work brought to focus the budget private schools and a lot of other studies since have also emerged with different positions and perspectives. Some commentators seem to believe that the demand for such schools, especially why even the poor are opting for them, is that because they offer education in the English language and that it is the medium (English) which is a key factor that drives demand for private schooling (Nambissan, 2012). In general, historically and in everyday discourse, in India 'private school' implies two main features, the use of English as a medium of instruction and the requirement of a fee which conveys exclusivity and social status (Sarangapani and Winch, 2010).Thus, private schools are often equated with English medium schools in India.

This perception, however, is misleading and can obscure the fact that there exist a huge number of private schools in Indian languages and they cater to a very large population. The application of market principles to the education sector which promotes choice, competition and privatisation has led to the market forces capitalising on the demand for private schools and these schools are not necessarily all (or claim to be) in English medium. There are many such private schools that emphasise on education in the mother-tongue and use this as a central selling point. However, that private schools are functioning in regional languages has not received much attention in academic circles.

**Method**

In this paper, an attempt is made to look at these schools from the lens of market and school choice. This study draws from secondary data on an all Indian level on schools. For this, the UDISE+ report for Enrolment by Grade and Medium of Instruction for the academic year 2018-19 is referred to. Also, examples of private schools (in Assamese medium) from the state of Assam are cited. Furthermore, some findings from an ethnographic study being conducted in one such school in the state of Assam are used to complement the secondary data. The school is a small private school in Assamese medium in Guwahati, Assam.

**Market reforms and the changing nature of language politics**

The neo-liberal economics of the 90s which led to transitioning of a state controlled socialist economy to a more liberalised economy profoundly changed the nature of politics (in general) in the Indian nation-state. In this new economic set up, there was more reliance on market forces, via supply side policies, which meant a reduction of the socio-economic role of the state and individual initiative in the private sector was expected to fulfil this role more effectively (Rajagopal, 1994, p. 1659). This reduction in the role of the state had a cascading effect and it affected the politics of be it caste, religion, ethnicity and so on. The emphasis on 'individual' and 'private' meant less demands to the state and more dependence on the market. In the context of language politics, in earlier times, there were usually linguistic demands made to the state for safeguarding or promotion of any language. This involved mobilisations and movements around standardisation, purification, script, medium of instruction in schools, official recognition of languages and so on. But in the post 90s India, what was seen was more private participation and apart from demands being made to the state, individuals in their private capacity also made efforts to safeguard the language.

Madan, Sastry and Ramdas's (2019) work on Adivasi Munnetra Sangam (AMS) and their Vidodaya school show how private participation can lead to

educational change in the form of social movements and how community sentiments might lead some to safeguard their language in the form of a school (that teaches and has books in their own language). In this case the AMS took over a private school and used the school for furthering the cause of the Adivasi identity and so on. The important point to note, however, is that this was done in their private capacity rather than any demands being made to the state.

In other parts of the country, particularly in the language sensitive areas, where we see a large number of private schools in the regional languages, the market forces has had a tremendous impact

**The case of Assam**

In the case of Assam, the manifestations were in the form of private schools that offer education in the mother tongue (Assamese), both in setting up of such schools as well enrolment of students in them. Before the 90s, there were only a few private Assamese medium schools in the state and the state run government schools were in bad shape. The deteriorating condition of government schools in the state at that time was a serious concern for many and the phenomenon of abandonment of government schools by the middle classes was also seen in Assam. Private English medium schools were the only option for a so-called good education and their numbers were increasing but some of them, particularly convent schools were also notorious for humiliating students for speaking in the local tongue. These developments combined with the prevalent political atmosphere of the state where there was deep sense of existential crisis for the Assamese community in general due to the political developments of the earlier decades; be it the Assam Movement[1] in the late 70s and early 80s, the medium of instruction movement of 1972[2], the state official language movement of 1960[3], the language riots associated with it and the earlier riots just after independence all somewhere contributed to the perception that the Assamese language and the community was in danger and that without good quality education in the language, the language will die and so will the Assamese community. It is at this juncture that some individuals

who were inspired by the Assam Movement got together and set up a school called the Assam Jatiya Bidyalay (AJB)[4] in Guwahati. Their objective was to provide quality education in the mother-tongue and also to safeguard the language. The school was a grand success and the founders took this forward and provided the initial push and leadership. Inspired by this, many individuals started their own schools in their private capacity and over the years hundreds of such schools have come up in every nook and corner of the state. This development has been compared to that of a movement in the regional literature (Deka, 2018). Here, the market forces played a bigger role, appropriated the cause and facilitated the spread of the schools. The market allowed individuals to tap into the demand for schooling in Assamese by setting up schools and gave them a source of livelihood. The fact that there was serious unemployment at the time and these schools provided a good source of entrepreneurship for these individuals also played a part.

To get an idea as to how many of such schools have come up in the last two-three decades, a look at UDISE+ report for Enrolment by Grade and Medium of Instruction for the 2018-19 for private unaided (recognised) schools show that at present private schools in Assamese medium outnumber English medium schools by quite a big number.

Table 1[5] shows the figures for the number of schools and their corresponding enrolment in terms of medium of instruction.

**Table 1: No of private unaided (recognised) schools and their numbers in terms of medium of instruction for the year 2018-19 in Assam.**

| Med. | No Sc | Enr. | % No | % Enr |
|------|-------|------|------|-------|
| Assamese | 3365 | 600205 | 53.83 | 46.52 |
| Bengali | 450 | 53918 | 7.2 | 4.18 |
| Hindi | 42 | 5030 | 0.67 | 0.39 |
| Nepali | 1 | 4 | 0.02 | 0 |
| Sanskrit | 28 | 1626 | 0.45 | 0.13 |
| Urdu | 1 | 12 | 0.02 | 0 |

| English | 2065 | 582469 | 33.03 | 45.15 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bodo | 143 | 22169 | 2.29 | 1.72 |
| Others | 156 | 24748 | 2.5 | 1.92 |
| Total | 6251 | 1290181 | 100 | 100 |

Source: UDISE+ reports 2018-19,

As can be seen from the above table, amongst the private unaided (recognised) schools in Assam which number 6251, Assamese medium schools are 3365 while English medium schools are 2065, that is, there are 53.83% Assamese medium schools as compared to 33.03% English medium schools. The difference in number of schools is quite large. Enrolment wise, however, their numbers are more or less equal, at 46.52% for Assamese medium and 45.15% for English medium, despite English medium schools being less in number.

Therefore, it can be argued that from very low numbers to the present number of more than three thousand, private unaided Assamese medium schools have increased substantially, in the last two-three decades. So, what has happened in the case of Assam is that just like the rest of the country, there has been a boom of English medium schools from the 90s but along with it, private Assamese medium schools have also managed to grow substantially.

**The private schools in regional Indian languages in India**

The examples from the state of Assam show the presence of a considerable number of private schools in regional (Assamese and others) languages. The question is what is it like in the rest of the country? Is this phenomenon unique to Assam or is a similar pattern observed?

To understand as to how many such schools exist all over the country, it is important to look at the macro level data that exists. In India, schools are generally divided into government schools, private aided schools (these have private management but are funded by the government) and private unaided schools (these run independently and have a private management and they manage their own funds). According to the UDISE+ Dashboard, for the year 2018-19, government school enrolment was at 50.4%. The remaining was in

non-govt. schools with private aided schools (10.7%), private unaided schools (35.4%) and others (3.5%). The focus of this paper is on the private unaided schools where the market forces see their full manifestation.

The UDISE+ report for Enrolment by Grade and Medium of Instruction for the academic year 2018-19 gives an idea about the enrolment in terms of medium of instruction. Table 2[6] lists the private unaided (recognised) schools in terms of language (medium).

**Table 2: Private Unaided (recognised) schools and their medium of instruction (All India)**

| Med | No Sc | Enrol | %No | %Enro |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Assamese | 3507 | 612251 | 1.01 | 0.73 |
| Bengali | 8630 | 1071167 | 2.49 | 1.27 |
| Gujarati | 9234 | 2673862 | 2.67 | 3.18 |
| Hindi | 124857 | 25895322 | 36.08 | 30.78 |
| Kannada | 6519 | 902009 | 1.88 | 1.07 |
| Konkani | 7 | 955 | 0 | 0 |
| Malayalam | 353 | 41743 | 0.1 | 0.05 |
| Manipuri | 53 | 6609 | 0.02 | 0.01 |
| Marathi | 4762 | 742385 | 1.38 | 0.88 |
| Nepali | 20 | 1591 | 0.01 | 0 |
| Oriya | 3292 | 669075 | 0.95 | 0.8 |
| Punjabi | 7165 | 323571 | 2.07 | 0.38 |
| Sanskrit | 415 | 43054 | 0.12 | 0.05 |
| Sindhi | 5 | 1175 | 0 | 0 |
| Tamil | 1156 | 97858 | 0.33 | 0.12 |
| Telegu | 4210 | 356238 | 1.22 | 0.42 |
| Urdu | 2369 | 380941 | 0.68 | 0.45 |
| English | 134614 | 43364608 | 38.9 | 51.55 |
| Bodo | 158 | 24827 | 0.05 | 0.03 |
| Do, Kha | 649 | 27598 | 0.19 | 0.03 |
| Others | 34079 | 6885960 | 9.85 | 8.19 |
| Total | 346054 | 84122799 | 100 | 100 |

Source: Compiled from UDISE+ report, Year 2018-19.

From the data above, it is clearly seen that more than 61% of all the private unaided (recognised) schools are those that offer an Indian language as a medium of instruction, while English medium schools account for only near about 39%. In terms of enrolment, English however has the highest enrolment at 51.55% while other languages account for the rest. This is because English schools are found throughout the country. Amongst the Indian languages, Hindi medium schools are the most prominent at 36.08% with an enrolment of 30.78%. This is understandable since Hindi is spread out across a larger land mass and its reach is more. The rest of the languages have lesser numbers and that's because they have a limited range, mostly confined to their regional states. But nonetheless in total, the enrolment in other languages is near about 50%, which is still a big number and cannot be ignored. To get an idea about the scale of this, in absolute numbers, out of the 8.4 crore students who are enrolled in a private unaided school of the recognised type, more than 4 crore students are studying in private schools in a medium other than English. The data therefore suggests the presence of an enormous number of such schools catering to crores of students in regional languages on an all India basis. The above data was for the private unaided recognised schools. A similar pattern is also seen in the unrecognised schools, the ones that are not officially recognised and not affiliated to any education board, although the numbers are much less. See table 3. For simplicity, all other languages except English are combined and only the contrast between English and other languages are highlighted.

**Table 3: Comparison of English and other languages in private unrecognised schools (All India)**

| Med | No Sc | Enr | %No | %Enr |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| English | 12460 | 2039121 | 38.79 | 46.85 |
| Others | 19659 | 2313605 | 61.21 | 53.15 |
| Total | 32119 | 4352726 | 100 | 100 |

Source: Compiled from UDISE+ report Year 2018-19

The data from the tables above clearly shows that although English medium schools constitute the largest share of private schools in India, it is much less than 50%. Therefore, we need an explanation for the sizeable proportion of private schools in regional languages.

**School choice and the medium of instruction: English vis-à-vis Indian languages**

The UDISE+ data gives us a broad understanding of the nature of private schools in the country. It suggests that surely, there is some (or rather much) demand for private schools in other mediums; otherwise their numbers wouldn't be so high. But nonetheless, field based studies can complement this data and enhance our understanding of such schools. In their work on school choice on Rasola in Rajasthan, Hill, Samson and Dasgupta (2011) suggest five main reasons that influence parental choice: supply, quality, cost, social barriers to entry and gender (Hill et al 2011, p. 100). Their work, which focused on two government schools and two private schools in the said village, does not mention the medium of instruction of the private schools but it seems they are in Hindi medium. Describing the popularity of one of the private schools named JK Public, they write

'It reflects the growing community attitude that private schools offer higher quality education than do government schools and the practical concern parents have about accessing a quality Hindi-medium education' (Hill et al 2011, p. 102).

This offers some evidence that there is ample demand for private schools in Hindi medium in that village, since the said school is the most popular among the four. There are other studies that provide richer insights into the question of school choice. Lahoti and Mukhopadhyay's (2019) detailed study across 10 districts in the four states of Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand show the complex nature of school choice. With their data, they claim that the medium of instruction- whether the school was English medium- did emerge as an important and valued characteristic, especially for

parents sending their children to private schools. A very remarkable finding that they bring to light is that there exists a large discrepancy between parental reporting of English as a medium of instruction, the official medium of instruction as reported by schools and the actual medium of instruction in practice (Lahoti and Mukhopadhyay 2019, p. 55). In their study, 22% children go to private schools whose school authorities report English as their medium, while 39% children were reported by parents to attend private schools in English medium, while in actual practice the percentage of children going to private schools that actually use English as a medium is only 10% (ibid). Thus there is a quite a big discrepancy between parents perception and the actual realities.

This is a very interesting insight. There are two ways to interpret this finding. First, it shows that although many parents think their children are enrolled in English medium schools, in reality they are not. What is really happening on the ground, as evident from this data from the field, is that probably some parents are mislead into believing, possibly by the schools, that they are in English medium. But the actual reality is that many of them are semi-English medium or other medium completely. The question then is: is it possible that the numbers we saw earlier in the table where almost 50% students were enrolled in a private school of other mediums is also due to such apparent mismatch between perception and reality of parents. Well, there is some possibility but surely it can't account for all. It is possible that some private schools advertise themselves as English medium although in their functioning they are not. There are some studies which bring to light such dimensions (LaDousa, 2014; Gurney, 2018).

But it is highly doubtful that it can be applied to all the private schools. It is hard to believe that more than 4 crore students who are enrolled in private schools of other medium have had some form of misinformation and they all went to schools thinking the medium is English. There might be some gap between perception and reality but surely it can't be that big. Also, empirical evidence from some states point that this isn't true either. In the state of

Assam, it is a very common practice for private schools in Assamese medium to advertise themselves as "axomiya madhyam'r adharxa shikshanusthan" (ideal educational institutions in Assamese medium), the emphasis being on the quality and medium of the school. It is possible that there might be similar instances in other states as well. However, the tendency in some of the existing scholarship has been to use some kind of a generalisation that it is English that is aspired by all; and that even if some schools don't have the cultural capital required to function as an English medium school, they would claim it is one when in reality it is not. This can be true for some cases, but not for all.

The second possible way to look at this data is if the actual use of English as a medium in the schools is less than what is reported by school authorities, it is likely that in many schools that claim to be of English medium, it is the regional language that is functional. Using this scheme to the UDISE+ date from the table would imply that officially although around 51% students are enrolled in English medium schools private unaided schools, in actual functionality, the number could be slightly or even significantly lesser. This makes the regional languages even more important as they are the functional languages in many of the so called English schools.

**Language Ideology at Work**

The question then is why do private schools in Indian languages remain unnoticed and why is it that some people assume that most private schools are in English despite the data suggesting to the contrary. A very simplistic explanation would be that such mono-causal explanation of phenomena can be a result of class, language and urban biases at work. A more useful understanding however, comes from the concept of language ideology. According to Joseph Errington, language ideology refers to the "situated, partial, and interested character of conceptions and uses of language" (LaDousa, 2007, p. 928).

In explaining how language ideology and social phenomena interrelate, Gal and Irvine suggest that one of the ways is through erasure, i.e. persons and practices can be hidden by simplifications of ideology (erasure) (ibid).

LaDousa (2007) in his work on schools in Banaras, while discussing the school fees of cheap versus expensive shows how while reflecting on schools that focus on fees, the cheap (or the free) are held to be run by the state with an assumption that they are Hindi medium while the expensive ones run by private administrations are assumed to be in English medium (LaDousa, 2007, pp. 942-43). He suggests, using Gal and Irvine's concept of erasure, that this phenomenon exhibits semiotic erasure.

"Semiotic erasure is the process in which ideology, in simplifying the sociolinguistic field, renders some persons or activities (or sociolinguistic phenomena) invisible. Facts that are inconsistent with the ideological scheme either go unnoticed or get explained away. There indeed exist Hindi-medium schools that charge substantial fees and English-medium schools that charge comparable fees to their Hindi- medium counterparts. In reflections on fees, however, those examples remain unmentioned and are thus erased" (LaDousa, 2007, p. 943).

While LaDousa was talking in the context of fees and medium, such a scheme can be applied to management and medium as well. In fact, he mentions that the process of semiotic erasure leads to the assumption that English medium schools are private while Hindi medium schools are government (LaDousa, 2007, 951). This provides a fair explanation of why private schools in other mediums become or remain invisible, simply because they are inconsistent with the ideological scheme. In such a scheme, English indexes the private schools while regional languages index the government schools. This leads to a shorthand for most people that English equals private while other languages equal government, which obscures the government English schools and private other medium schools.

**Private schooling in Indian languages**

There are a few probable causes as to why this is happening, i.e. why there is a demand for private schools in regional languages? The field data suggests there are multiple factors at work. First, unlike common perception, not all parents view the medium of instruction as more important than teaching and learning. For some parents, particularly for lower middle classes, English is too alien but they do seek quality education. They do not necessarily have an English obsession. They send their children in private schools because they do not trust government schools due to perceived lower quality and are not too concerned with medium. Private management and learning outcomes are more important. In fact, in their work on school choice in rural India, Lahoti and Mukhopadhyay's (2019) findings show that quality of teaching-learning formed the most important category of reasons among parents to send children to a particular school. This is true for private schools as well and is more important a reason than English being the medium of instruction (Lahoti and Mukhopadhyay, 2019, pp. 53-54). The Public Report on Basic Education in India (PROBE) report also cites examples of parents who go to great lengths and make great sacrifices to send children to private schools because they are disillusioned with the quality of education in government schools (Tooley, 2007, p. 540). Their preference for private schools might not necessarily be a preference for English.

Second, the exclusive character and social status that a private school offers is more important than the medium of instruction for some. The ability to pay fees or even high fees allows some parents to secure some form of 'distinction' from others. For them, the medium of instruction in English is secondary. Many scholars assume that exclusivity (and status) and English medium go together, but this need not be the case. In the era before there was mass education in the country, the very act of sending one's kids to a government school, while the majority of the population was illiterate, itself was a marker of distinction. Now, when everybody sends their kids to school, private schools, be of whatever medium, allow some 'exclusivity' and

'distinction' for many individuals compared to those who can't afford to. For example, a small businessman who enrols his kid in a low cost private school (in a regional language) might not prefer to enrol her to a government school (of the same medium) which provides a mid-day meal due considerations of social status. Such class distinctions are important for many people.

Third, some parents have strong sentiments for the language and their community and prefer such schools because they want their kids to know about their language and culture. This combined with their lack of faith in government schools is a reason for their opting private schools in regional languages. Many parents interviewed in the field expressed such opinions. For example, some parents confidently asserted their love for their language and their desire to enrol their kids in Assamese medium schools while others lamented that English medium schools do not teach anything about their culture and are disconnected with their roots. For them, these aspects are important when it comes to the question of school choice.

Finally, there are other reasons like the sheer convenience of the school being located nearby, security, and discipline and so on. Given the complex and nuanced nature of school choice, the actual reasons might be some permutation and combination of these factors. Whatever is the case, market forces have capitalised on this and hence we see a lot of supply of private schools in Indian languages since there definitely is a demand. That is why they account for more than 60% of all private schools.

**Conclusion - Deflecting from the real issue (market forces)**

Attributing the spread of private schools to the lure of English alone deflects focus from the central issue which is that government schools are getting more and more unpopular day by day. To think that the abandonment or migration from government schools to private schools is due to better life chances promised by the English language alone is a misdiagnosis of the problem. This can also lead to ill thought of solutions like switching to English medium in government schools as a remedy as seen in some states. Probably the root

cause is that many government schools are dysfunctional today where no learning takes place at all as suggested by many. This is not to claim all private schools are better. Sure enough, many of the private schools are of poor quality as well. But a private management seems to offer some hope for parents who are concerned more about teaching, learning and discipline. As Stephen Ball mentions in the context of Britain, 'there is now in education policy a well-established, powerful and complex ideology of the market and a linked culture of choice which are underpinned by dangerous idealisations about the workings of markets, the effects of parental choice and profit incentives in education' (Ball, 1993, p. 3). Such ideas can be said to operate in the Indian context as well.

There is no doubt that private schools in regional Indian languages occupy an important place in the educational scenario of the country. Despite this, these schools have not received the academic attention they deserve. Surely, the importance of English cannot be denied and as scholars have pointed out, English is one of the key factors that have resulted in the growth of private schools. English is well entrenched and is in a dominant position when it comes to private schools. But the point is that there is more to it. Other languages also have their own appeal. There have been instances where EdTech companies have produced educational content in an effort to capitalise on demand for learning in Indian languages.The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has brought the focus back on Indian languages again. We would hope that private schools in Indian languages also get the deserved attention. More research into private schools of other mediums, especially how market forces operate there, would bring fresh insights into the state of private schooling in the country.

**End Notes**

1 Assam Movement/Agitation/Andolan was a six year movement from 1979 to 1985 led by the All Assam Students Union (AASU) for the deportation of foreigners in Assam.

2 The medium of instruction movement of 1972 in Assam started when Guwahati University proposed to introduce Assamese as a medium of instruction in all colleges under its jurisdiction.

3 In 1960, the Assamese Official Language Bill was passed to make Assamese the official language of the state.

4 Jatiya Bidyalay literally means school for the Assamese jati, as in the race of Assamese people. Jati is not to be confused here with caste.

Assam Jatiya Bidyalay (AJB) is not the first private Assamese medium school in the state. There existed a few such schools since earlier times. Also the first Vidya Bharti school, (these schools are called Sankardev Sishu Niketan schools) affiliated with the Rashtriya Swayamshevak Sangh (RSS) was established in 1979 in Guwahati, Assam. The point however, is that the establishment of the AJB was a crucial turning point in 1994 for private schools in Assamese medium.

5 This number included roughly around 1500 jatiya bidyalays, around 500 Sankardev Shishu Niketans and other private schools in Assamese medium.

6 The difference in number of schools in Assamese for Assam and rest of India is because for the former, the number of schools is only in the state of Assam. For the latter, the number of schools in Assamese is all over India. The latter number is more because there are some schools in Assamese outside the state of Assam as well.

Also, there are miniscule no of schools with French as medium of instruction, so can be ignored.

7 These include Dogri, Khasi, Garo, Mizo, Bhutia, Lepcha, Limbo, French, Santhali and Maithili

**References**

Ball, S. J. (1993). Education markets, choice and social class: The market as a class strategy in the UK and the USA. *British journal of sociology of education*, *14*(1), 3-19.

Deka. K. (2018). *Jatiya Vidyalaya: A Movement.* In Jatiya Andolan: Assam, Assamese, Assam Jatiya Vidyalaya (pp. 114-118). Guwahati. Aank Baak.

Gurney, E. (2018). School quality: Parent perspectives and schooling choices. In *School education in India* (pp. 260-280). Routledge India.

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*, 98-105.

LaDousa, C. (2007). Of nation and state: language, school, and the reproduction of disparity in a North Indian City. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 925-959.

LaDousa, C. (2014). *Hindi is our ground, English is our sky: Education, language, and social class in contemporary India*. Berghahn Books.

Lahoti, R., & Mukhopadhyay, R. (2019). School choice in rural India: Perceptions and realities in four states. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *54*(49), 51-57.

Madan, A., Sastry, R., & Ramdas, B. (2019). Social movements and educational change: a case study of the adivasi munnetra sangam. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *54*(5), 45-52.

Nambissan, G. B. (2012). Private schools for the poor: Business as usual?. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 51-58.

Rajagopal, A. (1994). Ram Janmabhoomi, consumer identity and image-based politics. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1659-1668.

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.

Tooley, J. (2013). *The beautiful tree: A personal journey into how the world's poorest people are educating themselves*. Cato Institute.

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.

_____

***Digantaraj Medhi***, PhD Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, Tezpur University, Assam

*Email: diganta.raj.medhi@gmail.com*

***Nirmali Goswami***, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Tezpur University, Assam

*Email: nirmalig@gmail.com*

# Negotiating maternalistic practices in domestic work: Strategies of part-time domestic workers in Guwahati City (Assam)

--Shruti Talukdar & Kedilezo Kikhi

*Abstract*

Framed within a discussion of maternalism and its varied facets in domestic work, this essay seeks to develop an understanding of the strategies adopted by part-time domestic workers in Guwahati, as they negotiate the practices of distinction mobilized by their employers within a maternalistic relation. The essay analyses these strategies as part of the domestic worker's power to resist by drawing insights from James Scott's concept of everyday resistance and hidden transcripts. Building on data collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with the domestic workers, this essay argues that, despite being embedded in an unequal power equation with their employers, the domestic workers are not passive victims of subordination. Rather, they are acting subjects who capitalize on informal strategies by manipulating the unequal power in the relation, and construct a selfhood which affirms their dignity and moral superiority.

*Keywords: Class-consciousness, domestic work, maternalism, resistance, strategies*

## Introduction

In India, paid domestic work as a special category of labour received prominence in the early 1990s, with the recognition of the sector in terms of female employment (Neetha, 2004; 2009). Typically, this recognition was accorded considering the exponential growth of women performing part-time domestic work in urban areas (Neetha, 2009). Unlike, the full-time domestic workers who are accommodated in employer's houses, these are workers who live in their own

houses and perform specific tasks for multiple employers either once or twice a day in exchange for a monthly wage (Raghuram, 2001; Neetha, 2009). Additionally, they exercise a greater flexibility and autonomy in choosing their employers (Ray & Qayum, 2010).

Significantly, while these changes with the emergence of part-time arrangement hints at the development of a contractual relationship, existing scholarship on domestic work in India reminds us that employer-domestic worker relation is far from being straightforwardly contractual (Neetha, 2009; Ray & Qayum, 2010; Mattila, 2011; Barua, Haukanes & Waldrop, 2017). Scholars have inferred this in context of the space where the work performed is the employer's home, wherein employer and worker meet as 'isolated pairs', entailing to an interpersonal relation (Dickey, 2000a; Ray & Qayum, 2010; Mattila, 2011). Moreover, given the moral economy of contemporary domestic work in India being primarily a gendered sphere, interpersonal ties in the relationship has been analysed in the light of maternalism, where women employers engage in varied practices of benevolence with their women domestic workers, which perpetuate a relation of patronage and dependency (Mattila, 2011; Barua et al., 2017). Markedly, in doing so, while the employers affirmed their own superiority, they simultaneously maintained everyday boundary of distinction with their domestic workers by constructing them as inferior beings.

In this essay, we turn the gaze around, by shifting our focus on the perspectives of domestic workers towards employers' maternalistic practices. Drawing insights from the fieldwork in Guwahati (located in north-east India), the essay deciphers strategies of part-time domestic workers in negotiating the practices of distinction as embedded in maternalism. We analyse these strategies as part of domestic worker's power of resistance by situating it within Scott's idea of everyday resistance and hidden transcripts (Scott, 1985; 1990). In this, the essay highlights the capacities of domestic workers to construct a dignified selfhood, despite being

entangled in an unequal power relation with their employers. It thus, unveils an entirely different aspect of embeddedness of the work relations in maternalsim, whereby, the domestic workers unsettle the dominant constructions of 'them' as inferior beings, in significant ways.

**The contours of maternalism in domestic work**

Maternalism originates from the historical tradition of paternalism in domestic work, based on the ideology of feudal patron-client model, in which employer's obligations of protection and guidance towards his servant was in return for the servant's work, loyalty and obedience towards the master (Rollins, 1985; Romero, 1992). In the contemporary discourse on domestic work, the term paternalism has been replaced with maternalism[1], given the domestic labour relations largely being between women (Rollins, 1985). In this sense, maternalism as a conceptual category is distinguished from paternalism, where 'women's supportive intra-familial roles of nurturing, loving and attending to affective needs, serves as a key element in moulding the labour relationship between a woman employer and her domestic' (Rollins, 1985, p. 187). However, Rollins emphasises that such gendered manifestation of the relationship does not serve as a unifying element between woman employer and the woman domestic worker; rather much like paternalism it contributes towards disregarding the human worth of the worker:

The maternalism dynamic is based on the assumption of a superordinate-subordinate relationship. While, maternalism may protect and nurture, it also degrades and insults.The female employer with her motherliness and protection and generosity, is expressing in a distinctly feminine way, her lack of respect for the domestic as an autonomous, adult employee. (Rollins, 1985, p. 186)

Notably, the role of maternalism in domestic work relations is dynamic in shaping the social identities of the actors involved. According to Romero (1992), the varied acts of employer's maternalism projects the domestic workers as needy,

immature and inadequate, while buttressing the employer's perceptions of themselves as benevolent, thoughtful and superior moral guardians. Building on this, Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) has defined maternalism as a one-way relationship which underlines the deep class inequalities between employers and their domestic workers. Additionally, studies have attributed maternalism as an instrumental component which contributes towards racial/ethnic superiority of employers (Rollins, 1985; Romero, 1992, Glenn, 1992; Lan, 2003), and in Indian context, it shows caste superiority (Barua et al., 2017).

Existing studies have shown how employers exhibit maternalism towards their domestic workers through varied practices like transferring of gifts and personal favours, expressing gestures of maternal protection and altruism, by incorporating them as 'part of the family', by treating them as a child incapable of taking independent decisions, extending financial help and so forth (Rollins, 1985; Romero, 1992; Shah, 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Lan, 2003; Ray & Qayum, 2010; Mattila, 2011; Barua et al., 2017). Such practices existing within the market-oriented features of domestic labour, in significant ways, serves as a key element for employers to solicit unpaid services from their domestic workers. It significantly ties the domestic workers in a relationship of obligation by blurring the distinctions between paid and unpaid housework, thereby, weakening the worker's ability to maintain contractual agreements (Romero, 1992, p. 130). The unpaid housework in this regard is not simply limited to physical labour of the domestic workers, but it encompasses also their emotional labour, wherein they are required to manipulate their feelings in order to fulfil psychological needs of employers (Romero, 1992). In this light, scholars have agreed that a maternalistic relationship in domestic work aids to both physical and psychological exploitation of the domestic workers. This has been marked powerfully by Rollins as, 'what makes domestic service as an occupation more profoundly exploitative than other comparable occupations grows out of the precise element that makes it unique:

the personal relationship between employer and employee' (Rollins, 1985, p. 156).

It is significant, however that, while, scholars have emphasised maternalism as a discretionary power of employers in reproducing structures of inequality and subordination - class, race/ethnic, caste - in domestic work relations; this does not entail one to dismiss the perspectives of domestic workers in embracing a maternalistic relationship. As Lan observed, neither employers nor domestic workers are monolithic groups, rather both the groups develop different preferences and strategies based on their social positions, job descriptions and employment conditions (Lan, 2003).

For instance, several Chicanaca domestic workers in Romero's (1992) study willingly exchanged unpaid additional physical and emotional labour in order to seek psychological satisfaction of attaining respect and dignity in workplace. Mendez's (1998) study, shows domestic workers employed through bureaucratic agency using 'strategic personalism' as a potential tool in their relationship with employers, to obtain alternative 'fringe benefits' in the form of material goods, cash bonuses or loans. Hondagneu-Sotelo's (2001) study shows live-in domestic workers craving for a personal relationship with their employers, as it entailed towards their respectability as people. Lan's (2003) study, shows Filipina migrant domestic workers, more particularly those from rural areas, and newly arrived migrants in Taiwan artfully displaying their material poverty in order to seek patronage from their Taiwanese employers.

Building on these claims, this essay seeks to contribute to the extending body of scholarship by providing insights into how part-time domestic workers in Guwahati perceive and negotiate the struggles of inferiority as embedded in maternalistic relationship with employers. This study reveals that despite being embedded in an unequal power equation with their employers, the domestic workers capitalise on certain informal strategies which reflects that they are 'as

manipulative as they are manipulated' (Nyamnjoh, 2005). The essay approaches these strategies as part of their resistance, by drawing insights from James Scott's concepts of 'everyday forms of resistance' and 'hidden transcripts' (Scott, 1985; 1990).

According to Scott, resistance includes 'any act(s) by member(s) of a subordinate class that is or are intended either to mitigate or deny claims made on that class by superordinate classes or to advance its own claims vis-a-vis those superordinate classes' (Scott, 1985, p. 290). However, considering the risk of open confrontation with their superordinates being too high, the intentions of the subordinates find reflection through everyday forms of resistance like gestures, feigned ignorance, gossip, and other such small acts which are typically informal, thereby, requiring no organised group effort (Scott, 1985, p. xvi). Key to Scott's 'everyday forms of resistance' is the concept of 'public transcript' and 'hidden transcript' (Scott, 1990). While, public transcript refers to 'the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate; hidden transcript is the discourse that takes place "offstage", beyond direct observation by power holders' (Scott, 1990, p. 2-4). As public transcript takes place in a power-laden context, it bears the mark of fear, impelling subordinate groups to enact rules of deference and compliance. However, it is through hidden transcript, the subordinate groups express their 'everyday forms of resistance' that contradict to what appears in the public transcript (Scott, 1990). In this sense, resistance can be defined as a subtle art of dissimulation, wherein subordinate groups challenge their superior without any direct confrontation, thus, allowing for "a veiled discourse of dignity and self-assertion within the public transcript.in which ideological resistance is disguised, muted and veiled for safety and sake" (Scott, 1990, p. 137).

The use of Scott's idea of resistance to analyse the capacity of domestic workers' agency has been best articulated by Parrenas in her study with domestic workers in Los Angeles and Rome, shows how 'domestic workers take advantage of

opportune moments within the daily rituals of domestic work by creatively interjecting subversive acts into everyday routines so as to resist the tedium and disciplinary measures that normalize inequalities between employers and employee' (Parrenas, 2015, p. 151-152). In the Indian context, Barua, Haukanes & Waldrop mobilized the concept of Scott in order to understand how domestic workers contest boundary work of employers as embedded in class and caste practices. Their study reveals the oppositional cultural repertoires developed by domestic workers in their contestation with employers, without publicly challenging their authority (Barua, Haukanes & Waldrop, 2016, p. 7).

Taking cues from these earlier studies, we have applied Scott's concepts of everyday resistance and hidden transcript, in order to understand how part-time domestic workers in Guwahati city construct a selfhood which negates the dominant perception of them as inferior beings. This essay particularly explores the practices of domestic worker's resistance in light of the varied maternalistic acts expressed by their employers. Here, it is noteworthy that, while the domestic workers in Guwahati city overwhelmingly resorted to resistance strategies that primarily found expression through certain subtle everyday practices, this does not entirely give an impression of their negation of direct confrontation. On the contrary, they are seen negotiating overtly with employers, albeit sparingly, in situations which serves as a cause of deep injury to their inner-self. Resistance here, as Scott observed originates from the pattern of personal humiliation inflicted upon the subordinate class (Scott, 1990, p. 112).

**Methodology**

This essay has been developed based on the fieldwork conducted in Guwahati, the capital city of Assam. The data has been collected through semi-structured interviews on thirty women working as part-time domestic workers, as well as through four focus group discussions. The women have been interviewed in their settlement with most interviews lasting between one to two hours. Given their

busy work schedule, the women mostly have been interviewed in the afternoon when they returned home for a break between their morning and evening shifts.

The women interviewed are all residents of the slum settlement located in the Uzanbazar area of Guwahati city. The particular slum has been deliberately selected as it is situated in the oldest residential locality of Guwahati, and it being one of the oldest slums which featured in the list of the Director of Municipal Administration Department, 1997. The entry point to these women was through a local non-government organisation (NGO), which has been associated with the slum settlement since 2014. Interestingly, our association with the NGO aided to our acceptability amongst these women, which consequently contributed to several rounds of informal discussions with them.

The selected slum predominantly houses the communities belonging to Bihari Bansphor, Bihari Paswan and East Bengal-origin Muslim. Of these the Bihari Bansphor and Bihari Paswan are Scheduled Caste1 groups hailing from the state of Bihar, and have been residents of the slum since several decades. The East Bengal-origin Muslims, on the other hand, are comparatively recent settlers in the slum and hails from the districts of lower Assam. It is found, Bihari Paswan and East Bengal-origin Muslim women, predominantly work as part-time domestic worker in the neighborhood of larger Uzanbazar locality; therefore, the study sample comprises these two women groups. Out of the thirty women interviewed for the study, fifteen are Bihari Paswan and fifteen are East-Bengal origin Muslim. All the women are married and are mainly between the age group of 25 to 55 years. Most of these women have experience of working as part-time domestic workers for more than five years. Almost all the women work in three to four houses each day, and perform tasks that are related to cleaning like sweeping, mopping, washing clothes and utensils.

In order to maintain anonymity of our respondents, pseudonyms have been used throughout the essay. It is also noteworthy to mention that, although the

interviewed women are associated with the activities of the local NGO (which has served as our entry point), this is primarily in context of their larger rights as workers in relation to the state, and it did not cater to their daily challenges at workplace. Moreover, the women are also not members of any trade union. It is therefore, from this vantage point, we have analysed the experiences of the interviewed women and their strategies of negotiating everyday struggles of subordination masked within a maternalistic relation.

**Findings and discussion**

This section of the essay delineates the findings as per several sub-themes, which have been established after interacting with the part-time domestic workers in Guwahati. It outlines the varied maternalistic practices exhibited by employers and the subsequent negotiation strategies deployed by the domestic workers. Although, existing scholarship enumerates a diverse range of employer's maternalistic practices, our interaction with domestic workers in the field, highlights practices of gift-giving, provision of food and financial assistance as few main practices. While, these practices served as a key component in marking everyday class inequalities between employer and the domestic worker, the narratives of the workers suggest their compliance to these inequalities as part of their daily work routines. This however, did not signify their passive acquiescence; rather it implied their conscious manipulation of real feelings in presence of employers. Given the unequal power equations in which they are embedded, and a sense of their own precarity as dependents of a poorly regulated sector of informal economy (Neetha, 2009), compliance served as a significant strategy for the workers in deploying subtle practices of everyday resistance. This, in significant ways, entailed to their inverting of the power dynamics as embedded in employer's maternalism, and contributed in constructing themselves as superior beings in relation to their employers. It is also worth noting that in situations where employer's maternalistic practice served as an injury to the

domestic worker's inner-self, their subtle assertions to power found its way as open confrontation. It is from the vantage of this understanding; we have discussed our empirical material and highlighted the particularities which manifest varied forms of resistance amid the domestic workers.

**The practice of gift-giving**

In domestic work relations, gift-giving has been one of the persistent phenomena across the globe, and a primary example through which employers' exhibits maternalism (Rollins, 1985; Romero, 1992; Lan, 2003; Mattila, 2011; Barua et al., 2017). However, unlike the practice of gift-giving which occurs between 'equals', and is governed by a norm of mutual reciprocity, the specificity of gift-giving in domestic service is marked by an absence of reciprocity (Rollins, 1985). Moreover, here, the gifts given mostly comprise of old clothes and all other material possessions which are no longer of use to the employer concerned. By transferring such unwanted items, the employers in general portray themselves as 'benevolent', and their domestic workers as someone who is 'needy', and ever willing to accept discarded goods, thus, reiterating the class distinctions ingrained in the work (Rollins, 1985; Romero, 1992; Barua et al., 2017). This employer practice essentially necessitates the question as to: how the domestic workers perceive such one-sided transfer of gifts?

Similar with the studies elsewhere, the present study reveals that the most common maternalistic act of employer is transferring of old clothes to domestic workers. While, this primarily contributed in amplifying emotional gratification of employers wherein they marked such practices as 'part of their charity'; for most domestic workers, this served as a major arena of contestation. Their contestation most commonly found expression through bitter complaints about their employers, in which they referred about the deplorable condition of used clothes that were handed over to them. Significantly, while there are domestic workers who said about re-using employer's old clothes, but they maintained that

it was only when the clothes are in a decent condition. One such worker is Anita, who explained it as:

To be honest, I do not have problem in wearing used clothes. But, my point is, the clothes should at least be in a decent condition to be re-used again. Most employers fail to understand that, and hand over clothes which are best to be used as either dusters or rug for drying legs. Can you believe, I also have experience of receiving mekhela sador1, where it got burned when ironed? Shamelessly she showed me the burnt mekhela and advised me how to conceal the burnt portion while wearing it. If she knows how to hide the burns while wearing it, then she should have kept it for herself only. As I do not like answering in her face, I bring whatever is given. But, when I showed it to Malti (her friend who also works as a domestic worker), she suggested me to give it to some beggar. I will do that only.

Likewise, emphasising on a similar experience, another worker, who took great offence in such employer practices, narrated her experience as:

This woman (one of her employers) gives me her old sarees with stains in several parts. She gives it to me in such a cheerful mood, as though she is doing me a great favour. Such people do not even think once that the stained saree that she herself refuses to wear, how could I put on the same? They think us to be beggars who are dying to wear their dirty and worn out clothes. It makes me very angry, but, I do not react. Back at home, I give it to someone in need.

Similar sentiments of anger are echoed in the narratives of several other domestic workers in this study. Their testimonies are manifestations of unequal power equation in relation to their employers, which do not translate into any direct confrontation on their part. Instead, as the narratives above suggest, the domestic workers successfully 'mask their attitude of anger' (Scott, 1990), and manipulate the public transcript by accepting their employers' worn out clothes. Their feelings of contempt and resistance in turn, find expression through hidden

transcripts wherein, they say about discarding the used clothes which were meant to reinforce employer's self-image as benevolent (Mattila, 2011), either to a beggar or someone 'needy'. This therefore, entailed the domestic workers to castigate the common employer's perception of them as someone who is 'needy and ever-willing to accept discarded goods'.

In addition to deplorable conditions of used clothes given as gifts, another manifestation of gift-giving in Guwahati found expression in the form of new clothes. Usually, employers give sarees as new clothes to their domestic workers particularly during Durga puja and Bihu1, the two most important Hindu festive occasions celebrated with much fervour in Assam1. But, the question of new sarees in return is of much contestation, as several domestic workers denounced this gift of the employers. This becomes evident when they expressed shock in group conversations when we asked them about employer's gifts they received during festive occasions. They commonly retorted to our question as, 'Are you asking about the 100 rupees' sarees that they give us?'; 'Oh, the cheap sarees! We take it and never use them'; 'We also have knowledge about sarees, we buy them too. The ones given to us are of extremely poor quality'; 'We wear sarees worth 500 rupees with our hard-earned money, not such cheap quality sarees'. Such comments are mostly observed to be followed by a sarcastic smile amongst the domestic workers, giving an impression of their momentary pleasure by mocking their 'stingy' rich employers. In doing so, the domestic workers as a subject to similar subordination by employers shared a common interest of constructing a discourse of self-worth and dignity for themselves (Scott, 1990).

**Provision of food**

Another arena of employer's act of maternalism is manifested in offering food to their part-time domestic workers. For the employers, it served as a powerful symbol to exhibit maternal qualities of care towards their workers, considering the nature of part-time arrangement of domestic work, where they spend limited time

at each employer's house. However, in this form of care, the domestic workers shared the humiliating experience of being served with stale and left-over food by most employers. The domestic workers explicitly elucidated such employer's practice as: 'employers have this strange habit of storing things in the refrigerator for days. And, when they do not feel like eating it anymore, they give it to us. They don't even feel ashamed to serve us with such baasi (stale) food. They think us to be fools, but we can easily differentiate between what is fresh and what is left-over'. Nevertheless, despite their awareness of being served with stale food, the domestic workers mostly feigned ignorance in presence of their employers, thereby, resorting to certain informal tactics, which, contributed towards their personal satisfaction in fooling their employers (Scott, 1990).

For instance, Lakhi narrates how she uses the tactic of dumping such stale food in the dustbin without the knowledge of her employer. Her employer's husband who works in a different district of Assam, made a routine visit to Guwahati every Sunday with boxes full of sweets. Lakhi being a witness to this says that, her malikni (female employer) never offers the sweets when it is fresh. Rather, she offers it to Lakhi only after the third or fourth day. Unable to openly deny her employer, she asks her to pack it in a carry bag. And, on her way to home she dumps it in the nearest roadside dustbin. Mojiron, on the other hand, says about setting her rule straight in such households offering stale food. On the pretext of not having time to wait for a cup of tea and snacks, she slyly evades such households immediately after work. Another domestic worker by emphasising her practice of consuming fresh food on a daily basis, in contrast to the habit of her rich employers, says that she feeds such stale food to dogs in her basti (slum). She narrates:

These rich people have the habit of buying things in bulk. They store 2-3 kg of fish in the fridge for days. And, when they cannot finish it, they ask us to take it by saying 'note that a piece of fish is worth 80 rupees, cook it properly and have

it'. Before giving it to us, they spell out the price. I wonder what they try to imply on us by saying the price. Have we never had any good food? They fail to understand that for us dal (lentils), bhat (rice) and alu bhaji (potato fry) is sufficient to satisfy our stomach. Unlike them, we consume everything on a daily basis. In such households, I take such rotten food and back home; I feed it to the basti dogs.

Significantly, in such situations of discrimination masked in the form of employer's care, bitter criticism via gossip serves as another significant strategy through which domestic workers express resistance. Gossip as a form of resistance is noted by Scott (1985) as a kind of democratic voice in conditions where powers and possible repression make open acts of disrespect dangerous. In the present study, it is seen that gossip is manifested amongst the domestic workers by critiquing about the discriminatory practices of one employer to other employers. By doing so, the domestic worker achieves 'the expression of opinion, of contempt, of disapproval while minimizing the risks of identification and reprisal' (Scott, 1985, p. 282). Moreover, by resorting to such practices, they make themselves heard to their present employer, albeit indirectly, so that the same is not repeated in that particular household.

Further, in certain households, employers' maternal care is not just limited to the domestic worker, but is also exhibited towards their children in the form of packing over-ripe fruits, and left-over food for them. The domestic workers expressed great indignation to such employer practices which involved their children. In this, they most commonly resorted to the tactic of throwing such food in the roadside dustbin, while workers like Usha, who has been working for more than a decade overtly expressed displeasure towards such practices involving their children. She explains her encounter with one such employer:

I do not accept such food. Even if they say, it is good; I deny it out-rightly. In one such house, when an employer was packing food for my children, which I have

seen the family consuming for the last two days, I told her on face that my children eat fresh food only. They do not like consuming food which is three-four days old. And, that, if they fall sick after consuming such stale food, I will be in trouble. You must have seen her face, it turned black (laughs). It hit her like a bullet. (Pausing for a while, with an expression of anger she continues). These rich people treat us like dustbins, and they expect us to be grateful for such low acts of theirs.

In addition to the above, yet another masked within employer's symbolic expression of care is the daily humiliation in the form of food served in separate utensils. In the present study, it is found that, mostly, the Bihari Paswan domestic workers belonging to Scheduled Caste group are particularly vocal about this employer practice. They took great offence in such practices of segregation wherein the utensils used by them are kept in segregated corners like the kitchen window pane or behind the gas cylinder. However, despite such practices serving as a regular source of humiliation for them, they refrained from any overt reaction; instead, most of them commonly resorted to acts like restraining themselves from eating food in such households. A few domestic workers like Radhia nevertheless, said about overtly expressing displeasure in one such household:

...the practice of sua-chuth (untouchability) is high amongst the Brahmins. They follow a lot of uporia niyom (undue rules) which I do not like, and that is why, I mostly avoid taking up work in Brahmin households. In the past, I was working in one such Brahmin household, where I experienced it all. As I used to be in a rush to reach my next workplace, I never had time to have tea in this particular house. But, one day after her (employer's) much insistence, I had tea. I was not only served in separate utensils, but, also when I went to the kitchen to wash my cup and plate, she yelled at me, 'do not wash there; do not wash there! Take some surf in your hand and wash it in the basin placed outside'. I felt very humiliated, as she

asked me to wash the utensils in the basin where they wash their mouth and throw spit. But, I did not react; I washed it silently that day. The next day when she asked me to have tea again, I said it on her face that I find it dirty to wash my utensils outside and, also told her, in the next workplace I am fed with plate full of nashta-pani (tea, snacks and water).

Notably, such practices of segregation are manifestations of traditional caste based notions of pollution which perpetuate untouchability on a daily basis. But, the study reveals domestic workers, irrespective of their caste are being subjected to similar humiliation. The fact that they belong to lower classes is instrumental in subjecting them to discrimination based on notions of purity and pollution (Dickey, 2000b; Barua et al., 2016). Intriguingly, in this light, the humiliation experienced by Bihari Pawasn domestic workers in Guwahati could be inferred primarily in context of their caste supremacy in relation to the Bihari Bansphor, the scheduled caste group predominantly hired as sweepers in Guwahati city. This becomes evident when several Paswan domestic workers questioned the employers' practices of segregation in the form of utensils unanimously as: 'are we sweepers to be treated that way?' From this statement, it can be argued that, while, the testimonies of Paswan domestic workers on the one hand are a reflection of the marked differences they embodied to distinguish themselves from those lower in caste, it can be at the same time, depicted as their struggle to manoeuvre their lower caste status, thereby, 'reclaiming a relatively high ritual position in the social hierarchy' (Sharma, 2016). In the same light, Radhia in the above narrative found it particularly degrading when practices of extreme segregation of a 'separate wash basin' was followed by her Brahmin employer. This markedly, unveils the inequalities that characterises domestic work interactions not only between employers and workers, but also amongst the workers (Sharma, 2016).

**Financial assistance**

While, the above discussed maternalistic acts of employers reflects the sense of 'degradation' experienced by domestic workers, significantly, the employer's practices like extending financial assistance to them in times of their crises added complexities to the labour relationship. Unlike the practices of gift-giving and provision of food which is expressed by employers in an uninhibited manner, financial assistance as a trope of maternalism is a rather selective practice. It develops only after both the groups have known each other for a considerable time. This time period is however not uniform, and varies for each employer-domestic pair.

Existing scholarship on domestic work highlights that, employer's act of maternalism in the form of financial assistance often contributed in cultivating a relationship of dependency amongst the domestic workers (Mattila, 2011; Sen & Sengupta, 2016). In the present study too, the domestic workers, specifically the single earning member of the family articulated a similar understanding of dependency. But, at the same time, they perceived this dependency on financial assistance received from employers as a positive aspect of domestic work as an occupation. Indeed, domestic workers who spoke about good sides of their employers mainly discussed it within the shadows of such benevolence expressed by employers. They elucidated how such additional benefits in the form of financial assistance, along with their monthly wage served as a source of 'protection' at times of distress. One such domestic worker is Pooja, a single mother of three teenage children who spoke about her relationship with one of her employer for whom she has been working for the past seven years:

My relationship with baideo1 is very different. When I was all alone with three small kids to look after, baideo supported me a lot. She provided me financial assistance when I had no one from my own family. She helped me support my daughter's education. I won't lie, till date; she pays for my daughter's school

admission fees, in addition to providing money to buy books and all other essential items needed for her school.

Likewise, Noorjahan narrates as to how one of her employers helped her during her lactating period. On her second pregnancy, she did not have enough breast milk to feed her baby, which, led to malnourishment of the new born baby. It was in this trying time, her employer looked after her by lending money to buy powdered milk for the child. Again, there are several others who shared about the help they receive from employers in the form of advance or loans. Although, in such cases, the total sum lent to them is deducted in instalments from their monthly salary, the domestic workers nevertheless, acknowledged the benefits of the loans in sailing through their difficult times. Moreover, in comparison to other available choices in the form of moneylenders and micro-financing groups in receiving loans, interest-free advance or loans granted by employers entailed to their protection from getting entrapped in a vicious cycle of debt.

Notably, the testimonies in general are reflections of the domestic workers' feelings of gratitude towards their employers, wherein the employer's maternal instinct in their trying times is the best thing that they could expect from the relationship. Interestingly, in this, the domestic workers of the present study concurrently projected an understanding of their weak bargaining power in such households. This becomes evident when they explained about their position in the particular households as one which is 'constantly being re-negotiated'. For instance, Pooja in the later part of our conversation emphasises:

...the work at her (employer) place is very heavy, but, I cannot tell her anything considering all that she does for me and my family. To be honest, working for her sometimes gets into my nerves. Baideo is such that, I am required to work as per her rules only, I have no freedom to do the tasks as per my wish. If she does not like something, I need to do it again.

These sentiments are echoed in narratives of several other domestic workers who are dependent on their employers for more than their monthly wage. While, workers like Pooja emphasised about the heavy burden of work load, others felt cheated for not getting their legitimate wage. Yet, despite their awareness, they hold back reasoning with such employers, instead, they successfully 'mastered the art of subordination', by complying with employer's expectations of work demands, as defiance or open confrontation entailed risks which they could not afford to bear (Scott, 1990). On a similar note, Constable in her study in Hong Kong, with migrant domestic workers, observed that most women are afraid to resist or assert their rights due to risks involved in losing their source of income, which helped in supporting their families back home (Constable, 2007). However, such accommodation of subordination does not necessarily imply that the domestics perceive themselves as 'subordinate' beings. Rather, their accommodation 'expresses both an understanding and a critique of the existing power structure' (Constable, 2007, p. 204).

Moreover, earlier studies on domestic work has also shown how domestic workers actively perform ingratiating behaviour by conforming to employer's expectations, thereby, manipulating their real feelings (Cock, 1980; Rollins, 1985). This reflects the power of manipulation exercised by subordinate groups as described by Scott, 'what may look from above like the extraction of a required performance can easily look from below like the artful manipulation of deference and flattery to achieve its own ends' (Scott, 1990, p. 34). Likewise, the domestic workers in Guwahati city had, by accommodating the employer's demands of additional labour normalise the deferential behaviour expected from them as subordinates, in order to improve their material advantages.

**Conclusion**

Drawing from Scott's idea of everyday resistance the essay provides insights into how part-time domestic workers in Guwahati negotiate the employer's practices

of inequality and subordination masked within maternalism. Although, the domestic workers are entangled in unequal power equation with their employers, the essay argues that the domestic workers are not passive victims. Rather, they are active subjects who consciously manipulate the power equations with the employers as a part of their everyday resistance. In the process, the domestic workers construct a selfhood which affirms their dignity and moral superiority, in contrast to the employers' perception of them as 'needy' and 'inferior beings'. However, it is noteworthy that, considering their awareness of precarity in the face of power, their assertion to dignity makes way through a balancing act of deference in their interaction with employers and hidden transcripts that they maintain away from the employer's gaze (Scott, 1990).

Significantly, while, the deferential performance gives an impression of the domestic workers' passive acquiescence to structural inequalities, this essay reveals that it serves as a part of their conscious contestation, in order to seek both material benefits and to dampen the injuries that maternalism as a class mechanism inflicts upon them. The hidden transcripts, on the other hand, find reflection in their basti settlement with fellow domestic workers, particularly those with whom they share daily experiences of workplace. It is in such exchanges about workplace experiences, the domestic workers reveal their true feelings about their employers without any inhibition. Consequently, they articulate criticisms about their employers which reflect the outburst of their anger that they suppress as part of public transcript. Such shared experiences aids to their devising of informal strategies which help them contest particular employer's practices of subordination as embedded in maternalism. Notably, while most of the strategies, as the present study shows, are indirect; nevertheless, it is the contention of the authors that such strategies entailed the domestic workers to implicitly challenge unequal power dynamics in which they are embedded, thus, contributing to reclaiming their moral selves as superior to their employers. Furthermore, in situations which served as an attack to their inner-self

or involved their children, the study shows the domestic workers engaged in rather open confrontation with their employers (see also Barua et al., 2016). However, it is noteworthy that, this primarily involved domestic workers who have been in the occupation for several years and through years of experience in multiple households have therefore, better equipped themselves to confront the employer's authority, albeit sporadically. This admittedly hints at the contradiction of subjectivities within the social class of domestic workers depending on their positionalities. But, we acknowledge that, the forms of resistance – open and indirect – both as part of the workers' individual struggle, and as part of their collective class-consciousness expressed through hidden transcripts, nevertheless, empower them to question the authority of their employers.

**Declaration**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

**Notes**

[1] Judith Rollins was the first to use the concept of 'maternalism' in 1985, in her study in Boston. She used the term in a context where class and race served as the primary power relations that shape maternalism in domestic work.

[1] Scheduled caste is an official category used for the lowest caste groups in India who are entitled to access special concessions through positive discrimination.

[1] An ethnic Assamese outfit.

[1] There are three types of Bihu in Assam, namely Magh Bihu, Bohag Bihu and Kati Bihu. It is during Bohag Bihu which marks the celebration of Assamese New Year and beginning of spring, Assamese people exchange new clothes as gifts with much avidity. However, in the context of domestic work, it is only the employer who gives new clothes to their domestic worker, while the domestic worker is not expected to reciprocate this.

[1] As the domestic workers in the present study primarily work in Assamese Hindu households, they received new gifts during Durga Puja and Bihu. But, a few East Bengal origin Muslim workers, who work in both Hindu and Muslim households said about receiving new gifts during Eid celebrations from their Muslim employers.

[1] In literal sense, *baideo* means elder sister in Assamese, but, here the domestic worker referred to her female employer. The domestic workers in the study often used kinship terminologies like *dada* (elder brother) and *baideo* (elder sister) or *bou* (sister-in-law) to address their male and female employers respectively. And, the usage of such terminologies is not governed by age, wherein their employers might be either older or younger to them, thus, marking it as a symbol of deference towards their employers.

**References**

Barua, P., Haukanes, H., & Waldrop, A. (2016, September). Maid in India: Negotiating and contesting the boundaries of domestic work. In *Forum for Development Studies* (Vol. 43, No. 3, pp. 415-436). Routledge.

Barua, P., Waldrop, A., & Haukanes, H. (2017). From benevolent maternalism to the market logic: Exploring discursive boundary making in domestic work relations in India. *Critical Asian Studies*, *49*(4), 481-500.

Cock, J. (1989). Maid and Madams: Domestic Workers Under Apartheid.

Constable, N. (2007). *Maid to order in Hong Kong: Stories of migrant workers*. Cornell University Press.

Dickey, S. (2000a). Mutual exclusions: Domestic workers and employers on labor, class and character in South India. In Kathleen M. Adams & Sara Dickey (Eds) *Home and hegemony: Domestic service and identity politics in South and Southeast Asia* (pp. 31-62). United States of America: University of Michigan Press.

Dickey, S. (2000). Permeable homes: Domestic service, household space, and the vulnerability of class boundaries in urban India. *American Ethnologist*, *27*(2), 462-489.

Glenn, E. N. (1992). From servitude to service work: Historical continuities in the racial division of paid reproductive labor. *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society*, *18*(1), 1-43.

Hondagneu-Sotelo, P. (2001). *Domestica: Immigrant workers cleaning and caring in the shadows of affluence.* Berkley: University of California Press.

Lan, P. C. (2003). Negotiating social boundaries and private zones: The micropolitics of employing migrant domestic workers. *Social problems*, *50*(4), 525-549.

Mattila, P. (2011). Domestic labour relations in India: Vulnerability and gendered life courses in Jaipur.

Mendez, J. B. (1998). Of mops and maids: Contradictions and continuities in bureaucratized domestic work. *Social Problems*, *45*(1), 114-135.

Neetha, N. (2004). Making of female breadwinners: Migration and social networking of women domestics in Delhi. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1681-1688.

Neetha, N. (2009). Contours of domestic service: Characteristics, work relations and regulation. *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, *52*(3), 489-506.

Nyamnjoh, F. B. (2005). Madams and Maids in Southern Africa: coping with uncertainties, and the art of mutual zombification. *Africa Spectrum*, 181-196.

Parreñas, R. (2015). *Servants of globalization: Migration and domestic work*. Stanford University Press.

Raghuram, P. (2001). Caste and gender in the organisation of paid domestic work in India. *Work, Employment and Society*, *15*(3), 607-617.

Ray, R., & Qayum, S. (2009). *Cultures of servitude: Modernity, domesticity, and class in India*. Stanford University Press.

Rollins, J. (1985). *Between women: Domestics and their employers*. Temple University Press.

Romero, M. (1992). *Maid in the U.S.A.* New York: Routledge.

Sen, S., & Sengupta, N. (2016). Domestic days: women, work, and politics in contemporary Kolkata.

Scott, J. C. (1985). *Weapons of the weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance*. yale university Press.

Scott, J. C. (1990). *Domination and the arts of resistance: Hidden transcripts*. Yale university press.

Shah, S. (2000). Service or Servitude: The Domestication of Household Labor in Nepal. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 87-118.

Sharma, S. (2016). Of rasoi ka kaam/bathroom ka kaam: Perspectives of women domestic workers. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 52-61.

*Shruti Talukdar*, Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, Tezpur University, Napaam, Tezpur, Email: shrutitalukdar05@gmail.com

*Kedilezo Kikhi*, Professor of Sociology & Chair Professor, Dr. Ambedkar Chair, Tezpur University,Napaam, Tezpur, Email: kedithejakikhi@yahoo.co.in

# Translating History into Movies: Analysis of Caste Discussions in Contemporary Indian Cinema

--Swetha. S & Naresh Annem

*Abstract*

Cinema, as a visual medium, has deeply influenced Indian society. The genre 'historical films' is the intersemiotic translation of history into movies. Historical films have several audiences but when it comes to the notion of representation, cinema was not able to represent the history of the struggles of the marginalised groups such as the Dalits, minorities, Adivasis, women. The agency of marginalised people was not explored in Indian cinema. History has been translated into art such as novels, poems, dramas, and movies. When history gets translated into cinema, initially it was translated for the people who were always at the top of the hierarchical order and excluded the marginalised communities. The recent trend in Indian cinema began to document some parts of history which discuss the struggles of the Dalits and Adivasis with due importance. A number of films portrayed the history of the downtrodden by narrating the history with importance to them. This paper analyses how the translation of history into movies with given agency to the marginalised community becomes the representation of their identity in society.

*Key Words: Translation, Cinema, Dalit, Identity, History, Representation*

**Introduction**

Cinema is a visual medium which has a significant impact on Indian society. Like any other art form, cinema is also a documentation of the realities of life. It is debatable, though, to what extent film can accurately depict the struggles and daily life of Adivasis or Dalits. A commercial art form such as cinema has become a part of popular media by not considering the history of several struggles

against caste led by Dalits and Adivasis. Commercial movies were set in a standardized imaginary society where problems like caste disparities or struggle for land were not acclaimed as existing. This paper analyses how the translation of history into movies with given agency to the marginalised community becomes the representation of their identity in society and how the history in these movies are being narrated.

**Review of Literature**

Translation and adaptation have been an integral part of movies since the beginning of film production in India. From the very beginning of the history of Indian films, themes from Puranas and history have been adapted along with the life stories of the people. Vamsee Juluri (2013) in his text Bollywood Nation, India through Its Cinema, elaborates that the initial contributions of Indian cinema were strictly confined to the plots taken from Puranas and Itihasas. He also describes that these films tried to attribute some human nature to God and hence, tried to establish that God is one among us who possesses all or at least some vulnerabilities that human beings have.

"Gods May well be the single biggest concern of Indian Cinema, directly or indirectly. The first films made in India were 'mythologicals'. After independence, as 'social' films became more prolific in Hindi, some of the greatest and most popular films associated with what some would call the Golden Age of Telugu and Tamil were still about gods. It would seem that each new mass medium in India, following its emergence, passes through a phase of paying tribute to the stories of the god."(Juluri, 2013, p. 15)

Later, the phase of Historical movies portrayed the stories of kings, local chieftains, warriors and leaders. Adaptations from Puranas were still popular among the Tamil audience and Sultanate history was adapted into Hindi movies at that point of time. From the early period itself, films like Veerapandya

Kattabomman (1959), Raja Raja Chozhan (1973), and Kappalottiya Thamizhan (1961) which narrate the stories of kings and legendary heroes were made in Tamil. Films like Jhansi- Ki- Rani (1953), Mughal- E- Asam (1960), and Taj Mahal (1963) were made in Hindi. Eventually, Tamil films diverged from this trend of myth and history but in Hindi, this trend persisted until Jodha Akbar (2008) and Patmavat (2018). In Malayalam, a number of films were made by adapting Vadakkan Pattukal, the saga of warriors from the middle part of Kerala. Malayalam films adapted stories from Mahabharata, Bhagavatam, and Ramayana also. Films like Kunjali Marakkar (1967), Veluthambi Dalava (1962) and Pazhassiraja (1964) were made out of history and legends in the 1950s. But 'historical films' as a genre is a very recent trend when it is compared to the other two languages. Films like Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha (1989) Pazhassiraja (2009), Urumi (2011), and Kayamkulam Kochunni (2018) were made in the later part of the 1990s or 2000s. It is important to note that all these films were commercially successful.

In the text Reel History: In Defence of Hollywood (2002), the author Robert Brent Toplin notes that cinematic history has great diversity in terms of setting, plot and characters compared to the other genres and he says that there are so many familiar practices in the craft. He numbers seven features of cinematic history which explains how different the real history is. Toplin points out that:

"...cinematic history simplifies historical evidence and excludes many details. It offers partisan views of the past, clearly identifying heroes and villains. Cinematic history simplifies plots by featuring only a few representative characters. mostly, cinematic history frequently injects romance into its stories, even when amorous affairs are not central to the historical events." (Toplin, 2002, p. 17)

Various theorists have given their own interpretations, definitions and classifications of historical cinema. Among them, Robert Burgoyne's classification of 'five subtypes' and Sue Harper's division of 'historical films' and

'costume dramas' are significant. Through all these definitions and classifications, one can understand the features of historical movies as a genre (Stubbs, 2013, p. 16). Though these theories are made by scholars from the west, these features are applicable to historical films all over the world.

In Indian context, how much authenticity can these 'historical movies' claim? In other words, in the name of history, these films talk about heroes who would have been a part of a large struggle. The hero will be courageous, powerful, and well-behaved and will always talk about binaries such as white and black or good and bad. These films would narrate the story of their heroism on one side and the emotional relationships with people around him on the other. By evoking the sentiments of the audience in this way, these films could meet the equilibrium of a commercial movie but completely ignore the Dalits, minorities, Adivasis, women, and other marginalised groups who would have been there in the struggle along with the hero in real history. They are characterized as either villains and comic characters or they will be side-lined with a negligibly minor character. marginalised people in Indian cinema were portrayed as people who do not have an agency of their own. In that way Indian cinema, especially the genre of 'historical cinema' failed to address and represent the social realities of Indian society.

In this context, scholars such as Juluri (2013) ask 'Which India are we talking about?'. He asks "Is it the India of cities or villages? Is it the India of the young or the India of everyone?". It also should be asked if it is the India of the privileged or the marginalised. Evidently, Indian Cinema was not talking about 'the India of the marginalised'. He also considers the question of "why realism has somehow been less important in popular cinema than recognition, usually of something we could call 'truth'" (p. 60).

In this regard, some changes have been observed in Tamil cinema recently. A group of directors made films on caste discrimination, honour killings, and

genocides, which were projected in the earlier movies only as economic backwardness. Movies such as Paruthiveeran (2007), Subramaniapuram (2008), Attakatti (2012), and Rummy (2014) were the initial attempts. Later, directors like Pa Ranjith, Vetrimaran, and Mari Selvaraj, who came to the forefront by claiming their Dalit identity, could manifest their identity and politics through their movies. All these films were made in the commercial formula, but they could talk about the marginalised people of the society and their struggles in their true sense in the movies Visaranai (2015), Kabali (2016), Uriyadi (2016), Kaala (2018), Pariyerum Perumal (2018), Asuran (2019), Karnan (2021) and Jai Bheem (2021).

As a continuation of this trend in Tamil, films centring on the lives of the marginalised were made in other languages like Malayalam and Hindi as well. The history, which was getting translated into movies, for the people from upper caste and high in hierarchical structure till the end of 2010s have begun to get translated for the marginalised. The marginalised are getting their visibility in media like cinema through this process. Here, the translation of history into movies is working as a representation of the marginalised. This can be substantiated by analysing three movies that are Karnan (2021), Article 15 (2019) and Pada (2022).

**Methodology**

The select movies are analysed using qualitative analytical methods of film studies. Three movies, from three different Indian languages i.e Karnan from Tamil, Article 15 from Hindi and Pada from Malayalam are analysed by using narrative analysis and cultural/historical analysis. According to Andre Bazin's (1958) narrative analysis presented in "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema", the decision of a director to portray events with a sense of authenticity or realism can have an impact on the way the story of a film is constructed. Thus, comprehending how reality is portrayed in movies can be aided by narrative strategies such as storytelling style, visual aids, sequence of events, point of view,

etc. Siegfried Kracauer (1947) in From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film, placed German films into a larger global historical context, drawing inspiration from Stuart Hall's Cultural Studies. He examined Germany's social and political landscape through the prism of film. Both narrative and historical methods are helpful in analysing how history is being represented from the margins in select movies.

**A Shift of Politics and Aesthetics in Karnan**

Karnan (2021) directed by Mari Selvaraj is a movie that documents the atrocities by the police for and with the support of people from Other Backward Castes (OBC) in a Dalit village named Kodiyankulam in Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu. The people of Kodiyankulam did not have a bus stop in their village. Even though buses pass through Kodiyankulam, they never stop there stating that there is no bus stop and because of which they had to depend upon Melur, the neighbouring village. As Melur was largely populated by the upper caste, the people of Kodiyankulam were bullied and harassed by the people of Melur constantly for coming to Melur and boarding the bus from there. The people of Melur were powerful enough to influence the authorities because of which the petitions given by the Kodiyankulam villagers went in vain. This eventually leads the villagers of Kodiyankulam to protest against this which ends up in attacking and vandalizing a public bus. Eventually, this incident turns out to be a police case and this becomes a reason for the police to enter and create violence within the village.

When history gets translated here into Karnan movie, with a powerful hero who wins at the end. By projecting such a hero, the movie could justify the requirements of a commercial film and gain commercial success also. But this did not affect the justful portrayal of the atrocities faced by the Dalits and their struggles. In fact, this film restructured many of the aesthetic parameters of popular Tamil cinema. Symbols used throughout the film are related to the Dalit

village life. The portrayal of characters is different from the other commercial movies. Introduction of the hero in Tamil movies generally will be the so-called mass entry with loud background music. But in Karnan, we see the 'hero' being terribly beaten up by the police. This scene is shown with the accompaniment of the song 'Kanda Varachollungal' (If you see him, tell him to come) sung by the villagers in the movie. There is an image of a statue of a headless god and in certain scenes the hero's figure is coming over the headless god which indirectly attributes the hero an aura, an image of a Xavier. The movie is being narrated in a third-person point of view but even the placement of cameras in certain scenes shows the point of view of the Dalits.

The very first scene of the film shows the death of a young girl on the road. No vehicle stops and no one even cares. This girl's soul is shown as a guardian angel of the village in the movie. She appears with a mask of a rustic village goddess. The rustic little goddess is present everywhere as an omnipresent witness and guardian where there is a struggle, and the villagers take up the struggles and decide to fight for their rights. The most visible and direct projection of the lack of agency in the community appears through an image of a donkey whose legs are tied by its owner in order to curtail its motion. There is another image of a horse, whom one of the village boys looks after passionately but he never rides it. The film shows the hero frustratedly untying the knot on the donkey's legs and straightaway gets into a fight with the upper caste men from where he ends up vandalizing the bus. Initially, the villagers are afraid to speak for themselves because they think that they are supposed to bear all the injustices that are happening to them and then only they can live in the society. They think that their needs will be satisfied only if they please the upper caste people or at least they should not provoke them. But there is a point where they realize that those who exercise power will keep on pushing them down and unless they begin to fight for their rights, their situation will never get better. The villagers realize that they were beaten up by the police not because they vandalised the bus, but because

they stood headstrong, spoke for themselves, and did not untie their turbans in front of the upper caste people. They realize that the upper caste people, including the police officers, do not want them to hold a name which are usually of the upper caste men, such as Karnan, Duryodhanan and Abhimanyu. The hero riding a horse in the climax stands for the rights and dignity of the villagers and as the result of their struggle the donkey runs away freely.

By translating the Kodiyankulam incident into the movie Karnan, Mari Selvaraj was able to expose a Dalit community that holds its own agency. These symbols and images are not conventional in the history of commercial Tamil films, but the director of the film was able to incorporate the peculiarities of Dalit culture and the struggles and agency of the Dalit characters in a commercially structured film. The film attributes the role of a hero and a villain, yet successfully reshapes the history into the conventions of a commercial movie while pertaining to a Dalit perspective.

In Tamil Nadu, Dravidian identity politics has its roots in a very deep level even before Dalit politics came into the forefront. Dravidian and self-respect movements of the 1930s later followed by Periyar and then the political parties like Dravida Kazhakam (DK), Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), and Akhila India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) evolved by taking inspiration from Dravidian ideology with their views against the Aryan supremacy have influenced the art and literature of Tamil Nadu significantly. Apart from this, Tamil Nadu was impacted by the Dalit Panthers movement, which started in Maharashtra. It aimed to organise Dalits against violence and discrimination based on caste. Despite starting in the 1970s, its influence is still evident in the Dalit movements in the state. Founded by Thol. Thirumavalavan in 1999, Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) is a political party based in Tamil Nadu that mainly advocates for the rights of Dalits. It promotes the welfare and rights of Dalits and other marginalised populations. It is noteworthy that the Dalit

movements in Tamil Nadu are multifaceted and constantly changing, and this historical analysis is just a comprehensive perspective. Diverse movements, organisations, and leaders have subtle priorities and strategies. All these socio-political movements together contributed to the change in art and self-expression including an entertainment industry like cinema. Hence, Karnan can be seen as one of the outcomes of these socio-political movements.

**Unveiling Atrocities Against Dalits – The Movie Article 15**

Article 15 (2019) is a Hindi movie directed by Anubhav Sinha which addresses caste discrimination in the background of Badaun rape case, which actually happened in a village in Uttar Pradesh. The film is made as an investigation thriller about the murder of three Dalit girls who were raped and killed by the upper caste men of the village. Three of them were gang-raped to remind them of their place in the society because they asked for an increase of three rupees from their upper caste supervisor. Two of their bodies were hung from a tree to remind the whole Dalit community of where they belonged to. Pooja, the third girl, somehow manages to escape from the upper-caste rapists but does not return home. Though the victim's families tried to file the missing case of their daughters, the police, instead of taking up the case, framed the girls' fathers for the murder. The entire police force is seen to be suppressing the Dalits throughout the movie and through this incident, the film portrays many other practices of caste discrimination which was prevalent in that village. The protagonist Ayan is an IPS officer who initially doesn't know the intricacies of caste which is deeply embedded in the village. When the movie progresses, the protagonist tries and manages to convince the senselessness of caste discrimination.

Whenever the protagonist tries to speak and work for Dalits, the other policemen continuously tell him not to disrupt the Santulan (balance) of the society, which is created by Lord Brahma. The upper caste policemen never even use a proper noun to address the Dalit community. They just refer to them as 'these people'. At a

certain point, the protagonist asks fellow policemen about their own castes, and he observes how proudly and eagerly they talk about their castes and try to rank the other people according to their caste and caste occupation. In a particular scene, the protagonist displays a copy of Article 15, one of the fundamental rights given by the Constitution of India, which prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth within the country.

The movie shows Nishad, a Dalit leader who fights for their own people by using revolutionary strategies. He quotes Ambedkar that 'if I find the constitution being misused, I shall be the first to burn it'. When Nishad explains the problems, their community faces and how he ended up being a revolutionary, Mayank, a policeman who was Nishad's classmate tells him that 'You have learnt so much' which means the Dalits should not have learnt that much. Mayank was indirectly saying that it is their education which made them stand up on their feet for their rights. According to the upper caste people, Dalits standing on their own feet is the problem. Otherwise, the 'Santulan' will not have been disrupted. Jatav, a policeman from Dalit community, initially obeys everything that the superior officers from upper caste do or say. He does not even have the courage or agency to help himself or the other Dalits out there. But later he works for Ayan, the protagonist and stands firm against the culprit officers. When Jatav arrests Brahmadutt who is a policeman and also one of the accused, he raises against Jatav asking 'You have shown where you truly belong. You should have stayed a sweeper instead.' Jatav slaps him and asks him back 'till when do you expect us to continue as sweepers?'. Towards the climax, an enquiry happens against the protagonist, accusing him of being biased towards the Dalits. There, the officer of enquiry commission, who is a south Indian, asks him to speak in Hindi. Here, the connection of caste and language comes into picture. Through this scene, the director gives a glimpse of how Hindi is being imposed all over the country. When he was asked why he couldn't be neutral, Ayan said 'Staying neutral when a fire is raging is standing with the ones who lit it'. The film also unveils the

recent growth of Hindu fundamentalists in the country by showing the Ashram and the fundamentalist speech of the Babaji, who are equally powerful in religion as well as politics. He flexes over the Dalit girl's missing notice to cover up the upper-caste Hindus.

In this movie, the struggle and resistance are mainly expressed directly through dialogues rather than images and symbols. The director proves that proper understanding and implementation of the constitution is the solution to resist caste discrimination in the country. In the film, the Dalit community is in constant struggles to possess their rights and dignity. They ask for an increase in wages, they visit the police station daily requesting for justice, they fight with the entire society. At the end, a point occurs where everybody from the police force stands for justice instead of caste identity. Hence, Article 15 was able to create some impact in the still caste-driven north Indian society.

This kind of change in Hindi cinema can be observed as the overall change that happened in the political atmosphere in India though the mainstream party politics cannot be included here. Reformation movements from the colonial and post-colonial periods should be considered when situations are talked about in India. Though the Mandal Commission report of 1990 gave visibility to OBC, SC, and ST communities, the role that the Dalit Panthers of Maharashtra, found in 1972, played was very significant. The later period in Indian politics turned out to be a period of identity politics. The revival of Ambedkarite ideology and a group of people and organizations such as Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha, Scheduled Caste Federation, Ambedkar Students Association and people like Jignesh Mevani, Chandrashekar Azad, Kiruba Manuswami and Kancha Ilaiyyah trying to emphasize the importance of Ambedkarite ideology and its relevance in contemporary India are significant part of this change. This is reflected not only in the field of cinema but in all the other fields as well. Cinema has been greatly influenced by these Dalit movements, both in terms of form and content.

Mainstream cinema has been impacted by Dalit movements, leading several directors to include Dalit themes and characters in their works. As a result, people are now more aware of Dalit problems. Article 15 has turned into a strong instrument for drawing attention to the problems and social issues that Dalits confront, including discrimination, untouchability, land rights, and economic inequality. The intricate facets of Dalit identity, such as the interaction of caste, class, and gender, are explored in this movie. It investigates how Dalit lives are shaped by these overlapping identities.

**Land, Legislation and Power – Pada**

Pada (2022) directed by K.M. Kamal duly documents an incident that happened in Palakkad district of Kerala which is related to the revolt for the rights of land for the Adivasis in 1996. Four activists, who were part of the Naxalite movement in Kerala earlier, held the district collector hostage for around nine hours with the demand to demolish Kerala Scheduled Tribes Act 1975, to ensure the forest land for the Adivasis. Kerala Scheduled Tribes Act 1975 is an act that restricts the transfer of land by members of Scheduled Tribes and the restoration of possession of lands held by them in Kerala. This act basically alienates the rights of Adivasis over their own lands. All the 140 members of the legislative assembly unanimously voted for the bill. The activists call themselves Ayyankalippada (The soldiers of Ayyankali) and raise a question as to how many of these elected members spoke to the Adivasi communities. Ayyankali is a social reformer of Kerala, who fought for the rights of Dalits. In a scene, an Adivasi leader is addressing a crowd in front of a police station. The character resembles C. K. Janu, an Adivasi activist, who leads Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha in Kerala. In the course of the film, the injustice that the Adivasi community of the state goes through is mentioned several times. The Ayyankalipada demands to summon the legislative assembly immediately and invite all the Adivasi communities of Kerala and ask them if they approve the new law. But their demand is never being

taken on after the release of the district collector. Also, the end of the film tells that these four people were hunted by the police and bureaucracy throughout their lives just because they revolted against the authority and spoke for the marginalised. One of the activists makes a statement at the end of the film that Adivasis are the real hostages in society. This film is based on the dramatic nature of the incident. Still, this incident is documented in a very realistic way with no overdramatic or violent elements incorporated in the movie, even though it uses the resources of commercial cinema, such as popular actors and style of making. In that way, this can be referred to as the best translation of history into movies. However, the movie lacks the representation of Adivasis as the revolt was for the Adivasis but by the people from other communities. Hence the movie fails to portray the agency of the Adivasis.

Observing the Dalit movements in Kerala should begin with the reformations made by Ayyankali and Sree Narayana Guru, who laid the foundation of anti-caste struggles in Kerala. Later the growth of Communism and its efforts in land reformation and redistribution happened. This aided the Dalit community, who were working in the fields of the upper caste people to be occupied with their own land and living. Various organizations such as Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam, Dalit Sahitya Parishad, Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha, and Bharath Dharma Jana Sena (BDJS), have contributed to the political visibility of Dalits.

The Naxalite movement of the 1970s is a focal point when it comes to the struggles for Adivasis. For Adivasi people, the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006 has been an essential piece of legislation. It acknowledges the rights of populations who live near forests, such as the Adivasis, to occupy and use forest land for cultivation. An organisation named Aikya Kerala Malai Kudumbam was established in the 1970s to address the political and socio-economic problems that Adivasi groups were facing. Adivasi groups have been encouraged for political

participation at different levels of government by these Adivasi movements. This involves setting aside seats for Adivasi representatives in local bodies. People such as C. K. Janu, M. Geethanandan, C. P. Roy, K. K. Kochu, and K. M. Kuttappan contributed to the social, political, and economic advancement of the Adivasi communities. Apart from this, the recent development of identity politics can be seen as the sum of the entire change that has happened in the cultural arena of Kerala, including cinema and literature, which ultimately aided the production of films like Pada.

**Conclusion**

Alun Munslow in his The Routledge Companion to Historical Studies says that one cannot analyse an art produced in society by excluding the history of that society. "Just like written history, film history is also fictive, genre-based, heavily authored, factually selective, ideologically driven, condensed, emplotted, targeted and theorised representation" (Munslow, 2006, p. 111). What happened in the past would be retold in various genres. In other words, history will be translated into art such as novels, poems, dramas, and movies. Translation is done by whom, how, and for whom is what matters, and this determines whether the translation is a representation or not, and whom it represents. These three movies from three different parts of India and in three different languages portray the problems of the downtrodden, particularly the Dalits and Adivasis. All these films take inspiration from incidents which are actually part of the history. Even though these films are not made in the style of the so-called period dramas or historical films, they represent and document history in their own way. These movies represent the history that is usually forgotten, neglected, or undiscussed. The perspectives in these films are drawn from the marginalised. There are certain historical and socio-political backbones in those respective societies which ultimately lead the people to create such films. They shape the aesthetics of the movies as well as the reception and appreciation from the audience. In India,

history used to get translated for the people who were always there at the top of the hierarchical order. But recently it has begun to get translated for the marginalised people of the society as well. The select movies can be seen as examples of this change. This arbitrariness of the process of translation is good for the field of cinema, and society as well.

## References

Bazin, A. (2004). The Evolution of the Language of Cinema. In What Is Cinema? University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520931251-006 Accessed online.

Gopalakrishnan, A. (2022, March 16). Pada Review: Kamal KM Recovers the Memory of a Protest in a Superbly Acted Political Film. Sliverscreen India. https://silverscreenindia.com/movies/reviews/pada-review-kamal-km-recovers-the-memory-of-a-protest-in-a-superbly-acted-political-film/. Accessed online.

Juluri, V. (2013). *Bollywood nation: India through its cinema*. Penguin UK.

Kamal, K.M, (Director). (2022).  Pada [Film], AVA Productions.

Kracauer, S. (2019). *From Caligari to Hitler: A psychological history of the German film*. Princeton University Press.

Munslow, A. (2002). *The Routledge companion to historical studies*. Routledge.

Sinha, A. (Director). (2019). Article 15 [Film]. Benaras Media Works and Zee Studios.

Stubbs, J. (2013). *Historical film: A critical introduction*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Suganth, M. (2021 April 9). Karnan Movie Review: Karnan Is a Powerful Tale of Defiance against oppression. Times of India. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/tamil/movie-reviews/karnan/movie-review/81982511.cms. Accessed online.

Toplin, R. B. (2002). *Reel history: In defense of Hollywood*. Culture America (Hardcover).

Yengde, S. (2018). Dalit cinema. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, *41*(3), 503-518.

***Swetha. S*** is a research scholar in the Centre for Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies at University of Hyderabad, Email: 21hapt02@uohyd.ac.in

***Naresh Annem*** teaches at Centre for Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies (CALTS), University of Hyderabad, *Email: nareshannem@uohyd.ac.in*

# Religious Beliefs & Practices of Bhils of Malwa: A Sociological Study

--Pradumn Singh

*Abstract*

The primary objective of this paper is to describe and analyse changing religious beliefs and religious practices in the Malwa region. The study was conducted with a view to understand the changing religious worldviews, Gods and Goddesses, rituals and religious practices and various other dimensions of Bhil's religious life. This paper covers the investigation conducted at various tehsils of Ratlam and some parts of Jhabua district where Bhils reside in good numbers. Fifty-eight in-depth interviews were conducted for this purpose. Younger and older generations of Bhils were interviewed including few women, hence religion, gender and age were used as variables of analysis in the study. The fieldwork suggested interesting results. It suggested an increase in religiosity among the Bhils as well as a positive correlation between wealth and religiosity. A trend has been observed wherein the Bhil community is increasingly engaged in the adoption of Hindu Gods, Goddesses and rituals in the Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh. It suggested a percolation of Sanskritic practices. Another notable observation was that of Christianization of the Bhils, whereby some Bhils are adopting the Christian faith and world view in a process of conversion through chain-reaction.

*Keywords- Malwa, Bhils, religious beliefs, Gods, Goddesses, religious practices, changing festivals*

## Introduction

Bhils are the second largest tribe in the country after Gonds, as the total tribal population constitutes about 8.6% of the total national population (Census, 2011). Bhil is the most populous tribe1 with a number of 4,618, 068, constituting 37

percent of the total ST population in the state of Madhya Pradesh (Census, 2011). The Bhils are mainly concentrated in districts like Jhabua, Dhar, Alirajpur, Ratlam, Barwani, Khargone and East Nimar in the state. The present paper is aimed at understanding the religious beliefs and practices of Bhils in the Malwa region. Scholars have often argued in context of transformation of tribal communities that the tribes are not frozen in time (Ghurye, 1963, Bose, 1967). They are transforming and getting integrated into the mainstream Indian society and culture since the constitutional provisions came into place. Regarding the Bhil society, Sharma (2001) comments that they have attended considerable mobility in terms of their social life. They try to emulate Brahminic culture and have joined government jobs and a section of them enjoys economic facilities at par with the mainstream society and have gained occupational mobility. Doshi also observes that Bhagat and Christian Bhils have acquired the status attributes of education, wealth, and rituals of the castes (Doshi, 1990: 229-230).

This article is based on the fieldwork through which empirical evidences were gathered in the Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh. While there are studies available in terms of changing religious institutions of Bhils of southern Rajasthan, the main aim of the paper is to understand and analyse religious beliefs, daily worshipping patterns, gods and goddesses and religious practices and transformation that the Bhil religion is experiencing in the Malwa region. The paper also tries to understand the three grand processes (Hinduisation, Sanskritization and Christianization) of sociological significance in the larger discussion of changing Bhil belief system and practices in the region. The focus of the paper is on how Bhils worship and follow ritualistic practices as well as what the members of the Bhil community think of their religious beliefs and practices in contemporary times.

It draws insights from the empirical study done in the Ratlam and Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh. The field work which lasted for over six months, included

fifty-eight interviews of different men and women across all tehsils except Jaora, Tal, and tehsils in Ratlam district where Bhils are nominal in numbers. Bajna, Raoti and Sailaina tehsils which are tribal dominated were visited and observed. In-depth interviews were taken to understand the changing religiosity in the Bhil community of the Malwa region. In Ratlam and Piploda tehsils where mixed villages of almost all caste groups exist, Bhils were visited to understand the cultural interactions and consequent impacts on religion and religiosity of Bhils in the Malwa. Temples were visited to understand interaction patterns among various caste groups and Bhils in the region.

An interview schedule was utilised to collect data with a set of 17 major questions and a number of sub-sets of questions in it. Bhil community people from different occupations such as doctors, high-school teachers, peons, police constables were interviewed. Respondents from both rural and urban backgrounds were interviewed to uncover their religious faith, practices and the institution of religion. Few Christian Bhils and two pastors (fathers) were also interviewed to understand the conversion processes among Bhils of the region. Church prayers were attended to know the processes of conversion among Bhils in the region. The next section of this article explores the theoretical framework and conceptual categories to provide better insights into the changing religious beliefs and practices of the Bhil community, the section after that discusses the fieldwork and findings as relating to Hindu religious practices, the penultimate section explores Christian conversion, and the final section concludes.

**Theoretical framework and conceptual notions**

There are multiple definitions and views regarding religion as an institution in the sociological discourse. But the definition given by Durkheim (1965) in his famous book 'Elementary forms of religious life' appears relevant from the sociological standpoint. Durkheim defines religion while emphasising a lot on rituals and practices. Religion in his view is 'a unified (solidaire) system of beliefs and

practices relative to sacred things. beliefs and practices which unite into a single moral community called a church is religion' (Durkheim, 1965:62-65). According to this definition, 'A religion is never simply a set of beliefs, it always involves prescribed ritual practices and a definite institutional form'. According to Durkheim (1965), 'there is no religion which does not have a church, although the form which it assumes varies widely. In his view, 'the concept of church refers to the existence of regularised ceremonial organisation pertaining to a definite group of worshippers' (Durkheim, 1965:62-65). The focus in the Durkheimian definition is on the sacred nature of beliefs and practices.

The paper now briefly describes basic concepts and categories to better understand the Religion of Bhils in the Malwa region. Around these concepts, we could better understand the religious life, belief system and practices of the Bhil community and changes that it has acquired over a period of time in the Malwa region with which this paper is concerned because scholars have understood tribal transformation in particular socio-political and cultural contexts with different notions and perspectives. First of all, the paper discusses the notion of animism followed by a discussion on Hinduism in context of the changing ritualistic practices and belief system of the Bhil community.

According to Ahuja 'Animism arose because of the difference between the dead and living. It is a religious belief that perceives animals, plants, rocks, rivers, human handiwork etc. as live and animated. The basic tenets of animism are:

    A. Phenomena of sleep, dream and death

    B.  Phenomena of possession

    C.  The Belief in spirits and ghosts

    D.  Magic' (Ahuja, 1965:22)

Hinduism as a world religion, as Ahuja writes is based on 'Vedanta philosophy. It believes in 'Re-birth', 'Karma yoga' and Bhakti. Bhakti is extreme love for God. Karma yoga refers to unselfish good and hard work as the goal of life. Rebirth refers to the soul as eternal and immortal, perfect and infinite. A Hindu believes that every soul is a circle whose circumference is nowhere but located in the body. Death means only a change of center from one body to another. The present is determined by past actions and the future by the present in the philosophy of Hinduism' (Ahuja, 1965: 22-23). In context of tribes, Comaroff and Comaroff's (1993:15) findings discussed by Sahoo (2018: 147) in the context of Bhils states that 'the long cultural contact with Hinduism that the majority of tribals these days follow rituals of Hinduism, worship Hindu gods and goddesses and celebrate Hindu festivals like Durga Puja, Holi, and Deepawali. The celebration of such rituals or festivals and other customary religious activities have served as an all - purpose social glue that has bound the tribals with larger Hindu Society and religion'.

Further in context of the above notions such as Hinduism and animism. It is important to study and understand Bhils in the larger debates of transforming tribals in the country. The colonial administrators Risley and Gatt who were in charge of the 1901 and 1911 censuses respectively described tribals as animists. Hutton who was Census Commissioner of 1931 wrote that 'Hinduism and animism are two separate religious faiths', while Ghurye understood that there are remarkable similarities between tribes and Caste-Hindus except few tribes who reside in the interior areas of the country (Ghurye, 1959: 7). Similarly, on Bhil religion, scholars are divided largely on the similar lines. According to Ahuja, 'There is one school of thought which feels that Bhils are not Hindus but scholars like W. G. Lacey and W. H. Shoobert feel that a Bhil deliberately calls himself a Hindu because thereby, he can improve his social status or elevate himself in the social scale. Such an understanding about Bhils piques our interest in the study of religious beliefs and practices of Bhils' (Ahuja, 1965:23-24).

Processes are highlighted the most called Sanskritisation and Westernisation in the context of change in Indian society, the concepts of Sanskritisation and Westernisation were conceptualised by M.N. Srinivas in his seminal work 'Social Change in Modern India' (1966) and rudimentarily in 'Castes in Modern India' (1962). The concept of Westernisation describes social change as a consequence of exogamous change whereas the concept of Sanskritisation describes endogamous source of change. It is a process of upward mobility whereby lower castes and tribes have tried to acquire higher social status in society by emulating Brahminical values, rituals and practices. It is relevant here as Bhils are acquiring caste status as has been shown by various anthropologists discussed previously. Marriott (1955) writes a bit differently while developing concepts such as 'Universalisation' and 'Parochialisation'. In his view, 'the process of universalisation takes place when elements of the 'Great Tradition' percolate downward and became organic part of 'little tradition' and loses its original forms. On the contrary, the process of Parochialisation unfolds when elements of the 'Little Tradition' (Deities, rites, customs, rituals etc.) circulate upward to the level of the 'Great Tradition'. Marriott supplies examples in favour of circular process of change while conceptualising an interaction pattern and mutual learning between the two traditions from his observations' (Marriott, 1961:220-222).

According to Marriott, 'the process of Sanskritisation (The process of upward mobility) does not operate as an independent process. Rather the process is circular and of mutual learning between two traditions in Indian civilisation. He also argued that 'Great Tradition' has super-imposed many non-Sanskritic cultural forms through accretion rather than replacement' (Marriott, 1961:196-224). Marriott (1968) writes that caste system principles like purity and pollution, hereditary occupation and kinship relations which form the ranking system corporate. In his view, the process of status mobility through Sanskritisation is manifested through this above explained ranking system corporate. This explains

tendency in rural areas to mobilise caste, tribe or ethnic groups as corporate (as a whole unit) for achievement of social status in traditional rural society of Indian civilisation.

Anthropologists have provided an understanding through which cultural change was understood among Bhils through acculturation. Acculturation is 'the process of learning a culture different from the one in which a person was originally raised' (Berelson and Steiner, 1964: 646). Majhi (2010) has utilised anthropological concepts of 'acculturation' and 'assimilation' and gradual integration and argues that the Bhils are in transition because of close interaction with institution of Hindu society and its impacts on Bhils. She indicates trends of changes in economic organisation, social organisation and religious beliefs and practices and even in the material culture in undergoing transformation. Modernisation factors include political awakening, urbanisation, developing economy, industrialisation and highways, playing a role in changing Bhil society. However, Majhi mentions that there are still continuities with their own economic, social and religious organisation (Majhi, 2010:184-189). In one of the anthropological studies of Naik (1969) where he assesses the impacts of education and argues that modern school education has introduced some structural changes in aspects of social life such as marriage, kinship, community, leadership, but also shows trends of continuity in it. He observed that education has in some way influenced the practice of bride-price, which is gradually decreasing. Change is visible in the kinship terminologies, but there is no marked change in the kinship behaviour. The most profound change observed is that educated Bhils have begun to play an active role and have become popular in the political and social life of the village. The Raj Panchayats encouraged participation of Bhil women. He also observed that education has helped Bhils in revivalist and reformist movements in the region (Naik, 1969:269-278).

However, educational institutions have made some change in the participation of Bhils in religious activities. Educated Bhils have a strong abhorrence for liquor even on social and religious occasions. According to Naik, they must have learnt the disadvantages of drinking liquor from books and teachers in schools and through migration to towns (Naik, 1969:238-240). Doshi, in his ethnography, argues that changes in the total Bhil culture can be understood with reference to the interplay of factors of change such as technology, economy, urbanisation etc. The government welfare schemes, and village development programs have further accelerated the transformation of the Bhil society and he concludes that Bhil society is situated between self-awakening and cultural synthesis (Doshi, 1971:234-235). Mann (1978) in one of his papers on the Bhils of Rajasthan published at 'Xth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences' highlights the factor of culture contact with non-Bhils and argues that Christian agencies of culture contact have strongly influenced Bhil families but the impact of Hindus and their social systems has been most vital and long lasting, and consequently the transmission of Hindu cultural traits has been more identifiable. As a result of Christianity and Hinduism, Bhils got divided into two groups, Christian Bhils and Non-Christian Bhils, similarly Bhagat Bhils and Non-Bhagat Bhils with differing religious beliefs and practices (Mann, 1978: 63-64).

The paper moves to the religious conversion question in the context of Bhils. In the sociological sense, 'process of religious conversion refers to the process by which a person achieves membership of a religious group' (Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, 2014). Sahoo writes that religious conversion is grounded on the idea of discontinuity or making a complete break with past beliefs, practices and rituals as well as the persistence of the past (Sahoo, 2018:9), particularly the caste or tribal identity. Indian Christians including the Pentecostal have accepted the 'continuity theory' because it is intimately linked to state benefits like access to reservation, employment, and welfare benefits (Appadurai, 1993). This has created many 'secret disciples' or 'undocumented or crypto Christians' (Kent,

2011:676). This has raised many questions on what conversion means to tribes. While in some cases the newly converted tribes have 'forgotten' or terminated the relationship altogether' with their past, in other cases, the converts have oscillated (Sahay, 1968:928) between their new and old identities. The flux of converted Bhils has also been suggested by Doshi in the context of Bhils of Banswara district. consequently, the two religions are being radically shaped and synthesised to have a hybrid belief system (Bayly, 2004:1). The very process of conversion and its impact on Bhil's belief system and religious practices is under investigation in the paper. Now the next section deals with the empirical evidence gathered from the field and the analysis of the field data in context of what has been understood till now.

**Empirical reflections on religious beliefs and practices and analysis of the field data**

This section of the paper is devoted to the field work findings and discussion around the religious life of Bhil people in contemporary Malwa. There are various constituent parts of Bhil religion and religiosity in the Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh with which this paper is concerned. The fundamental question addressed here is what the Bhils think of their religious belief and how do they perceive their own religious life has been given a detailed exposition. It shows how Bhils attach meaning to their gods and goddesses. What do they do in terms of their religious practices in contemporary Malwa. Also, continuities and changes in the religious beliefs and practices of the Bhils are analysed here.

**Religious beliefs, world views and ongoing changes in it**

The field interviews sought information on what religion or Dharma means to the Bhils. Bhils in the region mostly have been following gods and goddesses and religious beliefs of their forefathers. But a significant shift has occurred in the last twenty to thirty years especially by the educated section of the Bhils in the region

so a blend of change and continuities in terms of beliefs and practices in the region prevails. This is observed from some of the excerpts and narratives from the field. An educated respondent, Bhil Shanti Lal Rana,1 from village Khankai of Sailana Tehsil mentioned that:

'The village has Lord Mahadev's courtyard (Chabutra) which has recently been built by the sarpanch of the village. The village also has a tin-shed temple of Baba Ram Devji now. We are going to establish the stone statue of Govind Giri, the famed social reformer among Bhils, in the village. We have been following what our forefathers have followed traditionally.  We write Hindu as our religion in the census column and at other places on official documents as there is no column of tribal religion.'

While Nirmala Bai from Rupa Kheda village of Ratlam tehsil has given an excellent narrative on what Bhils do in terms of their religious beliefs and method of worshipping Gods and Goddesses. In an interview she mentioned:

'We light lamps and incense sticks and ritualistically in-front of God and Goddesses at home. Because the temple is situated at a distance from our house in the village. We believe and worship Pavagar Mata, Ram Devji, Kavalka Mata, Ambe Mata, Bheru Bavji, Jujhar Bavji, Sati Mata etc. The Temple of the village is situated in the Mohalla of the Patidar community, so Bhil community people often do not visit temple of the village but, during the marriage ceremony, the married couple go to touch the feet of Gods and Goddesses for seeking their blessings and go to the temple at the beginning of the marriage function.

Another respondent from the Jhabua district who is a third generation Christian convertee informed about his religious beliefs that Christian Bhils think differently about their gods and goddesses in the region. On asking about what you mean by religion, he said that "I like religion because all the old people follow (grandfather and father) Christian faith so do I follow". This discussion

highlights the continuities from generation to generation in terms of belief system and religious practices of the Bhils. While asking about religious worldviews and daily worship. One of the Catholic Christian Bhils observed:

'I do light incense sticks, I read Bible, I have photos of Jesus, Mariam currently in my room and at my home. I do daily worship during the morning and evening every day for 15 minutes. I hope and request from almighty that I get a good job, this is the hope from God. We Catholic Bhil Christians do offer coconut to the almighty. The Church provides us with a rosary, and we keep it, The Church charges rupees 10 for giving rosary to us'.

A major change and shift that the field is experiencing in terms of changing religious beliefs and thinking is that Bhils, those who are educated and politically aware believe from last 10-20 years that "Adivasis have no religion. We Adivasis are 'Dharma-purvi' (we existed before religion came into existence)." A shift is seen in the socio-cultural awareness and political consciousness of the Adivasis as it can be attributed to the fact of emergence of political organisation like Jai Adivasi Yuva Sangathan (JAYS), Bhim Army. This process has been furthering the political consciousness and giving a new definition of religion and shaping new religious beliefs and practices in the region especially among the educated and young generation of the Bhil society. A major factor contributing to the political awareness amongst Adivasis is social media platforms like WhatsApp groups, Facebook et al. (mostly used by the educated sections of Bhils in the region). One of the informants further shared his views and mentioned why Adivasis are Dharma-Purvi:

'Adivasis have a distinct religion and culture because Adivasis have been worshipping mother goddesses. The worship of mother goddess is so prevalent among Bhils and Adivasis while Hindus put a lot of emphasis on Lord Rama, Krishna etc. Adivasis worship nature (rivers, hills, forest, animals living in their surroundings are worshipped by them). Marriage ceremonies of the Adivasi are

held under the auspices of the Sun and Moon alignment (locally known as Bichu). Tribals do not harm flora and fauna and worship nature. When crops ripen after the end of Rainy season, they tie Rakhi's to the standing crops.

**Belief in Fasting ritual**

Bhils believe in fasting as respondents informed about this practice. It is especially popular among the Bhils who are living alongside the caste-Hindus in the mixed villages than the Dungar areas where Bhils are closer to their own indigenous religious practices. It is an influence of Caste-Hindus on Bhils. Interactions with one of the respondents reflects that he was fasting on every Monday, but he has stopped fasting since 2002 because he came in contact with social activists and changed his views on practice of fasting afterwards, but the respondent's father is continuing fasting till now. This shows that the older generation continues to believe more than the younger generation, who might be more educated or be more exposed to a range of ideas these days.

**Believing in sects and cults**

Hinduised cults like Radha Swami and Jai Gurudev are followed by Bhils of the region. One of the respondent's parents and grandparents are devotees of the Radha Soami cult. His family members visit the Radha Soami ashram at nearby Bodina village where they participate in religious activities of the sect. The Bhils who follow Radha Soami cult do not light incense sticks or believe in idol worship as noted by the respondent. Jai Gurudev sect is gradually gaining momentum and Bhils are joining this cult along with other middle Caste-Hindu communities in the Malwa region. Bhils also believe in the cult of Govind Giri. This cult is popular among Bhils of Sailaina and Bajna areas of Ratlam district.

It shows us a simple religious outlook and world views of the rural Bhil residing in villages of Malwa, as well as of the educated sections among Bhils in the

Malwa region. The discussion above provides empirical evidence of how Bhils are changing in terms of their religious beliefs and worshipping gods and goddesses. It appears that their worldviews have been shaped by various religious denominations, ideologies, sects, cults in the region. This also hints at Hinduisation of Bhils even in the hilly regions of Malwa but the politically aware and educated sections are putting forth new ideas such as the idea that 'Adivasis are Dharma-purvis'. The narratives mostly indicate that they generally follow what their forefathers have followed, for instance the gods and goddesses of Hinduism or their own indigenous gods and goddesses called Sira Bavji. Bhils who have converted to Christian faith follow Christian gods and goddesses like Jesus and Mariam in the Hilly regions of Bajna, Raoti and Sailaina tehsils of the Ratlam district. The Bhils in the contemporary Malwa region show us continuity in terms of generational transfer of religious beliefs and pantheons as well as change in terms of changing belief system and religious practices due to Hinduism, Christianity and modernity.

**Major Gods and Goddesses among Bhils of Malwa**

Most of the Bhils in the region worship Hindu Gods and Goddesses along with their age-old indigenous Gods and deities with elements from nature worship. They have been worshipping Animism and shifting towards Hinduisation in the Malwa region. Bhils worship Kul Devta (either God and Goddesses of the Clan), Bheru and Jujhar. They also worship Satis (the female who self -immolate are also worshipped among Bhils). They continue worshipping the elements of nature like sun, hills, dales, rivers, snakes (Nag Devta) and many other elements of nature. A respondent from the Jhabua district informed about the major gods and goddesses revered and worshipped elaborately. It tells that the cultural differences exist between Bhils of the plains and hills. But Hinduistaion has increased manifold in the Jhabua region as well. As (Dev Singh Bhabhar) stated that his father is a devotee of Lord Mahadev. He said, "I believe in Lord Bajrangbali and

worship him". He also added that according to Adivasi tradition, people also worship ancestral souls when harvesting season comes. New crops are offered to them during the festival of Dipawali. Ancestral souls are worshipped on all important occasions. On asking about whether Bhils worship Hindu gods, goddesses or not, he mentioned that all the major Hindu gods and goddesses are worshipped by the Bhils in the region.

Interestingly, Bhils in the region worship ancestral souls which are known as 'Sira Bavji'1. Siras are established on raised platforms on special occasions of Kali Chaudas after the festival of Diwali with all the due procedures and offerings of fouls and goats along with a feast. Bhils during this time after harvesting season organise such religious establishments of Gods and Goddesses with great enthusiasm. Sometimes all the members who died in a span of 10-15 years are placed together in one courtyard or a place designated for worship in villages. The respondent noted that male figures are depicted on horses with swords in their hands along with their female counterparts as moon and stars. Most of the stone statues erected in the memory of their ancestors or their dead ones are found on horses along with the sun and moon depicted on it. The sun and moon show the dichotomy in the relationship of day and night in the stone idols which are widely worshipped in the Dungar areas, but less so in the plains of Malwa. Siras are mostly found in Sailana, Raoti and as we go deep towards Bajna area. The research found more "Siras" in the deep and remote areas of Jhabua district of Malwa region while Bhils living in the plain area with caste groups in mixed villages had a lower propensity of worshipping of Siras (ancestral souls) due to the age-old influence of caste groups and Hinduism. But they do worship dead souls as it has been noticed during the field investigation.

Each clan group of Bhils have their clan deities like Gir Mata is for Girwal Clan and Nanderi Mata is for Munia Clan. So, this way they worship more than a hundred clan deities in the region across Bhil community. Sati Mata is a clan

deity of Ohri. It reflects that Bhils believe in mother Goddesses and their powers. Lord Hanuman is worshipped among Bhils. He is understood as the protector of the village. This specific form is known as Kherapati Hanuman. Sitala Mata, Goddesses of chickenpox and smallpox are also worshipped in the region by the Bhils. Local Gods like Baba Ramdev, Tejaji, Pavagarh Mataji, Dasa Mata, Hinglaj Mataji, Ambe Mata Goddesses kalka are worshipped by the Bhils. Every year people go to Rajasthan to the shrine of Baba Ram Devji. It is like Kashi for Bhils. People do not prefer to go to Haridwar, but they go to the shrine of Baba Ram Devji with great happiness and devotion. Shivji (locally known as Bholenath), Goddess Chawanda, Lord Ganesh (locally known as Sunda Dev) are worshipped. Bada Dev is worshipped by the Bhils of Jhabua district. Sanol Dev whose shrine is at Ranapur in Jhabua is widely worshipped. People visit and take vows to resolve their difficulties in life. Kashmor Baba is worshipped, and Churma is offered to this God.

The fieldwork findings show changes and continuities in terms of gods and deities as Bhils in the region worship all major Hindu Gods such as Bajrang Bali (Hanuman), Lord Rama, Vishnu, Shiva. Bhils in the region worship Krishna, Kalka Mata, Shitla Mata and many other Hindu Gods and Goddesses. Bhils celebrate all major festivals of Hindus. Hinduistaion of Bhils in the Malwa region is gradually increasing as they worship more and more Hindu Gods and Goddesses. But their own ancestral Gods and Goddesses which are colloquially known as 'Sira Bavji' are still worshipped in the region.

**Daily worship and worshipping patterns among Bhils**

Daily worship is practiced among the Bhils of Malwa but not that much widely as by the Caste- Hindus in the region. This is an influence of Caste-Hindus residing in the region. It is more practiced and prevalent among Bhils of plain areas of Malwa than the Dungar (hilly) areas. The way daily worshipping is practiced among Bhils residing with Caste-Hindus is an indication of acculturation of Bhils.

It has been noticed in the fieldwork data that trends of daily worship are going down or declining. There are many factors behind it. One of the respondents from the mixed village of Malwa on being asked about daily worship or how they worship respondent that, he does not do "daily worship as a devout person does". The respondent reasoned out for not worshipping Gods and Goddesses that since he and others are simply farmers and laborers, so they do not get enough time to worship. He worships only on certain auspicious occasions and bows down in front of Gods and Goddesses. He further described the method of worship this way:

Red foil, vermilion are used along with oil to worship Gods and Goddesses on special occasions. At morning and evening, we fold our hands to the almighty God and place incense sticks in front of them. With folded hands, we remember Bheru jhujar and Mataji and take vows and wish that things remain good, everyone lives happily in the family, and we get work for livelihood.

One of the educated Bhil respondents who is a doctor by profession mentioned during the interview that he does not believe in worshipping Gods and Goddesses on daily basis, rather he believes in work. He further spoke in this way:

'I pre-decide and set my targets daily or every day and try to complete them. I do not depend on Gods and Goddesses. I just have faith in working hard. Although I do believe in worshipping Gods and Goddesses for the reason of getting peace and relief from the outside world while visiting temple. But when we come out from temples again, it is the same world in front of us. If we depend on Gods and Goddesses, then it is a greed (Bhagwan ke Bharose rahenge toh ye lalacch hai). I do not follow Gods and Goddesses blindly, but I do celebrate all major festivals and religious ritualistic practices (major ones) throughout the year. During Navratri festival, we celebrate (Navami) Ninth day of the Navratri festival in memory of our clan deity, and we worship it as our forefathers have done and transcended these traditions to us as we follow now'.

A Christian respondent elaborately responded on the process of worship at his village that they first of all bows down on the stairs of the church outside then they enter the church and sit. Then again, they bow-down in front of the statue of Jesus and they fold their hands, close their eyes then they recite prayers and remember the Almighty God in the church. He further said that Fathers (pastors) sit on chair then they start prayers. They continue it for one to two hours. Bible recitation is done. Father wears white clothes while giving sermons. It is generally given for five-ten minutes. According to respondent, 'sermons are only given to those who are baptised in the church. 'Those who have been baptised receive white Prasad in the church' he said. Further he said that converted Catholic Bhils keep photos of Jesus, Mariam, and both of them are worshipped by them while protestants worship only Almighty Jesus.

The above narratives on daily worship hints at how educated Bhils think in the region as they are modernising and secularising themselves within available means and opportunities in the region. It indicates changing values and norms as the modern state has unfolded itself. Impacts of modernity in the Malwa region among Bhils has percolated and is showing its manifestation as it emerges from the narratives. Educated Bhils do not believe and follow Gods and Goddesses superstitiously. It also shows the emergence of a middle class and a rising questioning spirit among them. All these factors are transforming religious values and beliefs. The discussion above suggests change and continuity among Bhils of the region in terms of their ritualistic practices and religious beliefs.

**Religious Practices- Witchcraft, Sorcery, and Magic**

On asking what do you think about witchcraft, sorcery and magic, a respondent replied that such practices are found in all the groups across religion, so there is no need to attach them to Adivasis only. 'Bhopa' and 'Badvas' are magical healers and witch finders, generally engaged in agricultural activities in the region other than the ritualistic activities. According to the respondent, Bhopa, with the

help of nature, used to treat people earlier because there were no medical facilities, so nature and religious practices like witchcraft, magic etc. were used. The respondent further mentioned that certain practices are negative and must be discarded as the respondent himself is educated and does not believe in such religious practices. Most of the educated Bhils of the younger generation do not believe in magic and witchcraft. Witchcraft as a practice is almost dead in the region. One of the factors mentioned was the organisations like 'BAMCEF', 'Rastriya Adivasi Ekta Parishad' and 'Jai Adivasi Yuva Shakti' and their activities. Their campaign against such practices has contributed immensely behind the decline of such religious practices in the Bhil society. Socio-political consciousness has been increasing as education has reached among Bhils of the region.

Another respondent from the Ratlam rural (Grameen) area mentioned that black magic and witchcraft is much more practiced in Jhabua and tribal dominated tehsils such as Sailaina, Raoti, Bajna known as 'Dungar region'. These superstitious practices are not followed much in Malwa where Bhils have been living for centuries with various caste groups as it may be attributed to cultural interaction between tribes and caste groups in the region. The respondent further said that they go to doctors in a hospital when they fall ill with fever, but for typhoid, they wear a garland locally known as 'Moti Bavji ki Mala' given by the Bhopas and Badvas, Bhils believe that they get relief out of this garland given by the local expert for typhoid. Interestingly the respondent on asking about the Bhopa, replied that there is no Bhopa left in the village. They do not believe in the service of Bhopa anymore. Rather they believe in medical services and doctors.

Another respondent informed about the mechanisms of activities and the procedures executed by Bhopas for finding witchcraft, dead souls and other ill spirits in Bhil society. It is a very complex phenomenon of executing their powers and skills. To find out witches, dead souls, the respondent believes that Bhopa just

guesses, and they fool innocent people in the rural area of Malwa. Bhopas organise 'Jatras' to identify the cause of illness and evil-spirits and accordingly they advise patients to sacrifice fouls and goats to their ancestors' souls or evil spirits who has caused the illness or misfortune. This sort of dynamic is still going on among the Bhils of Malwa of Madhya Pradesh. Interestingly, one of the respondents said that the practices of witchcraft and sorcery has died down and become extinct. Education plays a great role in changing the mindsets of people. This respondent himself went to Bhopa for one of his ailing children, but could not get successful results, so later he went to the doctor. According to respondents, Political awareness along with the spread of medical science and scientific ideas are the major factors behind the decline of such practices. Earlier people used to go to the Bhopas due to lack of education, rampant poverty, belief in superstitious practices and absence of medical facilities and doctors in the tribal areas (locally known as Dungar). Increased road connectivity to the district town and tehsils, has contributed to the reduction of such practices in the region.

Major change that the Bhils experiencing currently is decline of the magical healer and its importance in the region. Although Bhils have continued to believe in practices like witchcraft, sorcery and magic, a huge blow has come to these practices as Bhils seek medical facilities, doctors, and hospitals in the Malwa region. The expansion of health facilities has contributed greatly to the reduction of the importance of these practices. The Bhopa who is an expert of indigenous medicine and magical healer is declining as the new generation do not believe any more. The old Bhopas are gradually dying and lessening in numbers in the Bhil society of Malwa. As old people are dying, so their old values and practices are also dying with them gradually. Increasing education and general awareness is another cause of the decline of these practices as the young generation do not believe in seeking of Bhopa's healing services in the region. It supports the findings of Majhi (2012). She claims that Bhils near the Highway roads in Udaipur district believe in seeking medical services rather than in Bhopa

institution and ritualistic practices of curing ill patients. But Bhils still believe in diablerie (Totka), shadow of evil being (Chaayan Parna), restless and wandering dead souls. People came to know when family feuds or family infighting goes on then Bhils think that it is because of evil spirits. Bhopas come to identify the evil spirits at home or on people. They go to other villages to cure and solve problems of such sorts. It shows us a declining trend, but these practices are still followed by the Bhils to some extent in the villages of Malwa region.

**Festivals and accompanied changes**

Mostly Bhils celebrate Hindu festivals such as Diwali, Holi, Ram Navami, Dasa Mata, Navratri, Vijaya Dashami. They also celebrate local festivals like Akhateej, Ujjaini, Divasa. Local festivals like 'Hal-Chhath' and 'Rishi Pancham' are also celebrated by Bhils in the region. Local festival of Bhils is known as 'Gaaj – Beej', where the home is cleaned by water and the Brahmin priest gives them a sacred thread of Gaaj Beej. This thread is worshipped. Women fast on this occasion. Bhils prepare idols, locally known as 'Bhilra- Bhilri', (whereby a pair of female Bhil and male Bhil idol) is worshipped with items such as Puri and rice as well as vermillion and sacred thread are offered to them. Then they light a Deepak (light). Earthen idols, which are finally immersed in the pond, well and river. Locally 'Teja Dashmi' is celebrated with great fervor by the Bhils and they offer 'Nishan' if their vows are fulfilled. Processions are carried out. Traditional wrestling, acrobatics are performed by young people during the procession, however these activities have somewhat decreased in the past few years as the youth are not taught/transferred the techniques of the physical activities as the respondent noted. The birthday of Baba Ram Devji is also celebrated almost in a similar fashion in the region.

These days festivals are limited to family only, even in the rural areas of Malwa. Earlier festivals were celebrated by all the members of the village unitedly. In the

last 20 years increased means of entertainment like T.V., mobile and social media has somewhat negatively impacted the festivals in the region.

The major change that the Bhil community is experiencing is a political mobilisation and awareness and resultantly, the celebration of (Viswa Adivasi Divas) World Indigenous Day on 9th August. On this occasion, Bhils gather in groups to worship their leaders like Tantya Bhil, Rana Punja, Birsa Munda and many others across Malwa region.  This is a new development of the last 15 years in the region. This festival has been recently added by the young generation of the Bhil community who are becoming politically conscious, organized and aware of their rights. It has reached even to the panchayat level where leaders like Dr. Ambedkar and other tribal leaders are worshipped. Most of the respondents mentioned this day as a festival during the interview process. This is celebrated as a festival among Bhils of Jhabua, Ratlam, Dhar, and Barwani district of Madhya Pradesh with great enthusiasm to show a socio-political unity of the community.

Individualism has been increasing among Bhils due to the penetration of market forces and competition. People used to celebrate festivals with great fervor and enthusiasm, which has gone down in the last 20 years. It clearly shows a declining trend of celebration of festivals like Diwali, Holi and Navratri in the region. 15-20 years before Bhils used to drink liquor and used to sing songs of Holi which are locally known as "Phagan Geet" (songs in praise of Holi) in groups and they used to visit each and every household and greet,  which is locally known as 'Ger', a sort of  a village procession at the time of Holi but increased individualism and lack of toleration among various members of the community are some of the factors behind the decline of these  religious practices in the region.

Christian Bhil respondents from the Jhabua district mentioned that Christmas is their major festival. On this occasion they prepare hut of Jesus, and the stories are narrated of birth of Jesus Christ. Pastors visit villages in numbers of 4-5 and they organise programs and prayers. Fairs are also organized in the villages in the

month of December. Christmas is celebrated with great fervor and enthusiasm in different villages of Thandla tehsil. Finally on 25th Dec, the major program is organized in Jhabua district. In the villages, night long ceremonies, dance programmes, songs related to Jesus Christ are sung. The respondent mentioned that they also celebrate Raksha Bandhan but do not celebrate any other Hindu Festivals like Diwali, Holi, Navratri etc.

**Christian conversion, changing belief system and practices among Bhils of Malwa**

In the remote areas of Malwa where Bhils are in majority, Christian missionaries learn local language, local rituals, and then they gradually enter and pursue Bhils for conversion. Missionaries organise training camps, where prayers are taught to them. The respondent (Raghunath Katara) informed that no such religious conversion is happening in the plain areas of the Malwa region, rather this is happening in Dungar areas. One of respondents mentioned that Christian missionaries do organise programmes whereby they call missionaries and preachers from Mumbai and Australia. They provide Bible and teach in both languages whereby the Bhils can be taught about it. They focus on education and provide educational facilities to the poor Bhils. Such measures often tend to convert Bhils to Christianity. Missionaries help in curing various diseases and run mission hospitals in remote areas of Malwa.

Another major point brought up by the respondent regarding Christianity, conversion and the dynamics that has emerged in the region is that the conversion process got momentum through a "chain reaction process". In his view, it usually happens when one gets converted in one family then he tries to convert other members of the family from both maternal and paternal lines as well as the members of his extended family. In this manner, Christianity spreads, conversion gets solidified, and the number of converts increase among Bhils. The missionaries also provide health facilities. They promise poor Bhils that

"everything, economic-wellbeing and better health etc. are possible if one seeks blessings from Jesus".

Lack of education and Health facilities in the remote areas has helped Missionaries to build mission schools and hospitals. Missionaries help poor Bhils by providing education. They also support Bhils in curing their ailments and diseases, so Bhil people are attracted towards these facilities and convert to Christianity as it was mentioned by the respondent. The same respondent gave a contrary view that in last 5-7 years those who are educated and employed have understood that conversion to Christianity is not much helpful in the long run for their overall development of the community. There are other factors behind conversion such as Christian missionaries do not forbid the Bhils to eat non-vegetarian food and drink rather focus on Christian beliefs. Christian convertees influence either Bhils through dialogues and discussions and through thoughtfulness on matters of religion. Those who fall ill are advised by already converted Christians to seek relief in the church, then as respondent mentioned, a Christian Father gives an oil massage and they are advised that they will soon be recovered by the blessings of Lord Jesus and Goddess Mariam and this way, they are persuaded to follow Christianity. Hopes are given by the Christian missionaries that if you devoutly follow the sayings of Lord Christ then one will have good crops, diseases will be cured, and one will have a good fortune.

Changes in the Bhil's beliefs and practices after conversion into Christianity
After conversion, there are many religious and cultural changes occur in the lives of Bhils of the Malwa. Prayers have become a regular phenomenon due to the presence of churches in the Bhil villages in the interiors of Thandla tehsil of Jhabua district as well as Raoti and Bajna tehsils of Ratlam district. Christian Bhils believe in the Jesus Christ and most of them do not believe in the worship of the dead souls. They do not establish the godyard of dead souls after conversion. Only 5% still believe in dead souls after conversion, Bhils participate in the

Sunday　prayers every week. Due to Christianity, people do not wear sacred thread on wrist; rather they prefer Christian cross and rosary. Nearest Villages from the respondent's village like Rangpur, Kardawad and Ambakohra are also protestant Christian villages. These villages have churches and follow religious beliefs and ideologies of Martin Luther as the respondent informed.

After conversion, the Christian Bhil respondents (Monica Parmar and Michael Girwal) reflect that the Bhils are advised not to believe in spirits. Next, they are accustomed to Bible reading, prayer recitation and other churchly activities as suggested by the Father. Marriage is understood as a pure bond according to the rules of Christianity after conversion. It has impacted their death rituals as well. The Bhils have started believing in burying the dead as per the Christian norms. They offer flowers to the dead. Before few years, Christians Bhil used to fold the dead in clothes but these days they use glass box to bury. Protestants advise the Bhil convertee not to consume worshipped or offered materials to Hindu gods and goddesses. That is how they differentiate themselves from Hinduism and Hinduist worshipping patterns. Ideological battles on lines of religions, politics around it and conversion of Bhils to Christianity in areas like Jhabua, Bajna and Raoti has been bringing changes in the socio-religious practices associated with marriage, festivals, funeral rituals and birth rituals as well. After conversion, the converted Bhil greet each other by saying "Jai Yesu" instead of "Ram Ram". The Bhils after conversion offer the first crops to the church in the region as it was informed by the respondents. Christian converts mentioned that they sacrifice goats and fowls to Goddess Mariam and seek her blessings. The respondent was a follower of Catholic denomination and said that Protestants are much more active in the conversion activities than the Catholics in the Thandla tehsil of Jhabua.

Conversion decimates original traditions, religious rituals, eating habits, social customs of marriage and funeral practices. It develops intra-religious problems in the Bhil community as it divides Bhils into groups like Christian Bhils, Hindu

Bhils, Bhagat Bhils as respondents informed me. The whole discussion suggests as far as the narratives from the fieldwork which was conducted over six months in the Malwa region suggests that there is continuity of indigenous worship but a trend towards Hinduisation and Sanskritisation of Bhils is visible. The institution of Bhopa is diminishing as well as festivals are changing along with their age-old practices such as witchcraft and sorcery in the region. New festivals are emerging with a union of political dynamics and narratives on culture and religion among Bhils of the region.

**Conclusion**

Processes and factors which are responsible for changing religious beliefs and practices like Sanskritisation, Hinduisation, and Christianisation have also been understood and analysed in context of the Bhils of the Malwa region. The paper gives descriptions of religious life of Bhils which have undergone major transformations- a transformation of animistic practices and a trend towards Sanskritisation and Hinduisation. It is evident from the findings of the field work that Bhils follow religious activities like 'Yajna-Hawan' (Rituals to purify and to appease Gods). Katha and Bhagwat ceremonies are increasing among them, especially in mixed villages of Malwa. Bhils are increasingly worshipping all the major Gods and Goddesses of Caste-Hindus as seen through the field-based study. Christianisation is also gradually increasing, and they follow Christian religious norms and values in the region. The research draws similarities with scholars like Doshi (1971), Mann (1978) and to some extent with the observations of Majhi (2010) in Malwa region. The declining importance of Bhopas and their activities have been seen through factors like education and increasing medical facilities, which is an indication of increasing socio-cultural awareness and modernisation through education and medicines. Interaction with Hinduism, Christianity and modernity are some the factors contributing to the transformation of religion as an institution of the Bhils.

Primarily education and general awareness are leading to political consciousness. Migration of educated Bhils for employment opportunities and adoption of urban lifestyle is also impacting their outlook towards religion and religious practices. Impact of social media on the young generation and lack of interest towards religion are found. Forests are declining and so rituals and worship associated with forests like animism are declining. New Hinduist sects like Radha Soami, Jay Gurudev stress on puritanical aspects of life, opposition to traditional hierarchy and prevalent religious dogmas bringing Bhils close to the Hindu fold and which will gradually be stronger as they are working among Bhils. However, increasing Sanskritisation and Hinduisation along with Christianisation will be a sociological process to be observed along with modernisation process and their impacts in the future as Bhils still believe in indigenous animistic beliefs and practices.

**References**

Ram, A. (1965). Religion of The Bhils-a Sociological Analysis. *Sociological Bulletin*, *14*(1), 21-33.

Appadurai, A. (1993)'Number in the Colonial Imagination.' In C. Breckenridge and Van der Veer, (Eds), *Orientalism and the postcolonial predicament: Perspective on South Asia*, 314-340. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Bayle, S. (2004). *Saints, Goddesses and Kings : Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society 1700-1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bose, N. K. (1941). The Hindu method of tribal absorption. *Science and culture*, *7*(2), 188-194.

Doshi, S. L. (1971). Bhils: between societal self-awareness and cultural synthesis. *(No Title)*.

Ghurye, G. S. (1980). *The scheduled tribes of India*. Transaction Publishers.

Halsey, A. H. (2014). *Conversion*, In John Scott (Eds), Oxford Dictionary of Sociology (4th ed.), Oxford: Oxford university.

Kent, E. F. (2004). *Converting women: gender and Protestant Christianity in colonial South India*. Oxford University Press, USA.

Marriott, Mckim. (Eds.). (1961). Village India, studies in little communities, Bombay: Asia publishing house.

Majhi, A. S. (2010). *Tribal culture, continuity, and change: a study of Bhils in Rajasthan*. Mittal Publications.

Sharma, K. L. (2001). *Reconceptualizing Caste, Class and Tribe*, Jaipur: Rawat publication

Sahay, K. N. (1968). Impact of Christianity on the Uraon of the Chainpur Belt in Chotanagpur: An analysis of its cultural processes. *American Anthropologist*, *70*(5), 923-942.

Vyas, N. N., Mann, R. S., & Chaudhary, N. D. (Eds.). (1978). Rajasthan Bhils (Vol. 10). Manikyalal Verma Tribal Research and Training Institute, Social Welfare Department, Government of Rajasthan.

*Pradumn Singh*, Centre for the Study of Social Systems (CSSS), School of Social Science-II, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi-110067

*Email: pradhuman.tammu@gmail.com*

## Whither the great tradition of village studies?: Exploring the contours of field-view in a North Indian village

--Prabudh Singh & Santosh K. Singh

*Abstract*

The aim of this paper is to unsettle the discourse on rural studies and to generate a discussion on the methodological underpinnings of the discipline of rural sociology. By putting the voices of the rural youth at the centre, the paper attempts to re-orient the rural subject from the anecdotes and the margins. From examining the indigenous scholars' claims of 'nativity' to attempts to introduce wandering and lostness as a research methodology, the paper then modestly delves into an ontological inquiry of the concepts of identity and belongingness pertaining to rural-to-urban migration.

*Keywords: Rural sociology, village studies, wandering and lostness, rural youth, rural-to-urban migration, identity, belongingness*

### Introduction

In contemporary India, there has typically been a deafening silence surrounding the words 'village' and 'rural', only to be broken by exceptional events like the recent pandemic-induced return of rural migrants to their homes, a wave of suicide cases reported from rural areas, or some farmer protests for a better deal with the state (Singh, 2020). Though this silence is not new, it has been present for at least the last three decades, if not longer, starting in 1991 with the introduction of the new economic regime referred to as LPG (Liberalisation, Privatisation, and Globalisation). Even by a conservative estimate, a region that contained nearly two-thirds of India's population of more than a billion people ought to have been humming with activity and setting the country's agenda for the present and future. In practice, the situation appears hopeless. The titles of

newspapers and other media outlets with ominous sounding words like 'vanishing villages', 'death of villages', or 'ghost villages' only serve to further depress the morale of those who still exist and occupy this space. In that sense, a village today is merely a location where people are forced (due to lack of other options) to live. Urban has an addictive charm, especially for young people. But there is a history behind it, a history that is rife with empty promises, moral gimmicks, and even reification. This history serves as a backdrop to the current situation.

The villages weren't always as decrepit as they are now, at least not in the same way. They were long regarded as the centre of Indian society and the source of the great virtues of Indian civilisation. André Béteille had rightly observed:

'The point to bear in mind is that the importance of the village within Indian civilisation is to be understood not simply in demographic but also in normative terms. The village was not merely a place where people lived; it has a design in which were reflected the basic values of Indian civilisation.' (Béteille, 1980, p. 108)

Ancient religious texts consistently emphasised the concept of the village and accorded the area and its communal bonds a sacred status. Even before the main deities were invoked, many rituals started with gram devata (the village-god) (Ray, 1973). Naturally, villages have always been seen as the essence and a fundamental component of Indian society, since the country is primarily rural and peasant. Villages once more played a crucial role in the colonial era, not only as a means of revenue collection but also in understanding the native population and their way of life in order to support and maintain the British regime's colonial interests. This prompted a plethora of actions, including censuses, to better comprehend the constitutive logic of Indian society and unravel the mystery that is Indian society. The three most important and essential tropes for studies and research on Indian society were caste, religion, and village. It is evident how seriously the colonial government took this enumeration project, especially given

its socio-cultural dimensions and complexities, that several census commissioners and administrators had training in anthropology. The process of identifying microcosms to investigate and study the evolution from simple to complex forms was also supported by the then-dominant anthropological tradition. Under this framework, the village emerged as a unit of study of the Indian society.

As expected, India's development planning agenda kept its promised emphasis on the villages after independence. Planners and decision-makers remained enthralled by the beauty of the countryside. The trend persisted, at least in the early years of the post-independence era, until it was re-oriented toward industry and the secondary sector under the Nehruvian model of growth and development, which was introduced with a distinct focus on heavy industries and with renewed vigour. To relieve some of the pressure on the rural economy, the new thinking was to create jobs in the manufacturing and non-agrarian sectors. A focus on urban areas, youth skill development, training initiatives to develop a skilled labour force, etc., were initiated on a massive scale. This is not to say that villages vanished entirely from the planners' minds. The majority of Indians, nearly three-quarters, still resided in villages. The political class appears to have been forced to keep one foot in the villages for this reason — the importance of numbers in democratic electoral politics — even if it was mostly for show and tokenism (L.I. Rudolph & S.H. Rudolph, 1987).

However, the rural or the village began to reappear at the start of the 21st century. But this was not a result of the people in charge of running the country realising their errors or failings. Instead, a crisis was unfolding at the time of this reappearance. The countryside was gradually eroding; now wide cracks were apparent – the result of decades of colossal neglect and apathy (Gupta, 2005). Farmers' suicides drew the nation's attention as a sign of an unprecedented agrarian crisis (Mohanty, 2013). According to popular perceptions, the farmers were always seen as hard-working, resilient fighters who never gave up.

Consequently, the sudden spike in suicides reported from the hinterland, including from areas that had previously participated in the Green Revolution, shocked the country. When reports of suicides began to come out of Punjab and Maharashtra, the surrounding silence on the rural began to break.

Due to a number of factors, primarily historical and structural, the agrarian economy collapsed. This collapse led to the emergence of numerous new processes that over time started to reconstruct (and also interrogate) the ethos of the agrarian economy. The deepest parts of the village and its socio-cultural world could see and feel its effects. In the final decade of the 20th century, a new economic regime and the aggressive market entry into rural areas hastened the reconstitution process even more.

The people involved in the renewed quest for knowledge were taken aback by the scale, speed, and depth of the change and reconstitution of the rural that occurred over the decades of 'shutting off the village' (Jodhka, 2014, 2016; Thakur, 2014). The typical conceptual tools and frameworks needed to be revised. For instance, the land that had previously held such a strong socio-cultural centrality in any village study now had a completely different connotation; it was more of an economic entity than a socio-cultural one. The large-landholding castes relocated their families to nearby towns, but they kept one leg in the village and one in the city because the land could not be transported in the city-ward truck that they first boarded with their families. They did this because they wanted to take advantage of better access to healthcare, educational opportunities, and, more importantly, a higher standard of living that the cities provided compared to their rural homes. The countryside had effectively been 'de-moralised'. The land that largely supported the concept of the village was beginning to show signs of fractures in its ties to the people on an organic and cultural level. Other significant add-ons, including the animal population and conventional tools like wooden wheels and ploughs, too slowly started to vanish. With this, the traditional jajmani system

collapsed. Specialists like potters, barbers, blacksmiths, basket makers, and rope makers who formerly provided the necessary tools for the agrarian economy and society were all steadily looking urbanward for a better future for their offsprings. The built-in power and inequality imbalances of the jajmani system, which were encased in a caste-based framework, gradually pushed its subaltern actors toward a more secular and civil occupational zone.

The most understudied theme in research on India in general, and its villages in particular, may be the aspiration. Aspiration is mental and cognitive in nature; it doesn't always need external validation from the world around it. Both the young zamindar and the landless farm labourers from the lower caste developed into aspirational next generations by the turn of the century. The ubiquitous mobile communication technology and access to the outside world expanded their imaginations. The flight of that imagination was encouraged by declining farm fortunes.

Undoubtedly, the crisis depicted in the agrarian scenario is real. A more objective and realistic assessment could only be possible if we stop viewing the villages as merely economic units devoid of any social and cultural agencies and networks. It is true that agriculture, as the mainstay of the rural economy, is in deep distress, but does that spell doom for the space known as the villages? Looking at villages as drastically reconfigured and reconstituted areas would be a more realistic response or line of thought, and not vanishing. Villages have changed in terms of their signposts, but they still exist as spaces. Against this backdrop, it becomes imperative to interrogate the old and explore newer methods and frameworks to study the village and the rural afresh (Singh, 2021).

**Interrogating the urban gaze**

A typical method adopted by practitioners of rural sociology has been to focus on one 'middle-sized' village and conduct extensive fieldwork there for one to two

years, with the ultimate goal being the publication of a 'holistic' account of the village's social and cultural life. The key feature that enabled these investigations to be classified as anthropological was the fieldwork component and the application of 'participant observation', a method for data collection that Western anthropologists had devised for investigating tribal societies. 'Intensive fieldwork came to be seen as the defining characteristic of the discipline of social anthropology and there was a fairly standardised pattern that had to be followed by the practitioners' (Jodhka, 1998, p. 314). Thus, as these practitioners turned their attention away from tribal societies to the rural community, the tradition of fieldwork gradually planted its roots and subsequently became a dominant trend in the study of the village (Srinivas, 1975).

A dilemma faced by these early practitioners was to rescue the tradition of fieldwork and its method of participant observation from its colonial anthropological pasts, while attuning and devising new ways to suit their endeavours of studying the rural societies. A major significant break from the colonial legacy was the new-found position of the researcher as 'native'. While colonial anthropology studied distant tribal societies from the position of an 'outsider', the indigenous sociologists presented themselves as 'natives' studying their own societies and cultures. The field-view offers correction to the incomplete book-view of India that Indologists had created from the classical Hindu texts, and provides purportedly a better framework for comprehending modern Indian society. The fact that the book-view was based on writings from ancient times and that the Indologists used writings composed entirely of Hindus from the elite upper-castes, made it partial and biased. The field perspective, on the other hand, employed a scientific method of inquiry and offered a holistic picture of how social life was structured at the grassroots of Indian society. 'Once the methodological supremacy of the 'village studies' was thus established, sociologists lost no time in riding on this wave: to each, her/his village' (Thakur, 2013, p. 144).

Although researchers engaged in fieldwork adopted 'reflexivity' as a means to constantly be aware of one's own position vis-à-vis the field, the claim of the indigenous researcher of being a 'native' needs to be questioned afresh. Can an urban or an urbanised researcher claim oneself to be a 'native' of the rural society, or is actually positioned as an 'outsider'? What forms of methodological complexities does this rural-urban dilemma present as pertaining to the study of the village and the rural?

This urban-rural dilemma between the researcher and their field also determines the way the rural presents itself to the researcher. On encountering an urban outsider in their midst, the rural presents itself in a mediated manner. This mediation is often determined by suspicion, social projection and imagined transactional gains. The researcher meets the appearance, albeit a distorted one, and continues their pursuit to find the essence. In this situation, the researcher, at best, can count the bones and draw the flesh but fails to meet the soul of the rural.

Let's take an example of the study of religion and ritual structure in a village, as undertaken by sociologists in India. Religiosity in the rural as traditional and animistic appears to be a concurrent theme among colonial administrators-anthropologists and then among nationalist-indigenous sociologists. S.C. Dube (2018) describes the religion of the rural people as a mixture of animism, animatism and polytheism, with the occasional appearance of monotheism. Sujata Patel (2021) argues that such scholarship can be linked to sociology's legacy as anthropology in India and its embeddedness in the episteme of colonial modernity. This paper further argues that the nationalist-indigenous turn in sociology post-independence in India developed a specific form of colonial modernity – one in which the dichotomy of the West and the East was replaced by a dichotomy of the urban and the rural, albeit with similar undertones. Indigenous researchers stressed the need for research to be conducted by insiders rather than outsiders vis-à-vis the erstwhile colonial scholars. But in turn, they assumed the

role of an urban outsider while studying the rural. The urban and the rural were thus defined and presented in terms of modernity and civilisational values and their lack thereof. Partha Chatterjee (1986) argues that Indian nationalism is derivative in nature and reproduces colonial binaries in its discourse in new ways. Here, the colonial binary being reproduced seems to be that of the urban and the rural.

How do we break away from such a colonial binary and study the rural then? Taking M.N. Srinivas' (2009) approach, we could make use of the perspective of social anthropology and thus of ethnography or 'field-view' to assess changes in modern India. But ethnography or 'field-view' comes with its own sets of concerns. According to Sujata Patel, 'epistemically, ethnography made a distinction between subject and object and suggested that the subject, the social scientist, should distinguish herself from the object that she observed. In these circumstances, ethnography merely mirrors the subject's ideology. Research so produced becomes empiricist on the one hand and creates theoretical and methodological ambiguities on the other' (Patel, 2021, p. 12). Thus, in the study of the village, the rural is designated as the object while the researcher retains their position as the subject. The rural is thus seen, interpreted and presented through the researcher's subjectivity and ideology.

**Village India: A meeting without appointment**

Taking a left turn from the highway, the freshly mortared road stretches to about five kilometres. From there, a twisting dirt road through mango orchards and paddy fields takes one to an artificial pond on the village borders. All the open sewage from the narrow lanes of the village lands in the pond. The pond has fishing nets and is filled with indigenous fish species living off human and cattle waste. The fishing rights of the pond are contracted to a local contractor by the gram panchayat (the local elected body of a village). A researcher standing on the pond's edge gazes at the possibilities of how to decipher, understand and write

about this frivolous piece of rural infrastructure. The open sewage spills and stinks in all directions, yet finds its way into this pond. Once inside the pond, the same sewage filled with human and cattle waste provides nutrition and life to the fish. It generates economic wealth and income and is pocketed piece by piece through a hierarchical network of competing power structures. What is the story of this pond, and who can tell it?

The researcher enters a house adjacent to the pond and starts to enquire. A few days ago, a lady washing clothes under a hand pump said, a non-poisonous aquatic snake crawled from the pond and came inside their home. They didn't kill it as they knew it was non-poisonous and told their kids not to disturb the snake. The researcher grew impatient as this snake story was a mere anecdote for him, and he wanted to know 'hard facts' about the pond, which he could then convert into data points. Even after repeated enquiries, the lady could not provide any data and directed the researcher to meet the pradhan (village head). Designating the meeting as futile, the researcher takes leave of the woman and starts preparing a mental list of government offices from which the data pertaining to the pond can be procured. Back near the pond, the researcher remembers his time as a kid when he freaked out because a snake had crawled near him in a playground. The researcher didn't know then and even now what kind of a snake it was and how to react to such a situation. The fact that a simple lady in a village could identify the type of snake and ward it off safely was amusing to him. After all, one doesn't have to be a herpetologist to learn such essential life skills. Anyway, with his superior knowledge and expertise, the researcher continues his quest for data.

The above account is a reflexive exercise from the author's own fieldwork in its initial stages. Researchers are trained to be systematic and structured in their approach towards the field. This training helps the researcher to stay on track towards their research outcomes. The village becomes a research site, often visited in the morning and left with freshly collected data in the evening. Such a

clinical approach towards the field determines the nature of relationships the researcher forms with their subjects.

Although informal interactions and unstructured interviews form a major component of ethnographic research, newer terrains of a flexible methodology must be explored to incorporate phenomenological research into nuanced lived experiences. According to Lucy Bartholomee, embodied wandering and lostness can be powerful enhancements to walking methodologies and provide valuable data-gathering tools for researchers who aim to extract meaning from both human and material landscapes. Building upon a human sense of bipedal knowledge – being on foot – the value of wandering and lostness as phenomenological experiences can be examined as a research methodology that departs from a traditional linear path (Bartholomee, 2023, p. 59).

Thus, borrowing from the field of performance studies, wandering and lostness are proposed as an addition to sociological research methodologies. In the field of rural sociology, ghumakkadi (wandering) through the rural landscape can provide – 'rich experiential sensations, the opportunity to discover a sense of place, and to attune oneself to the environment with childlike wonder that would be overlooked in a racing vehicle, veiled by inattention that is the luxury of the familiar' (ibid.). By incorporating ghumakkadi, a much vibrant and vivid account can be drawn of the lived reality of the researcher and the rural populace.

**Making colloquial sense of unemployment in a village**

Rahul is an advocate. The boy who used to roam around the village without purpose has now attained a social stature. His parents invested lakhs of Rupees for him to study and obtain his law degree in Dehradun. But he has been at home for over a year and is yet to find any gainful employment. Next month is Rahul's engagement, and he is worried. On a summer afternoon, Rahul lies under a tree with his friends in his family-owned mango orchard. 'I didn't get a placement

from college', Rahul says, 'and there are no jobs in the city. And now I have to arrange money for my engagement, but all options seem closed. I should sell a part of the mango orchards.' Siddharth, Rahul's younger brother, interjects and affirms what Rahul is saying. 'We should sell all our land. You can get married, and I will go to Canada. There is nothing left here.'

The brothers' family takes a loan. Rahul is now married and is semi-employed in a local court. Siddharth still looks after the farms and orchards and watches English-speaking videos on his mobile. Their aspirations aren't met, and they are waiting for a better future in the village. Whether the village provided a refuge to their broken aspirations or was it the reason that they couldn't succeed in the first place is a dilemma that neither Rahul nor Siddharth could resolve.

Unemployment among the youth in the village has several facets. As can be seen from the example of Rahul and Siddharth, the degree or perception of the state of unemployment varies. Rahul is an unsuccessful lawyer at a local court, and Siddharth works on his own farms and orchards as a farmer – but both consider themselves and are seen as unemployed. For the rural youth, failure to meet expectations and broken aspirations is seen as a state of unemployment. Thus, the term is defined in terms of its cultural connotations.

As per economists, unemployment is a situation when a person actively searches for a job and is unable to find work. Rahul or Siddharth cannot technically be designated as unemployed in its literal sense – they are rather underemployed. Underemployment is a situation where people are unwillingly working in low-skill and low-paying jobs or only part-time because they cannot get full-time jobs that use their skills. But the term underemployment or any of its colloquial equivalent is not used in the village. Either you achieve what you aspire for, or you are deemed unemployed.

Taking in account this cultural context, one can now better understand how the unemployed (and underemployed) youth navigate their lives. Ankur wakes up at 4 am every day and goes to a nearby field to run and exercise for two hours. By 7 am, he wears his blue uniform and then shares a bike with his friend to go to a factory in Bhagwanpur. His shift as a security guard starts at 9 am, and during his 8-hour long shift, he spends most of the time on his mobile phone. He has bought a subscription to online classes for the Delhi Police recruitment exam, and watches its videos during the shift. However, he is not able to focus on the online classes during the shift and thus ends up spending most of his time scrolling through social media and watching Hindi-dubbed South Indian and Hollywood movies. In the evening, upon completing his shift, he takes several detours to meet and hang out with his friends before actually returning home before dinner. This is more or less his daily schedule, and Ankur admits that he is neither satisfied with his current job nor able to prepare seriously for the Delhi Police exam. But the schedule continues.

Ankur is a school pass-out, having completed his 12th standard two years ago. Based on his current qualifications, a security guard's job is considered acceptable – as it does not entail much physical labour. But Ankur knows that survival is tough on a meagre Rupees seven thousand salary, and there are no prospects of growth in this line of work. He thus aspires to join the Delhi Police in order to secure a lucrative government job. But time is running by, and Ankur has already failed in several government recruitment exams – including those of the Indian Army and Delhi Police. Ankur and other young boys don't often talk about their current situation and aspirations, but would rather divert their attention to one form of entertainment or another. Such serious topics are rather deeply pondered upon in seclusion and during private conversations. The insecurities are not meant to be displayed in public.

However, these insecurities over the state of employment become a dominant driving force as to how caste and class relations are configured in the village. Brahmpal is an elderly farmer sitting on a khaat (cot) in the verandah of his home. During a conversation, Brahmpal laments at the situation of Rajputs in the village – especially the youth. He says that the Rajputs are losing power and prestige in the village as their incomes are dipping every day, while families of other castes are becoming wealthier. While the young ones from other castes go to the cities and work hard in any form of employment available, the Rajput youth is too uptight and arrogant to work under someone else's instructions. 'Look, the Chamars are building kothis (bungalows), while ours are dividing property and homes', says Brahmpal.

Shiv runs a grocery shop in the village. His brother, Abhishek, runs a dairy adjacent to him. Both have built their shops on the outer verandah of their ancestral home, facing a major intersection of roads. They have a joint family and raise their kids together. Shiv and Abhishek's father is a small farmer and used to work as an agricultural worker in other's fields. They are Dalits, belonging to Chamar caste. Shiv and Abhishek open their shops early in the morning and judiciously carry out their work throughout the day and till late night. They send their kids to a local English medium school and have high hopes for their future. When asked if running a shop was their aspiration or a compromise, both say they have seen far worse days. They are happy that their father doesn't have to work in others' fields anymore, and are content that they are taking good care of their children. Generations of struggle has shaped their worldview, and they are steadily climbing up the social ladder.

While the worldview of Dalits in the village is shaped through generations of struggle, the worldview of Rajputs is shaped through what can be called generations of entitlement. As a land-owning community, Rajputs have historically amassed wealth and steady sources of income throughout generations.

Their dominance over the agricultural landscape of the village subsequently bolstered their caste pride. However, diminishing land ownership and a seeming wave of unemployment faced by the current generation have left them perplexed as to how to grapple with the present situation.

**From modernist ideals to utilitarian goals: How rural youth navigates the education market**

Rachit is an eight-year-old boy. It's 7 o'clock in the morning, and Rachit is dressed up in his school uniform. A rickety yellow school bus arrives at the main intersection of the village. 'English medium school affiliated to CBSE, New Delhi' is embossed on the bus along with the school's name. Rachit sits inside the bus, and the bus drives away. A group of boys of similar ages are walking past the bus. Their school uniforms are not as crisp, and their school bags seem rather old and worn off. These boys are students of the government primary school situated in the village itself.

Sending one's children to an English medium school has become a necessary status symbol and an aspiration for the villagers. Several new private schools have mushroomed across the sprawling rural landscape. But most of them operate with poor infrastructure and teaching facilities, sometimes even worse than the government schools with which they compete. These private schools in rural pockets do not and cannot charge exorbitant fees like their urban counterparts. Instead, they charge nominal fees in order to attract a larger volume of students. Their first and foremost unique selling point is a promise of English medium education, and quality of education is only an afterthought.

Education becomes the playfield where desires for upward social mobility, status and economic progress translate into a certain set of aspirations. These aspirations have, over time, created and continue to shape a niche market of English medium schools, professional institutions, private coachings, online courses and tuitions.

Education in itself is hollowed out of its ideal goals – such as shaping better citizens with humanist values, instilling scientific temperament, stimulation of intellect, etc., but is rather aimed towards a singular utilitarian goal of securing employment. The market thus turns education into a commodity, and it is also evident through how education is perceived by the villagers.

Kartik is enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts programme at a government college in Punvarka, nearly ten kilometres from the village. He is enrolled in a regular course but hardly visits the college. He is preparing for various government recruitment exams, and attends several private coachings throughout the day. His sister, Swati, is also enrolled in the same college in a Master of Arts programme. She also rarely visits the college and spends most of her time doing household chores. Swati gives tuitions to neighbouring school kids in the evening and earns some independent income in lieu of the same. When they were enquired as to why they don't attend their college classes regularly, both replied, 'Neither teachers nor students are serious in the college, classes don't happen, and more over the course is useless'. Clearly, they don't see a utilitarian value in their college education. Yet they enrol in such courses only to obtain the degree – so as to qualify for the minimum eligibility of various government recruitment exams and to attain a certain educational status.

As fears of unemployment are high among the rural youth, desperate attempts are being made to pursue 'job guaranteeing' courses. Parth is pursuing his post-graduation in Political Science from a reputed government college in Saharanpur city. But under the pressure of finding suitable employment and on the advice of his relatives, he has enrolled in a three-year Polytechnic course this year. The minimum eligibility to enrol in a Polytechnic course is to have cleared a secondary school examination, or as it is colloquially called – class 10th. Parth, as a post-graduation student, is over-qualified for a Polytechnic course. 'A relative has assured my family that upon completion of the course, he will find me a job',

says Parth. Such promises by friends, relatives and educational institutions themselves play a decisive role in determining the rural youth's career path. Several years of prime age and a large chunk of financial resources are spent in pursuit of such career paths determined through ongoing negotiations between aspirations and promises. In the best-case scenario, these processes result in the creation of an estranged labour – devoid of creativity and valour. And in the worst scenario, it produces an unemployed person with shattered dreams. The phase of education acts as a period of liminality towards one of these outcomes – a condition in which the rural youth navigate through their lives.

**The rural-urban conundrum: Where is the home?**

Aditya is an engineering student at a top private college in Ghaziabad. He had topped his school examinations and was one of the most studious students in the village. During his college vacations, Aditya visits home and meets his friends. 'No one in the college has heard of our caste, and there is no social respect owing to it there,' Aditya confides to one of his friends. He seems perplexed by the sudden loss of his social identity in a distant urban milieu. Aditya walks around confidently in the village as his academic achievements are socially recognised. But once he arrives at his college, he becomes one of many, stripped of any markers of social distinction. While grappling to find his identity and struggling to come to terms with it, Aditya dreams of joining a multinational corporation and settling in the city. But how he would come to identify himself and his home is a constant perplexity that Aditya faces.

Raj's family is from the same village but had migrated to Haridwar in the last generation. He has received an English education in Mussoorie and drinks bottled water in the village. Raj's family visits the village during festivals and family functions. Raj's cousins are fond of the clothes and gadgets Raj possesses and are also envious. They persuade Raj to take them to a mall sometime and make them tour the city. Raj likes this attention and wants to flaunt it as well. But Raj also

feels that he doesn't understand the village – its colloquial tone, customs and ways of the people. Village, for him, is a home lost in the past and never to be rehabilitated. Yet he longs for its affiliation and maintains this last strand of relationship.

The above ethnographic accounts of Aditya and Raj were collected by the author during fieldwork conducted in a village in Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, from 2019 to 2021. These accounts have been presented in a story-telling format, so as to keep their essence intact. Aditya's and Raj's quest to find a 'home' underlines a common theme – the dilemma of identity and belongingness. This dilemma of identity and belongingness, in light of the migration of the rural youth, draws a series of complimentary questions – who is being urbanised and to what extent? Is this migration ever complete, and what does it entail? Does migration for economic gains necessarily translate into adopting the urban social milieu? What about those who work and live in the city but have a home in the village?

Such a series of questions can lead from one to another and disturb the tranquillity of known dimensions of rural-to-urban migration. When it comes to mapping the contours of rural-to-urban migration, it is not enough to draw unidirectional or seasonal round lines. Some lines are cut short, some never emerge, and many oscillate at various frequencies. However, the village persists and continues to hold on to its pivotal position amidst different erratic migration trends. Villages are not going anywhere; they are just being reconstituted and reconfigured. The village and the rural are not succumbing but adapting themselves to the contours of modernity, market and urbanisation. The rural youth live at the crossroads of such socio-cultural and economic transformations. And it is through their voice that the changing landscape of the village India can be mapped.

Manish Thakur asserts that researchers may need to erect tents on railway platforms to understand the village and the villagers rather than staying with the old village headman. 'Tracking the trail of the villagers – rich and poor – will

mean the demise of single village studies and inaugurate the new methodological era of multi-sited ethnography. No study of village, howsoever insightful, can afford any longer to celebrate a fieldworker's continuous stay in a single village for the remainder of her life.' (Thakur, 2014, p. 16). In light of the ever-growing scholarship on rural-to-urban migration, the erstwhile stable diet of sociological studies in India – single village studies, has lost its charm. To the extent that scholars are eager to declare its demise (ibid.). Migration to urban centres in search of better education, health facilities, and, more importantly, quality of life is an overwhelming and pervasive phenomenon. At the same time, it is not enough to study migration in terms of the movement of people in pursuit of economic aspirations but also in terms of simultaneously shifting spaces of identity and belongingness.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this paper is to unsettle the discourse on rural studies and to generate a discussion on the methodological underpinnings of the discipline of rural sociology. By putting the voices of the rural youth at the centre, the paper attempts to re-orient the rural subject from the anecdotes and the margins. From examining the indigenous scholars' claims of 'nativity' to attempts to introduce wandering and lostness as a research methodology, the paper then modestly delves into an ontological inquiry of the concepts of identity and belongingness pertaining to rural-to-urban migration.

The concurrent themes of rural-to-urban migration, aspirations and agrarian crisis have radically changed the rural landscape. The change and reconstitution of the rural has happened at such a large scale with such a swift pace, and so deep that the decades of 'shutting off the village' left the people associated with the renewed quest for enquiry with a sense of surprise (Jodhka, 2014, 2016; Thakur, 2014). The usual conceptual kit and frameworks proved inadequate. Thus, the rural and its ruralities must be explored with newer sets of methodologies – with

their own concepts, frameworks and positions. Although many of these methodologies might eventually be accepted, attuned or dismissed under the scrutiny of scholars, but a point of departure has to be confidently taken. Through such moves and attempts, the field of rural sociology can be armoured with a much-needed fresh approach – and drag the discipline out of its oblivion.

**Disclosure Statement**

The ethnographic accounts and field notes mentioned in this paper are based on fieldwork conducted by the first author towards his doctoral research. The fieldwork was conducted in a village in Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, from 2019 to 2021. Names of persons and places have been altered to maintain anonymity.

**References**

Bartholomee, L. (2023). Discovering Lostness: Wandering and Getting Lost as Research Methodology. In *Walking as Critical Inquiry* (pp. 59-75). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Béteille, A. (1980). Indian village: Past and present. *Peasants in history, essays in honour of Daniel Thorner, edited by EJ Hobsbawm...[et al.].*

Chatterjee, P. (1986). *Nationalist thought and the colonial world: a derivative discourse?*. Zed Books.

Dube, S.C. (2018). Indian village. Routledge.

Gupta, D. (2005). Whither the Indian village?: culture and agriculture in 'rural'India. *Review of Development and Change*, *10*(1), 1-20.

Jodhka, S. S. (1998). From "book view" to "field view": Social anthropological constructions of the Indian village. *Oxford development studies*, *26*(3), 311-331.

Jodhka, S. S. (2014). What's Happening to the Village. *Revisiting Rural Life and Agrarian Change in Haryana*.

Jodhka, S. S. (2016). Revisiting the rural in 21st century India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 5-7.

Mohanty, B. B. (2013). Farmer suicides in India: Durkheim's types. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 45-54.

Patel, S. (2021). The nationalist-indigenous and colonial modernity: an assessment of two sociologists in India. *The Journal of Chinese Sociology*, *8*(1),2.

Ray, N. (1973). *Nationalism in India: An historical analysis of its stresses and strains*. Aligarh: Aligarh Muslim University Press.

Rudolph, L. I., & Rudolph, S. H. (1987). *In pursuit of Lakshmi: The political economy of the Indian state*. University of Chicago Press.

Singh, Santosh K. (2020, April 24). Village as home. Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power. https://www.identitiesjournal.com/the-viral-condition-virtual-symposium/village-as-home

Singh, Santosh K. (2021). Introduction. In Santosh K. Singh (Ed.), Remembering India's villages. Delhi: Aakar Books.

Srinivas, M.N. (1975, August). Village studies, participant observation and social science research in India. Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 10, No. 33/35, Special Number, pp. 1387+1389-1394.

Srinivas, M.N. (2009). The Oxford India Srinivas. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Thakur, M.K. (2013). Review: Of 'village studies' and the 'village': A disputed legacy. Sociological Bulletin, Vol. 62, No. 1, pp. 138-151.

Thakur, M. (2014). Understanding ruralities: Contemporary debates. CAS Working Paper Series, CAS/WP/14-1.

*Prabudh Singh,* PhD Research Fellow in Sociology, Ambedkar University Delhi

*Email: prabudhsinghsocio@gmail.com*

*Santosh K. Singh,* Associate Professor, Ambedkar University Delhi

*Email: santoshsocio@gmail.com*

**Article: Social impact of COVID-19 on rural residents: Some evidence from a Telangana village**

**Author(s):Sreeramulu Gosikonda**

## Social impact of COVID-19 on rural residents:

## Some evidence from a Telangana village

--Sreeramulu Gosikonda

**Abstract**

The lockdown in India, a coronavirus-related inescapable consequence explained in the name of all residents' self-protection, has numerous consequences for all classes in rural Telangana. What does lockdown signify to people in rural India from various socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds? What effect does a lockdown have on the closing of educational institutions? What effects do the COVID-19 laws and regulations have on those who are ill-health and how deceased bodies are handled? The research examined the issues that the pandemic-related lockdown caused for rural residents in general and their livelihoods in particular. The study is based on empirical research conducted in a village. Personal interviews were performed with the respondents. The study shows that lockdown harms rural livelihoods. Hence, the revival of the rural economy depends on the effective policies that are prepared and implemented by the government in its post–pandemic measurements.

*Key Words: Lockdown, multiple marginalities, rural people, rural livelihoods*

**Introduction**

The recently identified coronavirus is the infectious disease known as COVID-19. While the first case in India was announced in January 2020, this novel virus and sickness were discovered in Wuhan City, China, in December 2019. All of India's states, where the bulk of the workforce worked in the unorganized sector in general and in rural livelihoods in particular, were affected by the spread of COVID-19, which hurt people's lives. The Government of India strictly conducted the nationwide lockdown in four phases that began on March 25, 2020

and ended on May 31, 2020, to stop the virus's spread. Through the exclusion of necessities and commodities, this countrywide lockdown ceased interstate transportation.  Most states took appropriate action to ensure that individuals have access to necessities. The pandemic, however, has had a significant negative impact on lives and means of subsistence throughout rural India. The nation's agricultural and related industries employ more than half of the workforce. In India, less than two hectares of land are owned by about 85% of farmers, who are classified as small and marginal farmers. Furthermore, the livelihoods of about 14 million people, both directly and indirectly, depend on the fishing industry. To exclude the agricultural industry and related industries from lockdown restrictions, rules were released by the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Government of India on April 15, 2020. Various projects covered by the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme were also permitted to operate (MGNREGS).

With an area of 112.08 lakh hectares, 60% of which is arable, Telangana is the 12th largest state in India. In the State, where about 55.5% of the population depends on farm work for a living, agriculture is important to the economy. The state's marginal holdings (less than 1 hectare) and smallholdings (between 1 and 2 hectares) account for 62% and 24%, respectively, of the total agricultural holdings in the State, or around 86%.  It shows that the vast majority of people depend on agriculture for a living while only making a modest amount of money from their small holdings. The primary sector, which also encompasses horticulture, animal husbandry, and fisheries, comprises agriculture.

According to the 2011 Census, around 54.6% of the population works in agriculture and related industries, which generates about 17.4% of the nation's Gross Value Added. Due to employment issues, India's rural population has been dropping every year. Rural residents faced numerous issues with their means of subsistence, but the lockdown imposed by the Indian government forced them to

remain at home for two months. People became fearful as a result of the lockdown, and their lives were prioritised over their livelihoods. As instructed by the Government of India, even the Government of Telangana sent food supplies and cash aid.

In India's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Frontal Assault on the "Historically Dispossessed", Mohan & Mishra (2021) addressed problems and difficulties relating to migrant labour. These workers' suffering was seen in the context of the current migratory crisis. The pieces demonstrate the state's political disinterest and civil society's callous treatment of migrant workers. According to the report, India's government and civil society have historically shown little concern for the marginalised groups in general and migrant labourers in particular. According to Kandikuppa & Gupta (2021), COVID-19 has severely impacted internal migrants in India. The highest level of human crisis occurred in post-independence India as a result of the national government's unexpected announcement of a lockdown. In Indian migration history, it was regarded as the second-largest internal migration. A crisis of civilization and morality resulted from a lack of public transportation, food, water, and shelter. Additionally, it emphasised India's state failures and a lack of coordination between the central and state administrations. It has demonstrated how LPG policies have failed to address the structural and operational issues facing India's information labour force.

Rodrigues and Jian's article, Regulation of COVID-19 Fake News Infodemic in China and India, published in 2020, examines the political economy of the rumours that spread throughout China and India during COVID-19's first and second stages. The influence of fake news has had significant repercussions for socio-religious groups, as well as for individuals who are COVID-19 victims. To foster a sense of social cohesion across religious, socioeconomic, and class divides, the study makes the case for government intervention to suppress bogus

news and regulate its dissemination.  The study by Mahapatra and Sharma (2021) illustrates what education means in the context of COVID-19. Learning discontinuity and educational discontent were caused by the premature closure of educational institutions from KG to PG. Although the alternative online learning techniques developed by the private schools gave a sense of learning, they also produced anxiety and a sense of learning alienation because of the foreign knowledge ecology of online teaching. As a result, the majority of the kids were dealing with various psychological issues.

The study by Gogoi & Sarmah (2020) examines how the COVID-19 pandemic affected Assamese citizens' mental health. It demonstrates the nature of the connection between Assamese society's various social groupings' demographics and mental health. It promotes the use of mental health specialists to treat the mental health crises brought on by the months-long lockdown, which also caused a social divide among family members and social groups. according to Sahni & Aulakh (2020), the lockdown caused social and economic problems for rural migrants. The main issues faced by rural migrants included anxiety, lack of awareness, ignorance, stigmatisation, homelessness, unemployment, debt traps, and reverse migration. According to Gurung (2020), Sikkim's government, panchayats, non-governmental organisations, and local youth provided aid to rural residents in various ways, such as by distributing rations and medicines. She disclosed that COVID-19 caused rural Sikkim residents to experience social stigma, dread, anxiety, and estrangement.

According to Jena & Nanda (2020), door-to-door health checks were conducted by ancillary nurse midwives (ANMs), Anganwadi, and ASHA employees in Odisha. Several SHG members were working to produce face masks. JEEVIKA used flyers and announcements in moving vehicles to raise awareness in Bihar. In Tamil Nadu, SHG volunteers worked at ration shops to provide gloves and hand sanitizers while maintaining a physical distance. According to Chandra (2020),

effective state-local and citizen action is possible when there is adequate local representation in planning and coordination activities, especially during times of crisis. She discovered that the Panchayats tried to prevent the virus from spreading and made sure that vulnerable rural residents in particular and rural residents, in general, received critical service. Numerous press pieces also emphasised the effect of COVID-19 on India's numerous marginal groups, in addition to academic articulations. Understanding the size and breadth of COVID-19 in rural Telangana is crucial given the institutional hierarchies and discriminatory practices present in Indian culture.

**Objectives and Methodology**

The paper aims to find out the meanings of lockdown that were explained and experienced by the rural people belonging to various socioeconomic and cultural origins whose diet, hygiene, and health depend on their religion, caste, classes, and gender. The study examines the impact of lockdown on the closing of educational institutions. In addition, the paper also covers the effect of lockdown laws and restrictions on those who are ill and handling dead bodies. The current article is based on primary data gathered from Rampur Village in Telangana's Karimnagar District. The study was limited to a single community due to restrictions related to the lockdown. The settlement is close to the town of Huzurabad. The majority of individuals commute into the town each day for a variety of reasons. However, the majority of the working classes—and particularly women—rely on agriculture and related industries. As per the Gram Panchayat records, the village has around 520 households. The researcher adopted a convenience sampling technique and selected 50 households to be covered in the study. Finally, the researcher visited these households and conducted in-depth interviews with around 50 individuals to represent various livelihoods of the village. The researcher took every precaution when interviewing the respondents, including maintaining a physical distance, wearing a face mask, washing hands,

etc. The researcher observed and noted each cautious action that the villagers and the local Panchayat took. In addition, the state's strategy and the public's reaction have been examined by reviewing newspapers and the sites of both the union and state governments.

**Results and Discussion**

Under the instructions provided by the Government of India, the Government of Telangana initiated the Janata Curfew on March 22, 2020, and continued the lockdown until May 31, 2020. All of the markets, shops of all kinds, wine and liquor stores, and temples were closed. All weddings, religious celebrations, rituals, and jatras ceased. To stop the spread of the coronavirus, public and private transportation operations were even outlawed. Strict regulations were also put in place regarding the mobility of individuals, except necessities like rice, essential supplies, vegetables, milk, and medications. The lockdown in rural Telangana, however, harmed daily life and the local economy. The researcher captured some of the important observations on the behaviour of respondents in dealing with the new coronavirus in the study area.

**Table 1: Precautions Taken by the Respondents during the Lockdown**

| Sl. No. | Occupation | No. of Respondents | No. of Respondents who practiced | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Awareness of Corona infection | 50 | 50 | 100 |
| 2 | Knowing the purpose of lockdown | 50 | 50 | 100 |
| 3 | Cleaning hands with liquid/soap | 50 | 50 | 100 |
| 4 | Wearing mask/ kerchiefs | 50 | 50 | 100 |
| 5 | Staying at | 50 | 47 | 94 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | home | | | |
| 6 | Maintaining Physical distancing | 50 | 45 | 90 |

Source: Field study

Table 1 indicates that respondents not only have strong awareness and knowledge levels on coronavirus and lockdown but also developed and followed good habits to protect themselves and their family members. However, the researcher recorded that around six percent of respondents did not stay at home and another 10% of them did not maintain physical distance. They felt if any coronavirus case was reported in the village, they knew it very easily due to less population. Hence some of the respondents did not follow these two rules strictly. A qualitative description of the different practices followed by the respondents is presented in the forthcoming paragraphs.

**Awareness of Rural People on COVID-19 Pandemic**

The evidence in the field showed that everyone was aware of the coronavirus. The majority of people relied on television to keep up with the newest information on the virus and to learn about new instances that had been reported around the nation, specifically in the state of Telangana. Those using smartphones relied on them to stay up to date on the virus's progress around the nation. The majority of the educated youth relied on publications to tell them of the actions that the union and state governments had taken as well as the virus's spread at many levels, including the national, state, district, mandal, and village. When the lockdown went from one phase to another, the majority of people expressed curiosity in knowing about the relaxation that the government/s had provided. Additionally, if at least one member of any family owned a smartphone, all family members

watched lockdown/COVID-19-related videos published on social media platforms.

**Precautious Steps Taken by the Rural People**

A careful field investigation showed that everyone was eager to take precautions to protect themselves from contracting the virus. They were aware of various methods for containing the infection because they often watched television throughout the lockdown. When going outside to get necessities, everyone covered their faces with masks, kerchiefs, or towels. Depending on their financial situation, everyone used either liquid Lifebuoy/Dettol or soaps to wash their hands. It was observed in the field that most elderly individuals washed their hands with soap. Before eating meals or anything else, including fruits and snacks, they all strictly adhered to the rule of washing their hands. In teaching their children to abide by all of these regulations, including using a face mask and washing their hands, parents play an important role. Additionally, when in public spaces like ration shops, general provision shops, panchayat offices, etc., people kept their distance from one another physically. Most people made an effort to avoid visiting neighbours' or other people's homes because doing so encourages the formation of groupings. The majority of the groups, however, were only observed in a few locations where toddy is consumed.

**Awareness of Rural People on the Purpose of Lockdown**

The study found that everyone was aware of the government-imposed lockdown, which was strictly enforced to stalk the spread of the coronavirus. They were aware that intimate contact with a person who has the coronavirus can spread it. They were aware that the main symptoms of a Corona infected person include a cough, cold, fever, body pains, weariness, or any combination of these conditions. However, the virus takes two weeks to manifest its symptoms rather than immediately making a person sick. People were afraid to be near each other since

they couldn't tell who was ill. In other words, because there was no way to identify either the virus or the diseased person, people stayed at home. The fact that no one had ever before experienced this form of the disease caused psychological issues among the population as a result of the virus's novel and distinctive features. In this way, the phrase "coronavirus" spread among the populace, and everyone was aware of the fundamental reason for the lockdown.

Telugu literature played a significant part in raising awareness about the coronavirus, the reasons for the lockdown and its strict implementation. The Chowrasta team's song "Chethulethi Mokkutha Cheyi Cheyi Kalapakura, Kaallu Kuda Mokkutha Adugu Bayata Vettakura," which translates to "appealing you neither go for handshake nor go out," became well-known among the rural populace and encouraged them to stay inside. Additionally, the police in Huzurabad town closely regulated who may enter and go out of the town. Because of this, people remained stationary in their homes.

**Identification of Rural Livelihoods**

The report documented how COVID-19 affected rural residents by causing a nationwide lockdown. The study found that lockdown had an impact on rural communities in a variety of ways, including those related to the economy, society, religion, psychology, personal relationships, families, health, education, and child development. The study found that hat members of the working class worked in a variety of professions. These include self-employment, the farming class, and tractor and harvester drivers. On the other hand, there are weavers, agricultural labourers, manual labourers, fishermen, dairymen, toddy tappers, masons, carpenters, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, and sheep and goat farmers. Some of the traditional professions were also identified as part of the study including drummers, priests, stone cutters, beedi makers, hairdressers, washing men, tailors, and painters. Salespeople and other employees working in the nearby clothing stores in Huzurabad Town lost their livelihoods. The income distribution of

private school teachers and college lecturers was severely impacted by the closure of educational institutions situated in Huzurabad.

The study also found that people worked for themselves in a variety of businesses, including steel furniture manufacturing, electric motor winding, refrigerator stores, chit businesses, boutiques, and photo studios. According to the survey, people who were working at the Mee Seva centre, electrical shops, and mineral water distribution plants in the hamlet, and Huzurabad town lost their jobs. Small business owners who operate general provision stores, chicken shops, and cycle shops are particularly hard hit. People who depend on wedding celebrations, running night-time hotels, selling bangles, brooms, and auto rickshaws as well as ice cream, dry fish, seasonal fruits, sweets, and dolls at jatras (fairs) have lost their main sources of income. RMP Doctors, dish operators, DTH providers, and people who depend on flour mills, own tent houses, and run small businesses in the village all struggle financially. This analysis shows how the lockdown in rural Telangana hurts the country's economic sources. The effects of COVID-19 and the lockdown on various occupational groups in the villages are shown in the forthcoming paragraphs.

**Economic Impact of Lockdown on Rural People**

The lockdown in India has brought immense hardship to the already struggling rural communities, especially manual labourers and poor farmers. Fears are rising that extended restrictions could cripple the upcoming harvest, further deepening their plight. Urgent government intervention is needed to ensure basic sustenance and put farms back on track (Modak, et al., 2020). According to the survey, the majority of rural livelihoods are harmed by the lockdown. Farmers who grow rice, vegetables, fruits, and flowers saw a sudden loss of revenue in addition to their debt. The agricultural labourers, whose only source of income is agriculture, were destitute. Due to limits placed on entering other villages and markets, even fishermen had needs. The lockdown affected all self-employed individuals as well

as weavers. Due to limits on all kinds of events, even the traditional village drummers lost their jobs. In addition, men who were employed in several shops located in Huzurabad lost their jobs for two months. The investigation found that because of the lockdown, teachers and lecturers who work in private schools and colleges were living in appalling economic situations. The below table provides a clear picture of the adverse effects of the COVID-19 Lockdown on the livelihoods of respondents in the study area.

**Table 2: Livelihood Losses among Respondents during Lockdown**

| Sl. No. | Occupation | No. of Respondents | No. of Respondents who lost livelihood | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Farmers | 4 | 4 | 100 |
| 2 | Agricultural labourers | 6 | 6 | 100 |
| 3 | Weavers | 3 | 3 | 100 |
| 4 | Priest | 1 | 1 | 100 |
| 5 | Fishermen | 2 | 2 | 100 |
| 6 | Toddy tappers | 2 | 2 | 100 |
| 7 | Shepherds | 1 | 1 | 100 |
| 8 | Carpenters | 1 | 1 | 100 |
| 9 | Black smith | 1 | 1 | 100 |
| 10 | Traditional   Drummers | 2 | 2 | 100 |
| 11 | Stone cutters | 2 | 2 | 100 |
| 12 | Barbers | 1 | 1 | 100 |
| 13 | Washer mans | 1 | 1 | 100 |
| 14 | Masons | 2 | 2 | 100 |
| 15 | Construction workers | 3 | 3 | 100 |
| 16 | Self-employed | 9 | 7 | 78 |
| 17 | Beedi workers | 2 | 2 | 100 |
| 18 | Auto drivers | 1 | 1 | 100 |
| 19 | Car drivers | 1 | 1 | 100 |
| 20 | Painters | 1 | 1 | 100 |
| 21 | Salesmen at cloth stores | 1 | 1 | 100 |
| 22 | Workers in shops | 1 | 1 | 100 |

| 23 | Private Teachers | 1 | 1 | 100 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 24 | Private Lecturers | 1 | 1 | 100 |
| | Total | 50 | 48 | 96 |

Source: Field study

Table 2 indicates around 96% of the respondents of the study lost their jobs. The study witnessed that the Kirana shop owner as well as the Cable TV operator did not lose their jobs. Moreover, there was a lot of demand for these services due to lockdown restrictions. However, the Kirana shop owner struggled a lot to get the required provisions from his regular wholesale shop located in Huzurabad. The researcher excluded government employees like government teachers from this survey as their jobs are permanent. However, it is noticed from the field study that the government employees received half of the salaries, sometimes lately. The government said that their remaining salaries would be paid later on after the lockdown was revoked. In this way, the lockdown harmed the livelihoods of rural people. As Sengupta and Jha (2020) rightly suggested in the post-pandemic, both rural and urban work need better protection and dignified standards. Expanding existing programs like MGNREGA and ensuring portable welfare support are crucial steps toward tackling the resurgent poverty brought on by modern challenges.

**Social Impact of Lockdown on Rural People**

All activities relating to human life, from birthday parties to funeral rites, were prohibited and limited to family only to stop the spread of the new coronavirus. To put it another way, all forms of social meetings were prohibited. Parents postponed their children's marriages because the government forbade any marriages or private gatherings. The family was the only group invited to such events including naming ceremonies, birthday celebrations, housewarming ceremonies, and any other cultural ceremonies. Some of the government

employees who retired from their duties during this time did not celebrate their superannuation function. Some others refused to attend weddings even before the lockdown because they were afraid of the virus.

Most individuals were reluctant to participate in the funerals or other ceremonies that followed someone's passing. Due to their concern about contracting infections from a dead body, the deceased's family members, or any other attendees, they have avoided certain village activities. They believed that since the virus is unknown, anything may happen, even a person's death. Funerals were not attended by anyone unless they were very close relatives. Those who owned motorcycles went to the funerals of their close relatives who lived outside their village and were only 10 to 20 kilometres away. Anyone wishing to go to Telangana state to attend the funeral of a close relative was required to obtain prior approval from the Tahasildar of Huzurabad. Some residents of other states were unable to attend the funeral of close relative/s, and occasionally even of members of their own family. In other words, because of limits on interstate public and private transportation for people's movement, they missed their last chance to see their family members, close relatives, friends, and well-wishers. As a result, social interactions suffered during the lockdown, which contributed to psychological stress among the populace.

**Religious Impact of Lockdown on Rural People**

The lockdown has influenced the religious life of rural people negatively. It is noticed from the field study that the village is dominated by Hindus whereas around 15 households follow Christianity. Though Muslim households are not there in the village, around 17 households celebrate the Muharram festival as their family tradition.

**Table 3: Religious Festivals Affected in the Village**

| Sl. No. | Date of Festival | Name of Festival | Status of Celebration |
|---|---|---|---|
| I | Hindu Festivals | | |
| 1 | 25-Mar-20 | Ugadi | Partially |
| 2 | 2-Apr-20 | Sri Rama Navami | No |
| 3 | 1-Jul-20 | Toli Ekadashi | Yes |
| 4 | 3-Aug-20 | Raksha Bandhan | Yes |
| 5 | 11-Aug-20 | Krishna Janmashtami | No |
| 6 | 22-Aug-20 | Ganesh Chaturthi | Partially |
| II | Christian Festivals | | |
| 1 | 10-Apr-20 | Good Friday | No |
| 2 | 12-Apr-20 | Easter | Partially |
| III | Muslim Festivals | | |
| 1 | 30-Aug-20 | Muharram | Partially |

Source: Field study

Table 3 presents about status of the celebration of different festivals that were affected during the lockdown and post-lockdown periods. The Hindu residents of the village celebrated Ugadi at the house with restrictions. Hindus felt that they did not celebrate Sri Rama Navami in their village due to the lockdown. They also missed visiting the Illandakunta temple and the local Yellamma jatra. A close observation from the field revealed that even after the lockdown, people did not celebrate some of the festivals freely due to fear of COVID-19. Festivals such as Toli Ekadashi and Raksha Bandhan were celebrated at home only. Krishna Janmashtami did not celebrate at all whereas Ganesh Chaturthi celebrated simply with a lot of restrictions. Similarly, Christian families of the village neither gathered at Church to perform prayers at the time of Good Friday nor celebrated Easter. They celebrated Easter at their respective homes. The study witnessed that around 17 Hindu families celebrate Muharram festival every year in the village.

However, in the year 2020, it was celebrated among those families only due to pandemic tensions.

It is clear from the evidence on the ground that the majority of people preferred to travel on pilgrimages during the summer. The majority of them stated that they intended to visit Tirupati first, then Vemulawada, and then Kondagattu. However, due to the temples being closed, they were unable to visit any pilgrimage sites. Besides, a few of the males wished to participate in the Hanuman Diskha (Maala) during April-May 2020. They typically perform this Diksha once a year. However, because of the lockdown, no religious activities could be undertaken in the village; therefore, they could not carry this out. Noonwal and Kaur (2021) observed that the pandemic disrupted everything: the economy, habits, even celebrations. While the spreading of COVID-19 and subsequent lockdown instilled fear and increased responsibility for health, it also sparked creativity – virtual gatherings, and new ways to celebrate. We must learn to overcome COVID's depression and adapt to social distancing, finding new ways to keep rituals and festivals alive. After all, we're social creatures, and life without society and celebrations is unimaginable.

**Impact of Lockdown on Children's Education and Employment**

The study recorded parents' perceptions of how a lockdown might affect their kids' academic performance and employment prospects. The majority of parents whose children attend school or college believed that prolonged absence from studies might reduce kids' focus on schoolwork. They were concerned that even moving everyone up a class without an exam may lower the standard of instruction and harm talented pupils. All exams were either cancelled or delayed, except for intermediate (+2 level) exams. SSC (10th class) results were announced based on the student's internal marks. Since it was unclear how their exams would be administered during the lockdown, it was noted on the ground that the majority of SSC students were experiencing psychological stress.

The majority of parents have a negative opinion of online education because it requires a smartphone and/or laptop and an internet connection. They readily admitted that the cost of teaching online was a hardship for them. They noted that nothing would take the place of the teacher. They believed that while there is no way to clarify doubts in online instruction, students could only clear them when the teacher was physically there. Even students occasionally experience issues with their internet signal/connection. They viewed those parents should also keep an eye on children while they use the internet because it can have negative consequences on them. To restart the schools and colleges as usual, they advise the government to take alternative measures like running school in morning and evening shifts, expanding the physical infrastructure, and monitoring students' health conditions by checking temperature regularly.

One of the parents of the village who was covered under the study explained that his elder daughter was enrolled in the final year of her B.Tech. programme at IIIT, Basara. However, her end-of-semester exams were postponed as a result of the lockdown. She additionally participated in a couple of company interviews as part of campus placements. She was chosen for a position by one of the recruiters. She was therefore waiting to administer exams. He asserted that his daughter cannot receive an appointment order from the company until she has passed her final exams. Due to the delay in final examinations, he was extremely concerned about his daughter's future because she might not get the job that the company had given her before the lockdown.

**Health Impact of Lockdown on Rural People**

The study found that the majority of participants were afraid to tell RMP doctors about any health issues. If somebody was experiencing minor issues like a cold, cough, sore throat, or fever, they purchased medications from pharmacies. They were concerned that if they disclosed their health issues to an ASHA representative or a local RMP doctor, they may be advised to undergo a Corona

test and/or be admitted to the hospital. Even the RMP doctors had explicit instructions on when to quit providing services. Additionally, the majority of individuals conceal their medical conditions and experience stress due to the fact that during the first several days of the lockdown, only two hospitals in the entire Telangana state were operating to treat the epidemic. Depending on the severity of the infection, the patients must be admitted to either Gandhi Hospital in Hyderabad or Mahatma Gandhi Memorial (MGM) Hospital in Warangal.

It has been observed from the field that individuals with chronic illnesses were unable to attend routine examinations and follow-ups. They so kept taking the medication that the doctor had recommended during their prior consultation. All patients followed physical distance rules and wore face masks when they obtained their medications from the Huzurabad medical outlets. Following government regulations, a few medical offices remained open 24 hours a day to assist individuals in an emergency. Police permitted people to visit Huzurabad at any time to purchase medications.

One of the respondents who reside in Hyderabad claimed that they were stranded at home as a result of the lockdown. She cited her husband's inability to finish and turn in his Ph.D. thesis due to the lockdown. She was concerned for her mother-in-law's heart condition as they had skipped the third review at Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences (NIMS) in Hyderabad due to the lockdown. Since there was no means of transportation, they continued taking the same medication throughout the lockdown. She continued by saying that because of the extremely high temperature in the village due to the summer season, they had trouble adjusting. To purchase an air cooler, even stores were closed due to the strict implementation of the lockdown rules. As Singh, et al. (2021) viewed that COVID-19 highlighted the need for resilient health systems in resource-scarce regions. Rural communities and urban under-served areas faced particular hardship, with worsened chronic conditions and job losses. While disparities in

managing chronic diseases were exposed, the pandemic also offers a chance to bridge these gaps through innovative solutions in post-COVID India.

**Fake News as Usual**

COVID-19 has exposed India's vulnerability to misinformation and behavioural disruptions during epidemics. Past experiences with smallpox and plague highlight how cultural beliefs and panic can hinder effective containment measures. To ensure compliance with social distancing and isolation, interventions should consider incorporating traditional beliefs and social connections while addressing misinformation. By understanding India's unique social context, we can design more effective strategies to combat the virus (Tagat & Kapoor, 2020). Due to the intimacy of rural residents, there are more opportunities for informal news dissemination than in urban regions. People rely on newspapers and television for news. However, they also depend on social media, their neighbours, and friends for information specific to their area. Fake news can occasionally spread quickly among rural residents. People were reluctant to visit the homes of expatriates who had recently returned from Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Bangalore, Chennai, and Hyderabad, among other major Indian cities. According to the study, there was a spread of false information in the village that two residents—one young person from New Delhi and one middle-aged person from the U.S.A.—were sick with the virus. No one was therefore prepared to visit their homes. The people did not even take the vegetables, milk, etc. from those families that had returnees from other cities who have reported more Corona cases during the lockdown. Along with gathering samples from returnees of the village and sending them for COVID-19 testing, the Sarpanch, officials of the revenue department, and health professionals also persuaded them to undergo home quarantine for two weeks starting on the day they arrived in the hamlet. On their wrist, they also applied a home quarantine stamp. Additionally,

the passports of village residents who returned from foreign were collected by the revenue officials as per the directions.

**Steps Taken by the Village Panchayat**

A study conducted by Kundu and Bowmik (2020) explored the diverse social impacts of COVID-19 lockdowns in India, encompassing health, economy, essential goods, etc. A thorough look at the situation on the ground showed that the Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) visited every home in the hamlet to record the health profile of every resident. Periodically, sanitary staff members cleaned the drainage and used bleach (Calcium hypochlorite). To stop the Coronavirus from spreading, the Sarpanch kept an eye on the sodium hypochlorite being sprayed in every roadway. To spread the word about the lockdown and the precautions that should be taken to stop the spread of the virus, a member of the village Panchayat staff made daily rounds around all the streets on a motorcycle while playing the song written by the Chowrasta team. To prevent residents from the surrounding area from entering the hamlet, the Sarpanch stationed Panchayat workers at its three entrances. To take further necessary procedures by the rules, the Sarpanch was involved in identifying individuals traveling from major Indian cities. In addition, the Police occasionally conducted village inspections to assess the state of the lockdown and issued warnings to those who disobeyed the guidelines.

**Impact of Lockdown on Village Developmental Projects**

As a new recession looms, communities already are facing hardship due to the lockdown need powerful and effective policy across health, industry, government, and local organizations. Immediate, well-planned support is crucial to avoid leaving anyone behind. Stabilizing and motivating the economy during this downturn requires mid and long-term strategies. A comprehensive socioeconomic development plan with infrastructure and sector-specific schemes is vital,

supporting businesses with reliable and sustainable models to ensure their success and drive recovery (Kumar, et al., 2020). According to the report, the lockdown has a detrimental effect on the village's development efforts. All government initiatives, particularly those involving construction, were halted. The study showed that because the government stopped it, none of the MGNREGS's enrolled workers got work during the first month of the lockdown. The construction of CC Roads, worth 20 lakhs, was halted, according to Mr. Manoher, the Sarpanch of Rampur village. Due to the lockdown, the construction of four distinct structures, each costing Rs. 20 lakhs, for the Mahila Mandali, Mudiraj Community Hall, Rajaka Community Hall, and SC Community Hall has not yet begun. Additionally, the beneficiaries of the Kalyani Lakshmi Scheme, one of the prestigious programmes of the Government of Telangana, did not get checks.

**Conclusion**

The study found that most rural residents were not ready to leave their houses because Curfew and Lockdown were new to them. Panchayat officials guarded village entrances. People were afraid to tell health workers about their colds, coughs, and fevers to avoid isolation and hospitalisation, which were necessary for pandemic treatment. The field study shows that all farmers lost money during the lockdown, affecting their agricultural investment. Few farmers were unable to sell perishable goods like vegetables and fruits, causing psychological stress. After one month of lockdown, agricultural activities were restored, but keeping physical distance in workplaces is difficult. Thus, most people were inactive until the lockdown ended. The epidemic caused rural residents to clean up and wash their hands before eating, according to the report. From the field, many people did not have enough money to satisfy their daily necessities, therefore they took on debt. Alcohol addicts paid more at local belt shops. Some paid double or triple the maximum retail price due to demand. Thus, the lockdown impacted the lives of rural people, farmers, agricultural labourers, weavers, self-employed persons,

workers in organised and unorganised sectors, private school teachers, and private college lecturers. The study claims lockdown has multiple marginalities on rural populations. COVID-19 has long-term effects on livelihoods across occupations. Corona's safety culture also helped them cope. To keep working people employed, the government should provide zero-interest loans. In their post-pandemic programmes, national and state governments should prioritise rural economic revival to give rural people the confidence to live comfortably. Then only rural people can endure psychological and economic stress with hope.

## References

Gogoi, A. J., & Sarmah, C. (2020). COVID-19 and Lockdown: impact on mental health among the residents of Assam, India. *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Health*, *32*(8), 456-457.

Government of Telangana. (2020). Socio-economic outlook 2020. Planning Department, 27. https://www.telangana.gov.in/PDFDocuments/Telangana-Socio-Economic-Outlook-2020.pdf

Gurung, J. M. (2020). *Impact of COVID-19 on Rural Society of Sikkim*. In R.K. Sinha (Ed.), Impact of COVID-19 on Rural India (pp. 159-168). New Delhi: Kalpaz Publications.

Jena, B. M., & Nanda, B. (2020). *Role Played by Self Help Groups in Combating COVID-19 in Odisha*. In R.K. Sinha (Ed.), Impact of COVID-19 on Rural India (pp. 63-71). New Delhi: Kalpaz Publications.

Kandikuppa, S., & Gupta, P. (2021). Capitalist agriculture and the creation of the circular migrant: Understanding COVID-19's impact on internal migrants in India. *Human Geography*, *14*(1), 128-132.

Kumar, S., Maheshwari, V., Prabhu, J., Prasanna, M., Jayalakshmi, P., Suganya, P., ... & Jothikumar, R. (2020). Social economic impact of COVID-19 outbreak in India. *International journal of pervasive computing and communications*, *16*(4), 309-319.

Kundu, B., & Bhowmik, D. (2020). SOCIETAL IMPACT OF NOVEL CORONA VIRUS (COVID-19 PANDEMIC) IN INDIA. *Indian Journal of Social Research*, *61*.

Mahapatra, A., & Sharma, P. (2021). Education in times of COVID-19 pandemic: Academic stress and its psychosocial impact on children and adolescents in India. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, *67*(4), 397-399.

Modak, T. S., Baksi, S., & Johnson, D. (2020). Impact of covid-19 on Indian villages. *Review of Agrarian Studies*, *10*(2369-2020-1852).

Mohan, M., & Mishra, S. (2021). India's response to the covid-19 pandemic: a frontal assault on the "historically dispossessed". *International journal of health services*, *51*(1), 107-114.

Noonwal, M. V., & Kaur, M. A. A Case Study: Impact of COVID-19 on Local Fairs, Rituals and Customs in India. *Local Food and Community Empowerment through Tourism*, 221.

Hsu, A. T., Lane, N., Sinha, S. K., Dunning, J., Dhuper, M., Kahiel, Z., & Sveistrup, H. (2020). Impact of COVID-19 on residents of Canada's long-term care homes–ongoing challenges and policy response. *International Long-Term Care Policy Network*, *17*, 1-18.

Singh, K., Kondal, D., Mohan, S., Jaganathan, S., Deepa, M., Venkateshmurthy, N. S., ... & Eggleston, K. (2021). Health, psychosocial, and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on people with chronic conditions in India: a mixed methods study. *BMC public health*, *21*, 1-15.

Sengupta, S., & Jha, M. K. (2020). Social policy, COVID-19 and impoverished migrants: challenges and prospects in locked down India. *The International Journal of Community and Social Development*, *2*(2), 152-172.

Rodrigues, U. M., & Xu, J. (2020). <? covid19?> Regulation of COVID-19 fake news infodemic in China and India. *Media International Australia*, *177*(1), 125-131.

Tagat, A., & Kapoor, H. (2020). Go Corona Go! Cultural beliefs and social norms in India during COVID-19. *Journal of Behavioral Economics for Policy*, *4*(S), 9-15.

***Sreeramulu Gosikonda,*** Assistant Professor, School of Law, Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies (Deemed to be University) Mahabubnagar District, Telangana, India, Email: sreeramulug1234@gmail.com

**Displaced and Disadvantaged: A Social History of Bru IDPs in Tripura**

--Lalnundika Darlong & Sharmila Chhotaray

## Abstract

This paper explores the social history of the Bru internally displaced persons (IDPs), focusing on the forced displacement of around 30,000 population from Mizoram to Tripura in 1997 due to ethnic clashes with the Mizo community. It specifically delves into why the Bru tribes were unable to establish their own Autonomous District Councils (ADCs), leading to ethnic violence in Mizoram and subsequent displacement. Utilising qualitative research methods such as oral history and field interviews, this study offers a detailed social history and context. The displacement profoundly affected the Bru community, leaving lasting impacts on future generations and stigmatisation. Beyond a historical account, this research contributes to the ongoing discourses about displacement, territorial, identity and conflict complexities in the northeast (NE) India region. It offers a nuanced analysis of the social and political factors influencing the experiences and aspirations of the displaced Brus.

*Keywords: Bru IDPs, Sixth Schedule, Ethnic Violence, Forced Migration, and Social History*

## Introduction

Despite extensive research on forced displacement and migration, there has been minimal scholarly attention given to the situation in North East (NE) India, particularly in comparison to the significant focus on the displaced Kashmiri Pandits. The enduring challenges of territorial dynamics and adversity faced by the region, including the post-partition era and persistent demands for ethnic homelands or separate states, have been largely overlooked. This paper examines the social history of the approximately 30,000 Bru/Reang tribes who were

forcibly displaced from Mizoram to Tripura during the 1997 ethnic clashes with the Mizo tribes. It draws main attention to the reasons why the Bru were unable to obtain their own Autonomous District Councils (ADCs), which eventually resulted in ethnic violence in Mizoram and displacement of Bru tribes. This resulted in long-lasting effects on the community and present generations. Although the new generations born in the relief camps (Tripura) did not experience the trauma, they continue to face challenges navigating social lives and labelling as 'Sarnathis'(refugees) in their own country[1]. The consequences of displacement on individuals and communities have rendered them more vulnerable to prolonged suffering and victimisation.

As reported in the Global Report on Internal Displacement(2022), approximately 38 million individuals across 141 countries and territories were internally displaced in 2021 due to conflicts, violence, and disasters[1]. This figure represents the second-highest annual estimate in the past ten years, following 2020's record-breaking year for disaster displacement. Conflict and violence resulted in approximately 14.4 million movements, reflecting an increase of almost 50 per cent from the previous year. The UNHCR anticipates that by 2023, forced displacement or statelessness will impact around 117.2 million people, displacing those within their national boundaries (referred to as 'internally displaced persons' or 'IDPs') and internationally (known as 'refugees'). This ongoing crisis has garnered significant attention, particularly due to recent conflicts alike.

Since the 1980s in India, it witnessed the rise of new social movements that challenged the existing developmental paradigm (Jodhka, 2001). This period marked a decline in the dominant 'Nehruvian agenda,' sparking debates on secularism, development, and modernity, leading to substantial shifts in social scientific discourse. India's social structure, rooted in a communitarian tradition (Jodhka, 1999), shows the enduring importance of community bonds and community-based approaches within the country's cultural framework as well.

But later, numerous incidents of movements and ethnic violence also resulted in the internal displacement of large populations, such as the Gujarat riots of 2002 or the displacement of Kashmiri Pandits from 1989 to 1990 (Oommen, 2008; Datta, 2017). While NE India shows a rise in of prevalence sub-nationalism and ethnic homeland movements in the region (Kikhi, 2009; Wouters, 2022). The sensitivity in the region and complexities in autonomy demands since the post-partition period are exemplified by the case of Bru IDPs.

**Methods**

This paper, part of a broader research project, adopted a qualitative approach to delve into the social history of the displaced Brus. For the paper's purpose, oral history interviews are used to grasp historical insights and narratives from participants, allowing for a wide array of meanings and depth in understanding complex social history—where life experience and storytelling intersect (Eastmond, 2007). These primary informants' accounts offer valuable insights into comprehending the underlying reasons behind forced migration, such as the case of the IDPs. To protect the confidentiality of participants and acknowledge the sensitive political nature of the explored issues, the authors referred to the participants as anonymous in the paper. Additionally, the study also utilises secondary sources such as e-resources, books, newspapers, magazines, journals, articles, research papers, manuscripts, and official records to enhance the empirical analysis of the primary data. The fieldwork was conducted at the Naising Para Camp (North Tripura), where the Mizoram Bru Displaced People's Forum (MBDPF) main headquarters is located, and the Kaskau Para relief camp, which is located close to the state border between Tripura and Mizoram in North Tripura district. It also obtained historical accounts from both Bru and Mizo elders, and former officials fromMamit district (predominant Brus region) in Mizoram, who could provide insights into the displacement. Targeting the first generation of Bru informants who resided earlier in Mizoram and were exposed to

the event, in-depth interviews were carried out aged above 50 from Kaskau Para and Naising Para Camp who were mostly labourers. Additionally, information was gathered from MBDPF officials and former government officials who could give an account of the event during their tenure.

An interdependent link exists between the ethnicity of the researcher and the research subjects. While it may be easier to gather data in a language that is widely spoken, a researcher's subjectivity—their identity, religion, or community affiliation—may come under examination because it may be assumed that they are pursuing their interests. There are counterarguments from multiple outlets concerning the Mizos, who are the counterparts of the displaced Bru. While non-Mizo researchers frequently portray the Brus as the primary victims and Mizo groups in an unfavourable light, most Mizo scholars frequently shift blame for the displacement from the Mizo perspective to the Bru militants and the Hindu right-wing groups, allegedly portraying the Mizo population and Christianity in an unfavourable light. Therefore, this research has taken with caution the viewpoints of informants from diverse ethnic backgrounds, as well as archival sources and the insights of scholars, with careful attention paid to the subtle details of the context.

**General Bru Migration and History: Brief Background**

The Bru people, also known as Riangs (alternatively spelt as 'Reang'), have a long history in the region of Mizoram, Tripura, and surrounding areas. They predominantly resided in Assam, Mizoram, and Tripura, speaking the 'Kau Bru' language, which falls within the 'Tibeto-Burman' linguistic group and identifies with the 'Mongoloid' race (Acharya, 2004; Reang, 2021). Within Tripura's 19 Scheduled Tribes (STs) list, they rank as the second-largest population according to the 2011 Census. Recognized by the Government of India as particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs), they are among the 75 PVTGs among the 705 Scheduled Tribes across 17 states and one Union Territory. In Tripura, out of the

total ST population of 5.92 lakhs, the Riangs constitute the second largest group, totalling 1.88 lakhs as per the 2011 census. However, in Mizoram and Assam, they are categorized as 'Riang,' a sub-tribe of 'Kuki,' complicating an accurate population count. The term 'Bru' is officially used to identify the displaced group from Mizoram, distinguishing them from the general tribe population.

The notion that the Bru IDPs of Mizoram originally hailed from the state of Tripura was widely propagated by politicians, scholars, and the media. Consequently, it was concluded that the Tripura state was more responsible for the prospects of Bru IDPs. Additionally, it has been revealed that in response to the exodus of the Bru tribe, also known as Riangs, from Mizoram, the Mizoram Government wrote a letter to the National Human Rights Commission, providing various details about their migration to Mizoram. The letter stated that the Bru tribe, classified as a Schedule Tribe according to the Constitution Order (1950), migrated to Mizoram after conflict with the royal kingdom of Tripura in the 1940s. Some people also generally believe that all members of the Bru tribe came from Tripura during the displacement caused by the Gumti Hydro Electric Power Project in the 1970s[1]. Although this may not be entirely accurate, it can be established from the accounts of certain elderly individuals aged 80 years and older, from both the Brus and Mizos that many of Brus were already residing in Mizoram by the 19th century. However, the fundamental issue on this matter is determining who the genuine indigenous or native people of Mizoram are. Xaxa's (1999) argument on the term 'indigenous,' especially concerning the NE tribes, asserts that the problem lies in the definition of the term. Additionally, some politicians have claimed that the Brus are originally from Tripura and recently migrated to Mizoram. For example, several politicians in Mizoram have argued that since the Brus are originally from Tripura, they may continue to resist the Mizoram government there indefinitely. However, even the situation of the Mizos, who did not arrive in the present-day Mizoram territory until the 16th century when a small number of tribes arrived and were later joined by other

groups that are now considered indigenous (Xaxa, 1999), can be a matter of contention when determining indigenous or native identity, particularly in the NE scenario, and thus varies across the country. Consequently, asserting one's indigenous or native land always requires scrutiny, and therefore, the legitimacy of land is determined by the majority ethnic population.

According to the most elderly informants, they accounted that many were already settled in Mizoram even around the 19th century. To which, the Mizo scholars like Lianhmingthanga and Lalthangliana (1992) also acknowledged Bru tribes were already present in Mizoram as early as 1892. The Brus are considered to be one of the mongoloid race tribes and migrated across Burma. One group of Brus settled in Tripura, while another group moved towards Mizoram from the Chittagong hill tracts of Bangladesh. The origins of the Brus in present Tripura can be traced back since 14th century when they first settled from the Chittagong Hills under the reigns of Maharaja Ratna Manikya I (Reang, 2021). And records of the royal army list of Maharaja Dhanya Manikya's reign also provide evidence of their presence in Tripura. In Mizoram side, the Bru settlements consists into two groups 'Dikhin Reang' and 'Khondol Reang' (Lianhmingthnaga and Hluna, 2004). The first group, 'Dikhin Riang,' migrated to the south side of Tripura from the Chittagong Hill tracts and Burma, and some members of this group can also be found in the Chakma District Council area and Lunglei District. The second group, 'Khondol Reang,' may have moved towards the Mamit, Lawngtlai, and Aizawl districts of Mizoram. The Bru's first settlement was near the Maini River of 'Mainitlang Hills,' which is now known as the 'Karnafuli River' in present day Chittagong (Bangladesh). This area is presently located in the border parts of the southwestern parts of Lunglei District in Mizoram. Many informants therefore noted that the stories from their forefathers in earlier periods close to Tripura migration around the 14-15 century, after the Bru settled in the Karnafuli River area of Bangladesh, they turned towards Tripura and Mizoram for settlement due to various clashes with other ethnic groups. One needs to understand earlier tribes'

settlements consisted of constant migration where various community clashes persisted.

Even during the reign of Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya in the 1940s, Bru one of the largest tribal populations in Tripura rebelled against the monarch's rule under the leadership of Ratnamoni. The rebellion was sparked by the heavy taxes imposed on the community, which led to impoverishment. Although the royal army defeated the rebellion, many were displaced within Tripura and fled to Mizoram and Assam. Some populations in South Tripura, such as those in Amarpur and Udaipur, migrated towards the North Tripura district. Several others fled outside of Tripura territory to places like the Chittagong Hill Tracts (present-day Bangladesh) and the Lushai Hills (present-day Mizoram). After the rebellion, a shift in migration from Tripura to Mizoram occurred.  Based on census data, the Bru/Riang people are recognized as separate Scheduled Tribes in Tripura, but in Mizoram and Assam, they are grouped under the Kuki tribe. The Mizoram Census of 1960 showed that the Kuki tribe comprised about 1,000 individuals, including the arrival of the Brus. By the 1981 Census, the Kuki tribe had grown to a total of 21,065 individuals. The population increased to approximately 31,092 by 1991 but then declined to 21,040 by the 2001 census due to the displacement of the Brus from Mizoram.

However, the exact number of individuals who migrated to Mizoram is unclear. Some populations moved to Mizoram after the 1940s rebellion against the monarch's regime. And some reported that many individuals left in the 1950s before and after the collapse of the Kaptai Dam in Bangladesh, along with the Chakmas. Additionally, Hussain (2006) noted that during the construction of the Gomati hydroelectric project in the 1970s, many people were displaced, including the Bru people. During these turbulent times, the region inhabited by the Bru communities lacked a particular sense of unity and for centuries remained a battleground for the expansion and consolidation of power among the Hindus,

Mughals, and British colonial rulers. This context highlights the complexity of determining the history and conflict, particularly in the NE region of India. Therefore, the Bru people have a complex and multifaceted history, with evidence of their presence in the region dating back centuries. Their migration across Myanmar, Bangladesh, Tripura, and Mizoram has shaped their identity and history. This Bru complex history emphasizes the importance of understanding the Autonomy demands in NE India and its relevance to Bru's failure autonomy demands, which leads to their displacement.

**NE India and Autonomy Demands**

It is imperative to comprehend the political climate and situation in post-independent NE India before exploring the root causes of the Bru-Mizo conflict and the history of its displacement. This is significant as it is linked to the Bru displacement scenario. Following India's partition, the separation of Nagaland in 1963 as a separate state and the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971 major reformation led to several other states following suit in gaining statehood after their inclusion in union territories, including Meghalaya (1972), Mizoram (1987), and Arunachal Pradesh (1987) splitting from earlier Assam state (Baruah 2005; Bhaumik 2009). In their pursuit of a designated ethnic territory (Arora & Kipgen, 2017), several groups also merged into a wide-ranging list of demands, including separate states such as 'Bodoland' in Assam, 'Kukiland' in Manipur, 'Tipraland' in Tripura, and several other autonomous district councils like the Brus as per the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Nevertheless, this endeavour for autonomy sometimes leads to violence, leading to a sudden upswing of insurgency, ultimately resulting in multiple displacements across the NE states.

The importance of Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) in NE India and the reasons behind the continued demands for their establishment by several tribes need to be addressed to understand the failure of the Brus in their demand for an

ADC, which ultimately led to their displacement from Mizoram. The Indian Constitution has provided a clear direction for protecting the rights of tribal communities in the NE region by granting them special privileges with the establishment of ADCs (Hoakip, 2023). This provision was implemented in four states of the Northeast, including Tripura, where the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) was granted, encompassing all the communities classified as tribes in the state. Assam has three ADCs, Manipur has six district councils, Meghalaya has three Autonomous District Councils, and in Mizoram, the Chakmas, Lai, and Mara have been granted ADCs. These councils have been granted the power to manage and administer the affairs of their respective regions, including the power to make laws on various topics, such as land, forest, and local governance (Xaxa, 2023).

The councils are also responsible for preserving the social, cultural, and traditional values of their respective tribes. By providing a platform for tribal communities to voice their concerns and grievances, these councils have played a critical role in promoting the participation of tribal communities in the democratic process. Furthermore, they have also been instrumental in preserving the unique identity of tribal communities by promoting their culture, traditions, and customs. However, the implementation of the Sixth Schedule has its challenges, as the councils have faced issues such as limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of trained personnel. There have also been concerns regarding the limited representation of women in these councils, which has hampered the effective participation of half of the tribal population. Nonetheless, the establishment of ADCs has been a significant step in ensuring the protection of tribal rights in the NE region. They have provided a platform for tribes to participate in the decision-making process and have helped preserve their unique cultural identity. However, there is still much work to be done to ensure that these councils are more inclusive and effective in addressing the needs and concerns of tribal communities.

**The Socio-Political History of Bru Displacement and Linkages**

To fully grasp the current challenges faced by the Bru IDPs and the associated conflict issues, it's essential to explore Mizoram State's historical background. The establishment of the Lushai Hills ADCs in 1952, following the abolishment of the chieftainship system, was a significant step under the Sixth Schedule to India's Constitution (Nunthara, 1996). This move aimed to introduce an alternative governing body. Subsequently, the Central government formed the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council (PLRC) in 1953, catering to the Lakher (now Mara), Pawi (now Lai), and Chakma tribes. Recognising the unique identities within the Pawi and Lakher tribes, there were growing demands for separate ADCs (Liankhaia, 2002; Lalfakuala, 2016). The Sixth Schedule allowed the creation of self-governing administrative regions with provisions for autonomy. As a result, the PLRC evolved into three distinct bodies: the Pawi Autonomous District Council, the Lakher Autonomous District Council, and the Chakma Autonomous District Council. The formation of the Mizoram Hill Councils, comprising the Lushai Hills ADCs and the PLRC, aimed to promote self-governance and address the diverse needs of tribal communities. Over time, dissatisfaction arose among some minority tribes, sparking calls for increased autonomy.

Following Mizoram's separation from Assam as a union territory in 1972 through the North East Re-organisation Act 1971, the Lai, Mara and Chakma tribes established independent autonomous district councils under the Indian Constitution's sixth Schedule[1]. This move aimed to address concerns about encroachment on their territories, mirroring similar councils established earlier. During the early 1970s, this background initiated a surge in political awareness among the minority tribes like Pang and other smaller tribes Bawm, Bru/Riang, and Tlangau. This led to the formation of the United Pang People's Party (UPPP), inspired by the establishment of ADCs for other tribes. This movement advocated

for regional or district-level autonomy, empowering these communities in their pursuit of political agency and self-determination. Simultaneously, the Bru and Hmar communities had their distinct paths within Mizoram. The western fringes saw the Bru community involved in uprisings, symbolising their struggle against economic disparities and the assertion of ethnic identity. Likewise, the eastern regions became a focal point of unrest for the Hmar community, reflecting their quest for recognition and identity preservation within the Sixth Schedule.

Additionally, Mizoram attained statehood in 1987, and the establishment of the Sinlung Hills Council added depth to the Bru autonomy demands. In 1994, the Hmar People Convention (HPC) was formed to seek greater autonomy within Mizoram[1]. The Hmar community, an integral part of Mizoram's identity, holds diverse affiliations, with some associating themselves with the wider Chin-Kuki-Mizo grouping. Negotiations between the Mizoram government and the HPC led to the creation of the Sinlung Hills Development Council in 1997. A significant milestone was reached in 2018 with the Memorandum of Settlement formalising the Sinlung Hills Council through the Sinlung Hills Council Act of 2018. This council operates within the Aizawl district, encompassing Hmar-dominated territories.

Thereafter, the informants reported that the Reang Democratic Party (RDP) which was established in 1990 with the specific goal of achieving their rights and also for the demands of their separate autonomous district council (ADC) in southern Mizoram, exclusively representing the Bru (Reang) tribes. Initially, they attempted collaboration with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to bolster their pursuit of this ADC. However, the RDP was dissolved during the tenure of the Congress government in Mizoram. Despite seeking partnerships with major parties like the BJP, the RDP's impact on the state's political scene was limited. Throughout the 1990s, larger parties like the Mizo National Front (MNF) and the Congress government gained substantial influence in Mizoram, overshadowing

the role of smaller entities like the RDP. Later, in 1994, many former RDP members joined the Bru National Union (BNU), an NGO advocating for general Bru welfare and reinstating their demand for an ADC. However, the displacement of the Bru community in 1997 led several leaders to shift their focus to the Mizoram Bru Displaced People's Forum (MBDPF). Within this forum, these leaders assumed significant roles, guiding the community's concerns and initiatives for resettlement. MBDPF officials pointed out additional reasons behind their demand for the ADC. In the 1990s, when a new government came into power, they designated their land as a reserved forest area, now known as the Dampa Tiger Wildlife Sanctuary. And Mizo officials, without explicitly blaming any specific political party like MNF or Congress, linked the statehood obtained in 1987 to the government's desire to implement development projects, including the sanctuary, to generate revenue for the residents. Meanwhile, a Bru informant previously associated with RDP recalled a different perspective:

"Initially, the ethnic Mizo influential bodies like Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) and Young Mizo Association (YMA) opposed our demands. Also, our persistence did not succeed, which led to 1997 displacement event, even when some of us voted for Congress government leaders in hope for gaining our ADC demands in exchange for electoral support." (May 10, 2021)

The Bru informants show distinctive opinions regarding their political affiliations. Often, they are alleged to be the major supporters of the BJP, but in actual concerns, they tend to emphasise political support that can enhance their ADC demands since earlier. But in post-displacement, after their ADC demands are dissolved, the political support emphasis has also created dividends within the displaced Bru population, which sometimes led to various arguments. But generally, the affiliations' concerns mostly stemmed from major interests that can give better support for their overall development measures and aids; not only displaced Brus but the other displaced victims' cases in this particular context per

se, have also generally processed in achieving their demands. Amidst these discussions, the earlier concerns were raised by Mizo representatives regarding their protest over Bru ADC demands failure and asserting the caution over the state's limited territorial size. They feared that granting ADCs to the Brus could potentially lead to further division of the state. Expressing this worry, a Mizo official remarked:

"If ADCs are granted to the Brus, it might fuel demands for a separate state, especially considering the Chakma's existing ADC strongholds." (March 8, 2022)

The caution stemmed from past decisions granting separate ADCs to the Chakma, Lai, and Mara tribes in 1972, pivotal supporters of Mizoram's formation since the 1960s. Concerns were amplified by the prospect of providing ADCs to the Brus, potentially igniting further ambitions, perhaps even a quest for a separate state.

The turning point before the Brus' exodus was an early conference held in Aizawl district in 1997. Around 400 influential from Bru ethnic backgrounds attended, discussing critical issues such as forming an ADC, re-registering voter lists after 20,000 Brunames were omitted in the 1996 Lok Sabha election, securing at least 3 MLA seats, and officially registering their ST category as 'Bru' instead of 'Riang'. Post-conference, opposition and protests arose from ethnic-oriented Mizo bodies like the Young Mizo Association (YMA) and a student organisation called Milo Zirlai Pawl (MZP), against the Bru's primary demand for ADC. This resistance was rooted in the fear of losing ethnic political dominance and concerns that other minorities might gain influence. Consequently, Mizo groups incited fear and protests in the Bru in 1997 to halt their ADC demand. Following the 1996 Lok Sabha election and the unsuccessful ADC demand, tensions intensified between the two groups. The situation worsened when a Mizo forest guard was killed by the militants - Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF) in 1997, the armed outfit that was raised since 1996 in subsequent of these ethnic conflicts and to protect the Bru rights. The death of Mizo forest guard incident ignited major ethnic

violence and led to the displacement of Brus, who fled to Tripura. The conflict stemmed from the Bru community's pursuit of autonomy within Mizoram, perceived as a threat to Mizo dominance. Attempts were made to invalidate various claims, such as removing Bru's name from voter lists and disputing census results. The blame game between the ethnic groups persisted, evident in testimonies from witnesses on both sides of the conflict. They often claimed that Mizo counterparts began assimilation efforts during Mizoram's establishment, impacting language, religion, nomenclature, and general cultural identity. This assimilation is evident in Bru's name and clothing choices, which resemble those of the Mizo community. In counter-reactions, some Mizo counterparts often accused the Hindu right-wing organisation – Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) of supporting various displaced Bru organisations leading to their ADC movements' demands. Likewise, they alleged that certain displaced Bru officials, seen as political opportunists, incited hostility towards Mizos to further their cause. Hence, the presence of 'Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram,' an RSS-affiliated organisation for schools and Ashrams, can be observed in relief camps. But in general, after their displacement and dissolution of their ADC demands, since the repatriation started in 2009 the focus has shifted more on materialising their rehabilitation packages and assistance aids, which are brought through by their Mizoram Bru Displaced People's Forum (MBDPF) initiatives. Though often alleged, the officials themselves never assert any political affiliations or their engagements.

Both ethnic groups often blame each other for the conflict: displaced Brus resist the imposition of Mizo culture and religion, citing these as reasons for their exodus from Mizoram. Meanwhile, Mizos alleged displaced Brus' ties with Hindu right-wing groups, fueling confrontation. Post-displacement, Bru officials were often accused of aligning with mainstream BJP parties while countering by alleging the Congress state government's failure to prevent displacement. Efforts for repatriation began during the NDA central govement tenure (1998–2004),

coinciding with peace agreements signed by militant outfits. However, most informants (both Mizos and Brus) come to an agreement where they often alleged that Tripura's Communist Party of India-led government and Mizoram National Front (MNF) administrations post-1997 allegedly didn't adequately resolve the resettlement process. The displaced Brus believes the BJP's state government in Tripura since 2019 and the central government since 2014 have accelerated efforts towards their permanent resettlement, solidifying a resolution in Tripura by 2020. Nonetheless, their demands for ADCs in Mizoram remain unfulfilled amidst their permanent settlement in Tripura.

**In the Field: Narratives of Displacement through Oral Histories**

This section highlights the historical narratives of the displaced Brus since 1997. It depicts mainly their thorough displaced journey, examining their primary resettlement dynamics, the subtleties of stigmatisation both within and between ethnic groups, and the tenacious search for identification and belonging in the face of adversity. First, Ronjana, a 61-year-old woman living in the Kaskau Para relief camp, described the horrific event that occurred in 1997 when a Mizo forest guard was killed, resulting in their collective displacement:

"We had no choice but to escape when our homes were set on fire. Our entire family had to flee and find refuge in the current camp". (March 29, 2022)

During the Ronjana interview, Katireng aged 65 (male), who experienced the event, intervened and instead expressed empathy towards the general Mizo residents as well. He mentioned:

"While some Mizos offered aid with food and essentials during our journey, certain Mizo ethnic right-wing factions among them pushed for our departure. Despite the churches attempting peaceful solutions, they were overpowered by local these Mizo organizations". (March 29, 2022)

Mizo ethnic-based organisations such as MZP and YMA wield substantial political influence in Mizoram, extending their reach even into churches and political parties.  This ethnic influential bodies in NE context comparison to mainlands, is greater than that of political and religious organisations. Nonetheless, this demonstrates the extent to which local political formations periodically subjugated the Mizo population and occasionally becomes the people mouthpiece. However, both sides continue to engage in the blame game, accusing the other of igniting the ethnic violence. There have also been reports of widespread crimes like rape, murder, and house burning. Despite these assertions, state representatives have refuted them. 52-year-old male Kaskau Para camp informant Thana told his story during an interview on January 28, 2021. "The night before we arrived in Tripura, some Mizo people were yelling slogans 'kan ram ni hi' (this is our land), demanding our departure," he said, recalling a traumatic experience during their migration from Mizoram to Tripura.

The suffering of the displaced Brus is highlighted in this previous story, and it is crucial to learn more about their experiences—which are occasionally marked by violent actions. Urvashi Butalia (1993) noted that because of the social shame attached to experiences like forced marriages, rape, and kidnapping during times of conflict, survivors and their families are often discouraged from sharing accounts. This silence highlights how important it is to have these accounts available so that survivors can talk about their experiences without fear of shame or reprisal.

Additionally, there is still a stigma, which leads the younger generation to hide their identity frequently and present themselves as local Brus (Riangs) from Tripura. This social division promotes forms of alienation, a phenomenon that Goffman (1963) referred to as social stigmatisation. Furthermore, even among the same ethnic tribes, stigmatisation persists. Displaced Brus frequently experience social stigma after being uprooted because they are perceived as different because

of their Mizoram origins. Relocating brings new chances and problems for navigating ethnic identities and a sense of belonging, particularly for the older generation with greater attachments to their previous residences. Despite differences in prior employment, social rank, and property ownership, there is a generational difference in these experiences. Therefore, Melinda J. Milligan (2003, p. 383) observes that through 'social', 'symbolic', and 'meaningful ties' formed by people who have spent decades at camp, there is more attachment to these features to this new settlement. But for the displaced Bru case, stronger ethnic ties to Tripura have fostered a sense of belonging to the Tripura state, as seen by the large number of people who chose to stay there rather than return to Mizoram during repatriation drives. Following their 23-year departure from Mizoram, they envisioned themselves migrating to Tripura, a region with more intimate ethnic ties. Therefore, their impression of a new home is not only shaped by this redefined feeling of home and attachment to the environment but it is also linked to their ethnicity and emotional ties to the Tripura side, which led them to permanent settlement.

While Mr.Apeto from Naising Para Relief Camp, who was underage during the 1997 event but remembered:

"We were just kids playing football. But after 1995, even before the killing of the Mizo forest guard, our Mizo friends started distancing themselves from us while playing football. They would often call us 'Tui Kuk,' using it as a discriminatory term for our ethnic group" (May 15, 2021).

The roots of ethnic political sentiments began stirring among civilians before the 1996 Mizoram Lok Sabha election, stemming from the demands for ADCs that had persisted since the 1990s. These sentiments have perpetuated discriminatory remarks exchanged between groups. The Brus in response, often label Mizos as 'Skam,' using another derogatory term referencing their background as another marginalised ethnic group. This continuous stigmatisation persists between the

two ethnicities; aligning with Goffman's (1963) argument that stigma can deeply discredit individuals. This stigma within the Bru and Mizo communities tends to be based on ethnic backgrounds, notably intensifying more after the ADC demands. Even after their permanent resettlement, the younger generation continues to face stigmatisation, not just from Mizos in the past. One student, Mawia, a 20-year-old male, expressed:

"When we attend school or college with our friends, we avoid mentioning that we're from the relief camps. Instead, we claim to be Tripura Bru locals to be treated normally. Otherwise, we risk being labelled as 'Sarnathi' (refugees) and certain discriminations in social lives." (June 27, 2021)

Despite facing new challenges, the displaced Bru IDPs found a new sense of community in their new settlements. Their time in relief camps contributed to forming a communal identity, despite proximity or similar ethnicity and language among settlements. This sense of 'otherness' developed due to the ongoing resettlement issues and barriers and labelled as 'refugees' or Sarnathi' in their own country, instead fostered a feeling of much more unity among the displaced than before in Mizoram, promoting a cohesive and solidarity-driven purpose. Likewise the displaced Brus, Ankur Datta (2017, p. 128) argues that the lives of the displaced Kashmiri Pandits are "shaped by migration", defining their sense of home through this process. However, for the displaced Brus, their attachment to the Bru ethnicity in Tripura who hold the second highest population in tribal groups was the driving force behind their arrival and permanent settlement, distinguishing it from other states.

**Concluding Insights**

The case of Mizoram offers a profound lens through which to understand the intricate interplay of ethnic tensions, aspirations for autonomy, and the haunting legacy of colonial territorial constructs. The intricate challenges inherent in

resolving such conflicts become undeniably evident, including the dire need for holistic approaches that address grievances comprehensively. Effective mechanisms for autonomy and representation, when coupled with a concerted effort to foster harmonious coexistence and inclusive governance, stand as imperatives for sustainable peace (Xaxa & Roluahpuia, 2020). Against the broader Indian backdrop, ADCs emerge as crucial instruments for safeguarding tribal rights and cultural heritage in the NE region. The recent Manipur conflict is an example of the nuanced relationship between ethnic identity and territorial dynamics.

The Brus, a significant ethnic group in the region, has faced various difficulties and socio-political challenges, particularly related to displacement. Conflicts between the majority of Mizos and the minority Brus in Mizoram resulted in a significant number of Brus being evicted from their land in Mizoram with their failure demands of ADCs. As a result, the Brus became internally displaced persons (IDPs) and spent over two decades living in temporary relief camps in Tripura. Hence, the cautious stance within the Mizo faction also stemmed from concerns about the potential repercussions of granting ADCs to non-Mizo, non-Christian ethnic groups like the Bru and Chakma. These concerns encompassed fears of territorial division, potential demands for separate states, and the preservation of distinct ethnic and religious identities separate from the Mizo majority. Despite being displaced for many years, it wasn't until the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) intervened that dialogue began on their repatriation and relief funds. However, there was disagreement between the Mizoram and Tripura administrations regarding the exact number of displaced Brus. Although the demand for an Autonomous District Council was withdrawn by the displaced Brus gradually, an agreement was made based on the overall development of their community and resettlement back in Mizoram. The repatriation and rehabilitation period can be looked back to several key events since 2001 when the tripartite agreement was signed between the governments of

Mizoram, Tripura, and the central government of India, to repatriate the displaced Brus to Mizoram but did not start until 2009, and only a small number of displaced Brus returned to Mizoram. The last attempt at repatriation was made in 2020 and a new permanent settlement agreement was signed between the governments of Mizoram, Tripura, and the central government, along with displaced Bru leaders to settle the displaced Brus who want to stay back in Tripura. The agreement included provisions for their repatriation over two years, along with a rehabilitation package for those who returned. In this latest turn of events, some families chose to return to Mizoram, while the remaining members were permitted to remain in Tripura and received Tripura residents' certification. Even in this new settlement, the displaced Bru group faced difficulties highlighting the urgent need for increased efforts to guarantee their safety and social inclusivity. This displacement period showcases the displaced Bru community's resilience and tenacity in starting over in the face of all these hardships. It also adds another dimension of complexities that delves back into the colonial territorial constructs that are still inherited in the recent related ethnic conflicts and territorial nuances in the NE India. Thus, it is essential to consider the perspectives of both ethnic groups when examining the root causes of these disputes, as this study explains, particularly to comprehend the complexities of distinct autonomy demands and how they contribute to ethnic violence.

## References

Acharya, R. K. (2004). *Bru or Reang: An Aspiration of the Reang tribe of Tripura in Tui: A Quarterly Research Journal of Tribal Life and Culture, XII (1).* Agartala, Tribal Research Institute.

Arora, V., & Kipgen, N. (2017). Demand for Kukiland and Kuki ethnic nationalism. In V. Arora& N. Jayaram (Eds.) *Democratisation in the Himalayas.* Routledge.

Baruah, S. (2005). *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India.* Oxford University Press.

Bhaumik, S. (2009). *Troubled Periphery: The Crisis of India's Northeast.* Sage Publications.

Butalia, U. (1993). Community, state, and gender: On women's agency during partition. *Economic and Political Weekly, 28*(17), WS12–WS21.

Datta, A. (2017). *On Uncertain Ground: Displaced Kashmiri Pandits in Jammu and Kashmir.* Oxford University Press.

Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity.* Prentice-Hall.

Eastmond, M. (2007). Stories as lived experience: narratives in forced migration research. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 20*(2), 248–264.

Haokip, T. (2023).Territoriality. In J. J. P. Wouters& T. B. Subba (Eds.), *TheRoutledgeCompanion to Northeast India.* Routledge.

Hussain, M. (2006).Internally displaced persons in India's North-East.*Economic and Political Weekly, 41*(5), 391-393.

Jodhka, S. (1999). Community and identities: Interrogating contemporary discourses on India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34(41), 2957–2963.

Jodhka, S. (Ed.) (2001). *Community and Identities: Contemporary Discourses on Culture and Politics in India.* Sage Publications.

Kikhi, K. (2009). What ails the North East? Challenges and responses.*Sociological Bulletin, 58*(3), 346-366.

Lianhmingthanga & Hluna, J. V. (2004). Riang in Mizoram: Settlement and its impact on cross-border migration. In S. Sangkima (Ed.), *Cross-Border Migration: Mizoram*. Shipra Publications.

Lianhmingthanga, F., & Lalthangliana, B. (1992).*MizoNunhlui (Part II): Pawl 9 and 10 Zirlai Bu.* Mizoram Board of School Education.

Liangkhaia.(2002). *MizoChanchin,* L.T.L. Publications.

Lalfakzuala, J. K. (2016). Ethnicity and autonomy: The unending political process in Mizoram social change and development, *13*, 46–53.

Milligan, M. J. (2003). Displacement and identity discontinuity: The role of nostalgia in establishing new identity categories. *Symbolic Interaction, 26*(3), 381–403.

Nunthara, C.(1996). *Mizoram: Society and Polity.* Indus Publishing Company.

Oommen, T. K. (2008). Reconciliation in Post-Godhra Gujarat: The Role of Civil Society. Pearson Education India.

Pachuau, J. (2014). *Being Mizo: Identity and Belonging in Northeast India.* Oxford University Press.

Reang, L. (2021). *History of Reangs (Bru).* Eastern Publishers.

Wouters, J. J. P. (Ed.). (2022). *Vernacular Politics in Northeast India: Democracy, Ethnicity,andIndigeneity*. Oxford University Press.

Xaxa, V. (1999). Tribes are the indigenous people of India. *Economic and Political Weekly, 34*(51), 3589–3595.

Xaxa, V. (2023).Sixth Schedule. In J. J. P. Wouters& T. B. Subba (Eds.), *TheRoutledge Companion to Northeast India.* Routledge.

Xaxa, V., & Roluahpuia. (2020). Indigenous peoples and nations interface in India. In K. J. Joy & S. R. Jacob (Eds.), *Indigeneity and Nation*. Routledge.

*Lalnundika Darlong* is a Ph.D. Scholar,  Tripura University

*Email: ndikadarlong@gmail.com*

*Sharmila Chhotaray* is an Assistant University, Tripura University

*Email: sharmilachhotaray@tripurauniv.ac.in*

# Can Pre-departure help in better Migration Governance? The case of Indian migrants to Gulf

--Sadananda Sahoo & Feroz Khan

## Abstract

Historically, India is a migrant sending country. Since the colonial time massive migration from India to many countries are almost a regular feature. Today, India is also the leading migrant sending country with a whopping 18 million migrants' stock and 32 million diasporas. Going to another country is quite often not just an economic but also social and psychological challenge. This is where all those who intend to migrate need to learn about other's culture and behaviourand learn to adjust in the real world of work and struggle. Today India is the largest migrant sending county in the world having a migrant stock of about 18 million. It is very important for migration governance and more so for country like India. In this paper we try to examine the importance of pre-departure programmes for those migrating to Emigration Check Required (ECR) countries in general and the Gulf in particular. India is a major source of migrant labour in the Gulf. The objectives of the paper is to identify some of the issues and also tries to provide some insights on the migration governance gaps and how they can be tackled through better Pre-departure strategies in the case of India. Based on secondary sources and using content analysis, the paper provides a broad overview of the importance of migration governance and the pre-departure orientation for migrants in the context of the Indian migrants going to GCC countries.

*Keywords: Migration Governance, Pre-Departure, Diaspora*

## I. Introduction

It's important to understand why the Pre-departure orientation and related programmes at various levels are very important in the context of any migrant sending countries in general and India in particular. The first and foremost important thing is to consider the demography of India which is having highest youth population and the economy within country is not adequately absorbing such a huge population. As per the analysis done by the United Nations' World Population Prospects-2022, the population of India will reach 166.8 crores by 2050 from its 146 cores as of 2021. This demographic scenario will continue till next three decades making India the most populous country in the world. Being a migrant sending country and having a well-managed migration is the need of the time. This will help the country to reap the demographic advantage in short terms such as promoting better livelihood, livelihood, economic and social remittances to far reaching collaboration in the areas of scientific collaboration, innovation, entrepreneurship, and soft power diplomacy etc.

Based on secondary sources and using content analysis, the paper provides a broad overview of the importance of migration governance and the pre-departure orientation for migrants in the context of the Indian migrants going to GCC countries. In this paper we try to examine the importance of pre-departure programmes for those migrating to Emigration Check Required (ECR) countries in general and the Gulf in particular. India is a major source of migrant labour in the Gulf. This paper tries to identify some of the issues and tries to provide some insights on the migration governance gaps and how they can be tackled to a great extent through better Pre-departure. Based on secondary sources, the paper provides a broad overview of the importance of migration governance and the pre-departure orientation for migrants in the context of the Indian migrants going to GCC countries.

The objectives of the paper are to identify some of the issues and also try to provide some insight on the migration governance gaps and how they can be tackled through better Pre-departure strategies in the case of India. The following is the scheme of the paper: Section II briefly discussed the importance of the pre-departure training program. Section III in brief provides the best practises followed in the global north and global south in relation to the pre-departure programme. Section IV discusses the case of India and its pre-departure programme. whereas Section V deals with the challenges faced by the workers. Section VI provides a critical view of India's pre-departure programme. Section VII will conclude the paper.

## II. Why Pre-departure training programme?

Pre-departure is the format for discussion that provides tools for successful adaptation to the new environment (Weinmann & Bragg, 1993). Workers who are migrating abroad on ECR passports for the purpose of work are not likely to have a positive impact, unless they are not aware of the land, culture, language, customs, and law of the destination country. Migrants are comfortable under the ambit of the law of their home country, but once they leave, they are in the policy realm of their destination country (Barsbai, 2018). Pre-departure orientation is therefore used to help the migrant workers by orienting them about the destination country and reducing the maximum unpredictability involved migrating or working in the destination country. As Poudel et al. (2019) noted in their study, migration is a stressful process. It can impact the mental health of the workers. The pre-departure orientation programmes are designed to reduce stress. As Ali (2005) argued, the pre-departure programmes are designed for the whole cycle of migration. The programmes are designed in such a manner that they will help the migrant workers by reducing their vulnerabilities and maximising benefits from overseas employment. The migration cycle begins with the decision to migrate for overseas employment to adapt to working in a new environment.

The pre-departure orientation programmes appear to try to assist migrants at each stage of the migration cycle. The programme of pre-departure is not only associated with the workers; rather, it also helps the students and prepares them to study abroad. However, the focus of the article will remain on the migrant workers.

### III. Global Perspective: Learning from the best practices

From the global south the two Asian countries Sri Lanka and Philippines do the campaigning of legal and safe migration at community level. Tools like – drama, talk show, discussion and programme in mass media are used to do the campaigning. The help of NGOs is also taken to penetrate at the grassroot of the society (Siddiqui et al., 2008). Apart from this at the official level both the countries have their Pre-Departure Training Programmes. The Sir Lankan government provide two-three weeks compulsory Pre-Departure Orientation Programme. The programme programme is mainly focused on female workers who are looking for overseas job opportunities as domestic workers (Siddiqui et al., 2008). Moreover, the recruiting agents also provide some informal trainings to the migrants. The Philippine government prepare their migrant for their journey through Pre-Departure Training Programme. The government of Philippine involves NGOs and recruiting agencies to widespread the programme. Form the global north, the Mobility programme of the European Union train the people to study, train or teach in a foreign country. The mobility programme ran between 2007 to 2013. The programme focused on the pedagogy, culture and the linguistic training (Membrive& del Rio, 2016).

The pre-departure training programme aims to deliver knowledge of safe and legal migration. The programme is offered by different agencies in the sending countries. In general, the foreign employment bureaus or agencies of the government offer the programme. The NGOs are also offering the programme in many countries (Thimothy & Sasikumar, 2012). The programme helps the

trainers, and the migrants learn about the culture, language, traditions, and rules of the destination country (IOM, 2005). To an extent, it also serves to know the set of skills required for the job. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought significant challenges to people who wish to travel from one country to another. In the case of India, labour migrating on ECR passports abroad is one of the most affected categories. Flexible labour demand, travel restrictions, quarantines, the expenses incurred on quarantine, the fragile travel advisories, and mental anxieties are some of the few challenges faced by migrant workers. At the time of this writing, it is unclear when the world will witness the new normal or when the labour movement will ease. Temporary travel restrictions and advisories have once more put the emphasis on the pre-departure policies of the nation. India, one of the highest labour sending countries, has to put in extra effort despite prioritising vaccination. This paper has attempted to cover the pre-departure measures that the government of India uses to protect the workers who migrate on ECR passports.

## IV. Case of India

There is total 7-8 million Indian migrants in GCC countries together (Sasikumar, & Thimothy, 2015), most of them having low socio-economic and educational background. In addition, many of them have very little social and financial security that can help them to face challenges during any crisis. The recent Covid-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerability of migrants in general and international migrants in particular to a great extent.

The Pre-Departure Orientation Programme (PDOT) is a collaborative initiative of the Ministry of External Affair and he Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MEA and MSDE). The programme is run by Pravasi Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PKVY). Broadly the programme is divided into two components, that is, Pre-departure Orientation Training and Training to Trainers. The programme focuses on the improvement of the soft skills of the migrant workers. For campaigning the research think tank of the MEA prepared the booklet

('*Surakshit Jaaye, Prashikshit Jaaye'*) for safe and legal migration. The campaign videos are also available on YouTube.

In India, the pre-departure orientation programme is implemented to serve a wide range of purposes. The primary goal of the programme is to educate prospective emigrants about safe and legal migration, as well as about the destination country's culture, language, traditions, and local rules and regulations (Chindea, 2015). The pre-departure orientation programme for emigrants is often referred to as the basic awareness and guidance programme (ibid). It aids in addressing the issues of migrant workers by advising them on how to effectively adapt to unfair working conditions in a completely new socio-cultural environment (Regmi et al., 2020). The programme is intended to orient migrants who wish to migrate for overseas work. It is designed to lessen the vulnerabilities of female migrants and those who fall under the category of ECR workers (Thimothy& Sasikumar, 2012). The programme is designed to protect workers while also encouraging legal and safe migration to ECR countries[1]. The complex nature of international migration exposes migrants to a large number of insecurities and vulnerabilities (Thimothy& Sasikumar, 2012). Migrants experience anxiety and insecurity when they arrive in a new land with a new language, culture, skill, and law (Chindea, 2015). The pre-departure training programme helps the migrants prepare for the journey abroad. The programme introduces the workers to the nature of the contract for their travel. The pre-departure programme introduces the labour laws of host countries; socio-cultural aspects of the host country; the language and religions of the host country. Notably, the pre-departure programme provides

---

[1]As per Bureau of Immigration, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, the listed 18 countries are as follow: United Arab Emirates (UAE), The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, Malaysia, Libya, Jordan, Yemen, Sudan, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Syria, Lebanon, Thailand, and Iraq. It is important to note here is that government of India can suspend emigration clearance for both ECR and ECNR passport holders if found disturbance situation or unrest in any particular country.

detailed accounts of the government of India's welfare schemes enacted for the workers migrating abroad (ibid).

**A. Indian labour in the Global Economy**

The COVID-19 pandemic has spread to every corner of the world. The impact of COVID-19 is still visible in 2022 and it is expected to continue more. Despite the fact that people are getting vaccinated, the cases of its spread are visible. The real-time data on COVID-19 in 2021 is collected from worldmeters. As on 16-07-2022, the statistics of India and a few Gulf countries are given below.

**Table1: Impact of COVID-19 on Indian Migrant**

| S.No. | Country | Total Cases | Total Deaths | Total Recovered |
|-------|---------|-------------|--------------|-----------------|
| 1 | India | 43,725,900 | 525,604 | 43,045,350 |
| 2 | UAE | 970,586 | 2,325 | 950,717 |
| 3 | Saudi Arabia | 802,586 | 9,229 | 787,198 |
| 4 | Kuwait | 648,216 | 2,556 | 641,752 |
| 5 | Oman | 391,641 | 4,260 | 384,669 |
| 6 | Bahrain | 646,695 | 1,505 | 634,506 |
| 7 | Qatar | 392,916 | 680 | 386,447 |

Source: Worldmeter, Retrieved from,

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/ accessed on 16-07-2022.

The pandemic has brought economic activity to a near standstill (Mohamed, 2021). It has disturbed the flow of the economy by interrupting the process of production and causing supply changes (Ozili & Arun, 2020). At the time of writing, it is still not clear how much damage the pandemic has done to the global

economy and how much it is going to do – both at the national and global level. The effect of the pandemic is evident in every sector of the economy. The restrictions imposed by many countries due to the outbreak of COVID-19 have severally impacted the travel, tourism, and hospitality industries. The sports industry, event industry, and entertainment industry are the other major sectors that were impacted badly due to restrictions on movement. These sectors noticed the fall in demand, business and the high rate of unemployment. Notably, the oil-producing and dependent countries are both affected by COVID-19.

The prices of commodities, especially energy, are showing high volatility in the present scenario. The fall in the price of oil due to the policy war between Russia and Saudi Arabia has impacted the oil market in early 2020 (Ozili & Arun, 2020). Moreover, the restrictions on travel due to COVID-19 have further worsened the situation for both oil-producing and dependent countries. Nonetheless, the Russia-Ukraine war disturbed the oil flow and raised the prices (Orhan, 2022). The fluctuation of oil prices is caused by the increase and decrease in demand from China as a result of the influence of Omicron and its zero tolerance for COVID. The increase in oil prices and commodities triggers high inflation at a global level. Hence, Central Banks of many countries are taking steps to increase the interest rate. At one end, the increase in the increase in the interest rate may check inflation, but at the other end it may slow down the growth that may lead to recession.

**B. International Labour Migration from India**

Indian migration can be traced back to British rule, when large numbers of labour migrated to British colony plantations or mining regions as indentured labor. These labourers migrated to Fiji, Malaysia, Jamaica, Singapore, and Guyana. During the colonial period, the workers were also transported to Sri Lanka as indentured servants (Jain, 1989`). The recent migrant flow from India is not limited to any particular labour force or region, but rather to almost all sectors

across all continents. In general, highly skilled and professional Indians are migrating to developed countries. Available research indicates that the USA, UK, Canada, Germany, France, Belgium, Australia, and New Zealand are some of the few countries where large numbers of highly skilled professionals prefer to go (Khadria, 2004). whereas a large number of semi-skilled and unskilled workers are migrating to developing countries. GCC countries appear to be the favoured destination for semi-skilled and unskilled workers (Sasikumar & Hussain, 2008).

**C.Workers migrating to Gulf**
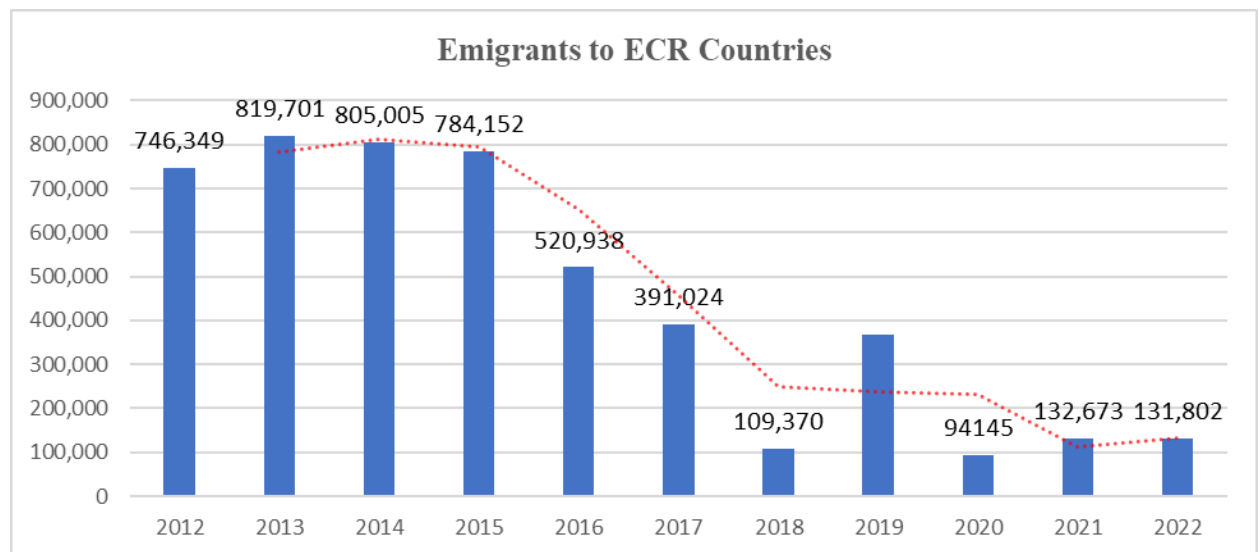


Source: Data released by the Ministry of External Affairs, India on the e-Migrant portal 2012-2022

*Note: data gathered from the portal on 10-06-2022. Hence, the data for 2022 is not for the complete year.

In Gulf countries, migrant workers are often temporary and circular migrants (Sasikumar &Thimothy, 2015). As per the official data, till June 10, 2022, nearly 1,31,802 workers were granted ECR clearance check. The number for 2019 was 3,68,048. Workers were granted emigration clearance. Due to COVID-19, a steep

fall in the outflow of migrant workers reported to Gulf countries, nearly 94145 workers were reported to have gotten emigration clearance checks. The number will jump to over 1,32,673 in 2021 after the opening up of borders for migration after the COVID lockdown. According to studies on Gulf migration, workers migrating to the Gulf are generally low-skilled. These low-skilled workers belong to lower-income families. As per their skills, these workers are generally hired for semi-skilled and unskilled jobs. Men are generally hired as domestic workers, construction site workers, and fishermen. whereas large numbers of women are hired as domestic workers and nurses.

**Table 2: Country wise Number of emigrants going to ECR Countries**

|      | Bahrain | Kuwait | Oman  | Qatar | UAE   | Saudi Arabia |
|------|---------|--------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|
| 2012 | 20148   | 55843  | 84503 | 63137 | 1E+05 | 356489       |
| 2013 | 17317   | 72628  | 63554 | 78380 | 2E+05 | 353565       |
| 2014 | 14207   | 80420  | 51319 | 75997 | 2E+05 | 330002       |
| 2015 | 20908   | 66579  | 85054 | 59384 | 2E+05 | 308380       |
| 2016 | 11964   | 72384  | 63236 | 30619 | 2E+05 | 165355       |
| 2017 | 11516   | 56380  | 11516 | 24759 | 1E+05 | 78611        |
| 2018 | 3491    | 18381  | 13209 | 14820 | 30192 | 21760        |
| 2019 | 9997    | 45712  | 28392 | 31810 | 76112 | 16110        |
| 2020 | 4175    | 8107   | 7206  | 8907  | 17891 | 4436         |
| 2021 | 421     | 0      | 1319  | 1854  | 740   | 646          |
| 2022 | 5949    | 33631  | 17967 | 13628 | 15235 | 99452        |

Source: Data released by the Ministry of External Affairs, India on the e-Migrant portal 2012-2022

*Note: data gathered from the portal on 10-06-2022. Hence, the data for 2022 is not for the complete year.

Among the six countries of Gulf, Saudi Arabia and UAE are top receiving migrants from India. On the contrary the data indicates that Kuwait and Qatar noted to receive less migrants.

The inflow of labour to the Gulf can be traced back to the post-1970s development, when oil production demanded more labour. Before the 1970s, the maximum labour flow to the Gulf was from Arab countries (Thimothy& Sasikumar, 2012). However, the increase in oil production has opened a new avenue for large numbers of foreign workers in the Gulf countries. Large-scale development has taken place in the Gulf countries after the oil boom (ibid). Consequently, the demand for labour has increased significantly in the services and in the construction sector.The development process in the Gulf has provided an opportunity for many workers to migrate as temporary workers in this region. For unskilled or semi-skilled female workers from India, the Gulf represents an important avenue (Kodoth& Varghese, 2011). A large number of women, especially from Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra, have migrated to the Gulf countries. A large percentage of migrant women get engaged as domestic workers (Thimothy& Sasikumar, 2012). A significant share of female migrants is reported to be engaged in care work and as paramedical staff. Many studies on Indian nurses in the Gulf have found that Kerala has the highest percentage of Indian nurses in the Gulf countries (ibid).

**D. Demand for ECR Workers**

In the last few years, India has emerged as the top country in service providers for high-skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled workers. The cheap availability of labour and job proficiency has put Indian workers in high demand in the global labour market. The United Nations International Migration Report, 2019, noted that

international migrants worldwide reached nearly 272 million. In which India accounts for the largest number of people living outside the country's border. According to the report, India was the leading country of origin of international migrants, with 17.5 million people living abroad(United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2019). Mexico's second largest country of origin, with 11.8 million, is followed by China with 10.7 million. The outflow trend of semi-skilled and unskilled workers shows that these workers are generally migrating to ECR countries.The flow of these workers towards the Gulf in particular is also related to the oil boom of the 1970s. It has attracted many unskilled and semi-skilled workers from India and its neighbouring countries. In addition, the geographical, cultural, and some similar food habits attracted these workers. Migrant workers were drawn to the lucrative job opportunities, high earnings, other economic benefits, and distance from their native land for short and long periods of time. In 2017, around 3.91 lakh workers emigrated from India (Standing Committee on Labour, 2017-18). Many are less educated among these migrant workers and are recruited as maids, nurses, and construction workers in the Gulf countries (Ibid).

The Standing Committee on Labour, 2017-18 – the report noted that (as on November 30, 2017), around 3.61 lakh workers emigrated from India after obtaining emigration clearance. According to the report, in the year 2017, around 1.50 lakh workers emigrated to the UAE. This is followed by Saudi Arabia with 0.78 lakh workers, Kuwait with 0.56 lakh workers, and Oman with 0.53 lakh workers. Therefore, the outflow of ECR migrant workers to ECR countries from India is reported at 94145 for the year 2020 (e-migrant). In the year 2017, the total number of out migrants on ECR passports was reported at 391024. In the year 2018, the total number of out migrants on ECR passports was reported as 340157, and in the year 2019, it was 368048 (e-migrant). The distribution of the outflow of migrants from a few top states is shown in the table given below.

**Table 3. State-wise, Emigration Clearance (ECs) obtained by Recruiting Agents (RAs) and Direct Recruitments by Foreign Employs (FE) to ECR Countries**

| S.No. | States | 2020 | 2019 | 2018 | 2017 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Utter Pradesh | 28911 | 116251 | 86273 | 88450 |
| 2 | Bihar | 13911 | 55423 | 59181 | 69426 |
| 3 | Kerala | 8487 | 19173 | 14496 | 16643 |
| 4 | West Bengal | 7425 | 28982 | 28648 | 36599 |
| 5 | Tamil Nadu | 6467 | 27783 | 31588 | 38341 |

Source:emigranthttps://emigrate.gov.in/ext/fetchECReport.action?StrFileFormat=.pdf

Table 3 distribution indicates that despite the fact that Uttar Pradesh emerges as the top state to send large numbers of out-migrants to the ECR countries, it reported a drastic fall along with the other four states that appear in the table. The COVID-19 pandemic appears to be one of the main reasons for the drastic fall in the number of outflows of migrant workers from India to ECR countries.

**E. ECR migration**

In India, the specification of national policy is confined to the Emigration Act of 1983 (Gurucharan, 2013). Under the Act, it is mandate for the ECR passport holders to obtain an emigration clearance (EC) while migrating to the listed 18 ECR countries for work (ibid). Further, women who wish to work in the ECR countries have to undergo emigration clearance (Wadhawan, 2018). With effect from 30 April 2015, the emigration of nurses for overseas employment in 18 ECR countries must require emigration clearance from the protector of emigrants (PoE) (Office Orders Nurses' Emigration Clearance, MEA). Further, the government has permitted the out-migration of female nurses and domestic workers only through state-run recruiting agencies. These are – Non-Resident Keralites' Affairs

Roots (NORKA, Kerala), Overseas Development and Employment Promotion Consultant (ODEPC, Kerala), Overseas Manpower Corporation Ltd., (OMCL, Tamil Nadu), Uttar Pradesh Financial Corporation (UPFC, Uttar Pradesh), Overseas Manpower Company A.P. Ltd., (OMCAP, Andhra Pradesh), and Telangana Overseas Manpower Company Limited (TOMCOM, Telangana) (Wadhawan, 2018). Additionally, the government introduced a minimum age criterion of 30 years for all women (except nurses) who wish to migrate to ECR countries for work. The age of creation is applicable to all women, irrespective of their nature of work in ECR countries (Ibid).

In comparison to men, women are less migrating. According to an ILO report, in 2015 women comprise just less than one fourth (23.9 per cent) of the total Indian migration stock (Wadhawan, 2018).

**Table 4: District wise – ECR country-wise EC given to the female workers**

| S.No. | Year | Total |
|-------|------|-------|
| 1. | 2017 | 943 |
| 2. | 2018 | 576 |
| 3. | 2019 | 1731 |
| 4. | 2020 | 608 |

Source:emigrant,https://emigrate.gov.in/ext/fetchECReport.action?StrFileFormat=.pdf

The figure in table 4 shows that except in the year 2019, women are migrating less to the ECR countries for work. The less representative may be the impact of the restrictive policy of the Government of India.

**Table 5: EC given to the nurses**

| S.No. | Year | Total |
|-------|------|-------|
| 1. | 2017 | 4123 |
| 2. | 2018 | 7174 |
| 3. | 2019 | 10207 |
| 4. | 2020 | 7915 |

Source:E-migrant,

https://emigrate.gov.in/ext/fetchECReport.action?StrFileFormat=.pdf

Table 5 clearly indicates the impact of COVID-19 on the follow of nurses out migrants.  It appears that on the protective line, the Government of India has made a provision that no person shall recruit an Indian citizen for overseas employment without being registered on the e-migrant portal. Furthermore, there will be a Protector General of Emigrants (PGE) with the authority to approve intending emigrants and register prospective recruiting agents. As per the Act, it is the responsibility of the Protector General of Emigrants (PGE) to ensure the protection and welfare of the emigrants. Moreover, the Protector General of Emigrants (PGE) is responsible for regulating the recruitment process to prevent

malpractices. It is interesting to note that the Act does not create any difference between the general worker's migration and protective workers' migration. Nonetheless, the regulatory framework for emigration in India filters overseas workers and regulates the manner of their exit. This is done by issuing a separate passport for the workers belonging to the protective and general categories.

## B. Labour Protection

In addition to the 1983 Act, policymakers have initiated many safety measures to protect migrant workers working abroad. The Pravsi Bhartiya Bima Yojana (PBBY) is one of the initiatives in this regard. The PBBY is a mandatory insurance scheme for ECR migrant workers. The scheme was initially launched in 2003 with the objective of covering overseas migrant workers. The scheme provides an insurance cover of Rs 10 lakh in case of accidental death or permanent disability (Thomothy, R. 2015). The scheme provides up to Rs. 100,000 in medical insurance, Rs. 50,000 in maternity benefits, Rs. 50,000 in family hospitalisation in India (for a spouse and two children under the age of 21), and Rs. 50,000 in legal expenses (ibid). The process of ensuring minimum wages for migrant workers is another major initiative taken by policymakers. The system of Minimum Referral Wage (MRW) functions by fixing a prescribed minimum wage for particular occupations.

## V. Major Challenges of Indian workers in Gulf

Exploitation, both in terms of financial and physical, is one of the major problems faced by migrant workers (Ahn, 2004). Also, very often, people get into the trap of fake recruiting agents. Many people are trapped in the issue of inappropriate visas in their pursuit of higher wages or easily available jobs (International Labour Organization, 2016). The lack of awareness also appears to be one of the reasons that people easily get misled by fake recruiting agents (ibid). Migrants, especially the less educated or illiterate, get cheated, as many get another job

instead of the promised job. The informal workers often faced the issue of receiving less salary than promised by the agents (Trebilcock, 2005). There are cases in which the agent sent the workers on a tourist visa. The literature on migrant workers to ECR countries also noted that many workers reported sexual abuse. In addition, migrant workers face the issue of language and culture in a foreign country. The lack of knowledge of the host country's law some-times lands the migrant workers into legal issues.

## A. Socio-Economic Challenge

Prior to the onset of COVID-19, the GCC countries were acting as the major hosts for a large number of semi-skilled and unskilled workers from India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Bangladesh (Weeraratne, 2020). However, the outbreak of COVID-19 has changed the scenario. The outbreak of COVID-19 has brought lockdown and economic crises at the global level. In the event of an economic crisis, migrant workers tend to be more vulnerable in GCC countries. The fear of pandemic forced thousands of workers to return to their home lands. Nonetheless, many were prevented or stuck due to lockdowns or the closing of international borders. Some of the workers were able to maintain their jobs, while many low-paid workers were fired without any notice or pay. Most of the workers who retain their jobs are facing issues like unsafe working conditions. Many were working without any health safety measures (Foley, & Piper, 2020). Moreover, these workers also face the issues of pay cuts or delayed payment. Domestic workers and care workers are especially vulnerable because many of them work long hours and they are not permitted to leave the premises. There were no days off, delayed or withheld wages, and, in some cases, physical abuse.

The pandemic has raised new challenges, at least for the government and workers. On the other hand, the pandemic hurt millions of workers and enterprises during the shutdown. Millions of workers have lost their jobs, and many small and medium enterprises have closed down due to a fall in demand, health concerns,

and disturbances in the supply chain. Similarly, the pandemic has had its adverse impact on wages. Before the crisis, real average wages were growing rapidly in some lower-and middle-income countries (ILO, 2020). However, the economic and labour market crisis due to the pandemic also affected the government's minimum wage security to an extent. For example, the government of India bargains for the Minimum Referral Wages (MRW) for overseas workers. The MRW applies to migrants travelling on ECR passports.

The system of minimum referral wages (MRW) functions by fixing a prescribed minimum wage for a particular occupation. In general, the minimum referral wages (MRW) are fix through bilateral agreements between the two countries (Sasikumar & Sharma, 2016). Through the system of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), both countries frame the agreement with regard to the labour market. The terms of the agreement in the MoU also govern the inflow of labour and wage policies. The minimum referral wages are also fixed directly by the origin country. In this case, the rate of minimum wages differs from occupation to occupation in the same destination country and also varies for different countries. Generally, India follows the system of pre-deciding minimum wages, which varies from occupation to occupation as well as differs from country to country. The minimum referral wages (MRW) for Indian migrant workers are fixed through the executive order (ibid). Importantly, this executive order does not have any legal or statutory backing. Nonetheless, it acts as one of the major protectors of fixed wage security for migrant workers. Nonetheless, under the impact of a pandemic and to protect workers' employment, the government of India has taken the decision to lower the MRW.

The two office orders issued on the 8th and 21st of September have fixed the new MRW. According to the Office Order of September 8th, the minimum referral wages of Indian workers working in Qatar have been fixed at USD 200. The minimum referral wage in Kuwait is set at USD 245 for work visa holders and

USD 196 for domestic sector workers(The Indian Express, 2021). Similarly, the Office Order of September 21st fixed the minimum referral wages as USD 200 for the workers for the workers working in Bahrain, Oman, and UAE and USD 324 for the workers working in Saudi Arabia (eMigrant). The fixing of wages will result in a uniformity of wages across the occupations. The skilled or semi-skilled workers also have to work for the same wages fixed by the governments. Some may argue that the reduction in MRW may increase the demand for Indian workers in the Gulf, but at the same time, it may hamper the workers who are already working in these countries on higher wages. The reeducation in MRW may also lead to a reduction in Indian remittances. As an informative tool, along with the e-migrants portal, the pre-departure also makes the workers aware of the MRW.

## B. Workplace and Gender specific challenges

The COVID-19 also brought up a number of issues affecting female employees abroad. In general, women get paid more for low-skilled domestic work or care giving. The group of vulnerable employees includes the women who migrate as domestic workers. Many of these individuals lack access to social security and are required to work long hours without breaks. Numerous workers who live in the homes of their employers are vulnerable to physical, psychological, and occasionally even sexual exploitation. Many domestic workers lost their jobs and residences as a result of COVID-19, and many were left without employment. The money or residual earnings for many of the women works were not supplied. Numerous domestic workers saw their pay decrease. Additionally, their employees' hours are extended.

Many women workers who were engaged in domestic work or care work in private houses faced different problems and challenges. As already discussed above, most of the workers who are engaged in domestic work are migrants. The nature of their work makes them invisible. Hance, their hardships and

vulnerabilities hardly get noticed, at least not on a priority basis. Nonetheless, the outbreak of a pandemic raised new challenges for these workers. Many domestic workers were fired because they were afraid of being infected by the domestic workers (Foley & Piper, 2020). The restriction on mobility made the situation of these workers more precarious. The restrictions on mobility were not allowing them to go back to their country of origin and the closing down of businesses and markets left them without any work. Many of these migrant workers are left with no jobs, a lack of information, a lack of medical facilities, and a vulnerable zone where they could possibly get infected (ibid). Lack of social security also left these workers vulnerable during the worldwide lockdown due to the pandemic (ibid).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on not only worker mobility but also the nature of worker engagement. Importantly, it affects different occupation sectors differently. On the one hand, the pandemic has increased demand for caregivers; on the other hand, caregivers appear to be among the most vulnerable workers as a result of the pandemic. Due to an increase in demand for care workers in hospitals and in private clinics and a shortage in supply, they are now required to work lengthy hours (Grimm, 2020). Moreover, it has put a large number of care workers at risk of contracting the virus. In the absence of any other alternative and restrictions on movement, many migrant workers were working in dangerous conditions in the care industry (ibid.). Many do not have personal protective equipment (PPE) for them. The situation of insufficient resources to take care of patients increases the challenges for care workers. Other challenges faced by caregivers included the lack of specific treatment and the changing nature of the variant (American Nurses Association, 2020). The situation of isolation, fear of getting infected, and health of colleagues were some of the issues that were creating anxiety and fatigue among the care workers (Grimm, 2020).

**Other Challenges**

Low-skilled migrant workers constitute one of the most vulnerable categories of workers. Millions of migrants were unemployed both in India and abroad due to COVID-19 lockdown (Khanna, 2020). Many migrants return to their native places. The major impact of the return of temporary migrants and the loss of jobs is clearly visible in the form of a reduction in the flow of remittances. In the early 2009 financial crisis, remittances played a vital role in safeguarding the economy (Weeraratne, 2020). Importantly, the flow of remittances gets disrupted under the impact of COVID-19(Khanna, 2020). To many families, the flow of remittances acts as the backbone of their family finances. In the absence of jobs and remittance inflows, the families of low-skilled workers face a financial crisis.

## VI. India's Pre-departure Strategies: A Critical Appraisal

The opening of international borders and a reduction in COVID-19 cases has given new hope for mobility. The economy, which is struggling to gain growth at a pre-COVID level, may demand more workers. Even though the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war has loomed a global recession, any opportunity for work may encourage semi- and un-skilled workers to migrate. It is because of COVID-19 that many workers have lost their livelihoods and they are waiting for any good opportunity to get the work that may help them with their livelihoods. In this scenario, the role of programmes like pre-departure becomes very crucial. The programme must intensively instruct the migrants about the risks involved in working abroad. Apart from informing them about the labour conditions abroad and cultural restrictions (particularly in Gulf countries), the people need to learn how to protect themselves from getting infected by COVID and other communicable diseases. The programme needs to sensitise the migrant workers about COVID, especially to women, domestic and care workers who are at more risk.

The Pre-Departure Orientation Programme of India largely focused on the trainings of the master trainer. Under the PDoT programme, workshops are arranged for master trainers in order to ensure that workers migrate with advanced skill sets. The programme focuses largely on ECR countries, and a special programme is arranged for the European countries. However, the programme is not specified for any particular category of workers or enhancing their set of skills. To cope with the changing technologies and meet the demand of the labour market, the PDOT programme should also focus on the training of the workers. The policymaker should focus more on the large-scale awareness programmes of legal and safe migration. The use of drama and continuous advertisement on TV and in cinema should be done. The policymaker can ask the celebrities to campaign for the awareness programme.

**VII. Examining the Pre-Departure Training Programme:**

The Pre-Departure Orientation Training (PDOT) is a flagship program of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) that was started in 2018. The program provides free orientation training to emigrants going abroad for employment. The longer version of PDOT is 160 hours and is offered at all Indian Institutes of Skill Centers (IISCs). The program consists of orientation related to languages and digital literacy. On the other hand, the shorter version of the program is one day long. All migrants who are ready to depart soon and have registered themselves for the training through registered recruiting agents are eligible for this program. In the absence of any authentic granular data, it is quite difficult to provide the exact number of people who have been trained in PDOT. Nonetheless, as per IISC, "as on March 31, 2020, 93,748 emigrants have been delivered PDOT Training Programme through 9 PDOT centers in 7 cities".

**The Shortcomings**

Although the program has been implemented since 2018, there is no clear study indicating how much help the program is providing to trainers who are providing training to workers or emigrants who migrated after getting orientation training. PDOT is initiated for emigrants who are ready to depart. However, what skills they acquire in the short duration and how much the training is useful is not taken into consideration. Moreover, the program largely covers migrants who are registered through registered recruiting agents and ready to take orientation training. It does not cover other migrant workers traveling through irregular channels. The PDOT website shows that there are 33 offline and 10 online training centers. However, the high capacity of PDOT 100 and above 100 both offline and online are concentrated only in a few urban centers. This appears to limit the services provided to migrant workers from rural and semi-urban areas. It may also limit the effectiveness of the program among unskilled and semi-skilled workers who are largely migrating to GCC countries. The lack of public awareness related to the PDOT program also appears to limit the impact of the program.

**VIII. What can be done?**

There are many innovative methods that can complement the Pre-Departure strategies for better migration governance. Media, schooling and use of new technology can play an important role.

**A. Media Outreach**

Programmes related to Overseas Indians can be a regular feature that can promote awareness among not only the migrants and migrant organisations in the host country but also among their family members, migrants'organisations and local government officials back hom

## B. Educational Institutions

Curriculum focusing on the issue of migration and its advantages and challenges should be taught. Considering the issue of human-trafficking other exploitative

B. Educational Institutions and Other strategies

Curriculum focusing on the issue of migration and its advantages and challenges should betaught. Considering the issue of human-trafficking other exploitative practice' there should be components on gender sensitiveness, legal education and workplace culture etc. in the school curriculum..

## The Philippines Case

*Migration is a multifaceted phenomenon that affects individuals, communities and societies in various ways. Migration governance refers to the norms that shape the management of migration at different levels. Along with regulating the movement of people, migration governance ensures the rights of the migrants. Educational institutions have a crucial role to play not only in designing the curriculum on migration governance but also filling the gaps in the provided structures. This work can be done by providing migration-related topics into their curriculum about migration governance. It also helps in fostering a culture of learning among students to get knowledge related to the importance of migration policies and impact on the migrants. Ortiga, Y. Y. (2001) study argues how the employability agenda encourages aspiring migrants to invest in their own training and education to turn themselves into desirable workers for employers overseas. It allows the migrant-sending states to avoid accountability in a volatile global market. Ortiga, Y (2018) studies highlighted the importance of education in schools to create better awareness and acquire skills that are useful for migrants. The Philippines' long history of emigration has made it a popular subject of study among migration scholars. In recent years, researchers have been particularly interested in the role of state agencies in recruiting, marketing, and deploying Filipino labor to foreign employers.Many areas such as Nursing, Hotel and restaurant management etc. have benefited a lot due to the migrant oriented curriculum that facilitates a better equipped labour force., Scholars have attributed the overseas success of Filipino nurses to the country's nursing schools – in particular, their ability to adjust curriculum to the needs of foreign employers. As an older profession, Filipino nurses have several well-established organisations, all of which are actively involved in the formation and*

## C. New Technology

In the current scenario, modern means of technology play a vital role in every sector. The State-of-the-art modern technology can also help emigrants, NGOs and Government agencies in the better migration governance. Mobile applications

are one such technology that can guide and protect aspirants from opting for irregular channels to migrate. The application can help them by providing information about the culture, language, and labour laws of the host country. It can also help in knowing the registered recruiting agents and the training programs initiated by the government for migrants. The application can guide migrants and keep track of them. The mobile application may help migrants better address their physical and mental health. One such application is MigAPP. It is a downloadable app by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). It serves migrants by providing current and practical information throughout their migration process. MADAD is an Indian app by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) that offers online logging and tracking of grievances. It is specially designed for students. On similar lines, the government may initiate an application for working abroad. It may also help policymakers maintain migrant data.

To increase the effectiveness of the PDOT program, the government must provide training well in advance to emigrants. The training institution can conduct the program round the year for small durations to better inform migrant workers.

The government should provide a unique program only for unskilled and semi-skilled workers going to GCC countries. Under this program, the use of new modern means of technologies should be provided. It will benefit workers who are migrating for household work.

The government should involve educational institutions to study the impact of the PDOT program.

The government should take the initiative of promoting the program through media and social media on a large scale to attract aspirants and to protect people from opting for irregular paths to migrate for employment.

## IX. Conclusion

Poverty, the expectation of a high income, lucrative opportunities, government policies, mode of transportation, and transportation costs are all factors that may influence someone to migrate abroad for work. The pre-departure programme for migrants, particularly semi-skilled and unskilled, to ECR countries acts as a guiding tool. It assists the migrant in adjusting to a new work environment. The outbreak of COVID has provided an opportunity to further comprehend the programme by sensitizing about the communicable disease. There is a need to make migrants aware of the health risk of working abroad. The programme needs to add knowledge about COVID and what measures to take prior to departure. The information about COVID and other communicable diseases in the curriculum of pre-departure will better support adaptation and preparation in destination countries. There is a need to provide more health-related information to migrants in the current situation.

These programmes alongside effective Pre-Departure Orientation can promote sustainable and far reaching benefits for migrants and the sending regions and country in general.

## Reference

Ahn, P. S. (Ed.). (2004). *Migrant workers and human rights: Out-migration from South Asia*. International Labour Organization, Subregional Office for South Asia.
Ali, A. M. (2005). Pre-departure orientation programme: study of good practices in asia a comparative study of bangladesh, the philippines and sri lanka. *Labour Migration*, 85.
American Nurses Association. (2020). Nurses, ethics and the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Available at: nurses-ethics-and-the-response-to-the-covid-19-pandemic. pdf accessed*, *13*.
Barsbai, T. (2018). Pre-departure policies for migrants' origin countries.

Chindea, A. (2015). *Headstart to Integration: A Global Review of Pre-Departure Support Measures for Migrants*. International Organization for Migration.

Economic Times. (2022, June 28). Indians are leaving the country in droves. Here's where they are headed and why. The Economic Times. https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/nri/migrate/indians-are-leaving-the-country-in-droves-heres-where-they-are-headed-and-why/articleshow/96847173.cms

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

Grimm, C. A. (2020). Hospital experiences responding to the COVID-19 pandemic: results of a national pulse survey March 23–27, 2020. *US Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General*, *41*.

urucharan, G. (2013), The Future of Migration from India Policy, Strategy and Modes of Engagement, India Centre for Migration Ministry of External Affairs, available at, https://www.mea.gov.in/images/attach/I_G_Gurucharan.pdf

International Labour Office. (2020). *Global Wage Report 2020-21: Wages and minimum wages in the time of COVID-19*. International Labour Office.

International Labour Organization. (2016). Non-standard employment around the world: Understanding challenges, shaping prospects.

International Migration Report. (2019). United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2005), Labour and Migration in Asia, IOM, Geneva.

Jain, P. C. (1989). Emigration and settlement of Indians abroad. *Sociological Bulletin*, *38*(1), 155-168.

Khadria, B. (2004). Migration of highly skilled Indians: Case studies of IT and the health professionals.

Khanna, A. (2020). Impact of migration of labour force due to global COVID-19 pandemic with reference to India. *Journal of Health management*, *22*(2), 181-191.

Kodoth, P., & Varghese, V. J. (2011). Emigration of women domestic workers from Kerala: Gender, state policy and the politics of movement.

Membrive, V., & del Rio, J. M. (2016). PILOT PROJECT ON PRE-DEPARTURE TRAINING FOR LLP AND ERASMUS+ TRAINEESHIPS. In *EDULEARN16 Proceedings* (pp. 5484-5488). IATED.

Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship. (n.d.). Pre-Departure Orientation Training (PDOT). Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship. https://msde.gov.in/en/schemes-initiatives/schemes-initiatives-through-nsdc/pre-departure-orientation-training-pdot-

Mohamed, A. H. (2021). A literature review: The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on Somaliland economy. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, *9*(2), 54-64.

NSDC India. (n.d.). IISC Network. Retrieved July 17, 2023, from https://nsdcindia.org/archive-iisc-network

Orhan, E. (2022). The effects of the Russia-Ukraine war on global trade. *Journal of International Trade, Logistics and Law*, *8*(1), 141-146.

Ortiga, Y. Y. (2021). Shifting employabilities: Skilling migrants in the nation of emigration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *47*(10), 2270-2287.

Ortiga, Y. (2017). *Emigration, employability and higher education in the Philippines*. Routledge.

Ozili, P. K., & Arun, T. (2020). Economic Effects of Coronavirus Outbreak, Retrieved from, http://dspace.khazar.org/handle/20.500.12323/4497

Poudel, O. P., Thapa, B., & Bhandary, S. (2019). Pre-departure psychological distress, depression, anxiety, stress and perception of risk factors at workplace among migrant workers of Nepal: A pilot study. *Journal of General Practice and Emergency Medicine of Nepal*, *6*(8), 20-25.

Regmi, P. R., Aryal, N., van Teijlingen, E., Simkhada, P., & Adhikary, P. (2020). Nepali migrant workers and the need for pre-departure training on mental health: a qualitative study. *Journal of immigrant and minority health*, *22*, 973-981.

Sasikumar, S. K., & Hussain, Z. (2008). Managing international labour migration from India: Policies and perspectives. *ILO Asia-Pacific Working Paper Series, New Delhi*.

Sasikumar, S. K., & Sharma, S. (2016). Minimum referral wages for international migrant workers from India: An assessment. *ILO*.

Sasikumar, S. K., & Thimothy, R. (2015). *From India to the Gulf region: Exploring links between labour markets, skills and the migration cycle*. GDC Country Office Nepal, GIZ.

Siddiqui, T., Rashid, R., &Zeitlyn, B. (2008). Information campaigns on safe migration and pre-departure training. *Sussex: Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty*.

Standing Committee on Labour. (2017-18). Ministry of External Affairs and Ministry of Labour& Employment. Fortieth Report, available at, https://eparlib.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/763787/1/16_Labour_40.pdf

The Indian Express. (2021, January 7). Telangana: Migrant workers lose Gulf jobs in pandemic, stare at bleak future. https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/hyderabad/telangana-migrant-workers-lose-gulf-jobs-in-pandemic-7136584/

Thimothy, R., & Sasikumar, S. K. (2012). *Migration of women workers from South Asia to the Gulf*. VV Giri National Labour Institute.

Thomothy, R. (2015). Migration of Women Domestic Workers from Kerala to the Gulf: Challenges and Policy Options. Centre for Socio-economic and Environmental Studies.

Trebilcock, A. (2005). *Decent work and the informal economy* (No. 2005/04). WIDER Discussion Paper.

Trinh, T. M. H. (2005). Other than myself/my other self. In *Travellers' tales* (pp. 8-25). Routledge.

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. (2019). International Migration 2019: Report(ST/ESA/SER.A/438).

https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/InternationalMigration2019_Report.pdf

Weeraratne, B. (2020). Return and reintegration without assimilation: South Asian migrant workers in the gulf during COVID-19. *Institute of South Asian Studies. Working Paper*, *327*.

Weinmann, S., & Bragg, J. M. B. (1993). Optimizing the International Experience through a Pre-Departure Orientation and a Re-entry Workshop,.

*Sadananda Sahoo*, Associate Professor, Programme Coordinator of M.A. in Migration and Diaspora, School of Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary Studies, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi

*Feroz Khan*, Fellow, GRFDT, New Delhi.

Email: khan.feroz09@yahoo.com

# Netizen Perception on the burning of 2479 Stockpile Single-Horn Rhino in Assam in three social media platform

--Rupa Rani Sonowal & N Atungbou

## Abstract

Posts related to animals and environment attracted social media users but not without reaction which suggests nature and society, and companionship. One horn rhino has a special place in the heart of people of Assam illuminated in folktales, songs, literature, and crafts. Often this beautiful creature falls prey to the poachers lured by trade value. On 22nd September 2021, Assam Government burnt down world's largest confiscated stockpile of 2479 of Rhino's horn, coinciding with World Rhino Day aims to dispel myths associated with market value. Social media users have reacted through shared, liked, and commented on government's action vis-à-vis economy, religion, arts, tourism, and research, acclamatory and disapproval. Drawing on this event, the study locates how meanings are perceived, constructed in three prominent social media platforms and analysed through 'Need-to-belong', 'Self-Worth-Self-Esteem', and 'Idealized-Virtual-Identity' framework. Study observed, YouTube is inclined toward the government's action while Facebook and Twitter posts were skeptical of the event.

*Keywords: Rhino, Stockpile, Assam, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube*

## Introduction

Rhinoceroses is one of the largest perissodactyla animals that have always been accentuated around the globe. The earliest known rhinoceros are from the late Eocene deposits in Asia, North America and Europe resembling early horses and tapirs that are delicate, small and with no horns. The present form of modern rhinoceros resembles the Rhinoceratidae family that appeared in the late Eocene but were less dominant than the other families (Dinerstein, 2003). Rhinoceros can be identified with five different species, out of which three are in Asia and two in Africa. Javan, Sumatran, and African black rhinos are in a

critical situation and considered as an endangered animal (WWF, 2019). The root cause of rhinoceros's decreasing number of population can be traced centuries back when they were hunted for agriculture pests, meat, trophies, and skin used for shield, good luck charm, handles for ceremony daggers and horns for the traditional medicinal practices. Later, the animal's habitat degraded due to the management practices and human settlement (Amin et al., 2006). In recent times, it has captured people's curiosity and concern due to the steady stream of poaching and trading of its horn. For decade conservationists have been campaigning for heightening the awareness among the public (Tosh, 2015). In this critical juncture, the media played a vital role in disseminating the information about the extinction of Rhino. The plight of African rhinos in the media landscape is well-taken but not on the Asian rhino. However, what captures the most, of the Asian Rhino is the recent burning of stockpile horn in Assam and the people's reaction in different social media platforms.

Social media has occupied an important platform in the contemporary world where people seek, consume, be it news or entertainment due to its low cost, easy accession, and fast transformation of information. The latest figure indicates that 4.9 billion people accessed the Internet in 2021, roughly 63 per cent the world's population, an increase of 17 per cent since 2019, and almost 800 million estimated to have accessed online (ITU, 2021). Statista (2021) reported that India's digital population is growing over 680 million, and presently social media penetration is 32.5% among the global active users. Public's accession to the internet gave a new avenue of interaction in social media, a platform for discussion, and debates on important social issues on regular occurrence. Time and again, animal concerns have occupied an important space, contents were created and shared on various social media platforms, characterised the relationship and companionship between human and animal. The content can influence perceptions on certain issues that have greater impact on the public's sentiments. Within its parameters of information, netizen consumption can be diverse, informative, crucial, and also controversial and over-exaggerated (Lyngdoh, Dixit, and Sinha, 2017, p.

564). In 2018, there was a strong reaction to the death of the last male northern white rhino and drew interest even from the western countries (WWF 2018). Issue pertaining to rhino poaching has little direct experience, where the public is reliant on social media for information. Nevertheless, social media could mold by emphasizing directly connected to the public and pressurize the decision makers to take actions in preserving biodiversity (Fink, Hausmann, and Di Minin, 2020, p.1).

Such is the case of the one horn rhinoceros, home to the iconic Kaziranga National Park (KNP), cultural heritage and natural treasures of Assam, India. Its representation is ingrained into the folktales, political movement, songs, literature, and the crafts of Assam. Nevertheless, this symbolic animal has been killed by the poachers and smugglers for horn to be sold illegally at the international market. The cases have been reported in both local print and electronic media for many years. However, the incumbent Assam Government, on 22$^{nd}$ September 2021, made a stand to burn down the world's largest stockpile confiscated Rhino's horn, accumulated since 1979. The event coincided with World Rhino Day, and the aim of the government is to dispel the myth associated with the horns that drove the poachers and illegal trade at the international market. The incident took place in the Bokakhat, headquarter of the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve. Before the event, 2,623 horns have been examined by the high-level committee, out of which 94 are preserved for the academic and 50 for the court cases, while the rest are confined to flames (GoA, 2021).

Nonetheless, the public have reacted to the government's action by sharing, commenting, and criticising on various social media platforms. Generally, posts related to animals and conservation have always attracted a number of users. Taking the que from the event, the paper posited how news or posts related to the iconic species of Assam and the burning of the stockpile of 2479 horns of single-horned Rhino presented in the social media. Further, the study explores how the recipient perceived information presented on social media. Considering the accessibility, for this study, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter

have been selected for the representation of digital media platforms while leaving out WhatsApp as it is more on the encryption protocol. A total of 688 comments on YouTube, Facebook and Twitter have been culled from the first post of each platform. Based on the comments made on three different digital platforms, thematically analysed emphasising on the reactions to the burning of 2479 single-horned Rhino of Assam vis-à-vis economy, religion, arts, tourism, and research, and acclamatory and disapproval of the government's action. The paper is analysed within the framework of 'need to belong' (Baumeister and Leary, 1995), 'self-worth and self-esteem' (Nadkarni and Hofmann, 2012), and 'idealized virtual identity' (Back et al., 2010). Paper is structured into rhino in historical period, rhino in Assamese Society, rhino on the brink of extinction, burning of the Stockpile, methodological frame, data analysis, discussion, and conclusion.

**Rhino in Historical Period**

The archaeological findings suggest that the rhino flourished across the subcontinent dating back to the Harappa civilization from 2,600 to 1,900 BC (Bose 2020; Divyabhanusinh, Das, and Bose, 2018). Further south in India excavated the unearthed artifacts of rhinoceros in several early Bronze Age sites (WWF 2016b). Gupta Empire (5th Century) minted coins showing the king on horseback attacking a rhino (Mintage World, 2015). Thousand years later, the Mughal emperors frequently depicted rhinos beautifully in illuminated manuscripts (Ali, 1927; WWF, 2016b). The first ever rhino believed to be seen in Europe was in 1515. It was sent from India to the Portuguese King. Later the King offered to the pope as a gift but died on the way to Rome due to shipwreck. The animal was immortalized through the artwork of German artist Albrecht Dürer (Biedermann, Gerritsen, and Riello, 2018, p. 18). Well into the 18th century, for 300 years, rhinoceros had been the Europeans imagination through Dürer's artwork. In some areas, this animal was domesticated, and used for ploughing. During the 18th century, the Nawabs of Lucknow, kept menageries of more than ten rhinos. Jean-Baptiste Chevalier's account noted how local rulers organised an event of rhino's

carnage for their pleasure and entertainment purposes in the 19th century (Talbot, 1960, p.198). Big hunting expeditions were the main attraction for the Europeans who came to India. In Nepal, royal hunting in Chitwan continued well into the 20th century. When Britain's King George V was crowned Emperor of India in 1911, he proceeded to Nepal for hunting (Rookmaaker, Nelson, and Dorrington, 2005; WWF, 2016b).

**Rhino in Assamese Society**

The one horn rhinoceros represents the cultural heritage and natural treasure of Assamese society. The animal has been a longstanding symbol of pride, used in government signage and brand logos. Its representation is ingrained in the folktales, political movement, literature, and the crafts of Assam. The legend was told that:

*"Lord Krishna came riding on a Rhino from Dwarka to rescue his grandson Aniruddha from the King Ban of Sonitpur. While on his expedition, he let the Rhino graze in Kaziranga as he had to cross the Brahmaputra to wage war against the King. After the war, the King called Rhino by playing the flute to return but inaudible to the Rhino due to the sound of the flowing river. As the rhino failed to respond to the call, Lord Krishan was annoyed and proceeded to Dwarka without taking his mount. Nevertheless, the rhino loved the place and decided to stay."* (Divyabhanusinh, Das and Bose, 2018).

Through the prism of folk stories and arts, rhinoceros found a space in the hearts of the people of Assam. In addition, regional pride and possessiveness over the rhino have stirred in the past due to refusal to relocate rhinoceros outside the state. The local pride is helpful in conservation initiatives, as this animal is the inhabitants in most parts of the Indo-Gangetic and Brahmaputra in Assam. Well, 70 percent of the Rhino population found in Kaziranga National Park was first notified as a rhino conservation region in 1908(Puri and Joshi, 2018, p. 307). The Department of Forest of Assam has made an enormous contribution in rhino conservation that has built up its population to 1,855 in Kaziranga National Park, 68 in Orang National Park and 81 in

Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary. The Rhino translocation to the Manas National Park from Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary is one of the success stories of the Indian Rhino Vision 2020 Program that made it possible for the breeding population of the Rhinos (Bonal, Talukdar, and Sharma, 2009, p.8).

In the political narrative, the genesis of projection of Rhino as the pride of Assam is associated with the Assam Movement (1979-85) linked to the indigenous people's control over land, resources, and influx of illegal immigrants (Agarwala, 2021). The Assam movement found its root in anti-foreigner issues due to the influx of immigrants from the neighbouring countries. Conservation in Assam was initiated by the European Colonial amid the protest by the locals. There in, the federal rule was imposed in the state of Assam in 1985, when the movement took place against the immigrants by the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) and took refuge in the Manas National Park. Leading to which the Indian army was called in and drove one of the successful operations known as 'Operation Rhino' (Bhaumik, 2007, p. 4). This was the first of its kind where an animal was invoked for its operation. From 1990 to 2009, quite a few conflict situations took place between the paramilitary forces combined with police, forest guards and armed insurgents, and poachers. The government's anti-poaching drive is the other factor that created acceding to evictions of certain villages from the nearby Kaziranga National Park (KNP). The presence of rhino in the political discourse became an integral part of the election campaign connecting with 'pride of Assam'. During the parliamentary election in 2014, BJP Prime Ministerial Candidate accused the Indian National Congress-led government in Assam for the decreasing number of Rhino in Assam (Agarwala, 2021). The campaign claimed that the Congress led government had conspired to bring in undocumented immigrants from Bangladesh by providing a place in the marshes of KNP by replacing Rhinoceros from their natural habitat (Barbora, 2017, p.1145). Political narrative emphasises on the influx of undocumented immigrants as one of the reasons for diminishing rhinos in Assam.

**Rhino on the brink of extinction**

The symbolism and greatness of this animal is on the brink of extinction due to poaching, massive hunting for illegal trading, sacrificial, entertainment and other purposes. History was told about the royal hunting expeditions on the Rhino to offer at the holy site once in their lifetime (Rookmaaker, Nelson, and Dorrington, 2005, pp. 89-90). In addition, rhino horns have been smuggled from various parts of Asia for medicinal use especially for the traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). Hence, it is traded illegally, consumed in TCM and among other usages (Cheung et al, 2018, p. 133). Internationally, since 1977, under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, trade on rhino horn has been banned (Biggs et al., 2013, p.1038). This, however, continued illegally as demand from Asia drove the poaching activity into this part of the region as well. Regulatory enforcement has failed causing wildlife protection to turn into militarization and propelling the black-market prices. Nevertheless, legalization has been proposed, a potential solution, wherein improved enforcement, funded by the sales of horn from natural mortalities, existing stockpiles, and harvesting through dehorning (Biggs et al., 2013; Cheung et al., 2018).

Besides, increase in human population, settlement, habitat destruction for crops and developmental activities, encroaching on natural habitat, resulted in severe conflicts between humans and wildlife (Choudhury, 2014; Vigne and Martin, 1994). By the 20th century, the presence of rhino in the agricultural land was threatened, so the local rhino populations were eradicated to meet the demand of growing human populations. Human encroachment on protected forest reserves increased manifold reducing the habitation space for the rhino. In addition, limited local gene pools and direct conflict with humans damaged the strength of the Rhino population. In the dawn of the 20th century, it has become clear that the survival of the rhino was in question, and it is estimated that fewer than 200 one horned rhino remained in the wild (WNET 2020). In the context of Assam, the data show that number of cases of rhino poaching have reported and killed upto 527 during 1981 and 2001(GoA, 2021). From

2001 to 2020, two hundred fifty-three have been reported to be killed (GoA, 2021; WPSI, 2018). In 2001, eighteen rhinos were killed and seventy-two in 2011 in Kaziranga National Park. The highest figures in a decade were reported in 2013 (twenty-seven), 2014 (forty-one) and 2015 (thirty-five) with a total of one hundred-three. The figure decreased to twenty-one in 2016 and thirteen in 2017, six in 2018 and 2019, and two in 2020 were reported that show drastically reduced. According to the 13th Rhino Census Report of 2018, there are 2,413 rhinos in Kaziranga alone.



Fig.1. Rhino Poaching cases in Assam
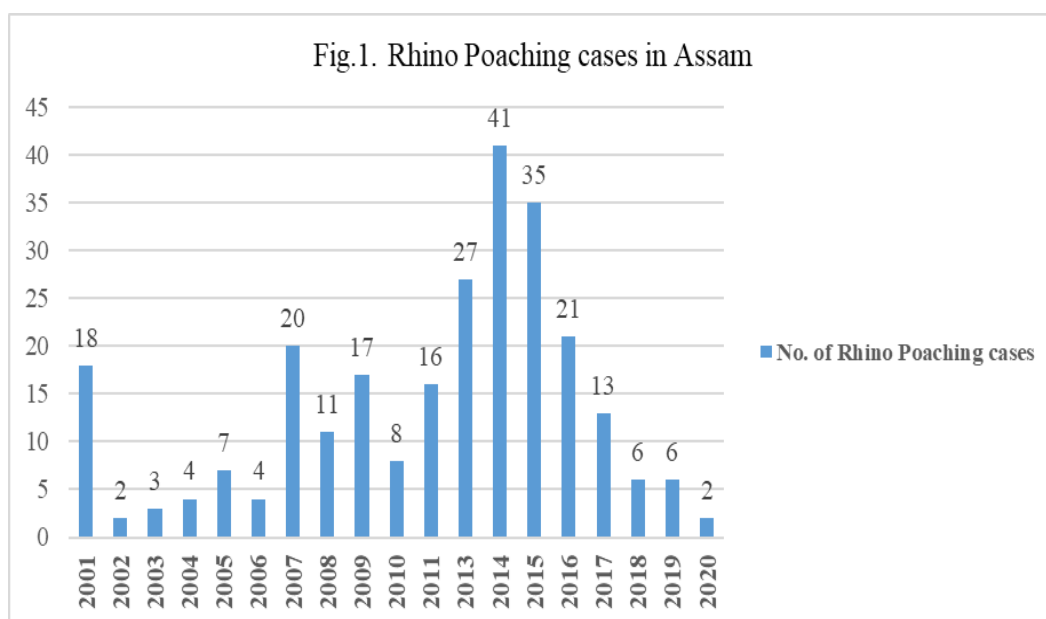
**Source:** Forest Dept, GoA; WPSI's Rhino Poaching Statistics, 2015-2018

This reduction in poaching may be due to the increase in anti-poaching activities conducted by the NGOs, forest department, police, and the locals. According to Uttam Saikai, Honorary Wildlife Warden of Kazaringa:

"*In the past when a rhino was killed people would not find out but now with social media, it becomes a news item. Statistically, poaching has come down, you cannot really say whether the government should be credited, or numerous NGOs which have been working actively on the ground to raise awareness.*" (Agarwala, 2021).

**Burning of the Stockpile**

As the cases of poaching and killing of rhinos have been reported over many decades. The government, during the past decades has seized a number of rhino horns and kept them under its control. Policies have been made in several countries to address the poaching case, but it continued poaching and illegal selling of the rhino horn. To address this issue, in recent times,  several countries have come up with alternative ways, by destroying the ivory stockpiles, demonstrating not to tolerate crime against the wildlife, ensuring never will be sold, and must  end the senseless slaughter of animals. The burning of ivory goes back to Kenya in 1989, the then Kenyan President burned 12 tonnes of elephant tusks and helped change the global approach on ivory exports(Zane 2016). Following which, in 2015, Mozambique burned over  440 pounds of rhino horn, came from a police seizure (Vaughan 2015). Celso Correia, Minister  for Land, Environment and Rural Development stated:

"*Today sends a signal Mozambique will not tolerate poachers, traffickers and the  organised criminals which employ and pay them to kill our wildlife and threaten our communities.*" (Guardian, 2015)

For the second time, on 30 April 2016, Kenyan President ignited the largest piles consisting of  105 tonnes of elephant ivory and 1.35 tonnes of horns (Duggan, Kriel, and Cuevas 2016; WWF  2016a). Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta told the crowd:

"*The rising value of elephant ivory trade, illegally on the international market, has  resulted in a massacre in the rainforest of Africa. In 10 years in Central Africa, we have  lost as many as 70% of the elephants. The elephant, as has been said, is an iconic  symbol of our country. Unless we take action now, we risk losing this magnificent  animal.*" (CNN, 2016)

Echoing the effort made by the Kenyan Government, world renowned conservationist Richard  Leakey express that:

*"The slaughter of rhinos is driven by trade in rhino horn. Burning it and ridiculing those who value it is an excellent idea. And those who try to sell it should be publicly condemned as they deliberately try to make personal profit on extinction of rhinos"* (Guardian, 2017)

In Europe, the Czech Republic was the first to burn 50 kilograms of rhino horn in 2014, in a bid to  help conserve rhinos(Hance 2014). Přemysl Rabas, Director of Dvůr Králové Zoo express that:

*"It is necessary to show clearly that the situation of rhinos in the wild is critical and  that it is the demand for rhino horn that drives them towards extinction. Burning itself  is a symbolic event that calls on everyone to re-consider consequences of her/his  behaviour. By buying rhino horn you are funding the criminal gangs and poachers. Because of  smuggling and trading in rhino horn, the rangers are killed, inhabitants of poor African  regions are terrorized, and beautiful animals are destined to suffer cruel death. Its consistency is like the consistency of human nails or hair."* (ME News, 2014)

Richard Leakey, a renowned conservationist expressed the impact of burning down the ivory  in different decades show the positivity on the mind-set of the people:

"*Many people cannot understand why destroying rhino horns is the best thing. When we burned ivory in Kenya at the end of the 1980s, its price dropped rapidly  in about half a year as the demand for it was dramatically reduced. Apparently, people  have already begun to realise that the cost for purchasing ivory items is animal lives*."

(WFL, 2017)

The Dvur Kralove Zoo organised a 'Burn Horns Save Rhinos' campaign in partnership with  the Customs Administration of the Czech Republic, and for the second time in 2016 burnt more than 33 kg of rhino horn(WFL 2017). The pile was ignited by Veronika Varekova, a Czech  model in the presence of a Member of the African Wildlife Foundation board of trustees, and   Paula

Kahumbu, Kenya's prominent conservationist. Speaking at the event, Veronica Varekova said:

*"We meet today for one simple reason - to show that the Czech Republic can be an important player in the field of nature conservation. While in South Africa these days, unfortunately, the first legal auctions of horns are taking place, we are destroying the rhino horn to symbolically point out that the trade in rhino horn is totally meaningless. I thank the Dvůr Králové Zoo for what it does."* (WFL, 2017)

The Dvůr Králové Zoo conducts long-term efforts to save rhinos and brings attention to the plight of rhinos worldwide and is supported by the renowned conservationists and celebrities alike. Speaking at the event, Director, Dvůr Králové Zoo Přemysl Rabas said:

*"If we do not fight the trade in rhino horn, the time will come soon when rhinos completely disappear from our planet. By burning rhino horn we want to send the world a clear message that horns belong to rhinos and not to people."* (WFL, 2017)

In June 2013, the Philippines destroyed the confiscated ivory since 2009, estimated to be US$10 million and the first Asian country to do so by sending a message to other countries: "stop the ivory trade and don't put a value on the existing stocks" (Christy 2013). Mundita Lim, Director of Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau (PAWB) says,

*"The destruction of the items would hopefully bring the Philippines' message across the globe that the country is serious and will not tolerate illegal wildlife trade and denounces the continuous killing of elephants for illicit ivory trade."* (National Geographic, 2013)

In January 2014, China destroyed 6.1 tonnes of ivory, a move welcomed by the conservationists, International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and others, seen as a symbol of growing concern about the ivory crisis. China's destruction of tonnes of tusk is important, the country has been the world's

biggest market accounting for 70 percent of the demand(UNODC, 2020). In January 2016, the island nation, Sri Lanka destroyed 350 tusks crushed to the furnace (Jayasinghe, 2016). Colombo Customs Director said:

"*We are trying to demonstrate that there is no value for blood ivory... It is horribly cruel, and the elephants suffer for about a week before they die.*" (Quartz, 2016)

In September 2021, India burnt thousands of rhino horn stockpiles since 1979 sending an anti-poaching message to the poachers (Hussain, 2021). Speaking at the event, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said:

"*Trading in rhino horns must stop and the claim of these horns having medicinal properties is false*" (AP News, 2021)

The burning of a stockpile of ivory and rhino horns has generated massive social media opinion and comments. Social media, as one of the most attentive platforms for the contemporary generation, plays a vital role in disseminating the information, and knowledge on the importance of animals and its conservation policies. It is observed that awareness of the heritage and endangered species are also on the rise. A deep strength of feeling for this glorious natural heritage coupled with a growing awareness of the present generation, a tranche of efforts to save the rhino with the change in attitude across the regional boundaries. Whereas forefather organised hunting expeditions, sporting events to display and to be recognised in the social hierarchy, now prevented by the statute going after the animals. Wildlife sanctuaries

established, laying the foundations for conserving the value species, on which today's species are being protected. The presence of rhino in Assamese culture is time immemorial. News relating to rhinos, especially in relation to Kaziranga National Park have been highlighted in different media platforms. It is not always the killing of animals that is emphasized but related to the biodiversity that attracts netizen response to the issue concerning conservation

of iconic species such as rhinoceros on YouTube, Facebook, twitter, and online news contents. For instance, strong reaction to the death of the last male northern white rhino, drew interest even from the western countries, and pressured the decision makers to take actions which would contribute to preserving biodiversity (Fink, Hausmann, and Di Minin, 2020,p.1). Media is not merely generating public opinion but could mold by emphasizing certain voices in raising awareness the issues that are directly connected to the public gets more emphasis.

**Methodological Framing**

Constant interaction is essential for the formation of meaningful interpersonal relationships, and in turn it creates an avenue for the need to belong (NTB). According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), NTB is found almost in human cultures, though intensity of expression varies. Projection of a group inclined towards sustaining social bonds facilitates defending the members of the group from external threats, entrails continuous interaction with others to build a cordial relationship. Stability in relationship and concern is formed providing a relational context and perception of bond essential for satisfying the need to belong (Baumeister and Leary, 1995,p. 497). The "need to belong" makes a basic point about human motivation and drive to form and maintain relationships with others. An individual who attributes a main role to others' opinions in relation to themselves have a high need to belong (Morrison, Epstude, and Roese, 2012,p. 675). Closely associated with the 'need to belong' is self-worth and self-esteem, acting as a sociometer to monitor oneself for the acceptability in a group. If a warning is felt by the person due to a fall in self-esteem, it tends to take certain steps for inclusion to avoid rejections in the community (Nadkarni and Hofmann, 2012,p. 247). Self-esteem in the context of collectivism links members who consider themselves as part of the group(s) motivated by the norms, duties and prioritize the goal of the group over their own personal interest, emphasising connectedness to the members of the group. Whereas in the context of individualism, one is motivated by one's own interest and emphasises the rational analysis of

benefits in associating with others (Hamamura, 2012,p.3). Self presentation portrays or informs oneself to others by ways of presenting one-self to the expectation and preference of the audience, and to one's own self (Baumeister and Hutton, 1987,p. 71). Idealized-virtual identity hypothesis measured the profiles of social media (FB) users reflecting actual personality rather than self-idealization(Back et al., 2010, p.372). Participants expressed and communicated real personality rather than promoting idealized versions of themselves and the impressions made independently from the profiles were accurate, and an exception of emotional stability (Nadkarni and Hofmann, 2012,p.245).

**Data Analysis:** For this study, youtube, facebook and twitter were selected for representation of digital media platforms. The sample collected for the study is based on one single post. A framework is devised to retrieve from the post pertaining to the keyword such as "burning of rhino horn in Assam" from the search engine. The collected data were compiled and analysed based on the netizen 'like', 'shared' and 'comments' in three social media platforms. In the 'like' section (fig 2) of three social media platforms, 67% YouTube, followed by Facebook with 29% and 4%Twitter respectively have liked the event. In the 'shared' section (fig 2), 67% YouTube, followed by Facebook with 42% and 16% twitter respectively have shared with others the event of burning of rhino horn. And in the 'comment' section (fig 2), 60% YouTube, 39% Facebook and 2% Twitter respectively have commented on the event. From the 'comment section' on three social media platforms, sub-themes- for and against the government viz, economy, tourism, religion, art and medical research-has been extracted and analysed the text accordingly.



Fig.2.Netizen Reaction
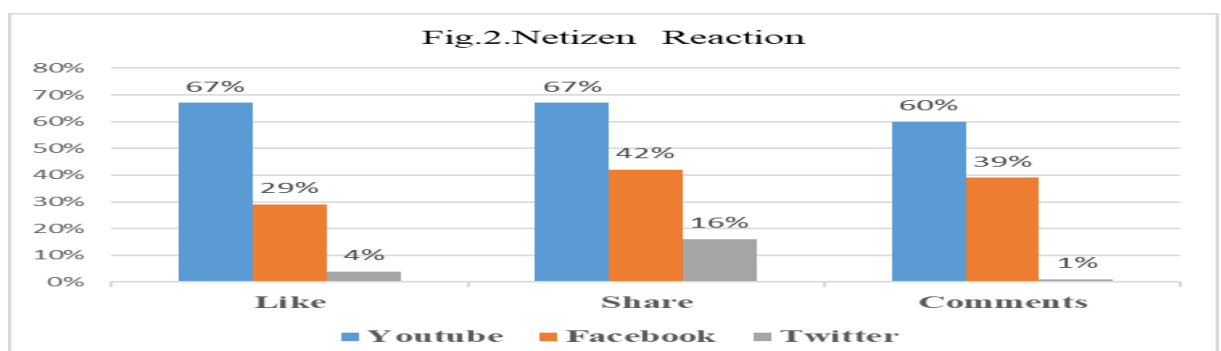
### *Economy*

Economic benefits were discussed linked with the condition of the state's (Assam) economy.  Discussion emphasized on the return from selling the horns in the international market and  generating revenue for the government of Assam.

*"...our economy is not in a good shape; this is totally a stupidity of the government...use  this as an asset! Use that money for a hospital or some school. Set an example by investing  it for humanity. Instead of burning such valuable items. It will be better if our  government sells them to the international market and collects a handsome fund for the  welfare of those covid affected poor people. It can be auctioned and should give the  money to the needy people of assam. State govt please can tell us what is the value of these horns in the international market? Is Assam too rich? It would be wise enough if  we distribute it to all the countries in the world, one each to preserve in their museum  so that at least the na…"* (Facebook, 2021)

It is observed that when the burning of the stockpile took place, the economy of the state is in  shambles due to the covid-19 and lockdown, and the business is in suspended animation and  the government election's promise of employment never takes place- though massive  recruitment took place years later.

*"Sell them with that money and give it to me. I will buy piglets and raise them and during BIHU I will provide pork meat at a discount as you cannot give it to the government. Job for me atleast  let me be helpful to you, mama (to Chief Minister of Assam)"* (Facebook, 2021)

The incident has made the netizens react in such a way that they could relate to their personal  situation. As the horn would have brought personal benefits to people of Assam. With the  money they would invest in business which would help them to generate income or useful for  day-to-day life, as the government is not able to provide employment to the youth of Assam.

*"If they would give me one, then I would drink tea daily with it or fill petrol. I don't have artistic talents but instead of burning it out it would have been useful. Mama (pointing to cm) with that money I would have invested for an NGO with proper documentation, rhinos' death wouldn't have been dishonored, meaningless and in vain."* (Facebook, 2021)

Comments also pointed on how to use the seized horn for the promotion of tourism, utilised in humanitarian aid, schools, or spent on welfare for the affected families and employees due to covid-19.

*"Saddening both Financially and Emotionally. The seized horns can be auctioned in the international market… to boost the tourism sector that suffered a major loss due to Pandemic. Nevertheless, drugs seized and destroyed is a praiseworthy step for the government of the day to prevent the menace of drugs in the society. Burning of horn, is the act of rational thought process. Drugs cannot be preserved in the museum, but rhino can. Museum preservation of rhino horn can earn resources, as people would like to glimpse at the iconic animal's horn. It is prudent upon the incumbent government to look beyond mega events, which may not serve any purpose in the long run. Government moves are primitive in nature. Further, selling the horn would generate good money to the state as the present economic status of Assam Government is not that conducive. In return, a good investment for the security of the rhino is the better option to preserve the animal. On the humanitarian ground the money could have been utilized in hospitals and in schools or assistance provided for the welfare of those covid affected poor people. But instead, the act of the government has resulted in the wastage of the national heritage of Assam."* (Facebook, 2021)

Since March 2020, the state tourism has been severely affected and resulted in huge economic loss. To generate income for the concerned department, it is found that auctioning of horn is a better choice for the government instead of burning.

*"The horns seized can be auctioned in the international market and further be*

*used to boost the tourism sector that suffered a major loss due to the Pandemic. Drugs seized and destroyed is a praiseworthy step for …"* (Facebook, 2021)

Some comments were made on the benefits of the horn from selling but with a proposal of stringent law to stop poaching or killing or selling in the illegal market.

*"Law needs to be strict, but seized horns need to be sold or kept by the government. And earn with them and use it for good works".* (Facebook, 2021)

In relation to the comments made by the social media users on the economic benefit of the seized horn vis-à-vis stringent law, some of the comments also made on wrong footing of auctioning or marketing of the horn would be equivalent to poachers and smugglers.

*"…if the govt will auction the horns then this kind of people will come and say that there is no difference between govt and poachers. Rhino horns are not to be auctioned or sold. Or else we will be doing the same thing as poachers. Then poachers would stop voting for them altogether. This move might seem bad, but if horns are sold then imagine the image of Assam tourism it will create around the world. People all over the world come to see one horned rhino in Assam. If the horns are sold, that won't be a good gesture."* (Facebook, 2021)

In responding to the comments made in favour of selling of horn to generate revenue for the state, comment was also made asking the netizen to inform the government the market value of the Rhino:

*"One horn rhino does not have a legal market...in black-market there was a price minimum 44-50 lakhs /KG. Those who think by selling horns, Assam will gain a lot of revenue then please inform the state govt about the legal market to sell these horns."* (Facebook, 2021)

Nevertheless, legalization of trade on rhino horn has been one of the proposals

as a step toward eradicating the illegal marketing (Biggs et al. 2013; Cheung et al. 2018). For many  decades, hunting and poaching and illegal trading in the international market has been happening despite having stringent laws to deal with it but never stopped from doing it. In this regard (Lopes, 2019,p. 110) pointed out the ineffectiveness of trade bans in curbing poaching and suggested that corruption needs to be tackled to reduce this menace. In hindsight, legalisation on  trading of this valued animal may not be the wisest of decisions but awareness as one of the  solutions or way forward to stop poaching and illegal trading in any form. A study by Crookes and Blignaut (2015: 16) reveals the conventional demand for reduction strategies are unlikely to reduce poaching, instead consumer behaviour modification through education might  be more effective.

### *Religion*

The event of burning of rhino horn started with the chanting of *slokas* from Veda by 21 priests where CM Himant Biswa Sharma presided over '*daha sankar'* ritual. It is observed that  description on the religious rituals and praising the present government also became part of the posts.

 *"I did not know that Rhino horn follows any religion. Thanks for enlightening me that  those rhino horns were followers of Hindu religion Puja with 21 priests while burning  Rihno horns sent a message from Assam to the world to end superstition. Modi is a  Viswaguru, Assam CM who is a world leader in the fight against superstition. I am proud."*

(Twitter, 2021)

With regards to the religious chanting, the government was of the view that the purpose of chanting of *slokas* and '*daha Sanskar'* ritual, is an attempt to send a message that rhinos are  part of family, culture, and identity, and symbolic way to respect the dead animals. As a matter  of fact, the religious chanting at the event of burning of the ivory or horn is not new to the  world or India specific. Sri Lanka, in 2016, burnt the ivory with the religious ceremony

performed by the Buddhist monk, Hindu, Muslim and Christian representative, praying for the elephants who have lost their lives (Dashgupta, 2016). Well, one may say that religious chanting is a way forward to display the societal interconnection with the ecosystem as every species is in need of others as well for its existence.

### Arts and Research

Art, tourism, and research were some of the points raised by the netizen proposing that the rhino horn would have been crafted for, to exhibit and keep in museums, and utilised for medicinal purposes.

*"Such a foolish decision... There are great artists in Assam, they can craft it into a great work of art can't they make it an art exhibit on those Rhinos' memories? It can be beautifully crafted if given to any craftsman. And can be placed in museums."* (Facebook, 2021)

Comments were made on consideration for the horn to be used in medical science as there is a scope for further research studies.

*"Instead of burning and wasting raw materials...could have utilised for medical research to make medicines...saved many lives... it has great demand due to medicinal properties... there is enough scope for future research...but what can we expect from this Government? 2,400 rhino horns = 2,400 rhinos killed/injured. Burning 2,400 rhino horns = no benefit. Auctioning off 2,400 rhino horns to 2,400 different "government" museums and research labs = efficient/educating/no air pollution. Worst decision ever. Are these people retarded.... Why make such a grand showbiz for this..."*(Youtube, 2021)

In relation to the research and academic purposes raised by the social media users, it is observed that, the government has preserved 94 horns for academic purposes and 29 horns for court cases, and the rest were sent to the furnace in 2021. Rhino horns having medicinal value have been debunked by activists, wildlife conservationists and the government as seen in official comments.

Simply debunking for the mere sake is far from how other communities' utilisation of the horn in traditional medicine. For centuries some communities in Asia used rhino horn in traditional medicine, and there is merit to it and cannot simply deny the scientific reason for using it. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), is claimed to have medicinal value in rhino horn but further scientific consensus on pharmacology is required (But, Yan-Kit, and Lai-Ching, 1991; Cheung et al., 2018; Laburn and Mitchell, 1997; Liu et al. ,2011).

### *Acclamatory on the Government's Action!*

Nevertheless, the government's action was well received by the social media users, burning of horns sent a strong message, as there is no economic value, and it is a right move to stop poaching of Rhino. Further, this would also help the Rhino to live a peaceful life eventually.

*"Well done. A bold step. By burning the horns, we are sending a message - there is no economic value in RHINO horns. Perhaps in the long run this will help these magnificent animals live a peaceful life"* (Youtube, 2021)

Few comments were raised the pertinent issue of how important the Rhino is to the people of Assam and praiseworthy of the way government has done, and questioning of others linking economic valued and auctioning of the horn:

*"Horns are not the symbol of the state, but the entire rhino is. When you auction off the very thing that the animals are being killed for, what message are you sending to the people: that you don't respect the animals whose bloods were few horns are preserved for academic purposes. Rhino horns are not to be auctioned or sold. Or else we will be doing the same thing as poachers. Only a passionate determination is enough to save the one-horned rhinoceros."* (Facebook, 2021)

Social media users also urge the government to carry out a similar act for the elephant's task, as the Elephant poaching is also high in the state. It is prudent upon the incumbent to take drastic action whether to carry out similar events

on other animals as well.

### *Disapproval of Government's Action*

The government's action has been well received but some of the comments found expressed their anguish. It is expressed that the burning of rhino horn was just to get attention, political mileage, and publicity linking government crusades on drug peddlers in the state.

*"first the govt stopped drug peddlers but now everything is available in market again…in the name of rhino horns, they will burn woods and become famous…Publicity at its Height…Drugs burning, Rhino horn burning, please burn the weapons of the surrendered militants with such publicity so that those cannot be reused by anyone. It is an attempt to fool people they might have made a deal with the rhino horn mafias in exchange of donations to the party's fund. Gifting the horns to museums across India and World will not earn any political mileage so burning in a spectacular way will give the right amount of political mileage. If this kind of activity is stopped then the government will get away from the voting bank of these people."* (Facebook, 2021)

Questions are also being raised over the authenticity of the horn. Few comments compared Chief Minister Shri Hemanta Sharma with the ministers of other states prophesying that this act will bag him the best Chief Minister in India. It is found in the comment sections where the government was associated with terms such as '*chor*' (thief), 'hands on smugglers', and 'comedy show'.

*"This government performs much better than standup comedians. RIP logic. Biggest comedy show is coming up on Wednesday. I feel pity for Yogi Ji because he will not be awarded the best CM. What does the Assam govt want to show such a foolish act .why don't they sell these horns and help the poor instead or else put the money in purchasing more security to these rhinos? This is nothing but show off. It is a problem*

*of India, always pretend to be idealistic but they should go for materialistic purposes.*" (Facebook, 2021)

The strict law and better surveillance system is the need of the hour for the protection of Rhino from being killed is what the public urged in the conversations. The event had also made few mockeries of the action and compared it to their perusal situations. It was not only the government the public mostly commented on but also on the poaching and the people who are involved. The public here compares the government with poachers.

"*Those who were arrested in connection with the smuggling of rhino horns, they might be released because govt. is going to erase their witness means govt. also have hands with smugglers*" (Facebook, 2021)

Comment also sarcastically mentioned about the fake horn:

"*The Gun salute, Vedic puja could be integrity show-off in the destruction of evidence to make oneself tension free since a report of 2016 mentioned most horns in the treasury were fake. A committee was then hastily convened without zoological experts.*" (Twitter, 2021)

The allegation of fake horn is not being denied, fake horns were found but the officials handling in verification of horn did not reveal the number. Some news reports say, case was reported in 2016, and five fake rhino horns have been found during the verification process (Nath, 2016).

**Discussion**

Social networking sites are one of the important tools for communication in the contemporary world. The common activities that we can identify on these networking sites are the likes, shared, and comments on the posts. Considering the present study of burning of rhino's horn in Assam, netizens from across the state and others have expressed their concern over the sensitive issues. The reactions recorded in the post of all the three platforms constitute the main analysis of the study. In hindsight, users of the social media platform might be

motivated because of the "need to belong" (Baumeister and Leary, 1995) and the "need for self-presentation" (Nadkarni and Hofmann, 2012). Hence, in the case of rhino's horn burning, belonging is expressed in an emotional connection with the animal. Whereas collectivism describes how the relationship between members of a society, or a community underline the interdependence of its members. So, the comment shared in the post has the chained reactions on some of the discussion that took place as the collective voice towards the case. The need for self-presentation has been referred to as the idealized-virtual identity hypothesis which relates to the personality characteristics of the users, users portray the real personality and not influence to promote idealized versions of themselves (Back et al., 2010, p. 372). In the context of the act of government and providing alternative means to the issue was discussed by many in the post and hence is the reflection of one's personality rather than the idealized version of self. The netizen is vigilant about the iconic animal of the state and has raised concern on the lack of Government taking effective measures/initiatives in preservation. Few measures were emphasised on cutting the rhino's horn to stop the killing by the poachers. If poaching activity continues, and the government fails to take any action, then the days are not far off that the rhino population will distinctly reduce. In the context, burning of stockpiled rhino horn has generated varied opinions ranging from economic value to no value, for and against the government action, religion chanting, medical research, to art and crafts. Religious chanting associated with the burning of horns has been articulate on both sides, some have appreciated it while others condemned it. Least on the contradictory statement made on 'no economic values on the rhino horn.' Proper utilisation of horn was most discussed in the comment sections which can be made into a beautiful art and crafts, used for scientific development and medical research rather than burning into ashes. Netizens were disappointed in the Government's action and found dismay and betrayal. It is expressed that the burning of rhino's horn stockpile is just to have political mileage and publicity and nothing to do with busting the myths 'no value in the illegal market' on the rhino horn. The comment showcases public frustrations by not

fulfilling the government's promises of employment in the state. The crucial issue such as this has clearly taken into a criticism on being able to provide for the daily necessities of a person such as drinking tea or raring pig or establishing an NGO with the money generated from the confiscated rhino horns. There is an apprehension on the image of the state if horns are sold in the international market. Nevertheless, selling rhino's horns can recover the amount, and the government uses those amounts in installing a better surveillance system to monitor the poaching activity. Utilisation of technology will be immensely beneficial in safeguarding the rhino of Assam. The digital communities around the globe are functioning for different causes. Knowledge and technical skills have benefited where the natural conservation sector must learn to remain effective in bringing changes in the conservation.

**Conclusion**

In the last couple of years, social media platforms are gaining its popularity, main reason been not only because of its ability to reach out to the mass but provision of interactive features to raise one's opinion. Hence, social media as a popular medium has manifested even in human nature interaction platforms. The burning of stockpile 2479 of single-horn Rhino of Assam have been shared in different social media platforms which generate mixed responses who are strongly associated with the place. Hence, the responses are the consequence of emotional attachment with this iconic species. Some have expressed the good faith of the government's action, as it is perceived in a good ridden manner, while others have compared it as illogical, and anguish over the burning of horn rather than using them for a productive purpose. In comparison to the kind of expression, and comments made on different social media platforms, the study found that Youtube is inclined towards the government's action while the Facebook and the Twitter post were sceptical of the event. Overall, the results of the study can be used to enhance strategies for the conservation of rhino in Assam. Based on the gravity and the assertiveness of the comments of the netizens, pressure can seek the decision makers for adopting or allocating necessary steps for the conservation of the rhino. The

comments of the post in all the three platforms, should be able to develop activities and initiatives so that both the government and NGOs work hand in hand to develop policy documents. Conservation is not an easy task; it is a relentless fight against the smugglers and the poachers though laws and policies are promulgated by the government of India but still not active in action. Like the digital community, conservationists can employ the very forum to propagate their campaign and be an active observer on the conservation issues. Nevertheless, this study is based on one single post of three social media platforms focusing only on the burning of rhino in Assam, India. This paper was not compared to similar cases in other countries. The comparison of comments from different countries could broaden the understanding and emotional attachment to the animal. In addition, few comments from the Facebook post were deleted, and selected which is marked as "most relevant", so some replies might have been filtered out. The relevance of the removed post is not known and the reason for taking this decision by the host of the post is not clearly defined. This study is undertaken online whereas users are not in physical contact. Hence, similar studies can be conducted in offline mode to understand motivation or intensity of the users, personality traits of an individual and group.

## References

Amin, R., Thomas, K., Emslie, R. H., Foose, T. J., & Strien, N. V. (2006). An overview of the conservation status of and threats to rhinoceros species in the wild.*International Zoo Yearbook*,*40*(1), 96-117.

Back, M. D., Stopfer, J. M., Vazire, S., Gaddis, S., Schmukle, S. C., Egloff, B., & Gosling, S. D. (2010). Facebook profiles reflect actual personality, not self-idealization. *Psychological science*,*21*(3), 372-374.

Barbora, S. (2017). Riding the rhino: Conservation, conflicts, and militarisation of Kaziranga National Park in Assam.*Antipode*,*49*(5), 1145-1163.

Baumeister, R. F., & Hutton, D. G. (1987). Self-presentation theory: Self-construction and audience pleasing. In *Theories of group behavior* (pp. 71-87).

New York, NY: Springer New York.

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (2017). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Interpersonal development*, 57-89.

Bhaumik, S. (2007). Insurgencies in India's northeast: conflict, co-option & change.

Biedermann, Z., Gerritsen, A., & Riello, G. (Eds.). (2017). *Global gifts: The material culture of diplomacy in early modern Eurasia*. Cambridge University Press.

Biggs, D., Courchamp, F., Martin, R., & Possingham, H. P. (2013). Legal trade of Africa's rhino horns. *Science*, *339*(6123), 1038-1039.

Bonal, B. S., Talukdar, B. K., & Sharma, A. (2009). Translocation of Rhino in Assam.*Tiger Paper*,*36*(1).

Baumeister, R. F., & Hutton, D. G. (1987). Self-presentation theory: Self-construction and audience pleasing. In *Theories of group behavior* (pp. 71-87). New York, NY: Springer New York.

But, P. P. H., Yan-Kit, T., & Lai-Ching, L. (1991). Ethnopharmacology of rhinoceros horn. II: Antipyretic effects of prescriptions containing rhinoceros horn or water buffalo horn. *Journal of Ethnopharmacology*, *33*(1-2), 45-50.

Cheung, H., Mazerolle, L., Possingham, H. P., & Biggs, D. (2018). Medicinal use and legalized trade of rhinoceros horn from the perspective of traditional Chinese medicine practitioners in Hong Kong. *Tropical Conservation Science*,*11*, 1940082918787428.

Choudhury, A. (2004). Human–elephant conflicts in Northeast India. *Human dimensions of wildlife*, *9*(4), 261-270.

Christy, B.(2013). In Global First, Philippines to Destroy Its Ivory Stock. Retrieved July 13, 2022, from Animals website: https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/130618-philippines-ivory-crush-elephants-poaching-world-asia

Crookes, D. J., & Blignaut, J. N. (2015). Debunking the myth that a legal trade will solve the rhino horn crisis: A system dynamics model for market demand. *Journal for Nature Conservation*,*28*, 11-18.

Dashgupta, S. (2016). Sri Lanka crushes and destroys over 350 ivory tusks. Retrieved July 20, 2022, from Mongabay Environmental News website: https://news.mongabay.com/2016/01/sri-lanka-crushes-and-destroys-over-350-ivory-tusks/

Dinerstein, E. (2003) Return of the Unicorns: Natural History and Conservation of the Greater-One Horned Rhinoceros. New York: Columbia University Press.

Divyabhanusinh, Das, A. K., & Bose, S. (2018). *The Story of India's Unicorns*. Marg Foundation.

Fink, C., Hausmann, A., & Di Minin, E. (2020). Online sentiment towards iconic species. *Biological Conservation*,*241*, 108289.

Duggan, B., Kriel, R., & Cuevas, M. (2016). Historic ivory burn covers the sky in smoke and ash. Retrived from CNN website: https://www.cnn.com/2016/04/30/africa/kenya-ivory-burn/index/html

Facebook.(2021). G Plus. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/guwahatiplus/posts/pfbid037xjZUvW8RGKyEheU JAPC5BUEQamrm9NcoXLUsdRJNsWDUYrxW1XaZocwrgdEwxmZl

Singh, D. M., Sharma, A., Dutta, D. K., Swargowari, A., Bhobora, C. R., & Bonal, B. S. (2020). TRANSLOCATION CORE COMMITTEE.

Hamamura, T. (2012). Are cultures becoming individualistic? A cross-temporal comparison of individualism–collectivism in the United States and Japan. *Personality and social psychology review*,*16*(1), 3-24.

Hance, J. (2014). Czech Republic publicly burns confiscated rhino horns. Retrieved July 13, 2022, from Mongabay Environmental News website: https://news.mongabay.com/2014/10/photos-czech-republic-publicly-burns-confiscated-rhino-horns/

Hussain, W. (2021). Indian officials burn rhino horns to stop illegal trade. Retrieved July 13, 2022, from AP NEWS website: https://apnews.com/article/environment-and-nature-asia-india-animals-south-asia-b35a25bafb92044ff7d40c0d114cfc08

ITU. (2021). Measuring digital development: Facts and figures 2021. Geneva: ITU.

Jayasinghe, A. (2016). Sri Lanka destroys biggest ever illegal ivory haul. Retrieved July 13, 2022, from https://phys.org/news/2016-01-sri-lanka-biggest-illegal-ivory.html

Laburn, H. P., & Mitchell, D. (1997). Extracts of rhinoceros horn are not antipyretic in rabbits. *Journal of Basic and Clinical Physiology and Pharmacology*, *8*(1-2), 1-12.

Liu, R., Duan, J. A., Wang, M., Shang, E., Guo, J., & Tang, Y. (2011). Analysis of active components of rhinoceros, water buffalo and yak horns using two-dimensional electrophoresis and ethnopharmacological evaluation. *Journal of separation science*, *34*(3), 354-362.

Lopes, A. A. (2019). Transnational links in rhino poaching and the black-market price of rhino horns. *Australian Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics*, *63*(1), 95-115.

Lyngdoh, S., Dixit, D., & Sinha, B. C. (2017). Print mass media coverage of wildlife in the developing world. *Current Science*, 564-570.

Mintage World. (2015). Gupta Numismatic Art – Rhinoceros Slayer [Numismatic Art]. Retrieved June 27, 2022, from Mintage World website: http://www.mintageworld.com/media/detail/45

Morrison, M., Epstude, K., & Roese, N. J. (2012). Life regrets and the need to belong. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, *3*(6), 675-681.

Nadkarni, A., & Hofmann, S.G. (2012). Why do people use Facebook? Personality and Individual Differences, 52(3), 243–249. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2011.11.007

Nath, H.K. (2016). Five fake rhino horns found during verification process in Assam. Retrieved July 20, 2022, from https://www.thehansindia.com/posts/index/National/2016-08-26/Five-fake-rhino-horns-found-during-verification-process-in-Assam/250634

Puri, K., & Joshi, R.(2018). RRC: A Case study of Greater One Horned Rhinoceros (Rhinoceros unicornis) in Kaziranga National Park of Assam, India. NeBIO:An International Journal of Environment and Biodiversity, 9(4), 307–309.

Rohman, F.Y., & Sonowal, R.R. (2021). Twitter Study on the Framing of COVID-19 Communications by the Government of Assam. Global Media Journal-Indian Edition, 13(1), 1–30. https://gmj.manipal.edu/issues/JUNE2021/

Rookmaaker, K., Nelson, B., & Dorrington, D. (2005). The royal hunt of tiger and rhinoceros in the Nepalese terai in 191 1. Pachyderm, 38, 88–97.

Statista. (2021). Statista, 2021. Hamburg: Statista.

Talbot, L.M. (1960). A look at threatened species: A report on some animals of the Middle East and southern Asia which are threatened with extermination. London: Fauna Preservation Society.

Tosh, D.(2015, September 22). Africa's rhinos hog the limelight while their Asian cousins head for extinction. Retrieved March 18, 2023, from The Conversation website: http://theconversation.com/africas-rhinos-hog-the-limelight-while-their-asian-cousins-head-for-extinction-47336

Twitter. (2021). Have never heard of Gun salute ,vedic puja in rhino horn burn—Full on Tam Jham. Wastage of money and human resources. It happens only in Assam. #WorldRhinoDay2021 #mygovassam [Tweet]. Retrieved July 26, 2022, from Twitter website: https://twitter.com/disha_j22/status/1440569181372489728

UNODC. (2020). World Wildlife Crime Report: Trafficking in protected species. New York: UNO.

Vaughan, A. (2015). Mozambique burns world's largest rhino horn seizure. The Guardian. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jul/06/mozambique-burns-worlds-largest-rhino-horn-seizure.

Vigne, L., & Martin, E.B. (1994). The Greater One-Horned Rhino of Assam is Threatened by Poachers. Pachyderm, (18), 28–43.

WFL. (2017). Stockpile of rhino horn burned in the Dvůr Králové Zoo in the Czech Republic. Retrieved July 5, 2022, from Wild For Life website: https://wildfor.life/stockpile-of-rhino-horn-burned-in-the-dv%C5%AFr-kr%C3%A1lov%C3%A9-zoo-in-the-czech-republic

WNET. (2020). Rhinoceros Fact Sheet | Blog | Nature | PBS. Retrieved July 1, 2022, from Nature website: https://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/blog/rhinoceros-fact-sheet/

WWF. (2016a). Largest Ivory Burn Kenya 2016. Retrieved July 13, 2022, from https://wwf.panda.org/wwf_news/?267833/LARGEST-IVORY-BURN-KENYA-2016

WWF. (2016b). The Greater One-Horned Rhino: Past, Present and Future. Geneva: WWF. Retrieved from https://moam.info/the-greater-one-horned-rhino_59f585901723dd6520d5a8c0.html

WWF. (2019). Rhino | Species | WWF. Retrieved June 10, 2023, from World Wildlife Fund website: https://www.worldwildlife.org/species/rhino

Youtube. (2021). Thousands of rhino horns burned in ceremony in India to mark World Rhino Day. Retrieved July 26, 2022, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KljtLb2vNgw

Zane, D.(2016).Kenya's ivory inferno: Does burning elephant tusks destroy them? BBC News. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-afric-34313745.

**Rupa Rani Sonowal,** Assistant Professor, Dept of Mass Communication & Journalism, Central University of Karnataka
*Email: rupasonowal@cuk.ac.in*

**N Atungbou,** Assistant Professor, Dept of Sociology, Sikkim Manipal University, *Email: atungbou10@gmail.com*

# Pride and prejudice of sex reassignment surgery among transgender people: Qualitative explorations from Bhubaneswar, India

--Prachi Parimita Rout & Pranaya Kumar Swain

**Abstract**

In the context of gender dysphoria, sex reassignment surgery (SRS) plays a vital role in accomplishing desirable gender transition and the associated socio-psychological comfort among transgender people. Though transsexualism and gender dysphoria have been studied extensively, the psycho-social aspects of SRS among transgender people have, unfortunately, not received enough attention from the researchers. With advancements in medical technology, many transgender people have started opting for their chosen gender through the process of SRS. However, the magnitude of marginalization and shifting social dynamics play critical roles in the perception and decision-making among transgender people while going for the SRS. Albeit with a small number of transgender participants, the present study attempts to dive deep into several aspects, such as the perception of SRS, the issues faced by transgender people related to gender identity disorder, and the need for sex reassignment surgery among the transgender people in Bhubaneswar, the capital city of Odisha. The study involved a series of personal interviews with willing participants recruited through snowball method. They discussed various life experiences reflecting upon their perception of SRS and the associated social dynamics. The study findings show that transgender people face a high degree of marginalization and social discrimination due to their gender identity disorders, forcing them to go for SRS in order for them to have enhanced self-confidence and societal acceptance of their new gender.

*Keywords: Sex reassignment surgery, Discrimination, Perception, Gender identity disorder*

**Introduction**

Gender has often been argued as a biologically determined and inherent identity, based on and reinforced by societal norms. This renders genders as performative as well as an illusion of two natural and essential sexes. The categories of women and men are, as a result, created as individuals act as women and men rather than being biologically deterministic women and men (Butler, 1990). Butler's notion of

performativity echoes a range of social psychological approaches to gender and gender difference, what many call gender norms and stereotypes (e.g., Eagly, 1987; Fiske and Stevens, 1993), or gender schemas (Bem, 1981). Reinforcing the notion, many individuals depart from the binary view of sex, gender and sexuality and embrace an identity that is essentially performative and not normative. Discordance between gender with which one identifies and biological sex assigned at birth often translates into gender dysphoria (Safer & Tangpricha, 2019; Schechter, 2016) among the transgender people rendering them more vulnerable to increased risks of depression, substance abuse, self-injury and suicide compared with those in the general population (Bustos et al., 2021, Lane et al., 2018). Such people often express 'dissatisfaction with their anatomic gender and the wish to have the secondary sexual characteristics of the opposite sex' (Brown, 1990).

Transgender people constitute one of the most marginalized communities in the society (Atheequee & Nishanthi, 2016). Moreover, they face negative consequences if they fail to conform to their normative gender roles and discrimination afflicting their daily lives (Bustos et al., 2021). The transgender people feel that their gender identity is in contrast to the gender assigned to them at the time of birth, and because of this they fall into the trap of gender identity disorder (Blosnich et al., 2013). In this context many argue that Gender-affirmation surgeries (GAS) assist in aligning the people's appearance with their gender identity and provide personal comfort with oneself, thereby decreasing psychological distress (Wernick et al., 2019; Nolan et al., 2019, Lane et al. 2018).

However, in the case of health care services related to gender transitioning and hormonal therapy, transgender people face many other problems. Science and technology are developing at an incredibly rapid pace impacting the lives of many individuals. However, when it comes to sex reaffirmation surgery (SRS) among transgender people, many legal and medical issues stand as stumbling blocks. Besides, SRS is legally accepted in many developed countries, but till now, Indian laws have been conspicuously silent on these issues. Indian surgeons also face many legal and technical hassles while dealing with such transsexual patients. The 12th five-year plan of the Government of India has

underlined targeted interventions for the transgender community by providing support for their education, housing, and access to healthcare. In doing so, the government of India has also emphasized that the health policies must focus on the unique requirements of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and the transgender community as a whole (Klein et al., 2009). However, many social scientists, activists, and policymakers have reported the gap between theory and practice. Hence, this calls for a systematic understanding of the issues and problems that transgender people face.

**Understanding Transgender**

Transgender is an umbrella term used to define those individuals whose gender identity varies from the accepted stereotypical gender role associated at the time of birth (Arvind et al., 2022). First coined in the United States of America the term was used to include people whose way of life appears to be non-confirming with the gender norms developed in society. In broad terms, a transgender person is a person who crosses the conventional binary of gender in terms of walking, speaking, dressing and behaving. Blosnich et al. (2013) explain the term with broader scope, 'it typically encompasses individuals who self-identify as being or living outside socially constructed gender roles of masculinity and femininity'. Transgender people go through multiple surgical procedures to fit into the gender they desire to be (Whittle et al. 2007). Stryker (2008) defines transgender people as '. people who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender...' The movement across socially imposed boundaries away from an unchosen starting place- rather than any particular destination or mode of transition- best characterizes the category of transgender people.

Transgender includes transsexuals, cross-dressers, drag kings and drag queens, and genderqueers. First, transsexuals are those persons whose self-identification of gender is different from their assigned biological sex. Transsexuals may or may not go for medical interventions or hormonal treatment to change their physical appearance to match their self-identified

gender. Second, cross-dressers are those individuals who, for various reasons, wear clothes stereotypically associated with a different gender. Third, drag kings and drag queens are those persons who wear drag clothing and make-up to imitate the other gender signifiers and roles for entertainment. Fourth, gender queers are those persons who may not identify themselves as male or female as they feel their gender transcends the gender binary (Beemyn, 2003). It includes those transgender gender norms that encompass the culturally prevalent traditional gender roles (Chakrapani, 2010; Craig & Heith, 2014; Davidson, 2007; Valentine, 2007; WHO, 2017). The transgender and gender non-conforming persons, despite being reportedly part of every society through human history, encounter several psychological, social, economic, and legal barriers in their everyday lives (Khan et al., 2009). This study intends to make a modest attempt to understand transgender individuals' lived experiences related to sex reassignment surgery. In doing so, it also aims to explore our understanding of their experiences with gender identity disorder and gender dysphoria.

**Transgender people in India**

In India, transgender is a culturally identified group that is diverse, distinct, and includes different types of gender identities (Jayadeva, 2017; White Hughto et al., 2015). The transgender population in the country, as per the 2011 Census, is 4.88 million, constituting 0.04% of the total population. However, many researchers, academic experts and social activists claim this estimate to be under-reported, as many transgender people in India often choose to remain unrecognized due to the structured social stigma and discrimination labeled against them (Arvind et al., 2022; Chakrapani, 2010; Jayadeva, 2017). There are many ways through which transgender individuals express their gender identity by making changes in their lifestyle and following the transition process, including changing one's name and appearance, and most popularly cross-dressing (Chakrapani, 2010). Some transgender individuals take it further by going under the knife for sex reassignment or reaffirmation surgery and hormone therapy. It is interesting to

know that gender identities are considered fluid in many Asian and Pacific Island cultures (Al-Mamun, et al., 2022). For example, some of them prefer to introduce themselves as transgender men (i.e., feeling like a man but from birth, the person is a woman), transgender woman (i.e., feeling like a woman but from birth the person is a man), or simply transgender. In India, various heterogeneous groups of transgender women introduce themselves as Hijra, Kinnar, Aravani, Jogta or Jogappa, and Shiv-Shakti (Chakrapani, 2010; Satpathy et al., 2017; Sawant, 2017). Many transgender women want to be a part of these groups on their own will (Swain, 2006), whereas others are forcibly handed over to the Hijra community by their parents due to their gender identity disorder (Kalra, 2012; UN-OHCHR, 2015). Hindu goddess Bahuchara Mata is popularly known as the deity of Hijras in India. Hijras are mainly found in Western India and are commonly known as the Hijra gharana (Nanda, 2015). Ancient Indian myths depict the Hijras as having special powers to bless people with good luck and fertility (Kalra, 2012). Some Hijras go through a ritual called nirvana, involving castration or emasculation (Kalra, 2012; Kalra & Shah, 2013; Nanda, 2015). Despite all these, transgender community in India continues to struggle for substantive justice and community development. The landmark verdict of the Supreme Court of India, National Legal Services Authority Union of India (NALSA) in 2014 has certainly been a step forward towards a justiciable framework of substantive human rights on the grounds of the multiple and intersectional marginalities of the transgender community (Kumar, 2021).

**The sex-gender interface**

Globally, all human beings are expected to act and behave as per the biologically determined sex assigned at birth. A man is expected to behave as a man, and a woman is perceived to act as a woman. However, some individuals are known by different names in different societies and cultures. Some of the widely used terms for transgender are cross-dressers, transsexuals, drag queens, transvestites, etc. (Lind, 2010). The term transgender gained wide popularity in the 1990s due mainly to the advocacies

of the United Nations. So before going to discuss transsexuality or transgender, the definitional nuances of gender and sex need to be understood. Gender refers to social, psychological, and emotional traits, often influenced by social roles and identities assigned to males and females, distinguishing an individual as feminine or masculine. Associated intensely with the social aspects of life, gender explains how boys and girls walk, play, eat, wear clothes and behave in public space. Gender differences are identified through the socialization processes of the society that one grows up in.

Further, gender identity refers specifically to social differences between boys and girls. In other words, gender identity is an individual's self-perceived sense of maleness and femaleness in relation to the societal norms (Giddens, 1998). Sex, on the other hand, refers to the biologically determined distinctions between males and females with specific references to internal and external genitalia, physiological hormones, and reproductive functions (Torgrimson & Minson, 2005; Tseng, 2008).

For ages, it was believed that the different characteristics, roles, and statuses assigned to women and men in society are determined by sex, which is natural and, therefore, not changeable. Thus, the social identity of an individual depends on his or her sex, i.e., on her biological identity. Unlike sex, which is biological, the gender identities of the individuals in society are psychologically and socio-culturally determined (Bhasin, 2005). Sex refers to the quality by which organisms are classified as female or male based on their reproductive organs and functions. Physical differences are distinguished by sex through the birth of a person. Sex is associated with the biological aspect of the body (Beemyn, 2003). Sex and gender have been interpreted in archaeology for a very long time. It contained the concept of the social polarity of man and woman. Sex and gender are always considered the binary notion where sex falls under the category of biology and gender falls under the category of culture (Joyce, 2008).

**Conceptual underpinnings of sex reassignment surgery**

Studies establish that transgender people suffer from gender identity disorder (Arvind et al., 2022; Blosnich et al., 2013; Gupta & Murarka, 2009; Khan et al., 2009; Kalra & Shah, 2013), where they fail to identify themselves with the gender assigned to them at birth. This gender dysphoria leads them to desire to live a life of the sex of their choice. To overcome the problem, many transgender people opt for SRS, which includes the process of removal of various parts of the body to change the external sexual features assigned to the perceived sex. Sex reassignment surgery has been practiced for quite some time now and is globally accepted as a unique and essential treatment among transgender people to overcome the problems associated with gender dysphoria (Cohen-Kettenis & Gooren, 1999).

Selvaggi & Bellringer (2011) note that gender reassignment (which includes psychotherapy, hormonal therapy, and surgery) has been demonstrated as the most effective treatment for people affected by gender dysphoria or gender identity disorder, in which people do not recognize their gender/sexual identity as matching their genetic and sexual characteristics. Gender reassignment surgery is a series of complex surgical procedures, genital and non-genital, performed to treat gender dysphoria. Genital procedures for gender dysphoria, such as vaginoplasty, clitorolabioplasty, penectomy and orchidectomy in male-to-female transsexuals, and penile and scrotal reconstruction in female-to-male transsexuals, are the core procedures in gender reassignment surgery. Non-genital procedures, such as breast enlargement, mastectomy, facial feminization surgery, voice surgery, and other masculinization and feminization procedures complete the surgical treatment available. Jokic-Begic et al. (2014) in their study 'Psycho-social adjustment to sex reassignment surgery: A qualitative examination and personal experiences of six transsexual persons in Croatia', explain how the transgender people after doing SRS reported good condition of physical and mental health. They had good social support and were satisfied with the surgical treatment and outcomes. Gupta et al. (2016), in their study 'Challenges in transgender

healthcare: The pathology perspective', explore how the pathological challenges were associated with caring for transgender patients regarding hormonal and surgical options for transgender individuals. Bracanonic (2016), in his study 'Sex reassignment surgery and enhancement', explains that sex reassignment surgery is a therapy for transgender people in a gender dysphoria state of mind. However, transgender scholars criticize this practice as unjustified medicalization and stigmatizing transsexual people. By demanding that sex reassignment is not classified as therapy, they imply that it should be classified as some biomedical enhancement. Davison (2000), in his study 'Aesthetic considerations in secondary procedures for gender reassignment' explains how secondary aesthetic surgery in gender patients is multi-diversified and broad. It addresses various types of differences between genders and is certainly not limited to genital surgery. A sensitive approach and high index of suspicion for potential psychological and emotional problems are needed. Reisner et al. (2016), in their study 'Advancing methods for U.S. transgender's health research', report lack of extensive critical observational studies and intervention trials, limited access to data related to benefits and risks of sex reassignment surgery, and inconsistency in the use of various definitions across studies hinder evidence-based care for transgender people. Gomez-Gil et al. (2017), in their study 'Determinants of quality of life in Spanish transsexuals attending a gender unit before genital sex reassignment surgery', used the WHOQOL-BREF scale to evaluate self-reported quality of life (QOL). They propose that cross-sex hormonal treatment, family bonding, and working or studying are connected to developing a better self-reported QOL in transsexuals.

Traditionally castration constituted an integral part of sex reassignment process among the transgender people. In India, the process of castration is referred, by many, as nirvana (salvation) or new birth. In case of castration, male genitals are removed surgically by unqualified quacks or traditionally performed by a daima/ daiamma/thaiamma (senior transgenders). Daima performs the procedure along with her assistant in the early morning by placing Bahuchara Mata (the transgender deity in Gujarat) in a locally

sanitized room. Many restrictions were associated with this ritual. For forty days the transgender person undergoing surgery stays in an isolated room without combing hair, doing makeup, coming in contact with a man and maintaining a strict diet. After those forty days, a grand feast is organized by the operated transgender person for the trans-community of the locality (Nanda, 1990). However, the operation is performed by trained doctors nowadays, and the following requirements are necessary.

**Requirements for gender affirmation surgery** (Ahuja & Bhattacharya, 2001; Gupta & Murarka, 2009; Gupta et al., 2016)

For undergoing the process of SRS, the following criteria need to be fulfilled.

- A feeling of discomfort with one's sex assigned from birth.

- Willingness to change one's sex organ and desire to lead a life of the opposite sex.

- The discordance feeling must be continuous for not less than two years.

- Lack of mental disorder including severe depression or schizophrenia

- Absence of genetic abnormality.

**Prerequisite of referral letters from health professionals for gender affirmation surgery**

1. One letter from a mental health professional is required for undergoing hormone therapy or for doing breast surgery.

2. Letters from two mental health professionals are required for undergoing genital surgery.

Literature on issues of gender identities highlights discordance between transgender people's internal and external identity (Kalra, 2012; Kalra & Shah, 2013; Agoramoorthy & Hsu, 2015; Nanzy & Savarimuthu, 2015); persistent need for sex change and gender change, and the need to find a

community of similar people (Shivakumar & Yadiyurshetty, 2014), challenges in coming to terms with their gender identity and/or gender expression (Chakrapani, 2010), gender dysphoria - feeling of an incongruence between sex and gender (Ahuja & Bhattacharya, 2001; Gupta & Murarka, 2009). However, there is little research on their lifestyle (Khan et al., 2009). With this at the backdrop, this study intends to explore the socio-psychological and economic aspects of access to health services by transgender people in general and sex reassignment surgery in particular. The objectives of the study include understanding the perception of transgender about sex reassignment surgery, the types of discrimination transgender people face due to having gender identity disorder, the availability of health/ surgical facilities to transgender people, and the level of post-surgery acceptance of transgender people in their families/Societies.

**Methods and materials**

A qualitative study was carried out by using semi-structured interview schedule. A total of twelve participants were included in the study. The respondents were identified by locally known transgender people using the snowball sampling method (Parker et al., 2019). Required permission was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee for Human Research at the National Institute of Science Education and Research, Bhubaneswar, India, to conduct the research among human participants. All the participants were made aware of the objectives, and their consent was taken to participate in the study. All of them were male-to-female transgender people residing in Bhubaneswar and were above eighteen years of age. The respondents were interviewed separately for sixty to ninety minutes each in their challi (the place where transgender people stay with their peer groups and Guru). One respondent was interviewed in one day, and a joint informal discussion was conducted among the participants at a mutually convenient time and place. All the interviews were conducted during March-May 2021, in the local Odia language and later translated into English by the researchers. The interviews were recorded for future reference, for those who agreed to come in front of

the camera. Appropriate non-verbal data including eye contact, body language, and the pace of voice while answering sensitive questions by the respondents were recorded in a special note of the researcher individually for each respondent. Verbatim were used by the researchers in the study to supplement the study findings and to add more insights. Four themes were identified and subsequently analyzed in this study: 1. the Socio-economic profile of the respondents, 2. the perception among transgender people about Sex reassignment surgery, 3. nature of discrimination transgender people face due to having gender dysphoria, 4. Need of surgery for transgender people and the associated satisfaction or regret if any.

**Results and Discussion**

All the participants (n=12) were residents of Bhubaneswar city. Out of them, ten identified themselves as Hijra and the rest two claimed themselves to be transgenders. Table 1 presents the demographic of all the twelve participants who have either undergone the SRS or willing to go under the knife soon.

Table 1. Participants Demographic Profile

|  | Participant's Name (pseudo names) | Age | Self-claimed Gender identity | Highest education | Occupation | Monthly income (~ in INR) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Roshni | 23 | Hijra | Higher secondary | Sex work | 28,000 |
| 2 | Chanda | 25 | Hijra | High school | Sex work | 25,000 |
| 3 | Rajni | 30 | Hijra | High school | Sex work | 20,000 |
| 4 | Priya | 27 | Hijra | High school | Sex work | 18,000 |
| 5 | Soniya | 26 | Hijra | High school | Sex work | 20,000 |
| 6 | Supriya | 29 | Hijra | Primary education | Sex work | 35,000 |
| 7 | Bhavna | 30 | Hijra | Post-graduation | Storekeeper | 15,000 |
| 8 | Radha | 28 | Transgender | Secondary | Sex work | 38,000 |

| | | | | education | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | Chandrika | 35 | Hijra | No schooling | Begging | 18,000 |
| 10 | Madhuri | 34 | Hijra | Secondary education | Begging | 15,000 |
| 11 | Aiswarya | 20 | Transgender | Higher secondary | Acting and dancing | 45,000 |
| 12 | Khusi | 32 | Hijra | Higher secondary | Beautician | 50,000 |

In the present study, the twelve participants, were between twenty-three and thirty-five years of age. As far as their educational qualifications are concerned, most of the participants (n=11) had not gone beyond higher secondary level: one participant never went to school, three went up to primary/ elementary level, four had completed high school, three had completed higher secondary level, and only one had done post-graduation. The livelihood sources of the participants included mostly the unskilled and semi-skilled works. Most of them (n=9) were engaged in unskilled works such as road-side begging, begging at the public parks, cinema halls and traffic signals, and paid sex, a large section of which (n=7) were working at night at the roadside pickup joints for selling sex and going as call girls to hotels, lodges, and private houses on a payment basis. Only three of them were engaged in semi-skilled works like storekeeper, dancing and assisting in a beauty parlor. No one was found to be engaged in any skilled job such as government or private salaried jobs. Six of the participants earn between INR 10000-20000 per month, two of them earn between INR 20001-30000, another two people earn in the range of INR 30001-40000, and the rest two earn above INR 40000 per month. While presenting the narrative analysis of the responses, we have tried to use pseudo names to protect the identity of the participants.

**Perception about Sex reassignment surgery**

The study findings reveal that the perception of transgender people related to Sex reassignment surgery is varied and unique, which differs from one transgender person to another. For ordinary people, it is just an operation through which they change their organs, befitting the perceived sex they feel like. In medical terms, it is termed cosmetic surgery. Roshni, a 20 years old participant shares her perception as follows, which corroborates the views of three other respondents:

…I am now 20 years old. Due to my fair complexion and slim body, my customers like me so much. Besides, I have a boyfriend who insists on marrying me as the earliest possible. So, on his request, I am going for the sex reassignment surgery which will transform me from a man to a complete woman.

 Adding to Roshni's perception, Chanda added her perspective on the struggle for a social identify of her choice and coming out of the trap of the identity disorder and social distress.

To undergo surgery is like getting a new birth for a transgender person like me. Though we live a trans life to prove ourselves to the common public, SRS is a must for all of us. Only by doing SRS, I can get nirvana (salvation) from this life after my death.

 To reinforce further, another participant Rajni expresses similar views and vouches for SRS as a realistic solution for overcoming the gender dysphoria.

Sex reassignment surgery is very much essential for me to get new birth as a transgender person, and also my beauty will increase as a woman, my body structure and hormone will be completely like women. Now my body is like a man who will be transformed by doing SRS.

Most participants felt that they had been subjected to stigma and the resultant social exclusion largely due to their non-conforming to the age old gender

dichotomy. The non-acceptance by the society was primarily because of the expectation binaries that they failed to live up to. While explaining her lived experiences, a participant (Priya) added:

…..though I did the surgery (vaginal surgery) one year ago, it was not due to interest or need but due to compulsion and pressure from my peer group. In my Challi those transgenders who have done the surgery receive high status, prestige, and value compared to others who have not done it. My peer group calls me andira (boy) and says I cannot get salvation due to having a male body in this birth period. I do not perceive SRS as a mandatory requirement for better quality of life for a transgender person, but it has certainly given me more confidence and dignity. I feel more satisfied with my transformed look and my earning has also increased after surgery. With more confidence, I charge a higher price.

The need, both voluntary or forced, for SRS appears to have emerged out of the longing for a social identify of choice. Being marginalized to a limit, the transgender people do not see many options other than surgically transforming their body to be able to receive acceptance by the mainstream society.

**Nature of discrimination due to gender dysphoria**

Transgender people face many problems as they feel and act differently from the gender they are assigned to. Due to their different behavior, they face problems related to education, health, livelihood, and lifestyle. They always face the problem of marginalization and social exclusion. The various types of discrimination they experience can be understood through Soniya's account.

Since my childhood till date, I have been discriminated against as I walk and talk like a girl. In my village, I used to play with girls and dance with them at various festivals. One of my seniors raped me inside the school toilet by saying I was a Maichia (male person behaving as a female) and must be used for sex by all the boys. In one of my cousin sister's marriages also, my uncle raped me brutally and warned me not to tell anybody about the incident. The

pain can never be forgotten as even now I can feel the torture I have endured.

This study also reveals that most of the public space is either denied or restricted to transgender people in our society. At public spaces such as schools, colleges, malls, and houses (where ordinary people live as colonies, etc.), they are bullied, harassed and subjected to humiliating comments and verbal abuses. As a testimony to such public abuse, a participant Supriya shares her agony:

…though my family members never harassed me, when I came from my native place to Bhubaneswar, people all around started teasing me by calling names:  Hijra, Chakka, and Maitulia (local colloquial word used for transgender as an insult). I always used to have long hair and wear nail polish, earrings, and lipstick. Initially, I was searching for a house, but the house owners would hurl derogatory remarks at me and tell me that they would rent their houses to decent people, not to useless people like you.

Family is the first social group where a child gets nurtured and gets care, love, and affection. However, many transgender people face eviction from their families at the early stages of their life. The social stigma associated with them make people assume that they bring curse on the family. So, the parents of most of the participants did not accept them and prohibited them from staying with their families. Unfortunately, the participants had to leave their homes and lead a life of misery and suffering. Reinforcing the ordeal, a participant Bhavna explains:

My family does not accept me after knowing my transexual character. I was the only boy in my family along with my two sisters. My father threw me away from the house when I was doing my high school as my father came to know my real identity. He also warned the other family members that no one should keep any relationship with me and dummy-performed all death rituals in my name.

Another participant Radha also expresses her trauma, on a similar note as

follows:

In my office where I work as a storekeeper, all my co-workers look down upon me as a lesser human being. I can operate the computer and have good writing skills. But my manager asks me to do in-store maintenance work as he thinks my presence in the main office will affect the work with clients. Other staff members try to take advantage of me and touch my private body parts which causes unpleasant and uncomfortable situations for me. Whenever I report such thing to the manager requesting him to take action on them, the manager tells me to keep quiet and continue working.

The transgender people face unique obstacles and discrimination compared to other sexual identity communities. They are marginalized in the everyday social life on several counts. Though in legal terms, they have equal right to benefits from society's resources and services, the social stigma historically attached to them keep creating stumbling blocks.

**Need of surgery for transgender people**

It has been well documented that people who underwent sex reassignment surgery have experienced significant improvement in quality of life, body image satisfaction and overall mental wellbeing (Nelson et al., 2009; Barone et al., 2017; Papadopulos et al., 2017; Hadj-Moussa et al., 2018; Agarwal et al., 2018 & Wernick et al., 2019). SRS, earlier known as the emasculation process, is viewed as a ritual for transgender people. The transgender community considers it a pure form of transformation from a male to a female body (Nanda, 1990). A participant Chandrika, recounting her experiences, shares:

I have done sex reassignment surgery, which has given me new life altogether. I have become a complete woman. My identity now is that of a pure woman. Surgery is very essential for a transgender person. After surgery only we can prove ourselves to all. Now I wear the new identity on my sleeves with a sense of pride.

The importance of surgery among transgender people is revealed through the study findings. The surgery not only gives a feeling of new birth to those who undergo it, but also increases one's bodily beauty, and a sense of renewed confidence. Additionally, it provides a distinct social identity and status to the transgender person. The feelings can be shared as follows by a participant Madhuri:

Surgery was essential for me. So, two years ago, I underwent surgery in Delhi. The doctor gave me a certificate that now I am a woman. Now no one can call me Maichia or Hijra, as I have a vagina and breasts to show to them. My social status in the transgender community also got enhanced as everyone calls me Madhuri maa post-surgery. After surgery, my body tone has become smooth and beautiful in which I feel more confident than before. As I am a sex worker, my old clients now offer more money as compared to the earlier times.

The study findings show that many transgender people earn their livelihood through singing, dancing, and acting. They go to the badhai (traditional ritual of blessing the newborns) ceremonies and also participate in local dance festivals and reality shows. A respondent Aiswarya shared:

I always wanted to do acting and dancing. To act in TV series, music albums, films, and work in the fashion industry, I have undergone a sex reaffirmation surgery. Now after surgery I am getting offers for acting in telefilms and many TV serials. I am feeling happy and excited about all my new acting assignments. The director is happy with my performance and assured me to give more offers in future. The surgery has changed my life for better and now I feel more confident of achieving my dreams and prosper in my professional career.

The surgery has apparently helped the transgender people to boost their confidence and keep their heads high in the society. It has provided mental peace, self-satisfaction, and confidence to many of the transgender people. During one of the interviews a participant Khusi shared her experience as

follows:

A woman nearby by my house used abusive language to me saying 'you are Maichia, and are spoiling my husband. You are merely sex workers and cannot be anyone's spouse. My husband may be using you for temporary pleasure'. I along with other two transgenders who have undergone surgery confronted that woman, showed our genitalia (vagina), and firmly said to her that we are women and not keeps of her husband. I said to her that her husband was coming to us for sexual pleasure, we never forced ourselves on him. She should please her husband and stop blaming us. In this way, we feel relaxed and more confident that we can prove our gender anywhere and anytime and no one can challenge us. The surgery has certainly proved to be a boon for us.

The study highlights the issues of transgender people related to gender identity disorder and sex reassignment surgery. Gender identity disorder creates immense pressure on the transgender people because their behavior is non confirming to the sex assigned to them. The transgender study participants perceived that to overcome the issues of gender identity disorder, surgery was the best measure to alter their sexual organs to match their mental feeling. The nonconformity to social stereotypes forces the transgender people to undergo SRS. The need for SRS is quite impressively visible among transgender people, as shown in the study findings. It helps them earn better livelihood, prove themselves, and become confident in their everyday life. The findings also depict how transgender people face multifaceted marginalization, exclusion, and harassment. Family support and government mechanism are either negligible or not there at all to help them come out of the shackles of many manifest and latent discrimination and torture. The stigma against them runs too deep to be erased. Sex reassignment surgery is seen as an essential measure and plays an integral part in their lives, but accessibility and affordability of such surgery are some of the issues that may act as deterrents for many who do not earn a decent sum. Post- surgery health care facility is not so easily available in the state. Transgender people have to spend huge

amounts to consult doctors outside the state (Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, etc.) for the surgery. Most participants were apprehensive about the medical procedures and standards that are maintained for this type of surgery. As if that is not enough, no health insurance policy covers SRS, considering this as a cosmetic surgery. The importance of this surgery is rarely discussed in any public forum. Only transgender people are believed to be born for begging, sex-work, dancing, and singing in public place to earn their livelihood. This stereotype of the glass ceiling belief also makes the matters worse for them.

**Conclusion**

This study reinforces that transgender people face issues related to gender identity disorder, where there is a mismatch between the gender assigned to them at birth and the gender they perceive as they grow older. In ancient days as depicted in mythology, they were treated well and accepted by the general population, but over time public spaces were restricted and denied to them pushing them to extreme margin of the society. Non-acceptance, exclusion, harassment, and discrimination are handed to them in almost every social sphere as shared by all the participants. In all the developmental sectors related to education, health, sanitation, welfare measures, employment, and housing, they lag behind the mainstream population. They were living in a body of the opposite sex hostile to the lived experiences and emotions and with a feeling different from the body they are entitled to. The concerns of well-being and social identity always calls for a new paradigm that emphasizes harmony rather than control and domination (Shah & Manorama, 1996), and fragmentary pleasure (Srivastava, 2010). Thus, to fit into the gender they feel inside they go through the process of SRS. The sex reassignment surgery is one of the essential topics to analyze because, despite many socio-economic and psychological problems, they also have many associated health hazards. Moreover, there are several legal, ethical, and psycho-social issues related to it. Chakrapani and Narain (2012) have identified several issues and options to address the lack of or ambiguity in legal recognition of the gender status and advocated for SRS as a possible

solution for gender dysphoria. This study also reinforces that transgender people do SRS without adequate awareness about the medical interventions. At most places, the healthcare facilities are not pro-transgenders in nature. The transgender people face discrimination primarily due to their stigmatized gender identity. As mentioned earlier, improvement in quality of life, satisfaction with the changed body/image and overall psychiatric functioning among the transgender people who have undergone SRS has been fairly documented. The study participants also corroborate this. However, attention should be given to identify and recognize prevalence of regret, though some studies suggest that prevalence of regret is less due to improvements in standard of medical care, patient selection, surgical techniques and gender confirmation care (Bustos et al., 2021).

Scholarship in this area is evidently scanty and largely unsystematic. Adequate data are also not available that can be used by academicians and policymakers. Substantive rights, as well as fundamental rights of the transgender people, are of equal importance, but mostly neglected. Hence this research made a modest attempt to bust the myths and misconceptions surrounding sex reassignment surgery among transgender people and to address the need for targeted interventions by various stakeholders, including lawmakers, administrators, policymakers and health practitioners, etc. Lastly, it is envisaged to provide researchers and policy makers the impetus to research the issues related to sex reassignment surgery further with a wider lens.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest, whatsoever.

Ethical approval: The study with participants from a socially and culturally vulnerable population segment was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee of NISER, Bhubaneswar.

## Reference

Agarwal, C.A., Scheefer, M.F., Wright, L.N., Walzer, N.K., & Rivera, A. (2017). Quality of life improvement after chest wall masculinization in female-to-male transgender patients: A prospective study using the BREAST-Q and body uneasiness test. J Plast Reconstr Aesthet Surg.71(5), 651–657. doi: 10.1016/j.bjps.2018.01.003.

Agoramoorthy, G., & Hsu, M. J. (2015). Living on the societal edge: India's transgender realities. *Journal of religion and health*, *54*, 1451-1459.

Ahuja, R. B., & Bhattacharya, S. (2001). Intersex, transsexuality, and gender reassignment surgery. Indian Journal of Plastic Surgery, 34(2), 83. https://doi.org/10.4103/0970- 0358.59287

Al-Mamun, M., Hossain, M. J., Alam, M., Parvez, M. S., Dhar, B. K., & Islam, M. R. (2022). Discrimination and social exclusion of third-gender population (Hijra) in Bangladesh: A brief review. *Heliyon*.

Barrett, P. M., & Duffy, A. L. American Psychiatric Association.(1994). Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Washington, DC: Author. Barrett, PM; Dadds, MR; and Rapee, RM (1996)."Family Treatment of Childhood Anxiety: A Con. *Marriage and Family*, *66*, 893-905.

Arvind, A., Pandya, A., Amin, L., Aggarwal, M., Agrawal, D., Tiwari, K., ... & Agarwal, P. (2022). Social strain, distress, and gender dysphoria among transgender women and Hijra in Vadodara, India. *International Journal of Transgender Health*, *23*(1-2), 149-163.

Atheeque, M., & Nishanthi, R. (2016). Marginalization of transgender community: A sociological analysis. *International Journal of Applied Research*, *2*(9), 639-641.

Barone, M., Cogliandro, A., Di Stefano, N., Tambone, V., & Persichetti, P. (2017). A systematic review of patient-reported outcome measures following transsexual surgery. *Aesthetic plastic surgery*, *41*, 700-713.

Beemyn, B. (2003). Serving the needs of transgender college students. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education*, *1*(1), 33-50.

Bhasin, K. (2005). Understanding Gender. New Delhi: Women Unlimited

Bem, S. L. (1981). Gender schema theory: A cognitive account of sex

typing. *Psychological review*, *88*(4), 354.

Benjamin, H. (1967). The transsexual phenomenon. *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences*.

Blosnich, J. R., Brown, G. R., Shipherd, PhD, J. C., Kauth, M., Piegari, R. I., & Bossarte, R. M. (2013). Prevalence of gender identity disorder and suicide risk among transgender veterans utilizing veterans health administration care. *American journal of public health*, *103*(10), e27-e32.

Bracanović, T. (2016, December). Sex reassignment surgery and enhancement. In *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy: A Forum for Bioethics and Philosophy of Medicine* (Vol. 42, No. 1, pp. 86-102). Journal of Medicine and Philosophy Inc..

Brown, G. R. (1990). A review of clinical approaches to gender dysphoria. *The Journal of clinical psychiatry*, *51*(2), 57-64.

Bustos, V. P., Bustos, S. S., Mascaro, A., Del Corral, G., Forte, A. J., Kim, E. A., ... & Manrique, O. J. (2021). Regret after gender-affirmation surgery: a systematic review and meta-analysis of prevalence. *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery–Global Open*, *9*(3), e3477.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of indentity* (p. 61). New York: routledge.

Chakrapani, V. (2010). Hijras/transgender women in India: HIV, human rights and social exclusion.

Chakrapani, V., & Narrain, A. (2012). Legal recognition of gender identity of transgender people in India: Current situation and potential options. *Policy Brief*.

Cohen-Kettenis, P. T., & Gooren, L. V. (1999). Transsexualism: a review of etiology, diagnosis and treatment. *Journal of psychosomatic research*, *46*(4), 315-333.

Craig, J. F., & Heith, C. (2014). Encyclopedia of social deviance.

Davidson, M. (2007). Seeking refuge under the umbrella: Inclusion, exclusion, and organizing within the category transgender. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy*, *4*, 60-80.

Davison, S. P., Clifton, M. S., Futrell, W., Priore, R., & Manders, E. K. (2000).

Aesthetic considerations in secondary procedures for gender reassignment. *Aesthetic Surgery Journal*, *20*(6), 477-481.

Eagly, A. H. (2013). *Sex differences in social behavior: A social-role interpretation*. Psychology Press.

Fiske, S. T., & Stevens, L. E. (1993). *What's so special about sex? Gender stereotyping and discrimination*. Sage Publications, Inc.

Giddens, A. (1998). *Sociology*. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers.

Gómez-Gil, E., Zubiaurre-Elorza, L., Esteva de Antonio, I., Guillamon, A., & Salamero, M. (2014). Determinants of quality of life in Spanish transsexuals attending a gender unit before genital sex reassignment surgery. *Quality of Life Research*, *23*, 669-676.

Gupta, R., & Murarka, A. (2009). Treating transsexuals in India: History, prerequisites for surgery and legal issues. *Indian Journal of Plastic Surgery*, *42*(02), 226-233.

Gupta, R., Sahu, S., Gupta, A., & Singh, T. Transsexualism and sex reassignment surgery–Arising medicolegal issues.

Gupta, S., Imborek, K. L., & Krasowski, M. D. (2016). Challenges in transgender healthcare: the pathology perspective. *Laboratory medicine*, *47*(3), 180-188.

Hadj-Moussa, M., Ohl, D. A., & Kuzon Jr, W. M. (2018). Feminizing genital gender-confirmation surgery. *Sexual medicine reviews*, *6*(3), 457-468.

Jayadeva, V. (2017). Understanding the mental health of the Hijra women of India. *American Journal of Psychiatry Residents' Journal*.

Jokić-Begić, N., Lauri Korajlija, A., & Jurin, T. (2014). Psychosocial adjustment to sex reassignment surgery: A qualitative examination and personal experiences of six transsexual persons in Croatia. *The Scientific World Journal*, *2014*.

Joyce, R. A. (1992). Images of gender and labor organization in Classic Maya society. In *Exploring Gender through Archaeology: Selected Papers from the 1991 Boone Conference. Monographs in World Archaeology* (No. 11, pp. 63-70).

Kalra, S. (2012). The eunuchs of India: An endocrine eye opener. *Indian*

*journal of endocrinology and metabolism*, *16*(3), 377-380.

Kalra, G., & Shah, N. (2013). The cultural, psychiatric, and sexuality aspects of hijras in India. *International Journal of Transgenderism*, *14*(4), 171-181.

Khan, S. I., Hussain, M. I., Parveen, S., Bhuiyan, M. I., Gourab, G., Sarker, G. F., ... & Sikder, J. (2009). Living on the extreme margin: social exclusion of the transgender population (hijra) in Bangladesh. *Journal of health, population, and nutrition*, *27*(4), 441.

Klein, C., & Gorzalka, B. B. (2009). Continuing medical education: sexual functioning in transsexuals following hormone therapy and genital surgery: a review (CME). *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, *6*(11), 2922-2939.

Kumar, P. (2021). Struggle for Substantive Justice and Community Development: Transgender Subjects in Contemporary India. *ASEAN Journal of Community Engagement*, *5*(2), 210-241.

Lane, M., Ives, G. C., Sluiter, E. C., Waljee, J. F., Yao, T. H., Hu, H. M., & Kuzon, W. M. (2018). Trends in gender-affirming surgery in insured patients in the United States. *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery Global Open*, *6*(4).

Law, C. L., Martinez, L. R., Ruggs, E. N., Hebl, M. R., & Akers, E. (2011). Trans-parency in the workplace: How the experiences of transsexual employees can be improved. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *79*(3), 710-723.

Lawrence, A. A. (2003). Factors associated with satisfaction or regret following male-to-female sex reassignment surgery. *Archives of sexual behavior*, *32*, 299-315.

Lind, A. (2010). *Development, sexual rights and global governance* (p. 240). Taylor & Francis.

Morgenroth, T., & Ryan, M. K. (2018). Gender trouble in social psychology: How can Butler's work inform experimental social psychologists' conceptualization of gender?. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 1320.

Nanda, S. (1990). *Neither man nor woman: The hijras of India*. Wadsworth Pub. Co.

Nanda, S. (2015). Hijras. *The International Encyclopedia of Human Sexuality*, 501-581.

Nanzy, F.M., & Savarimuthu, R.J. (2015). Perceived stigma and quality of life

among transgender. Indian J Cont Nsg Edn, 16(1), 72-74. https://www.ijcne.org/text.asp?2015/16/1/72/286362

Nelson, L., Whallett, E. J., & McGregor, J. C. (2009). Transgender patient satisfaction following reduction mammaplasty. *Journal of Plastic, Reconstructive & Aesthetic Surgery*, *62*(3), 331-334.

Nolan, I.T., Dy, G.W., Levitt, N. (2019). Considerations in gender- affirming surgery: demographic trends. *Urol Clin North Am*. 46, 459–465.

Papadopulos, N. A., Lellé, J. D., Zavlin, D., Herschbach, P., Henrich, G., Kovacs, L., ... & Schaff, J. (2017). Quality of life and patient satisfaction following male-to-female sex reassignment surgery. *The journal of sexual medicine*, *14*(5), 721-730.

Parker, C., Scott, S., & Geddes, A. (2019). Snowball sampling. *SAGE research methods foundations*.

Reisner, S. L., Deutsch, M. B., Bhasin, S., Bockting, W., Brown, G. R., Feldman, J., ... & Goodman, M. (2016). Advancing methods for US transgender health research. *Current Opinion in Endocrinology, Diabetes and Obesity*, *23*(2), 198-207.

Safer, J. D., & Tangpricha, V. (2019). Care of transgender persons. *New England Journal of Medicine*, *381*(25), 2451-2460.

Satpathy, M., Noor, F., & Choudhury, L. (2017). *Gender identity, voices and action: Transgender activists of India and their worldviews*. Indian Journal of Health, Sexuality & Culture, 3(2), 62–71.

Sawant, N. (2017). Transgender: Status in India. *Annals of Indian Psychiatry*, *1*(2), 59-59.

Schechter, L. S. (2016). Gender confirmation surgery: an update for the primary care provider. *Transgender health*, *1*(1), 32-40.

Selvaggi, G., & Bellringer, J. (2011). Gender reassignment surgery: an overview. *Nature Reviews Urology*, *8*(5), 274-282.

Manorama, S., & Shah, C. (1996). Towards a new perspective on women's bodies: Learning and unlearning together. *Economic and Political Weekly*, WS35-WS38.

Cooper, S., & Ratele, K. (2014, June). Markers of well-being among the

Hijras: the male to female transexuals. In *Psychology Serving Humanity: Proceedings of the 30th International Congress of Psychology* (pp. 232-246). Psychology Press.

Srivastava, S. (2010). Fragmentary pleasures: Masculinity, urban spaces, and commodity politics in Delhi. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, *16*(4), 835-852.

Stryker, S. (2008). b. Transgender history. Berkley.

Swain, S., (2006). Problems of third gender. In S. Swain (Ed.), Social issues of India. 57–59. New Vishal Publications.

Torgrimson, B. N., & Minson, C. T. (2005). Sex and gender: what is the difference?. *Journal of Applied Physiology*, *99*(3), 785-787.

Tseng, J. (2008). Sex, gender, and why the differences matter. *AMA Journal of Ethics*, *10*(7), 427-428.

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN-OHCHR). (2015).     Free & equal campaign fact sheet: Intersex. Office of the High Commissioner for    HumanRights.

Valentine, D. (2007). *Imagining transgender: An ethnography of a category*. Duke University Press.

van de Grift, T. C., Elaut, E., Cerwenka, S. C., Cohen-Kettenis, P. T., & Kreukels, B. P. (2018). Surgical satisfaction, quality of life, and their association after gender-affirming surgery: a follow-up study. *Journal of sex & marital therapy*, *44*(2), 138-148.

**Prachi Parimita Rout**, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Science Education and Research, Bhubaneswar, Odisha

*Email: routprachi002@gmail.com*

**Pranaya Kumar Swain**, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Science Education and Research, Bhubaneswar, Odisha

*Email: pranay@niser.ac.in*

**Article: Irregular migration to GCC countries – Determinants and challenges: The case of housemaids from Kerala**

**Author(s): Santhini Paul & Antony Palackal**

## Irregular migration to GCC countries – Determinants and challenges

## The case of housemaids from Kerala

--Santhini Paul & Antony Palackal

**Abstract**

Female Migrant Domestic Workers (FMDWs) in Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries are seen as one of the most unprivileged and insecure labour migrants. This paper is an attempt to identify the determinants of the irregular migration of FMDWs from Kerala to GCC. Abuse is seen as a main feature of this job, the premises for which is discussed in this paper. Also, an attempt is made to answer the common query "why and how do the women stay back in GCC after escaping from abuse?". The paper divides the determinants into three as enabling, sustaining, and emerging factors and also discusses the challenges to measures taken by India and GCC to counter irregular migration. The paper is based on extensive literature survey and secondary data analysis along with findings from face-to-face interviews with female domestic workers from Kerala to GCC. The Integrative approach by Nana Oishi has been adapted to make a graded categorisation of various factors.

*Keywords: Irregular migration, Feminization, Migration policy, Kerala*

**Introduction**

'Assisted labour migration'[1] during the colonial period marks the first known kind of organized migration from India to foreign lands (Jain, 1989). Kerala which didn't find much emigrants during this period of migration began to become an out-migration oriented state by the dawn of 20th century. The initial flows of Malayalis were to Burma, Malaya and Sri Lanka. Kerala has had ties with the Middle East from long back due to the trade and religious ties. But the Gulf boom and resultant exodus of Malayalis to the Gulf states made novel portraits in the emigration canvass of Kerala (Joseph, 2006).

The 'Gulf boom'[2] from Kerala to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries was the resultant of 'oil boom'[3] which happened in Gulf states during the

1970s. Kerala became the leading state from India in the labour export to the Gulf due its historic ties with the area as well as due to the socio-economic conditions that existed in Kerala during that period (Joseph, 2006). Today Malayali diaspora has a considerable presence in various English-speaking countries as well European nations. But the Gulf migration still makes a significant contribution to Kerala's GDP as the Gulf migrants are permanently sojourners (Advani, 2019) whereas the non-rentier states provide permanent migration options to their labour immigrants.

Migration narratives until 1950s was considered to be 'his' story which changed during the 1960s and 1970s due to 'Feminization of Migration' (Arachchi, 2013). Women who were until then regarded as dependents of men who migrated for jobs began to be understood as independent agents who undertook labour migration journeys on their own. The trend of feminization of migration was the result of paid care jobs arising around the world which due to being considered feminine needed women as labourers (Ketema, 2014). Nursing and domestic work are the two main job sectors which find demand in rich countries and is in turn supplied by poorer nations. Nurses from Kerala today has wider spectrum of opportunities whereas majority of women from Kerala who migrate as domestic workers have their destination as any one of the GCC countries- Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman.

The domestic work in the Gulf countries until the oil boom was a family matter which was managed by the womenfolk in the household. Employing paid domestic workers or slaves was a luxury that could be afforded only by well-off families. But the oil money enabled every household to be affluent enough to delegate their chores to outsiders (Arachchi, 2013). In fact, domestic workers are today the part of the luxury offered by the 'rentier state'[4] to its citizens to buy off their loyalty and non-interference in the administration of the country (Vlieger, 2011, Advani, 2019) and this has created the immense demand of domestic workers in the GCC. The plateauing of infrastructure development as well as the nationalization programmes of the Gulf countries has resulted in lesser demand for unskilled and semi-skilled

male labourers in Gulf. But due to the culture of shame attested to manual labour, devaluation of domestic work, domestic workers still being a luxury offered by the government alongside with more women stepping out of their houses into the public, the demand for Female Migrant Domestic Workers (FMDWs) in the Gulf region wouldn't subside anytime soon.

The job of an FMDW in the Middle East is marred with isolation, excess work, meagre rest and food, wage issues, substandard living conditions and various forms of abuse causing stark violation of fundamental human rights and denial of basic human needs (Arachchi, 2013). In spite of this reality which has found numerous public discourses, women from Kerala still migrate to GCC countries to take up jobs as domestic workers (Kanth, 2020). It is found that often many women undertake this migration irregularly and prefer to stay back in the respective countries irregularly after running away from abuse, inhuman conditions, and wage denials (Pattadath, 2020). This paper attempts to identify the push and pull factors or determinants of the irregular migration of female migrant domestic workers from Kerala to GCC countries.

The first part of this paper has been written relying mainly on literature review and secondary data and the second part relies on the field notes from face-to-face interviews (Pseudonyms have been given for the respondents in the paper to protect their identity and privacy) with the FMDWs from Kerala to GCC countries. The factors identified from both primary and secondary data has been classified into three sections viz. (1) enabling factors and (2) sustaining factors forming the first part and (3) emerging factors consisting the second part. The paper progresses by initially presenting the theory of integrative approach put forward by Nana Oishi to study the international migration of women and is followed by conceptualizing irregular migration from India to GCC and the determinants of irregular migration. The subsequent sections detail the various determinants(factors) identified and a chart (Chart 1) is attached before conclusion in which categorization of the determinants based on the Integrative approach by Nana Oishi (2002) is given. The conclusion summarizes our findings and analysis along with a brief glimpse into

challenges to the measures taken by sending and receiving countries in curbing the irregular migration and is followed by references.

**Integrative approach to international migration of women**

Oishi (2002) in her paper argues that no single theory can explain the female international migration and an integrative approach is the best way to explain the phenomenon. According to her integrative approach, the international migration of women can be analysed along three levels viz. macro (the state), meso (the society) and micro (the individual). Oishi (2002) makes the following assumptions regarding her integrative approach to female migration.

1. State plays a major role in determining the patterns of international female migration. Emigration policies treat men and women differently. The emigration policies for women are value-driven compared with those for men which are economically driven.

2. At the meso level there must be a social environment accommodating for international female migration. For this to happen the country would have to be integrated into the global economy and induces internal mobility first.

3. Factors at the agent level – the autonomy of migrant women explain the patterns of female emigration. For a large-scale female migration to take place women in the particular country women should have more autonomy and decision-making power within the household (Oishi, 2002, pp. 8-9).

**Irregular Migration**

United Nations define migrants as people who live in a country or in an area other than in which they were born (UN 2013). 'Those who do not fully comply with migration related legislation of the country where they live are "migrants in an irregular situation" and the corresponding phenomenon is called irregular migration' (Fargues, 2017, p. 15).

Shah (2017) talks about five clear identifiers for migrants in irregular situation in Gulf. (1) Entering into the country unlawfully (2) Overstaying of a valid residency permit (3) Being employed by someone who isn't the sponsor (4)

Running away from the sponsor/employer (5) Being born in the GCC country to parents who are in an irregular situation.

As the paper deals with irregular migration from Kerala, a State in India, the migration undertaken in breach of India's emigration laws are also considered as situations of irregular migration in this paper. The above categories are not mutually exclusive (Shah, 2017) and a frequent concurrent situation that occurs is of the overstayers and runaways taking up freelance work where overstayers are in conflict with both stay and employment regulation whereas runaways are under triple threat as they will have a legal case also on them for absconding if sponsor happens to have reported the missing to the authorities.

**Determinants of Irregular Migration**

Irregularity comes from a spectrum of situations between full compliance and non-compliance of the host states' regulations. The intermediate situations have been termed 'semi-compliance' by Ruhs and Anderson according to Fargues (Fargues, 2017). These situations can arise due to the conditions imposed on the entry, stay and employment of a foreign national into another nation-state. (Fargues & Shah, 2017).

Irregular migration in the Gulf has its own characteristics which is made unique due to the sponsorship system prevailing there, which stipulates that a non-national to become a labour migrant in a GCC country he/she should be sponsored by a citizen. Due to the restrictions in mobility and in access to citizenship the non-citizen workers are perpetually under the threat of falling into irregularity. This has created 'Dual Societies, in which citizens and non-citizens are separated in legal and economic terms' (Fargues, 2017, p. 19).

The determinants of irregular migration can be classified mainly as enabling factors-which produce irregular migration and sustaining factors- which perpetuate irregular migration (Shah, 2017). Enabling factors and sustaining factors identified from Literature and secondary data and which were corroborated by the interviews done by us is given in the subsequent sections.

This is followed by a section 'Emerging factors' which are the factors assuming relevance lately as determinants of irregular migration of female domestic workers from Kerala to GCC countries.

**Enabling factors**

The factors which produce the phenomenon of irregular migration are referred to as enabling factors (Al-Kazi, 2017). As pointed out by Oishi (2002) the value-based policy formation of sending countries result in paternalistic policies of emigration for their women citizens. Same is the case of India as, since the inception of its first Emigration policy after independence-the Emigration Act 1983- India has tried to restrict women through its protectionist policies. The Emigration Check Required (ECR)[5] category criteria and banning of women below age thirty from migrating for domestic work are the two major restrictions by India which push women into irregular migration to Gulf for domestic work (Kodoth, 2020). Kodoth (2020) and Pattadath (2020) reports women circumventing ECR regulations through various ways. During the interviews too we came across women attempting irregular migration by going to GCC with free visas as well as visiting visas. In 2007 a requirement of $2500 security deposit by the employer was made mandatory to obtain ECR clearance which encouraged the employers also to seek irregular migration channels to circumvent this regulation. Later this was taken away in 2016 due to its drastic negative effect (Kodoth, 2020). Kerala, having been a leading state since the 1970s in providing labour to GCC countries, Keralites has formed a wide and deep migration network connecting GCC nations and India. The existence of this strong and efficient migration network of Malayalees at meso level is also a push factor for irregular migration (Pattadath, 2020). A glimpse into the working of this migration network can be seen in Aniyamma's words of how she got a visa to Gulf for the first time.

*Vimala's* (Her neighbour) *father's younger brother's brother-in-law had a travel agency. When they visited here and happened to see my circumstances, he asked "Chechi* (Pronoun popularly used in Kerala for addressing elder

women), *there is a 'chance'* (a word frequently used by women we interviewed. The word 'chance' has synonymised to windfall when used in parley of Gulf emigration especially by low skilled migrants*) for going abroad. Are you willing to go?" Because it was, he who asked, we didn't have any qualms about going to Gulf. It was an Arabi house. But as we were connected through acquaintances there were no problems. He had the business of buying and reselling visa.*

Kerala being a state with substantial women empowerment and autonomy, the decision to migrate is at the end of the day a personal choice of the woman who migrates (Ramji, 2002). Hence the premises and persona of the woman who migrates also becomes decisive in the method of migration (Pattadath, 2014, 2020). Although there are some women who unknowingly rely on irregular channels (Kuttappan, 2017), many willingly rely on private visas and visiting visas (Kodoth 2020, Pattadath 2014, 2020). Desperation as well as determination of these individuals thus become the micro factor which pushes them into irregular migration.

The Kafala system is the labour migration governance system that decide the fate of every woman migrant who enters into a GCC country as a domestic worker (Frantz, 2017). Kafala system binds the woman to her sponsor who is also the employer and her life and livelihood is dependent on the kafeel's (sponsor's) mood and manner (Kuttappan, 2017). This system was put in place by the Gulf countries after the Gulf rulers were threatened by the Pan Arabism ideologues (Advani, 2019). The Kafala system makes the migrants permanently temporary migrants who can be evicted at the whim of the sponsor and the migrant is heavily dependent on the sponsor for her entry, stay and employment in the country (Pattadath, 2020). This immense power brings about abusive conditions for the worker who often is pushed into running away from the house in which she is employed in. Every legal document that a worker should possess (visa, passport and work id) are withheld by the sponsor and without it, being outside the workplace make the worker an illegal immigrant (Pattadath, 2020). To make ends meet and to meet their migration

objective, the runaway workers turn to freelancing, which is also illegal in GCC countries. The freelancers eventually become overstayers failing to renew their work permits and visas. Thus, the labour migration governance of the GCC countries produce runaways, freelancers and overstayers which are all conditions of irregular migration.

One major practice that brings migrant labourer in irregular situations into GCC countries is the visa trading or sale of visas by GCC citizens (sponsors) to potential migrants whom they do not intend to employ (Strobl, 2008). Visas of this type are referred to as the free visa, private visa or azad visa (visa maftoohah) as the migrant is free to find a job on his own and is unattached to the sponsor in terms of employment (Rajan, 2017, Pattadath, 2020). This is unlawful and hence irregular as an immigrant worker is supposed to work for his/her sponsor only. Jureidini (2017) talks about visa trading between companies. Unused visas in occupation A are sold to needy occupation B whose quota has exhausted. Thus, worker will be entering GCC for work B but will possess visa A which is illegal according to GCC countries' migration laws. The generosity of Arabs, a micro factor reflected in the possession of gold, clothes and gadgets on women who are currently migrants and on women returnees also pull some women from Kerala. They tend to resort to irregular channels for quick and easy migration (Pattadath, 2014).

**Sustaining Factors**.

The sustaining factors are the determinants which help to sustain or continue the irregular migration condition (Al Kazi, 2017). That is, these factors aid in the continuation of the irregular migration state into which the migrant has fallen into.

With respect to the receiving countries, the exclusion of FMDWs from the labour laws, the unjust legal system and police forces and the horrible state of detention centres form the macro factors which sustain the conditions of irregular migration of FMDWs. The domestic workers do not come under the purview of labour ministry in any of the six GCC countries (Pattadath, 2020).

Even if they did, the cultural norms of the Gulf region rule out any form of inspection into the households, which are the workplaces of the housemaids (Vlieger, 2011). Thus, running away becomes the only way of escape for the women from abusive conditions. The housemaid who escapes the employer or is wronged by the employer will be hesitant to approach the legal system or the police of the country. The police force who are the citizens themselves share the mentality of the kafeels and the legal system punishes the act of running away rather than address the cause of the act (Strobl, 2008). Abuse is hard to prove and working and living conditions are beyond inspections thus making the legal system a no-account establishment for an aggrieved women worker. Rape cases are also hard to prove or will ultimately result in convicting the housemaid for having committed 'zina' (Illegal sexual relations) (Vlieger, 2011). The runaways are also hesitant to become detained and await deportation due to their desperation to become freelancers to fulfil their migration journey as well as due to the unhygienic and overcrowded situations of the detention centres (Kodoth, 2020).

The FMDWs from India who become runaways, freelancers as well as overstayers are wary of approaching Indian embassies in the Gulf countries especially if they entered the Gulf through informal channels due to the apathy and neglect, they fear they would face from the administration. The embassies are said not to have enough leeway or incentive to negotiate with the maids' employers or the GCC authorities too. Cases have been reported by Filipino activists of Indian maids approaching Sri Lankan embassies due to being turned away by Indian embassy (Kodoth, 2020).

The GCC citizens also aid in sustaining irregular migration by transferring sponsorship (sponsorship trading) outside legal channels as well as by 'temporary secondment'[6] (Fargues, 2017). Whatsoever, the transfer of sponsorship even legally is not allowed in any GCC country in the case of domestic workers. But the runaways are in some cases given employment by citizens or expatriates which sustains the irregular situation of the runaway (Pattadath, 2014).

Just in the manner the migration networks aid in perpetrating the irregular migration, they aid in perpetuating it too. One formalised informal channel is the 'Kasargod Embassy' (ILO, 2015) which was brought into limelight subsequent to the Air India crash in Mangalore in 2010 (Radhakrishnan, 2010). It was discovered that at least twelve of the Keralites who were killed in the crash were travelling on passports with fake identity. Pattadath (2014) and Kodoth (2020) also reports having encountered accounts of relying on and reliability of Kasaragod embassy during their research. Thus, informal networks like these let the runaway workers stay back in irregularity and leave only when they are ready to return to India.

A micro factor that let the domestics stay on in an irregular situation is the level of desperation to fulfil the objective of migration and the will to sacrifice themselves to the cause (Pattadath, 2014). This is dependent on the person and varies between workers. Another micro factor is the ability to acquire survival mechanisms and coping strategies to remain in irregular situation which often increase with the length of the stay which is so much applicable in regular situations too. It is seen that women learn to adapt with irregularity and freelancing with a number of strategies to find work, negotiate pay and stay and connect with people forming slowly a strong social capital. (Pattadath, 2020, Shah, 2017) This also is dependent on the agency as well as urgency of the worker which is an individual trait.

**Emerging factors**

The factors we discuss as emerging are the ones, which were identified during interviews with the FMDWs. These factors are resultant mainly of contemporary events and hence do not assume significance in the academic research done so far on the FMDWs from Kerala to GCC countries.

In September 2016, Government of India instructed six state-run agencies to undertake the recruitment of domestic workers to GCC. NORKA, Govt. of Kerala, struck an agreement with Al-Durra manpower recruitment agency of Kuwait-a semi-government establishment in 2018 and recruited more than a

hundred women through this channel within two years. From our interviews we have understood that most women recruited were first time migrants to GCC countries. Many of these women who returned with or without ending their contract of two years, was found to have re-migrated utilizing their networks formed during initial migration or relying on their relatives and friends whom they were earlier not interested to approach. Thus, the formal recruitment gave the women grit and means to migrate through irregular channels.

Jaseena Beevi, 48 years old, got recruited through NORKA in 2020 January. But she could stay there only for one month due to issues with food and overwork. She had to forego her one-month salary and also had to pay penalty of Rs. 1.25 lakh to return home which her family sent after mortgaging their house. In spite of the bad experience with her first migration she is interested in remigration. But says, *I will go if it is in good way*, meaning she has to get an assurance that she will get good sponsors. This is one thing that only irregular migration can give at least a little bit of assurance. In regular migration channels sponsor gets to choose the worker. But irregular migration provides the worker also options to an extent to ascertain the character of the sponsor and the house in which she will be employed in via informal means and acquaintances. Jaseena Beevi, who migrated for the first time only because it was through NORKA is now ready to approach irregular means to get a fair chance abroad.

Dhanya, 38 years old, who also migrated for the first time through NORKA commented:

 *I have a confidence now. When I left from here, I had a fear in me. Didn't know language. New country. Because of this migration, a confidence has developed that I can go again. Even if I have to go to other countries too, I have the courage that I will be able to work there*.

We came across a number of women who migrated through NORKA who are still abroad, but some had returned and remigrated through informal channels-

according to their families who responded to us in their absence. And then there is Rosie about whom we relate further down in this section who told us that three of her friends remigrated with the help of migration networks. For all these women, NORKA recruitment gave them the first taste of being an FMDW in a GCC country which they wouldn't have undertaken through informal channels in the first place. But the experience enabled them to seek migration outside formal channels invoking irregular migration as a result of formal migration.

Two other factors which are not system generated but is of macro proportion is the repeating floods devastating the God's own country as well as the pandemic. The floods during the 2018 and 2019 took away livelihoods of so many families in the highlands. This has created conditions for increase in the irregular migration from the highlands which was already witnessing major forms of trafficking for forced labour due to the unfamiliarity of highland women with reliable migration networks whereas the Coastal women have long been a part of GCC labour emigration enabling them to have information and support of reliable mechanisms. The pandemic also made women sustain in or rely on irregular methods as many who migrated for specific objectives had to utilize their remittances to fulfil daily needs of their families as the other income generators in the household were stalled or rendered jobless by the pandemic. Every woman who returned after being abroad during Covid restrictions responded how the pandemic jeopardized their original migration objective and hence they intend to remigrate again and this time they are going to use their contacts and acquaintances to provide them with visas.

Migration networks spanning Kerala and GCC countries is a well-known aspect of the domestic worker migration. But the recent advancements in communication have laid the way for a transnational sisterhood to form. NORKA recruited as well as private agency recruited women exchanged their contacts and was found to help each other by passing reliable information on good sponsors and vacancies. Also, the time spent together at the agency offices abroad also brought these women closer. Survival strategies were

shared among the women. The women who help each other to survive ordeals keep their connections afresh by continuing contact even after return to Kerala. When a vacancy with a good sponsor arrives, they inform their connections in Kerala to make an attempt. Also, the women who leave on vacations, place some freelancers they are in touch with in their post while they are away. Thus, the formation of transnational sisterhood due to the ease of communication has made possible avenues for irregular migration. The major reason for this transnational sisterhood formation was the NORKA-based migration although agent-based migrants also upon forming a friendship try to keep tabs on each other by maintaining contact.

Rameela, 48 years old, told us that while she was waiting in the recruitment agency abroad a co-migrant from another district called her and advised her, *not to give money to "Phillipeeni"* (Citizen of Phillipines) *if they ask. Because they do not pay back.* This advice proved beneficial to her she said.

Kanakalatha, 48 years old, was recruited by NORKA along with other four women who flew together. She is still in touch with all of them. She is the only one who completed her two-year contract she says. All the other four had returned to Kerala within the first few months itself. But from our further conversation it became evident that all four has remigrated already by irregular means. Two as domestic workers and another one as a home nurse. The fourth, who found a job with another family is currently calling Kanakalatha to join her. Her friend assured her that the 'Baba' (Male head of the family) and 'Mama' (female head of the family) are good persons. Kanakalatha told us that she hasn't decided yet about it. But is of the mind to stay for two years if the house is good enough because it is as Kanakalatha told us, *If the house we get is good all will be good.*

Reji, 36 years old, talked to us about her remigration aspiration like this. *Should go back. I am trying for another house. Now I am in contact with two-three friends there. A neighbour chechi of mine is also there.* She intends to rely on any of these 'sisters' for her remigration.

Rosie, 42 years old, told us how co-migrants helped her to learn the language:

*Upon reaching there, we will have to sit at the office for some days. The women who happen to stay there used to write down Arabic words they get to know in a book. Also, before I started itself my friend called me and asked to write down some useful Arabic words. Told me to learn it. So, by the time I reached abroad I knew the basic words.*

Rosie, also talked about the women who flew with her and whom she met abroad at the recruiting office as the flights and the offices are the only places these women get to meet in person in most of the cases. She told:

*We were three together who boarded the plane. Me and other two from Ernakulam and Idukki. I didn't have much problem. For the Idukki woman no food was given at the sponsor's house. The employers used to order food from outside, eats it and leaves the table. She can eat if there are any leftovers. But she never used to eat it saying that she didn't live at her home like that. When we were at the office the women there had told us: "Eat the food even if it is leftovers. Afterwards you might get nothing. Anyway, they don't eat with hands. They use spoons. And they do not dig into food like us. Takes food from a side only. Shouldn't throw away the food thinking that it is leftover." The Idukki woman at last made suicide attempt to be sent back home.* (On asking about the Idukki woman's whereabouts Rosie replied that she was in Dubai now being given a visa by her cousin and it seems that the initial migration gave her the courage to make an attempt again).

Another friend of Rosie phones her regularly and is urging Rosie to join her. In Rosie's own words, *they need a housemaid at that house. Two people are employed there. One for cooking and another one for cleaning and other jobs.* The co-migrant needs Rosie to become her co-worker and hence she is calling her to join her.

Another meso factor which was identified is the presence of young women professionals especially nurses who rely on Kerala women for care after

delivery as well as for child care. This can be considered as a special case of 'Global Care Chain' – a concept put forward by Arlie Hochschild. According to her, a global care chain is:

*A series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring. A typical global care chain might work something like this: An older daughter from a poor family in a third world country cares for her siblings (the first link in the chain) while her mother works as a nanny caring for the children of a nanny migrating to a first world country (the second link) who, in turn, cares for the child of a family in a rich country (the final link). Each kind of chain expresses an invisible human ecology of care, one care worker depending on another and so on. A global care chain might start in a poor country and end in a rich one, or it might link rural and urban areas within the same poor country. More complex versions start in one poor country and extend to another slightly less poor country and then link to a rich country.* (Hochshild, 2000, pp. 131).

In our case young Malayali women leave Kerala to take up care jobs in Gulf countries and in turn employ other Malayali women to take care of her role at home abroad for a price. Thus, it becomes a chain of care labour across countries. Women with free visa or visiting visas are found to take up these jobs. Aniyamma stayed in Qatar with a Kerala family in which both husband and wife were employed and they had three kids. The youngest was two months old when Aniyamma joined the family and she stayed with them until the kid was three years old. Uma, 50 years old, also went with a Malayali family in 2019 to Kuwait. Both the husband and the wife were nurses who had night shifts too. She said, *it was Arabi's visa. They managed to procure it via an agent.* She had earlier also gone to Qatar in 2017 with another Malayali family but returned after six months as her daughter's husband died in an accident.

One of the micro factors identified was the usage of social media apps which has made communication with the children and family at home easier for the FMDWs. These means make it bearable and worth it to toil in irregular

situations as they are reminded through the video calls the objective and effect of the migration as well as these calls beat the blues of isolation and alienation. It also acts as a means of security and assurance to inform others about their existing conditions. *Only reliance is the phone. I survived by hearing to a lot of prayers in YouTube using headset*, tells Reji. Rosie told, *as there was phone it was not that hard. I could call, see and talk whenever I wanted to, except during duty time*. Kumari who had only her husband at home to take care of her two daughters told us that, to compensate for being away from her school-going adolescent daughter she managed the care drain by entrusting her daughter with her class teacher. She regularly communicated with the teacher through WhatsApp about her daughter's studies. Also, whenever she found her daughter to be depressed during her calls, she used to inform the teacher and make requests to kindly sort out the matter.

Apart from the classic means and reasons for borrowing, Kudumbashree loans and easy loans from private financiers like Muthoot, ESAF etc was also found as perpetrators of personal debt accumulation of women in Malayalee families. They borrow for family needs and these middle-aged women are increasingly finding a two-to-five-year migration to GCC as a panacea for their debts. The reasons for availing debt are also seeing a shift from 'basic education' to 'higher education' of their kids which involves higher fees along with the usual reasons of dowry and house building. There is also an increasing tendency for women of this age having settled with their family responsibilities to migrate to gather money for a nest-egg before they are too old and weak to migrate. Many women of this category have migrated in their cash strapped days earlier when their kids were small and had come back during the adolescent period of their kids to take care of familial responsibilities. Most of the kids have been settled and these women find their pockets empty and gauge it's tough to make savings out of the income of their spouses alone or the spouses are ill or absent. These middle-aged women are willing to migrate through irregular methods as they rely on migration networks to point them to good sponsors or "nalla (good) visa", as they say.

Aniyamma went to Gulf for the first time when she was 35 years old, because her husband's income wasn't enough for their needs. Now she is 58 years old and is on an interval from migration as she has to oversee the construction of their house in a recently bought land. Her most recent migration was to Qatar where she stayed for a year and a half before returning home. When we interviewed her in November 2021, she was only three months into her break having returned only in July 2021. During the past twenty-three years she has travelled seven to eight times to various Gulf countries for stints ranging from six months to three years at a time, returning when her presence is required at her home. When asked about recent remigration she replied: *We have no house yet. Husband is not healthy enough to take up heavy jobs. As children has become independent there is no more responsibilities to hold me back nor any liabilities left. So, if I go and make money now, we can use it for our own needs like buying a dress or getting our medicines.* Aniyamma is ready to remigrate if good opportunity presents and asked us too to inform her if any vacancy arises.

Prameela travelled to UAE when she was 32 years old, in 2007 and did domestic work in various Emirates states until 2014. She had wanted to get rid of her debts and build a house, but couldn't make it happen as the remittances got utilized for daily needs. After return migration she could build a house with Government aid but couldn't find a proper job suiting her although she was active socially as well as politically having been a Panchayat member after return migration. So, in 2021 she attempted migration again as her children were married off and settled. This time she migrated to Kuwait but had to return in just one and a half months as she was employed for domestic work in three houses (a case of 'temporary secondment') with meagre food. Fortunately for her, she got employment as housekeeping staff in district guest house after return migration. As her temporary job became permanent recently, she doesn't have intention for remigrating now. But she added that she might attempt migration once she is retired from the government services.

Manitha migrated in 2019, when she was 48 years old to gather money for children's education who are currently doing MCA (daughter) and BSc Electronics (son). She stayed for two years and returned in 2021. She has no savings left and would like to remigrate. But she is holding back as her family members especially her daughter wants her at home. She will probably remigrate once her daughter gets married and move out of the house whereas Preetha, 48 years old, who told, *education of children caused many money problems* causing her to migrate is on vacation gearing up to migrate again as soon as her sponsors (who are relatives of hers employed abroad and have a small kid to take care of) get hold of a visa.

Kanakalatha has two elder kids who is doing BTech and BSc and the youngest in school. She relates her intentions of migration as: *The kids would soon be employed. I too wanted to be employed with good income meanwhile they become independent. Also thought that I would be able to see those new places.*

Ninety percent of our respondents were part of Kudumbashree and had availed loans without generating income out of it. Thus, the Kudumbashree loans repeated as a liability for all these women. Manjima, 46 years old, said: *I am in Kudumbhashree. As I had taken loan from it, I didn't resign when I went abroad. From my monthly remittances, family members used to pay the interest. Now also I am a part of Kudumbashree. There are no income-generating activities done by Kudumbhashree. I have taken Linkage loan out of it.* Many women were in similar state where a part of their remittances was parted to pay interests of Kudumbashree loans. We also came across Sharadha who had to mortgage her gold to close her Kudumbhashree loan due to some misunderstandings and later had to resort to emigration to take back her ornaments.

Thus, it can be seen that, apart from the classic migration objectives of FMDWs to GCC from Kerala like payment of debts and making money for house, dowry and basic education of children, there are emerging micro push factors involving repayments of quick loans and guarantee less loans, money

for children's education involving high fees and for saving money as a retirement fund, so as not to depend on their grown-up children for their own needs.

| Level | Enabling Factors | Sustaining Factors | Emerging Factors |
|-------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Macro | 1. The labour migration Governance of GCC countries<br><br>2. Labour migration policies of India | 1. Exclusion of female migrant domestic workers from the labour laws of the GCC countries<br><br>2. Unjust Legal system and police forces of the GCC countries<br><br>3. Horrible state of detention centres<br><br>4. Unequipped embassies and apathetic officials of the sending country | 1. Formal migration through government agencies<br><br>2. The repeating floods of Kerala and the pandemic |
| Meso | 1. Migration Networks of Malayalees<br><br>2. Visa trading by GCC citizens | 1. Sponsorship trading by the GCC citizens<br><br>2. Existence of formalised informal networks of Keralites in GCC | 1. Transnational sisterhood<br><br>2. Presence of young women expats from Kerala in GCC countries |
| Micro | 1. Generosity of Employers<br><br>2. Individual traits of the migrants | 1. Individual traits of the migrant | 1. Ease of communication through smart phones and social media usage.<br><br>2. The nest egg migration and debt migration of Middle-aged women |

**Chart 1**: Application of Integrative approach on Determinants of Irregular Migration from Kerala to GCC countries. **Source**: Self Formulation

**Conclusion**

Collecting data on and statistics about the migrants who are in irregular situations is tough as they are difficult to detect and reluctant to talk. These people are mostly lower-skilled workers especially female domestic workers

who work within houses and when freelancing tends to hide themselves in their bedspaces during their non-working hours. Constantly under fear of apprehension and due to being in vulnerable positions they will be unwilling to reveal their existence and circumstances unless under life-threatening abusive conditions or only if connected through very trustworthy personal network.

Although considered risky, unfair and harmful by policy makers, activists, researchers and police due to the lack of opportunities in the sending countries people are still willing to venture into irregular situations. The demand in receiving countries and the migration networks facilitate this and the situations although irregular is perceived as tolerable. Moreover, the sponsorship system and legal system of the GCC countries do not make regular migration any more attractive than irregular migration. In fact, irregular migrants under free visa willingly enter into and remain in such situations as they find it safer and more remunerative (Pattadath, 2014). Attempts to mitigate irregular migration by the GCC countries and India are countered by the activities of GCC citizens too as they benefit from visa trading, rents from apartments, reduced hiring cost, temporary secondment and sponsorship trading.

India can make meaningful attempts by preparing the women before migration thoroughly and by not considering them as a shame to the nation. Another measure that will yield results will be licensing private agencies and closely monitoring them. The documents should be made difficult to forge and emigration checking should be made corruption free. Strict penalties should be meted out to erring recruiters and officials. Embassies should be welcoming to both regular and irregular migrants who attempt to get help from the Indian embassy abroad. Also, awareness campaigns should be done to reach up to the grass root levels. Data about women migrating should have to be diligently gathered and maintained resulting in meaningful gender sensitive policies and be used for responsible emigrant administration.

Irregular migration is a context specific and time-specific phenomenon, which is complicated but is reversible (Fargues, 2017). Irregular migration in GCC of

the domestic workers is largely the result of the sponsorship system and cultural impediments existing in the Gulf region. India also pushes the women into irregular situations with its discriminatory policies and gender-insensitive attitudes. Addressing the system which cause migrants to become irregular has to be done instead of targeting the people who move for making livelihoods, as migration for work is a basic human right.

**Notes**

[1] Assisted labour migration from India was sponsored by British India administrators to enable recruitment to their plantation colonies around the world.

[2] Gulf boom refers to the mass migration of Keralites to Gulf countries during the 1970s and 1980s.

[3] Oil boom refers to the increase in oil income of a country by the sale of its oil resources.

[4] Rentier state is a country whose income mainly relies on rents obtained by selling its natural resources outside the country. For GCC countries the rents comes from the oil resources they possess.

[5] Emigration Clearance Required (ECR) visa holders are the Indian citizens who haven't passed tenth standard or are unable to present matriculation certificate. They have to get clearance from Protector of Emigrants (PoE) to migrate abroad to the eighteen countries which are notified as ECR countries by the Government of India.

[6] Temporary Secondment is the process where the sponsor employs the migrants under his/her sponsorship to work under other citizens/expatriates.

### References

Advani, R. (2019). A realm without rights: Noncitizen workers and exclusive citizenship in the Gulf. The century foundation. Retrieved from https://tcf.org/content/report/a-realm-without-rights/

Alhasan, H. (2017). Irregular migration in Bahrain: Legislation, policies and practices. In P. Fargues & N. M. Shah (Eds), *Skilful survivals: Irregular migration to the Gulf (*pp 77-94), Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre

Al-Kazi, L & Shah, N.M. (2017). Irregular migration to and within Kuwait: Enabling and sustaining factors. In P. Fargues & N. M. Shah (Eds), *Skilful survivals: Irregular migration to the Gulf* (pp. 95-114), Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre

Arachchi, S.H. (2013). Violation of migrant women worker's rights in Middle-East. International Journal of Arts and Commerce, 2(2), 332-347

Battistella, G & Asis, M.M.B. (2017). Stemming irregular migration at the source: The Philippine Experience. In P. Fargues & N. M. Shah (Eds), *Skilful survivals: Irregular migration to the Gulf (*pp. 315-336), Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre

De Bel Air, F. (2017). Irregular migration in the Gulf states: What data reveal and what they conceal. In P. Fargues & N. M. Shah (Eds), *Skilful survivals: Irregular migration to the Gulf (*pp 33-56), Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre

Fargues, P. (2017). The normal and exceptional in irregular migration in the Gulf. In P. Fargues & N. M. Shah (Eds), *Skilful survivals: Irregular migration to the Gulf (*pp 13-31), Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre

Frantz, E. (2017). The legal production of Illegality: Obstacles and opportunities to protect undocumented migrants in the Gulf states. In P. Fargues & N. M. Shah (Eds), *Skilful survivals: Irregular migration to the Gulf (*pp 57-76), Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre

Global alliance against traffic in women (GAATW). (2019). Towards building safe and fair migration: Practices within the domestic workers' communities in Kerala-Both cross border and interstate migrants.

Hochschild, A.R. (2000). Global care chains and emotional surplus value. In W. Hutton & A. Giddens (Eds). *On The Edge: Living with Global Capitalism*. London: Jonathan Cape.

Hochshild, A.R. (2001, December 19). The Nanny chains. *The American Prospect: Ideas, Policies and Power*, Retrieved from: https://prospect.org/features/nanny-chain/

ILO. (2015). Indispensable yet Unprotected: Working conditions of Indian domestic workers at home and abroad. ISBN:978-92-2-129840-3(Web PDF)

Jain, P.C. (1989). Emigration and settlement of Indians abroad. *Sociological Bulletin*, 38(1), 155-168.

Joseph, K.V. (2006). *Keralites on the move: A historical survey of migration from Kerala*. New Delhi: Shipra Publications.

Jureidini, R. (2017). Irregular migration in Qatar: The role of legislation, policies and practices. In P. Fargues & N. M. Shah (Eds), *Skilful survivals: Irregular migration to the Gulf (*pp 135-160), Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre

Ketema, N.B. (2014). Female Ethiopian Migrant Domestic Workers: An Analysis of Migration, Return-Migration and Reintegration Experiences. Master's Thesis Presented to The Department of International Studies and The Graduate School of The University of Oregon.

Kodoth, P. (2020). In the shadow of the state: Recruitment and migration of South Indian women as domestic workers to the Middle East. ILO background paper, ISBN:978-92-2-032402-8(Web PDF)

Kuttappan, R. (2017, April 28) Missing in the Gulf: Trafficked Indian domestic workers flee abuse. http://middleeasteye.net/topics/humanrights.

Mahdavi, P. (2017). Producing irregular migration: Living and labouring under laws in the United Arab Emirates. In P. Fargues & N. M. Shah (Eds), *Skilful survivals: Irregular migration to the Gulf (*pp 185-202), Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre

Oishi, N, (2002). Gender and migration: An integrative Approach. Retrieved from: https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0s04g29f

Parrenas. R.S. (2000). Migrant Filipina domestic workers and the international division of reproductive labour. *Gender and Society*, 14(4), 560-580

Pattadath, B. (2014). Negotiating the intimate space: Home and sense of belonging among migrant women domestic workers. *Jobs and livelihoods: Mapping the landscape,* 66-79, IRIS Knowledge Foundation, Mumbai.

Pattadath, B. (2020), The blurred boundaries of migration: Transnational flows of women domestic workers from Kerala to UAE. *Social Change,* 50(1), 95-108.

Radhakrishnan, M.G. (2010, June 21). Kerala: Republic of Kasargod. *India Today,* Retrieved from https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/states/story/20100621-kerala-republic-of-kasargod-743199-2010-06-10

Rajan, S.I & Joseph, J. (2017). Migration (in)flux: Impact of legislation on patterns and quantum of irregular mobility between India and Saudi Arabia. In P. Fargues & N. M. Shah (Eds), *Skilful survivals: Irregular migration to the Gulf (*pp 269-292), Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre

Safar, J & Leavaillant, M. (2017). Irregular migration in Oman: Policies, their effects and interaction with India. In P. Fargues & N. M. Shah (Eds), *Skilful survivals: Irregular migration to the Gulf (*pp 115-134), Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre

Shah, N.M. (2017). Introduction: Skilful survivals -Irregular migration to the Gulf. In P. Fargues & N. M. Shah (Eds), *Skilful survivals: Irregular migration to the Gulf (*pp 1-12), Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre

Strobl, S. (2009). Policing housemaids: The criminalization of domestic workers in Bahrain. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 49(2), 165-183

Kanth, A. (2020, January 4). In 2019, more Kerala women migrated to ECR countries for housemaid jobs. *The New Indian Express*, Retrieved from https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/2020/jan/04/in-2019-more-kerala-women-migrated-to-ecr-countries-for-housemaid-jobs-2084734.html

Varghese, V.J & Kodoth, P. (2012) Protecting women or endangering the emigration process: Emigrant domestic workers, gender and state policy. *Economic and political weekly*, 47(43),56-66

Vlieger, A. (2011). *Domestic workers in Saudi Arabia and the Emirates: A socio-legal study of conflicts*. Alblasserdam: Haveka BV

**Santhini Paul**, PhD Research Scholar, Department of Sociology,

University of Kerala, Karyavattom

*Email Id: mailtosanthini@gmail.com*

**Antony Palackal,** Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Kerala, Karyavattom

*Email Id: antonypalackal@gmail.com*

**Commentery: The Marginalised  Studying the Margin of Law: the Bathos and the Pathos**

# The Marginalised  Studying The Margin of Law: The Bathos and The Pathos

--Sthabir khora

## Abstract

An academic article does not show the difficulties encountered by a researcher conducting research on a socially sensitive topic, such as caste atrocity. This is especially pertinent when the researcher is a member of a marginalised  group and potentially at risk. This article describes the  story behind an academic paper of the author resulting from a study commissioned by an Indian state government.  The commissioned investigation was into the veracity of 'false cases', known in legal parlance as the 'Final Report', of the Atrocities Act. Atrocities Act can be considered as a marginalised  law and the Final Report can be considered to be at the margin of a legal procedure. Despite having been invited by the government, the author was unable to evade the pangs of casteism. Keeping in mind the objective of countering the biased perceptions of the society and the state, the author had to control his emotions and complete the research.

*Key words : autoethnography, researcher's experience, Atrocities Act, false cases*

## Introduction – is the researcher's experience worthy of being made public?

At the end of a Jackie Chan film, often the shooting of the action sequences are shown. While the film's action scenes appear smooth, the shooting of the action sequences shows how difficult it was. Similarly a published research article may appear polished and reader friendly, but the researcher might have had a tough time overcoming many obstacles to complete the research. However, the prevailing publication paradigm does not accommodate the inclusion of a researcher's personal experience.

'I (MM) am consistently asked to adopt the Master's ways to be recognized as an international medical education researcher, but I do not recognize myself in my work. The paper may be acceptable to an international audience, but what makes the work important to me, the goals I have for medical education are missing, rendering the work virtually lifeless' (Mokhachane, Green-Thompson & Wyatt, 2023, p.6).

The 'Master's ways' is the west dominated publication paradigm. Global south researchers, who can be considered the marginalized in the world of publication, have to face this publication paradigm and master it. This paradigm is not accustomed to accommodate the researcher's experience. Of course research methodology has progressed from 'scientific' (positivistic) to the unscientific (qualitative, ethnographic). However, even in qualitative research what matters is the respondent's feeling and not the researcher's. In this context, one may wonder what is the publication worthiness, of the experience of a marginalised studying the 'margin' of a law meant for the protection of the marginalised !

Nevertheless, some have underscored the importance of bringing to public domain the experience of the researcher (Fogle, Duffy & Hunter, 2022; Fletcher-Brown, 2019; Upadhya, 2008; Warren-Findlow, 2009). Reflections on power, emotion and vulnerability during the process of research should not belong to the private realm but should be a matter of public conversation (Oakley, Fenge & Taylor, 2022). Underscoring the importance of a researcher's personal experience Amy M. Lane writes:

The present article is not about the ethnography and its findings. Rather, it is a reflection on the experience of doing the ethnography and treats the research process and its results as the media through which to consider important theoretical and conceptual positionings (2014, p.1).

While conducting qualitative research, the researcher may experience anger, guilt, shame, dread, and sadness (Oakley, Fenge, & Taylor, 2022). The problem is exacerbated when the researcher is from a marginalised background. Uvanney Maylor (2009) had a traumatic experience as a black

researcher facing complete non-recognition and misrecognition as a 'helper' rather than the 'lead researcher'.

I have resisted attempts within academia to silence and make me invisible by constantly talking about my research experiences with my colleagues (whether they are listened to or not) ( Maylor, 2009, p. 62).

When conducting research about caste atrocity, the researcher's caste background will almost undoubtedly affect the researcher. When Ambedkar was a member of the Legislative Council, he was unable to travel to Chalisgaon on official business (research for the Starte Committee, 1929) without suffering physical injury (Cháirez-Garza, 2021). The position of Critical Race Theory is that race affects everything in the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2011). The equivalent of this in India would be Dr B R Ambedkar's statement that 'Turn any direction you like, caste is the monstrosity that crosses your path. You cannot have political reform or economic reform until you eliminate the demon'.

## The Atrocities Act (The Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989) – A marginalised law

We usually take off from various theories and concepts, apply to people and create analytically distinct categories of people like 'the marginalised '. The movement is from categories to people. However the reverse movement/transposition from people/reality to categories/theory is possible. For example, can we use the category of margin or marginalised with respect to law/s?

The law remains a monolith in most of the jurisprudence. The 'law' in the jurisprudence of course includes the 'laws'. However when one moves one's gaze from 'the law' to the 'laws', chance is that one's image of law will change drastically. While 'the law' is general, abstract and philosophical, 'laws' are particular, concrete and sociological. Therefore one can have a philosophy of law and sociology of Atrocities Act and not the other way round.

Doctrinal legal discourse may not be different from other discourses in constituting its own authoritative spokespersons. That is not the point being made. The point being made is that this exercise of self-legitimising power reveals the space between law and laws. The negatively ideological moment in Jurisprudence begins with the closure of that space. From a legal point of view, norms are the objects of knowledge of law qua legal doctrine. To infer from that, however, that norms are the object of knowledge of a social theory of what law is, supposes that what ought to be meant or understood by 'law' is what lawyers mean or understand by 'law'. Now this, precisely, is a constitutive assumption of Hart's and Finnis' Jurisprudence. It closes the gap between law and laws but it is vulnerable to several objections. ( Kerruish 1991, p.91)

Kerruish points out that the original jurisprudential deception which liberalism does is that 'rule of law' is not 'rule of men', while empirically this is not true. If we adapt western feminist's counter to this to India then 'rule of law' is 'rule of men of particular caste'.

If we take the scope of the applicability (general vs special law), offence-punishment (minor-major) and procedure prescribed (non-cognisable - cognizable; usual burden of proof- reverse burden of proof) we can place 'laws' on a continuum of 'marginalised – mainstream' where some laws like the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocity) Act 1989 can be placed as marginalised while the Income Tax Act as the mainstream.

**The final report (FR)- the margin of law**

A case is 'law in action'. It is a combination of substantive and procedural law used to establish order, justice, etc. The career of a case usually takes the following trajectory: FIR (First Information Report) -investigation-chargesheet/Final Report (FR) - trial- conviction/acquittal. The media attention and public visibility pertain to all phases of a case except for the Final Report. The media gaze on the alarming crime rate (regarding registration/FIR), shoddy investigations, and abysmally low conviction rate give rise to the dread that criminals have little respect for the law. However, the FR has largely evaded academic scrutiny, and media attention.

Consequently, in terms of the procedural aspects of law, the FR can be viewed as 'the margin of the law' that escapes public and academic scrutiny.

Studying the FR cannot be easy.  A FR can expose police bias. However, circumstances sometimes can force the police to reveal themselves to save themselves. A Chief Secretary may be questioned by the National Commission for Scheduled Castes regarding the high Final Report rate. Following bureaucratic custom, it is only natural for the Chief Secretary to ask the Director General of Police (DGP) to submit an explanation. The DGP can hardly accept responsibility him/herself. One solution would be to assert that only a study can determine whether or not the Final Reports are justified. Only in this context can the police open its sanctum sanctorum - the final reports i.e. the judgement of the police that a case, lacking any legal foundation, does not deserve to go to the court and be closed.

**The research project on the final reports of the Atrocities Act**
The study was commissioned by the Centre for Good Governance (CGG) located in the CSTI (Civil Service Training Institute) of a state. The chairperson of the centre was the Chief Secretary and the members included the Finance Secretary, the Home Secretary, the DGP   and many other secretaries. So, the centre was virtually the Government of that state. There was an Officer on Special Duty (OSD) who was assigned to deal with me. The reason for commissioning was that approximately fifty percent of the cases filed under the Atrocities Act were 'false cases' according to the police of the state. The purpose of the study was to determine the veracity of such 'false cases'. At that time, I was oblivious of the significance of 'false cases,' which the Supreme Court ruling (*Subhash Kashinath Mahajan v. The State of Maharashtra*, 2018) eventually underscored.

**Encountering casteism in the CSTI**

Prior to this study, I had never visited the state, but I had heard that its social environment is quite casteist. When I first entered the institute, I immediately encountered probing about my caste. Even though I attempted to avoid the

subject by claiming to belong to the generic category of  Scheduled Caste (SC), the probe was relentless. I had to tell them my exact sub-caste. This was very ironical because I was studying the Atrocities Act, and the first thing I encountered was an atrocity to me. However, I was compelled to continue with the study. If I had asserted my dignity, the study would have been over before it began. This raises a matter of research ethics. *Does a researcher have to endure humiliation for a greater purpose?*

An illustration from the field experience will serve to illustrate this point. During the second visit of my fieldwork, I was once sitting in the OSD's office. Tea was being served. During the conversation, the OSD stated, 'This is in the office. If this was at my house we would have had separate cups, Dr. Sahib'. During my first visit to the CSTI, my caste was already known. He attempted to provide a justification by invoking the notion of division of labour. I thought to myself, 'I currently have the support of the law. Actually, I was invited by the state to conduct the study. Therefore, even if you don't want to, you have to cooperate with me'. At that moment, I recalled Ambedkar and his reliance on law as an instrument for social change. What would have happened to the SC/ST if Ambedkar had not existed and Article 17 instituted ! I just shuddered at the thought of it.

**Bureaucratic     machinations     and     the     smile     of     the     DGP**
I couldn't have studied police stations and closed cases (Final Reports) without the permission from higher-ups in the police department. Therefore, the Member Secretary at the CGG wrote a handwritten message to the DGP to enable my meeting with him. I went to meet with the DGP according to the protocol. One must first create a pass at reception before proceeding to the DGP's chamber leaving  everything (bag, even mobile phone) at the door. Two armed guards stood in front of the DGP's office which can make a visitor uneasy. I met with the DGP, introduced myself, and showed him the study's sample police stations. He smiled as he saw the sample. I couldn't figure out at the time why he was smiling. Only at the end of the study could I understand his smile. The DGP's community is one of the dominant communities in that

state, though legally classified as a Scheduled Tribe. The DGP's village police station was included in the sample. There are supposed to be more than a hundred Indian Police Service (IPS) officers in that village. If the police station in that village had been selected as a sample, the most likely conclusion would have been that the Scheduled Tribe oppress others, which can create havoc through generalisation about the Atrocities Act. This was most likely a move by the Chief Secretary, a Syrian Catholic (based on his surname and domicile state), against the DGP, a member of the Scheduled Tribe. Probably, the DGP was aware of the larger implications of selecting the village police station as a sample. He modified the sample proposing that we focus on the western part of the state because it was under feudalism for a long period.

**Encountering caste pride- the joke with a constable**

I was waiting in front of the office of a Deputy Superintendent of Police (DySP). One constable came to me. He was in a good mood. He started talking to me. He asked me what I have come for. I told him that I have come to study the closed cases (Final Report) under the Atrocities Act. He asked me whether I am from the police department. I said no. Then somebody nearby remarked that whether I am from the CBI (Central Burau of Investigation). I said I am not from CBI. The conversation was going on and I could witness the *Jat* (a dominant caste) pride in that constable. I had already encountered casteism in the CSTI. This time I wanted to confront. To tease him, I asked him whether he was a *Jain*. He was annoyed. He asked me 'from which angle I look like a *Jain*'! I answered diplomatically that there are lots of *Jain*s in the state and therefore I thought he could be a *Jain*. Then he answered that he is a *Jat*. Meanwhile the DySP came. I met him and explained the study. When he came to know that my surname is Khora he asked me what does it mean. I told him that I don't know what is the meaning and there is apparently no meaning of it. Then he answered that Khora is a particular *gotra* of the community to which he belongs as well as the DGP. He seems to have become sympathetic to me on account of this because he then asked the constable to drop me at my hotel room in his official maruti gypsy. While leaving me at the hotel, the

constable requested me not to mind whatever he had said. I told him that I didn't mind at all. From this incident I could witness firsthand the caste pride of a *Jat* who even think themselves superior to *jain* though *jain*s are economically dominant community and see themselves as *ksatriya varna*.

**Discrimination in high places**

At  the time of the DGP altering the sample police stations, the Director General (DG) of the CSTI was also from the same community as the DGP. The DGP might have been confident that the DG would concur with him and not raise objection. The DG's approval was crucial because he was the member secretary of the  CGG which was funding the study, even though the work pertains to the police department. In the meanwhile, a Christian replaced him as the CSTI's DG. When a Christian became the DG of the CSTI, I was happy thinking that he would be more sympathetic to the SC/ST and more willing to support this initiative based on the assumption that Christianity is based on egalitarianism. I should have been wary of the fact that the chief minister of that state had previously did not side with a *dalit*  IPS officer when the case involved a Muslim MLA (member of legislative assembly). Caste has penetrated all religious communities in India.

On the day of the presentation of my report, very few members of the police department were present - the DGP and the Additional Director General of Police ( ADGP; who assisted me in formulating the questionnaire), the city's Police Commissioner, and one female DySP. In contrast to the police department, many more senior bureaucrats from other departments were present including the Home Secretary, Secretary of Women and Child Welfare, Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission.  A Non-Government Organization (NGO) working on women's rights was invited on the ground that the study also dealt with section 498 of the IPC (Indian Penal Code).  But no organisation working on *dalit*  rights was invited. Later, I learned that the most prominent *dalit*  rights organisation in that state, which had its headquarter in the city, had somehow learned about this important meeting at

which a presentation on a study on closed cases under the Atrocities Act were to take place. The NGO sent two representatives to this meeting, but they were denied entry. Later, I learned that the DG's wife is a professor and is associated with that NGO. While the DG had officially invited women's rights activists, he did not invite any civil society organisation working on SC/ST rights. So my belief about Christian sympathy for SC/ST rights was shattered. The DG was a Christian.

I gave my presentation to the best of my ability at the meeting. However, following the presentation, the Chief Secretary set off the criticism by stating that he had anticipated a high-quality report, but it turned out to be superficial and of poor quality. Then, everyone else followed suit. It was evident that the chief secretary was very displeased  because the sample police stations were changed. But instead of directly questioning the DGP (who changed it) he wanted me to disclose it in such a large meeting which definitely would have created a very precarious situation for the DGP.  The Director General, who was moderating the meeting, was preventing me from responding. The DGP initially attempted to defend me, but eventually realised that he is outnumbered by senior IAS officers with higher ranks. To project a semblance of neutrality, he also made a critical remark about my report - the number of times the investigating officer was replaced at the victim's request. Despite being a faculty member from a reputed institute, I was forced to endure indignity over which I had little control and over which even a high-ranking officer like the DGP had little control, as he could not have done much in front of a group of senior IAS officers, including the Chief Secretary. This incident demonstrates that SC/ST individuals cannot avoid indignity, even if they achieve high positions like the IPS.

**Working with bureaucracy without sacrificing dignity**

The Chief Secretary had deemed the study to be of poor quality, but there were no suggestions made during the presentation about how to improve the study. The Director General had to apply his mind to determine how to conduct the study that would be acceptable to the Chief Secretary.

Clearly, the Chief Secretary was dissatisfied that the research was not conducted in the original sample police stations. However, conducting the study at the DGP's village police station would have amounted to confronting the DGP. When I inquired with the Director General, I discovered that he wanted me to study additional police stations without additional compensation in order to pacify the Chief Secretary. He didn't include the DGP's village police station that suggests that high ranking bureaucrats don't confront each other openly.   When I pointed out the difficulty of doing additional work without additional compensation, he merely sidestepped the issue by stating that he is too busy.

The entire situation was humiliating to me. I had already completed the study taking the required  number of police stations suggested by the ToR (Terms of Reference) of the CGG, albeit a different selection than the one proposed by it. I did not alter the sample districts on my own. It was at the behest of the DGP, a member of the CGG. The change had been communicated to the CGG from the very beginning and the Chief Secretary, the chairman of the CGG, in principle could not claim to be in the dark. Therefore the charge of incompetency against me was unjustified.

I chose to adopt a seitskrieg strategy and reclaim my dignity. The hostile action was initiated by the Director General. In a formal letter to the Registrar of my institute, he complained that I had not completed the study according to the Terms of Reference. Obviously, failing to execute in the sample districts was a severe lapse. However, I had the correspondence to prove that I kept the CGG updated throughout. My institute's Director could see that I was not at fault. Rather the CGG was at fault because it did not stop the DGP to change the sample police stations. He granted me a little additional funding, from the institute's own sources, to complete the study to maintain relation of the institute with powerful external agencies like a state government. This funding obviously could not match the original funding. I was compelled to conduct the fieldwork in a spartan fashion. During the first phase of the study, I could

travel by air and rented vehicle. This time, however, due to paucity of fund, I had to travel by train and public transport in the blistering month of June.

I decided to put the Director General in a little inconvenience just the way the Director General's letter to the registrar had caused me inconvenience. This was a protest from a powerless in anyway s/he could. I requested a letter of authorization to study the police stations from the Director General. I was aware that it won't be smooth to issue permission letters because the Director General doesn't have direct jurisdiction over the police department. The first phase was without a hitch because the DGP himself supported the research and the Inspector General - Human Rights issued a permission letter. I was aware that the Director General of CSTI lacks direct authority over the Inspector General and SP (Superintendent of Police). After a good three months, I received the permission letter, where the Director General had addressed directly to the district Collectors rather than the SPs. The collectors had forwarded the letter to the SPs. One district SP had replied to the Director General, while another did not. He stated to me that he will cooperate with the investigation, but will not reply to the Director General. This is a reflection of the cool relation between the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and the IPS.

**How an academic report becomes acceptable to an administrator**

In one of the initial encounters with the DGP, someone referred to me as 'Dr.' to indicate that I am having a PhD. The DGP appeared to get panicky. He said, 'please provide me with a simple study, not a PhD type study'. This shows that an usual academic study does not satisfy an administrator. I knew it from the beginning. However, there is no set method for doing a study that satisfies an administrator.

This study focused primarily on the police department's shortcomings. I was aware that demonstrating the shortcomings of the police would not be simple. My first move was to obtain a significant number of Final Reports from the police. I was to study nine police stations from four districts. I thought that the primary data of nine police stations may be insufficient to prove a point. I

thought if I could get the data of the entire districts then probably I will have sufficient data. Therefore I wrote to all the SPs of the districts to provide me all the Final Reports of a particular year pertaining to that district. I was unsure whether the SPs would give so much of data because I was to study only two police Stations in a particular district. However my adventure worked. The respective SPs directed the Nodal Officers (DySPs) to provide me the data of all police stations. The Nodal Officers gave me the data under the RTI (Right to Information). I asked one of the Nodal Officer later that whether he would have given me the data under the RTI ordinarily. He replied me that ordinarily I couldn't have got the data. I got the data only because there was approval from above. I was aware that having such a large number (500) of police Final Reports with me would serve as a counterweight against any question from the police department about the robustness of the study. I attached scanned excerpts from the police Final Reports wherever I needed to substantiate a point in my report. This was not data from my interviews, but rather their own Final Reports, which they cannot refute. The scanned excerpts clearly indicated the police station, the FIR (First Information Report) number, and the district, allowing for cross-checking whenever desired. I assume that this strategy worked. Ultimately the police department endorsed my report and the CSTI in turn did.

**Conclusion**

There is no such a thing called positive discrimination in the world of publication allowing the publication of the experience of a researcher from the marginalised researching on the marginalised. This article brings out the cathectic bitter sweet experience of a researcher doing research on a law for the marginalised. It shows that resisting humiliation and maintaining dignity is not easy though it may be unavoidable if one intends to create some positive impact for the marginalised  through research. The actual instance of discrimination in high places brought out in this article underscores why special laws for the marginalised  like the Atrocities Act is needed.

**References**

Carter, C., Lapum, J. L., Lavallée, L. F., & Martin, L. S. (2014). Explicating positionality: A journey of dialogical and reflexive storytelling. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *13*(1), 362-376.

Cháirez-Garza, Jesús F. (2021). Ambedkar and the production of anthropological knowledge: the case of the Depressed Classes and Aboriginal Tribes (Starte) Committee, Retrieved from https://www.theotherfromwithin.com/post/ambedkar-and-the-production-of-anthropological-knowledge

Delgado, Richard, and Jean Stefancic (2011). *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. New York University Press.

Fletcher-Brown, Judith (2019). Reflexivity and the challenges of collecting sensitive data in India: a research note, *Qualitative Research*, *20*(1),108–118.

Fogle, E. L. V., Duffy, L. N., & Hunter, W. (2022). On being a Black woman 'Mzungu'researcher. *Tourism Geographies*, 1-19.

Kerruish, Valerie (1991). *Jurisprudence as ideology.* London: Routledge.

Khora S. (2018). Misconstruction of the Anti-atrocities Act's Misuse, *Economic and Political Weekly*, *53*(15), 11-14.

Lane, Amy M. (2014). 'I grew up a working-class evangelical': lived experience, intersubjectivity, and ethnography, *SAGE Open*, October-December,1–8.

Maylor, Uvanney (2009). Is it because I'm Black? A Black female research experience, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *12*(1), 53-64.

Mokhachane, Mantoa, Lionel Green-Thompson & Tasha R. Wyatt (2023). Voices of silence: experiences in disseminating scholarship as a global south researcher, *Teaching and Learning in Medicine*, DOI: 10.1080/10401334.2023.2181815.

Oakley, Lisa, Lee-Ann Fenge & Bethan Taylor (2022). 'I call it the hero complex' – Critical considerations of power and privilege and seeking to be an agent of change in qualitative researchers' experiences, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *19*(3), 587-610.

Subhash Kashinath Mahajan v The State of Maharashtra: Retrieved from http://sci.gov.in/supremecourt/2017/22086/22086_2017_Judgement_20-Mar-2018.pdf.

Upadhya, C. (2008). Negotiating policy research, academic knowledge, and *political movements: one researcher's experience. Review of Development and* Change, 13(1), 11-27.

Warren-Findlow, J. (2009). Inside the circus: Examining the experience of breast cancer as a researcher, teacher, and feminist. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, *2*(2), 313-328.

*Sthabir khora,* Dr B.R. Ambedkar Chair Professor, Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (Deemed to be University), Campus 3 Higher Education Campus, P.O. KIIT, Bhubaneswar, *Email: sthabir.khora@kiss.ac.in*

**Conversation: R. Indira in Conversation with Shanthi G**

**Source: Explorations, ISS e-journal, Vol. 7 (3), December 2023, pp. 295-320**

**Published by: Indian Sociological Society**

## R. Indira in Conversation with Shanthi G

[Transcript of the interview held on January 14, 2024]

### Introduction

**R. Indira,** taught in the Postgraduate Department of Sociology in the University of Mysore for forty-two years, and superannuated from university service in the year 2014. During her service in the university, she discharged such responsibilities as the Director of the Centre for Women's Studies and the Director of the International Centre. In the ten years following her superannuation, R. Indira has been invited as Scholar-in-Residence in Kuvempu and Bangalore Universities, Visiting Fellow in Delhi University, Visiting Professor in the University of Johannesburg in South Africa and Visiting Professor, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Chair, University of Mysore. Currently she is Professor of Eminence in the School of Social Sciences, M.S. Ramaiah University of Applied Sciences, Bengaluru. She is the former President of the Indian Sociological Society and has received the Lifetime Achievement Award from ISS, in the year 2022. She is a two-time Fulbright Scholar, four-time Shastri Fellow and an ICSSR Senior Fellow. A prolific writer, she has written extensively both in English and Kannada in theme-based books, encyclopaedias, journals, and edited volumes. For the past twenty years she has been writing columns in Kannada newspapers which are credited with bringing sociological issues to the public domain for the first time in Karnataka. She has been conferred the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Mooknayak Award by the Karnataka Media Academy for her columns on people in society's margins. A proactive researcher Indira has carried out a number of field projects on themes of social relevance, many of which have influenced policy in the state of Karnataka. Special mention must be made of her research work with forest dependent communities in the Joida region of Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka State with a special focus on women's empowerment which initiated many reforms in a region that had been sidelined by developmental projects for several decades. In the year 2011 she founded Samruddhi Foundation, a civil society group actively involved in

developing academic and social skills of students, researchers, and women members of PRIs.

Website: www.r-indira.com

**Shanthi G.** is an independent researcher who has wide experience in studies on third sector and has worked with action-oriented research projects addressing issues of gender equity, sustainable livelihoods, traditional health care practices and survival strategies of forest dependent communities. Shanthi who is actively involved in the autonomous women's movement is associated with programmes aimed at mobilising rural and tribal women, students, and members of civil society groups to campaign for their rights. She has been coordinating gender sensitisation programmes and designing and teaching gender courses in Study India Programmes being organised by civil society groups in collaboration with Samruddhi Foundation. Shanthi is the Secretary, Samruddhi Foundation & Member, Samata Vedike a Progressive Women's Forum, Mysuru.

**Shanthi (SG):** I thank Explorations and Prof. Nagaraju Gundemeda for the opportunity given to me to engage in a dialogue with my teacher Prof. R. Indira (RI) with whom my association lasts for more than four decades. I have known her as a highly involved teacher of Sociology and Gender Studies, a research guide who gave to each student so much of her time and energy, besides sharing her knowledge, an educational administrator who combined discipline with a human approach and above all a human being with deep social concerns and dreams for creating an inclusive world.  What stands out in her persona is her passionate love for sociology, which for her is not just a classroom subject, but 'a way of life'.  Before tracing the several facets of her professional journey of half-a century I will begin by asking her how her association with sociology began.

**SG:** When did you first come into contact with sociology?

**RI:** The academic world held a special fascination for me, even as a young school student, as my father was a teacher of English literature in the University of Mysore. Our home was the centre of many discussions and debates in which his students would take an active part. Though I could not understand much of what was happening I would sit in the veranda of our house and watch this interaction. This was the beginning of my interest in becoming a teacher. Those were days when we had the choice of opting for science or arts stream courses even in high school, and I chose History, Economics and Geography as my elective subjects. In the tenth grade examination, I scored high marks in these subjects which triggered my decision to continue in the arts stream even in college. I joined Teresian College for Women in 1966 and took up the same subjects as my optionals in the Pre-university course which was then a one-year programme. When I joined the B.A. course , I had to choose an optional stream in which two had to be major subjects and one a minor subject. I choose English literature and History as my major subjects and Economics as the minor. My ultimate aim was to do my masters in English literature and follow in my father's footsteps. There were five students who had opted for this combination, and we even had classes for two days. When I went to the class on day three, I found the classroom empty. On making enquires at the college office, to my utter dismay I was told that the other four students who had opted for this optional group had changed their combination, as they felt that literature was too heavy a subject. The only other optional stream that was available in the B.A. course had Sociology and Political Science as major subjects and History as a minor subject. I was not at all keen on going with this combination, nevertheless I was not ready to change my college as most of my good friends were in this college. It was my father who then told me 'sociology is a good subject; you must go for it'. So, I took a transfer to this optional stream and even after fifty years, I keep thinking about what I would have missed in my life if I had not continued in Teresian College and chosen Sociology as one of my majors. Thus began my journey with sociology.

By the time I completed my undergraduate studies, in 1970, I had decided to pursue the masters course in sociology, which had gradually begun to engage my attention. I joined the Department of Sociology in the Manasa Gangotri campus of the University of Mysore. After my father's superannuation from the Department of English, in recognition of his writings and proficiency both in English and Kannada, the University had invited him to head the revision of the English-Kannada Dictionary Project of the University of Mysore, as Chief-Editor.

It was also my father's desire that I join the Department of Sociology which was headed by Prof. Parvathamma, one of the country's senior most and revered teachers of sociology. Since all my teachers in the Department were my father's students or colleagues, I was treated with a lot of affection. Just as I was happily settling down, my father was diagnosed with cancer, and he had to go to Vellore for treatment. Since my mother also had to go with him, our family suffered several jolts. But I never fell back in my studies. I attended classes regularly, wrote all my assignments and performed well in tests because I would sit and study every day. After seven months of treatment, which initially seemed to have cured his ailment, the cancer relapsed and he passed away in 1971, with about two weeks left for my first year examination. My teachers were concerned that I would not write the examination, in the situation of grief that had engulfed our family. They would send my seniors and the department office staff home with messages that I must not skip the examination. Since I was studying regularly, I was prepared to face the examination and performed well in all the papers.  It was difficult to imagine life without my father's presence and support, but my mother stood as a pillar of strength and educated all her three daughters well and I am happy to share with you that all of us are in the academic line and have been able to continue our father's legacy. I completed my masters in June 1972 with a distinction, and this marked the completion of an important phase in my life.

**SG:** When did your journey as a teacher begin?

**RI:** I started looking for a job as soon as my results were announced.  I was hoping to find a teaching opportunity in one of the degree colleges in Mysuru. But in July I got a call from Professor Parvathamma to go to the Department and meet her. I was completely taken aback when she asked me to apply for a temporary lecturer's position in the Department of Sociology and asked Mr. Nagaraju, who was then in our office to help me get the application form ready. I can never forget what she said to me that day 'you do not have to go anywhere looking for a job, I will give you the opportunity'. I never imagined that I would straight away get into a post-graduate department as a teacher. I knew that her concern for me and the respect she had for my father were the major reasons for this decision of hers. Of course, I had scored a high percentage that helped me qualify for the post as well. Professor Parvathamma commanded so much respect in the university fraternity, and her words carried such weight that my application was accepted by the University, and I reported for duty on August 10, 1972, as a Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, the very space in which I was a student for two years. I was still bewildered but realised that a huge responsibility awaited me and decided to give my best to live up to the trust which my teacher had placed in me. By 1974 the Lecturer's post in the Department was advertised and I was selected for the post, in which I remained till 1984, the year in which I moved on to become a Reader and in 1994 I was selected for the position of Professor, which had fallen vacant after the superannuation of Professor Parvathamma in 1988. I remained in the Department till 2014, the year in which I superannuated.  It is the opportunity which she gave me in 1972 that has brought me this far and I remain ever grateful to my teacher who charted the path of my life.

**SG:** You have established yourself as a deeply concerned teacher of sociology.  Can you take us through the trajectory of the pedagogical practices you have adopted in the 50 years of your teaching journey?

**RI:** My teaching journey began almost immediately after completing my masters course, when I was just a twenty year old. In the initial years of my teaching career most of my concentration was on preparing for classes because those days we had to teach at least eight hours a week. Professor Parvathamma allotted two courses to me-Research Methods for the first year and Criminology for the second year M.A classes. The second-year students were actually my juniors, and every time I went to their class, I felt uncomfortable. As days passed on both of us got used to our new roles.

In the first ten years of my teaching career, I followed only the lecture method. I also shared the key points on each unit of the courses I taught. I would prepare the points very carefully and devote the last fifteen or twenty minutes of my class to dictate these points to students. I must confess that holding on for 1 hour, especially for a new teacher is a big challenge. However, much I may have prepared, within half an hour or forty minutes, my material would get exhausted. There were days when I would let off the class early and was warned not to do so by Madam. This led me thinking about new ways of engaging students in the classroom.

In those days there were no orientation or refresher courses to train teachers in new or innovative pedagogical practices. It was only when I started working for my Ph. D in the late seventies that I got my first exposure to the field. Since I was teaching a course on research methodology, I began to share my field experiences with students in the classroom wherever there was a scope to do so. By mid eighties I became deeply involved in the women's movement and this gave me the opportunity to combine academics with activism. I also started receiving invitations to participate in programmes organised both in the public and academic domain on women's issues in and around Mysuru. I must say that this gave me a good deal of visibility as a teacher who could engage in discourses on gender. I had also begun to take up small projects on gender related themes and had started writing articles in journals and edited volumes mostly in my mother tongue, which had also by then become the teaching-learning medium. As my contacts with the world outside widened, I realised

that 'we learn better sociology outside than inside the classroom'. This helped me to bring into the classroom experiences gained in my interactions with people.

There was a big shift in my pedagogical practices once I began teaching batches of students from universities in US and Canada who came to Mysuru as part of Study India Programmes. I designed and taught the gender course in almost all these programmes. Initially I was using the lecture method even while teaching these students, but one day it dawned on me that the 'monologue' mode is not the right approach, and the interactive genre would be the most effective way of reaching out to these students. I started asking students what their expectations from my class were and also started encouraging them to ask me questions. From then onwards this became my teaching methodology. Experience has taught me that unless we engage students in classroom deliberations and give them the scope to ask questions, classes become monotonous. I use the PPT very rarely as I believe that talking is the best method of establishing a connect between the teacher and the student.

**SG:** As your student, I know that you give a lot of importance to bringing field-based evidence into the classroom. How important is it to give the feel of the field to students?

**RI:** Sociology is about people. I believe that the discipline cannot be taught or learnt without understanding the lived-in-experiences of people. Social realities can be comprehended only when you talk to people, live with them, and try to fathom the world from their perspective. The field teaches us not just to learn but also 'unlearn' many of our misgivings about different social groups. There are any number of themes that you can talk about in the classroom, but I believe that unless you give students the feel of the field, the subject loses its relevance. Research is treated as an academic exercise by many researchers whose sole motto is to get a doctoral degree. I am not saying that a Ph. D is unimportant or that one must not aspire for academic or social mobility. But it cannot be limited to routine procedures such as

identifying a topic, doing some reading, constructing a hypothesis, selecting a sample, generating some primary data, analysing that data, and writing a report. I do not deny that publication is important, but unless a researcher experiences the field, interacts with field partners before and after the data are generated, the research has little or no social relevance.  The field throws up many challenges, yet it is exciting. How can we forget the fact that a great deal of sociological and anthropological knowledge owes its existence to field studies? Field oriented activities do not generally form part of many teaching programmes and only a tokenist value is attached to field-based learning. Taking students to the field for a day is not the way sociology must be taught. I believe that students must experience the field on a regular basis. Teachers must encourage students to observe life around them and record their observations. Preparing field dairies must form a compulsory part of the teaching-learning processes. Both teachers and students have moved away from studying ethnography in many institutions and I consider this an extremely negative trend. Sociology must be experienced and not just read.

**SG:** You worked for your Ph. D under the guidance of Prof. C. Parvathamma, and you were her colleague too. Can you share your experiences of working with her?

**RI:** I was fortunate that I had the opportunity to study and later work under the guidance of Professor Parvathamma. I was just an eighteen year old when I joined the Department of Sociology as a student. She was known as a 'tough lady', a person who would never make compromises.  She did not tolerate people giving excuses. I always remember and follow the three basic lessons of life that I learnt from her. First, she would not like her students or her colleagues to say 'I cannot do'. The second thing she did not want us to say was 'I do not know'. She would get truly angry if we said 'I am scared'. The first take away for me was her message that 'personal is different from professional,' a principle that I adopted in my life and follow even to this day.

Professor Parvathamma was a person who did not take kindly to excuses. I will share just one experience with you. When I joined the Department of

Sociology as a student in 1970, social statistics was introduced as a full paper, and ours was the first batch to be taught this course. Our teachers used to come from the Department of Statistics and this practice continued for a few years. One day the Head of that Department sent a letter to Madam saying that he would not be sending his teacher to our department from the following day. This was around 5.00 PM and she called me to her room and told me 'from tomorrow you will take the statistics classes'.  Statistics was definitely not one of my favourite subjects, and also, I did not feel confident to accept this responsibility at such a short notice. So, I said 'Madam, I do not think I can do it'. She was annoyed at my response, and said, 'I do not know how you do it, but you are the only one amongst the faculty who has studied this subject, and you must teach this course from tomorrow.' It was already coming close to 5.30 PM and those were not the days of xerox or google. I was contemplating what I could do when it suddenly occurred to me that I should run to the Statistics Department and request help from a senior colleague to give me some ideas to manage my first class. When I went to his department  he sat me down in his room and patiently explained frequency distribution and its importance in social research. I felt relieved and went home and prepared myself to face the class the following morning. I want to tell you that over a period of time statistics became dear to my heart, and I came to be recognised as one of the few sociology teachers in the state of Karnataka who could handle this subject. I am sharing this experience with you because I want you to know that Professor Parvathamma would not take 'no' for an answer. She would always tell her students to 'go and explore.'  In many institutions today, let alone deciding what courses they teach, many teachers even pick the chapters that they would teach in courses of their choice.

I want to share my experience with her as a research student. It was she who suggested that I work on engineering education, and without much experience at that age, my first reaction was 'what is the relationship between sociology and engineering.' She was quite upset with my question and said 'you have taken sociology of education as your specialisation, and you are asking me this question. Engineering is not just about technological knowledge, there are

many other dimensions from which you, as a student of sociology have to examine the subject. A massive expansion in the number of private colleges in the state of Karnataka is taking place. It is in this context that you have to raise such questions as 'which are the groups accessing the benefits of this expansion and why? Is there a caste, class, and gender angle to utilisation of these increasing opportunities?' This, I must say was my first introduction to the idea of intersectionality, about which we are talking so much today.

As my study results began to unfold, I realised that 'merit' which was being projected as the only channel for entry into an engineering college is not just about grades but is the product of socio-economic circumstances in which students are placed.  Professor Parvathamma taught her students to question stereotypes and also be open to different points of view. She was one of the few research guides who sent her students to meet her colleagues in other universities to discuss their research topics. This is a rare quality which you do not find in many supervisors. She believed that it is important to expose students to different view points and also be prepared to have their work reviewed.  As a school student, I had seen Madam coming to my house to have her Ph.D thesis reviewed from the language point of view from my father.  What had struck me ~~even~~ then was that even at that stage of life, when she herself was such an accomplished person, her coming to our house to consult a colleague. This is the same kind of value she instilled in me and her other students.

Be it in her writings or talks, Professor Parvathamma was known for taking a stand on an issue and would never make a compromise for pleasing someone or for the sake of gaining power. This had a deep impression on me. Working with her charted a road map for me. I was fortunate that I was her student from 1970 to 1972, and from 1972 to 1988 the year in which she superannuated from our department, I worked as a faculty in the Department. I must say that her life and work are a great source of learning for me.

**SG:** Given the fact that education today is mostly controlled by market driven forces, do you think that sociology teaching in the state and at national level is responding to the need?

**RI:** It is difficult to give a capsule like answer to this question because there is a wide variety of institutions in this country. We have more than one thousand universities in India. In terms of pedagogical practices, facilities, human and financial resources available, there are marked differences between different types of institutions. The quality of teaching or research in a given institution depends upon these factors. Well, I must honestly say that in all institutions in this country, performance of teachers or students cannot be judged by using the same parameters. In many institutions, especially state-run institutions which do not have the kind of facilities that central universities or private institutions have, lectures and examinations dominate the teaching-learning process. There is not much scope for development of social or digital skills. In such a set-up the preparedness of students to meet the challenges of the new job market is limited. The market today demands certain special skills which students are expected to acquire but, I can say with certainty that many institutions are not imparting these skills. The application aspect is totally missing in many of our teaching programmes.

It is also sad that in the recent past both undergraduate and postgraduate courses in sociology in many colleges had to be closed for want of admissions. The main reason for this is the fact that students and their families do not see a connection between what they are learning in the classroom and jobs available in the market. After the era of economic liberalisation set in, with many new areas of knowledge entering the academia, technology gradually taking the place of the classroom teacher and the new jobs becoming more demanding, conventional methods of knowledge generation and transmission seem to be losing ground. In this data driven world if we do not build the skills of identifying and interpreting the varied data sources that are available it is likely that our students may not be able to comprehend the machinations of the emerging job market.

The entry of private players into the educational sector in a big way is creating a divide between institutions that have both financial and academic autonomy to mould their courses by keeping the changing demands of the job market, and those that are facing constraints of various sorts. The space that the private sector provides for making a discipline relevant is virtually absent in most of the academic institutions in the public sector. With a severe fund crisis, political interference, and corruption many institutions have reached a state of 'no return'. I am worried about the students, who because of their socio-economic-cultural conditions are denied opportunities of gaining the type of knowledge that enhances their employability.

**SG:** Madam, I have a question which spills from your response to my earlier question on the challenges that sociology is facing today because it is not living up to market demands. But I also think that sociology need not always live up to market demands, because an understanding of social realities is also important.

**RI:** Thank you, Shanthi, for asking me a very important question. I totally agree with you that education cannot be perceived only in terms of its utilitarian value. It is very important for teachers to create in students a desire to understand what is going on around them. It is critical that they ask fundamental questions such as 'why is there a growing gap between a small number that has all the comforts and facilities of life and a large number who are being deprived of even the basic necessities simply because of their caste, gender, location, religion, class and various other reasons?.' So, it is not always about job, money, or comforts, but also about thinking of those who live in society's margins. It is true that not all those whom you come into contact with see a relationship between understanding the realities of life and their own future. But we must remember that today we are dealing with a very sensitive generation. It is wrong to generalise that they do not care. They are caught in their own world of fascinations, contradictions, and questions about the future. I believe that it is up to a teacher to draw students into thinking about the unequal world in which we live and how they can make a difference

to the lives of people who do not have the kind of advantages they have. I think here lies the strength of sociology.

**SG:** Teaching sociology in the mother tongue has become the need of the hour. What is your take on this?

**RI:** Well, your question takes me back to early seventies when I was a first year masters student. A proposal came from the university that teaching in the postgraduate departments must be done in Kannada. There was a lot of opposition from different quarters, especially from the science departments, because they said that it would be difficult to find Kannada equivalents to technical terms and also that it would bring down standards. But the opposition did not sustain for long and the demand became vociferous in the days to come, especially in social science departments. As a first step to implementing this proposal, the University gave students the choice of writing their examinations in Kannada. First generation learners who were not comfortable with English because they had their entire education in their mother tongue also demanded that classes be conducted in the mother tongue. Due to certain administrative and financial constraints, separate Kannada and English medium sections could not be provided in postgraduate departments, but teachers were advised to become bi-lingual.  Over a period of time in social science departments, in the state universities in Karnataka both teaching and research writing became virtually monolingual. Only a few out-of-state and international students use English as the medium of communication. This must be true of many other states too.

What are the ramifications of this situation? There is no argument on the point that we tend to receive knowledge transmitted in the mother tongue more effectively as compared to classroom deliberations that take place in English. An exception to this rule are those who have had their education in English medium right from the primary school stage. The learner as well as the communicator must have the freedom to use a language with which he or she is familiar. I do not subscribe to the view that teaching or writing in the mother tongue reduces educational standards or that lack of appropriate translation of

technical terminology acts as a hindrance to receiving quality education. It is our responsibility as teachers to make knowledge sources available in our respective disciplines in a language which our students and readers can comprehend.  Even as early as in 1987, I started writing books in Kannada as independent author and continue to bring out edited volumes on subjects of sociological interest.

Few teachers have also been writing in the mother tongue or translating theme and subject books into the mother tongue. I myself have been involved in two major translation projects initiated by the National Translation Mission in an editorial capacity. The first, is the preparation of Translation Equivalents in Sociology -English to Kannada, which has about 12,000 concepts used in sociology. It took  nine years for our team to complete this work.  We read classics, referred standard dictionaries of sociology, and discussed each concept several times with language experts and reviewed the multiple drafts we prepared before the print-ready copy was approved. The second project that I headed was bringing out the Kannada translation of the 6th edition of Anthony Gidden's Sociology (in the print process) running to more than 1000 pages. You were part of both the teams and are aware of the effort that went into these two projects. Our experience taught us that translation is not just about finding the Kannada equivalent of an English word from a dictionary, but paying due attention to the language, content, and context dimensions. Creation of knowledge sources in the mother tongue without compromising quality is a major challenge which social sciences have to cope with.

While we are on this subject, I also want to say that it is wrong to discourage students from learning English as there is a growing divide between English medium students and those who have had their education in the mother tongue. Employment opportunities are becoming too localised and with new jobs requiring knowledge of English opening up, we must equip our students with speaking and writing skills in English. Those who go to private institutions and live in society's comfort zones are garnering the best of opportunities. Education which was perceived as a 'leveller' is itself emerging

as the 'divider'. Our students must be engaged in serious debates about this issue.

**SG:** You have been writing extensively in Kannada media bringing sociology into public focus. I see in you a public sociologist who set readers thinking about how sociological perspectives can give a holistic understanding of issues. When did you start writing in popular media and what was your inspiration?

**RI:** It was in the late nineties that a friend of mine from the feminist movement started writing a weekly column in a Kannada newspaper in which the focus was primarily on gender issues. That caught my attention and created in me the desire to write in popular media so that I could reach out to a large number of people. It was in the year 2002 that I got an opportunity to write a weekly column in Prajaanudi, which was being published from Mysuru. Those were not the days of computer, email, or WhatsApp. I had to hand write my column which I titled Manushi. Its major focus was on gender. I wrote this column for about three years. The columns have been published in the form of a book.

The second opportunity to write a column came up in 2009, when I was invited to contribute a fortnightly column in Prajavani one of Karnataka's most widely circulated dailies. Its online edition is read by Kannadigas across the world. I was excited. It was quite a challenge, because when the editor met me in this connection, there were two points that he wanted me to remember. The first was that the issue that I chose to write on should be contemporary and second, it had to be data based to the extent possible and cannot be just a casual piece of writing. This came as a big opportunity for me to connect with readers from across the state of Karnataka, because the readership of this newspaper at that point of time was about 2,00,000. I was fortunate that the column which I called Hosadaari (new path), became very popular and widely read and well accepted. I always made it a point to respond to a contemporary issue. At least forty percent of the columns were on gender issues. But I also wrote on education, development, political crisis, and other socially relevant

themes. My focus was mostly on those in society's margins. I specially felt happy when readers called me up and said 'we had never realised that sociology deals with such matters. We saw the issue from a new perspective'. When the columns were published in the form of two books, they came to be treated as reference books both for sociology and gender courses. This gave me a great sense of satisfaction. It is my considered opinion that sociologists must write and speak in popular media if their voices and views are to be heard,

The opportunity I got to write this column for four and a half years changed my thinking, and my style of writing. I learnt to take care of language, content, and length dimensions. I would also do a good deal of reading, and this helped me widen my knowledge base.  My columns were liked by readers because I would take a stand on an issue that was otherwise considered controversial. I received a few phone calls warning me that I may not get higher positions in any university as the stand I took in some of my columns had embarrassed political decision makers. But this did not deter me as I had learnt from my teacher Professor Parvathamma that the path of conflict, however uncomfortable should be chosen and not the path of compromise. I also believe that it is the duty of sociologists to be courageous and take a stand on an issue. I am now writing my third column in Mysuru Mitra, a Kannada daily and have titled it Samaajamukhi (socially oriented). When I recently received the Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Mooknayak Award given in recognition of my columns specially focusing on those in society's margins, I was humbled. I must say that this has put a great deal  of responsibility on me and motivated me to keep on writing in my mother tongue. It is my belief that sociology has the power to touch hearts and my columns gave me this opportunity to do so.

**SG:** Gender seems to run as an undercurrent in most of your work during the last three decades. How did your interest grow in this area? Tell us about your engagement with gender and how you have been able to achieve this balance between academics and activism.

**RI:** As a student of sociology, the subject that bothered me most was inequality.  Many of our classroom discussions centred on the different forms of inequality.  I realised very early in my life that gender is one of the most visible forms of stratification that cuts across the barriers of caste, religion, class, location, and race.  Whenever I got wind of gender bias, I would record my protest, but nothing had emerged concretely either in my thoughts or in action, because there was no clear sense of direction in which to proceed if gender inequality had to be questioned. Around mid 1980s, when I came to the campus one morning, I saw members of Samata, the city's progressive women's forum assembled in large numbers in front of our campus canteen. A few of them were my friends, and after talking to them I came to know that they had gathered to protest against a very senior professor in our university whose son had married a young woman from another caste and from a different class background and when he took her home, she was outrightly rejected and thrown away. Her husband made no attempt to challenge his parents and asked his wife to leave. Shocked by the turn of events, she went to the Brindavan Gardens in Mysuru to commit suicide and just as she was about to jump into the waters somebody saw her at the nick of time, saved her and brought her to Samata, which by then was gaining visibility as a forum for questioning and countering gender inequality. That was the first ever time in my life when I saw a women's group protesting against a person or a family that had insulted a woman's right. I felt that I had found an answer to my search for situating questions of gender inequality and decided to become part of this organisation.

In 1985 the Conference organised in Nairobi to mark the end of the International Women's Decade had given a call demanding wages for housework. There was a lot of hue and cry as it had shaken patriarchal values and practices which saw domestic work as a woman's domain. Feminist groups were targeted for attacks and blamed for instigating women to demand wages for housework. Across the world, there were a number of debates and discussions being organised around this topic of wages for housework and my friends in Samata asked me if I could take up a study on this issue and present

the findings in a seminar which the forum was planning to organise in our city. This seminar generated a lot of interest and was well attended. Samata used to have its weekly meeting on wednesday in a friend's home, and women affected by violence either in their family or workplace would visit us and discuss the future course of action. Samata would organise gender sensitisation programmes in collaboration with Police Department, Department of Women and Child Development and other civil society forums. I took an active part in all its activities. This was the kind of initiation I got into gender activism. The bond established with Samata continues even today, well into the fourth decade.

This was also around the time that the University Grants Commission had started establishing women's studies centres in universities. The University of Mysore was one of the first in the country to come forward to establish a centre under the leadership of Professor Rameswari Verma. I got involved with the Centre's activities right from the time it started functioning. I participated in seminars and other activities that the Centre was organizing. I also tought a course on women and society to students of the postgraduate diploma course that the Centre had started offering. This marked my entry into the academic world of gender studies. Recognising my involvement in the Centre's activities the University of Mysore appointed me as the Honorary Director of the Centre for Women's Studies in the year 1997.

When I became the Director of the Centre for Women's Studies, or for that matter ever since women studies centers started functioning in India in the 1980s, there was a close connect between academia and activism. In fact, many of the invited faculty were from the movement. It is an established fact that women's studies cannot do justice to gender questions without involving partners from the movement. Women's studies was actually an offshoot of the women's movement. It was only because the women's movement saw the need to examine knowledge from the gender perspective that women's studies entered the academia. When I became the Centre's Director, I did two things- first, involve all departments in the campus with the Centre's activities,

because I was very keen that the Centre should not remain cloistered. I tried my best to identify different themes in consultation with departments, especially in the social science faculty and launched a lecture series.  Second, the Centre organised gender sensitization programmes involving women's groups, representatives of PRIs, school and college students, debate competitions, poster exhibitions, and plays- all with a focus on gender. This helped us network with both academic institutions and civil society.

Unfortunately, today there is a growing divide between academics and activism. In fact, I myself have been part of certain boards of appointments, in which the heads of universities said that they did not want to have activists whom they felt would create trouble. This is not the right approach to understanding gender at all. Activism does not have a negative connotation. A teacher of gender studies is expected to motivate the young to question gender-unjust practices but it looks as if this is not happening in many institutions.

By the time I completed my assignment as Director of the Centre for Women's Studies I was convinced that the study of gender cannot be limited only to women's studies centres but must be integrated into other disciplines as well. I was especially concerned about my own discipline sociology. Unless it is introduced as a compulsory course students will not get an idea of the gender dimensions of several issues that they study in sociology classes. I am happy to share with you that the Department of Sociology in the University of Mysore was one of the first to introduce a course on Sociology of Gender both at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Many other universities followed suit. This was definitely a step in the right direction, but I am still concerned about the situation in many departments, where the teaching of gender is limited only to the classroom and the multi-disciplinary perspective and field exposure are virtually missing.

**SG:** In continuation of this, I want to ask if it was this interest in sociology of gender which was your inspiration for framing your research questions in many of the projects you have undertaken? I would especially like you to

throw light on your research work with forest dependent communities in the Joida region of Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka.

**RI:** As days progressed, my involvement and interest in gender became so strong that whenever an opportunity came up for undertaking research projects, gender became the main focus of my study. This was especially true of the evaluative studies or situation analysis projects for which I either applied or was invited to take up. I could see that many development policies and academic studies had ignored the presence of women and their contribution to creation of sustainable societies. Let me talk to you briefly about my work with forest dependent communities in Joida, located in the rain forests of Western Ghats. My association with the region began in 1997 when I was invited to participate in a gender sensitisation programme for representatives of the Karnataka Forest Department who were chosen to operationalise the Joint Forest Planning and Management Programme (JFPM)an initiative in participatory forestry. My interest in examining the role of women in JFPM started growing day-by-day and when the Shastri Indo Canadian Institute invited proposals for bi-national projects, I submitted my application proposing a study of the role of women in forestry development projects. My research partner in this project was Prof. Karim-Aly S. Kassam from the University of Calgary in Canada. Our proposal was among the eleven out of two hundred and twenty five that were finally selected for the award of the grant. The opportunity to work with Prof. Karim was a great learning experience for me and it is from him that I learnt the nuances of participatory methodology. After overcoming initial hostility from male leaders of some habitats, we were able to establish a rapport with local communities and take our work forward. Our team was awarded two more projects by the Shastri Indo Canadian Institute to work in the area and by organising interactive meets, stakeholder consultations, door-to door campaigns to mobilise women's involvement in the region's development initiatives, mapping infrastructure in the region with the participation of local communities, setting up a federation of women's Self-Help Groups and encouraging the formation of theatre groups, we were able to bring women

into the public space, a first-time experience for them.  Our Projects initiated many reforms in the Joida region and the satisfaction for me is that the leadership of this movement is taken up by Jayanand Derekar, who did his masters and Ph. D in Sociology under my guidance and has been an inspiration to many youth. Special mention needs to be made of girls in the community who are now dreaming of change and pursuing their dreams through the medium of education. In a recent visit to the village of Deria, from where our first project unfolded, I saw girl children in every home making their way to school, a sight in sharp contrast to the situation twenty five years ago when the village leader had pushed all the women and girls into the community hall and ordered them not to speak to me as he was upset with me for talking about gender.

Both sociology and gender studies have taught me to envision a gender inclusive world, and since I look at research as an agency that bestows power to the people, I have tried to bring a gender perspective into not only my studies, but also encouraged my students to interrogate social life from a gender framework.

**SG:** Twenty seven students have worked under your guidance and received their doctoral degrees.  The research questions raised in the work of your students have emerged from what I would call your 'sociology lab.' Being your Ph. D student, I have had first-hand experience of the way you mentored your research students. You would give us the space to explore but constantly keep a vigil. I will never forget our bimonthly meets in which we shared our field experiences and also learnt to 'unlearn' many of our preconceived notions. I owe it to you for providing me the space and trust to explore the larger society and  also 'find myself.' I feel very privileged to have learnt sociology from you.

**RI:** Thank you, Shanthi, for your nice feelings. I have always believed that it is very important for a teacher to mentor and train the next generation of students. I have been trying to do this to the best of my ability during the last three decades. While it is essential for teachers to enhance their academic

competencies it is equally crucial for them to build the capabilities of their students and institutions.

**SG:** You have served the Indian Sociological Society (ISS) as its President, Secretary and Member of the Managing Committee. You were conferred the Lifetime Achievement Award by ISS in 2022. Can you take us through your ISS journey?

**RI:** My association with Indian Sociological Society began in 1984 when I became a Life Member. I always cherish the sense of thrill it gave me though at that point of time I was not fully aware of the entire range of its activities. I attended my first ISS Conference in 1993 when it was held at St. Aloysius College, Mangalore, and since then I have been attending All India Sociological Conferences quite regularly. Participating in an ISS Conference not only gave me the opportunity to meet in-person senior sociologists whose works we were studying but also make new friendships. When I contested the election for membership of the Managing Committee of ISS and got elected for a period of 6 years in 2002, I got to understand the functioning of the system from a close quarters. But it was my term as Secretary during 2014-2015 which widened my understanding of the way an institution of the stature of ISS has to function, the multiple responsibilities a secretary has to shoulder and the need to record, maintain and safeguard crucial documents. I realised that even a small lapse could have serious repercussions as you are constantly under scrutiny. It was a great learning experience for me as it taught me many crucial lessons both in office and human management. My election as President of ISS for the period 2018-2019 was a momentous period in my life. I was overwhelmed by the trust, affection and support I received from all across the country, but also realised that I had to work very hard to honour the responsibility that was given to me by members. One of my first tasks was to try and take ISS out of the metro city image that was attached to it by many. Wherever possible I travelled to colleges in different parts of the country, kept regular contact with conveners of Research Committees, MC members and the ISS office and tried my best to make everybody feel included. I am also

happy that the academic writing workshops programme that we initiated took off well and what has touched me most is the participation of young researchers and students in our activities. I see ISS as the only channel for fostering an inter-generational connect and my satisfaction comes from the attempt I made to relate to the emerging generation in sociology. Receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award from ISS has been the most touching experience in my life, and I cannot ask for anything better than this. I decided that the best way to celebrate this recognition is to keep on working. I have been in the profession for half-a-century, but my guiding principle is that 'this is the beginning and not the end'. I remember with gratitude everybody who has supported me at different points of time in my ISS journey.

**SG:** It is ten years since you formally retired from university service. But I have seen that you have been so busy during this period, travelling widely, invited by many institutions to take on new responsibilities and continuously working in various capacities. How do you feel about this?

**RI:** For me age is just a number and retirement an inevitable stage in a person's professional life. It however does not mean that you have to stop doing what you like to do. We must continue to do our bit for the discipline and society. I must tell you that the past ten years have seen a lot of activity in my life. It is during this period that I became Secretary and President of ISS, was invited as Visiting Professor in Delhi, Johannesburg Bangalore Universities, and Visiting Professor of the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Chair at the University of Mysore. I am now with the M.S. Ramaiah University of Applied Sciences as Professor of Eminence. I have also been continuously writing and lecturing. The one question that I am often asked is 'how can you do all this, do not you feel tired? This is a typical stereotype which one associates with age, and honestly it irritates me.

It is a touching feeling that my work is being recognised and institutions believe that I can contribute to their development. As a teacher, I have grown up in the midst of students and I am happy that in most of the assignments that

have come my way, my teaching work continues. I believe that being in the midst of sociological thinking and action is what has kept me going.

**SG:** Before we sign off, I have one last question. What future do you visualise for sociology in India?

**RI:** I would like to look at this question from two dimensions. The first relates to the changes that must take place within our discipline. Given the transformation that is taking place in both the knowledge domain and the world-at-large and also the employability issue, it is important to establish a connection between the digital world and the human world. The changing aspirations of students and their families must be given due cognisance when re-visiting our course content. There is no doubt that certain areas in sociology must be compulsorily studied if the essence of the discipline has to be understood, but it is essential today to introduce students and teachers of sociology to both the basics and advancements taking place in the world of computer technology if we have to safeguard their future as well as that of our discipline. It is in this background that the School of Social Sciences in the M.S. Ramaiah University of Applied Sciences with which I am currently associated is introducing a bachelor's programme in Computational Social Sciences which bridges social sciences with data science. In today's world sociology must adopt the multi-disciplinary perspective if its applicability has to be enhanced.

There is a second dimension to my response to your question. Sociology must now make inroads in a big way into other knowledge domains such as technology, biological and physical sciences, engineering, healthcare, environment, law, administration, and management, just to name a few. Not that it has not happened at all, but I am of the view that the movement for inclusion of sociology into other knowledge domains must gain a vigorous momentum. For doing this, our discipline must adopt new pedagogical practices and lay more stress on the 'applicability' aspect of knowledge generation and knowledge transmission. It is important for us as practioners of sociology to make students, faculty and educational administrators

understand that social diversity and lived-in-experiences of people are as important as gaining the expertise in their respective fields.

*R Indira* was formerly Professor and Chairperson, Department of Sociology, University of Mysore

*Email: ramaraoindira@gmail.com*

*Shanthi G,* Independent Social Science Researcher and Secretary, Samruddhi Foundation, Mysuru

*Email: shanthi.vg@gmail.com*

**Book Review: Gender Inclusion in India: Challenges and Strategies**

**Author(s): Krithika Narayanswamy Iyer**

**Book Review: Gender Inclusion in India: Challenges and Strategies. Ed. By Sabiha Hussain and Suraiya Tabassum. Routledge, 2023, pp. 284, £ 31.19 (eBook). ISBN: 9781003406235**

--Krithika Narayanswamy Iyer

The 'Global Gender Gap' report measures the status of women's economic empowerment, educational attainment, and political participation. In 2023, India ranked 127 amongst 143 countries in the world (Forum, 2023). Within the country, women are a heterogeneous group and those from Muslim, Dalit, and tribal communities face multiple marginalities owing to their location based on gender, class, religion, ethnicity, and caste identities. This edited book examines the intersectionality of structures and practices that embed the deprivation of minority women in India and provides policy suggestions to improve development outcomes. It contains fifteen essays written by professors, researchers, and Ph.D. scholars of sociology, labour history, gender studies, political science, and educational management.

The first chapter is a class-based analysis of the 'urban rape' phenomenon by Maya John. John makes a case for sexual violence as a product of gender inequality. According to the author, rape is a consequence of an exploitative capitalistic system prevalent in urban areas that dehumanize poor migrant male workers. It involves a complex interplay of social values towards gender norms, cultural differences between rural and urban attitudes, and situated vulnerability stemming from political, economic, and social dynamics between men, women, and children. The author talks about the role of class in the culpability of migrant working-class men, and the desirability and inaccessibility of 'hyper-feminine' upper-class women that create circumstances of sexual exploitation and rape of vulnerable women and children (p. 33). The allusion that working-class men 'steal sex' (p.28) from women and children from the same class without substantiating it with any (reliable) source of data segregating aggressors and victims from across gender, age, and class may be treacherous speculation.

Meher Fatima Hussain writes about the gendered experiences of The Partition violence. Anchored in history, gender studies, and minority studies, she draws on archival sources of non-fiction and fiction written by women and men on their perspectives of embodied gendered vulnerabilities caught at the crossroads of nation, family, class, and religion. This chapter impresses upon the reader the eminent importance of literary records in capturing the lost voices of women at a crucial point in the history of the Indian subcontinent.

The third chapter written by Suraiya Tabassum elaborates on Muslim women's location within the political and economic discourse of India's growth stories, the causes and consequences of their marginality, and strategies to improve their development status. She draws on data from the Census and reports by government and non-governmental agencies. The chapter studies the interplay between religious, social, and political institutions, locating Muslim women's intersectional identity to the complex outcome of Colonial and post-independence historical context. The author concludes with policy recommendations to enable gender equality.

Samam Eram M Ahmed provides an important perception into the status of health of informal home-based women embroidery workers in Aligarh. The approach to women's health is reduced to their reproductive role rather than a wholesome life-cycle. The tedious and underpaid work of embroidery done within the domestic sphere along with other household responsibilities add to the burden of labour on women, while simultaneously ignoring their well-being because of their gender and precarious employment status. The author scrutinizes various factors affecting the health status of women based on primary field survey data.

Niveditha Giri's 'Dalit women's emancipation: Struggle for change' talks about the impact of socialisation of caste on livelihood, public discourse of social movements, the role of civil society, and the state on Dalit women's lived experiences. It provides anecdotal evidence from different parts of the country shedding light on the heterogeneity of Dalit identity itself. Seema Mathur in the following chapter 'Dalit women in India: Patterns and Forms of

atrocities' describes the processes of domination and subjugation through social norms and economic practices along with overt and covert forms of violence that suppress Dalit women. Dalit women who are victims of violence face backlash not just from the aggressors of the dominant social setting but also from within their community, which deters them from reporting acts of harassment.

The two chapters on the status of Tribal women discuss health, livelihood, habitat, dispossession, and discourse of development. Salma Khatoon's interdisciplinary study of tribal women in Bankura in West Bengal examines the relevance of tribal cultural practices and social attitudes toward health and medicine. The author places the status of tribal women's health within the larger geo-political, social and economic factors of accessibility, affordability, and availability of health services. She bases her analysis on the data from reports of international agencies, the National Family Health Survey, and the Census data while critically addressing the limitations of available data formats. Amit Kumar Venkateshwar's research on the impact of the dispossession of tribal women from Jharkhand problematizes the notion of development and industrialization through the oppression of the state machinery in the name of progress and its detrimental effects on the development status of the historically marginalized tribal group in the region. The process of dispossession denies the indigenous communities access to natural resources that serve as reliable sources of nutrition as well as raw materials for livelihood. Tribal Women in new settlements suffer loss of status due to patriarchal practices finding their way as a result of social intermingling.

The three essays on lives of Kashmiri women discuss the interplay of religion, gender, class and state on women's development outcomes. Aneesa Shafi and Mohmad Saleem Jahangir's essay on the socio-political phenomenon of Kashmiri 'half-widows' and their precarious existence due to violence in the region, stigma of widowhood, absence of skill-based training owing to traditional gender roles, lack of legal recognition as head of the household, etc.

exacerbates their deprivation. The authors rely on direct observation, in-depth and informal interviews, and secondary sources such as gazetteers, books, and archival materials to provide a multi-layered overview of the lives of Kashmiri half-widows. The two essays by Shaikh Shamshul Arfin and Shazia Malik elaborate on the historical context of the development of education in Kashmir, the role of the princely state ruler and the colonial government in promoting certain kinds of education, and location whether rural or urban, and religion in determining girls' access to education. The author provides an elaborate quantitative overview of the status of education through the government district-level data. Shazia Malik's chapter focuses on the status of women in higher education in the same state.

'Reflections on Islamic Feminist Methodology and Gender Equality' by Sabiha Hussain extensively deals with the questions of methodology and the role of interpretation of religious laws gender justice and equality. In Islamic Feminism, the ontological positions as either the sacred unchanging or profane interpretive understanding of religious laws determine the potential for women's rights and empowerment within the ambit of religion.

Monica Khemani has written about the 'glass ceiling' for women workers against the backdrop of liberalization and the global movement of labour. The author has evaluated various structural and institutional hurdles women employees face such as gender roles and expectations, employers' safety concerns for women overseas travellers, absence of mentoring and networking opportunities, etc. for women accessing opportunities. 'Gender Inclusion and Higher Education Institutes in Delhi' written by Shafia Jalal examines the role of UGC's Internal Complaints Committee in enabling institutionalization and practices of gender inclusivity in higher education through case studies of two universities, namely Jamia Milia Islamia and Delhi University. Shah Alam has written on the importance of mainstream and alternative media as an active partner in women's empowerment and nation-building process by promoting progressive values in public discourse.

Each chapter elucidates the multi-dimensional and intersectional variables abetting minority women's exclusion. The authors examine key relations between individuals, groups, and social structures that produce women's gendered experiences. The language and prose of the book are accessible. Despite citation errors and inconsistencies, the book provides valuable empirical, theoretical, and methodological insights. It will be of interest to researchers and students of social sciences such as sociology, gender studies, minority studies, and development studies.

**References**

Forum, W. E. (2023). *Global Gender Gap Report 2023.* Geneva: World Economic Forum

***Krithika Narayanswamy Iyer*** is a PhD Research Scholar in the Department of Sociology at the University of Hyderabad. You can write to her at krithika.n.iyer@gmail.com

**Ashok Kumar Mocherla,** *Dalit Christians in South India*: *Caste, Ideology and Lived Religion*, **Routledge (Taylor and Francis), 2021.**

**--Abhijit Dasgupta**

I find Ashok Kumar Mocherla's book a fascinating read as it weaves together critical concepts of caste, religion, politics, community, and mass conversion into one thread to explore the lived experiences of the Mala Lutheran Christians of Dravidapuram, Andhra Pradesh. It is also a welcoming addition to the scholarship on village studies, which have long dominated Indian sociological and anthropological literature. In this case, it is a Dalit Christian village with a Dalit Lutheran population at the center of the village's everyday life that is the subject of study. Christianity, as one of the sociological topics of inquiry, was once an obscure topic of scholarship. However, in the last decade, many sophisticated ethnographies on Indian Christianity have introduced several facets of everyday Christianity in India. Ashok Kumar's work can be considered one of the latest additions of the scholarship. Rowena Robinson's foreword to the book provides us with a clear overview of the Dalit Mala Christians' active modes of conversion to Lutheranism, which brought a change in the social and religious worlds where Dalit identity and Christian identity were seen as compatible with each other. Robinson notes: "Ambedkar becomes a part of particular church celebrations centred around the birth of Jesus Christ" (ix). I agree with Robinson's indication that from a methodological standpoint, this book is also crucial for paying attention to the whole question of *native anthropology*. It discusses the challenges, dilemmas, and also offers sensitivity that is required to study one's community, which is often not an easy task.

As a Telugu Mala Lutheran Christian himself, Kumar sincerely attempts to keep aside his "insider" status to interrogate and question various everyday aspects of the Mala Lutheran Christians. Although caste was used as one of the first lenses to study Indian Christians, Kumar's ethnographic exploration of caste and Christianity is not to be understood as a residual product of the conversion from Hinduism. In fact, Kumar is right to point out the question of

"Dalit agency", which delineates caste and its place in Protestant Christianity as an important framework in negotiating the lived experiences of the Dalit Lutheran Malas. The book is divided into five chapters, an introduction and a conclusion, which interconnects the central theme of the book very well: what it means to be a Dalit Christian, and in what ways their lived experiences challenge many traditional practices of caste and local community politics.

Kumar tries to explicate the question of mass conversion to Christianity, circa 1840 to 1920, as a form of social protest. Conversion was taken up by Dalits not merely as per the interest of the colonial rulers but more so by the community elders as a form of political protest against the oppressive forms of the Hindu caste system. Kumar skillfully brings together different sociological and anthropological literature on conversion, revealing the Protestants' and Catholics' different stances of dealing with the caste questions. While Catholicism accepted the presence of caste-based ranking in Christianity and did very little to get away with it, Protestant missionaries, on the other hand, tried to liberate the Christians from the rigid hierarchy of the caste system. This perhaps drew many Dalits from Dravidapuram to accept Protestant Christianity. Kumar's mention of the specific breast cloth case in the context of the Shanars of Tamil Nadu establishes the fact that conversion to Christianity allowed the Christians to be a part of greater social and political change, which liberated many Dalits from the traditional hierarchy and practices. Perhaps, Kumar is right to say that mass conversion was the first ever organized social protest to counter the traditional Hindu caste system.

By using specific qualitative research methods such as oral history, participant observation and in-depth interviews, Kumar tries to probe the various critical events that shaped the subjectivity of the Dalit Lutheran Christians and their experiences of *being neglected* to the experiences of *being empowered*. Particularly by using the oral history method, the author traces the social history of the village that was dominated by upper castes such as *Kamma* and Brahmin castes who restricted the entry of Dalits to the many public spaces, such as schools, roads, lands, wells, and so on. The Advent of Lutheran

missionaries and subsequent conversion not only eased some of these restrictions but also gave the Dalit community agency. Agency validated by the church and the additional support from this facilitated a change in the worldviews of the village.

Like any other classical village studies, Kumar's ethnographic study of Dravidapuram also reveals that the conversion to Christianity brought changes in the village calendar, which was incorporated by church initiated programs such as Sunday services, Sunday schools, and *sthreela samajam* (women's union or community). Before the coming of the Protestant missionaries and mass conversion, the Malas were mere 'bystanders' or onlookers at upper-caste Hindu festivals, but this is no longer the case now. The various Christian festivals, church programs, and gatherings provide the Christians with new meanings to their calendars that put them in the spotlight and give them social and cultural capital to organize their own celebrations. While services and schools teach the young Christians the ideal and inspiring Christian values and virtues, sthreela samajam provides the women a platform to voice their choices and come together to share the experiences of being Dalit Christian women. It may look like Christianity allows the women to constitute an important part of everyday church life, but it is also true that the pastor's wife has the authority to steer the working of the women into the directions that she deems fit. This perhaps helps us to think about the agency of the Dalit women laity in the church. Kumar rightfully argues that one cannot understand the Mala dominated Lutheran church as an idyll, rather inter-community politics mediated by kinship hostilities and competition becomes visible, as the church continues to be the seat of power for the Christian community. The local community politics and the religious celebrations in Dravidapuram go hand in hand. This is best illustrated in chapter three where Kumar mentions the Easter celebrations. It is interesting to note that Christians early in the morning on Easter venerate their communist ancestors not only with the symbols of the cross, the Bible, and flowers but also with the powerful red symbol of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). This is drawn on the gravestones, close to the image of Jesus Christ. This is done to acknowledge the hard work of the

communist leaders in fighting against caste oppression and hierarchy in the 1960s and 1970s. This vignette from the field best captures the duality and parallel coexistence of political and religious symbolism for the Mala Lutherans.

One of the central contributions of Kumar's book lies in explaining the practices of "dual religious identity" that the Christians experience as Christians in their social and personal life and as Hindus in official records. The Hindu name in the official records, particularly during school admissions, allow them take the affirmative reservation benefits associated with the Scheduled Caste status. This duality is not maintained out of choice. Rather it is a compulsion which they engage in due to their poor economic background, which leaves them with no other option but to access the state sponsored benefits to the Scheduled Caste Hindus. As Kumar writes in his conclusion, "such duality is an outcome of structurally imposed marginality and also a symbol of marginality itself" (123). This is a grim reality for the Dalit Christians as they are not considered Christian enough by the Indian Christian institutions, thereby neglecting their admission to Christian schools, colleges, hospitals, and other institutions.

Situating his work in the context of the broader political and religious changes in Andhra Pradesh, another area where the book does an impressive task is in critically analysing the close nexus between caste and the congregation through the institution of *sangham*. Sangham refers to the hierarchical body of male people collectively organized to command and control community's socio-religious activities."Sangham" becomes the first place to address the grievances and hostilities between kinship and members of the church, as it offers free and fair judgments regarding various caste-and church-based problems, for example, the case of the excommunication of three catholic families due to disobedience of sangham rules. Kumar's ethnographic work brings forward the centrality of the Lutheran church as a guardian, protector, and custodian of the Mala community from the Hindu caste system by

invoking a sense of unity, solidarity, and caste consciousness among the Malas.

Although I enjoyed reading the interconnected themes and concerns of the various chapters of the book revolving around the question of Dalit agency, what I found missing is the dialogue with the new anthropology of Christianity, as popularized by Joel Robbins and Fenella Cannell. I was also interested to know more about the themes and concerns of Dalit sermons along with the centrality of prayers in their Dalit Christian identities.

***Abhijit Dasgupta*** is Assistant Professor of Sociology, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, Tamil Nadu.

*Email id: abhijitdasgupta@vit.ac.in*

**Book Review: Science and religion in India: Beyond disenchantment**

**Author(s): Suraj Kumar Tanty**

**Thomas, R. (2021).** *Science and religion in India: Beyond disenchantment* **(1st ed.). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.**

**--Suraj Kumar Tanty**

This publication *"Science and Religion in India: Beyond disenchantment"* employs the methodology of "laboratory ethnography" to investigate the mundane religious customs practiced within scientific establishments. In which author Renny Thomas maintains a contrasting view to Max Weber's disenchantment thesis, which posits that scientific rationality would supplant religious beliefs. He argues that the notion of disenchantment lacks a foundation in ethnographic data, and directly refutes the claim that an increase in scientific inquiry necessarily leads to a decrease in religious faith. Moreover, the book contests the explanatory power of conflict and complementarity models in deciphering the intricate interplay between scientific and religious concepts. Thomas contends that such binary frameworks fail to capture the nuanced arrangements of science and religion in India. The work of Thomas offers an elaborated description about India's cutting-edge scientific research which is intertwined with a normative system that is influenced by Hinduism and a system of social stratification based on caste. The laboratory, and the practices it encompasses, serve as both a subject of investigation and a site for the generation of knowledge. The text comprises five chapters that commence with Jawaharlal Nehru's conception of postcolonial India and culminate in a discourse on the role of caste within laboratory settings.

Introduction starts with the discussion about the issue of methodological analysis by social scientists inside the laboratories for ethnographic understanding with a scientific approach. Which shows the similarity with the things mentioned by Bruno Latour. Thomas mentions about how he conducted the research work, which includes the interplay of Archival research and ethnography. He offers interesting observations into the inner workings of Indian laboratories, where manifestations of numerous gods and goddesses' dwell alongside scientific endeavours, using an emic perspective. Critically

analysing the interaction between religious connections and the caste system behind the walls of scientific laboratories, this investigation dives into the lives of both religious and agnostic scientists. The book, which has 214 pages overall, provides a thorough examination of these subjects and is based on a painstaking study that was done over an eleven-month period at an institute in India's renowned Silicon Valley.

As the name itself suggests the author devotes the 1st chapter to describe about the saga of the scientific temper in post- colonial India. It gives a holistic picture of the Nehruvian model of development, in which Scientific temperament was the epicentre of development. In this chapter, Nehru's emphasis on science as the gateway to modernity and rationality is highlighted. Even he includes a picture in the beginning of the chapter which shows a Marble stone engraved with a statement *"too have worshipped at the shrine of Science"* by Nehru at the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for advanced scientific Research. It tries to analyse the portray of modernity by Nehru about India and how various groups responded to it. Science has this ability to be a vice grip to liberate someone from the clutches of primitiveness. Nehru admired the idea of scientific temper from famous personalities e.g. Bertrand Russell, J.D. Bernal, P.M.S. Blackett and Laurence Hogben. The dichotomy of Tradition and modernity in terms of development of Scientific vigour was also sketched through the perplexity about Indian system of medicine and Western scientific method (pg. 21). For him scientism was the key to achieve a secular India, which can result into inclusivity by elimination of superstition and discrimination (pg. 24).

The second chapter of the book examines how Indian scientists balance their life between religion and science and analyses the idea of disenchantment. The chapter painstakingly compiles a wide range of evidence to support the premise that both science and religion maintain major value for a particular group of scientists by drawing on biographical information and interviews with scientists. The chapter's thorough examination of the acknowledgements

section found in PhD theses, which exposes the inclusion of deities, is a distinctive and remarkable feature.

As a logical continuation of the chapter before it, chapter three offers a critical analysis of the idea of "scientist-believers." According to the author, scientists use a paradigm that distinguishes between "religious" and "cultural," classifying some Hindu holidays as being related to cultural practices and others as being religious in origin. Because of this categorical division, scientific believers see themselves as different from non-scientific believers by labelling the latter as having a propensity for superstitions and rituals. The goal of this study is to examine the ways in which some atheist or non-religious Indian scientists incorporate religious ideas into their work without taking a purely ritualistic or pious approach. The author asserts that Eurocentric viewpoints concerning the interplay between science and religion lack applicability in non-Western settings, rendering the imposition of the Western paradigm onto non-Western societies futile (pg. 104). To substantiate this claim, the author presents the case of Geetha Argade, a particle scientist who actively engages in religious practices while simultaneously eschewing belief in its ceremonial dimensions (pg. 86).

This chapter delves into the repercussions stemming from Eurocentric ideologies, which played a pivotal role in shaping the archetype of the "ideal scientist" who disavows belief in a higher power or displays any religious proclivities. However, a noteworthy observation arises from the study of scientists who identify as atheists, as they persist in conducting scientific endeavours while concurrently adhering to customary ways of life. Their adherence to cultural norms and compliance with religious practices emerges from a profound sentimentality and deep-rooted affection for cultural heritage. Consequently, their participation in religious ceremonies and observance of religious laws serve as expressive manifestations of this attachment.

The final chapter explores the complex issue of caste within the context of Indian science. It does so by illuminating the subtle interaction between so-called "cultural practices" that are supposedly accepted within scientific

institutions, such as vegetarianism and a preference for classical music, and their underlying ties to caste divisions. Thomas asserts unequivocally that Brahmin culture and the dominant scientific culture in India are closely related (pg.140). The overrepresentation of Brahmins and Hindus in Indian scientific fields is critically examined in this chapter, which also offers a forum for scientists from underrepresented castes and religions to voice their experiences and viewpoints. By highlighting these perspectives, the author shows how these scientists see the distinction between "culture" and "religion" as being intrinsically exclusive, weakening their feeling of identity and belonging in scientific contexts. Thomas contends that the idea of disenchantment conceals and is challenged by the pervasiveness of caste-based differentiations within scientific venues.

Overall, this is a fascinating book which presents a wealth of anthropological insights about the interplay of science and religion in the Indian context through laboratory ethnography, which makes it more interesting to read about all those intrinsic experiences and memoirs given by those scientists working in the lab. The affinity between spiritual and material culture inside the pedestal of scientific knowledge by emic perspective gives a very crisp taste to move further to understand the intersection between science and Religion. However, it also makes some populist remarks about the pattern of Science in India being moulded by religion but this pattern is also same in other countries like USA and EU, in which their research organizations also follow the same patterns where religion predominates as a major factor to shape the direction of Science and technology. In his historiography Thomas also misses out some of the major scientific movements happened in India through the major efforts of various state led organizations e.g., Marathi Vigyan parishad the Banga Vigyan Parishad, Tamilnadu Science Forum, the Kerala shastra sahitya parishad, the assam science society etc., which tried to make science and technology more impartial and unprejudiced through inculcating a critical approach to science and technology.

This book will be of great interest to anthropologists to understand more nuances of laboratory ethnography which is emerging as a new methodological tool to explore scientific institutional structures. Scholars of Indian history, Science and culture, Sociology of Religion and anyone interested in the intersection of science, religion and spirituality must also read this book for important insights.

*Suraj Kumar Tanty* is a PhD Research Scholar in the Department of Sociology at the University of Hyderabad

*Email: kumar021suraj@gmail.com*