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# The Editor's report

## August 2024

It is my pleasure to present the 17th issue of Explorations. The present issue presents eight papers published under the 'Articles' category, one conversation, and four book reviews.

This issue of the journal starts with a conversation with Professor Chandrashekar Bhat, a noted Indian sociologist, who shared his life academic experiences with teaching and research, which is a great learning experience for the young generation of sociologists in India.

The first article, titled ***Matchmaking in Digital Spaces: A Study of Matrimonial Websites and Dating Apps in India*** by Leena Pujari & Sucharita Pujari, attempted to understand and engage with the complexities and nuances of matchmaking in the digital space in India. Based on the content analysis of more than 250 user profiles drawn from three popular and national matrimonial websites with a pan India user profile, the authors problemitises matchmaking in the digital space. The paper argues that the digitial spaces has transgressed the rigidities of ascriptive identities, subverted patriarchal norms and enabled a re-imagination of marriage and families or fostered networks of solidarity and affection outside of institutional structures. The author's argues that despite a significant increase in choices and a senses of autonomy in partner selection, the unequal and gendered power dynamics that continues to shape marriage as an institution.

The second article, titled ***Queer and Citizenship: A Critical Analysis of Civil and Economic Rights of hijras in Bihar*** *by Shiroma Priyadarshini and Asima Jena* highlights the politics of sexual minorities. The paper demonstrates the contested indentities of Hijras. Though the judicial interventions which celebrate the basic rights of sexual minorities in India, but their righgts are either nullified or neutralised by the four kinds of counter-movements – aggressive nationalism, the exponential rise of neoliberalism, witch-hunting of political prisoners and COVID-19. The paper argues that the state-sanctioned transphobia, tends to accelerate violence against the trans community and institutionalises the criminalisation sexual eguality judgment.

The third article, titled ***Special School Setting as a Learning Environment: The Context of Uniparental (Mothers) Group in Telangana State*** by A. Mahalakshmi, presents the nature of

the interface between parents (mothers) and special schools in building the network among mothers of children with sensory impairment and the importance of such an interface in the formation of mutual support groups. The author argues that the special schools serve as a "socio-familial space" for the mothers of visually impaired children, who play a crucial role in the education of these children.

The fourth article, titled ***Schooling the Urban Margins: Studying a Lower-Class Settlement in South Delhi*** by Ruchira Das examines the relationship that children at the margins and their multiple lifeworld, rooted in their community practices share with urban, modern schooling. Based on the lived realities of a lower class settlement in south Delhi, Kusumpur Pahari. the study captures the schooling processes and practices of the children who belong to this fringe settlement.

The fifth article, titled ***Negotiating with Gatekeepers: An Experiential Account of Gaining Access for Fieldwork at an Elite Private School in Delhi*** by Sharmila Rathee highlights the issues and challenges encountered by the researchers. Author reflects on her journey as a researchers. She argues that writing practices are characterised by eschewed subjective accounts of researchers. The present paper presents an experiential account of gaining access to an elite private school in Delhi,. It describes the course followed and the challenges faced by the researcher in gaining access to elite school.

The sixth article titled ***Women in Corporate Leadership Positions in Indian IT Industry: A Study of Women's Experiences in Hyderabad*** by Ojaswi Bartika Mishra & Naga Lakshmi Chelluri article is highlights sthe 'glass ceiling', and 'glass cliff', faced by the women in the software industry. The paper argues that despite of academic qualifications and industry experiances, the the IT industry fails to prommote the women in leadership at higher positions.

The seventh article, titled ***Negotiating the blurred Boundaries of Sacred and Profane: A Sociological Analysis of Tibetan Buddhist Monastic Education*** by Sahana Sen analyses the the significance of religious symbols that are central to the culture of the Tibetans. Following This paper deals with the application of the dynamics of sacred and profane in the context of the potential reform efforts within the Tibetan Buddhist curriculum. The juxta- positioning of the pursuit of the Tibetan Buddhist cultural learning in the monasteries and the challenges posed by the need for Science education among the younger monastics pushed by the neo-liberal mainstream education system remain the main focus of the paper.

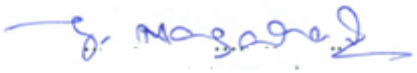
The eighth article, titled ***Transnational Subalternity: A Sub Theory within Subaltern Studies and the Post Migration Experience*** by Sajaudeen Chapparban is based on secondary sources, this paper examines persistent inequalities, hierarchies, and prevailing hegemonies within transnational migrant communities, applying Gramscian subalternity to conceptualize emerging forms of marginalization against and among various vulnerable communities such as laborers, refugees, students, LGBTQ individuals, and contextualize this study to marginalized communities among Indian Diaspora such as Dalit and Muslim minorities. It explores how migration reshapes social structures and identities, particularly in interactions between migrants and host societies and within migrant and diasporic communities with differing identities.

Referencing anti-immigrant rhetoric, cultural complexities, and caste dynamics, within transnational diasporic spaces, the study highlights intersections of culture, race, gender, age, and religion in shaping migrant experiences and new forms of marginalization.

The issue consists of four book reviews by, Manisha Manjari Jena, Triveni Pagilla, Shahla Palat, and Chetan.

Explorations invite your contributions to future issues of the journal. We would appreciate your feedback or suggestions on the journal. All the articles reflect diverse sociological interpretations of social facts across the states in India. I sincerely thank all the authors for choosing the explorations for publishing their articles. I am sure that the explorations enrich scholars' sociological imaginations across India's states.

Thanks & Best Wishes



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**Conversation: C.S.Bhat in conversation with Ajaya Sahoo**

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# Chandrashekhar Bhat in conversation with Ajaya Sahoo

[Transcript of the interview held on August 30, 2024]

## Introduction about Professor Chandrashekhar Bhat

Born on 23rd November 1944 in a remote village of Kasaragod district, erstwhile Madras Presidency and currently of Kerala State, Professor Chandrashekhar Bhat had his education in premier universities like Karnataka University (Dharwad), Delhi University and London University. After his doctoral studies at the Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, Delhi University, he began his teaching career at the University of Mysore in 1973 and moved to the newly established Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the Central University of Hyderabad in 1979 as one of the founding members of the Department and continued till his superannuation on 30 November 2006. Professor Bhat was invited as Professor of Eminence by Tezpur University in January 2010 where he served till June 2013.

During his five decades of academic service Professor Bhat, besides building one of the well-recognized and leading departments of sociology at the University of Hyderabad, provided leadership as the Head (3 terms of 3 years each), UGC-SAP Coordinator (1995-2006) and promoted the interest of the discipline as an expert member of UGC Subject Panel on Sociology(1996-98). As a Member of the Managing Committee (1992-98), Indian Sociological Society, Prof. C.S. Bhat has been instrumental in initiating the RC-04 on Migration and Diaspora Studies to include the newly emerging domain of research and teaching in India.

Prof. Bhat's pioneering research and expertise in the sociology of migration and diaspora studies were mentored particularly by Professor M.S.A. Rao at the Department of Sociology, Delhi University and Prof. Adrian C. Mayer under a Post-Doctoral program at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, U.K. He has the distinction of establishing India's first interdisciplinary *Centre for the Study of Indian Diaspora* in1996 at the University of Hyderabad, under the UGC Area Studies Program, and also the privilege to introduce study and research in diaspora studies when the very term and concept of 'diaspora' itself was less known in academics circles. This domain of research was further popularized with the organization of nearly ten national and international conferences and workshops. He facilitated the *High-Level Committee on Indian Diaspora*, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), to finalize its Report by organizing a workshop for recommending new policies to officially bridge India and Indian Diaspora.

The High-Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora has put on record their high appreciation Prof. Bhat's contribution to their endeavor.

Besides a number of articles in international and national journals, and book chapters, Prof. Bhat's publications include *Sociology of Development and Change* (Orient Longman, 1992), *A Reader in Urban Sociology* (Orient Longman, 1991), and *Ethnicity and Mobility* (Concept Publications, 1984).

Professor Chandrashekhar Bhat is the recipient of the coveted Commonwealth Academic Staff Fellowship (1983-84) and the prestigious position of 'Invited Professor' by the University of Rouen, France (2005). He was felicitated with appreciation by The Indian Diaspora International Center (New York) and Deo Gosine Foundation (Trinidad) at their conference at Benares Hindu University, in 2019. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations, Ministry of External Affairs, sponsored Prof. Bhat's visit as a cultural ambassador to People of Indian Origin Diaspora countries - Guyana and Trinidad - on the occasion of the *Commemoration of 100th Anniversary of Legislation to End the Indian Indentureship* in March 2017.

**Ajaya Sahoo (AS)**:

On behalf of the Editor of E-Exploration (ISS E-Journal), I sincerely thank you for agreeing to have this conversation. At the outset, I would like to congratulate you for receiving the Life Time Achievement Award of the Indian Sociological Society. For your information and the readers of the ISS E-Journal, we should keep this discussion only to academic contribution and institution building. Before proceeding with the themes, I would like you to share your experiences of what motivated you to carry out the Master in Social Anthropology and why you chose Karnataka University to pursue this and no other universities.

**CS Bhat (CSB)**:
Thank you very much, Professor Ajaya Sahoo, for reaching out on behalf of E-Explorations and its Editor Professor Nagaraju in particular. I consider it my privilege to share my academic and institutional experience through E-Explorations with the entire sociological fraternity. I also have the pleasure to thank you for greeting me on receiving the Life Time Achievement Award of the Indian Sociological Society last December 2023 at the 48th All India Sociological Conference held at Vellore Institute of Technology. I sincerely believe that the Award belongs to all those who inspired and shaped me in my sociological career and institution building – generations of students and colleagues from 1973 at the University of Mysore, from 1979 to 2006 at the University of Hyderabad and the Tezpur Central University as a Professor of Eminence in the Department of Sociology from 2010 to 2013. Above all, the credit goes to my teacher-mentors Professor M.S.A. Rao at the Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, Delhi University, who introduced me to the all-pervasive sociological domain of migration for doctoral studies, and

Professor Adrian C. Mayer of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London University, for introducing me to the ever-increasing incidence of international migration and the emerging field of Diaspora Studies under my post-doctoral studies.

The second part of your inquiry is on the motivation to join the post-graduate course in Social Anthropology at Karnataka University. During the 1960s, Karnataka University was one of the leading Universities with illustrious faculty drawn from the best of the academic Institutions in India and abroad. Several of my seniors in my university were studying in different departments who introduced and persuaded me to join the newly introduced subject of Social Anthropology by Prof K. Ishwaran, founder of the *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* (Brill Publishers), at Master's level with distinguished faculty such as Prof. T.N. Madan who was just back with a Ph.D. from Australian National University, Prof. M.C. Pradhan from the School of Oriental African Studies, London University and Prof. Gopala Sarana from Harvard University. On hindsight, I was really fortunate to have been introduced to this new discipline of study at the Master's degree level.

**2. AS:**
After you complete your Masters in Social Anthropology, you have received a research fellowship to carry out the doctoral studies at the Department of Sociology, University of Delhi. As we know the Delhi School of Economics was one of the top schools in India during those days, could you reflect on your personal experiences at the D-School, and your PhD research, supervisor, and influential faculty members of the department?

**CSB:**

My teachers at Karnataka University and Professor P.K. Misra, then the Director of the Southern Regional Office of the Anthropological Survey of India, suggested that the Delhi University Department of Sociology could be an important option to pursue higher studies if I am granted a scholarship. In response to my application for doctoral studies, I was called to appear before the admission committee under the Chairmanship of Professor M.N. Srinivas. The Department of Sociology informed me that I should meet Professor M.S.A. Rao that afternoon to know the outcome of the interview. Prof. Rao besides congratulating me on securing admission with a scholarship, arranged the logistics of my hostel stay with one of the research scholars of the Department until I secured my admission to one of the Delhi University hostels. I also learned that day that I was to pursue research initially for M.Litt. Degree and thereafter to register for Ph.D. in due course under the guidance of Prof. M.S.A. Rao. Yes, Delhi School was at its peak with distinguished sociology faculty such as Profs. M.N. Srinivas, M.S.A. Rao, A.M. Shah, Jeet Singh Oberoi, Andre Beteille, E.A. Ramaswamy, Ananda Chackravarthy, Baburao Baviskar, S.D. Badagayan, Anita Minocha, P.D. Khera (of Hindu College) and Veena Das, economists like Prof. Amartya Sen

and Prof. Sukhmoy Chakravathi, human geographers like V.L.S. Prakasha Rao and Prof. R. Ramachandran. The Indian Coffee House at the basement of Delhi School provided opportunities for close interaction between research scholars and also teachers at the informal level. Participation in Friday Seminars at the Department was made compulsory during which all scholar presented their research proposal, methodology and plan of fieldwork. The Department had initiated a contributory Tea Club in the Faculty Common Room, which was maintained by the research scholars. It was an excellent opportunity for all the research scholars for closer interaction with all the teachers besides their research supervisors to seek suggestions and inputs for enriching their research. During the absence of Professor Rao, on his long international assignments, I had the privilege of being guided in my research by Prof. Beteille. At the end of four years, I could complete the drafting of my doctoral thesis on social mobility among the Waddars of South India and, with the approval of my Ph.D. Supervisor Prof. M.S.A. Rao, I accepted the invitation from Professor C. Parvathamma for a faculty position as a lecturer at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Mysore, in 1973. I submitted my thesis in 1975 and was awarded the Ph.D. degree in 1976. When the Department of Sociology and Anthropology was bifurcated in due course in 1974, I was shifted to the Department of Anthropology, University of Mysore, headed by Prof. K.N. Venkataryappa, known for his expertise in the sociology of education and urban studies. I may mention that I had the privilege of being one of the founder faculty at the Department of Anthropology in Mysore and my domain of expertise in social anthropological theories and substantive areas of study such as Indian village, socio-economic structure and change formed the thrust of the Master's program in anthropology. In due course, courses in other branches of anthropology, such as physical, linguistic and archaeological aspects were included after the recruitment of faculty with due expertise.

**3. AS:**
You joined the Department of Anthropology at the University of Mysore as a faculty member in 1973. You later shifted to the University of Hyderabad as a faculty member in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology in 1979. Please tell us the courses you taught at the department, especially if you find any differences in the subject being taught here at Hyderabad compared to your previous faculty position at Mysore University.

**CSB:**
Thank you Ajaya for this significant question regarding my transition from the discipline of Anthropology, in fact, Social Anthropology, at Mysore to that of Sociology at the University of Hyderabad. I began my teaching career by joining the Department of Sociology in Mysore in 1973. In fact, I had a grounding in Social Anthropology at the Master's level at Karnataka University and the term and the concept of Social Anthropology at once led us to the British school of thought under Radcliffe-Brown. My research orientation at the Department of Sociology under Professor M. N. Srinivas was obviously influenced by his teacher Radcliffe-Brown's theoretical

orientation at Oxford. In the 1970s and 80s, the overriding theme of social change and transformation was primarily analyzed through the paradigms of *Sanskritization and dominant caste*. Except for a few, most of the Departments of Sociology followed the Delhi School orientation, including the newly initiated Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Hyderabad. Being one of the founding faculty members of the Department, I had the freedom to frame the syllabus for the M.A. Degree course in Sociology in 1979. In fact, the first Professor of the Department, Dr. G.S. Aurora, who joined the department in 1980, also had his doctoral training at the Department of Sociology, Delhi University.

**4. AS:**
You have been a role model for many young researchers and students of sociology and social anthropology in the coming years as you had extensive ethnographic experiences and influential faculty mentors. How do you connect this with the growth of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Hyderabad? What were the specializations being offered at the department during those initial days? How was the student-teacher relationship and what kind of research projects were carried out?

**CSB:**
The formative phase of the Department, from 1979 to 1985, engaged us in the creation of basic infrastructure for the department within the limited space for classrooms and faculty rooms, acquiring essential furniture and books, encyclopedias and reports for building a library in a historically significant location – *Golden Threshold* - home of Sarojini Naidu, donated by her daughter Padmaja Naidu to launch the University of Hyderabad in 1975. When I joined the Department in early August 1979 there were already 2 faculty members, viz, Dr. Rathna Naidu and Dr. Kodanda Rao and by mid-August, 1979 two more faculty – Dr. Vijay Kochar and Dr. Mithilesh (Pandey) Reddy - joined the Department. The Department commenced teaching the first 15 students admitted for the 1979-81 Master's degree program. Classes were held even under trees at times when classrooms were not available and the early batches of students recall their experiences with nostalgia generated by close interaction between faculty and students due to spatial constraints. The department too was compelled to limit student intake from 15 to 20 until more space was made available following the shifting of the School of Humanities to the University Campus during the mid 1980s. I fondly recall the very first batch of sociology students (1979-81), who created a vibrant WhatsApp group SUPER ELEVEN+ (indicating special association and inclusion of their teacher-friend Bhat and Mrs. Bhat in the group) out of the total 15 students admitted and twelve graduated in 1981. They still continue their effort to trace the 12$^{th}$ classmate! As mentioned earlier Prof. G.S. Aurora, the first Professor joined in 1980 to lead the Department.

I had a brief break from teaching for a year when I was awarded the Commonwealth Academic Staff Fellowship (1983-84) for Post-Doctoral research at the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, School of Oriental

and African Studies (SOAS), London University. The head of the Department and the then Director of SOAS, Professor Adrian C. Mayer was assigned to be my mentor under this Fellowship program. Professor Mayer introduced me to the study of international migration and Overseas Indians for my research in London. Professor Mayer pioneered the study of Indian immigrants in Fiji and published it under *Peasants in the Pacific: A Study of Fiji Indian Rural Society.*[1] Under his guidance, I had the privilege of carrying out fieldwork in London to study the dynamics of Indian ethnic associations in London at a time when there was an attempt to take over the Golden Temple by Sikh separatists in India and the 'Operation Blue Star'. The findings of my study on Overseas Indians were later published later in 1993 in the paper "Indian Ethnic Associations in London: Search for Unity in Diversity".[2]

The year 1985 is important in the growth of the Department, both through the promotion of some of the existing faculty and the recruitment of new faculty. The 3 faculty at Reader's level – Dr. Ratna Naidu, Dr. Kodanda Rao and Dr. Vijay Kochar - were appointed as Professors, I had the privilege of becoming a Reader and 4 additional faculty enhanced the faculty strength to 9, to initiate teaching of Anthropology courses at Master's level with effect from 1986. Dr. Uma Ramaswamy and Dr. K. Laxmi Narayan joined the sociology stream in 1985. A formal division and creation of the Department of Anthropology occurred in 1986 with Prof. Kodanda Rao as head and the newly recruited two Lecturers as faculty. The Department of Sociology continued with 3 Professors, two Readers and one Lecturer in 1986. The years from 1985 to 1988 are significant in the transition and stabilization of the Department of Sociology, distinct from the Department of Anthropology as the Department shifted to the newly created space at the University Campus at Gachibowli in 1988. By mid-1990s the Department acquired high stature among the sociology departments in the country and secured recognition with the grant of Special Assistance Programme (SAP) by UGC to the Department in 1994. I had the privilege of becoming the first coordinator of the Special Assistance Program when it was initiated with effect from April 1, 1995, under the broad theme of "Social Identities: Formation and Erosion", reflecting the faculty research orientation. Besides supporting annual national conferences, SAP could provide funds for books, faculty research and the introduction of emerging technology with the provision of computers and printers for faculty and more significantly, to research scholars in the department by 1996 by creating for them an exclusive computer room. Research scholars were encouraged to familiarize themselves with new technology in data analysis and report drafting and the Department had often involved the students in the organization of seminars and conferences, including those of the Diaspora Centre.

[1] University of California Press, 1973.
[2] Bhat, Chandrashekhar, L.N. Kadekar and K. Ranga Rao (eds.). 1993. *Sociology of Development and Change.* New Delhi: Orient Longman.

Personally, for me, the years 1993 to 1996 marked both institutionally productive and academically rewarding in my entire professional career. In 1993 I was appointed as a Professor in the Department besides the academic-administrative assignment as Dean of Student Affairs by the University. In 1995, I was also appointed as the UGC-SAP Coordinator in the department.

My initiation into the study of Overseas Indians, with the support of Prof. Aurora, who had carried out a study of Indian workers in England, facilitated the introduction of an Optional Course on Overseas Indians in the Department as early as 1985. When UGC invited proposals for undertaking an international conference on Indian Diaspora in 1994, the proposal submitted by the University of Hyderabad was approved and I had the privilege of coordinating the first International Conference on Indian Diaspora at the University of Hyderabad in November 1994. As an outcome of the International Conference, the UGC supported our proposal to establish the first Centre for the Study of Indian Diaspora in 1996, under the UGC Area Studies Programme. In the meanwhile, I was invited to participate in the 150$^{th}$ Indian Arrival Day celebrations in 1995 at Port of Spain, Trinidad and had interaction with Overseas Indians from several Caribbean and African countries, who evinced a keen desire to have Centre for the Study of Indian Diaspora in India.

The programs of teaching, research and both national and international conferences at the Centre for the Study of Indian Diaspora were supported by most of the colleagues in the Department and Prof. Laxmi Narayan in particular. A few faculty members from the School of Social Sciences and also from the Humanities evinced interest and initiated their students to take up diaspora studies. By the dawn of the new millennium, the Centre was showcased as a new domain of academic study and research by the University and was invited by the newly appointed High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora (2000) under the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, to facilitate the formulation of new policy initiatives in 2001.

**AS:**

The year 1994 was remarkable as you have embarked on a mission for not only venturing into a new area of research ‘diaspora’, but also subsequently established a first-of-its-kind interdisciplinary Area Study Centre at the University, i.e., Centre for the Study of Indian Diaspora. What motivated you to carry out research on the Indian diaspora which is a total shift from your previous studies on social mobility and social movements?

**CSB:**
The mid-1990s, as you well imagined, was indeed very challenging in the pursuit of expanding both the physical and academic infrastructure of the department securing adequate funding from the University and the UGC Special Assistance Program. It is around the same time, that a new

opportunity emerged to pursue further my research that I was initiated at SOAS, London University, on international migration and diaspora studies. The then UGC Chairperson, Prof. G. Ram Reddy, short-listed the University of Hyderabad and appointed me as the Coordinator to host the first International Conference on Indian Diaspora in 1994. Following the success of the conference, he further approved the establishment of the first interdisciplinary Centre for Study of Indian Diaspora in 1996 with moderate funding and the University appointed me as the Convener. With the support of colleagues from various Departments under the Schools of Social Sciences and Humanities, I formulated its primary objectives and courses of study at M.Phil. and Ph.D. levels besides optional courses at the Master's level. It was also a challenge to identify expert scholars working in this interdisciplinary domain in India and abroad and establish academic networks. As already mentioned, my exposure to overseas Indians during my tenure of studies at SOAS helped me to seamlessly continue beyond teaching and research in social mobility and movements to newly emerging areas of international migration and diaspora studies.

**AS:**
Institution building is not an easy task like carrying out research. Did you face any challenges or obstacles to establishing the Centre for Study of Indian Diaspora? What was the situation in India for diaspora studies during those days?

**CSB:**
When you articulated this question, you had perhaps no idea that I was mandated to build an interdisciplinary academic centre without any grant for faculty positions but by drawing on the expertise of existing faculty in the University and inviting some of the scholars working on issues pertaining overseas Indians or Indian diaspora. The term 'diaspora' was yet to be acceptable in all academic circles, especially among those who believed that the term orients towards and prioritizes 'motherland'. Even the Government of India preferred to call her overseas immigrants 'Overseas Indians' until 2000 when the Ministry of External Affairs appointed the 'High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora'. With the approval of the UGC, we went ahead with the establishment of the Centre for the Study of Indian Diaspora.

**AS:**
Despite two and half decades since the promotion of Indian diaspora studies in India, so far, we have not been able to establish diaspora studies as a separate discipline or to some extent we can say not been successful in establishing this as a separate discipline. What are the factors and what is your opinion about this?

**CSB:**
The Indian diaspora came of age in India along with the due recognition by the Government of India with the constitution of High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora. However, not many universities have Departments/Centres for

diaspora studies nor this new area of study has found its introduction at the college level. Hence, only limited opportunities for pursuing a career with this expertise are available. For an interdisciplinary disciplinary domain like diaspora, it is a herculean task to develop and establish in the academic milieu dominated by a uni-disciplinary environment. Under these circumstances, any promotion of diaspora studies is possible only by encouraging and involving the different cognitive disciplines that constitute the domain of diaspora studies.

**AS:**
How is the future of diaspora studies you envision when you witness the growth of diaspora studies globally especially in Europe and the Americas?

**CSB:**
Thank you for this very thought-provoking intervention on the future of diaspora studies in India keeping in view the growth of diaspora studies in Europe and the Americas. Interdisciplinary studies in social sciences and humanities in India, in my view, are yet to advance and acquire their prominence and sustain on their own as in the West. In India, we still go by disciplinary degrees for institutional appointments in colleges and universities rather than open it to those with expertise involving interdisciplinary orientation.

With the increasing prominence of migration and diaspora studies in the highly global world today, attention to these processes involving interdisciplinary approaches to comprehend will emerge in order of the day. No social scientist or student of humanities can ignore the importance of diaspora in nation-building and international affairs. It is only a matter of time before an interdisciplinary domain like diaspora will take over in the analysis and interpretation of every relationship governing groups, communities, regions, nations and the globe. I am optimistic that a day will come when diaspora matters in defining life and living conditions of their "homes' and the globe at large.

**AS:**

You are one of those professors in the department at UoH who have the expertise in publishing whether it is a monograph, edited book, or scholarly journal article. You have been an inspiration for the younger generation of scholars like me. Could you please elaborate on how you have acquired those publication skills? As I understand publication those days were not everyone's cup of tea.

**CSB:**

My initiation into social research during the late 1960s occurred at a time when ethnographic studies formed the essential grounding for any research. I

was encouraged to carry out ethnographic fieldwork at the village and community level right for my Master's dissertation. The first break was to carry out a study of "Marriage among the Waddars", a migrant community of Telugu earth and stone workers in Karnataka. Further, I compiled an "Ethnographic Study of the Waddars with Special Reference to Their Nomadism". These studies were published in the *Bulletin of the Anthropological Survey of India*, between 1968 and 1969. The process of the sedentarization of this semi-nomadic community and their transformation to securing a niche in the local caste system formed the thrust of my Ph.D. work, which was published by Concept Publications, Delhi, under the title of *Ethnicity and Mobility* (1984). This research illustrated social transformation and mobility of a seminomadic community through successful articulation of varied ethnic identities under different socio-political contexts, not merely through *Sanskritization.*

During the course of studying migrants, my attention was drawn to the then-emerging domain of social movements initiated by Prof. Rao and I was encouraged to write on the dynamics of social reform movements among the Waddar community, which was published in *Social Movements in India,* edited by M.S.A Rao (1979).

The turning point in my academic pursuit was at the School of Oriental and African Studies where I was initiated into the interdisciplinary domain of International Migration and Diaspora Studies by Prof. Adrian C. Mayer in 1983. Migration and diaspora studies presented the fascinating sociological question of 'who migrates and why' and the consequences that follow in the places of their origin and the destination. From the early structural-functional approach of 'Push and Pull' theory, through the neo-liberal approach under world systems theory highlighting the center's growth at the cost of the periphery to explain the process through 'social networks' and 'social capital'. Analyzing diaspora today is centered around the creation of a 'home' away from home beyond nation-state borders and integration with host societies. Exploration of networking with home and also with those dispersed around the globe forms another significant aspect of diaspora studies today. Out of the several papers published on diaspora studies, I consider my paper on "Indian Diaspora and Global Organizations: Communities and Contested Boundaries" in Elfriede, Hermann and Antonie Fuhse (eds.) *India Beyond India*, Pp.27-48, 2018, Göttingen (Germany): Göttingen University Press has been very well reviewed.

AS: Your association and contribution to the Indian Sociological Society is immense and the recent ISS's Life Time Achievement Award justified that. Could you explain a bit more about your role as a member of the ISS?

For my long active association with ISS, I wish to acknowledge the key role of my doctoral supervisor at Delhi University Prof. M. S.A. Rao, in encouraging research publications and participation in the ISS programs of conferences and workshops as early as 1969, just as I joined Delhi School. In the same year,

the All India Sociological Conference was held at IIT Delhi and Prof. Rao was the ISS Secretary. My interest and participation in ISS Conferences led me to seek membership in the ISS Managing Committee 1992-98. When the ISS launched Research Committees in the organizational structure of All India Sociological Conferences, I had the privilege of initiating the RC-04 on *Migration and Diaspora* Studies in 1997 at the AISC hosted by Osmania University.

Let me thank you very much, again, for this opportunity to share my experience Professor Ajaya Sahoo and through you the E-Exploration and its Editor Professor G. Nagaraju, who is currently heading the Department of Sociology, University of Hyderabad where I had the privilege of being one of the founder-faculty.

**C.S.Bhat** retired as a professor of sociology from University of Hyderabad, Telangana,

**Ajaya Sahoo** is a professor and head Center for the Study of Indian Diaspora, University of Hyderabad, Telangana

**Article: Matchmaking in Digital Spaces: A Study of Matrimonial Websites and Dating Apps in India**

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# Matchmaking in Digital Spaces: A Study of Matrimonial Websites and Dating Apps in India

-- Leena Pujari & Sucharita Pujari

## Abstract

This study is an attempt to understand and engage with the complexities and nuances of matchmaking in the digital space in India. Based on a comprehensive content analysis of more than 250 user profiles drawn from three popular and national matrimonial websites with a pan India user profile, Shaadi.com, Bharat matrimony and Jeevan Saathi (Indian matrimonial websites) and extensive conversations with a small group of students across two different locations, the authors ask whether matchmaking in the digital space has transgressed the rigidities of ascriptive identities, subverted patriarchal norms and enabled a re-imagination of marriage and families or fostered networks of solidarity and affection outside of institutional structures. While the results do point towards increasing choices and greater freedom in partner selection, they do not entail a significant shift in the unequal and gendered nature of marriage as an institution.

*Keywords: marriage, family, feminism, digital matchmaking, dating*

## Introduction

In India, marriage continues to hold a very important place in the life of an individual. It is seen as a union not just between two individuals but also a relationship between two families. Marriages are heterosexual and conformity to caste norms and social status play an important role. However, there is a lot of diversity in marriage forms across different communities and marriage is not a monolithic institution. Nonetheless, parental involvement in marriage is quite significant, whether it is in arranging a prospective groom or bride for their children or simply overseeing arrangements in love marriages. Over the

years marriages in India have evolved and matchmaking has taken on several dimensions. From intermediaries and matchmakers within the family and marriage bureaus and matrimonial advertisements in print media, to the burgeoning presence of online websites, matchmaking in India has indeed traversed a vast terrain. However, a few questions to ponder over are, is this change all-encompassing across caste, classes, communities and ethnicities, does this signal greater choice, individualism and freedom in the match making process, do barriers of caste, class, religion and region begin to fade? Does use of modern technology also encompass modern ideals of marriage given the fact that marriage is a highly gender unequal institution and does this inaugurate a new way of imagining marriage? (Kaur and Dhanda, 2021)

This paper is organised into three sections. Section I contains a brief profile of matrimonial websites and dating apps, Section II is a description of the method or the sources of data that comprised our study and Section III looks at the dominant themes and patterns that emerge from the study.

***Brief profile of Matrimonial Websites***

Indian matrimonial websites have millions of users and have become increasingly important in India's marriage market since the late 1990s. The online matrimonial market is led by three main websites: shaadi.com, bharatmatrimony.com and jeevansathi.com, of whom the first claims the highest number of users and successful matches. Apart from these big websites, there are a vast number of smaller ones that attract plenty of subscribers such as indianmatrimonials.com, lifepartnerindia.com, matrisearch.com, merasathi.com including one for the disabled. There are also a host of community based websites like Tamil matrimony, Telugumatrimony, marathimatrimony etc. They allow users to create profiles within regional, religious, community specific, and linguistic sub-sites. Profiles specify age, weight, and marital status, as well as preferences for food, alcohol, caste, geographic location, native language, the number of siblings, parents' occupations, education and career-related information, hobbies and photos.

Sites allow users to search the profiles with a "quick search". If users should want to carry out a quick search, they are asked to define the gender, culture, language, religion and age of the desired profiles. (Sharma and Nardi, 2019).

Interestingly, wherever there was a quick search option there was also a link provided to an "advanced matrimonial search" option. The advanced search is compiled of approximately ten further categories including "ethnicity, general cultural values, spiritual values, immigration status, country of residence, family origin, alcohol and smoking, education, diet (vegetarian or non-vegetarian), and mother tongue or language. (Shokha, 2004).

We decided to focus on the digital space, primarily because, as pedagogues we engage with a tweeting and texting generation on an everyday basis. Conversations with students especially Generation Z[1] (Gen Z)(Dimock, 2019) around marriage and family was quite revealing and led us to deeper questions of how they 'imagine' the institutions of marriage and family. As we began our research into the digital space looking at user profiles, the design and features of websites and apps, speaking to students with non-normative gender identities and cisgender students who were gay and lesbian, to understand what marriage and mate selection means for them, especially in a context where same sex marriages are not legal in India, we realized that we were navigating a complex terrain, not easy to slot into categories but one that required a very nuanced and layered analysis. Initially the focus was only on matrimonial websites but our conversations with students led us to dating apps because we realized that a large number of the youth was on dating apps. Contrary to popular perception about dating apps being only for casual flings or non-committal relationships and most certainly not for marriage, some students spoke about getting into long term relationships through dating apps and also contemplating marriage.

[1] Children born from 1997 onwards are considered part of a new generation and are referred to as Generation Z, also termed a Gen Z

According to the 2008 online matrimony report, (as cited in Titzmann, 2013) 12 to 15 percent internet users use matrimonial sites, users are between 21 and 35 years, well to do and upwardly mobile. In fact, none of the websites that we looked at have an option for lower class, so this is primarily an upper middle class phenomenon. 89 percent use specialised sites/identity based sites like Tamil, Gujrati, Brahmin, Indian millionaire marriage .com, Jat.com etc.

Matrimonial sites are not trans-inclusive. They are binary, recognizing only two genders male and female. However, some of the dating apps are trans-inclusive. Since we were interested in shifts in modes of mate selection, we were particularly intrigued by and drawn towards, what we felt were certain progressive features that some of these apps had. There are several of them like OK Cupid, Grindr, Bumble. There are paid and free features on dating and matrimonial apps.

**Method**

This paper is based on a comprehensive content analysis of more than 250 user profiles drawn from three popular and national matchmaking websites with a pan India user profile, Shaadi.com, Bharat matrimony and Jeevan Saathi. Choice of websites was based on their pan India user profile and ease of access. It was easier to make dummy profiles and then exit. We covered 84 profiles from Shaadi.com, 107 from Bharat matrimony, 63 from Jeevan Sathi. A total of 264 profiles out of which 129 were girls' profile and 126 those of boys. Hindus constituted a majority of the user profiles followed by Muslims, Jains, Christians, Buddhist, Sikhs and Parsis in that order. Age wise they were between 18 and 35 with the 22 – 25 range comprising the majority of user profiles. This was primarily an upper caste, upper middle class Hindu user profile.

The analysis concentrated on the profile section "About myself" or "About Her/Him" (if posted by others), which comprised essay-like self-descriptions of the respective candidates as well as the profile page where each candidate

was asked to mention their body type, weight, height, skin complexion, eating and drinking habits and other information. We looked at both self-created profiles as well as profiles created by others, primarily parents and a few by siblings. Online advertisements have descriptive sentences, as well as a template format where users have the choice to either mention physical attributes or keep the options blank. Broad conclusions and pointers have been drawn from a comprehensive content analysis of more than 250 matrimonial profiles along with the design of their respective websites. We looked at dominant themes and emerging patterns.

An analysis of the features and design of the matchmaking websites and dating apps gave insights into how they imagine and construct ideas about marriage and family. Thus, we looked at dating apps like OkCupid and Delta, which are for LGBTQI plus community and had extensive discussions with students who were on Tindr and Bumble and we realised that these dating apps are significant sites for match making. Conversations with undergraduate and post graduate students from different social locations and from two different institutions across two states enabled a deeper understanding of how marriage was 'constructed' by the young and whether there have been significant shifts in the way marriages are imagined or constructed. Prior consent was sought from students before the focus group discussion and we have used pseudonyms to protect their identities. Most of the conversations happened among young undergraduate students in a South Mumbai college where the first author is also the Gender Cell Convener and thus shares a close rapport with students including those with non-normative gender identities. This helped in creating a safe space where conversations could happen.

**Results and Discussion**

Some of the dominant themes that emerged from the analysis of user profiles are as follows.

One could discern a difference in the way profiles were being posted by parents and the prospective grooms and brides. When parents post the profile of their daughters there is an emphasis on physical attributes. For instance, they are invariably described as 'fair', 'good looking', 'beautiful'. They also describe daughters as caring, loving, cultured, adjusting, humble and down to earth, 'knows the importance of family', 'good at both home and office'. There were some who spoke about education and qualification and highlighted their achievements with a sense of pride such as 'won international championships', 'fitness trainer' and 'very intelligent' to name a few.

Parents of daughters are invariably looking for a well settled, highly educated and well qualified, mature, caring son in law for their daughters with clarity of vision and a positive outlook and good family values who can look after their daughters and support her decision to work after marriage with an explicit mention of salary that is expected anywhere between 5 lakhs to 1 crore.

When women create their own profiles, the focus is on the kind of person they are, qualities, hobbies, likes, dislikes and preferences and not so much on physical attributes. They are very explicit in describing themselves such as 'very ambitious', 'enjoys her personal space' 'loves to travel', 'free spirited, 'love my job','one who is traditional but not in a suffocating way'.'I am romantic in a very filmy way but I am also capable of understanding the ground realities of life'. They were also very emphatic about the qualities that they are looking for in their partner such as 'looking for a partner and soulmate and not a husband', 'simple marriage and no dowry' 'professional sincerity and family bound', 'mutual caring and respect and should be a friend', 'soul mate instead of husband', 'want to be a daughter and not daughter in law', indicating a new found emphasis on conjugal intimacy and conjugal compatibility that Kaur (2013) talks about. The desire for a "loving," "understanding" partner, and a "romantic soul mate" was a recurrent theme in most of the profiles analyzed, especially from shaadi.com and bharatmatrimony.com.

Parents of boys on the other hand describe their sons as smart, handsome, tall and good looking, progressive, fun loving, family oriented and they look for an educated, intelligent, pure, cultured and good-looking girl who respects family and Indian values and will be a good companion to their sons. There is certainly an anxiety about the bride maintaining traditional bonds, as is very evident in statements like 'my son is looking for somebody who is modern and still believes that marriage is sacred', the partner should be his best friend as well as his wife', 'need some different type of a girl who believes in God, is pure, cultured, educated and is a working woman'.

When prospective grooms post, apart from a mention of the specific qualities that they would want in their partners, there is also an emphasis on how they should relate to their families or to themselves such as 'someone who is passionate about her work and would love to travel with me, 'she should be moderately religious, brahmin, god fearing, yet financially independent', 'understand her responsibilities towards family', 'balances family and professional life', 'it is totally fine, in fact preferable if the person is working and wants to continue that', 'blend of tradition and modern', 'beautiful, presentable, fair, 'understanding, caring, respects personal space, easy to get along with', 'open minded, puts across her point, faithful, trustworthy and respects others opinion and values, and is aspirational', 'she should be ready to dive into different roles as per the situation like a friend, a companion, a mentor, etc. she should be very clear about the partner's expectations', 'strong willed girl with a pleasing personality who understands her responsibility towards her family and is a blend of tradition and modernity', 'she should be a friend, a companion, a mentor depending on the situation'.

Thus, most of the men wrote that they want women who will love, respect, care and understand them and their family but do not mention that they would also do the same towards her family. Interestingly, in the profiles posted by prospective brides, we did not find a similar emphasis on the kind of

relationship that they would want their partners to have with their natal families.

There is a clear attempt to reinforce caste, sub caste, gotra, class, linguistic, and community prejudices. Very few in fact, we would say negligible, would be profiles where people write caste or religion no bar. Colourism or the fetish for fair and wheatish complexion is quite strong. Parents are most certainly playing an important role in the digital matchmaking space and fewer girls as compared to boys were making their own profiles.

The search definitions of family origin, mother tongue and other questions does indicate an increasing predisposition towards cultural affinity (Shokha, 2019).

***Disrupting Patriarchy?***

What we did not see or find in the profiles were descriptions that could subvert patriarchal norms like for instance statements on sharing household responsibilities or foregrounding occupational identity as the primary identity marker especially for girls, that caste, sub caste, gotra and religion do not matter, that they want an emancipated woman. There were three profiles from the 264 that we analysed that stood apart in terms of non-conformity to patriarchal norms. One of them said, 'looking for a girl who likes to lead her life on her own terms, highly open minded, loves to explore new places', and the other 'I am looking for a companion who would be my best friend, with whom I can have an interesting conversation, enjoy finer things in life and traverse the journey of life', "I want a friendly, supportive and caring partner. Don't tell me that you are very good at cooking and looking after home and parents because I am not looking for a cook or caretaker. I can do these things. I am very good at cooking, washing, cleaning, caring, shopping, bargaining and I believe this is my responsibility as well and not just a woman's".

**Renegotiation of ascriptive identities**

One could also see complex negotiations of balancing family expectations of caste, class and religious compatibility with personal preferences of compatibility and companionship. One girl wrote "My parents expecting same caste sengunthar mudalaiyar and raghukethu dosam. I am expecting a caring, loveable, bestie soulmate with his family". Descriptions about self as well as partner expectations were loaded with the tradition modernity discourse. "Ambitious yet family oriented", "modern yet god fearing", "someone vivacious, educated and family oriented", "blend of homely and professional gesture", "modern outlook with traditional values", "yes very ambitious but ready to move in with the in-laws", "modern thinker but a firm believer in religious values and beliefs shared by our ancestors", "I won't say that I'm hugely ambitious but I believe in financial independence", "I believe in traditional Indian values and yet don't mind embracing a modern lifestyle", "highly independent yet down to earth", "someone who is modern but still believes that marriage is scared", "loves to explore and travel", "passionate about my work yet very family oriented". This is a theme that resonates in previous studies as well. (Wilson 2013; Ravindra Kaur 2014; Raja and Reninger 2015). One is a little perplexed by this tradition modernity discourse and we wondered what it entails when it comes to matchmaking? Modernity is of course associated with education and employment for women. As Suhas, a 23 year old post graduate student put it

"Even parents of a boy look for an educated girl who can teach in a school"

Traditional, perhaps hints at not transgressing certain boundaries, such as boundaries of being responsible for the home and maybe prioritizing childcare even when one is a successful professional (Shankar and Sahni, 2014). These narratives of self-perception, lead to the concept of the "New Indian Woman" who pursues a global lifestyle but sticks to Indian values. Does that imply greater agency and choice on the part of the searching candidates? (Vishnupriya,2019). A pertinent question here would be how choice is related to agency in a neoliberal and consumerist context. Jyotsna- Kapur (2009)

points out that choice is at the core of the capitalist market rhetoric that emphasizes 'freedom of choice' and 'empowerment' of customers. But one is not sure if this really means agency and the ability to act in an autonomous manner.

So even as we celebrate the wide range of choices available, we need to understand that these are highly commercial ventures ruled by market forces and the plethora of matrimonial websites and dating apps and their ever growing presence is a response to market needs and the consumerist ethos in a neo liberal state. There is a growing marketisation of love (Illouz 1997 as cited in Lewis, 2016) and the rise of choice-based consumer identities in India, reconciling, 'new' modes of partner choice within a familial setting where older conceptions of caste relations and kinship duties still dominate.

As Rhea, a second year student of Sociology put it,

*'Marriage is highly overrated and glorified and matrimonial websites are like shopping websites that lack a personal touch'*

**How do the apps construct the idea of marriages and families?**

We also looked at the features and design of matrimonial sites and dating apps since they have a story to tell, a story of how love, romance and marriage are imagined by the creators of these apps. The design and features of matrimonial websites reinforce cultural stereotypes. They foreground primordial identities of caste, class, gender and community. The first page or the initial filters are religion, caste and subcaste, disability status, manglik and these fields are mandatory. Then comes mother tongue, diet that includes veg, non-veg and vegan, education, occupation, income, horoscope matching and family background. While the field on boy's annual income is mandatory in case of girls it is optional. These popular matrimonial websites are gender binary speaking to only men and women and are not trans-inclusive.

However, some features on the websites are progressive and speak of a democratic ethos, a shift in an otherwise unequal partnership that underlies the institution of marriage. For instance, Bharat matrimony had a column, for men, though an optional one, on equal relationship that had nine choices that included among others, 'sharing household and parenting responsibilities equally, treat her parents with respect, respect her choices and opinions, her personal space, her religious beliefs and take significant decisions together and be supportive of her interests and hobbies'. 31 men out of 57 ticked anywhere between 4 and 6 choices. The most dominant choice was being supportive and encourages her career followed by respect her parents and stand by her choices. The least selected was participating equally in household chores.

Dating apps were however different. Very few had fields on caste; religion etc and even these were optional and not mandatory. They were far more inclusive in terms of genders and sexualities than marriage sites. However, this was not true of Indian based dating apps like TrulyMadly, Quack Quack which only spoke to two genders.

What struck us was the profile section of OKCupid which posed the following questions.

- How important is religion/ god in your life?
- Could you date someone who has strong political opinions that are the exact opposite of yours?
- Should women continue to work full-time after marriage?
- Would you date someone who did not support the #MeToo movement?
- Do you think it's important to challenge typical gender roles in dating?
- How would you feel if your partner earned more money than you?
- Should married daughters help financially support their elderly parents?

- What do you think about gender neutral passports?
- Do you consider yourself an activist?
- Do you make your bed most days
- Is it possible for your partner to be 'too ambitious'?

Delta App

- It's okay if my partner & I share different lifestyle choices (ex. Smoking)
- It's okay if my partner's customs & traditions differ from mine.
- Having a partner means you need to do everything together.
- My partner and I would be equally responsible for taking care of our home.

These questions speak to a different kind of constituency, the young and liberated who are looking for, as one of the students said 'companionship sans the burden of a marriage'. Notwithstanding the dangers of fake profiles, rampant misogyny, issues of power, consent and boundaries, the online space has most certainly proved to be an enabling experience for the young who can create their profiles, meet up, chat, video call and experiment with these novel ideas without the scrutiny of parents. Dating apps appeal especially to those who are sceptical of marriage and wondered whether anything has really changed. As one of the undergraduate students from the humanities section said

What about double burden? what about colourism and objectification? Parents including the prospective candidates still want their partners to be taller than them, earning well, look after them, be an NRI.

Or as another stated

Marriage is a lot of responsibility, I would rather invest my time and energy in existing relationships, parents and siblings rather than in a new one. If you are lonely adopt kids. I see marriage as a companionship wherein me and my partner don't fix roles for ourselves and are flexible as per the need of the hour. When two friends live together in an apartment do they not share work? why can't the same be in marriage? Marriages are beautiful if we keep them away from hierarchy.

Despite their traditional approach, evident in their structure and design with ascriptive markers like caste, class, sub caste, religion being used to create profiles, these online spaces nevertheless reflect new dimensions of media usage and choice of partners. What we can most certainly ascertain is the active participation of people in mate selection. There is increasing autonomy in partner choice. Sharangpani (2010 as cited in Titzmann 2013) and Mukhopadhyaya (2012) emphasize how technology which is the android phone here and its various features and dimensions prove to be an enabling and empowering experience when it comes to choosing partners. Since in many households, older members such as parents or grandparents are not comfortable using digital technology, younger members within the family post their own matrimonial ads without parental control. Chat, video, and other interactive features of online portals too have encouraged brides and grooms to be more engaged in the decision making process and in choosing their life partners. With new lifestyles and social realities in a post liberal India, notions regarding marriage, love, and gender roles are gradually being reworked. (Titzmann 2013,Vishnupriya, 2019). We see more individualistic patterns of partner search though at the same time they reinforce traditional criteria and requirements.

However, this does not mean parents are excluded from the process. In fact, what is sought is parental consent rather than their active selection of prospective grooms. Donner (2016 as cited in Bhandari,2017) in her study of the middle class in Kolkata explains that whilst love and choice in marriages

are important to claiming a modern self, the involvement and approval of the family remains intact. Thus, it needs to be emphasized that the self-posting of matrimonial profiles does not automatically presuppose agency. (Chattopadhya and Chattopadhya, 2019). Nonetheless, ideas of love, romance and dating are undergoing a paradigm shift marked by intense contestations and complex negotiations especially for the newly emerging middle class in the aftermath of globalisation and liberalisation.

**Conversations with students**

Focus group discussions with students across classes on marriage, family and partner selection produced some interesting responses. These conversations happened with two groups of students located in two different regions of the country. One was a small group of post graduate students primarily from the country side and smaller towns located in a research institute in Hyderabad and the other was a slightly larger group of middle class students drawn from across social locations in an undergraduate college in South Mumbai. While most of the post graduate students believed that matrimonial websites afforded wider choice and more freedom in terms of partner selection, they added that this freedom was constrained and did not include the freedom to transgress ascriptive markers. The undergraduate students in a South Mumbai college were more inclined towards dating apps than matrimonial websites. Avantee, a first year undergraduate student from the class of 2020 said

Dating is the space between a serious relationship and marriage. It is more about friendship. Dating apps are liberating because people do indicate whether they are interested in hook ups or a serious relationship

Many students spoke of how greater freedom in partner selection did not necessarily imply more choices. There are clear instructions on not transgressing boundaries of caste, class, status, family background, food choices which leads to considerable anxieties. Thus ‘new’ modes of partner

choice have to be reconciled within a familial setting where older conceptions of caste relations and kinship duties still dominate.

**Feminist critique of marriage and family**

Several feminist scholars (John, Shah, etal 2005) have argued that the very foundations of marriage are built on an inegalitarian ideology. Despite legal and social changes to the institution, marriage is still a central instrument in the denial of women's status as full citizens. Unequal division of labour within the domestic space is an area of contention. The critique of rigid gender roles and hierarchy in marriage and of their negative consequences for women is also a critique of patriarchal heteronormativity, which oppresses not only women, but also members of the LGBT community.

In such a scenario, will same-sex marriage in any way transform the unequal nature of the institution or change the structure of heterosexual marriages? Quite unlikely as heteronormative gender inegalitarian ideology is also reproduced in same sex marriages. (Josephson,2005). In a context where marriage is regarded as sacred and a union between two heterosexual couples and their families, one wonders whether same sex marriages can alter the equation and produce more companionate relationships. The recent stand of the Union Government(September, 2020) in a petition on including same sex marriage under Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, points to the fear that gay marriages will in some way subvert the institution of marriage. The State believes that same sex marriage is neither part of our culture nor the country's law and hence the court should not rule on legitimising same sex marriages. (Indian Express, 2020). Some of the same sex couples that we spoke to, felt that following the unequal gender norms of heterosexual marriages will perhaps lead to greater acceptance of their relationships. Prachi, a self-identified lesbian student echoes this when she says that she and her partner are invariably asked about who is going to be the husband and wife in their relationship.

Access to marriage, or even transformation of the institution, will not by itself make cis-women or even those with non-normative gender identities free and equal citizens. Rinchin (2005) argues that while the injustices and indignities within families have received scholarly attention there has been little discussion on relationships outside of institutional structures like marriage and family. In a society where the only legally and socially sanctioned institution for cohabitation is marriage and through that the family, this is what people will choose to be able to live secure lives. To question the patriarchal, patrilineal, patrilocal and patronymic family legitimised by law as well, is indeed a daunting task. The dominant family in India despite its flawed character provides the closest of emotional ties for the individuals. However, some individuals are creating their own structures of support outside the rigid bounds of marriage. Same-sex couples document their intention to live together in the form of a registered 'life partnership deed' and in some cases, in the form of friendship contracts such as 'Maitri Karar', which declared their status and rights as a couple (Vanita 2005 as cited in Ghosh and Sanyal, 2019) or as Perumal(2011) says cohabitation and life partnerships deeds. As Pancham a final year student of the undergraduate course of English put it

I see marriage as a companionship wherein me and my partner don't fix roles for ourselves and are flexible as per the need of the hour. When two friends live together in an apartment don't they share the work? why can't the same be in marriage? Marriages are beautiful if we keep them away from hierarchy.

**Conclusion**

Though the digital space has widened choices and possibilities across cities and nations, this does not entail a shift in seeking partners outside primordial identities. The analysis of matrimonial websites, dating apps and user profiles certainly indicates greater freedom and more control in partner selection but these choices are not free. They are happening within a framework that is heavily seeped in gendered and caste norms. However, the design of dating apps with its progressive set of questions relating to ideologies and politics of

everyday life is reflective of an attempt to interrogate gendered norms of our everyday lives and speaks of shifts in the entire discourse on relationships.

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**Article: Queer and Citizenship: A Critical Analysis of Civil and Economic Rights of *hijras* in Bihar**

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# Queer and Citizenship: A Critical Analysis of Civil and Economic Rights of *hijras* in Bihar

**--Shiroma Priyadarshini & Asima Jena**

## Abstract

In India, law and rights-based struggles have been central to the politics of sexual minorities. Undeniably, we gained from NALSA judgement and repeal of Article 377. Yet these legal reforms are backstabbed by four kinds of counter-movements – aggressive nationalism, exponential rise of neoliberalism, witch-hunting of political prisoners and COVID-19. Indicative of state-sanctioned transphobia, instead of declining, violence against the trans community escalated within weeks of the decriminalization judgement. If marital rights and right to inherit parental properties concern the upper class and caste queers, working class queers are fighting for basic civil and political rights (such as the right to life, equal treatment before law, protection against arbitrary violence) as well as social and economic rights (to welfare, employment and education).While using Banerjea (2022)'s notion of "homo-populism" and drawing empirical insights from the in-depth interviews with gurus and shishyas of Kamala Nehru Nagar in Patna, this article aims to discuss civil and socio-economic rights of *hijras* and Kinnars in Bihar.

*Key Words: hijra, homopopulism, civic rights and citizenship*

## Introduction

In India, law and rights-based struggles have been central to the politics of sexual minorities (Lakkimsetti 2020). However, this does not imply that legal reform solely can annihilate the sufferings of sexual minorities. If oppression could be tackled by passing laws, then the second decade of 21st century would be adjudged as a golden period for queer people in India, when protective laws were offered on a platter. A slew of legal reform was seen from NALSA judgement (allowing self-certification and recommending affirmative action in education and employment for third-gender groups), reading down of Section 377 (which previously criminalised transgender community) to the inclusion of transgender persons under Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act. While we are waiting with bated breath for the apex court's verdict on the marriage equality case (Shaikh 2023), there remains pertinent questions which demands reflections. Whether we need to be jubilant about it or it is time to circumspect? Whether these legal reforms ushered substantial changes in the lives of all kinds of sexual minorities? How do we problematise the citizenship rights of sexual minorities particularly

those hailing from the working class? Put differently, whether these legal changes address the problematic of intersectionality and overlapping identities? What kind of socio, economic and civic rights, hijras are entitled to in India?

These questions assume valency as living in a nation means living with the state (Rajan 2003). So, our being within a boundary extends to our dealing with the bureaucracy which involves power, policies, rules, regulations, and other such elements which transforms a resident into a citizen of that marked boundary. But that citizenship is not equal when it comes to gender, as men and women are treated differently by the state. Further people of non-confirming gender and sexuality need to fight for a dignified life along with the basic rights bestowed over others. At this juncture, it is important to reiterate that sexual minorities are not a monolithic community. There are hierarchies and variations of experiences related to caste, class, disability, religion, ethnicity and geographical location, which counter an understanding of a homogenous spectrum (Basak and Banerjea 2023, Upadhyay 2020). For instance, *Kothis* and *hijras* report transphobia within LGBTQ spaces, where they often feel unwelcome and excluded (Lakkimsetti 2020). It is these complexities that prompt us to interrogate not just the significance of these acts in the lives of most disenfranchised among the queer communities but also to deliberate on the process through which queer question was assimilated by the dominant and xenophobic ideologies of India's ruling class.

Undeniably, we gained from NALSA judgment and repeal of Article 377. Yet these legal reforms are backstabbed by four kinds of counter-movements – aggressive nationalism, exponential rise of neoliberalism, witch-hunting of political prisoners and COVID-19. If ascendancy of religious fundamentalism in India was attenuated by the electoral victory of BJP, it was accompanied by the violence, discrimination and ghettoization of Muslims at an alarming speed. Ironically, queer communities were co-opted into the majoritarian projects, even if previously the same party was objecting to queer rights when it was serving as the leader of opposition. After all, as Upadhyay (2020) argues the Hindu nation needs its queer, trans, and gender nonconforming Hindus to increase demographic numbers. Hindu upper caste queer activists endorsed the right-wing regime's proposal of abrogation Article 370 which provided special status to the Jammu and Kashmir, which was the only Muslim majority state in India. Subsequently, the same group aligned with Hindutva's call for constructing a temple in the controversial site Ayodhya where Hindu mobs destroyed a 16$^{th}$ century mosque in Uttar Pradesh. Later, these queer leaders appealed the right-wing regime to start a *Kinnar* battalion that would help erase Pakistan from the world map when Indian forces crossed

border to attack Pakistan. These episodes illustrate queer groups' assimilation into the majoritarian project (Shahani 2021, Banerjea 2022, Bhattacharya 2019, Upadhyay 2020).This particular counter-movement not only tried to polarise queer community based on religion, it also excluded the rights of transgenders from different faith and depoliticised them. Parallel to this, trans and queer bodies and voices aim and struggle to connect with Muslim and Dalit individuals and groups around survival and citizenship (Banerjea 2022).

Moving to politico-economy, it must be recounted that when India liberalised its economic policy, concomitantly we see the visibility of queer bodies and advocacy for sexual citizenship (Shahani 2021). If at one level, elite and highly skilled queer people were absorbed in corporate jobs, art, architecture and culture industry, we saw job loss and displacement of working-class queers at another level. Dispossession of *hijras* was triggered by the boom of real-estate sector and the land-pooling drive by the state for Special Economic Zones and other infrastructural projects. As working-class queers like hijras reside primarily in the slums of major cities, they are the victim of land grabbing like other impoverished communities. Similarly, COVID-19 too created havoc in the lives of queers and hijras are the worst affected people. The apathy towards *hijras* and the state's discrimination against them can be seen during the COVID 19 pandemic. The whole world was inside their house and undoubtedly, people such as daily wage workers, migrants and women were facing many issues that ranged from financial woes to domestic violence. At the end of the day, the government, Community Based Organisations and Not for profit organisations were able to reach most of them. However, in the context of *hijra* community in particular and transgender community in general, faced multiple forms of traumas. *Hijras*had almost lost their livelihood since then as they carry out their job in public spaces like parks, gardens and cinema halls. Significantly, since *hijras* are also a mobile population, lockdown halted that process as well. If *hijra* sex workers suffered income loss during lockdown, on the other side, the pandemic has become the occasion to enforce multifarious anti-sex work initiatives and discourses (Shankar et al, 2022). In the climate of suppression of democratic rights, when transgender communities from Thoothucodi, Tamil Nadu protested against the Sterlite plant along with other sections of society which was causing environmental and health hazards, they were subjected to police violence (Migrator 2018, Muralidharan 2018) which shows the authoritarian side of the state (Desai 1986).Ominously, these left-liberal queers are isolated citing them as either anti-national oranti-Hindu (Banerjea 2022) by the nationalist queers. Besides these counter-movements, we find also inconsistencies in the legal reforms listed above which would be discussed in the subsequent sections.

Having outlined the gap between these legal measures and perils of hijras, it is instructive to engage with the questions of violence and right to life. Even if in rhetoric the right-wing regime did not oppose the repeal of anti-sodomy law in 2018 and Hindu upper caste queers were assimilated in its majoritarian project, in actuality civil rights of queers[1] were abused. In fact, in 2017 India rejected a UN resolution on abolishing the death penalty for queer people and in 2018 the government dropped "sexual orientation" from workplace discrimination guidelines (Shahani 2021). Indicative of state-sanctioned transphobia, instead of declining, violence against the trans community escalated within weeks of the decriminalization judgement (Shahani 2021). If marital rights and right to inherit parental properties concern the upper class and caste queers, working class sexual minorities are fighting for basic civil and political rights (such as the right to life, equal treatment before law, protection against arbitrary violence) as well as social and economic rights (to welfare, employment and education). These rights-based struggles are grounded not-only in identity politics but also in class struggles where sex is articulated as labour and work (Lakkimsetti 2020). Concomitantly, social rights deal with the problems of stigma and ostracization, rights which are not conferred by the state nor attained through legal recourse. Rather social equality is to be sought from society. Despite repeal of section 377, stigma against non-normative sexual orientation remained and moreover, hijras endure additional abjection due to their involvement in sexual commerce. Sex workers challenge the normative expectation that sex, which should be available for free in marriage or a committed relationship, ought not to be commodified outside of these relationships. As a result, sex work poses a threat to the norm of monogamous heterosexuality (Lakkimsetti, 2020).Bhattacharya (2020) and Banerjea (2022) rightfully alarm that queer subject, once figures of death and disease, are folded into and align with nationalist projects and agendas as figures of life, merit and productivity. Yet, their socio-economic development is not on the agenda of Indian polity and policy framework.

### *Theoretical Framework*

A framework of 'populism' (Varshney 2019) in general and Banerjea (2022)'s homo-populism in particular is quite apt to comprehend these complexities, contradictions of these policies and laws, and the wretched living conditions of *hijras*. Varshney (2019) defines populism as a thin-centred ideology which can go in various directions. It is not a full-blown ideology like liberalism,

[1]Civil rights entail that freedom and right which should be guaranteed to every individual related to movement, behaviour, thinking and choice as laid down by Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Desai 1986).

socialism or conservatism. Its basic roots lie in the idea of popular sovereignty, orchestrated by a charismatic leader and are best expressed in elections. In populism, democracy is overwhelmingly about elections and the customary non-elected institutions like judiciary, media, election commission, civil society organisations, etc which normally constrain democratic governments become secondary. Importantly, Varshney (2019), clarifies that even if populism always claims for "the people" but precisely who "the people" are never clear. Distinguishing two kinds of populisms i.e. right-wing and left-wing; he explained that the greatest difference between left-wing and right-wing populism is how 'the people' are defined. A deep distrust of the independent non-elected democratic institutions that check the executive power is what they share in common. For left wing populists, the poor are the people and for the right-wing populations, it is the ethnic, racial or religious majority that constitutes the people. That is why right-wing populism is both anti-elitist as well as anti-pluralist. In tandem with this, in the context of sexual minorities, Banerjea (2022) invoked "Homopopulism" which offers a reference point to encapsulate how a complex democracy, consisting of right-wing, left-liberal, and centrist state practices, harbors populist discourses and methods to gradually mobilize LGBTQ identities for thin-centred ideologies, without necessarily having to create a recognizable population group with affirmative action policies and anti-discriminatory guarantees, asfacilitating conditions for a liveable life. According to her, homopopulism can also be understood as a popular modality to relate to the political in shifting contexts of inclusion/exclusion of LGBTQ identities. In allying with Banerjea (2022), this article uses the notion of 'homopopulism" to discuss the deprivations of *hijras* amidst political mobilisations as well as underpins precisely why this populist discourse overlooks the intersectionality dimension.

This article aims to discuss civic and socio-economic rights of *hijras* and Kinnars in Bihar. Considering this theme, this article has been organised into three sections. The first section justifies why Bihar demands scholastic attention pertaining to sexual minorities of Bihar as well as outlines the methodology. Additionally, physical description of Kamla Nehru Nagar- a housing colony of hijras- is provided in order to showcase the extent deprived of lives hijras endure. The second section historically locates the growing atrocities against hijras in recent times as well as their socio-economic rights. An attempt has been made to highlight the contradictions in the landmark judgements as well as countervailing Acts like Transgender Act, 2019. The third section is the discussion comprehending the main arguments.

I

As this paper concretizes the concept of "homopopulism" in the context of Patna, Bihar, it is instructive to outline the significance of study in Bihar. According to Dostanasafar, an NGO working for the rights of transgenders, roughly 40,000 transgender people livein Bihar. If *Kinnars* as a political constituency were mobilised by the right-wing regime for its Islamophobic projects, an empirical study on them and also their relationship with other working class queer who continue to identify themselves as *hijras* is very rare. During the onslaught of COVID-19, owing to the intervention of civil society organisation, we find documentation of the pains and miseries which migrant labourers (including women) of Bihar experienced.

However, we find complete silence on the reportage of sexual minorities of Bihar and this invisibility is puzzling given the fact that *hijras* are also a mobile population. Though the Bihar government started cells that could support people regarding mental health issues, but as reported by some of the research participants, no one ever picked up the call at the provided numbers. Further, there was no support from any CBO or NGOs to the *hijra* community. It was during this time that Bihar witnessed a spike in suicide of members from the queer community but most of them went unreported. One of the transgender activists raised money and ration for the community with the help of missionary college and some journalists and few other transgender activists. Their help was not just limited to their own community but also to people from marginalised communities. From this vantage point, studying *hijras* and *Kinnars* of Bihar assumes significance. Concomitantly, violence and torture which hijras were subjected to are other significant themes (besides livelihood issues) which this article discusses extensively. The impetus to focus on civic and socio-economic rights emanated when a *Gharana* (*hijra* household) member was apprehensive about our research, saying "*we are not lambs or goats, you will conduct research on. Neither the government nor do the so called "leaders" come and ask about us. We are just managing to live somehow in this world through what our ancestors have given us.----The ward councilors and these leaders come to us during the time of election for the purpose of campaigning so that we can pool crowd gathered for them, once it is over no one comes to ask about us. Most of us are not even enumerated in voter list. When we ask for the same, they just nod their head and leave. See, we are not even counted as humans.*"

**Methodology**

Insights for the study were primarily drawn through in-depth interview of *gurus and shishya* (mentor and disciple respectively) of the 7 *Gharanas* located in Kamla Nehru Nagar of Patna district, Bihar. It also includes interview with the activists. Most of the data were collected in the year 2018 and 2019 physically. During the lockdown in 2020 follow-up interviews were conducted via telephone in order to find out their health conditions from the activists. Through transgender activists during the lockdown Kinnars were approached via telephone.

As far as field-work is concerned, activists who hailed from upper caste were reluctant to put the first author in touch with the hijras and Kinnars when we attempted to get access to them through the former. Even the contact number which was provided to the first author was not in use and therefore, she decided to go there directly and look for them.

Later, she managed to visit the Kinnars on her own. In fact, it was seen that the flag bearers of the movement were those hailing from the educated section of the society. Those at the grassroot were still unaware of what was happening at State level. They were following the leader without even questioning them. The research participants were also scared to talk freely. As a result of which in one such interview, we were asked to delete the whole interview recording where they overshared about the exploitation from one of the transgender activists and complying with their request we did not mention in the research. Gradually with frequent visits, sitting with them and at times even cooking meal with them, rapport was built. One of the community members who was then pursuing Masters helped the first author a lot in gathering information as till now she takes guidance from the latter wherever she is stuck in her career.

Ethical concerns were also addressed in a two-pronged manner, one, informed consent as well as anonymity was strictly followed. Second, uncomfortable questions were avoided while adopting an empathetic approach and willingness to learn from them. Practicing feminist ethics of power-free research, research participants were treated as people who help us explore knowledge through their experiences, and it is through them that we learn not vice-versa. If this removed power asymmetry between the researcher and the respondent, assisting them and standing for their cause during the time of crisis- pandemic, too removed the distance between us. For instance, the first author too was involved in crowd funding for making ration available while allying with transgender activists. Before conducting in-depth interviews gate keepers like activists and *Gurus* also reviewed and provided clearance to the questions. No one was pressurized to answer.

Interview also involved transgender activists, people hailing from non-governmental organizations, government employees and activists from different segments which included secretary of National AIDS Control Organisation, Director of the social welfare department (Bihar), CRPF (Patna central)inspector, health practitioner, social activists and many such people who influence society in numerous ways. Besides physical interviews, some of the interviews and information were also exchanged over WhatsApp and telephonic conversations. The study also consists of observation and discussions with people hailing from various sections of society which extends to caste, class, occupation and region. Additionally, information was collected from government sites, newspaper, journals and books as well.

***Basic Amenities in Kamla Nehru Nagar***

As a precursor to discuss economic rights of *hijras*, in this section, an attempt has been made to describe the habitat of hijras in a bid to capture the plight of hijras. Kamla Nehru Nagaris very close to the Patna Railway station. The place is one of the slum areas and is mostly inhabited by daily wage labourers (such as construction site workers, cleaners, rickshaw drivers, shopkeepers, washer men, etc), cloth vendors, auto drivers and people involved in various menial jobs. In Patna there are total seven houses of *hijra and Kinnars*, in different corners of city. There are two in centre of city i.e. near railway station, one in old Patna city (also called Patna city or old city). Gharanas in the old Patna city is one of the oldest houses. Another one is located near Kankarbagh which is one of the largest colonies of Asia spread in 900 acres. Rest four are located at outskirts of city. The one located near Kankarbagh is also a prominent among rest of the houses as the eldest Guru or rather the one who established this one contested municipal election and also won it.

Though she passed away few years back, one of her protégé has recently filed for another election, but her candidature is still not confirmed. The eldest member staying in the city house too contested municipal election, but she could not make it with difference of very few votes. Other than these two houses, rest of them is located at places which lack basic amenities (drainage system, dumping point and well-constructed roads), lack hygiene, and are housed in the slums of the city, two of which are located across railway tracks. In fact, most of them stay at encroached lands. They are denied buying land because of the stigma attached to them, (as informed during interviews) and can be removed by the government at any point of time. Transgender people here live in houses which are not even properly electrified which make them prone to accidents. The staircase doesn't even have sufficient light during morning, and power cut is frequent. One of the houses was partially broken and a wall of it was covered with pile of garbage thrown by residents of nearby flats. In these houses one room was shared by four people, though the rooms were small enough to have even two people. This is because the Hijras stay with their Gurus and most of them are not allowed to visit their parental home as they are abandoned by their birth family. These illustrations capture contradiction that even if sexual minorities have their political representatives and anti-sodomy laws have been repealed, still the living conditions of the working-class queer are dismal. In spite of decriminalization of section 377, they live a life of fear and terror. Lack of social acceptance still keeps them under the scanner, and they become prey to many criminal offences as well as mental torture which sometimes costs them their lives.

It is important to elaborate on the identities of transgender and Hijra. The term transgender is an umbrella term wherein a person's personal identity does not correspond with their birth sex. Hijra/Kinnar are transgender but again, they form community whose economic and social structures are different from the mainstream society. Though some hijras use the local term "Kinnar", some others prefer to identify themselves as hijras as asserted by a hijra:

*"Do you know what does the term Hijra mean? Hijra is a very beautiful word, which comes from Urdu/Arabic language. It means one who leaves the society where he was born and forms a community of his own where everything is different from the common society. The way people live, family and kinship, way of earning and living. People don't know the beauty of the word but use it as an abusive term.*"

(Excerpt from interview of one of the Kinnars 27.5.2019)

II

Citizenship as Hines (2009) defines, broadly refers to political membership through exercising rights and responsibilities and having access to benefits and resources. Exercising our rights as citizens is decided by opportunities provided to us by the state. As Singh and others (2013) point out that it was parallel events such as growing urbanization and industrialization which brought together the sexual minorities. The growth in industrialization brought a change in the Indian joint family; people started moving from one place to another in search of job and better living opportunities. This also demanded an alternative for the previous family structure. Further, with postmodernism and post structuralism the concept of subjectivity (a person's sense of self) started to make room for itself (Hines; 2009) and this was witnessed through an increase in identity politics and awareness among people regarding identity and ethnicity. Learning from such movements for identity, rights and empowerment, the sexual minorities came together to fight for their rights and live life with equal opportunity. It is important to note over here that identity without rights is just a structure without a base. Today in context of India when we talk about transgender rights, they only have the right to vote and identity on paper. The issue arises when we talk about land right, right in parental property, right in the property of their partner and right to adopt child without SRS (Sex Reassignment Surgery). Besides this, concerns loom over the right to livelihood or gainful employment which has been the main theme of the paper besides civic rights.

***Co-option by the state in the cultural domain without economic incentive***

Before outlining exclusion of transgender people in welfare scheme in Bihar, it is imperative to discuss about the contradictions in the conduct of the state machineries which points to areas of inclusion and closure. Post-NALSA and repeal of IPC 377, recognition and identity question has been addressed to some extent, yet the struggles for livelihoods remain. This directs us to their economic rights and hijras' involvement in cultural programs organised by state government underpins this aspect. The Hijra community in Bihar has

worked for the state government on many platforms as part of government's awareness program regarding consequences of child marriage, female foeticide and menstrual hygiene awareness. One such step was taken by the government where it asked the Kinnar *kalajatha*, a group of Kinnars formed by Dostanasafar to perform for such events, to sensitise people about the evil system of dowry and child marriage since 2018. In return, the group's food and travel expenses were taken care of by the government but other than that no other incentives or honorarium were provided, leading them to live a life of deprivation. In fact, they went wherever they were called up by the transgender activists. The information was passed on to them a day or two ahead. They had to prepare a song and present it in front of the crowd. They invested their time which they could have otherwise used for *Badhayi*[2] or *Challa*[3] and earned something. But despite investing their time in the awareness they were provided nothing. It is worth noting here that neither transgender activists, nor feminists have an inclusive approach towards *hijra* community. Rather the state coopts the *hijras* through these civil society organisation leaders. Though *hijras* are involved in these cultural programs for the State, but their source of income, remains singing and dancing in *Badhayi*.

The *hijra* community has represented the culture of the State during occasions like Bihar Diwas, Rajgir Mahotsav and Guru Gobind Singh Jayanti to name a few. They are used by the government as tourist attraction during these events. Rajgir Mahotsav is celebrated for a three to four days event to mark the beginning of Hindi month Sawan during which new crops are sowed and it also reflects change in season from hot summers to rainy cloudy monsoon. Sawan month is celebrated as it is believed to be the season of farmers. It is held in Rajgir, owing to the fact that Rajgir is one of the historical places of Bihar for housing the relics of one of the oldest universities, Nalanda, and is also one of the tourists spots of Bihar. Further during Bihar Diwas also the Kinnar Kala Jatha is asked to perform.

It has also preserved the local traditions of the State and one of them being singing Sohar. Along with that they have preserved some of the oldest local songs sung during marriages and festivals like Chhath Puja. Earlier in the State, in any marriage the women from neighbourhood would come and sing

[2]This is a traditional source of livelihood of Hijras, wherein they go to residential areas wherever child is born or a marriage has taken place, they sing songs of blessing and dance in exchange of money.

[3]Challa refers to collection of money by Hijras during festival season. The term is widely used in Bihar for this activity.

*Geet* (local songs) for each of the ceremony. With gradual modernisation and class consciousness, these local language songs have now been replaced by Bollywood music. These gatherings of women during any ceremony were not just confined to singing *Geet*, but also brought a space of openness, sharing and bonding which they never got in daily life due to their household work.

Although the society has ignored Hijra community since long and may do not recognise their presence, yet the community by incorporating certain traditions and rituals of society, tries to show its historical origin as well as the musical heritage it has kept safe with it, i.e. Sohar. Sohar is one of the traditional songs sung generally on birth of a male child as a way to represent the happiness as well as to bestow blessings on the newborn. It was previously sung only on birth of male child, with change in time they (Hijra) sing it for female child too. The lyrics, however, remain same with the use of word *Lallna* which means a boy. Sohar is sung by Hijras of all Gharanas. Although some of them might go to the family of newborn child and sing whereas some are prohibited from doing so.

These Gharanas maintain hierarchy among themselves depending upon their source of income. Basically, they can be divided into three groups; i) higher ones – they are Gharanas whose economy is based on singing *Badhayi* (singing songs for newlywed couples and newborn babies) and seeking *Chanda* (money) during Hindu festivals. The rules regulations here are too strict and they are not allowed to seek alms in train or highways or even dance with some music band/group in marriages or birthday parties. They are bound to their Gharana and are not supposed to keep a man, marry a man, to stay out of the house where all the members are staying. In order to leave the house they are bound to inform their Guru on whom it depends if they are allowed or not. In case they are caught doing any of the work which is prohibited then they are banished from their respective Gharana. ii) Middle ones – they are the ones whose economy depends on *Badhayi*, begging in trains, or dancing in marriages and birthday parties. But they are not supposed to keep a man, so the notion of morality becomes the basis of their membership too. Thus, the Kinnars who do Badhayi, but simultaneously beg in trains, their social position is lower to the one who exclusively go for Badhayi. iii) Bottom ones– they are the ones whose earning depends upon sex work, begging in trains, highways, dancing in marriages or parties. The bottom ones are easiest to get an entry into but tough to get out of.

What explains indictment of *hijras and Kinnars* who do sex work? If at one level, hijras are socially accepted, considered to be part of society (Sahu, 2021), this tolerance derives from the notion of "renouncing penis",

masculinity and sexuality with the image of missing genitals and defunct genitals (Hossain, 2021). This act of renunciation of penis, renders them emasculated, confers upon them a divine and ascetic status and makes them "asexual". So, heteronormative Brahminical society compels hijras to follow a socially sanctioned asexual life. However, their rights to do sex work have not been recognised completely. Thus, when hijras, simultaneously involved in sexual activities, explored non-normative pleasures, and erotically inclined, they were ostracised (Hossain, 2021).Besides hierarchy on the basis of occupation, difference is noticed on the basis of caste as reported by one of the activists. Caste variation is evident in their preference to stay in gharanas or Garima Greh (shelter-homes for transgender):

*Those hailing from lower caste easily join the Gharana because at least their parents know that their child (transgender) would be fed well. Whereas a transgender person coming from upper caste like Bhumihar is not easily allowed by their family to get into the gharana or Garima Greh because it becomes a matter of shame.*

It needs to be mentioned here that the gender-normatives think differently about transgender people. Most of them still don't accept that one can live a life of one's chosen gender and there can be people beyond the boundaries of male and female. Since we all grow up with the knowledge of having a fixed body, we fail to believe that our gender is structured by the society and gender cannot be fixed according to the body. Therefore, the government appropriates the bodies of transgender people as a display for such a gender-binary society. The latteris not much interested into knowing what they are performing for, but are more interested in how they (*hijras*) are performing? To explore how a person with body of man wearing Sari looks when she dances? They get involved into such events with the patriarchal gaze, which has since long fixed 'vulgarity' and 'obscenity' into a non-binary and gender non-confirming bodies. The ignorance of society, deprivation, marginalisation, isolation as well as suffering of transgender people becomes food for the state to satisfy its greed of power and dominance. On one hand the state pretends to become the well-wisher of transgender community, on the other it earns through their labour alongwith that creates a face of being a welfare State which takes care of all its citizens irrespective of any categorisation. However, in concrete terms, hijras earn nothing to fill their stomach.

***Economic Hardship and suicide***

State's double speak is most evident when we actually unpack The Transgender Act. Even if hijras earning comes primarily from Badhayi and

Challa, in recent times, uncertainty prevails from multiple fronts. Now, most of the traditional songs are recorded but not widely used. The *Kinnar*group, whenever they visit any marriage ceremony or engagement, perform these songs. Uninvited and unwelcomed by the mainstream population, they work hard to make ends meet.

However, things got worse during pandemic. Sprawling of gated communities added to their woes and this amounts to dwindling of their earnings. In housing societies, they are barred from crossing the gatedue to increased surveillance fearing of them spreading Corona virus. Mostly the marriages take place at either some community centre or hotels which too restrict the entry of Kinnars. This exacerbated their economic hardship since they were not getting sufficient badhayi to survive. Most of them returned in empty hand to gharanas. Their physical mobility was completely stopped during the lockdown and the State which until now used them as one of the tools for representing culture and spreading awareness, completely sidelined them when they needed help the most. Unable to bear the tough economic time by sitting idle at gharanas, many ended up taking their lives. In such a situation, Kinnars with the help of some of its leaders approached social workers and institutions – missionary college as stated earlier- to provide relief by raising fund. It was with their help that Kinnars survived.It is worth noting that this missionary college has always been a support to the transgender community as it organises special programs for them during the Christmas where it not only recognises them as members of society but also gives away gifts. Besides this it also imparts vocational training like sewing so that Kinnars can draw income. The underlining point is the activities which should be initiated by the government is being initiated by the missionary college.

If the above insights demonstrate the expropriation of Kinnars by the Bihar government for the cause of cis-gender society while abandoning them during the time of distress like pandemic, Kinnars too were exploited in the Hindu majoritarian project. One of the *Hijra (Muslim)* community members on being asked what are the festivals they celebrate, she said

*"we celebrate every festival irrespective of it being a Hindu festival or Muslim festival, god created everyone same, why should we discriminate based on religion."*

Speaking about betrayal of the Hindu Akhadas, a Kinnar (Hindu) who was part of Kinnar Samadaya which follows Kinnar Akhada told:

*"We were born Hindus, if you see our lineage, it comes from the Ramayana where we waited for Rama to return from his exile of 14 years. But we were*

*given recognition in the Mughal era, you can trace our presence in Hamams and in protecting the queens. But in spite of calling ourselves Hindus, what do we get, no respect, nothing. We have our Akhadas too, but it has been given no recognition by the 13 Akhadas."*

Hidustan Times (Rawat 2021) too reported the same concerns which throws light on the mobilisation of Kinnars for Hindu majoritarianism, yet exploiting them by not including them as Akhadas:

"*Notably, in a recent meeting of AkhilBharatiya Akhada Parishad held at Prayagraj, a resolution was passed regarding non-recognition of so-called Kinnar Akhada, Pari-Akhada and Viswa Adhyatm Akhada by terming them as false Akhadas. …Opposing this move, Hari Giri Maharaj (pro-Kinnar Akhada)warns to resign from Akhada Parishad, if Kinnars are not included and given right to take holy Ganga dip during Haridwar Mahakumbh… They remain divided on this'*

Both field and journalistic evidence encapsulate the concept "homopopulism" and rise of religious fundamentalism. In late 90s, one of the members won the ward election, but she was not portrayed as a public representative but as a mockery for the previous corrupt and dysfunctional ward members. According to voters, it was the impotency of Kaalihijra which reflected the work of previous elected members and that's why they elected her without any expectation to work. During her tenure she started to work for improving governance in her ward but later was brought down due to her gender being under question.

Unlike any other citizen of the country even Hijras also become numbers for vote banks though it was a struggle for them to even be enumerated in voters list despite being rightful citizen. The only thin line is that they are marginalised among the marginalised. Struggle for access to resources, basic rights like housing, food, water, etc arises due to the certain provisions in the schemes like submission of identity certificate, which points to the contestations around the Transgender Persons (protection of rights) Act, 2019. After article 377 was removed, in November of 2019, the parliament passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights Bill) and declared it as Act (henceforth TPA) wherein the act mentions about identifying a person as Transgender based on certificate of identity provided by District Magistrate. TPA talks about identity but is silent on other benefits such as reservation wherever needed (Sahoo2022). This ascribed citizenship is still not very secure as social and cultural acceptance cannot be brought only through legal rights. Additionally, the government through TPB, focused on homogenisation

of transgender persons through SRS, only through which they would be able to claim their citizenship (Saria2019). Further, TPA while talking about reconciling *hijras* with their family members and terming *Challa* and *Badhayi* as "begging" demeans their history. *Badhayi* and *Challa* are the cultural and economic structure which makes the *hijra* community different from other transgender persons. Further, this is based on their belief in themselves having heavenly power to bless people. For us it might be superstitious but for them it is their belief. Seen in other way, through the Bill, the government also tries to shun down the religious diversity among the community as there exists Jogappas, Shivshaktis,Kinnars, Kothis and more such communities who have their own religious and cultural ways of life. Saria (2019) in this context also argues that though the 2014 judgment recognised the third gender, it led towards collapsing of various differences between other contextual gender. If NALSA speaks about self-certification, TPA reverses it by asking for SRS. Consider the following annoying response by a transgender activist:

*"How can anyone tell what we feel inside our heart? Does anyone know what pain we go through for sustaining our lives? Who knows what goes inside our heart? You are girl, you feel like one. I was born in wrong body, I never wanted to be a man. Since my childhood I always felt like girl. I enjoyed playing with them, getting dressed up like them. How can any doctor ever say what we feel from inside, even if they operate our heart they will never get to know."*

SRS creates problem at two levels, one, hijras have to spend money for this which they cannot afford and second, it invites them to all kind of health risks which is condemned by queer activists and health right activists. The problem lies not just with the Bill, but also the manner in which state machineries or bureaucrats rationalises the bill by making a false binary between fake and real. For instance, on being questioned about the formation of Transgender welfare board, the director of social welfare department opined that the word transgender has become a mockery and anyone comes and claims to be transgender. Therefore, according to him, TPA was very important:

"*I am explaining it to you. Married males having kids and wife, put on Sari and start begging in train. They fake themselves as Kinnars. This is what is happening now. Doesn't the Supreme Court say that if someone declares himself as transgender he/she is transgender. So, such people declare themselves as transgender. It is important to have the Bill, so they can be certified as TGs*"

(Excerpt from the interview of social welfare director taken on 26.9.2018)

***Concern of Civil Rights***

If sustaining a life is contingent on a decent job, equally, protection from harm and violence is another precondition for living in the world. So how do we see protection of hijras from these threats and vulnerabilities? Consider the following excerpts:

*We seek for minimum 2000 to rupees 5000. But people have problem in giving this amount too. They spend lakhs on their daughter or son's wedding. But when we ask for money they call the police. There was one wedding where we just asked for money. The man went inside saying he is giving us the money, but instead called the police. We were later thrashed by them and the man abused us. So, we left.*

(As informed by one of the Kinnars who goes for Badhayi).

Illustration 2

*When these netas need vote they come to us seeking our blessings but when they win, they forget us. The local councillor won because of us but when I got looted of all my hard-earned money, they didn't even ask the police to enquire properly. The police just came, questioned us and went back. Till now we have got nothing.*

(As informed by an old *Kinnar* who lost her money in theft that took place at her place)

If the first illustration reflected the case of arbitrary arrest and physical abuse, the second illustration shows hijras vulnerability to theft, burglary, etc even after struggling to earn. Even if safety (physical safety and safety of property) has been a consistent topic of discussion during the conversation with the *hijras* and *Kinnars*, interestingly, cis-gender society and police see them as criminals, looters, instigators of conflict and abductors. So how do we comprehend these disarrays? The short answer is that the history of the criminalization of gender variance from colonial times is residually present in the imagination of the public as well as the criminal justice system (Lakkimsetti 2020).

***CTA and its metaphor for hijras***

In 1871, the British colonial state introduced the Criminal Tribes Act, under which hijras were regulated. The act mandated registration of hijras and their property and imposed a penalty on registered hijras appearing in female clothes or dancing in public or for hire. It gave power to magistrates to remove

male children under sixteen who were living with registered hijras and to prosecute them. The act's property registration component aimed to interfere with hijra inheritance and succession patterns and prohibited them from making wills or offering gifts. Moreover, this legal history etched into the public imagination the dominant colonial view of hijras as sodomites, kidnappers, and castrators (Lakkimsetti 2020). Even as Bacchetta (2013) points out, during the pre-colonial phase a dichotomy of discrimination and acceptance existed. In some regions where they were accepted, on the contrary there were certain portions of the land now marked as Indian territory where they were unaccepted. She further adds that in context of queer people there has been a difference in which they have faced discrimination in pre-colonial as well as post-colonial era. After being criminalised by British under CTA, a general perception of queer being 'abnormal' and 'threat' to the society was established, this notion widely prevails even today.

Sexuality and women were the two elements over which the colonisers established control in order to establish their authority, supremacy and which were given as reason for colonies being uncivilised. The belief that if a man has sex with another man, it would make him weak was prevalent among colonisers. Levine (2007)writes that in temperate Britain, reason was given preference over passion and a 'good' breed mattered more to them than people's sexuality and emotion. So, sex and sexuality started to be controlled since 19$^{th}$ century. Unrestrained sexuality became threat for empire. So same–sex practices, children born to unmarried couples, and exchange of sex for money started to be considered "wrong" and "immoral". Sex became a tool to judge a person's morality and thereby colonisers started to control it.

On one hand where, CTA criminalized *hijras,* laws like Cantonment Act 1864 and Contagious Diseases Act 1868, was brought up for forced health inspection and registration of prostitutes. The insensitiveness and stigma that the colonisers associated with the *hijra*is exemplified by Hinchy (2019), through murder account of Bhoora *hijra.* Despite being victim of murder and rape, they were criminalised by a British judge for being "unnatural" prostitutes, beggars and cross dressers. They were also suspected to be kidnappers and castrator of children and habitual sodomites; their elimination was done through formalising laws. Further the act also enabled administration to police their movement and keep surveillance on their activities. Consequently, they would confine to homes. The act hit their personal as well as public life since neither were those registered under the act allowed to dress up in their traditional attire (saree), nor were they allowed to perform in public or follow the kinship pattern they used to, that is discipleship, or what Hinchy (2014) refers as "fictive kinship"(as they didn't

share the same blood line yet during tough circumstances they were ready to bleed for each other).

A mass level of crime was done by the administrators themselves and innocents got targeted as criminals. Natural was not considered to be normal and truth was being painted with colours of lies, thereby repressing an identity which a person was made to fake throughout her life. Such discriminatory acts against *Hijras* created a criminal image of theirs in the public eye and also pushed them towards the edges of society. Instead of being accepted as persons with equal rights and being ensured a life of dignity, they started to be treated as threats to society, 'abnormal', 'fake', criminals. That image prevails today as we see in the discourse around identity certification from the doctor and subsequently from the magistrate in order to avail welfare benefits. Similarly, when hijras beg in the trains, people continue to perceive them through colonial prisms like criminals and abductors Even today as soon as a family finds out that the child doesn't confirm to either of the genders, the family hides the child or takes it to doctor thinking a medical practitioner might have some cure. This also gives an opportunity to hoaxes for earning money in name of treating a disease which never existed, or cleansing a body which never was possessed (as it is superstitiously believed), impure and abnormal. Moreover, 'abnormality' is a created condition. Everything we fail to understand we tag it as 'abnormal'. The world rotates between the dualities of normal-abnormal, natural-unnatural, perfect-imperfect, ugly-beautiful, and many more such terms which politicise the society and most of the times it is these terms which also create an existential crisis for many people.

III

**Discussion**

While using the concept of "homopopulism" this article encapsulated the gap between political mobilisations and welfare concerns of sexual minorities. As populism is centred on thin based ideology and devoid of constitutionalism, concerns prevail over substantial and welfare rights of the working-class queers. Field insights showed that hijras are denied basic amenities and struggles compound when we reflect on their livelihoods which are actually the responsibility of a welfare state. It depicted economic precarity of hijras despite the state coopting them for tourism and cultural industry while mainstream society forgets them for being the repository of Bihar's folk arts. If well-ventilated housing, sanitation, ration, etc are crucial to prevent COVID-19 along with a decent income, these were almost absent in the case of working-class queers and a tokenistic approach is seen in the actions of the

ruling class. If state's apathy was highlighted through suicide cases during the pandemic, instances of physical violence and theft underpins the manner in which machineries ignore civic rights of hijras. In the language of Jayal (2013) such activities by the State, which claims to be welfarist and democratic, citizens who lack the basic amenities and who are not part of the mainstream society are reduced to subjects. They are just enumerated as population of the country but their identity is never brought into account. This leads to the creation of subject-citizen duality (Jayal2013). Also, this article underpinned a disjuncture between the judiciary and the legislative in recent times by the latter pushing for Transgender Act which rights activists fear will crush their bargaining power that NALSA judgement offered. Second, contention is whether legal reform is sufficient for the disenfranchised people like queer considering the fact that the community is heterogenous. Furthermore, if the mental scaffolding of the state functionaries continues to be heteronormative and Brahminical, to what extent legal reform can guarantee its implementation. Hindutva ideology has always been a propagator of Brahmanical patriarchy which is visible in the manifestation of Hindutva nationalism that condemns the presence of minority community in India, therefore threatening its secular base. Such an idea of nationalism is homophobic and xenophobic as it creates a suppressive and regressive environment which is not at all inclusive. In such environment idea of citizenship also becomes contradictory and conflicting tense situation is created.

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**Article: Special School Setting as a Learning Environment: The Context of Uniparental (Mothers) Group in Telangana State**

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# Special School Setting as a Learning Environment: The Context of Uniparental (Mothers) Group in Telangana State

--A. Mahalakshmi

## Abstract

There are very few studies on uniparental group of special needs children and inception of such groups in Indian context. The existing literature is mainly focused on interactions between family-disability-society, majority of which focus on intellectual and learning disabilities. However, the influence of family and societal dynamics on development of cohesiveness in caring for their children with disabilities in Indian setting has not received much attention. The present paper is significant in bringing out the interface between parents (mothers) and special schools in building the network among mothers of children with sensory impairment, and the importance of such an interface in formation of mutual support group. The relevant data were collected by employing techniques of informal group discussions and participant observation. It is found that the special schools serve as a "socio-familial space" for the mothers of visually impaired children, who play a crucial role in the education of these children.

*Key words: Special school, Mothers' group, Parents' participation, Children with disabilities.*

### Introduction

Motherhood is a new and exciting experience for every married woman, for it is considered to be the next most important event after her marriage. A woman not only wants to become a mother but also aspires to be the best mother to the best child. One is aware that "the best mother" and "the best child" are normative categories historically constructed. It is, nevertheless, true that motherhood as a personal experience is emancipatory and transformative for women. The reality, however, is that every child is unique and may not necessarily conform to the ideals of "the best child", even for that matter, to the very idea of "normal child". Such deviation from normativity often becomes a problem to the mother more than to the child. The present paper deals exactly with this challenging arena that hardly finds place in mainstream academic literature.

The paper is based on the fieldwork carried out in a special school for the blind in Hyderabad. The prime focus was on a group of parents (mothers and grandmothers to be specific) who took upon themselves the responsibility for

educating their children with special needs despite all odds. The parent group for the purposes of the study, therefore, generally refers to this group of mothers and grandmothers who organize themselves as a network.

Groups are generally formed to serve the interests of their members, to achieve the set goals, to gain identity and to extend mutual help and support to each other. One of the main functions of every group, be it small or large, is to develop new relations and strengthen association between the members. The present study finds that the commonality in everyday routines of mothers who bring their children with disabilities to the school under reference is one of the key factors for them to come together as a group. All of them bring their children to the school from different parts of the city every morning; spend their whole day before they pick up the children back to home. One finds this routine unique because mothers in other scenario would not have to undertake such an exercise. Mothers of this group, for example, would have been working women if not for their decision to spend their time exclusively for schooling their children. This is exactly what cultivated the interest to look into the nature, composition and functioning of this group.

Currently parents in India have access to a wide range of resources on child rearing in general, but a lot of these resources remain irrelevant for parents having children with disabilities. Mothers, therefore, often become inventors to find solutions for challenges they face in rearing children with special needs. Like all other parents, parents of children with disabilities also strive to plan for the educational, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities of their children.

**Methodology**

The findings of the present paper stem from an intensive fieldwork conducted in selected special schools in Telangana state as part of my doctoral research. The fieldwork for my research was carried out across four special residential schools. I spent around two years in the field, conversing with various stakeholders: students, teachers, parents, hostel staff, government officials in the Departments of School Education and Disabled Welfare, and volunteers from non-governmental organisations who visited these schools frequently. But the findings in this paper are limited only to one school.

The findings in this paper are drawn from the fieldwork conducted in DR[i] School for the blind, the only residential school for visually impaired in Hyderabad offering special education with English as the medium of instruction. The fieldwork in this school was carried out for 6 months (June-December 2018). Quite contrary to the initial expectation, the ethnographic

research of this institution had its own challenges. In the first phase, there was a cumbersome process involved in obtaining information from the management, introducing myself as a social science researcher to the respondents and operationalising the research in the field. Secondly, I also had to deal with the support staff both in the school and hostel with extra care in conversing with the respondents. Finally, making parents understand the research objectives was an uphill task in itself. Mothers didn't often speak up their minds, and I had to spend long hours for gaining confidence in order to collect the relevant data.

One of the key factors that drew my attention to explore further about the parental group was a specific pattern of group formation and the practices of the members of this specific group formed over a period of time. It is at this backdrop that the research was conducted using the technique of informal group discussion under the rubric of participant observation as core methodology. Mothers of the same age group, similarity of their family backgrounds and personal issues, their like-mindedness and their experience in bringing up children with visual impairment were some of the major criteria in forming informal groups for the purpose of the present study. Besides the informal group discussions, equal amount of time was spent in one-to-one discussions with the respondents. The discussions revolved around the issues of being a mother to disabled child, ill-treatments mothers received from none other than their spouse and family members, their precarious position at family gatherings and functions, accepting and responding to perceptions of bearing a disabled child, strategies to cope up with unforeseen challenges in rearing a disabled child, and the involvement of mothers in the school. My participation in activities of parents in the school facilitated greater rapport with the parents. This in turn helped in delving deep into everyday routines and encounters of uniparental (mothers) group. The data related to various aspects of Parents-Family-Society were collected.

**The school setting**

DR School for the Blind is run by a Trust founded in 1991. The trust was established by a prominent ophthalmologist, and at the time of the fieldwork the doctor and his wife were still in charge of the affairs. The school was formally inaugurated in July 1992 with 10 children. The main objective of the school is 'to provide opportunities for the visually challenged children in India on international standards so that they can be absorbed in the mainstream of society as socially productive individuals'.[ii] DR School for the Blind is situated in Begumpet, one of the prime locations in the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad. Begumpet is one of the major commercial and

residential areas. But DR School belongs to that part of Begumpet which is surrounded by a highly polluted drainage channel flowing from Hussainsagar. The school has a residential facility, besides which a few students are also allowed to attend as day scholars.

At the time of the fieldwork there were 210 visually impaired children enrolled in the school, making it the largest residential special school in Telangana State. Of those registered students, 130 (62%) were boys, and 80 (38%) girls. It was a ratio of 8 girls for every 13 boys. These children came largely from middle and lower middle classes. There were 16 teachers working on a salary basis, and a number of others would come and offer their services voluntarily.

DR invites parents to take active part in both teaching and administrative roles of the school. It may, perhaps, be appropriate to say that the school is run substantially through voluntary services offered by the parents and their friends. It is also pertinent to mention that parents in this case are largely mothers. The school is probably the largest recipient of generous help from outside both in material and non-material means. It is, for example quite a common practice for volunteers to come and offer their services for a specified duration. These volunteers are often trained students in music, dance, sports, soft skills, communication, language skills etc. Some of them volunteer even as classroom teachers similar to several parents.

**Composition and organisation of the group**

The parental group under reference consists of twenty five mothers and three grandmothers. Of the three grandmothers, one of them is a paternal grandmother and the other two are maternal grandmothers. One of the grandmothers has been leading them for several years. The common pattern in this group is that except two, all other children were first born and were identified to have been got affected with visual impairment. Except one, all are boys. Mothers and grandmothers in this group bring their children to the school every day from various parts of the city. As mentioned earlier, a large number of them migrated to the city primarily to facilitate quality English medium education to the disabled children. While these mothers and grandmothers stay back in the school till the end of the day to take their children back home after the school, there are few fathers and other male family members who usually drop their children in the morning and pick them up after the school hours in the evening.

Depending upon the distance and their economic conditions, some mothers commute by auto rickshaws while others travel by public transport systems

such as buses. Once they are fully convinced that their children are independent, they send them to the school by auto rickshaws. Mothers eventually find some job and contribute to their respective families.

It is found that majority of parents are not permanent residents of the city. As mentioned earlier, most of them moved to the city in the hope of providing good education to their disabled children. It must be stated that the educational opportunities for children with disabilities are largely restricted to a few urban areas. As a consequence, a parent willing to get his/her disabled child educated in an appropriate environment has no choice but to practically migrate to the city where a decent educational opportunity is available. Most of the mothers in the parent group under reference, indeed, belong to this migrated category. Uniquely in this case, while fathers find employment according to their skill sets, mothers typically devote their full time for their disabled children instead of building their own careers.

**Special school as learning environment**

The day-to-day routines of these mothers are not drastically different from other women whose primary duty is to manage home and provide care to the needy members of the household. One major difference, however, is that the mothers of children with disabilities have an extra responsibility of shaping their children as independent individuals. This includes: teaching them daily living skills, orienting them to new people and new places, training them in social skills and coping mechanisms. Unfortunately, mothers in India not only lack family and institutional support but also have no educational resources to handle their disabled children. Mothers, therefore, always have to either innovate on their own or learn from the peers in a similar situation. It is worth pointing out that the sole responsibility of a child with special needs falls entirely on the mother. In their quest to fulfil the obligations rested on this regard, mothers of children with special needs have to equip themselves with the necessary capabilities on medical intervention, access to appropriate facilities, educational and career opportunities, etc. As the members of the group admitted during the fieldwork, having a child with special needs is quite a painful experience in the first place. It suddenly changes their world view and brings down their expectation. So the journey of their motherhood begins on a disappointing note. Interestingly, however, as mothers travel the road with determination, each disappointment generated through social encounters strengthens their resolve to bring up their children as best as they can and to prove the critics wrong.

Members of the group under reference were found spending time together during the school time when their children were in the classrooms. At first sight it gave an impression that it was a simple gossiping group passing time. Given the serious nature of discussions at times, the researcher slowly started observing their conversations, only to realise that theirs was a serious, purposeful group serving as "socio-familial space"[iii]. Each member in the group has something to give and something to take back in terms of sharing their experiences and listening to that of others. It may not be an exaggeration to state that this group serves as an enabling space for mothers, for it is here that they feel empowered to freely speak out their minds and seek suggestions to face the challenges in their everyday routine.

Several studies on parents' groups of children with disabilities carried out in western countries have focused on aspects ranging from effectiveness of group to public policy for parents of children with disabilities. The study by Solomon et al. (2001) examined the relevance and utilisation of mutual support groups for the parents of children with disabilities in Greater London. They found that, in the case of parents of children with disabilities, mutual support groups are effective in developing a sense of control and agency in the outside world.

Experiential knowledge and its sharing plays a significant role in parenting. The effect from triadic sources such as family, society and intrinsic factors of a child create a situational crisis for parents of children with disabilities, especially for the mothers in rearing children with disabilities. The coping strategies in such kind of situations are illustrated by experienced mothers in the group. The mothers' group provides a free flowing space for its members to share their challenges and effective ways to tackle with them.

Information regarding medical care and education for these children appears to be more important for the mothers of children with disabilities. The information related to various hospitals, best treatment and services available for children with visual impairment and multiple disability are discussed and shared among themselves. Education related information such as braille learning centres and computer learning centres for visually impaired children, better colleges for visually challenged, courses appropriate for them etc., are also shared by the members of the group. The similarities and differences in their experiences shared by the old members of the group serve the newly joined mothers.

This group acts as a potential help for members during exigencies. For instance, if someone falls sick, or in the case of sudden arrival of guests, the

nearby parent takes the responsibility of dropping and picking up the child. Sense of belongingness among themselves and with the children is very much evident in their everyday life. Having disabled children appears to be a unifying factor in developing a sense of belongingness.

The group functions as an initiator of women's empowerment. When some mothers in the group regretted that their husbands and in-laws do not care much about these children, one of the grandmothers furiously said: '*after finishing your children's primary education, join immediately in some work so that no one can question you.'* The grandmother's stricture sits well with the general proposition that economic independence offers autonomy to a woman in the family. Sharing her daughter's experience, the grandmother explained: "when my daughter's in-laws and husband said they are not going to spend money on her child with multiple disabilities, she never felt deprived as she was economically independent". She further went on to suggest that if anyone passes disgraceful comments on having a special child, one should reply: '*God knows that I am capable of taking care of a special child, and that's why he gave us one and we are proud parents'.* In many instances, seniors in this group console the newly joined mothers and empower them by illustrating their own experiences.

**The active role of parents in schooling**

There is a growing recognition of parents' participation in children's education. Involvement of parents in school activities is essential for a disabled child to adapt to the school environment, and it is considered to be one of the indicators of effective schooling. I found a constant interaction between parents and the school, and various ceremonies and celebrations acted as the cementing force for such an interaction.

Along with national festivals, the school celebrated various regional and religious festivals. One among such is *Shravana masam*[iv]. Every year during *Shraavana masam* (August-September), with equal contribution from all the parents, the group provides lunch for the children. On the day, they make it a point to invite parents of the children who passed out of the school, particularly those who played an active role in the mothers group. The menu is prepared keeping in view the money received from the members, number of people to be served, member's preferences, and their fondness of children. Everyone gathers early in the morning and make all the preparations to celebrate it as a memorable event. The responsibilities of organising the festival are shared among the members, taking into account their familiarity

with shops and services in the city. The lunch is prepared by themselves without seeking any help from the school staff.

The feeling of responsibility rather than mere yearly routine is clearly explicit in their voluntary efforts to make the event a grand success. These parents feel that all the children are their own children and it is their privilege and responsibility to care for and spend time with them. After serving food to everyone, all the mothers have their lunch together at the dining hall. Finally, memories of the day are captured with a group photograph along with the warden. This is the most engaging festival of the year. It functions as an orientation and socialisation process to all the newly joined mothers. Apart from this, they actively participate in coordinating the children in many other occasions and happenings.

Participation of parents in policy making is legalised even with the parents of children with disabilities in some of the western countries. The need for and importance of parents' participation in designing educational programmes for students with disabilities from culturally diverse backgrounds are illustrated by Chinn (1979). Immigrant Chinese Canadian parents of children with disabilities in the province of British Columbia is analysed by Lai and Ishiyama (2004). They find that the Chinese Canadian parents' participation in education of their disabled children is less when compared to parents of non-disabled children in Canada. In continuation, Trainor (2010) comes up with challenges after the legalisation of parents' participation in special education of youth with disabilities. The role and impact of Bourdieu's (1986) cultural and social capital in decision making processes in special education was illustrated. Trainor cautions that "positioning parents as partners or collaborators in special education processes has the potential to exacerbate inequity, creating access for some families and ignoring existing barriers for others".

Except few studies, not much has been done on parents' participation in Indian scenario. Beteille (1994) brought out the women's participation in schooling of children in describing role of school as an institution in mediating relationship between family and new occupational system in India. But there is less focus on participation of parents in education of children with disabilities in Indian context.

Voluntary participation of parents in providing quality education for their children is explicit in studied group. All the mothers in the group except one purchased braille slates and stylus. The purpose of learning braille for them is to cross check their children's learning levels of braille, as they feel learning

braille is a foundation for their children's education. They learn braille by seeing braille letter chart, from primary school teachers in the school and braille teaching centres. As learning braille in braille teaching centre is expensive (Rupees 300/- per month), they prefer to learn by using braille letter chart and also by requesting primary school teachers. Activities of mothers reflect their understanding of braille script as an essential script in education of children with visual impairment. And also their strategies in preparing the children to sustain in further education.

**Unanticipated experience to mastery**

Childbirth in India is a qualitatively different experience when compared to the western scenario. In the western context one hardly finds either matrilocal or patrilocal system of residence, which effectively leaves the childbirth as an essentially a conjugal affair — a life-cycle event just between the wife and husband. But in most parts of India, patrilocal residence is the common practice, and the husband's family exercises enormous influence over childbirth choices. Given the socio-cultural significance attached to the childbirth, there is an undue pressure on mother not just from her in-laws but even her own family, community and society at large when the new-born baby does not turn out to be on expected lines. Thus, the disabled child brings about a wholesome change in the family, between the wife and husband, daughter-in-law (the disabled child's mother) and her in-laws, and even the disabled child's mother and her own parents. The most egregious consequence is that the family having a disabled child is subjected to everyday stigma, and mother is the most targeted victim as if she is responsible for everything.

On top of everything, no guidance is available for young mothers on how to bring up children with disabilities, least on how to handle the pressures consequent upon giving birth to a disabled child. For many mothers, a disabled child is unexpected and undesired, and the future looks quite uncertain to them. They are suddenly thrown into a confusion, left to themselves to face too many consequences. So, coping with a disabled child is a challenge on multiple fronts.

Burton (1975) tells us that many factors go into rearing a special child: "attitudes of the children, parents, extended kin, socio-economic status, ethnic origins and religious beliefs." They all play a considerable role in the way in which mothers cope up with rearing their chronically sick or handicapped children. A mother's social and economic status play an equally important role in her coping strategies. But they do not always have a straightforward relationship. In an interesting observation, McConnell et al. (2014) suggest

that high social support and low financial hardships can be enabling factors for raising children with disabilities and behavioural problems. This certainly goes against the general understanding that higher social status is the key for a better childrearing.

Besides the family and society, the state has a larger role to play in the lives of people with disabilities and their parents. Parents of children with disabilities in western societies are upfront in recognising this fact and therefore ask for participation in policy formulation. Working parents in particular are by now successful in securing a place to have their say in matters of public policy. In a specific case of research that concerns with public policy and parents of children with disabilities, Brandon (2000) explores the child care utilisation by working parents of children with disabilities and its impact on parents, children and families at large. Brandon believes that child care provisioning facilitates parents not only to plan effectively for child development but also to consolidate their role as better citizens. He therefore advocates for a systematic policy intervention and for a comprehensive understanding of the effects of such an intervention. Child care provisioning is only a starting point for such an exercise. It may be useful to point out here that the discussion on the place of parents in public policy discourse in India is yet to see the light.

The discussion on parents of children with disabilities in the Indian context is focused largely on 'individual and social dimensions of disability and their intersection in family life' (Chakravarti, 2008). Moving a step further, Vaidhya (2008, p. 34) studies the role of parent driven organisations and their role in facilitating familial coping strategies. Vaidhya tells us that the parent driven organisations are effective in building a community of "co-sufferers".

***Family response to birth of a special child***

The mother is the first member of the family to accept the birth of a disabled child, albeit under an emotional shock of her own. I learned from the parents group under reference that most mothers come to grips with the reality, get themselves out of the sudden shock (for they can hardly expect any support from others around them); and on top of everything they have to start convincing their husbands and the remaining family members to accept the new-born. In very rare cases fathers take up this role and try to convince the mother and the other family members. The parents group under study had only one instance where mother turned hostile against the disabled child, almost disowning her baby girl. But the father became emotionally attached to the daughter and took care of her on his own. As stated above, this is only a very rare instance, and the general scenario is that husbands blame their wives for

giving birth to disabled children, as if women have the full control over childbirth.

Mothers in the study said in a chorus, "the most painful part of giving birth to a disabled child is to wait for our husbands to accept the child. We didn't know how long it would take for them to own our disabled children, and we were not even sure whether they would really accept the reality." My conversations clearly reveal a great uncertainty on the part of mothers about the acceptance levels of their disabled children into their families. This adds an enormous psychological pressure to mothers already burdened with the stigma of giving birth to a disabled child.

The acceptance levels of a disabled child may be contingent on a variety of factors: the mother's kinship relationship with her in-laws' family, the gap between marriage and conception, the child's gender, his/her performance in the school, the socio-&-economic status of the family, etc. Mrs. LI, the mother of the boys in the first standard said that initially her husband did not show any interest on their special child. He did not even buy toys for the child to play, for he thought that it would be a waste of money. The father was quite reluctant to play with the boy and did not spend time with the child as a consequence.

Mrs. LI's husband started spending time with his son after seeing his impressive performance in studies. He gradually started buying toys and other study essentials for the boy, treating him like any other child. What is clearly evident in this case is that the father's affection towards the disabled child was guided purely by latter's performance in his studies. Though this is true in many instances, it cannot be taken as the defining characteristic of familial relationships involving children with disabilities all the time. The researcher also came across other instances where grandparents took special care of their grandchildren with disabilities when their daughters-in-law happened to be their own nieces.

The existing literature on parental attitude has focused largely on stress levels of having a child with disability, their adaptability, family dynamics and similarities and differences between and among the parents. The grief the parents experience after having a disabled child is often equated with the sorrow felt upon the death of a loved one (Turnbull and Turnbull, 2001). The initial grief is followed by a continuous stress, particularly if the special child is in need of constant care (Heiman, 2002). Caregiving is a lifetime challenge, and mothers are bound to bear the real brunt.

The efforts involved in bringing up a school-aged disabled child are often quite similar to those required for rearing a pre-school nondisabled child (Fink, 1988). Though some parents wish to opt for caregivers, it is often very difficult to find a suitable one for the job (Scott, 1988). I found higher stress among parents with disabled girl children than among those with disabled male children. In particular, parents in lucrative and prestigious careers experience far more stress than those working in middle and lower ranks. For the latter, rearing a disabled child is an economic liability, but for the former it is a social pressure.

There was almost a unanimous agreement among the parents in the study that though having a disabled child caused an initial depression (a serious agony in some cases) in the family, everybody would learn to come to grips with it over time. The findings of a study by Glidden et al.(2003), perhaps, also draws a similar conclusion in that it is argued that initial depression of having a disabled child is a short lived experience, and that parents and other family members adapt to the realities of life. What is striking is that religion becomes one of the effective coping mechanisms offering solace, comfort and hope in what looks like a family disarray. Mothers in particular adopt religion as a coping mechanism and also use it as a medium of expression (Gupta et al. 2012).

In a classic study on sorrow, Olshansky (1962) describes familial reactions to a child's disability as a natural response to a difficult situation, and not a neurotic reaction to an unnatural event. Olshansky's explanation is significant because it assigns agency to parents. Instead of merely treating them as reactive creatures, Olshansky considers them as agents capable of making adjustments in their familial relationships, adjustments demanded by the birth of a disabled child. Olshansky further suggests that the initial depression experienced by parents should not be treated as trivial, even when it is short-lived.

Arguing on the lines of Olshansky, Ferguson (2001) makes a case for parents' adaptability. Ferguson in his study found higher levels of adaptation in a group of parents in their late fifties, suggesting that over time, parents experience reduced stress and greater adaptability. Glidden et al. (2003) in their longitudinal study of mothers of children with intellectual disabilities also find that long term prognosis for adjustments to rearing children with disabilities is primarily positive. In a more focused study on the subject, , Gupta and Singhal (2004) highlight the post traumatic cognitive processes and recommend that parents should move away from negative outcomes and focus instead on positive perceptions.

One common thing in the studies on parents of children with disabilities cited above is that they focus exclusively on the needs, perceptions and behaviour of mothers. Fathers are usually evaluated for the support they offer to mothers. The substantive role of fathers in bringing up children with special needs is often overlooked, showing mothers as primary caregivers. So both in analysis and in practice gender bias of parenthood is clearly visible. This gender difference is also found in the way in which both the parents adapt to the birth of a disabled child. Studies tell us that mothers adapt to the reality more quickly than fathers (Pelchat et al. 2003).

***Dynamics of interaction***

As the basic unit of society, family can be an effective aid to mirror the larger whole. This is more so in the Indian context. As Gills (1997) puts it, "the everyday life of family is a balancing agent between the ideal and the actual" — an institution that oscillates between "the families we live by" and the "families we live with"' (cited in Patel, 2005). One of the authoritative figures in social anthropology Beteille (1994) says, "the family has been and continues to be one of the strongest institutions of Indian society, in all regions, among all communities and in all social sciences."

Family roles are described using two primary models: "Earner-Caregiver Model" (Gills in Patel, 2005) and "Boundary-role" (Parson in Anderson, 1977). These models remain equally relevant even in the Indian context. In the case of 'earner-caregiver' model, here in India father is considered as a breadwinner, and mother as a caretaker. But one only knows the limitations of this model when applied to everyday life. In many instances mother is the real breadwinner, but she is hardly recognised for that role. In a traditional social setup, fathers are entrusted with the affairs outside home, whereas the mother is solely responsible for everything inside home. Going strictly by this model, children's education, healthcare, leisure and recreation are the onus of the father, and cooking, feeding, indoor play, tutoring in basic life skills, etc. are the exclusive domains of the mother. This is clearly a 'boundary role model' in which domestic sphere is the object of demarcation.

My fieldwork interactions inform that neither of the models mentioned above — earner-caregiver and boundary role — seldom apply to families of children with disabilities. Since fathers show very little interest in children with disabilities, mothers take up their roles and do everything — from looking for an appropriate school to providing everyday care. Thus, mothers traverse the models by which one conceptualises the family roles. Besides parents, grandparents have an equally influential role in bringing up children and a

tuning family metrics to children's needs. They offer parents guidance and support, which become particularly crucial when the child is detected with any physical or intellectual limitations. The conversations in the field reveal that the support extended by paternal grandparents can become a game-changer for mothers, but such a support is likely to be forthcoming only in cross cousin marriages (in the case of Muslims it can be parallel cousin marriages as well). When grandparents stand by mothers, the coping and adaptation processes turn out to be quicker and easier.

A majority of mothers in the study said that their main source of support in coping up with the birth of a disabled child was from their parents (mothers in particular), and not from their in-laws. This implies that grandparents are often favourably disposed to a grandchild with a disability born to their daughters rather than to their daughters-in-law. In most cases parents are quick to come to the aid of their daughter when she gives birth to a special child, but they are reluctant to offer the same kind of support and solace if the mother of that special child happens to be their daughter-in-law. Thus, the mother of a special child finds a support mechanism at her natal home but has enormous challenges to face in her in-law's family. In the worst scenario, in-laws can attribute misfortune to their daughter-in-law, and such a superstitious belief may then turn into a lifetime stigma.

Mothers openly admit that paternal grandparents show a clear variation in the treatment of their disabled and nondisabled grandchildren. Such a variation becomes quite explicit when disabled children are prohibited from their participation in auspicious performances. Special children are isolated from their peers, and instructions are passed to the mothers of these children that they should make their kids sit in a corner in silence and not be seen until the performances/celebrations are completed. Though the isolation seems to be targeted at children with disabilities, in reality it implicitly implicates their mothers as well. Daughters-in-law having children with special needs are conspicuous by their absence during important family events. This is a recurring social assault as it is repeated on every auspicious occasion.

As daughters-in-law, mothers of children with disabilities are always treated as second to their co-sisters. Their motherhood is considered inferior. Their character is assessed on the pretext that it is their bad *karma* which is responsible for the birth of a disabled child. Even their religious devotion is questioned, because the popular belief is that children are God's gift decided based on a woman's character and devotion. All this creates in them a sense of separation, feeling of inferiority and loneliness. Naturally, then, there is an

increased level of psychological distress among mothers of children with disabilities (Crettenden et al. 2018).

It is pointed out on more than one occasion in this paper that maternal grandparents have more contact with mothers of children with disabilities when compared to paternal grandparents. But this constant contact may not always be positive. A review article by Sandler (1998) describes grandparents as source of both support as well as stress. Grandparents support for a disabled child's mother is rooted primarily in their affinity for their daughter rather than their love and affection for their disabled grandchildren. Like everyone around them, they too want their daughters to beget a non-disabled child. So, the mother of a disabled child has a constant pressure even from her own parents who expect her to prove herself as a normal woman, and the only way she can do it is to give birth to a child fulfilling the social norms of normalcy and perfection.

***Mothers' experiences from the field***

The impact of having a special needs child on mother ranges from harassment by spouse to denial of participation in family occasions and differential treatment by the society. Mrs. PL[1], a 32 year old woman has a 12 year old son named RL[1] who is studying sixth standard. She got married at the age of 12 years and gave birth to a girl child in her first pregnancy, in second pregnancy she gave birth to RL who is visually impaired by birth and this lead to friction with her husband and in-laws. Her husband started abusing her verbally as the first child is girl and second child is visually impaired though he is a boy. From Siddipet, they came to LVPI for the treatment of her son where she learned about a special school in Hyderabad and subsequently admitted her visually impaired son into the school and she herself started working there. School management allotted cleaning work for her and her husband was given the job of making paper cups. They have been residing in the same school since 8 years. Very recently her husband was diagnosed with tongue cancer. Now it is more burden to her as her daughter is at marriageable age, for which she has to save money and simultaneously spend on her husband's treatment. Above all, every day she has to face verbal abuse from her husband for no reason. She says "*he never helped me in taking care of RL and never talks to him and treats him very differently when compared to the other child."* Similar to others, she too received no help from her in-laws.

The consequence of giving birth to disabled child may go to an extreme situation such as threat to the life of the mother by her husband and in-laws. Issues of this kind are interlinked with many factors rather than just having a

disabled child. The position of a woman in defending herself is also webbed with factors i.e., her order of birth, gender of siblings and their economic status. From the mothers and staff in the school, it was learned that RH's mother was killed by her husband and his family. RH[1], 11 years old and BH[1], 12 years old are seventh standard students in the school. They come from a village in Telangana state and belong to agriculture family. RH's mother was the eldest daughter among four daughters in the family. She got married in her early age. Because she gave birth to visually impaired children though they are boys, her husband and in-laws started abusing her. They demanded divorce from her as they did not want her disabled children to inherit their property. As she was the eldest in her family, she did not want to put herself and the family at risk. She had a fear that her strained marriage and divorce would have a negative impact on the marriage of her younger sisters. Hence, she continued to tolerate physical and verbal harassment from her husband and his family. After few months there was a news that RH's mother was no more. Soon after her death her husband married another woman. Now only maternal grandparents are looking after RH and his brother BH.

The experience of Mrs. HB[1], a 34 year old braille teacher in the school reflects the family dynamics and position of mothers after giving birth to a disabled child. After twelfth standard, her parents arranged for her marriage with one of the relatives. Immediately after marriage she gave birth to a baby boy. After few months they identified some deviation in child's eyes and consulted many ophthalmic hospitals. In the process they came to Hyderabad for their son's eye corrective surgery and child survived with partial vision. It was during her hospital stay that she was informed about a special school where her son was admitted and she herself joined the school as a teacher. Along with her son, she too learned braille and eventually completed M.A. and B.Ed. in special education (VI) as well as other technical courses. Her son performed very well at every stage of education which she always feel the only achievement she had in her life.

As her son is the only special child in their entire family, handling the situation became a biggest challenge for her. All the help was extended by her mother, whereas mother in-law always ill-treated her. She hardly had any support from her husband in bringing up the child. She experienced extreme stress in dealing with her in-laws and relatives every day. She thought her son's performance in the school would change the attitude of her in-laws but it remained same as before. At every stage of her son's education, she stood for his ambitions.

In family gatherings and functions, Mrs. HB's mother in-law would ask her to sit aside in one corner and would never introduce her son as her grandson to relatives and others. As a consequence of such ill treatments she withdrew from attending gatherings and functions as she felt it is persistent insult to her. With all the psychological, physical and emotional pressures she started gaining weight and diagnosed with thyroid problem. Again after few years she developed severe headache and doctor diagnosed it as brain tumour. Every few months she has to undergo MRI to know the size of the tumour. In spite of the challenges in the journey of her life, she feels proud to be the mother of her son. She feels he is everything to her, he is son, brother and friend with whom she can share everything about her life.

In discussion, few mothers emotionally expressed that their in-laws feel bad for their sons however, they would never empathise with their son's children who are in actual need of care and support. One of the mothers emotionally said,

*'In spite of being women these mother in-laws never understand that their sons are also equally responsible for giving birth to a child. As if women are the only reason for bringing a special child onto to the earth, they always blame us and stamp us as misfortunate. The same will be imprinted in the minds of their sons. This makes us stressful and for the same kind of comments we have to give clarifications and defend ourselves every day.'*

With all the challenges from every angle, mothers become the primary teachers for teaching their children regarding daily living skills and communication skills. The experience of Mrs. HO[1], a 44 year old woman having a son with multiple disability, details the role of a mother in facing uncertain challenges. At the age of three months, her son was diagnosed with complete vision loss. As the time passed he was also diagnosed with Autism, difficulty in speech and communication. It was new for her as no one in their entire family had any child with multiple disability. She visited several hospitals and organisations for treatment and training for teaching daily living skills to child with multiple disabilities. But it was of no use for her in rearing the child. She felt, she was left alone in the world with her son. Her husband was a working man who was not available in her needy times. Even though her mother is educated she did not extend her hand to help her in nurturing her son. Then she started training her son by her own self. She taught him how to wear clothes, buttoning and unbuttoning, eating, leaving shoes or sandals, toilet training, how to open and close a tap while bathing etc. She recollects, teaching and training each activity to her son and to make him learn them to perfection took several months. She further expressed that handling children

with multiple disability is not just teaching and training daily living activities but dealing with their mood fluctuations is the biggest challenge. Initially for her it was very painful whenever she came across parents of non-disabled children as they were hesitant to even touch her son and used to treat her differently. In the process of taking her son to various hospitals, she came across other elders who suggested her to join the present school as a teacher where she could take her son along with. She joined the school and still continues to work there.

***Gendered Stigmatisation***

The impact of child's chronic illness on family is illustrated by Burton (1975). The diffusive effect on parents having a child with cystic fibrosis is discussed in detail. In explaining the same, Das and Addlakha (2001) adopts the concept of 'external body-selves' in illustrating the nature of spread of disablement beyond body. Authors say that, the locus of disability or disfigurement is not just 'in' the body of an individual but rather 'off' the body permeating to the family, kin and community. Similarly, Gray (2002) believes that Goffman's 'courtesy stigma'[v] is applicable to understand parents of children with High functioning autism. For him courtesy stigma is not just limited to the social occasion but it is a product of larger biographical relationship with their child and their known identity as the parent of a child with disability. Further, the author also points out that majority of parents' experience both types of stigma i.e. felt and enacted stigma as proposed by Scamber and Hopkins (1986) and the stigma experienced by mothers were greater than that of fathers.

The experiences of mothers also exemplify the courtesy stigma on having children with sensory impairment and multiple disability. Women with special children shared their experience that they are treated different by others at the time of travelling. Few of the women said that while they are travelling in buses every day, passengers in the bus stare at them differently which makes them to feel low and excluded in the society at large. It is not just a day experience but every day challenge for them.

In conversation with mothers in the school, it was learned that while they were passing through in public spaces most of the people, many a times make disgraceful comments. People passed comments like *'em paapam chesaro anduke ela ayyindi',* which means that having or giving birth to a special child is the result of sins or misdeeds of the parents. While sharing these experiences their eyes would fill with tears which reiterates the psychological trauma.

Despite all the challenges discussed briefly above, mothers put all their efforts to the welfare and future of the child. Their efforts towards education of children are insulted by the neighbours and relatives. The care provided to a special child by the mother is never valued and it is just seen as passing time. These insults haunt them in everyday life and amplify the psychological trauma.

The mothers of special needs children experience marital disturbances, familial and social isolation, financial deficits, sense of loneliness, sense of new experience (not many mothers have knowledge of rearing) as a consequence of giving birth to a disabled child. In spite of all the odds and constraints, they come up with strong determination in providing care and education to the children. In the quest for seeking information (on medical, welfare and education related services) related to child, they develop new networks and stand by the child primarily to take a social revenge.

**Conclusion**

From the above illustrations, it is explicit that birth of a disabled child in India is interlinked with a web of factors. Most of the time, the immediate impact is on mothers. The birth of a disabled child brings about inter-and-intra family changes. In the process of managing the adverse reactions from spouse, family and society, mothers find ways and means to make their children independent. Mothers strongly believe that education is the only weapon for children with disabilities to build a sense of autonomy. Therefore, the mothers in this group invest their time, energy and resources available on the education of disabled children.

The present paper finds that common experience of mothers with disabilities serves as the motivating factor for them to form as a group. The special school served as a space for organisation and operation of uniparental group in balancing the triadic experience (child rearing, family expectations and societal response) of mothers of children with disabilities. It is hoped that this study is an extension of the growing field of disability studies, parenthood and the ethnographic scholarship on family relations in India.

## Notes

[i] Real names in this paper have been completely changed to maintain the anonymity of the research participants.

[ii] this is stated on the official website of the school, and I but unable to provide its URL so as to maintain the anonymity.

[iii] The mothers' group is a space that serves both as a family setting and a social community at the same time. I therefore used the term "socio-familial space" to refer to the mothers group under the study.

[iv] Shravana masam, dedicated to Lord Vishnu, is generally considered as one of the auspicious festivals. This is observed in fifth month according to the Hindu lunar calendar.

[v] Courtesy stigma generally referred as attribution of stigma to an individual who is associated with and stigmatised by the society.

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**Article: Schooling the Urban Margins: Studying a Lower-Class Settlement in South Delhi**

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# Schooling the Urban Margins: Studying a Lower-Class Settlement in South Delhi

--Ruchira Das

## Abstract

*The present paper examines the relationship that children at the margins, their multiple lifeworld, rooted in their community practices shares with urban, modern schooling. School-milieu relationship emerges as an important site of research that needs to be explored sociologically to understand its impact on children, their marginal social setting and the education system at large. In the context of this background, the research intends to study the lived realities of a lower-class settlement in south Delhi, Kusumpur Pahari. The study intends to capture the schooling processes and practices of the children from this fringe settlement. Some of the pertinent questions that the study aims to explore are: how do the residents negotiate everyday life in the settlement as peripheries of the city? How schooling shapes their experiences as urban margins? What are the parental perceptions, dilemmas, anxieties and practices vis a vis their children's schooling? How do the children understand/perceive their schooling? What is the relationship that school shares with the community as they educate children from the margins?*

Keywords: *Schooling, Urban margins, Milieu, School-Community relationship*

## Introduction

The paper examines the relationship that urban margins impacted by the "architectural, economic, social, cultural and political changes that cities are increasingly undergoing" (Shah 2012: 18) and simultaneously rooted in their native/community practices shared with modern schooling. What is interestingly dichotomous about the landscape where margins are located is that on one hand, the look of these spaces is such that one perceives it as rural enclaves within the city. Yet, the residents by no means can be categorised as

'villagers'. "This makes the 'rural' and the 'urban' distinction even more fuzzy than we have known them to be for long" (Ibid: 18), leaving the milieu of such spaces paradoxical, ambiguous, complex and layered.

However, the concern with urban schooling is that it is imagined in isolation. Schooling does not recognise or rather dismiss the marginal milieu of children coming from such spaces of the city. Divorced from the community, schooling then provides a rhetorical understanding of equality-inequality, inclusion-exclusion practices vis a vis children from the margins. "Understood through the terms like out-of-school culture or community, milieu stands for children's lives that are lived outside the educational spaces and are generally seen as abominable, a sentiment that schools have towards the social setting from where children come from and specifically those from the margins". Nambissan (2021) also thinks, "since jhuggis are associated with slums and notions of illegality and nuisance, hence, such colonies are perceived to inhabit a 'spoiled' identity. Children from such a stigmatised space, which is seen as a space of filth, crime and drugs, are therefore subjected to derogatory comments and discriminatory practices in the school. Children from the jhuggis routinely face humiliation, abuse and ill-treatment from children and teachers of socially dominant communities" (Nambissan, 2021: 28).

Schooling bereft of children's milieu results in alienation and simultaneous 'proletarization', which Stiegler (2013) interprets to be a condition where production of knowledge is reduced to sheer consumption." (Dalal & Das, 2022: 1485-1488). Significant is therefore to understand how school speaks to the community from where the children belong to and simultaneously how children's social milieu responds to schooling. School-milieu relationship thus emerges as an important site of research that needs to be explored sociologically to understand its impact on children, their marginal social setting and the education system at large.

In the context of this background, the research intends to study a lower-class settlement in south Delhi and capture their lived realities in the everydayness

of their life. The study also makes an attempt to understand the schooling processes and practices of the children of this marginal settlement. Some of the pertinent questions that the study aims to explore are: how do the residents negotiate everyday life in a lower class settlement as peripheries of the city? How schooling shapes their experiences as urban margins? What are the parental perceptions, dilemmas, anxieties, aspirations and practices vis a vis their children schooling? How do the children understand/perceive their schooling? What is the relationship that school shares with the community as they educate children from the margins?

**The Research Process**

Kusumpur Pahari, a lower class, migrant settlement became the site for research for two prime reasons. One to understand the paradoxical lifeworld in the colony that ironically in the geo spatial sense stands in parallel to the affluent neighbourhoods of Vasant Vihar, a locality in South Delhi. However, so far the social position of the residents is concerned, they belong to the 'lower strata of life or can be called as subaltern urban residents' (Bhan, 2016) negotiating their life as margins/fringes of the city. The other significant reason was the two state run schools that are located adjacent to the settlement[1]. Most of the children from Kusumpur Pahari came walking to these two schools as they were closest to the settlement. Since the aim of the research is to explore the school-milieu relations, this particular colony was chosen for the study to meet the desired objectives. Twenty-five households were made part of the research as a representative sample for an in-depth understanding of the school-milieu connections. How children's back-home cultures are invoked in the schooling spaces, practices and processes and how does it impact the education of these children from the margins are some of the questions that the research aims to explore.

[1] Names of the schools/parents/children are not disclosed to maintain the ethics of research.

In the research the idea is not to capture the visible forms of violence that is located in the school-milieu relations, instead the interest of the research is to trace violence that is normalised in the everydayness of the schooling spaces, its processes and practices. Zizek's (2008) work is drawn upon to understand the veiled/invisible/latent forms of violence that is inherent in the very structuring of the modern school system. Zizek talks about two kinds of violence- "subjective violence as experienced against the background of a nonviolent zero level condition when such form of violence is seen or is visible as a perturbation of the normal state of things. Objective violence on the other hand is invisible since it sustains the zero-level condition of non-violence against which subjective violence can be perceived. This systemic/symbolic violence is like the 'dark matter' of physics, the counterpart of an all-too-visible violence. Objective violence may be invisible, but it has to be taken into account if one is to make sense of what otherwise seem to be irrational explosion of subjective violence". (Zizek, 2008: 2).

Since the study intended to study primary school children, families are selected based on the criteria of having children who are in their primary stage of learning in the adjacent schools of the settlement. About twelve children each from both the schools were made part of the study with the idea to present a comparative narrative. Besides the parents and the children, primary teachers of both the schools are also interviewed for the research. The teachers are made part of the research based on their familiarity with the children over years of teaching them in different standards and also based on their acquaintance with the community/parents of these children. Data from the field was largely gathered through participant observations, semi structured interviews and extensive informal discussions in different spaces of the settlement and the schools.

**Unfolding the Research Site**

Amidst affluent neighbourhoods, world class shopping malls, ultra-modern residences of foreign diplomats and colonies dedicated to high profile

bureaucrats, Kusumpuri Pahari, a lower class migrant settlement as identified by the Delhi government, is located in Vasant Vihar, a place which is characterized as one of the poshest locations of South Delhi. "There are several lower class colonies in this part of Delhi but Kusumpur Pahari is one the largest municipal ward. The history of this settlement goes back to as early as 1970s when this colony was mostly a jungle, with very few households clustered together. However, over the years, this urban poor settlement expanded. According to the Delhi Urban Improvement Shelter Board (DUSIB), there are now 4909 households in an area of 1732 sq. m" (Kohli, 2015: 1). Kusumpur Pahari is largely a migrant colony. The residents have migrated to Delhi majorly from the states of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Haryana and Odisha in search of better opportunities. "The cluster has grown in a haphazard way with each incoming resident staking out a piece of land for their settlement (though they do not have state-recognized title to the property). Interestingly, there seems to be a connection between the duration of residence and the size of land acquired with the earlier settlers having more sizeable portion of land for their households over the later arrivals owning smaller plots" (Ibid: 1). The settlement is divided into several blocks. Usually each block has residents living together who have migrated from different native lands of the same state. Region based blocks are organically and yet voluntarily formed to sustain the native community life, particular traditional lifestyles and region specific social customs. Such kind of a structure emerges because the "urban slum consists of people that are partially uprooted and decultured, who had to move out and were forced to loosen their community ties as city migrants. Yet the city spaces could not stop them from accessing their cultural traditions. Infact, often the resilience of cultures is seen in the most dramatic fashion in the urban slums." (Nandy, 1998: 6-7).

Currently the colony has 21,500 (SPYM Survey 2019) residents who have found their homes in this particular settlement of South Delhi. Lined on both sides of the narrow lanes with an open drain flowing through the colony are butcher shops, grocery stores, carts selling vegetables and loosely plastered

brick houses, at times less than a size of a single room. A narrow road separates Kusumpur Pahari from the posh neighbourhoods of Vasant Vihar. An invisible boundary exists that demarcates the affluent core and the impoverished margins in the same space and interestingly both the worlds are conscious of the unsaid boundary even though they share the same urban locality.

**Life Struggles of the Residents in the Settlement**

Living a life which is forever at the mercy of *'Sarkar'* (State) the challenges and struggles of the residents of Kusumpur Pahari is endless.

A resident says,

*"kabhi bhi bulldozer aa sakta hai kyunki hum bare longon ki mahol ko ganda kar rahe hain. Hum sheher ki gandagi hai jinhe kabhi bhi yahan se uthake kahin bhi fek diya jaa sakta hai.". (any time bulldozer can come as we are supposedly contaminating/polluting the environment of the big/affluent people. We are the dirt who can be removed and dumped anywhere in the city).*

This unceasing angst of being discarded as garbage of the city at any point of time from their homes, looms among the residents of the settlement. What is distressing to understand is that the sheer fact of having a life is not enough to value to it, as lives are recognized and perceived differently by the state. Such vulnerability connects to Judith Butler's (2016) work who explores the 'matrix of grievablilty'. For Bulter, "there are lives that get lost and are not grieved for in the same way. 'Deservability' is assigned to some lives over others. It is only the grievable lives that are considered worthy to be mourned for when lost. However, to be worthy of mourning that life has to be first recognised and valued as a life. The rest fall out of this matrix and can easily be disposed of as ungrievable lives. Reason being, their positionality is defined as politically marginalised subjects and are those who are ontologically already lost and destroyed" (Butler, 2016: xix). Therefore, they are "undeserving of public sympathy and/or mourning as one is believed to have caused one's own

condition through ill-advised behaviours" (Mayes, 2016 in Jeema & Spratt, 2022: 475). How lives are 'let to die' as they are not worthy of being grieved when lost, is something that gets blatantly visible in the vulnerabilities of the urban margins in the city.

The residents of the Kusumpur Pahari settlement are mostly found to be in menial blue collared jobs. The men inhabitants work as drivers, electricians, plumbers, barbers, daily wage construction workers, guards, peons and the women are majorly into domestic help. Everyday life the city is indeed a struggle for the residents of the settlement. Since most of the inhabitants of the households that are part of the study are unskilled labourers, their monthly earning goes upto not more than 7000/- to 8000/- depending on the availability of work. Most of the household expenditure goes away acquiring food and paying for water and rent (those who do not have their own house). The Kusumpur Pahari inhabitants are heavily depended on the public distribution system for food and that makes them extremely susceptible to corruption that is played out in the system. Many of the residents still do not have ration cards and as a result they end up buying the required groceries from the market in high prices to sustain themselves.

Dire inadequacy in water supply is another scary concern of the settlement because of which a considerable amount of the earning goes away in buying water specifically during the menstruation phases of the women. However, not all have the ability to buy water but women undergoing reproductive health concerns and menstruation complexities are found to buy water on days when there is absolutely no water availability in the settlement. "In KP, water is a particularly fraught issue both in terms of quantity supplied and the mode of delivery. There have been improvements from the late 1970s when, to get water, residents had to walk some distance to the public taps located at an adjoining affluent neighborhood. Now, residents receive water from the Delhi water authority operated tankers, which come to KP once a week, and from

bore wells installed in different sections of the settlement that also run on a weekly schedule" (Kohli, 2015: 2).

However, the supply of water in the settlement continue to be miserably insufficient. Adding to the woes of the residents is the uncertainty of time and the delivery places where the water tankers arrive. Navigating the community, it is observed that the burden of getting water from the tankers to the households is the sole responsibility of either the women or children of the families. Surprisingly, electricity does not seem to be of much concern for the residents. Most of the respondents seem to be satisfied with the electricity supply and costs that they bear. All the twenty-five households that are part of the study had meters installed. According to the respondents, this was done with the assurance that the electricity meters will serve as their residency proof if the settlement is ever legalized. "There is a marked change over the last decade. Earlier the only way residents were able to obtain electricity was by installing illegal connections to the supply network. The police would periodically conduct raids and disconnect these improvised installations. Since the repeal of a statute that restricted the state utility from providing electricity to informal settlements, and the privatization of electricity distribution, KP has been connected to the Delhi electrical distribution network" (Ibid: 2). Thus it is interesting and ironic at the same time to see how lives in this particular landscape of south Delhi is shaped with ultra-affluent high-class enclaves and a lower class, migrant colony holding a fringe status sharing the same urban space of the city as 'neighbours'.

**Angst and the Aspirations of the Parents on Schooling Children**

Survival and meeting the basic needs of life is the most important priority for the migrant inhabitants of Kusumpur Pahari settlement. Parents of the families were found more concerned about their everyday existence rather than educating their children. Being under the constant threat of eviction and demolition of their living space and the perpetual precarity they go through in

terms of their jobs, educational aspirations, they believe get lost in the struggles to survive the city.

According to a parent,

*"jahan tak iski kismat zor maregi tab tak ye parhegi. Sirf chahne se to nahi hota hai paisa bhi to hona chahiye." (She will study as long as her luck permits. Things do not happen even if we want, there has to be money for that.).*

However, parents are not against educating their children. All the twenty-five families who are part of the study send their children to school. For these parents, education is important to improve their living standards, and for greater awareness/exposure to survive the unapologetically demanding city. However, for their girls their thoughts are gendered. They believe that educating girls is all about bringing them better marriage prospects. Most of the parents said that girls are meant to be married off. This also decreases the family's burden. With girls married off, its feeding lesser mouths in the conditions of financial uncertainty that they go through. Hence parents chose to invest in their boys and favoured educating them over their girls.

A migrant from Rajasthan said,

*"betiyon ko padayenge par zyada nahi kyunki rajasthan mein betiyon ko zyada parhana accha nahi mana jata hai. Ye manna hai ki zyada par likh gayi to affair kar ke kisi bhi larke ke saath bhag jayegi. Aur waise bhi larkiyan paraya dhan hain ek bar shaadi ho jaye fhir jo bhi woh parivaar chahe who kare. Kuch bhi kare hamari pareshani nahi". (we will educate our girl children but not much. In Rajasthan educating girls too much is not considered good. If a girl is too much educated, she will have an affair and run off with any man. Moreover, a girl is a treasure of another family. They will be married off. Then it's that family's wish to make her do whatever they want. The trouble is not ours after that).*

Another migrant from Bihar remarked,

*"beti ko to parhana zaruri hai aur hum use parhane mein jitna ho sake madat karenge par bete ko to mein engineer banaunga taki woh ghar ki arthik halat mein sudhar la sake. Ghar ka sudhaar mere baad bhavisya mein use ke kandhe pe to hai". (it's important to educate girls and I will support my girl's education to the extent possible but I aspire to make my son an engineer so that he can improve the financial condition of the family. After me, in future, the responsibility of taking care of the family lies in his shoulders").*

Thus in Kusumpur Pahari, financial crisis, household responsibilities and the pressure of getting wedded off early, often thwart girls from their right to be educated. However, there were also a few parents who did understand the importance of schooling their girls.

One of the parents said,

*"hum khud zyada parhe likhe nahi hai isliye hum chahte hain ki humare bete or betiyan dono ko hum barabar shikhsha ka awasar dein taki unka bhavishya accha ho sake". (I am not much educated. Hence, I want that both my boys and girls get the opportunity of education so that they have a better future").*

Further, discussions specifically with the women's parents highlighted the crisis they experience on an everyday basis in the colony, because of which they are unable to send their children to school even if they desire to.

A woman parent informed

*"humari Kusum Pahari mein paani ki samasya bahut zyada hai. Paani ka tanker kismaat acchi rahi to din mein ek baar nahi to kai baar halfte mein ek baar aati hai woh bhi kaam samay ke liye. Humare aadmi kaam karne jaate hain to ye paani bharne ki zimmedari ya to hum aurton pe nahi to bacchon pe parti hai. Isiliye jab paani ka tanker aane ki sambhavna lagti hai hum jin gharon mein safai ya khana banane ka kaam karte hain, chutti le lete hai.*

*Bacchon ko bhi hum school nahi bhejte taaki woh paani bharne mein aur use ghar le jaane mein humari madat kar saken. Paani ka tanker zyada tar aise jagah par aata hai jo humare ghar se kaafi dur hota hai. Tabhi bacchon ko school jane ke liye hum rok dete hain. Bacchon ka nuksaan to hota hai par kya karein? Hum majboor hai! Yehi zindagi hai humari. Bina paani ke humara guzara kaise hoga".* (*In our Kusumpur Pahari, there is severe water shortage. If our stars are good, then the water tanker will come once in a day or else at times it comes once in a week that too for a very short time. Our men go out for work and hence the entire responsibility of filling water comes on us and the children. Thus when we see a possibility of the water tanker coming, those of us who are domestic helps in the nearby colonies, take leave from our work. We do not send children to school either so that they can help us in filling water. Most of the times water tanker comes in that location of the settlement from where our houses are far off. That's why we stop children from going to school. Children help us carry the water tubs back home. We do understand that not sending to school does impact the education of children but what can be done? We are helpless! This is how our life is! Without water how do we survive?")*

Narratives from the women residents reveal that the coming of water tankers in the colony, the whole mayhem that happens in who will be able to fill the maximum amount of water for their family as one is unsure when would the tanker come next is indeed an event in the settlement. Thus, interesting power dynamics vis a vis caste, class, gender become evident/visible in this water-filling event.

Among the children who are not sent to school when tanker comes are mostly girls as, according to a woman parent,

*"larkiyan humari parhai mein zyada hoshiyaar hai par kya karein yehi sunte hain humari. Is ke alava kyuki woh ghar ke kaam mein haath batate hain unhe paani ki kitni zaroorat zyada samajh mein aati hai". (girls are obedient.*

*Moreover, since girls help us in the household chores, they understand the importance of water more than the boys").*

Unfortunately, this is how gender dynamics was seen playing out when it came to educating girl children.

The other reason why children are not sent to school is when they visit their native village during the time of harvest. Parents further expressed that many a times, due to non-availability of work in the city, they go back to their villages or neighbouring towns for work. During that time, children could not be left behind alone in the settlement for security reasons. Hence, children and again, it was mostly girls who are unable to attend school, as revealed in the conversations, till the time their family came back to the city. Some of the parents also confessed that whenever they are met with severe financial crisis, they make their children work to contribute to the family's survival. Such conditions affect the schooling of the children as they are not able to go to school for long durations. Since the colony comprises of migrants from different parts of the country, there is a diversity in the socio-cultural backgrounds of the residents. Parents stated that even though they shifted their locales and chose to move to Delhi to improve their living conditions but they have not transcended their cultural practices and traditions. They experience alienation in the city and hence prefer to go back to their native land whenever possible and definitely during festivals and special occasions even if it meant children missing out on their school.

There is yet another crucial reason stated by the parents when they avoid sending their children to school. Parents communicated that teachers are at times, extremely harsh on their children. Children face punishments in school. Teachers physically hit and also use abusive words to the children when they come to know that parents are unable to utilise the money given by the school for the given purposes (buying uniforms/stationaries, etc). The parents expressed that the purpose of sending their children to school is to bring respect to poor families like them. If teachers misbehave, tease, ridicule or do

not give the required attention to their children, what is the point of sending them to school? Children should rather work and contribute to the family's survival. Moreover, children come back home feeling threatened, scared, and and losing their self-respect, confidence and motivation. This is unacceptable and hence, they do not send their children to school when they experience such vehemence from teachers.

Expressing their unhappiness, parents further shared that mid-day meal is one incentive to send children to school as there are times in the year when there is almost hand to mouth existence. During such phases it becomes extremely challenging to procure even two meals a day. Not that the school is unaware of their poor conditions, yet the school least cares to ensure that quality meals are severed to children. Parents mentioned that when they complain to the principal, the response is extremely rude.

A parent shared how a teacher responded to him.

*"Complain kis muh se karte ho tum log? Bacchon ko khana to khilaya nahi jaata. Mid-day meal school de raha hai tumhare bacchon ko uski kadar nahi. Khana hai to khao varna bhukhe maro. Jo milega yehi milega. Ye jo muft ka khana Sarkar se mil raha hai shukar manao" (how do you all even have the face to complain when you cannot afford to feed your children? Mid-day meal is provided by the school to your children and you don't even regard that. Eat or else stay hungry. This is the food to be served. You should be grateful for the free meals given to your children by the government).*

Another parent communicated,

*"Daal chawal aise milaya hua aata hai ki kai baar uske aise sakht gole baan jaate hain ki sir pe maare kisi ke to uska sir foot jaaye" (the way rice and daal come premixed, at times it becomes hard balls when severed. So hard that if somebody is hit on the head, the head will break).*

Children thus prefer to stay hungry if they are unable to carry food from their home than eating such tasteless, unhealthy meals. An activity conducted in both the schools by the research team further validated the concerns of the parents. Children across the primary classes were randomly chosen for the activity where they were directed by the research team to draw their stomachs, one before the mid-day meal and one after the mid-day meal. To the surprise of the team, most of the children across both the schools specifically the ones who are in classes 1st to 3rd standard, drew almost an empty stomach even post their mid-day meals, which revealed that most children do not eat or rather do not prefer to eat the meals. According to the parents, the disrespect and misbehaviour shown to them by the school when they complain about the bad quality food is only because of their vulnerable/marginal backgrounds.

Parents further mentioned that whenever children are unable to attend school, they are taken to task but school is never answerable to them (parents) when it closes down many a times without prior information, knowing that they are working parents and losing one day of labour means a day without any income for many of them. Moreover, teachers are irregular and many of them do not take their teaching seriously either.

A parent remarked,

*"Mera bacha har roz school jaata hai. Woh class IV mein parta hai par abhi taak na theek se par paata hai na likh paata hai. Jin maa baap ke paas tution bhejne ke paise hain who bhejte hain. Par mera sawal ye hai ki agar mujhe tutor ko paisa dena pare taaki mera bacha par likh paaye, fhir mein aapne bacche ko school kyun bhej raha huin? Kaam pe na laga duin. Kama lega. Ghar pe do paise le aayega. Parhai karni hai to tution chala jayega shayam ko kaam se waps aa ke"* (*my child goes to school every day. He is in the 4th standard but neither he can read properly nor write till now. Those parents who can afford to send their children to the tuitions, they do that. But my question is that if I have to pay the tutor so that my child is able to read and write, then why am I sending my child to school? Let me put him into work*

*then. He will have some earning at least to contribute to the family. If at all he has to study, he can go for tuition classes in the evening after coming back from work).*

Another parent further shared a disheartening narrative.

"*teachers bacchon ko syllabus nahi dete, exam ke din question paper galat aa gaya, fir bhi meri bacchi puri taiyari ke saath exam likhne gayi. Exam mein usne paper accha diya aur marks bhi uske bahut acche aaye par teacher ne uske marks mitakar average marks laga diye kyunki teacher ye viswas hi nahi kar paayi ki meri bacchi parke accha exam de sakti hai. Kyunki aatwi taak pass karane ki neeti banai hai Sarkar ne to usko average marks dekar pass kara diya. Ye baat mujhe wohan ke ek para teacher se pata chali. Usni ne bataya ki ki tarah se zabardasti class teacher ne use meri beti ke sahi marks mitake pass marks bithane ko kaha. Iske baad kaun bacha school jayega aur hum bhi kyun school bhejen?" (teacher do not provide syllabus; wrong question paper came during the day of examination. Yet my child went prepared for the examination. She did well and got good marks. But the class teacher erased her actual marks and just passed her as it was unbelievable for her that my child can score such high marks. Because the school has no choice but to pass all students till class VIII as per government policy, the teacher gave her pass marks. This episode was conveyed to me by a para teacher of the school who was made to do this forcibly by the regular teacher. After this do you think my child should go to school or should I send my child to school?).*

Some of the parents also raised on how schools have made examinations redundant in the post Covid times. Children are assessed many a times even without holding any examinations. The assessment is done arbitrarily based on the social milieu they come from. This completely randomness in the way children are evaluated got revealed in the anxieties of the parents.

Further, concerned about the laxity on the part of the system, parents shared that on sudden visits to school, teachers are found chatting away in the school playground. The heads of the institutions are also party to such a casual approach on the part of the teachers. Even if parents try to put forth their concerns in the PTMs which is meant to hear them out, they are dismissed most of the times by the school authorities and hence, many have even stopped attending the PTMs. Parents' non-attendance in the school PTMs is considered as their disinterest towards education by the authorities given the milieu they belong to, but the reality is different. Parents feel disheartened as school fails to understand their constraints their struggles and blame their milieu for the poor performance of their children. However, interestingly, parents are still hopeful. Those who aspire to educate their children are found validating the normalising of violence in school.

According to a parent,

*"jaisa bhi hai, mere liye to school accha hai, kuch to sikh rahein hain bacche. School mein thora daar banaye rakhna zaroori hai taaki bacche parhai theek se kare" (no matter how it is, for me, the school is good. At least children are learning something. Moreover, some amount of fear is important for schooling or else children will not perform well).*

Parents want to believe and imagine that school is giving their children that exposure which otherwise would have been impossible given the social conditions they survive as fringes of the city. Parents were thus found approving the disciplinary regime that the the school makes children go through. Parents are of the opinion that certain control and correction is required for children's growth and progress which only schools will be able to do. While they are aware that learning within the school spaces happens under strict surveillance, yet they feel that it is only education that can help poor, vulnerable families like them to aspire for a better life and transcend their stigmatised status. Conversations with parents thus reflect that not only children are conditioned by the school to value the disciplinary regimes to

become 'productive' citizens of the county, parents also have submitted to this civilising vision of the school.

**School from the Lens of the Children**

Interestingly and surprisingly, while the parents revealed their dilemmas and anxieties on the processes and practices of the school and the worrisome ways in which learning happens, children were found to have positive feelings about their school. Children expressed their desire to go to the school except on days when they know they will be punished by their teachers for their long absence from school and when they do not wear proper uniforms. Children shared their enthusiasm for going to school as they can meet their friends and play with them. Most of the girl children, specially those in the 4th and the 5th standard felt that coming to school was a blessing in disguise for them as it saved them from the multiple household chores they are overburdened with as most of their mothers are full-time domestic helps in the nearby localities and hence the entire responsibility of household tasks from cooking, cleaning the house, washing the utensils and taking care of their younger siblings falls completely on them.

Moreover, most of the children were also of the view that education is important. A student of 5th standard remarked,

*"Hum parhenge, hum sudhrenge to desh badlega, desh barhega" (if we study, we will improve, then the country will change, the country will progress).*

The slogans that the children are made to recite repeatedly at the time of school assembly were done with the purpose of indoctrination. *"Kehte bacche, acche bacche, ek banenge, nek banenge, hum sudhrenge, yug sudhrega, manav matra ek samaan, desh ki raksha kaun karega, hum karenge hum karenge, Jai Hind, Bharat Maata ki jai" (good children are those who will unite together and promise to be well mannered, promise to improve themselves. Only when we change, the age will change. Mankind is one and equal. Who will protect the country? We will protect the country. Hail India!*

*Long live Mother India!).* Students internalise the imagination injected that only school can make them 'good citizens', good-natured, civilised beings, etc., to be 'productive' for the nation. Unless they are able to cultivate/imbibe these qualities, they will not be able to safeguard and contribute to the country. To be of 'utility' for the country, as teachers would tell them, most of the students communicated that coming to school regularly is important.

Acknowledging the importance of education, a child of the 5th standard shared,

"*mein abhi bare class mein huin. Class V. Ghar jaa ke mera pura samay adhure class wale kaam aur ghar ke liye diye gaye kaam pura karne mein nikal jaata hai. Mujhe to khelne ka time hi nahi milta. School ka khatam karna khelne se zyada zaroori hai taaki mein class mein sabse piche na chuut jaun. Mein kaam khatam karke le jaaunga to mujhe teacher se shabashi milegi" (I am in a senior class now. Class V. After going back home, the rest of the day goes away in completing the classwork and homework. I have no time to play. I feel it is important to finish the tasks given by school rather than playing so that I don't fall behind the others in class. If I complete my tasks, I will be appreciated by the teacher).*

Seeking recognition or validation from the school is what most children of Kusumpur Pahari want, who are otherwise looked down upon coming from an 'impure', 'contaminated', 'savage' milieu.

However, observing and interacting with children what is also revealed is the disconnect children from the margins experience in school.

A child of 5th standard mentions,

*"tution ke sir parhate hain to zyada samaj mein ata hai kyunki teacher parhate kum aur maarte zyada hai. Isliye mein kabhi teacher ji ko sunta nahi huin" (I understand better when my tuition sir teaches. Teachers teach less and hit more. That is why I do not listen to my school teachers).*

Another child of the same class who goes to the same tuition class says,

*"aisa nahi hai tuition classes bare mazedaar hote hain par fhir bhi wahan humare kaam ko dekha jaata hai, humari galtiyan batai jaati hai jo school mein teachers nahi batate" (not that the tuition classes are interesting but there at least our copies are seen, checked and we are told where are we going wrong which teachers in school do not tell us).*

A 3rd standard child shared,

*"mujhe school aana bilkul accha nahi lagta hai. School mein kahan parhai hoti hai. Yahan to bacche sirf maar peet karne aur gaali-galauj karne aate hain. Teachers bhi pure din daante, maarte rehte hain. Isliye mujhe gaon jana hai aur kheti karni hai kyunki mujhe school aana accha nahi lagta hai" (I hate coming to school. Hardly any teaching happens here. Children only keep fighting and hitting each other. They keep abusing each other. Teachers are whole day scolding and hitting. I want to therefore go back to my village and do farming because I do not want to come to school).*

Another child from the 4th standard expressed,

*"mujhe parna accha lagta hai lekin mujhe aapni tarah se parna accha lagta hai jo school mein nahi ho paata. Madam ji parhati kam daati zyada hai. Tuition class jana school se zyada accha lagta hai". (I like studying but I prefer doing it in my own way, which is not possible in school. We are taught less and reprimanded more by the teacher. I like going to my tuition class than coming to school).*

What gets interestingly visible in some of the quotes of the children and their parents is how supplementary educational structures are taking over schools. Children feel the need of tuition classes more over going to school for their studies. The disjuncture between school and children as the former creates a disconnect between the learning space/practices and the lifeworld of the latter got all the more exposed and exacerbated in the Covid times when "despite

loss of jobs, parents from marginal/vulnerable backgrounds were struggling to meet additional costs incurred on private tuitions and resources supplied by Ed-Tech companies, to support their children's learning" (Batra, Bazaz, Shanmugam, Ranjit, Kaur & Das, R, 2021: 14). With the indefinite closure of schools when the pandemic hit the city of Delhi and with the shift from corporeal classes to virtual mode, most of the government schools failed to continue teaching-learning. With children, specifically those from the margins falling out of the system, the move shifted towards private tuitions/coaching which, according to their parents, were able to anchor their children's education much more than schools in the Covid times (ASER 2021; Yadav 2022; Mohan 2023).

Further, conversations with some children showed their anxiety about the labelling that happens in the classes, which becomes extremely alienating for them. Docile and obedient students become *'accha baccha' (good student)* and the ones whose bodies resist docility and control are rebuked by the teachers as *'ganda/bura baccha' (bad student)* of the class. This is how the school perceives and categorises children from the margins. Thus, "only when school is able to create what Foucault (1975) calls docile, controlled, obedient bodies for whom disciplinary rules of the school is sacrosanct, they become eligible schooled bodies for education. The ones who resist to be governed and become trained bodies are dismissed by the school as those who do not belong even if they are part of the school" (Dalal & Das, 2008: 54-55). "The force of this implicit violence is so strong in school that we find children internalising their failure" (Dalal & Das, 2018: 92). Teachers often echo how children from the marginal milieu who resist to be schooled bodies are recognised as the ones who have *'mand buddhi' (feeble/impotent minded).* and therefore, they fail to comprehend what is taught in class. "Children's knowledge and culture thus find no place in the formal, official world of the schooling. Infact the system perceives children in such a way that they find something wrong in themselves, which gets evinced through their constant failure" (Ibid: 92).

However, despite the struggles the children undergo, it is stimulating to see the sense of pride that some of the children take in the knowledge they acquire from school, whether it is through drawing, understanding of the subjects, learning a particular language or through the games. It is indeed fascinating to see how these children are able to articulate what is fulfilled and what remains unfulfilled so far as their schooling is concerned. Thus the educational vacuum is real, something that is starkly visible in the desires these children have i.e. the hunger to learn, being taught and being guided.

**Teachers Views on Educating Children from the Margins**

In schools, children's milieu is often blamed for their schooling failure. How children's back home-cultures are constantly evoked is revealed in the conversation with the teachers.

Interactions with teachers exposed their prejudices about children from the margins. Most of teachers felt that children coming from Bhangi, Chamar and Chandal castes have no interest in studies. Their families are into alcoholism, violence and sexual abuse. Teachers shared that children coming from such families use offensive language and are aggressive in nature. Some of these children keep bullying others. Moreover, since they do not take bath regularly, they stink and therefore, nobody wants to sit beside them. All this spoils the environment of the school.

Another teacher remarked,

*"parents send their children to school only for mid-day meals and the money that they get for buying uniforms and stationeries which most of the time they spend on their daily needs. School is like a crèche for these parents where they can send their children and freely go to work. Children also come here only to play or else back at home they are laden with household chores".*

Teachers believe that children coming from lower-class settlements are unable to learn as they are bereft of the learning culture/environment at home.

Teachers felt that such children do not even possess the basic ability to grasp the lessons taught in class. Coming from families where education is of least importance, children experience challenges in coping with their studies. In contrast to what children shared, teachers spoke the opposite. They mentioned that most of the children of Kusumpur Pahari do not even open their school bags on going back home, nor do they complete the homework given most of the time as they are either engaged in household chores or wear away/waste their time playing or chatting in the settlement. Teachers said that parents keep coming to school complaining that their children are not able to properly read and write. But when they are directed to be attentive towards their children when they go back home from school and ensure that they complete the work given to them, most of the parents put the entire burden and responsibility of schooling on teachers, saying how will they pay attention to their children as they have to work to feed the family.

The most serious problem, according to the teachers, is the sudden, long absence of the children in the midst of the session for months. The teachers communicated that they do not get the opportunity to meet the parents and discuss about the children's unapprised absence. This is because most of the times parents are unable to come to the school as they cannot afford to leave their day's work since for most of them are daily wagers and coming to the school would mean losing out on work and money for the entire day. The teachers confessed that they have, therefore stopped sending reminders to parents. Teachers said that some parents would act on the absence concern, things would be alright for some time and again, children would be founding missing their classes. Views of the teachers not only show distrust for children but also reveal the way schools dismiss children for their socio-economically vulnerable lifeworld. The backgrounds of the children of Kusumpur Pahari are often seen as chaotic, messy and dirty. *"Kude kachre wale ghar ke bacche" (children from garbage homes)* is how the head of the institution of one of the state-run schools part of the study referred to the children from the Pahari.

"In the school, children are reprimanded for the filthy, messy neighbourhood that they inhabit. The negative 'place-image' (Reay, 2007) of their neighbourhood has an imprint on how their lives are understood in the school. The 'bourgeois gaze' (Baviskar, 2020) that pushes the lower class to the peripheries by using the categories of order, hygiene and beauty. By being located at the margins of the city, the school witnesses a similar gaze as teachers coming with their middle-class sensibilities find the lives of children to be contaminated, dirty and unhygienic" (Anand & Dalal, 2022: 5-6)". How children from the margins lack order is evoked time and again by the school and any failure to attain a schooled body is attributed to the failing milieu of the children are also revealed in the research studies by (Kumar 1989 2007; Benei 2008; Dalal 2014 2015; Dalal & Das (2018; Rajan 2021a 2021b) that share similar findings.

The studies reflect how chaotic behaviour, messy, untidy dressing, incomplete school work, and disobedient attitude is attributed to children's failing/deficient home and milieu. Teachers often ascribe the negligence of parents, their class, caste backgrounds, and polluted milieu as reasons of their failure. The impoverished background of the children makes them encroachers in the school and hence is seen as the reason for their learning incompetency and how some of the best pedagogic methods and resources do not work with them. Their failed milieu is also cited as a reason for corporal punishment. "Children's milieu is not seen as something that can be overcome, but as a permanent and debilitating condition that condemns the children to failure. School emerges as a site that identifies and contains children within the same identity that it claims to transcend" (Dalal, 2015: 39). The school-milieu tension is also echoed in "Butler's emphasis on the "biopolitics of disposability that applies inherent value to productive citizens and does not apply it those who are deemed less productive. As a result, not only are 'unproductive' citizens understood to matter less, but they are also blamed for their failure to matter because of their presumed decision to make bad choices and lead unproductive lives" (Butler, 2016 in Jeema & Spratt, 2022: 475)

"A constant engagement of the out-of-school milieu with the official, formal school can also be traced in the theoretical insights of Bourdieu's primary habitus, Willis shop-floor culture, McLaren street culture and Ogbu's oppositional identities. Bourdieu's (1977) concepts of habitus, capital and field explain how symbolic violence is exercised through the interaction that the capital of primary habitus has with the capital that is associated with the field of the school. Willis (1977) explained the idea of cultural production by using the resistance frame as the shop-floor culture of lads' works as a counter school culture to the disciplined world of ear'oles official school. McLaren (1986) contemplates on this counter school culture by showing the interaction between the street culture and the school culture and Ogbu (2008) deploys the idea of the 'cultural frame of reference' and the 'language-dialect frame of reference' taught in the school to examine oppositional identities." (Dalal & Das, 2018: 95). The above frameworks thus echo the condition of the Kusumpur Pahari children.

**Conclusion**

The study highlights that parents of of Kusumpur Pahari do aspire for their children's education and desires to send their children regularly to school. However, living hand to mouth during the periodic work lulls and in their multiple struggles to survive the city, parents do not seek high hopes or aspirations for their children's education. Surviving the city can be extremely challenging. Hence parents expect children to attain that much education so that it can help them escape the precarity in terms of jobs and income that they experience on an everyday basis because of being uneducated. Further, parents confessed that they are not able to provide a conducive learning environment to their children at home in their struggles to cope the vulnerabilities of city life but many of them who can afford do ensure that they send their children to nearby tuitions so that their learning concerns are addressed that school is not able to provide or fulfil. Interacting with teachers of both the schools,, what is revealed is negation and a pessimistic perception towards the children and

their marginal milieu which prohibits them to reflect on their teaching and understand the need to contextualise their pedagogy according to the social milieu of the children. Observations reveal that the current classroom transaction processes in the school stress on reproduction of the textual knowledge without emphasising the ability to comprehend and understand its meaning. In the classroom, the teacher is the only communicator where children's voices and experiences do not find expression. Milieu knowledge that children bring to the classroom is often considered to be irrelevant and dismissed as illegitimate knowledge. There appears to be little effort to draw linkages between the content of the lessons in the textbooks and the experiences from everyday life to situate/position the diverse lifeworld and contexts of the children in school knowledge. The present teaching-learning processes estrange children of the margins from the school and, hence, significant is to find possibilities of bringing school closer to the community. There is a need to move away from the 'deficit' model of learning to an enabling discourse and therefore, school-community linkage/connection is crucial for building and strengthening the relationship and making learning in school meaningful and contextual for children of the margins.

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**Article: Negotiating with Gatekeepers: An Experiential Account of Gaining Access for Fieldwork at an Elite Private School in Delhi**

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# Negotiating with Gatekeepers: An Experiential Account of Gaining Access for Fieldwork at an Elite Private School in Delhi

**--Sharmila Rathee**

***Abstract***

The practice of reporting one's subjective experiences faced during research is often down casted in research descriptions. Such writing practices characterised by eschewed subjective accounts of researchers deceivingly imprints that entering a research field and conducting research with participants is always a straightforward and tranquil experience; and it masks the unique and unanticipated trajectories of fieldworks.

In this context, present paper attempts to present an experiential account of gaining access of an elite private school in Delhi, India for ethnographic research. It aims to describe the course followed and the challenges faced by the researcher in gaining access. While sharing the lessons learnt, present paper problematises the prevalent view that gaining access to the field is a universally smooth process with no impediments and asserts that owning to the interactive and relational nature of knowledge production, the course of research can be tricky with many unexpected turns and twists; and might demand inadvertent and impromptu negotiations by researcher.

*Key Words: Access, Fieldwork, Gate keepers, Experiential account, Private Schools, India*

## Introduction

Description of the research procedure especially the subjective experience of the researcher during research is given very little emphasis in most research documents such as research reports, thesis, and research papers (Fobosi, 2019; Goodwin, Pope, Mort & Smith 2003; Greene, 2014). The usual practice of summarising research methods and field experiences in a very crisp and concise manner in most research publications implies an oversimplified

impression of the course of research practices. Such practices of sidestepping the generous descriptions of the researcher's subjective experiences during the research journey implicitly convey that research is always a simplified and smooth activity with preset stipulated steps and anticipated course. It fortifies the notion that research experiences unfold alike for every researcher with absent miscellany at any of the research stages. Such an imprint is precarious for researchers especially novice ones who often enter the research field with preconceived notions of easy and hassle-free access to the research field.

The need for being precautious of such microscopic and generalised descriptions of research practices has been raised by a few other researchers, especially in the context of qualitative research (Johl & Renganathan 2010; Okumus, Altinay & Roper, 2007), yet it is a common practice till date that most researchers, even those who make use of social interaction-based qualitative research methodology, evade sharing their subjective and often distinctive experiences of engagement in research process (Fobosi, 2019; Oates & Riaz, 2016). As Sobayi (2021) posits such research practices are significantly guided by the positivist paradigm which has spread its wings as 'not simply an intellectual movement, but a cultural movement, and ultimately a form of power' (p. 5).

In this research milieu which is characterised by a dearth of literature on subjective accounts of researchers in the course of their research studies, the present paper attempts to share the experiential narratives of my engagement with the research field during my doctoral study which attempted to explore experiences of working-class students in an elite private school in a posh area of Delhi, India. While presenting the first-hand experience of conducting qualitative research in a private school in a metropolitan city in India, this paper particularly entails accounts of the challenges encountered in negotiating access to the requisite research field i.e., an elite private school in India for a qualitative research study.

**Contextualising the Subjective Experience**

While it has already been mentioned briefly in the previous section that experiences shared in this paper have emerged from my endeavors to understand the experiences of EWS students studying at an elite private school in Delhi, India, yet to further contextualise the subjective account of entering the field for conducting aforementioned research work, it seems imperative to present a brief about the rationale and objectives of the study which has been the source of the field experience being discussed here. To do so, the section below briefly describes the context of the Indian school education system, the rationale for the chosen domain of research, the aims and objectives beneath it, and the methodology adopted for it.

Historically, private schools in India are characterised as homogenous in terms of social class composition and cater mainly to high-income strata of society. However, after the implementation of clause 12(c) of the Right to Education Act, 2009, (hereafter 'RtE Act') all non-minority private schools irrespective of their fee-structure position were obligated to reserve 25 per cent of seats in their entry-level class for marginalised children and provide them free education till class 8 (Hill & Chalaux, 2011). Implementation of this clause has changed the character of elite private schools in terms of the composition of the student population vis-à-vis their social class standing. Formerly being largely homogenous and exclusive to higher strata of society, the presence of students from economically weaker sections (EWS) has turned even high-budget elite private schools heterogeneous in terms of social class composition of students and has created a never before situation of heterogeneity in private schools (Juneja, 2014). This unique and unusual educational setting prompted the need to explore and understand the experiences of EWS students who have been admitted under the aforementioned provision. Specifically, the research study on which the present paper has been grounded aimed to understand the process of meaning-making through which EWS students conceptualise their social class identity and navigate between two fields i.e., their home and school characterised by distinctive milieus.

A review of the literature on this domain suggested the lack of research studies involving school observations to understand the experiences of EWS students. Lafleur and Srivastava (2019) shared that they had to drop their plan of conducting school and classroom observations in the course of their research study aiming to understand the experiences of EWS students at private schools admitted under clause 12 (c) of the RtE Act (2009) because of denial of access to schools for their research. While observations at school and classrooms were an important part of their initial research design, unsuccessful attempts to gain consent to access school premises compelled them to withdraw this imperative method from their study. They posited "…accessing private schools was becoming a challenge during the time of the study, particularly in Delhi, where political issues around the RTE Act steadily contributed to a less welcoming research environment." (p. 12). Similarly, Mehendale, Mukhopadhyay & Namala (2015) faced constraints in accessing private schools to study the implementation of the aforementioned clause in private schools in Bengaluru and Delhi. They reported, 'Given the fact that Section 12(1)(c) has been a contentious provision and still a subject of litigation in the courts, accessing private schools for collection of data was not easy' (p. 46). Overall, the review of the literature pointed towards hitches in getting access to private schools for researching this domain.

Conceptualised with an exploratory approach, fieldwork for delineated research objectives required the use of multiple methods including observations at school, semi-structured interviews with participants (school officials, teachers, students from different social classes, and their parents), home visits to students' residences, administering few quantitative tools to measure particular aspects as well as attaining various academic records of students and documentary records. Observations were required to be conducted at various spaces in school including formal spaces such as classrooms, morning assemblies, and other academic events etc. as well as informal spaces such as lunch breaks, playgrounds, and various celebrations at school. In due course, community and home visits appeared vital for

understanding the socio-cultural milieu of students. Overall, the research methodology for the present work was significantly guided by the idea of giving primacy to the insiders' points of view and perspectives while exploring the research field. For conducting this research work, it was discernibly crucial to gain school access, negotiations for which are discussed here in the following session.

**Negotiating the Access of the Field**

The concept of access in research has been generally categorised into two steps i.e., primary access which means securing entry into the field and secondary access which is about getting acceptance among participants for collecting data (Clark, 2012). As Fobosi (2019) argues 'negotiating access to the field does not only involve these two steps. Negotiating access to the field is more than securing entry and persuading participants to provide data. Negotiation starts with making calls, sending emails, and writing letters to the gatekeepers.' (p. 506). My experience of negotiating access suggests that getting access to the field is rather a multi-step process that doesn't have any fixed, prescribed, and predictable progression. Each of these steps carries different challenges and need different kind of negotiations on the part of the researcher. While every step of negotiating access demands ample elucidations and experiential accounts of researchers, the present paper deliberately intends to delimit itself to share subjective accounts of very initial steps concerning primary access i.e., getting entry to an elite private school in Delhi, India for conducting ethnographic research.

Owing to my acquaintance with relevant literature on research methodology, prior experiences of conducting qualitative research, and previous interactions with different schooling systems as part of my profession, I was somewhat cognisant of the forthcoming challenges in accessing schools for research fieldwork. I was rather prepared for added impediments after comprehending that my ethnography-based research design demands access to a school located in some posh area of Delhi which should be fairly popular and sought-

after by elite strata of society. Yet, relying upon my noteworthy profile adorned with above-average educational credentials and my reputed professional position as a teacher educator in one of the most reputed universities in India, I enthusiastically began to approach the schools that fulfilled my research criteria. However, my enthusiasm emaciated gradually because the degree of real struggles in getting access to relevant kinds of schools was multifold than what I had anticipated at the beginning.

Disappointment over not receiving any response on comprehensive request emails, comprising ample explanations of the relevance of the proposed study, sent to numerous schools menaced my excitement to explore the promising research domain. Further, frequent dismissals and refusals received on my physical visits to schools to seek appointments with authorities to pave the way for convincing them to grant access to fieldwork further demotivated me and slashed my eagerness to work on the proposed domain. Feeling disheartened by the denials and dispiritedness of schools towards researchers, I had even temporarily decelerated my intensity of approaching the schools and started considering the amendments to my research objectives and research design.

Meanwhile, quite accidentally and luckily, a particular episode beheld my hopes of getting access. It started with my happenstance at an educational conference on the theme of early childhood held at one of the reputed elite schools in Delhi, targeting to address the pre-primary educators and parents of preschoolers. It called for my attention because I was reviewing different schools in my vicinity for the admission of my 3-year-old daughter who was about to begin her schooling journey this school was of special interest to me due to its' philosophy which conceptualises education as the means for self-actualisation. During the conference, I happened to interact with an educationist who coincidentally was positioned as the director of another reputed private school.

It was not the case that I knew about the professional position of that educationist prior meeting to with him. It was during an informal discussion at switch over time between two sessions of the conference when I was introduced to him by a senior teacher of the host school (unaware of my research plans) whom I knew briefly owing to a collaborative project on education in the past. In that informal interaction, I apprised both of them about my research proposal as well as about my struggles in getting access to school for my fieldwork. To the best of my luck, the director found my proposal promising and he sent a message to the principal of his school for assigning a schedule of appointment for further discussion and deliberation on my request for access. It wouldn't be incorrect to assert that personal contact with that school teacher was an influential factor in gaining the support of the director. Many researchers have emphasised the decisive role of personal contacts in negotiating the entry as well as access to the research site (e.g. Duke, 2002; Reeves, 2010; Wilkes, 1999) which my experience confirms as well.

The meeting with the principal was intense and detailed. Along with the principal, the school counselor and the head teacher of the senior wing were also present in the meeting. The meeting went on for almost an hour and involved a series of questions being asked by school authorities about my research proposal and my plans/schedule of fieldwork. After being convinced of the merits of the proposed work, the school principal directed the other two members to orient me about my position as a researcher in the school. This subsequent interaction mainly focused on specifying the terms and conditions of my provisional access to the school. Finally, after a struggle of approximately 11 months and owing to a coincidental interaction with a key stakeholder, I received restricted primary access (entry) to a private school for my fieldwork.

The coincidental happenstance in my research journey reminds me of the classic example of unexpected turns and coincidental (secondary) access shared by famous American anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) in his

widely cited text 'Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight' which describes how he and his wife got acceptance among natives of a Balinese village where they were intending to conduct their fieldwork.

**Lessons Learnt from the Field**

Altogether, my experience of approaching schools for granting access to fieldwork made me realise the intensity of hitches one can experience in getting access to an elite private school in India. As Fobosi (2019) posits novice researchers often enter the research field with a pre-conceived notion of being a welcoming and open research field along with expectations of smooth implementation of their research plans. Access to the research field is often assumed to be a simple process at the time of writing their research proposal, but my field experience told me loudly that it is not always as anticipated.

Riese (2019) very aptly posits that gaining access involves negotiating with officials who own up the authority to grant access to the field. Such authorities are referred to as gatekeepers by Clark (2012) and he describes them as the 'individuals, groups, and organisations that act as intermediaries between researchers and participants' (p. 486). My experience echoes that gatekeepers own a crucial position of power within the research process and own to multiple reasons they may or may not be willing to allow the presence of a researcher in their organisation. To be precise, I learned that permission of gatekeepers is indispensable in gaining access to the research field, especially if the research field characterises structural boundaries such as educational institutions and organisations.

It appeared to me that several factors influenced the interviewer's decision to allow my entry to the school. As per my judgment, my clarity of research proposal, assurance of ethics during the fieldwork, recommendation by the chairman, and authorities' anticipation of the value of this research for the school itself fostered primary access to the research field. Simultaneously, my gender and professional identity have played an important role in gaining

access to the school for research purposes. During the interview with school officials, it was communicated by the principal herself that in comparison to female candidates, they are considerably more restricted in granting access to male candidates especially if their domain of work involves interactions with students. Concerns over comfort and safety of girl students appeared to influence their decision to grant permission of fieldwork to an outsider.

As Gurney (1991) suggests, positive stereotypes of women being warmer and less threatening than their counterparts, give female researchers better aid in formal and informal access in the research field, especially in male-dominated environments. My conversation with the school officials also implied a similar rationale on their part. Particularly, in the Indian context field of academia, especially at the school level, the teaching workforce is significantly represented by females (Kundu & Basu, 2022; Malik, Mirza & Hussain, 2020; Manjrekar, 2013). So, it won't be inapt to say that being a female in a research setting, dominated by female professionals, gave me the advantage to enter the research field. The influence of gender in fieldwork has been discussed by several other researchers (e.g., Mishra, 2018; Mukherjee,2020; Schenk-Sandbergen, 1995; Wax, 1979). Based on these studies as well as my own experience from the field, I agree with Chacko (2004) who posits that an investigator/researcher's identity plays a pivotal and influential role in fieldwork.

Along with my gender identity, it appears to me that my professional credentials as a teacher educator specialised in the field of inclusive education potentially mediated my relationship with the gatekeepers in the initial phase of the research. As it was revealed to me later, school authorities were in pursuit of professional guidance for advancing the special education unit at their school and the expectation of help from my side owing to my specialisation in the related domain gave me an edge in getting access to fieldwork. This experience also reveals that gatekeepers' decision to grant access for fieldwork is often influenced by the anticipation of reciprocal benefits from the researchers.

Another important and reflective idea that my field experience has yielded is about the hesitation among school authorities in granting access to schools to the researchers. My experience of approaching several school officials in this regard revealed to me that the community of researchers hasn't built up credibility and trust among school stakeholders. School officials appeared to be indifferent towards the value and applicability of educational research. The course of my interactions with school officials in this regard made me comprehend that the choice of my research objectives instigated additional impediments in gaining access.

As my research work revolved around the experiences of EWS students, school officials often suspiciously perceived it as an inquiry into the implementation of the aforementioned legislative measure which was still considered controversial and unwelcome by a large strata of private school holders. It is likely to be one of the prime reasons for the near absence of qualitative research studies involving field observation on such a crucial aspect even after more than a decade of implementation of related legislation.

Such an outlook of school officials towards researchers calls for a passionate reflection on the part of researchers by deliberating on the question: To what extent educational researchers have contributed to the progress of school education in India? Research is a relational and social activity, and it calls for the concern and participation of researchers as well as participants. Participation of those who are being considered as subjects of research is often determined by their expectation of benefits, and with a genuine human approach, a researcher should deliberate on his offerings to the field and its members.

Another important lesson that I learned from this fieldwork experience is about the skills of conducting research. My experience taught me that research is not a matter of rote learning a particular technique rather it calls for persistence in one's endeavors and openness to the unexpected twists and turns unfolding in the field itself in its due course. Knowing about the research

methodology can help a researcher to some extent but being in the field including gaining access to a research field has its trajectories and complexities and a calculated road map may or may not work as it is in the field.

## Conclusion

To recapitulate, achieving this crucial and requisite milestone of getting access was not a cakewalk for me and it transpired very coincidently and unpredictably. The coincidence was indeed backed up by the persistence and tolerance to unanticipated responses of the gatekeepers. As Riese (2019) claimed, research is 'a complex process - "a multidirectional process' (p. 3), based on my experience of researching at a school, I would like to ensure that entry to any research field shouldn't be presumed smooth and straight. Especially, research in organisation involves relational social interactions and carry the high possibility of unexpected turns in getting access. A researcher should be primed for any unexpected happenstances and should be flexible to amend accordingly.

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**Article: Women in Corporate Leadership Positions in Indian IT Industry: A Study of Women's Experiences in Hyderabad**

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# Women in Corporate Leadership Positions in Indian IT Industry: A Study of Women's Experiences in Hyderabad[1]

--Ojaswi Bartika Mishra & Naga Lakshmi Chelluri

## Abstract

This article is based on a qualitative study and in-depth interviews of women in leadership positions and decision-making capacities in the Information Technology industry and organisations based in Hyderabad. The article also relies on secondary data based on studies already conducted. A detailed literature review and findings from the study validate some of the existing concepts, including the 'glass ceiling', and 'glass cliff', offering some interesting insights into the experiences of women in leadership positions in the IT industry.

*Keywords: Gender, Organisations, Women in IT Industry, glass ceiling, glass cliff, women in leadership positions*

## Introduction

The issue of gender equality and women's empowerment has gained a lot of traction over the years. One of the dominant sectors where women are likely to face gender disparity is in the IT Industry, especially in leadership positions. It would be intriguing to explore the experiences of women in leadership positions as it has been dominated over the years by men. While the IT industry has boomed over the decades and has become one of the most vital contributors to the world economy, the representation of women in leadership positions remains disproportionately low. This has raised questions about the

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underlying factors for women's progression to top-level roles and the challenges they encounter while navigating their journeys.

Research in this domain provides valuable insights into the social structures, cultural norms, and organisational dynamics that impact the experiences of women in leadership positions. By examining these factors, we can have a better understanding of the challenges faced by women, the strategies that they employ to overcome these challenges and the potential solutions that can be used to promote gender equality. The reason why it becomes important to study these phenomena is that women leaders can have a transformative impact on organisational culture, decision-making processes, and overall inclusivity. By examining the specific context of the Indian IT sector, this article tries to uncover a few insights that might help further research on this topic.

This article is organised into the following sections – first an overview of the existing conceptualisations of women in organisations as tokens, on the Glass ceiling, and glass cliff. The next section presents the concepts explaining women's positions beyond the glass ceiling and then on balancing work and family. The methodology for data collection and findings are presented in the subsequent sections. Discussion on the findings and concluding sections are presented towards the end of the article.

## Women in Organisations: Concepts of Token, Glass Ceiling and Glass Cliff

Extant literature offers significant insights into the experiences of women in organisations, especially for a woman in a leadership position. They face more barriers than men when it comes to career progress, even if they hold the same qualifications. When it comes to women and organisations, it is important to look at the concept of 'tokenism'. Rosabeth Moss Kanter introduced this term in 1977 in her work "Men and Women of the Corporation". According to her, individuals from minority backgrounds are hired primarily to project an illusion of organisational equity and impartial treatment to ostensibly curb any

critique that might spring up against their diversity and inclusion practices. In many organisations, women find themselves to be tokens which leads to them having a completely different workplace experience compared to men. Tokens can never really be seen as they are, and are always fighting stereotypes. The characteristics of tokens as individuals are often distorted to fit pre-existing generalisations about their category (Kanter, 1977). This results in women, as tokens, having to work harder and often separate themselves from their social identity as women, to progress in their careers and thus be considered a part of the male group which dominates in the organisation. The most significant concept that we come across to describe women's situation in organisations is the "glass ceiling." The glass ceiling refers to a metaphorical invisible ceiling that obstructs the upward progression of women when competing with men at the same level, in the sense that the "glass ceiling" does not apply to men. Even if we observe women breaking the aforementioned "glass ceiling" they are further under immense scrutiny when they finally reach leadership positions.

The glass ceiling is the "unseen, yet unbreachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder regardless of their qualifications or achievements". (Cotter et al., 2001, p.656). Even when women cross this barrier, their experiences might not get any better in terms of gender equality. There have emerged four criteria for the presence of a glass ceiling: firstly, a glass ceiling inequality represents a gender or racial difference that is not explained by other job-relevant characteristics of the employee; secondly, a glass ceiling inequality represents a gender or racial difference that is greater at the higher levels than at the lower levels in organisations; thirdly, a glass ceiling inequality exists in the chances of advancement into higher levels, not merely the proportions of each gender or race currently at those levels; and fourthly, a glass ceiling inequality represents a gender or racial inequality that increases over the course of a career. (Cotter et al., 2001, p. 657).

The gender stereotypes surrounding managers have an effect on who is more likely to be hired. The 'typical manager' is a stereotype, that shares many attributes with that of a 'typical man', but only very few attributes with a 'typical woman'. Therefore, in this context the stereotyping of male managers as "*think manager–think male*" bias is seen to have emerged. (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2009, p.435). This would indicate that a male by default would be considered for managerial or leadership roles. When leadership qualities are determined in a stereotypically feminine manner, women are more likely to receive praise for the jobs that they perform. But if they are put under the stereotypical masculine ideas of leadership, then more often than not the effectiveness of their leadership is considered to be lower than men.

**Beyond the Glass Ceiling**

Susanne Bruckmüller and Nyla Branscombe (2010) in their study present the ways in which women achieve leadership positions, despite the existence of a glass ceiling. One way of retaining male leadership is the existence of a status quo and the glass ceiling for women. But organisations that are performing poorly, overlook the glass ceiling and are likely to offer the leadership position to a woman, and perceive that appointing a female leader will appear as one way to achieve the transformation needed to turn things around. It is perceived that feminine characteristics are needed in times of crisis including interpersonal qualities such as intuitiveness or awareness of the feelings of others. (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010). In this context, the "Glass cliff theory" is introduced.

Empirical research provides further evidence concerning the factors and processes contributing to the appointment of women to precarious glass cliff positions, and the circumstances under which the glass cliff is likely to occur (Bruckmüller et al., 2014). This theory was first introduced by British professors Michelle K. Ryan and Alexander Haslam during their study on the performance of FTSE (Financial Times Stock Exchange) 100 companies (an index consisting of the shares of the 100 biggest companies by market

capitalisation on the London Stock Exchange (LSE)). They found that women face an additional and equally invisible barrier beyond the glass ceiling. They argued that compared to men, women are more likely to find themselves on a glass cliff, such that their positions of leadership are associated with greater risk and an increased possibility of failure, and can thus be seen as more precarious. (Ryan et al., 2007). The research that Ryan and Haslam conducted was in response to an article featured in "The Times" called "Women on the Board: Help or Hindrance" where it was suggested that while women attaining positions on the company board might be a positive change, these women leaders were having a negative impact on the company's performance. There was a need for a more nuanced analysis of women in leadership and company performance: one that can take into account situational factors such as the time of appointment and fluctuations in the company performance and can thus shed some light on the causal relationship between the appointment of women leaders and a company's financial performance. (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). The critical mechanism driving this outcome is biased against non-traditional leaders combined with preferences for traditional leaders. (Cook & Glass, 2013) In this way, compared to men, women who assume leadership offices may be differentially exposed to criticism and are in greater danger of being apportioned blame for negative outcomes that were set in train well before they assumed their new roles. (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). It would be important to look at how sensitive women leaders are towards their positions in the organisations in terms of the glass cliff theory and whether the existence of women as a low-status group might also be leading to more frequent confrontations with a glass cliff.

Women are considered to have a communal leadership style, i.e. leadership which involves sharing responsibility and decision making, while men are considered to have an agentic leadership style (Kulich et al., 2015, p.06). The reason why women are considered to have relational or soft skills may be because of the kind of socialisation women go through,, where intuitiveness, interpersonal sensitivity and empathy are some of the main characteristics that

they are encouraged to work upon from a very young age. These are often tacit, resulting from years of socialisation practices, primarily embedded in women's attributes and their "being," and exhibited in interactions with others (D'Mello, 2005).

In another study by Robin Ely and Irene Padavic (2020), based on a collaboration with a global consulting firm for 18 months, individuals were asked to explain the significant underrepresentation of women in top executive positions within most companies. The prevailing response was found to be based on the belief that these top executive roles necessitate excessively long hours**.** According to the authors, to explain the low number of women in positions of power, the explanation that the need for working long hours does not align with the firm's data. Further, the authors found that women were not held back due to challenges in balancing work and family, and men also faced similar issues. Instead, women were hindered by being encouraged to accept accommodations such as part-time roles and being moved to roles and positions which are internal-facing. This derailed their career progression. It was found that the root cause of women's stagnated advancement is a pervasive culture of overwork that negatively impacts both genders and perpetuates gender inequality (Ely and Irene Padavic 2020).

Further, research conducted by Ryan and others (2007), focused on various factors that contribute to explain the glass cliff theory such as sexism, in-group favouritism, lack of opportunities, expendability and scapegoating, gender stereotypes, lack of networks and support, a demonstration of equality, and other company factors, etc. Their study was based on a sample of 164 self-selected individuals, who answered a questionnaire spontaneously after reading an online news article on the differences in the opinions of women and men regarding the appointment of women to leadership positions. It was observed that social identity, in terms of gender identification[2] plays an important role in women's leadership positioning, and the degree to which individuals support particular explanations for group-based phenomena is

[2] It refers to how participants identify with their gender group.

likely to be influenced by identity-based motivations. (Ryan et al., 2007, p. 192). The study categorised participants as either high identifiers or low identifiers based on this self-identification. The concept of social identity was important to understanding participants' attitudes towards the glass cliff phenomenon—higher gender identification among women correlated with a stronger belief that women are more likely to be placed in precarious leadership positions, known as the glass cliff (Ryan et al., 2007).

Bruckmüller and others discussed the importance of understanding women's and men's experiences in the workplace, rather than simply seeing gender diversity as "a numbers game" (Bruckmüller et al., 2014). Gender equality in leadership is not only about the number of women in power but also about the types of roles they hold and their experiences in those positions. The phenomenon can negatively impact women's careers, particularly if they are associated with failure even when they were not responsible for the crisis and the glass cliff is most apparent in measures of performance that are psychological rather than material. (Bruckmüller et al., 2014). Therefore, these appointments of women which measure success and performance, not only hamper the reputations and credibility of these women but also harm women at a collective level.

This also brings us to understand how tokenism works in organisations. According to Rosabeth Moss Kanter, women are visible as members of a category, because of their social type. Every act of theirs tended to be evaluated beyond its meaning for the organisation and taken as a sign of "how women perform." This meant that there was a tendency for problematic situations to be blamed on the woman, on her category membership- rather than on the situation. (Kanter, 1977, p. 214). If women tend to do well in pressurising situations, then it is considered to be an extraordinary circumstance. But if a woman fails to perform, considering the fact that her position is inherently precarious, she is blamed for the company's bad performance as a leader, hence the 'glass cliff' serves as a metaphor. Further, this might also impact the workplace relationships among women in the sense

that they might not want to identify as part of their social group, hence isolating themselves so as to escape scrutiny in the organisation.

It is now known that gender stereotyping is a prevalent reason why women face the glass cliff, but another theme that keeps reappearing is "organisational change." Female leaders might be appointed just for the reason that they are not men. Bruckmuller and Branscombe (2014), systematically studied the history of leadership in both successful and failing companies. It was observed in this study that for some participants, all former leaders described in a brief company description were male, whereas, for other participants, they were all female. Results of the study revealed that glass cliff appointment patterns were contingent on a male-dominated history of leadership. In this condition, participants again chose a male candidate to lead a successful company and a female candidate to lead an unsuccessful company. However, this pattern disappeared when the company had a history of female leadership. Importantly, however, it was not reversed (Bruckmüller et al., 2014, p. 214). Similarly, a study by Kulich and others showed that the choice of an atypical leader (i.e., a woman instead of a man) may not indicate the valorisation of feminine leadership competence as a means for improving performance, but it may rather signal to the evaluators of the company (i.e., investors, clients, and other companies) that the company is taking action to cope with the crisis (Kulich et al., 2015, p. 6-7). The aim is to influence investors' evaluations towards a positive trend, a strategy called "window dressing" in the finance world (Helland & Sykuta, 2004, p. 5).

To sum up, women are confronted with the metaphorical glass cliff when they are hired to any position, they have to deal with much more than just the challenges at the workplace. Most organisations or companies looking to diversify, still consider the private sphere as a domain that should ideally be dominated by women, following society, and the amount of work that is to be done at work and at home. Women tend to deal with the household while trying to create a space for themselves in the public domain which is not as readily available as it is for men (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). For

example, take the case of working mothers. A working mother is found to be an institution in herself, aiming to attain a successful career with financial independence. She also has a greater responsibility to achieve motherhood for her growing child. Both jobs are challenging and require equal importance, doing justice to these two jobs without neglecting the other is a formidable task (Vasumathi, 2018, p. 101). Therefore, it is important to look at how the appointments of women were impacted in terms of the glass cliff effect, especially during the Covid-19 crisis during which we saw many companies facing economic downturns.

**Balancing Work and Family**

Work and family are equally tough arenas requiring huge amounts of time and energy, hence becoming antagonistic spheres, and leading to work-family conflicts. Women are increasingly encouraged to pursue self-fulfilment in terms of their careers and at the same time face intense pressure to sacrifice themselves for their children by providing "intensive parenting", and being highly involved in child rearing and development. (Reddy et al., 2010, p. 113). Therefore, since a woman has to handle both work and home, any kind of extra stress in either domain may affect her behaviour in the other. According to a study by Kandel and others on the nature of specific strains and stresses among married women in their marital, occupational, and household roles, it was found that strains and stresses are lower in family roles than in occupational and household roles among married women (Kandel et al., 1985, p. 73) These have more severe consequences for the psychological well-being of women than occupational strains and stresses. (Reddy et al., 2010, p. 114).

If there is a high amount of responsibility at home, women might not be able to give as much importance to their work life which might lead to low performance. This apprehension may also lead to women with children or married women not being chosen for certain jobs that demand importance even beyond certain working hours. Women might be given flexible working hours as was seen in the case of the interview with the first respondent in this

study, but even though it is a given that women have to do more work than men in terms of tackling both work life and household chores, they are not really compensated for it. The internalisation of the belief that roles are gender specific prescribes different life options for men and women. For men, this life option implies that they give priority to work over family, whereas, for women, it implies priority given to family over work and this leads to role conflict. (Reddy et al., 2010 p. 116). This is perhaps because of persisting stereotypes which often compel organisations to assume that married women (especially those with children) will and should play a primary caretaker role within their families. (Schwartz, 1989). Even though couples might claim to have "modern" ideologies and be more committed to gender equality at home as well as at the workplace, research over time and across cultures shows that there is a persistent inequality in the number of household responsibilities between men and women with dual career (Reddy et al., 2010, p. 113-114). In societies, where there is low gender egalitarianism, such as in India, spousal support is extremely important for women (Rosenbaum & Cohen, 1999, p. 110-111). But unfortunately, even though in India, the men as husbands are supportive of their wife's participation in the workforce, they are yet to assume responsibility for sharing domestic chores (Ramu, 1987, p. 911).

According to research based on two projects, where the first project entailed conducting in-depth interviews with six women working in senior managerial positions, three working for the Government of India and three working in the private sector; and the second project involved a questionnaire survey responses from six women in managerial positions, two of them working for the public sector, three in the private sector and one in a US-based multinational, it was found that the biggest challenge faced by women managers today is managing their dual role of managers in organisations and at home as housewives. Women experience tremendous stress caused by either work overload or underload. Women's overload comes from the pressure to work harder to prove themselves. (Budhwar. et.al., 2005, pp. 186).

Well-known multinational professional services network Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited began an inaugural survey in 2021, called the "Women @ Work" report which surveyed 5000 working women across 10 countries. Its 2023 report had interesting findings about the experiences of women in the workplace. The findings relevant to this study are presented here:

- More than half of the women mentioned that their stress levels were higher than the previous year.
- Around half of respondents report that their stress levels are higher than a year ago.
- Eighty-eight percent of women work full time but nearly half of them have domestic tasks as their primary responsibility.
- Only ten per cent mentioned that the tasks fell on their partners.
- Approximately, only one in ten were the primary income earners for their families in comparison to over two-thirds of the women who said that their partner is the primary income earner.
- Nearly four out of ten respondents mentioned that they had to prioritise their partner's career over their own. Even for those who were the primary income earners, one out of five women felt the same.
- The combined attrition of women from 2020 and 2021 has been less than the attrition in 2022 because of a lack of flexibility in working hours.
- An overwhelming ninety-seven percent believed that asking for flexible work arrangements would adversely impact their chances of promotion at work and ninety-five percent felt their workloads would not be adjusted accordingly.
- Women were still experiencing non-inclusive behaviours and many still don't report it to their employers with forty-four percent of the respondents reporting experiences of harassment and/or microaggressions in the workplace over the past year. (*Women @ Work 2023*, n.d.).

Women become a certain "social type" and in that way, their recruitment and promotions are also impacted. The reasons why many companies do not hire women employees include safety concerns, serious interruption to work due to maternity leave, less acceptance of women as bosses by male employees, and

traditional stereotypes hindering women from moving to managerial assignments. (Budhwar. et.al., 2005, pp. 189). It has been seen that even though at the policy level there exists the principle of "equal opportunity" empirical evidence suggests that women stagnate at certain levels, such as entry and middle level in the job ladder and are concentrated in specific areas like Human Resource (HRD) development, call centres, marketing, financial sector, etc., because of certain notions related to their "social type." The results reflect that the gender relations at the workplace project a certain kind of stereotypical image of women workforce and societal constraints force them to experience glass-ceiling causing over-representation in certain job segments in the lower rung while there is a scant representation of women in the top level of the hierarchy. (Bhattacharyya, 2012, pp. 50-51).

Leela Dube discusses the process of training girls in patrilineal India, and emphasises how the distinction between feminine work and masculine work comes early in childhood and becomes sharper as the child grows up. (Dube, 1988, pp. 17). And this kind of socialisation doesn't necessarily look discriminatory even if its basis lies in patriarchal forms of discrimination. The process starts with something as simple as encouraging the girls to play with dolls or play kitchen or other games which involve 'marriage,' 'baby' etc. That is perhaps one of the reasons why it is so normalised to expect women with qualities that are supposedly inherent to these activities even in a corporate setting and any woman who fails to fall into that category is questioned and looked down upon. The notion of tolerance and self-restraint are also rooted in a consciously-cultivated feminine role which is embedded in and legitimised by culture and cultural ideology. (Dube, 1988, pp. 17). Because of these ideas, women are not expected to seek more benefits or pay and this is reflected in the public sphere like workplaces and comes as a shock when a woman gets up and demands more.

For women, where the relational self predominates, empowerment would mean kindling their autonomous self to enable them to question the patriarchal order and create a space for themselves. (D'mello, 2006, p. 154). This would

mean that women have the freedom to choose their careers over their household responsibilities as easily as men. This could happen if household responsibility did not primarily fall on women and men were not considered as actors who are just helping with such responsibilities. Balancing both career and family is an arduous task for working women, especially when they have children who are very young and there is no well-equipped daycare/crèche facility where they can leave their kids without any tension while they are at work. Women often suffer from the guilt complex of not spending enough time during the tender age of their children and being forced to leave their children in the hands of the maids in whom they have little faith. Women employees thus face a dual burden—work and family— which creates a lot of stress and strain and role conflict. (Buddhapriya, 2015, Hochschild, 2012).

When it comes to hierarchical relationships specifically, between women (and sometimes between men in the organisation), where women occupy more junior positions it may happen that to make sense of a woman's rise to a top position, women themselves may come to view the possibility of success as available only to women who shed their feminine identity, and act like men. and that may lead to the women in senior positions to use gender-based identification. This further leads to viewing senior women as unlikely sources of support and not also as rendering the development of productive, developmental relationships (Ely, 1994). But if there are more women in leadership positions then the idea of women achieving such success may be normalised and there shall be more positive gender identification. According to Preeti Mehra, in an online article titled "Women Managers: to the Top and Beyond," there are three different approaches to gender initiatives in the organisation. According to the first approach, women employees are considered a part of the 'boys club' and adopt a masculine style of providing tough assignments and wanting their women employees to be assertive leaders just like men. In the second approach, it is recognised that though women should do the same work as men, they have 'different needs' which should be acknowledged and accommodated at the workplace. And the third approach

presumes that women bring with them a 'unique style and attitude' to the workplace. (Mehra, 2002).

In India, if we look at the experiences of women, it would be necessary to look into the experiences of women and caste in IT organisations. Caste is not freely talked about in these organisations and is not even acknowledged in these spaces, yet the experiences of lower caste employees speak a lot about how casteism flows as an undercurrent in these spaces. Caste problematises our understanding of institutions because it is a more visceral, embodied institution, underpinned by sacred justifications, which strips away individual agency and humanity in low caste identities. For women, this dimension adds up to the family-work conflicts, gendered glass ceiling, and systemic and personal obstacles that were noted as standing in the way of an inclusive environment and there is an 'interlocking or intersectional matrix'. (Fernandez, 2018, p. 27). Though the IT organisations in India are seen as promoting gender diversity, this does not trickle down to inclusivity in terms of caste. The intersectionality of caste, family, and gender in dominant caste women's access to IT networks through their strong family ties, has clearly presented the case for gender inequality including the caste dimension (Fernandez, 2018, p. 269). There has not been enough discussion on the gendered experiences of women from lower castes because of the sheer dominance of women from the dominant castes taking up IT workspaces.

In the purview of the existing research that has been done on the glass ceiling and the experiences of women in the workplace, this article is based on the following research questions:

- How are the experiences of women different from those of men in an Indian context, particularly in technology and engineering leadership positions?
- How does women's social identity affect their response to encountering a glass ceiling and other systemic barriers with specific responses to the IT industry?

The aim is to understand and present the experiences of women in the corporate sector in an Indian context, particularly in technology and engineering leadership positions in IT/ITES organisations located in Hyderabad. Also, how women in leadership positions function and respond in comparison to men.

**Methodology**

Hyderabad was chosen as the location for this study, as this city has flourished in terms of the massive expansion of the IT industry since the last decade of the 20th century. The liberalisation of the Indian economy in the 1990s led to a wave of foreign investment in the country, including in the software industry. The growth of the software industry in Hyderabad can be seen as a result of the interplay between global economic forces and local factors such as government policy, infrastructure, and human capital. The expansion of the IT industry attracts a significant number of people not only from urban centres but also from semi-urban and rural settings (Ramachandran & Ray, 2003).

On the one hand, the industry brought new opportunities for skilled employment, higher wages, and technological innovation. On the other hand, it also contributed to widening social inequalities, as the benefits of the industry were not equally distributed. Many of the jobs created in the industry were highly specialised and required advanced technical skills, leaving less educated and marginalised groups at a disadvantage. Moreover, the rapid growth of the industry also had environmental consequences, as urbanisation and industrialisation led to increased pollution and resource depletion. (Das, 2015, pp. 55-57). The developments can be analysed based on the broader process of capitalist development and the changing nature of work and labour relations. The software industry was characterised by a highly flexible and mobile workforce, with many employees working on short-term contracts or as freelancers. This new form of labour organisation challenged traditional notions of stable employment and job security, leading to new forms of precarity and insecurity.

This study was conducted during the period from January to April 2023, and about 20 women in leadership positions in IT companies were identified based on their LinkedIn social network profiles in leading companies in Hyderabad. They were approached through emails explaining the purpose of the study and requesting their time for unstructured in-depth interviews. Responses to the emails were very limited and rejections were many, as women were generally reluctant to talk about their experiences for fear of coming under negative scrutiny in spite of assuring them that the interviews would maintain anonymity. At times it proved to be a task to coax them into talking about any sexism that they might have faced. Because of the lack of responses, the respondent sample size is restricted to three interviews, with women with having considerable work experience. However, it may be noted that these responses provided substantial information regarding the topic for research.

The first interview and the third were conducted on Google Meet, due to lack of time to travel to their office and also as they work from home most of the time and the second was a telephonic interview. The respondents were quite enthusiastic about answering questions after clearing their initial doubts and a rapport was built during the initial conversation and mentioning the confidentiality condition.

The first respondent is a global HR head for an IT product company with 7 years of experience in the same company and a total experience of 29 years in the IT industry in Hyderabad – referred to as SA. The second respondent is the Manager of Technical Communications with 19 years of experience – referred to as SG. The third respondent was a qualified software engineer, in a multinational FinTech company in a leadership position as Head of a technical division, managing about 300 strong team members. She had earlier worked in the USA and moved to India, and has a total experience of 30 years, henceforth referred to as SD.

The interviews lasted 50-60 minutes and provided the study with findings which were in tandem with the secondary data and literature reviewed. From

the data collected, five themes have been detected which provide insightful evidence for my research questions. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed in tandem with the literature found. In the following sections, these themes will be elaborated.

**Findings and Emerging Themes**

**Glass ceiling**

When respondents were asked about their position in the company and the number of years of experience that they had it was found that there was stagnation in both cases in terms of whether there were chances for a promotion. In terms of their own experiences, the first respondent SA said,

*In this particular organisation, I have been working for close to 7 years and when I joined, I was told that this was the senior most position in HR, so I was very well aware that the minute I joined I have hit the glass ceiling here. It's just that, in between I had requested them to redesignate me because I had joined as a senior manager HR and then I told them that I know that this was the senior most position but my designation does not reflect that it is the senior most position because when you say it is the senior manager there is always something above that, so they kind of accepted my request and of course, they changed it some time ago and now I am head of HR, India.*

The second respondent SG mentioned some disparities that she had seen within her own career prospects,

*I have been working at this company for 19 years. But yeah, down the line I have also faced certain circumstances where the growth and the promotions were not at par with men. So, there could be many reasons and not just the women but people becoming older in the organisation, they are taken for granted. As far as working environment is concerned, we are pretty comfortable. Initially, it was okay, from a writer I became a senior writer. I managed a team of 2-3 people but later on for the past many years like 12 years it has become stagnant, yeah, the position remains the same despite*

*extra responsibilities given, the role changed quite a lot, and the amount of work has increased, the performance has been absolutely fine but still then that growth has become stagnant.*

But there were certain insights to be found in terms of them watching other employees face the glass ceiling. According to SA the HR Head,

*Yes. Sometimes I do feel though it is not very obviously told, but I do sometimes feel that happens. We had to internally promote some people and I saw that though some female employees were very good at their work they did not get that raise but their male counterparts who were not so good with their work got that opportunity because it was a manager's call and I guess maybe they, it was a very subjective decision than objectively looking at people's performance.*

And according to the SG,

*There have been instances where I felt there was this disparity between men and women. It never happened with me but I saw with a few colleagues of mine were not given key positions because they had children and they were women. I have seen the times changing in the last couple of years.*

The Head of a division, respondent SD, spoke about how she had not even thought of moving up the hierarchy, as she wanted to pay attention to her child. She said that it was better for her to opt to work from home after 4 PM, to reach home by the time the child comes from school.

She says,

*A colleague told me that I have all the knowledge, experience, and ability to be in the highest position in the company I work for, and he asked me why I am not considered for these higher positions. He also said that another male colleague has moved up at least two levels, and who is not as efficient as I am. I do realise that I have the potential. But that entails a lot more commitment to being available around the clock, and questioning of decisions. I am content*

*with the position I am currently in and my work. If I move up the ladder, there will be scrutiny of all the decisions, tasks, and my performance whereas the male colleague who moved up the ladder is not subject to such treatment. I can clearly see this happening in the meetings.*

The glass ceiling and the glass cliff are visible in these responses.

**Roles in Critical Task Projects**

When asked about whether they felt any discrimination in terms of being assigned high-risk projects the first respondent, being in HR, was unaware of how assignments are done in terms of technical jobs. But SG mentions,

*When you say high risk, I would say that I have deliberately taken up those projects with very less resources but we delivered without any complaints. I feel that women are more hard-working than men, men can spend more time because they have that (free time) but women work harder within less amount of time. It has been difficult not only for the same kind of work but much more than my male colleagues. I, myself have faced this. It is currently going on and I am trying to deal with it. Not that I have been interested in whether my male colleagues have been promoted or not but I have realised that this is what I have been doing and I should be getting.*

**Women and Layoffs**

When asked about gender disparity that they might have seen in terms of layoffs, SA answered in the positive and I quote,
*Now that you ask me this question and I look back I feel yes there were more women than men while I never consciously looked at it as if why were women employees laid off but yeah it's worth… uh because the reasons were very different every time there was a layoff there was a business decision and these were very very small teams, just one person, two people teams and three people teams and there were women employees also in that team that got*

*impacted so yes if I have to look there were more female employees who were laid off.*

The respondent SG, was not involved in layoffs. But there was a statement she made that in the case of promotions, she had seen gender disparity. However, she didn't want to speak more about it or speak more about those details.

**Experiences in comparison to their male colleagues**

It was observed that during the pandemic it was acknowledged that women had more responsibilities than men and flexibility was allowed while dealing with female employees as mentioned by the respondent SA:
*My organisation was very sensitive towards women's needs and whether pandemic (situation) or otherwise, I feel that managers are very accepting when women come to them for support, and say that there are certain issues so we need certain flexibility, they have always been granted that especially during pandemic there were situations where people were working from home and children were at home so it was an added pressure on the woman employee coz, she has to handle her children and work.*

Respondent SG however, did not face any difference in work experience during pandemic because her team worked from home for the entirety of the pandemic, but mentioned her experiences and situations that she had noticed as..

*Sometimes we women feel that we do our work and just go home and look after family but at times actually my male colleagues, sometimes they start work in the evening you know, they have no hurry to go back home. I am pretty old in the company by age also and by experience and I have seen my younger colleagues who were newly married and they became new mothers, so I remember how they struggle to come for work and when they go back, they have to deal with problems of young children. There is a difference*

*because a man can work and stay till late and not be bothered but with her, she wants to come on time and leave on time because after completing the office work, she has other responsibilities to attend to. I would say that we have to work harder within the same number of hours trying to complete our work with more sincerity and discipline than our male colleagues.*

Similarly, SA also mentioned instances of how certain stereotypes exist regarding women. She mentions that women are considered to be more compassionate and empathetic with an eye for detail hence they are more likely to be hired to an HR or finance position. And because of the extra pressure on women because of household duties they were less likely to be hired to a recruiter's position which required employees to be available at any time of the day. To quote her,

*Now being a woman, I would confess that if I want to hire a recruiter then I would recruit a guy than a woman. I'll tell you the reason why and this is not based on any ideas but is based on experience. Now typically the kind of flexibility women would seek, right now I do have a male recruiter and I have a female recruiter in my team and I see that the guy is 100 per cent dedicated to his work. He doesn't look at day, night or working hours. Women are more structured that way, you know, for them- I am gonna work eight hours nine hours is my stipulated work hours and I am not blaming them, after that I have other duties to perform so I need to focus on that. But what I see is that the nature of that role demands that somebody always be on the job. And men because of the way it is structured are only doing their job and they don't have any additional responsibilities (laughs… they will kill me if they hear me) they suit these kinds of jobs better. I am actually having issues with female recruiter here because every second day she is like- my son is not well; I need an hour off and I am sure some other teams might also be facing this (…)*

She gave her insights on how maternity leaves, especially the increase of maternity leaves from three months to six months impacted the work in the organisation. Neither would they be able to hire interns for work that required

full-time job positions nor could they hire temporary employees because of security issues hence the extra work would fall on the other employees in the team. To quote her,

*Sometimes they extend the maternity leave by a month or two and that leaves a position empty for 7 to 8 months. And then the work falls on the other team members. So, if we look at it from a purely meritocratic aspect, then we (women) should not say that we need flexibility and we need these kinds of things. If I have to look at myself purely as a professional, I want my work to be done right? So, I will obviously choose someone who will dedicate their time to do my work otherwise I am the one getting pressurised for the work not being done. So knowingly why would I get somebody who is going to slow down the entire process. and if I as an HR person can think like this then I am sure people in managerial positions are gonna think like that.*

According to the SG women had different experiences and demanded that they be given work only within the stipulated office hours. Further, she felt that because of this reason, women employees had to work with more discipline and could not afford to relax because their responsibilities do not end at the workplace. To quote her,

*There is a difference because a man can work and stay till late and not be bothered but with her, she wants to come on time and leave on time because after completing the office work, she has other responsibilities to attend to. I would say that we have to work harder within the same number of hours trying to complete our work with more sincerity and discipline than our male colleagues.*

**The Glass Cliff**

When SA was asked if, for certain decisions, her voice was heard and everything went well, people might try to disturb the process and not let her implement her decisions. She also mentions her experiences with a superior to whom she doesn't report to in the hierarchy, but this person is coming and giving her suggestions on how to do her work. She said,

*I'll make a suggestion and initially they will be like- no no this is not gonna work this doesn't happen here like this and one month down the line when we are having a meeting they will be like, I was thinking and I have come up with this brilliant idea and they will be talking the same thing that I have spoken to them. Or they will literally micromanage you and they try to keep on checking whether you have slipped somewhere down the road, only to get back to you saying- I told you so, this is not going to work.*

This is the glass cliff that we refer to where women are expected to fail when taking decisions that might be precarious and are put under immense scrutiny. This also reflects the sexism faced by women in terms of their ideas not being taken seriously and if for some reason it is, then she is put under immense scrutiny.

**Social Identity as Women**

When asked whether she ever had the "lean on" factor with her superiors who are women, SA mentions that she has received tremendous support from her female colleagues and even supervisors in whatever help or action that she has needed. Respondent SG however, did not have such experiences or situations neither positively nor negatively while respondent SD did not have any comments on the same.

**Discussion and Analysis of the Findings**

From the interviews with SA, SG and SD, it was evident that the existing literature on the experiences of women working in organisations is still relevant in current times. If we observe each facet of the workplace, we find important insights into how women's experiences differ from those of men.

First, considering the glass ceiling, it was found that even as a global HR head, SA, has been told that she will not be progressing upwards. Respondent SG, who has been working at the same company for 19 years has reached a point of stagnation, after a certain point even if the workload has increased over the

years. It proves that even though women reach certain higher-level managerial positions, they are less likely to be chosen for higher positions which can be observed in the case of SG, who mentioned that even though she had been in the company for 19 years she was in a position where she felt like she had been taken for granted. She also felt that she was facing barriers (in terms of the glass ceiling). It explains the fourth criterion of the glass ceiling, in terms of being greater at higher levels or in terms of reaching higher positions throughout one's career. (Cotter et al., 2001, pp. 661-662).

The experiences of women have been different from that of men and this can be observed through the interviews, how women want to give only a stipulated amount of time to their work and how the respondents had at least one incident where they were confronted with a female employee either asking for relaxation, (as in the case of HR head, SA) how a female employee was coming and sharing her problems about being stressed due to dealing with workplace responsibilities and her children. It is important to note that women are prone to taking care of household chores and adjusting their professional lives in order to accommodate family pressures. This goes in tandem with the research and literature mentioned earlier, especially on how balancing both career and family can be arduous and various factors affecting their personal lives may create a lot of stress and strain role conflict. (Buddhapriya, 2015, pp. 33-42). Even if there might be little support from families and partners in household chores, child-rearing is still largely considered the primary responsibility of a woman. So, even if in the household, the men/husbands are supportive of their wives' participation in the workforce they do not take equal responsibility for household chores. (Ramu, 1987, p. 914).

On the issue of layoffs, it was found that in the case of the HR head SA, she observed that there were more women who were taken out of their jobs. She says that it might be a coincidence that the layoff decisions taken on a case-by-case basis also involved more women being removed from organisations, which is an issue that needs to be further debated and studied.

During the interview, the response on the theme of recruitment, it was mentioned by SA, the HR respondent, that it would be preferable to recruit men instead of women. But it should be a priority for employers that rather than acknowledging this disparity and accepting it as a norm, they should adopt policies that will be favourable to work-life balance for both men and women. Speaking on how maternity leaves become a concern and has been seen as one of the major reasons why organisations do not prefer to hire women, along with other reasons like safety issues, less acceptance of women as bosses by male employees, and traditional stereotypes are hindering women from moving to managerial assignments. (Budhwar et al., 2005, pp. 189).

The HR respondent SA, also faced the glass cliff, and mentioned that her work was being micromanaged. When she would make some difficult decisions during meetings, they were not accepted in the first instance. This is because it is an inherent belief that women are more likely to fail since they are seen as non-traditional leaders as compared to men who are seen as traditional leaders. (Cook & Glass, 2013).

For respondent SG, the experiences at work stemmed mostly from the fact that employed women were not considered as the primary source of income for family. At work they were always concerned with household activities and chores, which impacted both their work life and promotional prospects. From the data provided by Deloitte in its survey on working women, it can be observed that even if eighty-eight percent of women worked full-time, half of them still had domestic tasks as their primary responsibility. And only ten percent mentioned that these responsibilities fell on their partners. (*Women @ Work 2023*, n.d.). Similar accounts of work and home responsibilities are provided by SA, when she mentioned the cases of women asking for time off because they had to take care of their children. While managers might look at this as postponement in meeting deadlines, what has not been considered is the kind of extra work pressure that a woman has to go through because of work overload. At the same time, there is pressure to prove themselves as good as men at their work, with stereotypical notions of women continuously working

at the same pace as men and also competing against them. One of the points that respondent SG, kept insisting upon was that women work harder than men in her opinion and this probably stems from the point mentioned in this context.

Besides, it was refreshing to see that respondent SA could depend on her female colleagues and superiors in terms of support at the workplace. Robin J. Ely (1994) talks of how women in senior positions in male-dominated organisations may find themselves at odds with each other. Perhaps, the reason she has found such support is that most of the senior positions in the organisation she was working for are occupied by women. Also, with respondent SG, even though, she did not mention it directly, her women subordinates were comfortable enough to approach her to discuss the problems that they were facing at home.

The two interviews with the HR (SA) and the Tech team leader (SD), give us important insights into how these instances and circumstances that women face still hold true. It is perceived that, organisations are becoming more flexible and responsive to women employees, during hiring and thus maintaining gender equality. For instance, even though the HR respondent mentioned that maternity leaves are an issue for the smooth performance of the organisation, and the extra pressure is on the other employees, none of the male employees in teams, complained about having women on their teams or showed any kind of reluctance regarding the hiring of women to the company. These instances perhaps provide some respite and hope that organisations might be changing for the better. However, there is still a long way to go in terms of policy changes and implementations that will help and encourage women in their career prospects.

Thus, many of the themes discussed in the literature can be found to be valid, reiterated and could be supported in this study. The next section concludes the discussion and some themes for future research.

**Conclusion**

This study provides significant insights into how women have to constantly negotiate their spaces in organisations and how the onus of proving themselves falls on the women solely as a "social type." While times are changing, women are facing fewer barriers on the one hand, and organisational structures are inherently created favouring men on the other hand. Women are not considered as normal participants in organisations, as men are. The existing societal stereotypes surrounding women still expect them to be "good mothers and wives" even if they are allowed to go out and pursue their professional careers.

Themes such as the glass ceiling, assignment of critical task projects, layoffs, glass cliff, and difference in experiences in comparison to male colleagues and their social identity seem to recur in this study and the findings seem to justify and demonstrate empirical reality in tandem with the existing literature.

The idea that women will never be able to be absolved from household duties is still a concern. This perhaps can be seen in the case of Indra Nooyi, the former CEO of the multinational PepsiCo. In her interview, she narrated how when she was promoted as president of PepsiCo, she was excited to tell her mother, but her mother asked her to buy milk. And when Nooyi protested saying, "*I've just been named President of PepsiCo. And all you want me to do is go out and get milk*", her mother replied saying, "*Let me explain something to you. You may be President of PepsiCo, but when you step into this house, you're a wife and mother first. Nobody can take that place. So, leave that crown in the garage*." This interview (available online) reiterates that a woman can reach the topmost rung of the ladder and still be pulled down when she reaches home. Women will always be inherently seen as wives and mothers to someone and cannot escape those responsibilities that are seen as inherent to her gender, perhaps as long as these stereotypical values persist, organisational structures will not consider women as natural components in their structures like men are. It is also observed that women from the upper

class and castes dominate the corporate sector and IT industry, and the present study gives us an account of their experiences. Due to the lack of time and rejection by a large number of respondents to the interview requests, this study is limited, and further research can be conducted for deeper insights into the themes of intersectionalities.

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**Article: Negotiating the blurred boundaries of Sacred and Profane: A Sociological Analysis of Tibetan Buddhist Monastic Education**

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# Negotiating the blurred boundaries of Sacred and Profane: A Sociological Analysis of Tibetan Buddhist Monastic Education

--Sahana Sen

## Abstract

The sight of red coloured robes and fluttering prayer flags is a common for all those who visit the Himalayan town of Dharamsala or any of the Tibetan settlements spread across India. It reflects the religious symbols that are central to the culture of the Tibetans. Following Durkheim, we can explore how the spaces of sacred and profane are blurred in the assimilation of the textual curriculum and the newly introduced aspects of Science and English learning among the Tibetan Buddhist Monks living in Sera Jey Monastic University, Bylakuppe, Karnataka. This paper deals with the application of the dynamics of sacred and profane in the context of the potential reform efforts within the Tibetan Buddhist curriculum. The understanding of the concept of 'sacred' as explained by Durkheim was essentially to create the domain of meaning of what was and what could potentially be considered as religious and what remained outside the boundaries of it. The juxta- positioning of the pursuit of the Tibetan Buddhist cultural learning in the monasteries and the challenges posed by the need for Science education among the younger monastics pushed by the neo-liberal mainstream education system remain the main focus of the paper.

*Keywords: Culture of learning, Education, Pedagogy, Tibetan Monastery*

## Introduction

The sight of red coloured robes and fluttering prayer flags is a common for all those who visit the Himalayan town of Dharamsala or any of the Tibetan settlements spread across India. It reflects the religious symbols that are central to the culture of the Tibetans. The focus of research is on this community which can be categorised along different lines of socio-economic, religious and political importance. The aim of the study is to understand the culture of learning of monks and nuns living in Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries and Nunneries. They form a part of an exiled community which took refuge under the Indian Government in 1959. It is a religious community which

identify as a minority in the Indian census. The aim of this paper is to bring out the uniqueness of the learning culture of the monastics who reside in a residential institution around which camps of this particular refugee community are settled. The study focuses on the distinctiveness of the curricular and pedagogic practices of this community from a sociological point of view. The views of the male and female monastics were taken into account. The challenge lies in cutting across all these levels in order to pin – point the main aspects of their learning culture.

This paper deals with the application of the dynamic of sacred and profane in the context of the potential reform efforts within the Tibetan Buddhist curriculum in the Gelug monastery of Bylakuppe named Sera Jey Monastery. The understanding of the concept of 'sacred' as explained by Durkheim was essentially to create the domain of meaning of what was and what could potentially be considered as religious and what remained outside the boundaries of it. The main argument of this paper is to draw out the multiple ways in which the reflections of this dichotomy is seen in the culture of learning of the Tibetan pedagogy. Qualitative research method based on oral history techniques were used to conduct unstructured interviews of 50 monks in Sera Jey. Interspersed with non-participant observation of classroom processes (*petty*), debate (*dmacha*), the Ethnography of the Monastic community involved critical engagement with their everyday daily routine, which centred around the Monastery and the culture and tradition which it represents.

**The Central Tenet**

The monastic curriculum of the Tibetans is centred on the authoritative aspect of the sacred texts. However, the forces of modernity and influences of technological advancement have started influencing the monastic community. In the context of the changing profile of monks and nuns who are now enrolling into the Monasteries and Nunneries in exile, there is also need to reflect on how the monastic community is responding to the demands of the

mainstream classroom teaching that is the basis of the institutional form of education that exists in India today. In this paper, the concept of 'modern education' emphasises on the effort of introducing the monastics to English and Science based education. The oral histories and participant observation techniques of data collection bring about the juxtaposition of the traditional system of scriptural learning with the need to introduce subjects like English, Physics and Biology in the Monasteries and Nunneries.

The dichotomy of religious education versus the relevance of receiving the contemporary science education is an intriguing question that has concerned the scholars of religious education, Buddhist studies, and pursuers of scholarly education in Tibetan Buddhism. Karl Mannheim (1952), in analysing the nature and scope of sociology of knowledge pointed out the relationship between knowledge and existential history. He took a historical-sociological approach to trace out the forms this relationship has taken in the intellectual development of mankind. To trace out the culture of learning of any particular society it is necessary to understand the relationship between the historical background of that culture and the socio-political ideologies of that particular society (Mannheim, 1952).

The lived experiences and perceptions of the monks are at the epicentre of the exploration of the conflict of interest in exploring how these religious institutions ensure educational attainment with the aim of achieving instrumental goals. The perceptions of monks and nuns, about the relevance of modern and mainstream school subjects in the monastic curriculum, the ordained and non-ordained teachers, administrative head of the CTA, in addition to non-participant observation of the classroom processes. In the end there is an effort to compare the relevance of the methods applied in the school and in the Monastery and Nunnery learning. These methods help to analyse and assess to what extent modern subjects integrate into the existing monastic curriculum as it is being conducted in the Gelug institutions.

**Identifying the profane in the sacred:**

The aim of having mainstream subjects or secular learning in addition to the monastic curriculum was to introduce the Tibetan monastics to alternative perspective of interpreting the world around them. According to some of the proponents of the science learning, especially the younger Tibetan monks born after 1990s educated in the CBSE Schools, the isolationist nature of erstwhile Tibetan culture has limited their worldview. In order to develop a holistic understanding of the world His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama had encouraged monks and nuns studying in the Monasteries and Nunneries in India in exile, to study Science and English. Under his auspices, the Emory-Tibet Science Initiative (ETSI) allowed science teachers from Europe and USA to work voluntarily with the Buddhist monks to further their science education. The first attempt of introducing science for the monks and nuns was through projects financed by the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) along with other funding agencies. After the completion of the project the Monasteries and Nunneries had the responsibility of continuing teaching science and english by monks and nuns themselves. However, the outcome of such efforts was not entirely successful. The current state of the science learning is portrayed through the class ethnography and the reflections of the teachers and students in the Monastery.

The need for religious education and the existence of monastic institutions have been questioned in the recent times as evidenced by the decreasing number of new students. There are two ways of approaching the issue here. Firstly, to see modern education as complementary to traditional education and secondly, to see traditional education as an alternative to modern education. In the present context the effort is to focus on the former.

Karl Popper (1963:22) pointed out that freeing oneself from tradition is not entirely possible. What happens is a transition of tradition from one to another. But one should critically accept as well as reject the 'taboos' of a tradition. The *scared* is depicted through regular engagement with scriptural readings taking precedence over science and other subjects, participating in prayers. The schedule of the monastics is based on memorising the sacred texts (*pecha*)

and commentaries for their respective levels of learning in the Sera Jey Monastic University, Bylakuppe, followed by attending lectures *(petty)* at the teacher's residence, memorising and meditating the same again at their own quarters, followed debating (*damcha*) with their classmates at the Central Monastery Courtyard. These activities in a day end with each of them going back to their quarters (*khangsten*) and reading and reflecting again. Through the three step processes of reading memorising and analysing they comprehend the texts.

Science education for the monks included a two-hour class in elementary Physics and Applied Physics with some mathematical problems. The classes were conducted by the Physics teacher from the Sera Jey Secondary School in Tibetan and by an American monk, Chogyal (named changed) in English who was previously a Physics teacher in America. His Holiness had made clear how relevant science was for the monastic community many times in his speeches. There were multiple projects that were conducted by the Department of Science under the Tibetan Government in Exile to propagate his message. Several workshops had been conducted along with the support of several foreign support groups from different parts of the world to get the monastic community interested in science for the purpose of understanding its contribution in our lives. However, there was a significant lacuna in making the amendments to the Monastic Curricula.

According to Bernstein (1971), curriculum defines what counts as valid knowledge and pedagogy defines what counts as valid transmission of knowledge. Using the concept of classification, Bernstein outlined two types of curriculum codes: collection and integrated codes. The shift from collection to integrated curriculum codes represented the change in the focus of curriculum as a movement from the *sacred* forms of scriptural learning to the inclusion of *profane* mainstream subjects like Physics, Mathematics, English etc. For a Tibetan monk entering a Monastery, to become an ordained monk, it would require 17-19 years ending with a Geshe degree. The *profane* in a monastic setting in erstwhile Tibet was every other activity beyond the routine

of the Monastery that a monk was a part of including enrolling in open universities for English courses, taking science classes during prayer timings to name a few, disrespecting a teacher to name a few. Monks did not share with their fellow monks that they were pursuing mainstream education like B.A or B.Com or B.Sc or were attending Science classes. It was not appreciated by some sections of the monastic community. A sense of taboo or shame was attached with the idea of pursuing mainstream education. It was felt by the senior monks and nuns that joining such classes were unnecessary and contradictory to what they were learning as a part of their monastic course. However, when the novice monks joined such classes they were happy to see fellow monks also showing similar interest in modern education. In erstwhile Tibet, quality learning was associated with the monastic way of life. Further, for the Tibetan society any engagement monastic learning practices imbibing an ascetic's life had significant value. Therefore, for them any engagement with non-monastic practices like studying mainstream subjects such as English and Science were considered as profane.

Students who opted for Open University courses from Karnataka State Open University felt that if they were getting some free time apart from Buddhist Philosophy course they should utilize the time. So they had taken up courses like M.A in English. Only one Sera Jey monk was doing this course in this batch. He got 50 % marks. But after doing this course, he did not feel that he had gained any additional knowledge, but definitely felt happy having gained a M.A. certificate. On most occasions the guardian teachers discouraged the monks to take up any study apart from their regular monastic studies, especially because the material possession of a certificate would not guarantee any holistic return to the Monastic community, rather it would be a for a selfish gain.

There was no clash of routines as they would adjust their routines accordingly. But one of them kept his course secret as he did not want to show off to others and 'advertise'. After completing CBSE from Sera Jey School many monks

were taking up such classes. Some were taking up science courses which needed more effort with practical classes and lot of things to write.

**Learning through critical reasoning: blurring lines between sacred and profane**

The 14th Dalai Lama acknowledges the development of Buddhist Philosophy and epistemology largely due to the challenges posed by other knowledge systems in early India. Today he considers Western science as the counterpart knowledge system and advices the monastics to integrate the findings of modern science and discuss its implications on Buddhist worldview (Sonam, 2017). The recent efforts to introduce science education into Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in India was the result of Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama's determination to maintain continuous interaction with western scientists, scholars and philosophers over last three decades.

While understanding the juxtaposition of Science and *Dharma*, it was found that on certain arguments *Dharma* or Buddhist Philosophy was found more logical and acceptable, secondly, on certain occasions, science was found to be more logical and thirdly, both were found to be trying to find the true nature of reality but from two different perspectives. A westerner monk explained how certain things which could not be explained by science could be explained through 'Dharma' or Buddhist Philosophy. He said just because Science finds something to be non-existant does not mean it does not exist. Usually what Science examines is the 'more gross' or manifest phenomenon, the external things. Whatever comes to mind which is the main 'object of meditation' in Buddhism, 'the inner mind'; science does not deal with that. Whenever science starts to think about mind there is a problem, because the way they perceive mind is kind of 'perverted' or far from what it is in reality.

The way Science understands mind, is through a third-person examination, which according to Dharma is impossible. One cannot see someone's mind, one can see his physical reactions but that is it. They try manipulating the brain and the body to try and discover different reactions. For scientists, mind

is just chemical reactions and nothing more than that. Ordinary people are aware of the gross mind and the subtle mind (a little bit) during the dreams. But one usually does not realize that one was dreaming. But people who have reached very high levels of meditation can bring themselves to levels of very subtle state. So, they could even mediate while they were in deep sleep and also at the time of death. This is what the Dalai Lama introduced to scientists. If scientific evidence contradicted what the monastics believed traditionally then they would have to abandon it. The aim of monastic education was valuable but in order to test what that was one was needed to go through the whole monastic course. This was an experiment in itself.

Monks during meditation have been examined putting them in very cold places like refrigerators. They could keep their body heat very high through meditation.

> 'One day, one high lama from Drepung Monastery, passed away and was taken to a Bangalore Hospital. A week after he passed away he was still in meditation. It was already a week, he was clinically dead, no air conditioning, any ordinary body would decay on the first day especially because it was summer. They had a 'machine' which could be attached to the body. As a result little bit of activity was detected. That gave them a lot of ideas about the more subtle states of mind that are not directly related to the body. The more subtle the mind is, the more disconnected it is from the body'.

The above-mentioned event brings to the context the exchange between Science and Religion which was important for the monastic course. There were many reasons. One was for the contact with the Western culture, with science, because many people thought that religion and science were contradictory. Again, many people who started engaging with science very soon began to lose faith in their own religion. In order to stop this, the first thing the Dalai Lama did was to organise interactions between science and religion to indicate that there was no contradiction. The Dalai Lama who said Buddhism had three sections. The first one is Buddhist science, secondly, Buddhist philosophy, and thirdly, Buddhist religion. So, Buddhist religion includes prayers or puja and following Buddhist rituals. For instance, the prayer for the good health of anyone, through rituals and chanting is a

common feature of Tibetan religious practice. These are things that scientists cannot accept.

In the Tibetan society they accepted a lot of things out of faith without examining which could be learnt from the experimental methods of natural sciences. Buddhism uses Debate to understand the meaning of a particular thing (*byastu*) but cannot make a thing. Here lies the importance of knowing the utility of scientific knowledge in today's world. Through studying *Abhidharma* texts one could see the process of scientific understanding of cosmology. But the purpose of introducing Science in the monastic curriculum was to look at the modern science so that the monastics also had a general understanding of how did the present scientists explain the world from their point of view.

The reason is all the texts that they were reading had been written in the 9th century. So, one could not understand the present scientific discussions. Like the theory of general relativity and quantum mechanics theories developed 100-150 years ago. Such discussions were being introduced to the monastics indicating that they as Buddhists explained in 'this' way and the western scientists explain things in 'that' way. It was upto oneself, one had to pursue, one had to establish one's own ways and find out which was more sensible and acceptable.

Durkheim relied on his interpretation of Buddhism to support two crucial claims in his definition of religious phenomena: that gods or spirits are not essential to religion, for early Buddhism had no meaningful gods or spirits; and that the *sacred-profane dichotomy* is characteristic of all religions, since it is central even to an atheistic religion like Buddhism. (Orry and Wang, 1992: ). These set of belief systems lay out the foundation for the exploration of the sacred and profane spaces of argumentation in the subjective interpretations of the monastic cultures of learning. Following Durkheim, we can explore how the spaces of sacred and profane were historically distinct in this tradition but

there is a concerted effort to blur the lines in the assimilation the newly introduced aspects of Science into the monastic curriculum.

There are methodological similarities between Buddhism and science, one of which is the common commitment to understanding the nature of reality based on reason and experience. The teachings of Buddha, like science, encouraged monastics to question what they learn. One was not really learning science to prove that what Buddha said was true. In the dialectic tradition which they were following, if one did not accept an argument, one could abandon that argument through a counter argument proven through logical reasoning. In Buddhism there were concepts such as 'partless' particle, 'directionally partless', etc. A Physics teacher from Sera Jey school said that discussing a partless particle is not enough. Einstein said that through the formula, E=mc2 energy could be transformed to matter and matter into energy. So, if the matter can be converted to energy there should be a last stage of the matter which is going to convert to energy and that should be partless. If it really can be divided then it cannot convert to energy. It still can be divided. This same logic can be applied in philosophy. Similarly, it was not possible to falsify four noble truths because they were universally applicable.

Monks emphasised the interdependence between science and Dharma or religion in terms of the same internal philosophy that they shared. But they have also expressed caution as to science in the hands of businessmen and politicians is dangerous. Additionally, 'future generation needs to understand the meaning of compassion'. Scientists are also taking each part of the atom and they took out the neutron, the proton and within the proton they said that it is made out of quarks, and then now they are trying to take out the Higgs-Boson particle. It was too early to say all Buddhist concepts are just the same as scientific concepts. But both are in the process of constant change. Even if there was Newton's Law, many years later Einstein came and pointed out time and space are not permanent.

A similar connection is drawn between Buddhist Philosophy and Western Philosophy. There are scientists who are drawn towards Dharma as they search for the same truth - What is the universe made of? Why am I here? These are some of the fundamental questions of western philosophy. These questions get the scientists interested in 'Dharma' and they see that there is a complementary if not similar way of finding the truth. In quantum physics, first they said that the molecule was indivisible. The word for atom from Greek word, 'atomas' – means indivisible. Later on it was found out that there were actually three parts in the atom, it is not indivisible. Now with quantum Physics one can subdivide the electrons. They discovered 4 types of subatomic particles. Thereafter there was a lot of discussion about the 'Higgs-Boson particle' which says electron can be broken down even further. Things can be subdivided several times and the end of it will appear to be empty of any self-existing thing. This is exactly what the *Prasangika* [1]school is talking about. There is a conjunction between the highest school of Buddhist Philosophy and quantum Physics.

The coordinator of the Science community, a senior monk, Geshe Palden in Sera Jey Monastery, Bylakuppe, said that there is a discussion about the behaviour of the molecules and particles inside the solid physical matter in Abhidharmakosha text. Modern science may have the microscope to prove it. But Vasubandhu did not have the tools then. In Abhidharmakosha (14th year of study) there is discussion about the development of a baby in a mother's womb. There is also an explanation about the celestial bodies, particles like the atom and also described what the smallest part of a substance was.

Initiative were being taken to bring about a collaboration between the Tumkur University and Sera Jey Monastic University so that they could benefit from each other. Sera Jey was affiliated under the Tumkur University as a Research Centre and had an MOU to conduct conferences in collaboration. They also

[1] The Prasangika school, was a particular school of argumentation which emphasized a more negative form of logical reasoning, was founded by Buddhapalita (c. 470–540), who wrote many works, including a commentary on Nagarjuna's Madhyamika Karika. https://www.britannica.com

had collaboration with Christ University . Professors from there came on 4-5 days of the week depending on their availability and lectures on arts and science, western philosophy. There were efforts to start a 'Virtual University' in collaboration with Madras University and introduce the Tibetan language and script training. This collaboration would also involve other religions and involve Buddhist monks and religious practitioners of other religions and organise talks.

**Negotiating Challenges: Implementation of Science Learning**

Thupten Jinpa, a Buddhist scholar and interpreter to the Dalai Lama stated two- fold goal of this educational initiative. The first goal was to update the Buddhist concept about the natural world by incorporating scientific theories. The second goal was to respond to the challenges posed to key Buddhist concepts by new scientific discoveries. But the most important goal was to modernise Tibetan Buddhism, to save the members of this tradition from a 'cultural conservatism'. This raised questions about how the scientific concepts would be interpreted by the monastics and what would be the worldview they would develop in the 'enculturation process'.

There were significant ways in which efforts to maintain the core integrity of monastic training was being implemented. Belief systems which held ethnocentric views about Buddhism, being discriminatory towards other religions or points of views which made generations of monastics believe that following the scared pathways of strict disciplinary training of scriptural learning was the only way of exploring Dharma. There were 'stubborn minds' and strict administrators, who did not allow monks to go and play outside. Earlier science education was not allowed in the Monastery premises. It was thought that science lead to making of bombs, destroyed the world, but now people were talking about quantum mechanics and physics and how science impacts the mind, etc. There were certain religious beliefs which were based on blind faith and did not use logic. There were some beliefs which encouraged people to do things like, 'Go to that temple (any religion) and

offer your wealth and you will get this'. There is no scope of probing what one was doing. With the introduction of scientific reasoning as part of the curriculum the monastics realised the importance of analysing their religious beliefs as well.

Under the auspices of a project called SMD, Rekon Monastery in Switzerland offered to provide voluntary service for the monastic community. When the Dalai Lama was approached by the Swiss Monastery to do some voluntary service, it was made clear to them that they would have to help themselves entirely. So they funded the entire procedure, including providing the funding, accommodation, volunteers, etc. The aim of the project was that the monks should be open to the modern world. Firstly, some of the Tibetans who participated in the foreign-funded project aspired to go abroad and establish their lives in foreign countries. Secondly, many of the instructors, mainly the Non-Tibetans participated in the project as they were interested in the issue of Tibet, for the Tibetan proclamation for an independent status.

As an immediate impact, when it started, many were not interested in studying science. The senior teachers opposed the new classes saying 'studying science is not good'. Classmates had also asked those interested, not to join. It will be a distraction. For the traditionalists, it was as if the image of their spiritual institution was changing towards fulfilling instrumental goals. The reform in the curriculum seemed unacceptable to them. But those who wanted to study did it anyway. Studying science was considered relevant by 95% of the monks. Additionally, it was identified that there were mainly four categories regarding their opinion about the relevance of science education. Firstly, 15 monks in their 3rd, 4th, 6$^{th}$ and 13th year of the study were very clear about the relevance, about 5 monks, all instructors in their interviews expressed their doubt, thirdly, about 10 monks found it complementary to studying Buddhism. Finally, there were very few who did not want to talk about it. The latter were clearly not much in favour of it. They were mostly the senior monks, had come from Tibet with no formal schooling. The Monks of Sera Jey were first introduced to Science education under the Science meets Dharma project

(SMD) undertaken under the initiative of the 14th Dalai Lama from 2001 to 2012. Out of all the students who had attended that project, some of them continued to study Buddhist Philosophy in the Monastery and a few went to Emory University in Georgia, U.S.A. taught Science and Buddhist Philosophy for 5 years. The pressure of memorizing scriptures, attending debate in the morning and evening was already too much for them to attend science class during their rest time. There were some who had never attended the Monastery Science classes conducted especially for the monks. But had gone to a few workshops conducted by volunteers from other countries or from within India. They retained very little from such workshops as there was no discussion or practice after that. In spite of being able to verbalize their opinion about relevance of science education and its utility in daily life, there were some monks who did not want to attend science classes. This group of monks and nuns were those who were in their 12th or 13th years of study, having spent many years in the Monastery. They did not attend mainstream school beyond 5th, 6th or 7th class back in Tibet and had the option of attending the science classes being conducted for them. They were conscious of the fact that the result of Dharma could not be received overnight. But, they were completely committed to the learning of monastic course and secular education did not interest them. Among those who were interested in pursuing science after the SMD was over, this was an opportunity to combine Philosophy and Science learning together unlike others and rise up the spiritual hierarchy in the larger Tibetan Monastic Community.

They were taught Physics, Chemistry, Biology and English There was a small laboratory where they could do their experiments and had translators. At one point there were two levels. The Level II was for those who had gone to school and knew some portion of science from before. Handouts for everyday lectures used to be given. The classes did not interfere with the monastic routine. Teaching aids like several charts and all the study materials were provided by them. For every year they were given Rs. 4000 for spending on educational aid for the classrooms as demonstrations by or for students. Using

projector for practical classes got more students interested. There were a set of books on topics like Cell, Genes etc which were written in two languages, English and Tibetan, under the joint collaboration of Emory University and Central Tibetan Administration.

Soon problems related to discipline and infrastructure started emerging due to which volunteers got frustrated. This was because some of the volunteers had decided to contribute purely in support of the political motive of the Tibetans' fight for freedom. In 2012 the Project came to an end mainly to make the Monasteries self-sufficient and conduct classes on their own. But initially there was no progress. His Holiness pushed the cause and made it compulsory for monks from *Madhyamaka* class ($10^{th}$ year of study) onwards to join the classes. The community of monks for science came forward and approached the administrator, wrote application three times to start class seriously. The administrator said, 'we will never forget you guys', but then there was no action. Then the disciplinarian took the initiative after which classrooms were built. The perspectives of the Monastery administration and the pursuers of science differed. However, the present administrator was a 'broad-minded' person and thus they were allowed to have science classes. Classrooms had come up on the first floor of the debate courtyard, there was also a provision for a laboratory. Slowly non-ordained teachers were appointed for Sera Jey Monastery. The salaries were paid from the Monastery funds. The effort from the very beginning was to get trained Tibetan teachers so that the extra expenditure of the translators could be avoided. There was one school teacher from Sera Jey and one American monk who taught at the Monastery. The rest of the volunteers for SMD left the Tibetan camps for higher studies.

The volunteer teachers would prepare their lesson plans on their own. Physics, Biology, Geography and a few lessons in Chemistry were taught by a Physics teacher. But continuity was not maintained for all the subjects. They were not taught every year. There were no experiments because they did not have any equipment due to lack of funds. In the beginning there were no exams even

after requesting the administrator. Now there were tests conducted by the newly appointed teachers.

Introducing Science from a basic level was difficult because the entire monastic course was extremely vast and challenging especially for the new entrants. Even though there was and is opposition from the senior monks there is hope that the younger monks will think differently. Geshe Nyima Tashi, who worked actively as a part of the SMD said, 'when I study science I develop more knowledge, and more faith in my own Buddhist philosophy because I have another way of examining things and analysing my own Buddhist tradition'.

**Applying Freire's Critical Pedagogy: Teacher-Student interaction**

The timing for conducting the science classes were during afternoons between 12:15 to 14:30. This was the time when people took rest after lunch. If any other time was taken, like in the morning then they would have definitely stopped their class. Thus, it was and it still is a struggle for those who wanted to pursue science. Additionally, they were also held before the commencement of evening debate. Monks were of the opinion that it was ok to miss the prayer for them, 'We always do prayer'. From 2014 it had been made mandatory that in order to get the Geshe Lharampa[2] degree one had to sit for the science examinations. But if they did not pass, they did not stay back or had to appear in exam again, if they got higher marks, it boosted up their grand total marks. Initially science classes were made compulsory with a provision of imposing punishment on absentees. Fine as a form of punishment was a common thing in the Monastery. However, Chogyal felt that there was no need for it. It was because, if students were not attending the classes regularly then there 'must be some fault in our class and there is no use of a class running'. In that case a new plan should be made to conduct classes.

[2] Tibetan equivalent for PhD in Tibetan Buddhist Philosophy

The westerner monk teacher, gave them problems to solve and would encourage them to discuss among themselves. If a monk needed some help in explaining the concept as he was absent during their previous classes the teacher would help him out. Within the class, 2-3 monks joined together to solve a problem if they could not solve by themselves. The class had started 3 months back for this group belonging to Madhyamaka class. One or two of them had gone to high school. Therefore, they had some knowledge of science. The teacher had designed his curriculum for teaching the novice monks. He said that he had collected Tippler Books of Junior College- 1st year Physics from 'Sapna Publication's from Mysore and use these books for the monks.

Fig 1: Picture Coursey: Author

A mathematical problem (as displayed in the fig.1) was given to the monk students to solve. Chogyal (the monk teacher) said to them 'If you do not understand something, ask someone.' He pointed out to a particular monk and said he might need some help in explaining the concept as he was absent during their previous classes. So he promptly joined another classmate to get the concepts explained. Then 2-3 monks joined together to solve the problem. When the monks sometimes expressed getting bored, the teacher mentioned, 'It is a good sign if the problems start getting boring', it showed that they had already learnt the concepts they were dealing with. 'Stop writing the

homework and listen to me' he said and explained the two formulae he had written on board.

It was observed that as they did in their Philosophy classes where they sat on the floor of their teacher's house on cushions, even in this class they put the cushions on the benches on which they were sitting. The use of a white-board and marker were new for the monks in this class. The most significant observation was that in this class students could freely ask questions unlike the other *petty*[3]. The petty were considered interactive by many of the respondents but as per observations, majority of them did not involve in any dialogue and students sat as mere 'receivers of knowledge' (Freire, 1970). This group of students were quite serious about the class and regularly attended the class. One of them had passed CBSE examination in 2000, then studied science for 7 years under the SMD project. The common idea among them was that many of the monks ordained at a very young age and started their religious education from a very early age, so exposure to outside world was very little, for which modern education was essential. While studying Physics the monks were very keen on understanding the processes behind each step, whether it was a formula or a mathematical problem. Even if it took a longer while, they discussed with the teacher, discussed among themselves to ensure that they had understood.

There was another class conducted by a Tibetan teacher and was for beginners. It was conducted by a Tibetan man who taught Physics in the Sera Jey Secondary School. The teacher from Sera Jey Secondary school was presently teaching the Tibetan monks for free, but earlier under the SMD project he was teaching and got paid till September 2013. There were some monks who had gone to the science class and had formed an opinion that what was taught there was directly from CBSE syllabus. So having studied in school, they preferred not to go. Again, sometimes he had to explain 10*10 = 100 and sometimes he had to go up to Theory of Relativity and Quantum

[3] Philosophy lecture classes, to be discussed in the following chapter.

Physics. Unlike the school where there was a fixed syllabus and he could sometimes teach in English and sometimes in Tibetan, here it was not the case. The teacher followed notes prepared by them in the beginners' classes for the monks. Now serious attempts were being made to make the monks interested in science, joint tests were to be conducted. Questions were to be set in consultation with the administrator. So the centralised hierarchy was maintained in academic activities in all subjects. When they had Buddhist Philosophy exams, the disciplinarian reduced time of prayer and thus there was 25 minutes for Physics class. But when there was no debate there was 60-80 minutes of class time. After the Tibetan Lhosar (New Year) they started their session at the end of March or April and continue till November, after which 80% monks went for winter debate off campus.

From 2014 onwards, Science exams had been incorporated into the curriculum. 80 students from 4th and 5th years of Madhyamaka and 60 from 1st, 2nd and 3rd years of Madhyamaka would come for alternate classes in a week. They did not know Basic English. A significant observation made by the teacher was that teaching them and the school children was different as 'the Monks here ask many questions'. It was more challenging to teach the monks and he was not looking to continue teaching them for a longer time. The Abbott had been informed regarding that. He was looking at a future when the monks whom he was teaching now would teach the other monks later.

They would also follow techniques of modern learning like giving tuitions to some monks from 3pm to 4pm. These were those monks who stayed in individual houses and received sponsorship from their homes. They paid Rs.3000 for one month. Science appealed to them because of the reason that they find similarity in the approach of Buddhism and Science. Both are trying to find true nature of reality. For example, in terms of cosmology, 'science says our universe begin from an energy source, at first there was only energy in the universe and then there were sub atomic particles and then all compounds and then they formed heavenly bodies like clusters, galaxies, etc.

In Buddhism, energy was not the beginning of everything and there should be a cause for that and that energy was impermanent. Since energy was the effect it should come later, there should be a cause, and so our universe is infinite'. This is the way in which the monastics use methods of subjective interpretation to explain scientific concepts like origin of the universe.

In his theorisation about the banking model, Freire (1970) rejects traditional methods of education and introduces problem-based learning as a critical dialogue in changing educational structure and system. Paulo Freire created 'critical pedagogy', where the teacher doesn't teach, but is learning while in dialogue with the students. And the students learn while teaching. Freire has distinguished between 'problem posing' learning with 'banking approach' to explain how education becomes a process of depositing where students are depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of actively engaging in designing output-based learning styles, the teacher ends up making deposits of information which the students receive and memorise repetitively. In the Tibetan Monastic system of learning, by structure the curriculum requires dialogue and critical engagement with the ritual texts which the monastic scholars engage with. But in practice there significant hesitance among the young Tibetan scholars to be able to question the textual authority and the *Geshe la* (Monk Teachers). The experience is different when it came to western scholars who found critical dialogues with the teachers as the only way in which they could justify their engagement with the culture of learning. The former group's persuasion of the text, scriptural learning and attending *petty* (lectures) was considered as a cultural mandate compared to that of the Western scholars, whose pursuit was seen with a different gaze, which was not as culturally staunch.

In the science classes, the monk students took notes. They did not have a copy of the book which the teacher was following in class. It had been seven years since Chogyal, the monk science teacher had left teaching Physics in high school. So, he struggled in the beginning. The students struggled with conceptual understanding and to address the mathematical problems as most

had left mainstream school several years back. In addition to the student driven interactive science classes, there was a need to introduce basic English training classes for them so that a 'dialogue in science' was possible among them. This was both for understanding basic scientific concepts and having a conversation beyond their own ethnic group.

In The Sera Jey Monastery, the idea was that when they become Geshes they would teach or give lecture in not only the Tibetan community but also in foreign college or school in India or abroad and so they are needed to learn English as well as Dharma vocabulary together. They also had to appear for an oral and a written exam at the end of the course. It was from the third year of their Madhyamaka class that they were allowed to take up Translation classes.

In all the classes which involved petty with monk teachers the hierarchical relation existing between the teacher and the student was significantly visible. A culture of silence was encouraged and nurtured among the young monks when it came to questioning the textual references and commentaries or asking for explanation for what the *petty gen la* (lecture teacher) had said in his class. There was also a vertical hierarchy that existed among the senior monks in their 14$^{th}$, 15$^{th}$, 16$^{th}$ year of their study in terms of the tasks of the monastery they would or would not engage in compared to the monks in their 3$^{rd}$, 4$^{th}$ or 5$^{th}$ years of their study. There were two sets of responses toward accepting this position of power. For most, especially older Tibetan monks being a part of institutional monastic set up, mandated them to confirm with the differential power dynamics. On the other hand, among those younger monks where the trajectory of thought processes from being a part of the monastic culture and at the same time learning to reject elements of modern life is sometimes a tough choice. It is especially difficult for those monks who have studied in mainstream school and are facing the challenge of imbibing the belief that having a open University degree is a credential that is to be kept a secret as a taboo. Since there is proactive engagement on the part of His Holiness the fourteenth Dalai Lama to set up classrooms in the main Monastery complex to conduct Science classes for the monastics from their 15$^{th}$ year of study

onwards, there is a certain sense of acceptance towards this change. However, it was pointed out clearly that this change was not considered welcome by certain section of the Monastic community who saw this as counterproductive to preservation of their monastic tradition.

**Monastic Culture of Learning: Tradition versus Modernity**

Ideas about the importance of modern education have changed in the Monastery. Earlier the feeling was that modern education would destroy their monastic culture of learning .But now there are sections who believe in the relevance of secular subjects like English and Physics. There is a significant divide among two groups of monastics. One group thought that following the 'Western model of learning' and studying English, Physics, Biology would affect their age old culture of learning based on rote learning and meditative analysis. There is another group mostly the younger generation of Tibetan monks who think it is required for them to know about the outside world.

In school the entire process of learning from the board to the copy was considered mechanical. There was no opportunity to critically reflect on what one was learning. The teacher wrote something on the board and the student copied and the process ended there with little guarantee that the student learnt something during this one-dimensional transfer of information. But in the Monastery the entire process of learning allows the student to self-learn. But the question is whether the way they are being taught in the Monastery is of any value addition in today's world? There were many of the monks who had attended mainstream school before taking monastic vows. They tried differentiating between the two systems of learning. One of them pointed out that there was more interaction with classmates, studying in groups in class and exchanging notes. But in the Monastic course the interactions with classmates were much less. The students at the Monastery were more hard

working, they are more mature and give focused attention to studying specific text and commentaries. In school distractions are more with some good influences and some bad influences. In the Monastery the student is mature enough to choose and avoid distractions.

One significant difference that was pointed out which somehow could be affecting them in the Monastic lecture classes was the lack of blackboard like they had in school. Like in boards different coloured chalks were used to colour coordinate and teach them about different issues in science. Visual aids such as these could also be used in teaching the monastics about different aspects of their Buddhist Philosophy. In Sera Jey white boards were used only for Science classes. Even though some students would like to learn English and found it difficult to converse in English in spite of having gone to school. They were institutionalized to think that they were too busy to study anything else apart from Buddhist Philosophy.

The school teachers are friendlier with students so that student does not feel embarrassed to ask question in the classroom. But in case of the spiritual teacher most of the students hesitate to ask questions. They explained that it was out of respect for the teacher. There was definitely a gap between the student and the teacher in the Monastic learning. Even though the teacher taught sincerely there had to be formal sense of respect towards the monk teacher. In any Tibetan Children Village School (CBSE) or Sera Jey Secondary school (CBSE) some are non-ordained and some are monk teachers. Monks who had attended schools like TCV, Suja in Mandi in Himachal Pradesh district said that they had friendly teachers, Indian teachers teaching science who liked Tibetans. There were also school teachers also who were only teaching for money. But in the Monastery the teachers were committed to teach and for that they did not take money.

The Monastery could be termed as a residential College. Here everyone had come because of their own wish. Everyone had access to free food, place to stay. But most importantly everyone came there to study. But in outside

college, one had to give admission fee, tuition fees, examination fees etc. One could also leave according to one's own wish. But there were no fixed number as to how many monastics were leaving every year. Recently there had been restrictions on their movement across the borders. So there were not too many Tibetans coming in. There were monks from Bhutan, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, and Arunachal Pradesh. In terms of Indians (not exiled Tibetans but original Indians) , there was one in Sera Jey Monastery from Mumbai, two Indians in Gaden Shartse and one in Dharamsala who was also from Mumbai.

In school they had to study Economics, Science, Geography, had no vows to keep, they could go out into town and enjoy, with not much restrictions. They could read any book they wanted. In the Monastery there were restrictions and lesser things to do, but still seemed peaceful. Everything they did here was related to practising Buddhism. They could read about leaders like Martin Luther King autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi in school, Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa. But now in the Monastery there was not time to read on them, as their routines had more emphasis on Reading and Analytical Meditation.

**Summary**

Karl Popper's argument is established as the changing times in the Tibetan Monastic community experience a time of immense transition. Challenges to well-established traditions along with a nuanced tendency to discard the 'tabooed' versions of advanced knowledge tradition of science were analyzed through the ethnographic experiences. There were a few clear research findings.

The aim of Tibetan Monastic Education is based on the principles of Mahayana tradition which aims at attaining nirvana through benefitting all sentient beings. Based on that studying anything other than religious scriptures was an impediment to monastic learning. This was a belief of several senior monks, mostly of Tibetan dissent who have been a part of the Tibetan exodus to India. But there are two reasons why the followers of this tradition should not consider any other model of learning as a roadblock for their cause. First,

this religious tradition considers critical rationality as an instrument to counter blind faith and second, debate (Tibetan: *rtsod pa*) are used as methods of finding the true nature of reality.

Secondly, there are methodological confluences and contradictions that were identified by the monastics in the pursuit of Buddhist religious philosophy and scientific reasoning on the basis of logic and experience. What Science examines is the 'more gross' or manifest phenomenon, the external things. Whatever comes to mind is the main 'object of meditation' in Buddhism, 'the inner mind' which science does not deal with that. The attempt at a nexus between the two methods of pursuance was justified on three levels. The first goal was to update the Buddhist understanding of reality about the natural world by incorporating scientific theories. The second goal was to respond to the challenges posed to key Buddhist concepts by new scientific discoveries. This was addressed through the several projects and Science and Religion based conferences which Tibetan monastics have taken part in. But the most important goal was to modernize Tibetan Buddhism, to save the members of this tradition from a 'cultural conservatism'. This raised questions about how the scientific concepts would be interpreted by the monastics and what would be the worldview they would develop in the 'enculturation process'.

Finally, through the research, experiential differences emerged across two generations of monks who reflected upon the reforms within the monastic curriculum. The generational gap is characteristic of their approaches towards the spiritual world and the temporal world. There were some who were really interested in studying science, mostly the young students who attended school, some who were interested because of the complementary feature of the two, science and Buddhism, some were accepting it's utility but did not want to attend science classes, while there were others who were not interested in the need for secular education at all. Non receipt of a certificate at the end of the year and non-recognition of such classes among the larger community were reasons for the low attendance.

However, on the other hand, the challenges of living in exile are too many for them to overlook the obvious need of the younger generation to accept and assimilate a few changes. Monks who had attended school earlier in erstwhile Tibet or in India clearly pointed out differences in their experiences of the two patterns of culture of learning. In school they had a 'friendlier' teacher, could exchange notes but the learning was mechanical and students were not as hardworking as in the Monastery. In the Monastery their curriculum was tough, the relationship with teacher was much formal and one had to be very hardworking and mature to ensure the fulfillment of one's goal of completing the monastic education. Capitalising on the knowledge of Physics and Mathematics, the monks had received teaching jobs beyond the Monastery in India and abroad. Those with such achievements validated the reform of the monastic curriculum. Religious training of 16 years along with knowledge of science were essential ways of accumulating cultural capital and getting recognised in the Tibet monastic community worldwide. Finally, through Durkheim's lens of the sacred-profane dichotomy and applying Freire's critical pedagogy perspective, this paper attempted in capturing a cross-sectional view of the negotiated learning culture that has been created in the Sera Jey Monastic University with the advent of Science classes and the increasing challenges that are being addressed towards the scriptural learning traditions.

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**Article: Transnational Subalternity: A Sub Theory within Subaltern Studies and the Post Migration Experience**

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# Transnational Subalternity: A Sub Theory within Subaltern Studies and the Post Migration Experience

**--Sajaudeen N Chapparban**

## Abstract

Socio-economic inequalities, warfare, political unrest, low living standards, and other compelling factors have displaced millions of individuals from their native dwellings, particularly from the global south. This has resulted in a surge of both national (for example in the context of India, there are around 450 million internal migrants as per 2011 Census) and international migrants (280.6 million by mid-2020, according to the IOM) in recent decades. The swift pace of globalization and transnationalism has further facilitated these migration processes. This phenomenon brings diverse cultures, religions, languages, and identities into "contact zones" (Pratt 1991), leading to varying receptions and post-migration challenges that this paper aims to conceptualize as Transnational Subalternity.

Based on secondary sources, this paper examines persistent inequalities, hierarchies, and prevailing hegemonies within transnational migrant communities, applying Gramscian subalternity to conceptualize emerging forms of marginalization against and among various vulnerable communities such as laborers, refugees, students, LGBTQ individuals, and contextualize this study to marginalized communities among Indian Diaspora such as Dalit and Muslim minorities. It explores how migration reshapes social structures and identities, particularly in interactions between migrants and host societies and within migrant and diasporic communities with differing identities. Referencing anti-immigrant rhetoric, cultural complexities, and caste dynamics, within transnational diasporic spaces, the study highlights intersections of culture, race, gender, age, and religion in shaping migrant experiences and new forms of marginalization.

*Keywords: Transnationalism, Migration, Diaspora, Marginality, Minorities, Subalternity.*

## Introduction

Socio-economic inequalities, warfare, political unrest, low living standards, and other compelling factors have displaced millions of individuals from their native dwellings, particularly from the Global South. This has resulted in a

surge of both national [for example in the context of India, there are around 450 million internal migrants as per 2011 Census] and international migrants (280.6 million by mid-2020: IOM) in recent decades. The inequalities and marginalizations *against* and *among* the internal migrants do exist but here in this paper I will focus merely on international migrants which is also increasing phenomenon despite the restricting immigrant policies and politics, hardship, and the emotional cost of dislocation. The swift pace of globalisation and transnationalism has further facilitated these migration processes. Migrants in general and international migrants, in particular, bring with them diverse cultures, religions, languages, identities, and practices as they enter what Mary Louise Pratt (1991) termed as a 'contact zone'. They often encounter either unwelcoming or partially receptive receptions, especially while migrating from one "socio-cultural setting" (Chapparban:2020) 'ethnolinguistic' setting to "other" (not another), resulting in diverse discrimination, inequalities, hierarchies, and prevailing hegemonies in the post-migration and post-welcomed lives in transnational spaces – which can be termed as the Transnational Subalternity and migrants as new subaltern. Upon closer examination, it becomes evident that certain sectarian, caste-based, religious, racial, ethnic and gender-related inequalities and marginalization persist within these communities in transnational spaces too. Applying the Gramscian farmwork of subalternity, especially in the transnational landscapes, this research attempts to conceptualize the emerging forms of subalternities in transnational spaces through the experiences of vulnerable immigrants spanning laborers, refugees, undocumented migrants, students, dependent spouses, the elderly, LGBTQ, minorities, and children. Discrimination and marginalization also exist among migrant groups within national migratory contexts.

However, to maintain a more focused scope, this research specifically examines caste-based and religion-based discrimination against Dalits and Muslim minorities within the Indian transnational diasporic setting and the growing anti-caste and anti-communal activism by the respective victim

communities in the recent time. The scholarly attempt is made to critically examine the dynamics of power and discriminatory patterns *against* these vulnerable communities and categorized these as (a) 'Transnational Subalternity' and inequalities and discriminations *among* these vulnerable communities is termed as the (b) 'Transnational Subalternity Within.' The paper also addresses some of the pertinent contemporary questions such as how migration is affecting the lives of people and social structures, and how direct interaction between guests/migrants/refugees and their respective host societies is leading to the formulation of new forms of transnational marginalities, particularly when the cultural identity of the guest differs from that of the host community with reference to recent anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric in the EU/US. It also underscores how cultural differences within the Indian diaspora led to further marginalization and multiply their immigrant hardship. By providing a few instances of anti-Muslim sentiments and caste-based discrimination in transnational spaces the research also highlights how the intersection of culture, race, identity, gender, age, and religion contributes to diverse experiences of migrants and the emergence of new manifestations of marginalization and subalternity.

Transnational subalternity is a result of globalization, transnationalism, advancement in ICT, rapidly increasing mass migration, and the continuation of discriminatory practices both at national and international levels against the underprivileged and marginalized sections of societies. The complex dynamics of discrimination, marginalization, power, and hegemony against and among the migrants (here transnational) is referred to as 'transnational subalternity'. One of the earliest applications of Subaltern studies to international migration can be seen through the work of Elif Kara (2002) aptly argues that,

Migration *is "defined within the context of the political conditions of the period in which it occurred,* and these definitions were made *by the "free" citizens of the receiving country. Laws, practices, and even nongovernmental organizations speak for or about but on behalf of the migrant*. Since the "migrant" is surrounded by the concept of *citizenship* in the modern world,

s/he is silent and under domination due to his statuslessness until s/he obtains legal status in the destination country. The Migrant's freedom is limited, s/he does not have the right to representation as s/he is not a citizen. Therefore, migrants cannot speak. In conclusion, it is possible to say that migrants are subalterns of the modern world considering their status and especially their silence" (Kara 137Emphasisadded)

I contend that even upon obtaining citizenship in the host country, accompanied by formal recognition through visas and citizenship documents, the obscured history of migration and the identity as descendants of migrants persistently cast a shadow over their lives in post-migration or diaspora settings. The experiences of individuals who underwent clandestine/undocumented migration, such as those depicted in *Dunki* movie (Dir. Rajkumar Hirani 2023)" or who are refugees, are notably more challenging compared to those who migrate legally or successfully acquire citizenship.

The instances of "dunki flights/undocumented/" multiplied the xenophobic behaviours of the host societies – especially in times of crisis – and provided a reason for the state to be at what German philosopher Carl Schmitt and Giorgio Agamben, an Italian philosopher, referred to as the "state of exception" (Agamben 2006, 7). In this state of state – the normal, legal, and human rights concerns are suspended and the state takes the authority even outside the established legal framework. This state of exception also applied to legal immigrants and citizens in times like 9/11 and other terror instances which also led to suspect the former President APJ Abul Kalam and veteran actor Shah Rukh Khan at the US airports

This further leads to another debate on citizenship and subalternity both in national and transnational contexts with special reference to minorities and immigrant minorities. Citizenship which has historically been regarded as an instrument of equality (Marshall, 1949; Elias, 1989; Oommen, 1997, 2010) and a defender of citizens' rights, including minorities seems to be a turning as

a very strong "legal" tool for the majority led state to oppression and exclusion for its own minority subject. Theoretically, citizenship was associated with equality, rights, and opportunities (political, civil, and social) the practical application of the concept has predominantly favoured privileged societal segments, perpetuating inequality and entrenched hierarchies. Thus, it is observed that in recent times citizenship has become a major political tool to further marginalized minorities. That's why the migrants who acquired citizenship in the West still lack social citizenship in the host society.

**Research Gap:**

The existing body of literature within diaspora studies, rooted in the works of scholars such as Robin Cohen and Safran, predominantly focuses on diasporic experiences of migrants. However, a noticeable research gap emerges as there is a lack of dedicated studies specifically exploring marginalities within the transnational spaces and diaspora communities. The studies of the Indian diaspora have covered wide range of topics and often focus on the majoritarian Hindu diaspora only, there is the relative absence of linguistic, regional, caste, and minority diasporas as well as their experiences, discrimination, and representation of their voices. Furthermore, the intellectual development of Subaltern studies, particularly within the context of Bengal, India, and South Asia, has extensively addressed facets of history, modernity, colonialism, and marginalities (Spivak 1998; 1999, Pandey 2000; 2002 Guha: 1983; 97; Chatterjee: 1993). However, the focus of Subaltern studies has primarily been within the national and post-colonial contexts.

Despite seminal works by scholars of Subaltern Studies, there exists a notable conceptual gap in scholarly discourse concerning the nuanced experiences of intersectionality, subalternity, and power dynamics within transnational spaces. Also, as Chakraborty's work primarily focuses on the intellectual traditions of modernity and the interactions between colonizers and the colonized, there is a notable gap in understanding the reverse migration of colonized subjects to colonial masters. This interdisciplinary study aims to

bring subaltern studies and diaspora studies together and fill a crucial gap in understanding the dynamics of subalternity, inequalities and marginalities in transnational spaces and the postcolonial emerging Eastern modernity and its interactions with Western modernity. It places a particular emphasis on the insights provided by Homi Bhabha's theoretical framework, which sheds light on the complexities of clashes, struggles, adjustments, and the evolving forms of diaspora hybridity. Central to this analysis is the exploration of how postcolonial cultural consciousness operates in installing, re-installing, and removing cultural frameworks, and how triadic forces contribute to the emergence of Diaspora modernity. These forces involve the active engagement of diasporic actors and their home countries (represented by their governments), aiming to harness scattered resources and project cultural influence as ambassadors or through soft power initiatives. Additionally, the study delves into the concept of cosmopolitan modernity, focusing on the impact of migrant cultures on host societies. This aspect is particularly significant given the heightened attention from far-right nationalist groups in the West. These groups, motivated by anti-immigrant and Islamophobic sentiments, are keen on reclaiming Western modernity more assertively. This trend is exemplified by movements like PEGIDA[1] and Act for America[2], as well as political figures such as Geert Wilders and Buchman, highlighting the contemporary tensions and power struggles surrounding cultural identities and modernity.

**Types of Transnational Subalternity**

The concept of transnational subalternity encompasses several distinct types that shed light on the vulnerabilities, marginalities, and intersectionality

[1]PEGIDA (a German acronym for the Patriotische Europäergegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes/"Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West" is a far-right, anti-Islam, and anti-immigration organization and a pan-European movement started in 2014 form Dresden, Germany. It organizes demonstrations and protests against Islam and Muslims and also against immigrants and refugees what they perceive as the Islamization of Europe and the Western world, often advocating for stricter immigration policies and promoting nationalist sentiments.

[2] Similarly, Act for Americais a pan-U.S. anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic organization founded by Brigitte Gabriel, an American author and anti-Islam activistin 2007. Like PEGIDA it strongly advocates the anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic policies. Both organizations are far-right organizations rooted in xenophobia and Islamophobia.

experienced by various migrant minorities and underprivileged minorities within migrant/diaspora communities. Transnational Subalternity (can be primarily defined in the context of migration spaces and experiences of being a migrant in a socio-culturally different county or society. As Elif KARA (2022) writes in the context of Europe, "international migrants are new subalterns". Being a migrant encapsulates the plight of individuals or groups who have migrated from their home countries, rendering them vulnerable due to displacement and various socio-cultural, legal, political, and economic underprivileges. These migrants often grapple with challenges stemming from their immigrant status and identity including unwelcoming attitudes from the host population.

Their experience involves navigating diverse cultures, negotiating differences, and adapting to new environments while also yearning to retain aspects of their heritage, culture, identity, language, and traditions left behind leading to the formulation of a "hybridity" (Homi Bhabha). Transnational subalternity manifests through factors such as race, culture, ethnicity, religion, caste, gender, health, age (including children and the elderly), and status of migrants (for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers/ undocumented, etc.) and their economic, political, and legal conditions. This phenomenon emerges as a consequence of interactions induced by migration or upon arrival in culturally homogenous spaces of Western societies.

Furthermore, intersectionality plays a significant role in shaping the experiences and voices of transnational subaltern communities, particularly regarding the *politics of acceptance or rejection* faced by migrants and refugees, both in the West and elsewhere. For example, the recent anti-immigrant cum anti-Muslim rhetoric and rise of far-right politics in the EU and USA. The recent political shifts and the electoral successes of figures such as Donald Trump, Geert Wilders, Giorgia Meloni, and growing oppositional far-right leadership in the West have multiplied the experiences of immigrants, specifically the Muslims and coloured migrants. One of the recent examples can be drawn from the Spanish far-right leader Santiago Abascal and his Vox

party's recent protest. His party "registered a proposal in Congress to suspend the granting of Spanish nationality and residence permits to people from Islamic countries. Specifically, the party wants to 'suspend the procedures for acquiring Spanish nationality and residence and stay permits'". It also wants to "ban the entry into Spain of immigrants from countries with an Islamic culture if their correct and peaceful integration cannot be guaranteed" (Euronews 2023).

Immigrant policies in countries like the US, Canada, and Australia have historically exhibited racial biases. This trend is evident in instances such as the recent ban on immigrants from select Muslim-majority countries by the Trump administration, which reflects the persistent presence of racial discrimination within these policies. In ongoing debates, in the UK and the US elections, public figures like British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Indian-American entrepreneur, as well as 2024 US presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy, have expressed views against the immigrant communities, despite that fact that both of them are from immigrant origin. What is important here is to observe that their voices are not their voices or the voices for the rights of immigrants but anti-immigrants. (Ramaswamy wanted to stop his B-1 Visa which he availed himself and reached the position where he is today) He calls H1-B visa as the "indentured servitude" and "vowed to replace the lottery-based system with admission based on merit, if he earned a seat in the White House in 2024" (Outlook: 2023) Sunak's and Ramaswamy's voices are not their voices but the voices of the dominant masses, which they are compelled to voice therefore those from migrant backgrounds *cannot speak* for themselves even after acquiring citizenship and being democratically elected on such crucial decision-making positions. The system of power that articulates the voices often suppresses the sub-sections, particularly those marginalized and underrepresented sections in transnational spaces, and controls/manipulates their views/opinions/ voices. These voices and representations are dominated by the dominant classes. Also, contexts like Rohingya refugees in India, Lohtshampa minorities in Bhutan, and the Chin in Manipur highlight how caste, religion, culture, gender, race, and ethnicity

intersect and significantly impact the experiences of 'being' migrants or refugees in transnational spaces and contribute to the complex dynamics of the transnational subalternity.

Transnational Subalternity can also be observed among the migrants and post-migration/diasporic spaces. There are layers of marginality and subalternity among the immigrants and *as migrants* and *as a subject of discrimination and hegemony/hierarchies* such as patriarchy, casteism, communalism, or heteronormativity that continues to sustain and practiced after crossing the national and transnational borders too. These layers of vulnerability can be termed as *'transnational subalternity within'*. Here the transnational subalterns are among the migrants in the post-migration/diasporic spaces. In these spaces, individuals belonging to underprivileged, undocumented, low-caste, or minority groups encounter multiple/additional challenges within the broader migrant/diasporic[3] population. For instance, within the Indian diaspora, the Indian Muslims and Dalits face a distinct form of discriminations and migrant experience.

Their experiences within migrant/diaspora communities stem from and interwoven with other identities based on caste, religion, sect, gender, age, culture, class, documents, and more. These instances are frequently noticed within the prominent segments of the Indian Diaspora, exhibiting discrimination against those who are already marginalized, (often Dalits and Muslims and other religious and linguistic minorities, LGBTQ, Women, elderly and children, etc.) whether in their home or their host land. Jamil Khader (2003) provides a similar example in the context of the Latin American diaspora, that the traditional and postmodern perspectives on the diaspora always valorised the mainstream culture and communities and often fail to fully capture the intricate experiences of writers who navigate life as

[3] Diaspora can be a citizenof the host society, whereas migrants often do not hold citizenship of a new country. They often have documents of their homeland/town. They are still hopeful about finding the options to go back or ready to go back once they complete their task or desired work. Whereas diaspora wants to come back but they cannot come back.

colonials, second-class citizens, and feminists facing marginalization within their national communities.

Moreover, this situation is exacerbated for those as Dalit/Minority women, or their children, LGBTQ individuals, and the elderly from marginalized communities like Indian Muslims and Dalits, who encounter heightened challenges and additional layers of marginalization within the migrants/diaspora communities. These varied types of transnational subalternity highlight the multifaceted nature of vulnerability and marginalization experienced by different groups of migrant within migrant communities and across diasporic settings, underscoring the complexities of their struggles for recognition, acceptance, and integration. Furthermore, when it comes to the attention of government and popular discourse around the dollar, euro, and dinar diaspora often neglects the voices of the diaspora from the Rupee/Rand/Taka/Ngultrum countries (South Asia/Africa/Caribbean/ East Asia). For quite a long time there were no voices or representation of blue-collar workers in the Gulf as well. Recently a few writers like Benyamin (*Aadujeevitham*/*Goat Days*2008), Nikhil Ramteke – (*An Arabian Dream*2017), etc. started giving voices and space to their experiences. (Both writers themselves were Gulf workers).

**Diaspora as an equalizer and unequal space:**

Migrant experiences differ significantly from the subaltern subjects within a nation-state/society, encounter numerous challenges and discrimination upon arriving in "new-socio cultural settings" (Chapparban:2020) and during their negotiations and subsequent settlement. The idea of transnational subalternities an interdisciplinary field of inquiry, basically stemmed from the postcolonial reading of Ranajit Guha (1960s-2000s), Dipesh Chakrabarty (1980s-present), Gayatri Spivak (1980s-present), Partha Chatterjee (1980s-present), Shahid Amin (1970s-2000s), David Arnold (1970s-2010s), Gyan Prakash (1980s-present) et al. primarily emphasizing the representation and providing voices to the voiceless within a particular society (Bengal, India,

and South Asia - within a national boundaries). The transnational subalternity broadens our intellectual comprehension and pushes us to think beyond national borders and communities. It focuses on the emerging paradigms of new forms of marginalities with the increase of international migration and – how diaspora – the reformulation of these scattered communities in transnational space – also works as both equalizer and unequal space.

Diaspora – on the one hand provides an opportunity to *reunite* the national subjects irrespective of their socio-cultural identities – under a blurring identity of an umbrella nationality but on the other hand with the strengthening of a specific community's number and their stability in transnational spaces – diaspora becomes unequal space for the less represented or the marginalized. Diaspora not only *reunites* people but also rejuvenates their socio-cultural practices including castism, communalism, regionalism, heteronormativity, sectarianism, linguistic jingoism, etc. – leading dominant classes to re-formulate/ re-organize /re-practice/re-look/ at the marginalized/underprivileged – and continue their patterns of marginalization that they used to exercise against their underprivileged subject back at home – and continues in diasporic spaces as well. Thus, here diaspora works as a *galvanizing space* to rejuvenate discrimination and marginalities – that the dominant classes left temporally during their transition– and when they are settling/being stabilized in the transnational space – they re-adopt those/started valorising their patterns of discrimination *in* and *from* the diaspora. This is how diaspora becomes an unequal space for the marginalized, if not only economically but also socio-culturally.

Diaspora scholarship highlighted and represented the condition of the international migrants and diaspora communities starting from Robin Cohen, Wiliam Safran, Goolam Vahed, Brij V Lal, Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Steven Vertovec, et al. The idea of transnational justice and cosmopolitan laws and rights etc. were also being discussed by scholars like Emmanual Kant[4],

[4] In Emanuel Kant's political theory, cosmopolitan law is defined as one of the public laws. Dhawan writes, "In his 1795 essay "ZumewigenFrieden" ("Perpetual Peace"), Immanuel Kant proposes the *iuscosmopoliticum*as a

Derrida, Arendt, Ben Habib, Ulrich Beck, et al. But the organic intellectuals who started joining the existing diaspora communities of their own – within a banner of a nationality – observed the more sophisticated and newer dimension of transnational marginality against the religious minorities, caste, linguistic, racial, sectarian, LGBTQ, minorities, etc. as it can be observed in the case of the South Asian and Indian diaspora. There was no established intellectual discourse on such emerging forms of transnational subalternities. But with the rise of intellectual mobilization and collective consciousness against injustice in diasporic spaces – and among the diaspora communities, one finds that these minorities have raised and asserted their voices in the recent past. We see the mobility of the Dalit diaspora – to advocate their voices and raise concerns against caste discrimination in transnational spaces.

**Caste in Transnational Space**

ABC News reports that "Some South Asians, many miles away from their homes, say they are suffering from experiences with discrimination that dates back to thousands of years. From job rejections to unsupported marriages, they claim that severe harassment from the caste system crossed over into America and has gone unchecked". One of the interviewers Prem Paariyar, a Nepalese immigrant said he was discriminated against because of his caste both back home and in the U.S., told ABC News Live. He said, "When we talk about our personal experience, people don't believe me," "Not just my experience, our experience." (Reena Roy et al 2023n.p.). Prof. Anupama Rao, a professor of history at Columbia University, discusses caste in the US with Reena Roy. I quote,

guiding principle to protect people from war and to morally ground *Welt- bürgerrecht*(cosmopolitan right) in the principle of universal hospitality. According to Kant, a world citizen acts from the pluralistic standpoint of humanity as a collective actor and not as an egoistic individual (*APH*, 411). Kant regarded state sovereignty as inviolable, even as his idea of world federation allowed individual states to be accountable to a universal citizenry. Furthermore, he believed that world trade provided the historical basis of cosmopolitan unity" (Dhawan : 141: 2023)

"Caste operates as an engine of social hierarchy and as a form of political and economic inequality," she said. Although the Indian government banned caste discrimination in 1948, it has still existed culturally, according to Rao. "The ways in which caste operates is subtle and not so subtle," she said. "People trying to figure out what your caste is through your last name, people being very interested in knowing about your cultural and social practices, all trying to get a sense of ways in which you can cut into somebody's caste identity." (Qtd in Reena Roy et. al. 2023)

One of the successful attempts of the Dalits in the diaspora is to convince the Western legal system to acknowledge the discrimination based on Caste within the South Asian and Indian diaspora as the Equality Act 2010 (UK), "allows, by order of a Minister caste to be treated as an aspect of race" (Government Equities Office UK: 2: 2010). In the context of the USA also Dalit activists were able to assert their voices through social and legal activists to propose a bill to ban caste discrimination in the US and "add caste as a protected class in US anti-discrimination laws". Sonia Paul, an activist and a US-based journalist who is known for her BBC radio documentary *The Hidden Caste Codes of Silicon Valley*, covers caste issues in the US and responds to how the Upper Caste Hindus in the US oppose the California Bill to ban caste.

There's a lot of opposition, mostly coming from Hindu groups who feel that adding caste as its specific category under anti-discrimination laws is going to make Indian Americans, and particularly Hindus, a target for discrimination as alleged perpetrators of caste bias. This is an ongoing issue among some Hindus in the United States, where they say they feel that their religion is always associated with castes and cows and curry. And then they're more than that. And here we have [a bill which could be] calling outcastes even more. But the [California bill] doesn't make any associations with religion. (Fernandes & Healy, 2023)

It was in 2013 the first-time anti-Caste resolutions were disused in Diasporic landscapes. In October 2012, the EU parliament discussed and adopted "a resolution on caste discrimination, calling on the EU to strengthen its policy on the issue. The resolution had been prepared by the Committee on Development (DEVE), which unanimously approved the draft resolution on 17 September[5]". The US legal system recognized discrimination based on caste. When a lawsuit was filed against CISCO.Inc. in California for allegedly discriminating against John Doe at the hands of his upper caste supervisors and co-workers, Defendants Sundar Iyer and Ramana Kompella[6].

**Modern Hinduism in the West, Proselytization and Dalit Experience**

Although Hinduism in diaspora, despite its non-proselytizing nature has attracted thousands of people to conversion in the West through various missions led by modern gurus like Maharshi Mahesh Yogi (1917-2008) through his Transcendental Meditation, Paramahansa Yogananda (Self-Realization Fellowship SRF) in the US, Satya Sai Baba, Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (ISKCON: International Society for Krishna Consciousness or "Hare Krishna"), etc.

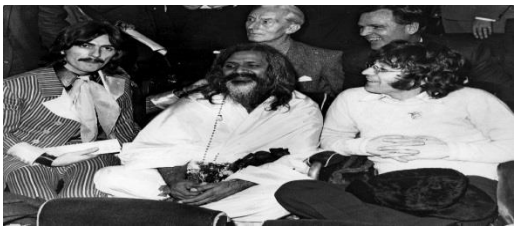
"Maharishi Mahesh Yogi followed a pattern established earlier by Vivekananda and Paramahamsa Yogananda (1893–1952), who emphasized to Western audiences the nonsectarian and philosophical teachings of Hinduism and taught that meditation, yoga, and parts of the Vedantic texts were

[5]" 013 EP Resolution on Caste Discrimination states that, "… to promote an enabling environment for civil society and human rights defenders working with people affected by caste discrimination in order to ensure their security and avoid any impediments to, or stigmatization or restriction of, their work; stresses that such an environment should include access to funding, cooperation with UN human rights bodies and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) accreditation." https://idsn.org/eu/eu-resolutions-on-caste/

[6]California court case filed. point no .4. "Doe's supervisors and co-workers, Defendants Sundar Iyer and Ramana Kompella, are from India's highest castes. Because both knew Doe was Dalit, they had certain expectations for him at Cisco. Doe was expected to accept a caste hierarchy within the workplace where Doe held the lowest status within the team and, as a result, received less pay, fewer opportunities, and other inferior terms and conditions of employment because of his religion, ancestry, national origin/ethnicity, and race/color. They also expected him to endure a hostile work environment. When Doe unexpectedly opposed the unlawful practices, contrary to the traditional order between the Dalit and higher castes, Defendants retaliated against him. Worse yet, Cisco failed to even acknowledge the unlawful nature of the conduct, nor did it take any steps necessary to prevent such discrimination, harassment, and retaliation from continuing in its workplace." https://regmedia.co.uk/2020/07/01/cisco.pdf

compatible with any religious tradition. Mahesh Yogi presented Transcendental Meditation as a technique for improving health and reducing stress. These benefits were also connected with the practice of Yoga. Since the late 20th century, there has been a veritable boom in Yoga studios in the West, which has in turn led to its renaissance in India".

*(Photo Courtesy – Britannica: Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in the middle with George Harrison on the left and John Lennon on the right side)*



It's noteworthy that despite the evolving representations of Hinduism in Western contexts, caste discrimination persists primarily within the Indian diaspora. Instances of such discrimination in the diasporic transnational settings are interesting when it comes to a low caste and new convert to Hinduism in the West. During a casual conversation with my friend Baba (pseudonym) residing in the US, he recounted an encounter with an African-American who had embraced Hinduism and performed music outside a temple in the US. Upon learning of his conversion, Baba asked about his caste, to which the individual responded, "I am simply a dedicated Hindu and do not believe in caste distinctions." This anecdote raises intriguing questions for scholars like me who are studying caste dynamics in transnational spaces, especially concerning the experiences of converts within Western Hindu communities. An important factor shielding the African-American convert from caste discrimination could be his name and racial features, which often obscure caste identity—a contrast to how individuals with identifiable names and caste affiliations from Indian origin easily fall prey to caste-based discrimination among the South Asian and Indian circles in transnational spaces. The mere sight of an *Indian*, based on appearance and name, triggers a scrutiny of identity, leading to either acceptance or rejection/discrimination.

Scholars like Vivek Kumar (2004) trace how Dalit identity and assertion organizations started mobilizing in the diaspora in the 1960s in the UK

followed by the US. Dalits residing in the UK established Buddhist Vihar (a Buddhist prayer canter) and Gurudwaras (Sikh prayer places) during the late 1960s. In 1985, a Buddhist Council was founded, comprising seven Ambedkarite organizations dedicated to supporting Dalit Indians. The Federation of Ambedkarites and Buddhist Organization (FABO) and Voice of Dalit International (VODI) are also actively engaged in uplifting Dalits in India from their base in the UK. In the United States, a more structured initiative emerged from educated Non-Resident Indian (NRI) Dalits who founded 'Volunteers in Service to India's Oppressed and Neglected' (VISION) in 1975. These individuals even collaborated with the Black Panther movement in the US. (Kumar 2004).

Today, there are numerous anti-caste and anti-communal/Muslim minority organizations and movements such as IDSN (International Dalit Solidarity Network[7]), Boston Study Group (BSG) led by some of my friends in Boston (MA), Dalit Solidarity Network UK, Indian American Muslim Council, (Washington: USA), Indian Muslim Committee, Indian Muslim Social Service Association (Singapore) Indian Muslim Federation (UK), Dawoodi, Konkani, Ismaili Muslims, Kerala Muslims (KMCC: Kerala Muslim Cultural Centre: GULF), etc. Farseen Ali Puthanveettil (2023) writes, "In recent decades, KMCC has undergone a significant shift from an organization primarily focused on charity, education, and cultural activities into a prominent diasporic organization that provides comprehensive social protection measures in both their host countries and their home state" (n.p.). These organizations work not only to give voices to these discriminations in the diaspora but also support their communities back home and have transnational solidarities with other marginalized.

[7] "The International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) was founded in March 2000 to advocate for Dalit human rights and to raise awareness of Dalit issues nationally and internationally. IDSN is a network of international human rights groups, development agencies, national Dalit solidarity networks from Europe, and national platforms in caste-affected countries." https://idsn.org/about-us/

The Indian Muslims in the diaspora also face dual discrimination in transnational spaces of the Western societies. One being as an immigrant another as an Indian Muslim at the hands of the whites/host communities and at the same time at the hands of Indian dominant castes. The rise of right-wing nationalism in Indian diaspora and far-right nationalism has multiplied the experiences of discrimination against the Indian Muslims. Kaleem Kawaja, executive director of the Association of Indian Muslims of America, expresses one such instance when Indian Muslims are discriminated against and neglected. He says in the context of Trump's Muslim ban, "A lot of the Indian Muslims with green cards fear that their green cards may be rescinded,". "They feel that as Muslims they're the visible target." "What is very heartening in America is that many white Americans in power spoke up against the Muslim ban," Kawaja said. "Unfortunately, we don't see as many mainstream Indians speaking up" (Mandhani2017).

During the Hindu-Muslim clash in the UK in September 2022, the Muslim Council of Britain, the largest umbrella organization representing Muslim-led entities in the UK, criticized the Indian High Commission for what they viewed as selective condemnation. "The India High Commission issued a statement on Monday condemning the 'vandalization of premises and symbols of Hindu religion'... 'We have strongly taken up this matter with the UK authorities and have sought immediate action against those involved in these attacks'" Al Jazeera (2022) reports. It also noted the opinion of Zara Mohammed, the "secretary-general of the Muslim Council of Britain, wrote in a letter to the Indian High Commission. 'Whilst it is right that we condemn the desecration of Hindu symbols, you must represent all Indians and also condemn the deliberate targeting, intimidation, and instances of assault of Muslims and Sikhs,' 'British Indian communities expect a balanced view from the Indian High Commission, which represents all of the diaspora, which can help heal divisions locally'" (n.p).

Nisha Thapliyal (2023) brought up another interesting case of how the Australian multicultural immigrant policy indirectly led to the robust Hindutva

nationalists' migration to Australia. She writes that following the events of 9/11, Australian immigration policies showed explicit targeting of Muslims and asylum seekers, while indirectly benefiting highly educated Indians. This group consisted largely of professionals in fields like IT and healthcare, and those capable of using education as a means for permanent migration. During this period, Indian migrants tended to be from upper-class and upper-caste backgrounds, having access to quality education and financial resources to pursue education-migration pathways in Australia. Consequently, this policy shuts out opportunities for working-class migrants. Overall, Australian multicultural policies, especially post-9/11, have favoured the immigration of groups that align with the core support base of Hindutva elsewhere in the diaspora: the upper class, upper caste, and financially mobile youth. Given this demographic landscape, the growth of a robust Australian Hindutva ecosystem doesn't come as a surprise.

**Conclusion**

One of the regressions of postcolonial legacy is that the power structure and power syndrome continue to flow among the postcolonial privileged migrants in the transnational landscapes. A mimicry of the colonial masters operates on their considered subordinates/others, ironically, despite the fact that they are also continued recipients of the same treatment from their hosts. In a nutshell, the transnational subalternity is multi-folded and highlights the challenges faced by the migrants in general and marginalized communities among migrants in particular as they cross different national, cultural, racial, political, and socio-cultural settings. Their problems multiplied if they belonged to minorities, low castes, LGBTQ, elderly and children, or women, and refugees and undocumented/unskilled migrants as they are always and already coming under the shadow of all ill practices that carried with the hegemonic classes in transnational spaces too. They often face discrimination by both hosts and privileged/upper caste South Asian and Indian migrants and lack/have limited agency and voices. Transnational subalternity emphasizes the intersectionality of marginalization and operates in transnational spaces on various grounds

such as religion, caste, class, race, gender, immigrant status, xenophobia, Islamophobia, exploitation, alienation, etc. It can also be understood as a community, space, condition /experience, or sub-theory within the subaltern studies. Therefore, there is an acute necessity to underscore how power and hegemony operate in transnational paces – not only to oppress the marginalized communities but also to systematically attempt to negate, discourage, and limit their attempt to resist, represent, and voice for their causes. The scholars who are willing to work in subaltern studies and migration and diaspora studies – this research provides them with new avenues of interdisciplinary explorations on subalternity in transnational spaces to work towards justice, advocacy, and equality across borders.

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**Book Review: *Gender, State and Education: Mapping the Inclusive Exclusion in South India***

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**Nagaraju Gundemeda, *Gender, State and Education: Mapping the Inclusive Exclusion in South India***

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**ISBN: 978-81-316-1316-0.**

--Manisha Manjari Jena

"Gender, State, and Society" (2024) is a brainchild of the author through his years of academic excellence in the field of Sociology of Education and his project on KGBV (Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya} schools in the undivided Andhra Pradesh. The book delves into the intricate dynamics between gender and education in India, particularly in the context of the KGBV schools in the undivided Telugu states. In this context, the empirical data (quantitative and qualitative) was collected from 40 KGBV schools and 427 respondents. The book is divided into six chapters, and each chapter except the last chapter (Conclusion) is divided into two sections. At the beginning of every section of the chapters, the author poses some questions and discusses them, which creates interest among the readers and develops sociological imagination. The book has a unique formulation that reflects the relationship between gender and education and analyses factors responsible for this correlation, such as religion, region, community, caste, class, etc. The author provided a brief historical picture of the existing literature for every section discussed throughout the book. Each chapter is narrated through a deductive approach, strengthening the arguments by critically analysing available data, studies, and empirical research.

Chapter 1, "Gender, Education, and Feminist Epistemology", starts with the negative correlation between education and gender in society through the lenses of both Western and Indian feminist theories. The author introduces unique concepts like savarna feminism and avarna women, adding depth to the discourse. The second section briefly discusses the debates, causes, and statistics of school dropouts in India, particularly the Telugu states, focusing on gender disparities. It also highlights the role of government policies and international bodies in decreasing the dropout rates for girls from both global and Indian contexts. An overview of the policies of the government in general and the KGBV scheme in particular is also provided. The history and making of the KGBV schools here serve as a backdrop for the whole book afterwards. Lastly, the four objectives of the study and the methodology are mentioned.

Chapter 2, "Educating Marginal Girls in India: A Sociological Exploration", addresses the challenges in girls' education despite various government interventions from the colonial era to the contemporary times. Gundemeda

critiques the socio-economic factors that hinder educational progress and evaluates the responses of academicians to these issues. The author underscores the ideological and practical flaws in state policies and social institutions by dissecting the works of scholars like Karuna Charan, Vina Majumdar, Vimala Ramachandran, etc. In the next section, he talks about the alarming situation of schooling girls in India from a global perspective, bringing it to the Indian context and narrowing it down to the Telugu states. To exemplify, he highlights uncommon issues like the difference between the 'Push-Out' and' Drop-Out' concepts. The ideological orientation and defects in the state's policies and social institutions that hinder girls' education in the country and Telugu states through the literature are highlighted as well. The chapter concludes by stressing the unique challenges faced by Dalit, tribal, and Muslim girls in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana to attain education, which are sociocultural, economic, and political.

Chapter 3, "Girls Education in India and Telugu States: Social Constructions and Contestations", traces the historical trajectory of education in India, especially girls education, emphasising the religious, cultural, and social influences that have shaped it. The unique sociocultural fabric of the Telugu society is highlighted along with its impact on girls' education. It covers all the periods from the Vedic times to the contemporary times, the changes in girls' education in the country, and the Telugu states. In the second section, the author overviews girls' education in the Telugu states. At this moment, he discusses the making and breaking of the Telugu states, girls' perception of their modern education, and stakeholders in educating girls. The historical monopoly of the knowledge system based on caste, class, and gender and its resistance to democratising education with multiple stakeholders like the state's interventions, religious and reform organisations, caste associations, and modern politics in Andhra Pradesh are peculiar to the study. Gundemeda also points out the causes responsible for the backwardness of girls and women and their education in the Telugu states, which is much worse than in other states of the country. The chapter ends with showcasing the interactions among caste, traditional occupation, and poverty with girls' education and their dropout rates in the Telugu states. Lastly, the lived experiences of the Dalits, especially Dalit girls in the state and the barriers they face to attain education are portrayed.

Chapter 4, "Social Significance of the Residential Schools for Dropout Girls: A Case Study of KGBV Schools in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana State", provides an in-depth analysis of the KGBV schools and their role in addressing the educational needs of marginalised girls hailing from different sections of the society like SC, ST, BC, BPL, and minorities. In the first part,

Gundemeda discusses the socioeconomic profiles of the girls studying in these schools, their relationship with the dropout rates, and the structural challenges within the schools. At this moment, the author also does a statistical analysis of the data. The government's initiatives to provide better education, history and structure of the KGBV schools, along with the responses of the girls and their parents about these schools, are discussed. Gundemeda argues that KGBV is a successful scheme by the government on papers and tables. However, it fails to effectively represent minorities (mainly Muslim girls) and backward-class girls while overrepresenting the Dalit and Adivasi girls. In the second section, he examines the classes in which dropout happens, its pattern, and causes from the narratives of these girls. Financial constraints, family unrest and family values, health problems and parental death, child labour both at home and outside, migration, lack of high schools in localities and inadequate schooling are the significant determinants in this context.

In the fifth chapter, "Inclusive Exclusions: Mapping the Voices of Marginal Girls on the Schools and Schooling," Gundemeda focuses on the perceptions and experiences of the students regarding the school infrastructure, culture, and teaching quality. The first section deals with the students' lived experience with the school's physical and social infrastructure. The narratives reveal significant issues with physical infrastructure, such as buildings, bathrooms, and water facilities, as well as general satisfaction with the school culture and teaching. However, the number of teachers is insufficient in almost all the KGBV schools under the study. The author discusses the recruitment and roles of teachers. The students' voices present the meaning of education, their aims and future aspirations, and the driving factors behind them. The second section deals with understanding the academic standards of the students through their learning abilities, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The study reveals that students enrolled in these schools are not well trained in their primary education; as a result, they commit many mistakes in their writing.

The concluding chapter starts by wrapping up access to education for marginal sections of society, especially the girls in these sections. Gundemeda advocates that education is a crucial instrument for empowering marginal sections of society, especially marginal girls and women being marginalised of the marginalised. He praises the state initiatives and the KGBV scheme, particularly for promoting girls' education and reducing dropout rates in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. However, he also points out the gap between policy frameworks and students' lived experiences in the KGBV schools through his study. Based on the findings in his study, Gundemeda ends the book with recommendations to address the issues identified in the KGBV schools, suggesting ways to improve the scheme's effectiveness.

The book has a good structure, with each section clearly articulated and conceptually sound. A brief historical background is given to each theme, and a sub-theme connects them to the present scenario, making it reader-friendly. The author not only critically analysed the literature, studies, policies, and statistics from a sociological lens in general and a gender lens in particular but also looked at them from an economic and political perspective.

Though the book is one of the best in the Sociology of Education and Gender in India, a few things could be improved. Repetitions in the discussions of historical contexts of girls' education and the KGBV scheme in India, particularly to the undivided Andhra Pradesh in the first three chapters, could have been minimised for better coherence. Additionally, the state-wise and district-wise number of KGBV schools in undivided Andhra Pradesh could have been mentioned. Girls and women with disabilities coming from the backward sections of society like SC, ST, BPL, minorities, etc., are triply oppressed based on their gender, disability, and social category. Hence, the absence of their narratives makes the study less inclusive.

Overall, "Gender, State, and Education" by Prof. Nagaraju significantly contributes to the Sociology of Education. It offers valuable insights into the intersection of gender, education, and marginalisation, making it a must-read for scholars dealing with the above intersectionalities in India. It will be equally helpful for policymakers to change and modify the girls' education policies, especially the KGBV scheme, or bring new ones. As a scholar working on the lived experiences of women school teachers, the book helped me to articulate a few things in my work. To exemplify feminist theories' arguments on education, the status of girls' education in India from the Vedic period to the contemporary times, the recruitment and roles of women teachers, and factors impacting the effectiveness of their jobs.

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--Triveni Pagilla

"In their day to day lives the OBCs are as oppressed as are the Scheduled castes by the upper castes" – KANCHA ILAIAH.

Sociology of literature is branch of sociology that deals with how texts are produced , social background of author and targeted audiences. Though founding fathers of Sociology did not reflect much upon it, Georg Lukacs, one of the first scholars in social sciences to reflect on literary works and recognising significance of Novel in presenting social life. One of his works, The Theory of Novel is seminal literary work reflects on modernity and contradictions of modern life. Drawing inspirations from him Frankfurt school also looks at the literary work from critical lens and its role in reflecting upon and critiquing societal structures. Post colonial studies understand role of literary works in challenges imperial power structures. Therefore literary pieces like novels, songs etc. plays significant role in challenges dominant narratives and reflecting upon on actual social conditions.

Literature, especially novels, involves in depicting everyday social world and interactions of people and presenting collective historical experiences of individual through fictional characters in a nuanced way, which can be rich data for sociologists to understand social life through sociological lens but mainstream sociologists in India hardly reflects on insights given by literature to understand social reality.

The Telugu literature played a crucial role in highlighting everyday humiliation, struggles, resistance, and celebration of the life of Dalits through texts like "Antarani Vasantham" (Untouchable Spring) by Kalyan Rao depicts Dalit lives and their everyday struggles, other seminal work is "My father Balaiah" by YB Satyanarayan talks about untouchability and the significance of education for Dalits to emancipate themselves. Along with that , Dalit women also have written multiple texts about Dalit women's issues. These works represents life of Dalits who were considered 'Untouchables' placed in SC category but there are no works either in sociology or in literature that focus on specific communities who experiences "Semi Untouchability" due to

their occupation, placed in OBC category. Communities such as Rajaka/ chakali or Mangali/ Nai Brahmins though engage with occupations which are considered impure and face semi untouchability their humiliation is hardly written in academics . However, there has been studies in recent times on Chakali community in telugu literature such as novels like REVU by GS Chalam and REVU Thiragadabithe by Pulikonda Subbachari, explores Rajaka community's struggles and their everyday forms of resistance to exploitation. Therefore, considering significance of novels in understanding social life, struggles of communities and individuals in navigating their life, this paper reviews REVU novel.

The novel REVU , penned by Telugu writer GS Chalam in 1994, is a pioneering literary work depicting the everyday challenges and resistance of the Rajaka (washermen) community towards the dominant caste in the Kalinga Andhra region during the 1980s. This literary piece demystifies popular and grand narratives and sheds light on the social conditions prevalent in villages, focusing on the exploitation endured by the Rajaka community at the hands of the dominant Naidu caste and their every day resistance and Migration from villages to cities as means to escape such exploitative conditions and do the same work with dignity. It establishes relationship between fictional construct and social context through characters like Ramisetty, Ankamma, Adisetty, Narisetty, and Bodi Thatha, along with various Naidu families, the novel explores the struggles faced by the Rajakas in both rural and urban settings. It also highlights the assertiveness displayed by women and the younger generation in their quest for self-respect and rights. The narrative unfolds across three chapters, each addressing the challenges encountered by the chakali community during three different seasons, thereby providing a comprehensive view of their plight throughout the year in a systematic manner.

Rajaka, or Chakali[1] is the community that engages with washing of clothes which are considered impure. The community services required for upper caste from birth to death and they ward off their impurity on to them as they present in every event to wash clothes. Though the occupation of the community and challenges are similar, administratively, they are categorised differently. In certain states, like UP, fall under the SC category, and others, like Andhra and Telangana, come under OBCs. As they come under OBCs and are seen as a homogeneous category, their struggles of untouchability, humiliation, and lack of representation in education and the political sphere were less debated in academia. Unlike Dalits, who are considered Untouchable

[1] Vernacular term for Washermen community.

in all spaces, this community is both touchable and untouchable simultaneously in Telugu regions because of which Prof. Komaranna termed it as SEMI UNTOUCHABILITY. Therefore, understanding the life of these communities provides nuances of caste and the changing nature of caste according to region and minute ways of exploiting weaker communities in the name of giving a sense of touch ability to a few communities.

The first chapter, "CHALI..CHALI..!"[2], portrays the harsh winter and the toil it brings to working people. Ramisetty, a young boy reluctant to engage in the exploitative caste occupation, questions authority and asserts his self-respect, this often conflicts with the Naidus. Ankamma, his elder sister, exemplifies resilience as she braves derogatory remarks while collecting clothes from the Naidu's house. Apart from washing clothes, they are also forced to do other work, such as carrying heavy weights whenever Naidu travels, which does not result in any payment.

Despite their loyalty and participation in the festivals of the Naidu families, the Rajaka caste's customs and beliefs are disrespected by the Naidu families. An example is the BALLA PANDUGA[3] festival, during which washermen are supposed to abstain from washing used clothes of the Naidus for a month. Nevertheless, when Adisetty brings this custom to Naiyuralamma's attention, she disregards it, compelling him to wash clothes without acknowledging or respecting their traditions. The chapter unveils the degrading tasks imposed on the Rajaka caste.

The second chapter, "DAHAM…DAHAM"[4], unfolds the struggle for water during summer. Narisetty's claim to ownership of the village tank sparks conflict with the Naidus, leading to a temporary halt in work until the Naidus concede to their demands. The absence of washermen for a week prompts a gathering of Naidus and other farmers at the sarpanch's house to address the situation. Naidus are reluctant to accept the washermen's claim of ownership of the tank but eventually agree due to the essential need for their services during marriages and festivals, highlighting the indispensable role of the Rajakas in the upper caste's lives.

After the incident, Adisetty works exhaustively for the marriage of Naidubabu's daughter from the beginning until the end, at times, going without food in the scorching summer. During the death of Peddi Naidu, Aadisetty is summoned to prepare the area for cremation. At the cremation site, an older

[2] Cold feeling during winter season.
[3] Community festival celebrated during winter season.
[4] Feeling of thirsty.

man exposes the atrocities committed by Peddi Naidu in the village, including grabbing land from innocent people and exploiting women of the lower castes. Meanwhile, Adisetty's passive nature results in inadequate payment for his labour, even during significant events like Naidubabu's daughter's marriage and Peddi Naidu's death. The chapter underscores the meagre rewards for their exhaustive efforts and the caste-based power dynamics.

In the final chapter, "VANAA…VARADHA…,[5]" the rainy season brings relief and challenges. Ankamma's resistance to polluting the water tank by Somi Naidu, highlights the severe instances of caste and gender nuances and assertiveness of rights by lower caste women. Ramisetty's journey to the city symbolizes hope for a better life free from caste-based occupations and oppression, yet it also isolates him from his familial roots. He builds himself a life in the city with the help of Suri, a barber, and learns about city life from Suri's brother-in-law, Mallesu.

A particular incident from the story sheds light on the caste and gender-based violent atrocities committed by dominant castes whenever they face resistance from the marginalized castes. When Adisetty and Ankamma go to collect food grains for their year's work, the Naidu family refuses their plea, citing the improperly washed clothes as their excuse. Despite Adisetty's attempts to dissuade her, Ankamma insists on receiving the grains owed for their labour. This incident sparks a heated argument where Ankamma uses strong language, provoking Naidu to physically assault her in the stomach, tragically leading to her death. Usually, in popular culture for example in Telugu films lower caste and working class women shown as immoral, sexual objects and as a passive beings but never recognised them as a active and resistant beings. In contrast to this popular narratives, this chapter throws light on how women from lower castes, especially from Rajaka caste fight against upper caste men for their dignity and rights.

Upon hearing of Ankamma's passing, Ramisetty returns to the village, overwhelmed with emotion. Narisetty informs Ramisetty about Ankamma's fight for essential rights like food grains. Ramisetty questions himself why he had lost the courage to resist such exploitative conditions, pondering whether only Ankamma and Adisetty were expected to confront these oppressive circumstances. He reflects on the necessity for everyone to work diligently to break these chains of exploitation. The fight for grains is not only a fight for food but also against exploitation and self-respect.

[5] Two telugu words, Literally vana means Rain and Varadha is flood.

The significance of REVU lies in its profound portrayal of social realities such as complexities of caste hierarchy, exposing the exploitative nature of caste-based occupations, gender discrimination entrenched in rural societies. the resilience of marginalized communities, and the intergenerational shift towards asserting rights and dignity and importance of collective action and solidarity in challenging oppressive structures. . The novel vividly captures the struggle for survival, dignity, and social justice in rural India during the 1980s, resonating with contemporary issues of caste discrimination and economic disparities.

The themes explored in the book remain relevant today as a reminder of marginalized communities' persistent struggles in their quest for equality and justice. The novel's enduring significance lies in its ability to provoke introspection and dialogue on issues of caste, gender, and social justice in contemporary India. As the younger generation seeks avenues for empowerment and liberation, it stands as a testament to the ongoing fight against oppressive structures and the resilience of the human spirit.

This book is of immense help for those scholars who are working in the area of sociology of literature, anthropology of literature and who are working in vernacular languages on impure occupations.

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# Book Review: Discard Studies in India: A Case of Patna

Author(s): Shahla P

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**Papia Raj and Aditya Raj**

**Discard Studies in India: A Case of Patna**

Kalpaz Publications, ISBN: 9789357222778, 9357222774Edition: 2023,
Pages: 148

-- Shahla P

Discard studies is a field of knowledge known in popular conception as waste/ waste management studies; the rubric of discard studies may be new to India, and the many social practices and economic and political behavior make it need to be understood differently.

This work analyses the nature of waste, the reasons for waste production, and the linkages of local processes to global imperatives; it also situates this study within the broader framework that locates environmental change with social change. The people who make subsistence out of the waste and its management, as well as their lives and health concerns, are discarded from the scrutiny of the main gaze. In this regard, this book is an attempt to include excluded people, practices, and products and to unravel the dire reality of waste management in Patna, an Indian city.

The research design of this work was developed by including quantitative and qualitative methods bolstered by an exhaustive review of literature and statistical data to provide a robust solution to waste management problems in India, particularly Patna. The book is organized into three chapters and an introductory part. The main chapters are ‘The context of Discard studies’, ‘Review of Municipal Solid Waste’ and ‘Waste Management to reduce health hazards in Patna’. The authors situate the study both in the introductory and in the first chapter; these chapters give direction to the succeeding part and the arguments.

The authors navigate discard studies from an intersectional view to understand the social production of waste in its historical, politico-economic and social context. The grounds for discard studies can be looked at through the purity and deliberate pollution of the caste system. In addition, what is considered polluted (product) or polluting (practices) concerns the authors. The labor untouchables did was discarded by the so-called not polluted (or pure). This practice of untouchability had a grounding in what is considered not required or to be discarded.

As climate unease and pollution are highly pronounced in this era, plastic is the major contributor to waste; its management poses a significant impediment among countries; developed countries try to hide their waste and use it to export to developing countries; earlier, it was common to export to China. At the same time, the waste in developing countries can be seen in their landfills.

The production of waste results from an increased population and human activities; if conspicuous consumption has no check and capitalist production goes exponentially, it will create an extreme situation for the planet. Raj and Raj "emphasize understanding it from a sociological perspective. The ever-increasing quantities of waste have attracted the attention of governments, scholars and activists, and the issue of waste has risen rapidly globally. Along with these developments, research into waste has surged both in anthropology and across the social sciences and humanities, give rise to the interdisciplinary subfield of discard studies" (page 15, 16).

Waste already occupies a place outside the dignitary and has a contrasting relation with the 'valued'. In this way, the attempt to define waste is intriguing. Waste is only waste if it is considered as it is. Some people use and throw away a particular thing while others reuse and extend its life span, and some make subsistence of the same (waste). In developed countries, products are easily discarded while they lose their intrinsic value; by contrast, the same thing (waste) is considered valuable in developing countries. In India, people are hesitant to discard useless electronics and items immediately; from e-

waste, people expect a financial incentive before discarding. Electronic products often find different users before finally getting disposed of. Similarly, the value of plastic bottles has been transformed in some other way, as they are used for gardening and innovative ways.

Anthropologists took three major analytic approaches to discard/waste. The first is *symbolic structuralist,* where every relation hinges on interactions; the sanctity of an item can deteriorate and, as time passes, may deprave in value. Thereupon, the sacred and profane are structurally confined to one another. Rather than an objective categorization, here, waste is social and relational. In the *economic materialist,* where materials are circulating to different spheres, the radical transformation of use value ensues when the object moves to another sphere. The object can be transient or durable per each realm. *Post human intersubjective* approach has gained strength since the 2010s; at this point, waste and various associated forms of work engender the 'subject'. Rag pickers can be considered as an example, seeing as their identities are closely associated with the waste.

Waste management has become a profitable business now. Currently, the dominant model regarding waste is recycling the garbage to set materials again into the productive cycle. The authors argued that minimizing the waste, either by not producing or reusing it (which is different from recycling) has yet to meet much social acceptance.

"In contemporary time, where risks ensuing through the heap of waste/discard is on the rise, adequate research is required on waste from sociological perspective while taking into consideration the various psychological, behavioral, and situational factors which influence people's habits of wasting, recycling and disposal in developing countries" (P.21).

High rates of population growth, rapid urbanization and sophisticated forms of consumption are the three interrelated factors due to which waste is generated in larger quantities. The waste is generated more by the materialistic needs of people than subsistence livelihood practices. The spurt of the industrial

revolution, with its capitalist mode of production and consumption, has been the decisive factor in the exponential generation of waste, Raj & Raj added.

In the second chapter, among various sorts of wastes, the authors focus on solid waste, unwanted or useless solid materials from combined residential, industrial, and commercial enterprises. Raj and Raj contend that MSW (Municipal Solid Waste) generations are the sequel of everyday practices. Therefore, MSW management becomes a complex issue intertwined with people's lifestyles, consumption patterns and urbanization. In developing countries, the industrial and service sectors are expanding with urbanization and rural-to-urban migration. Patna is no exception, as it altered the relationship to the consumption patterns and, thereby, the nature of MSW generation. The state government (Bihar) has called Patna the Garbage City of India as the premises were contaminated and profuse by MSW. In addition, the city is less equipped to deal with the rising volume of MSW. Developing countries cannot afford some waste management techniques on a large scale, but the consumption pattern is becoming par with developed countries.

This work illustrates that the solid waste generation rate is a functional result of social activities. As stated by Raj &Raj, three core dimensions can combine to portray lifestyles from a macro perspective: social status or class, attitude and preferences, and behavior. These dimensions significantly impact the level of waste generated in a particular household.

Globalization is responsible for the rise of a new middle class whose consumption pattern results in increased waste generation in developing countries. According to Raj & Raj "the new rich in India are a product of lumpenism, it is the way of life was epitomized during the last few decades when the agrarian and rural classes became dominant caste. Cities like Patna, pathetically, became a victim of their own people who resort to unruly behaviour that can at best be classified as lumpenism"(p.46).

Raj &Raj trying to draw challenges of MSW Management (MSWM)in the third chapter; MSWM encompasses processes such as proper planning,

policies, socio-economic conditions, climatic sustainability, storage, collection, transportation, treatment, final disposal and monitoring. MSWM is not limited to the boundaries of technological systems facilitating the handling and disposal of MSW. Instead, it also deals with many other factors, such as policy and legal framework, institutional arrangements, operations management, financial management, public participation and awareness, and action plans for improvement concerning sustainability. The current scenario of MSWM in Patna needs to be integrated and sustainable, which places the environment and the young population's health at potential risk. Improper planning and management will cause significant health and environmental deterioration.

There is no wonder that poor planning and weak institutional arrangements will deteriorate the quality of life of the specific region and environment. Likewise, the reasons for this are very predictable in the case of Patna. However, this work is praiseworthy as an attempt to bestow a nascent field of knowledge. The interdisciplinary nature and its uncomplicated writing make it pellucid.

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# Book Review: Leprosy in Colonial South India: Medicine and Confineme

Author(s): Chetan

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**Buckingham, Jane. Leprosy in Colonial South India: Medicine and Confinement. New York: Palgrave Publications, 2002, pp 249, Rs. 8654/- (Hardcover) ISBN: 0-333-92622-6**

--Chetan

While the disease of leprosy had a substantial long history in the Indian sub-continent and references to its existence found in the Hindu religious texts, Europeans were familiar with its prevalence in their continent too. Leprosy in South India: Medicine and Confinement by Dr. Jane Buckingham touches upon different dimensions of the disease. Buckingham begins the discussion with the question of how leprosy control in early nineteenth-century colonial India was a government matter rather than a missionary responsibility. The book also covers discourses on leprosy control and treatment from the early 1800s to the implementation of the Government of India Lepers Act 1898 with specific reference to medical research, sanitary politics, intensive policing and confinement of patients to protect the British soldiers and civilians from the contagion. These initiatives became stringent in the aftermath of the 1857 rebellion with the transfer of power from the East India Company to the British Crown that emphasized collecting information on sanitation and social conditions of natives. Besides, the disease was seen as a stigma inside and outside the country because of its multiple manifestations like nerve damage and loss of feelings that castigated sufferers from mainstream society. As the title of the book encapsulates 'South India,' it becomes important to locate reasons for intensive focus on the disease in this region. One of the main reasons was Madras Presidency, comprised of contemporary Kerala, Tamil Nadu and parts of Andhra Pradesh, had the least number of leprosy sufferers compared to the Bengal and Bombay Presidencies. Besides, Madras Presidency invested more government funds and support in the care and treatment of leprosy in the early decades of the nineteenth century as compared to other presidencies.

In the context of methodology, Buckingham explains that a substantial number of studies on medical histories in colonial India have already been conducted, including the works of Arnold, Harrison, Catanach and others. These studies focused on the challenges and dangers posed by epidemics to British soldiers and civilians but the study of leprosy did not gain much traction in academia till recently because of its slow and degenerative nature. Buckingham also explicates how Michael Foucault's works on power, truth, panopticism, legal institutions, civilization and confinement have given a new shift to studies in the discipline of history. Correlating the impact of Foucault's ideas on the study of leprosy, she writes that the disease generated interest in scholars

because it invoked anxiety and fear among people who endorsed vigilance on lepers. Consequently, the book addresses the fundamental questions of confinement and seclusion of leprosy sufferers through legal institutions in British India. Moreover, Buckingham raises a pertinent question on the identity of leprosy sufferers who were considered traditionally as patients at the domestic and international levels but the inception of the western medical system advocated for their confinement because of the contagious nature of their disease. Medical institutions established to provide treatment to lepers introduced an ideological change in the public domain wherein the sufferers were not treated as patients but rather agents of pathogens that needed to be restricted with the assistance of the legal system. Hence, Buckingham seems to have questioned the role of medical institutions acting as prisons instead of medical facility centres and changed the life experiences of leprosy sufferers.

Chapter one "Indian and British Concept of Leprosy and of the Leprosy Sufferers" gives an insight into the British perception of the disease in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and how it changed dramatically in the nineteenth century with the expansion of political authority in India. Leprosy was seen as one of the skin diseases – another form of syphilis and psoriasis until two Norwegian doctors C. W. Boeck and Daniel Cornelius Danielssen published their research based on the treatment of patients admitted to Bergen Hospital of Norway. Dr Francis Day and J. Shaw worked extensively on leprosy and divided it into two categories – Lepra Anaesthetica and Lepra Tuberculata – based on symptoms and manifestations in patients. The Chapter also captures the debate - whether leprosy sufferers inherit the disease or germs cause it. Diet, food habits and social and financial conditions have also been studied as associated parameters of leprosy.

Titled "Patient or Prisoner? Leprosy Sufferers in British Institutional Care," Chapter two begins with a discussion on the public perception of criminality, poverty and vagrancy. Leprosy was considered one of the forms of divine punishment that ought to be treated at par with crime. The Chapter further sheds light on the establishment of some of the oldest medical institutions, including a separate hospital for lepers by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century which was taken over by the Dutch and the East India Company in the eighteenth century. Some statistical figures of lepers treated as outpatients and inpatients at hospitals and dispensaries have been provided along with the role played by NGOs in persuading the government to allocate funds for homeless lepers. The separation of lepers from other patients was only a step toward acknowledging the potency and contagiousness of the disease; exclusive attention was given to the architecture of hospital wards wherein ventilation

remained the prime concern. Caste-based separation of Indian patients was thwarted to maximize the utility of funds allocated for leprosy care. Although the establishment of leper hospitals reconciles with the discourse of advancement and modernization of medical facilities, it also raises another debate if the leprosy sufferers were patients or prisoners.

Chapter three "Colonial Medicine in the Indigenous Context" discusses indigenous treatment patterns in North and South India with specific references to similarities and differences between Ayurveda and Siddha. Apart from indigenous medicines, Unani medicine created a niche place for itself in South India for several centuries since a large section of the Indian population was constituted by Muslims. While tracing the history of indigenous medicines, Buckingham writes about the references to dissection in the old Hindu texts of medicine. However, surgery did not receive much attention and became obsolete by the nineteenth century due to the strict prohibition of dissection on religious grounds. Despite this, parallels could be drawn among the European, Islamic, and Indian medicines because the three had their foundations in the perception that the imbalance of humour causes diseases. For instance, medical practitioners used to invoke gods, which were believed to be the presiding deities of different body organs, before the treatment. The Chapter also highlights the failure of the Indian medical system against Western medicine because of religious intervention that restricted the scientific explanation of diseases. In addition, the author sheds light on the changing approach of the British towards Indian medicines from the sixteenth century to the second half of the nineteenth century when European medicine was preferred over Indian in the wake of its scientific nature.

There was no cure for leprosy until the 1940s, but different kinds of treatment were practised in colonial India. There were some commonalities in the Western and indigenous treatments of leprosy; for instance - too much emphasis was laid on the cleanliness of the body. In Chapter four "Leprosy Treatment: Indigenous and British Approaches," Buckingham explains different remedies practised in the first half of the nineteenth century. Massage with neem oil was the most common remedy in the native medicine tradition, including Unani which gained extensive acceptance by a specific section of the society. In Western medicine, the formulation prepared with mercury and arsenic had a long history for the treatment of leprosy, venereal diseases and syphilis. Dalton's treatment was considered the most effective against leprosy since it included oral medicine and external ointment prepared from bichloride mercury. Admission of lepers to the Monegar Choultry and Native Infirmary in Madras testified to patients' confidence in Western medicine over indigenous medicine. On the recommendation of van-Someren, tonics, and

palliatives were administered to patients. A fumigation technique was also employed, particularly in Palliport and Calicut asylums. From the late 1870s onward, surgery was used for the treatment of leprosy in northern and western India. Gurjon oil treatment of leprosy, proposed by the surgeon Dougall, an officer of Madras Medical Service, was the first instance of a leprosy cure developed by the British from materials available in the Indian medical tradition. The Chapter also encapsulated the causes of patients' resistance to getting long-term treatment for leprosy in asylums.

Medical research gained traction with an increased inflow of doctors, chemists, and scientists in the imperial world. Chapter five "Leprosy Research and the Development of Colonial Medical Science" begins with a discussion on how science from Europe spreads to the colonial territories. George Basalla's article on the spreading of science to the colonial world received appreciation and criticism from medical historians. Buckingham argues that research into leprosy was not the priority of the East India Company and the Crown because it was assumed that the disease affect only the poor Indians and Eurasians. The Chapter also focuses on how the Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta presidencies contributed to leprosy research evident from the launch of medical journals, establishment of medical societies, and exchange of information among doctors. The journals and commissions generated new medical knowledge of leprosy and other tropical diseases leading to the professionalization of medicine in India.

"The Politics of Leprosy Control," the next chapter, gives an insight into how the disease became a tool of panoptical politics. Dr Beauperthuy's treatment of leprosy enraged a battle of leadership between the Royal College of Physicians and the British government on who has the authority to instrument guidelines of leprosy control in India. The Chapter also looks into the different trials of leprosy treatments like Gurjon oil, Johnston's Carbolic fumigation, Chaulmugra oil, and Marotty oil.

The last chapter "Confining Leprosy Sufferers: The Lepers Act" captures the fear of the British government that emerged after the death of Father Damien who contracted leprosy while working with lepers in India. The father's death revived the 1840s discourse of separating leprosy sufferers, strengthening the existing sanitary act, and implementing new acts to protect British troops and citizens from the disease. The Chapter also gives an insight into the recommendations of the Leprosy Commission with specific reference to permissible and prohibited activities for lepers. These recommendations were updated periodically on the back of new findings that led to overlapping of permissible and prohibited acts for lepers. Besides, the Chapter provides

details of the 1896 Leprosy Bill passed by the British Indian government on the lines of the Imperial Act.

Buckingham has provided an extensive sociological, political, economic, medical, and religious overview of leprosy in nineteenth-century India. Although the book encapsulates statistical data to corroborate arguments, it lacks the quantity to make a convincing and impactful statement. Buckingham emphasizes the advent of the Western medical system and how it slowly replaces indigenous treatments, discarding the fact that modern medicine was inaccessible to the large section of the Indian population who lived in the countryside and relied on hakims, maulvis, and veds. The book seems to be embracing the strategies and initiatives of British authorities to confine leprosy over the ineffectiveness of natives' traditional and customary methods. While the author attempts to provide glimpses of how indigenous therapeutic techniques were widely popular in the native population, the book does not acknowledge the massive acceptance of indigenous medicines by liberal British doctors and administrators before the breakout of the 1857 rebellion. Moreover, Buckingham seems to be predominantly highlighting the accounts of British doctors and medical practitioners who helped in the establishment of medical institutions and hospitals but eschewed the contributions of Indians who served the patients and simultaneously assisted their superiors in hospitals.

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