

From the Editor

Dear colleagues,

It is my pleasure to present the second issue of *Explorations*. The issue consists of five essays and one interview. Two essays of the issue are published under the 'Articles' category and three essays under the 'Research in Progress' category. The essays under the latter category have been selected from amongst the submissions made during the Young Researchers' Workshop on 26-27 December, 2016 which preceded the 42nd Annual Conference of the Indian Sociological Society at Tezpur University. This is also in accordance with the declared policy of the journal to promote the research publication of the young social scientists.

The first article titled *The Local Weekly Markets of Delhi: Operating in the Formal 'Space' and Informal Economy* by Suvrata Chowdhary studies the nexus between informal economy and the formal regulatory mechanisms of the state and the civil society. It sociologically contextualises LWMs in the triangle formed by the urban space, informal economy, state and market.

The second essay, *Interlinking Discrimination, Poverty and Social Exclusion of Scheduled Castes in Rural India: A Literature Review* by Jayashree Ambewadikar, is a review essay of available literature that examines different aspects of the caste-based discriminatory practices against the Scheduled Castes in rural areas leading to their poverty and social exclusion.

The first paper under Research in Progress is *Fieldwork: A Process of Learning and Unlearning* by Sudipta Garai. The paper explicates how the choice of the subject of research, homosexuality in this case, guides and shapes the process of fieldwork. The researcher here uses the medium of movies to negotiate a given situation in order to initiate discussion on a contentious subject matter to understand people's attitude towards homosexuality.

The next paper, *Doing Ethnography in Urban Spaces* by Vidyapogu Pullanna recounts the experience of conducting ethnographic study in an urban setting. The paper argues how a researcher's caste identity and social network either facilitate or challenge one's access to respondents even in a cosmopolitan urban space.

The final paper titled *Researcher or Consumer: Problems of Access in Studying Beauty Parlour Work* by Chayanika Pal presents an ethnographic exploration of beauty parlour work as a social phenomenon. The researcher states that while the researcher's identity as a consumer facilitated access, it at the same time posed the methodological dilemma of simultaneously being a client as well as a researcher.

This issue also carries an interview of Professor Margaret Abraham, the President of International Sociological Association. Besides addressing myriad issues concerning practice of sociology and challenges of contemporary society, she emphasised on the potential of students in building a just and democratic society.

I would like to inform you that the next issue (April, 2018) of the journal will focus on the theme 'Society and Sexuality'.

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

Chandan Kumar Sharma

Department of Sociology

Tezpur University

Editor, *Explorations*

Email: explorationsiss@gmail.com

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Author(s): Suvrata Chowdhary

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The Local Weekly Markets of Delhi: Operating in the Formal 'Space' and Informal economy*

--- Suvrata Chowdhary

Abstract

The Local Weekly Markets (LWMs) provide a unique subject matter of sociological study in the context of the informal economy. These markets have become a pervasive feature in various neighbourhood and streets of Delhi as of today. LWMs in terms of the nature of products exchanged and class of people who operate in it could be argued to belong to the informal economy, but its presence and survival in an otherwise formal urban space is attributed to both formal informal processes. It is to be noted that in an urban metropolis the street has become a much contested public space that is subject to regulation both by state and civil society. In light of these observations this paper aims to sociologically contextualise LWMs in the triangle formed by the urban space, informal economy, state and market and understand how informality is invoked when it comes to the use to which apparently formal urban space is put to.

Key words: Informal economy, Market, State, Urban space

Introduction

In the contemporary world the word 'market' has come to assume multiple meanings depending on the context in which it is spoken of. Yet at the heart of the concept lies the basic understanding which entails buying and selling of goods and services with or without the use of money. It has to be noted that economic principle underlying the concept is taken as a starting point in the discourse related to the configuration of the idea of market. This purely economic understanding has often obscured the social, political and cultural dimension that is embedded in the concept of market. One of the aims of this paper is to provide

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analyses of political and social dimensions that become evident in the everyday interaction of the market with state and society. This paper is based on the fieldwork undertaken in several weekly markets in Delhi and the primary respondents were traders themselves. These interviews and observations revealed that local weekly markets (LWMs) are organised in several locations in Delhi and there is a systematic process through which it comes about. Periodic markets have existed for long in the rural context where farmers, artisans, folk artists, cattle herders would gather periodically from one village square to another to exchange goods and services. It is interesting that the same idea has been adopted in modern and developed spaces in cities where such markets are organized by people who are largely characterized as migrants, poor or informal labour. These markets are called by varied names but have more or less same meaning, like *haat* (periodic market places), *tehbazaari* (street vending) or *saaptahik bazaar* (local weekly markets).

Local weekly markets or ‘haat’ or ‘tehbazaari’ is a traditional style of retailing where, on a particular day of a week, petty traders display their commodities on a makeshift arrangement in places authorised by the municipal corporation against payment of some fixed remuneration. Usually these markets are organised on pavements of roads that run through neighbourhoods. Commodities sold in these markets range from small objects of daily use in households that includes fruits and vegetables, garments, toys, and electrical gadgets, second hand clothes, utensils et cetera. To quote Tamaskar in this respect, ‘As against ‘fixed’ locations of trading firms (shops), with their openings on everyday of the week, except on the declared holidays, periodic marketing places meet once, twice, thrice or four times in a Market ‘week’. Periodic market places may be defined as spots or sites at which buyers and sellers converge periodically to acquire and or dispose of locally produced and exotic goods and services, exchange information with friends, relatives, and strangers and engage in recreational activities’ (Tamaskar, 1993, p. 46).

The title of the paper suggests that LWMs operate in formal ‘space’ and informal economy; footpath and neighbourhood streets where these markets are organised on different days of the week are referred to as formal ‘space’. LWMs are considered to be part of the informal economy for lack of formal accounting of flow of commodities, demand, supply and profit generated; status of traders and vendors many of whom have poor economic assets at their disposal, inaccessibility to formal system of credit et cetera. But LWMs have all the

characteristics that make it a market of its own kind and it has its presence in Delhi vis-a-vis other kinds of market. In this paper I would situate LWMs at this interesting juncture of formal space and informal economy and also present how LWMs are organised through internal organisation among various actors within the market and their negotiations with institutions that control and regulate these markets from outside. Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), Police and Residents Welfare Associations (RWAs) play important roles in giving a quasi-legal status to these markets.

The paper has been divided into four parts, part one presents a discussion about sociological analysis of the concept of market in contrast to its economic understanding, part two situates LWMs in the framework of informal economy, part three presents a brief social history of LWMs in Delhi and its relevance in contemporary times, part four entails discussion how the market comes in to being, its everyday politics, its engagement with institutions of state and civil society.

For a very long time economists have been interested in the determination of market prices and very little or no attention has been paid to study ‘the market’ as an institution in its own right. If one goes back to trace the emergence of theory built around the concept of market one can start off with the difference that persists between two schools of thoughts that is between classical economists and classical political economists. Classical economists saw the market as synonymous with either a market place or a distinct geographical area. They saw market as something concrete as opposed to the abstract market of later day economists. On the other hand classical political economists were concerned with production rather than exchange that took place in concrete geographical area where buyers and sellers met. The classical economists felt that prices were determined in the market and classical political economists held that price was decided essentially by the amount of labour that it took to produce a commodity. (Swedberg, 2003) Here we can see that whatever be the difference between the two, both approaches were interested in factors that determined the price of a commodity rather than the concept of ‘market’ itself.

It was Adam Smith¹ according to Swedberg, who combined the two views, mentioned above and came with a distinct analysis of markets. Though he considered market mechanism as peripheral but he was also fascinated by the capacity of human beings to enter into exchange with one another. The propensity

to truck, barter and exchange, he said was something that human beings were endowed with by nature and that could not be found in animals (ibid).

Swedberg criticised Adam Smith's view that evolution of the market throughout history took place as the result of a natural inclination among human beings to exchange things that one did not possess. Swedberg says that markets have very different structures and that markets are anything but natural. Yet another criticism levelled against Adam Smith is that it is not clear in his work in what sense he uses the word market. The market it turns out is the hollow core at the heart of economics (ibid).

Critics of the neo-classical economic model of markets say that it is shorn of social relations such as power norms and networks; externalities and institutions as areas of sociological research are neglected. J. R. Stanfield while reviewing Karl Polanyi's oeuvre states that, 'institutional analysis is for Polanyi more sociological than psychological because it is the institutions that surround an individual's actions that mould his character. At any given time the persistence and importance of this or that propensity in basic human nature is determined by the institutional milieu which supports or promotes some elements of the human potential and represses other elements' (Stanfield, 1986, p.14).

Another prominent classical political economist whose work can be cited here is Karl Marx. He also gave primacy to production than to market when it came to deciding the price of a commodity. For Marx, market is synonymous with 'the sphere of circulation' as he preferred to call it. He emphasised that the market essentially consists of social relationships. According to Marx the importance of market cannot be ignored. In his seminal work *Capital* he notes that commodities cannot go to market and make exchanges on their own account and that value is not inherent in a commodity but rather constitutes 'a relation between people expressed as a relation between things' (Marx, 1867). By this Marx meant that market is a sphere of exchange of the final goods and services and the value at which the exchange takes place is not the actual value of it; instead it is the value of the labour that has been put into its production. With regard to this statement it can be argued that Marx was among those few who saw in the market an element of social relationships.

Towards the end of the 19th century some modifications came to be observed in the way that economists used to define markets. It acquired tremendous analytical

interest as a price making and resource allocating mechanism. In and around 20th century economists thought that the term ‘market’ should be extended from simply meaning a market place to any area where buyers and sellers of a particular commodity are located. Though the abstract nature of market remained intact but new ways of analysing it became popular in the economics circle. During this period economist Alfred Marshall gave importance to the concept of market as an empirical phenomenon in its own right. He also emphasised upon the social dimensions of markets which got reflected in his work called *Industry and Trade* wherein he defined the market in the following manner: ‘In all its various significations, a ‘market’ refers to a group or groups of people, some of whom desire to obtain certain things, and some of whom are in a position to supply what the others want’ (Swedberg, 2003).

When sociologists took up the task of analysing the markets a great difficulty emerged due to lack of communication between theirs and the economists viewpoint. Nonetheless in the economics literature on markets that evolved in the twentieth century there were traces of attempts made on their behalf to look at the social dimension of markets. Many sociologists took off from there and came up with socio-economic analysis of markets. Smelser, Parsons, Weber, Harrison, White, Bourdieu, Karl Polanyi were among those few who paved the path for the sociological understanding of markets.

Swedberg writes that Weber was the one who was by far most interested in markets and especially during his last years he tried to develop what he termed a ‘sociology of “the market”’. He analysed market from the viewpoint of ‘social action’.² A systematic expression of his attempt to develop a sociological approach to markets is found in *Economy and Society* (Weber, 1922), where one of the key passages on the market reads as follows:

A market may be said to exist wherever there is competition, even if only unilateral, for opportunities of exchange among a plurality of potential parties. Their physical assemblage in one place, as in the local market square, the fair (the “long distance market”), or the exchange (the merchant’s market), only constitutes the most consistent kind of market formation. It is, however, only this physical assemblage which allows the full emergence of the market’s most distinctive feature.

Swedberg notes that Weber had emphasised the element of struggle or conflict in his sociology of markets. Weber used such terms as ‘market struggle’ and he spoke of ‘the battle of man against man in the market’. Weber’s understanding of competition has a positive connotation in the sense that he viewed competition as ‘a peaceful conflict... insofar as it consists in a formally peaceful attempt to attain control over opportunities and advantages which are also desired by others’. He was also interested in the interaction between the market and the rest of the society. This comes out from his analysis of the role that regulations play in the market. In his book *Economy and Society* he mentions that a market can be free or regulated. In a capitalist society, he said that the highest degree of ‘market freedom’ or ‘market rationality’ is reached³ (Swedberg, 2003).

There existed for long a distinction between physical market places and the market principle (demand-supply theory that determines prices of labour, resources and outputs) as if the two were unrelated to each other and anthropological studies subscribed to this difference. However Applbaum argues that there is a need to look at the two concepts in a continuum and that would pave the path for empirical research on markets in a more holistic fashion (Applbaum, 2005).

LWMs as part of the informal economy

There are enough dilemmas as to what constitutes informal economy; for instance Breman says that the concept is taken to cover everything that does not belong to the formal sector and this often gives the distinction a tautological character. Sometimes it is defined in terms of distinctive employment situation and on other occasions in terms of separate economic circuits or a combination of the two. Informal economy is also defined in terms of legality and illegality, hidden and shrouded activities that need to be either eliminated or regulated by the state. Then there are doubts in relation to the causes of its emergence, some point out that this sector has emerged as the fallout of the modern capitalist sector which has not been able to develop as rapidly as the rise in the number of unemployed people or those displaced from their primary occupation, that is agriculture in developing and underdeveloped countries. Proponents of this thesis contend that modern capitalist industrial society encourages such economies by creating structural inequalities based on class, ethnic, and cultural segregations. Kantor Paola has made a very apt observation, wherein he says that it is difficult to arrive at any all encompassing definition of informal economic activities because such a

characterisation or definition would eventually clash with ethnographic and participant accounts steeped in their own unique experience.

Significance

Barbara Harriss-White has written a great deal on the significance of the informal sector in India and about the reasons why it is so vital for developing economies. She says that the India of 88 per cent is sometimes called 'local', as opposed to national, or state-provincial; but local is often used to refer to the detail of activity carried on in cities. It has been called 'real', actually existing and even authentic, to distinguish it from the imagined economy that is so often inferred from official data in a selective way to support orthodox economic theories. Its market has been called 'mud floored' and indeed many are, but this does not mean that none are marble floored. Its economy is sometimes called 'unorganized' to distinguish it from the 'organized' and registered economy; and this is useful so long as it is clear that 'unorganized' does not mean 'unregulated'. By this the author brings out a critical perspective to the way in which the informal sector is analysed and the argument that unorganized does not necessarily mean unregulated holds quite true if one looks at the LWMs which are very much regulated by state policies even though they are informal in the wider sense of the term.

When looked at from the perspective of the informal economy LWMs display some characteristics that are akin to the prevalent understanding about this kind of economy. Traders and vendors who assemble in the weekly markets do not maintain accounts of their transactions, there is no systematic accounting of the flow of commodities in the market, it is difficult to assess accurate estimates of demand and supply of perishable and non-perishable products, most traders and vendors in the markets lack assets of economic value thus formal credit and finance options remain closed for them. But LWMs as mentioned in the introduction are regulated and there is a systematic process through which it is organised by traders. This systematic process entails social relations among traders, power and authority wielded by *pradhans*/organisers, negotiations between LWMs and non-market institutions (MCD, RWAs, and Police). This process also produces informality within LWMs in terms of management of the space (street and footpath) by the traders and *pradhans*. As the number of people wanting to become part of the market as sellers increases it necessitates either accommodating these new traders within established markets or search for new

spaces in the city where markets can be organised. This aspect of informality shall be explained later in the paper.

Having outlined some salient features of the informal sector I would like to discuss the case of LWMs that emerged in the context of informal economy but its persistence and continuity depends on negotiations, reconciliations, alliances, cooperation and sometimes conflict with formal institutions that is police, Resident Welfare Associations, and Municipal Corporation. LWMs are located at the centre of the complex formed by the state, market and society.

Specificity of LWMs in Delhi

LWMs of Delhi are of vital significance to the life of the city today. This economic phenomenon has a long trajectory behind it and there used to be weekly markets when the city was still in the process of being made during the Great Mughals. These weekly markets were run by small travelling salesmen who set up shops at a new location each day of the week, coming back to each location once a week. If on every Friday they were at Mohammadpur, on Saturday you could find them perhaps at Munirka, on Sunday at Masoodpur and on Monday at Rangpur Pahaari and so on. Each travelling merchant catered to a fixed set of six or seven villages within a specific part of what were then the environs of Delhi. The Capital continued to shift; battles were lost and won; kingdoms rose and fell. Families of the *Ashraaf* (Nobles) prospered or perished with each changing regime but these markets of the *Ajlaaf* (the Lower Orders) survived all this and continue to survive to this day. The presence of all these is also evidence of a continuity of this tradition. Going around the city it can be noticed that wherever there is a weekly market, there will also be an old Delhi village, hidden away and almost forgotten (Hashmi, 2007). What Hashmi says about the historical specificity of weekly market and its association with people belonging to that social class that was considered to be lower order during Mughal period has not much changed in contemporary times. LWMs are perceived to be market of the poor and for the poor.

During the interactions with some very old traders another story emerged related to the beginning of weekly markets in the modern period of Delhi. Punjabi and Sindhi refugees who came from Pakistan leaving their business and jobs to India had initially nothing in their hands to sustain themselves. Some of them then used to walk in the neighbourhoods of Delhi with the goods on their shoulders; they

were called *pheriwallah*. Walking on foot with a heavy load was a tiresome activity; some people whom they used to sell their wares asked them to sit on the roads in front of their entrances, on particular days of the week instead of walking in different areas alone. Thus, the trend of weekly markets in Delhi began. One of the earliest locations of weekly markets established by such refugees in Delhi is on the road that runs behind the old fort. This place was where some hundred to two hundred pheriwallahs used to assemble on a particular day of the week and sell different things. Gradually these pheriwallahs came with the idea of starting other weekly markets in different locations of Delhi. Today the space near the Red fort where once a weekly market used to come up has become a daily market place. Places like Ashok Vihar, Rohini, Dwarka, Jahangir Puri, Shahadara⁴ which were once scantily populated and lacked modern retail outlets, here weekly markets proved very beneficial for local residents to get fresh vegetables and other small household things at regular intervals. These areas are now well developed and connected with the main city through Metro, there are many malls that have opened but weekly markets have not lost its ground in the neighbourhoods.

Many weekly market traders who have been in the market for 28-30 years shared their experience of how they lost their small family run businesses during the riots (1984 riots in Delhi) as their shops were burnt down. They had no other alternative but to start from scratch and weekly market gave them that opportunity, as the start-up capital required to begin one's business was minimal in these markets. Survival of these markets in this city owes a great deal to the efforts put in by traders (especially those who have established themselves in the weekly markets for two to three decades now).

Context of migration and its acute relationship with the expansion of spaces of weekly market in the city continued in the 90s, which was again marked by a new turn in the history of Indian economy when liberalisation policies were initiated in 1991. According to Amitabh Kundu globalisation and liberalisation have induced negative urbanisation in India. It is not that all those who have come to the cities have got employment in the formal sector of the economy. Lack of employment opportunities in the organised sector has necessitated the growth of the informal sector where approximately 90 percent of the population is employed gainfully. This sector has become a refuge for the vast army of reserve labour rendered jobless by tripartite phenomenon of globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation. Continuous expansion of the informal sector has come to negate the popular neo-

liberal and Marxist analysis, which rested on assumptions that informal sector is transitory and primarily a feature of peripheral economies (Portes et al, 1989). My ongoing research on the LWMs of Delhi strengthens this thesis as most of the traders shared that they came to Delhi because they were bereft of any gainful employment in their villages. Social network also played major role in the migration of people from other regions to Delhi. Many traders shared that they came to Delhi to their relatives or friends who had found some employment in the city by entering the weekly markets, which gave them some kind of hope that they would also be able to find work in weekly markets through such contacts.

In this phase it can be argued that the identity of weekly markets as unorganised or informal markets became more entrenched. It came to be regarded as markets that provisioned for the needs of lower middle classes. Its value as a form of market for exchange of goods and services with a definite organisation and structure is yet to be given its due credit.

As of now there are 270 duly authorised weekly markets in Delhi and approximately same number of markets that operate without authorisation (aspect of authorisation would be discussed in detail in the next section). A variety of products go through the process of exchange in these markets every day, these include readymade garments, second hand clothes, household products, spices, imitation jewellery, handbags, travel bags, books, toys, stationary. Apart from these non-perishable products there are perishable commodities like fresh vegetables and fruits, Indian and Chinese fast food, fish and meat that find a channel of distribution in these markets.

The strength of these markets can be located in social and economic ties that actors share with each other and the trust and dependence that actors have on their pradhans. In the weekly markets of South Delhi where the fieldwork was undertaken it was revealed that traders were related to each other either through their family or kin affiliation, and since many of them came from same region from where they had migrated that also kindred a sense of brotherhood. These markets cannot be organised in an orderly manner in the limited space of the street or footpath unless traders have consent about their respective spot in the market. Traders congregate every day on some street or the other but they have a clear understanding among themselves with regard to the space that they occupy and if conflicts emerge it is resolved within the market through arbitration and intervention of the pradhan of the market. Social and regional ties are utilised by

new entrants to gain information about the market and build their route to the market. Being related to an established trader is not sufficient in itself in the market except for those who are core family members (father, son, brother). Others build their trust and connections to find a space in the market, they do so by working as helpers to a trader and if they have economic resources they find space on rent through *pradhan* as well. This aspect of rent seeking is widely practised in LWMs in Delhi.

From an economic point of view these markets have a continuous flow of commodities and they provision for the needs of the clientele. Traders change their products according to the seasons and festivals, for example during summers readymade garments made of cotton, poly cotton and polyester are commonly sold and woollens and hosiery replace it during winters. During festivals demand for more fancy clothes are met by traders. Similarly fruits and vegetables change according to the seasonal supplies available in the wholesale markets or *mandis*. These markets are deeply embedded in the social cultural and political milieu of the society as Polanyi suggested that economic phenomenon is an instituted process.

LWMs in Delhi are different from some other organised retail markets. Organised retail markets have permanent structures and built environment but LWMs do not have any permanent structure in one place, these markets are always in the making from one place to another in this metropolitan city. Don Slater made an observation that is relatable in the case of weekly markets of today in Delhi,

The appearance of a shopping mall does not necessarily result in the demise of older, less-profitable, perhaps less-alienated types of exchange outlets. On the contrary, these outlets are typically drawn into competition with the newer venues, and are thereby incorporated within the market ecology of the newer forms. Open-air marketplaces, their customer base as well as their traders, can come to represent a peripheral niche ‘in constant competition, or permanent metabolic exchange’ (to borrow Ernest Mandel’s [1972: 47] expression describing primitive and capital accumulation) within the larger market system that is dominated by international commodity-type transactions. They are not, in Mandel’s words again, ‘*successive* phases of economic history but also *concurrent* economic processes’ (1972: 46; original emphasis) (Slater, 2003).

LWMs are different from Sunday book market organised at Darya ganj in Delhi, which is a specialised weekly market for used books, whereas LWMs have a wide range of products on sale that are both old and fresh produce. Similarly it is different from *chorbazaar* that is infamous for products procured by traders clandestinely and is organised in the early hours of the morning everyday near Lal Quila. Notion of illegality is attached to the *chorbazaar* whereas LWMs though unauthorised in some spaces are not considered to be illegal markets from the point of the products that are exchanged in these markets.

When I argue that LWMs are organised through a systematic process it means that markets do not emerge in any neighbourhood street or footpath abruptly when some buyers and sellers meet. For this meeting of buyers and sellers a market place has to be created or produced. A street and footpath transform into a weekly market on a particular day of the week, the process of this transformation and becoming of a marketplace is a laborious task. An individual associated with the market has to be enterprising enough to remain in the market because it is not only about buying and selling but requires him/her to become the part of the entire process of making the market. There are various actors at different stages who perform their roles and then the market takes shape. There are certain physical requirements of these markets, it requires management of space as well as arrangement of products by traders in their respective shops such as power supply (either through electricity poles or LED lamps). All traders also require tables to arrange their products for selling and it defines the area of their shop in the weekly market. The measurement of this table is fixed by the MCD which has to be 6 x 4 sq. feet. Pradhan of respective weekly markets arrange for a supplier of these tables in their markets. These tables are provided to shop keepers on rent that ranges between Rupees 15-20 per table per day. A single supplier rents out table in several weekly markets in a Zone (Delhi is divided into twelve vending zones by the MCD). This supplier is from within the market and not someone from outside, it means that someone among those who manage the market takes this as a responsibility. If Friday is fixed for the weekly market then the supplier of tables has to ensure that tables are made available on the street on Thursday night or by Friday morning. When traders arrive in the afternoon tables are already piled up at regular intervals on the footpath. Traders bring with them iron rods or bamboo poles to create a temporary structure of their shops. Another supplier provides LED lights; in case where power supply is made available through electric poles there the pradhan has to ensure that a prior permission to

draw electricity is taken from the provider of power supply in that region. Portable electric meters are fixed and payment is made accordingly.

Why weekly markets have become an important aspect of provisioning in the socio-economic landscape of Delhi? First explanation can be provided from the demand side, there is always a class of population that is dependent for its daily needs on these markets, purchasing power of this class restricts them from going to organised retail markets where prices are fixed. Weekly markets provide them a site where customers have the liberty to bargain and reach that point of sale (if exchange materialises) where they are able to derive maximum utility from their limited resources. Another explanation for the prevalence of weekly markets can be provided from supply side, that is from the perspective of those who organise it. Many traders mentioned that more markets are getting organised because more people from same family, kin, and region are migrating from their native place in order to find opportunities within these markets. Many existing markets extend the space in which it gets organised, and that implies that roads also get occupied by traders to set up shops (only footpath can be utilised for the weekly markets). New spaces are also identified and traders through collective efforts organise markets and later initiate the process of authorisation from MCD.

LWMs have well defined organisation in place; though it is not a permanent or fixed market like malls, supermarkets, etc. yet it has achieved permanency of weekly presence by getting authorised status in several spaces of Delhi. Apart from this there are several sites where they are organised purely because of its intact internal organisational structure. In spaces where LWMs are not authorised there they have attained what Schindler (2014) would say state of negotiated (im)permanence. Neeladri Bhattacharya (2003) made a very insightful analysis in this regard, 'Peddlers and *arhatias* sustained the circuits and extended the limits of exchange, but they also resisted the new disciplinary regime that sought to regulate their practices and thus redefined in the process, the nature of market penetration. So the history of market shows no simple smooth transition from a world of exchange dominated by peddlers to one controlled by trading company and agency houses, from localised and fragmented exchange to international trade'.

Everyday politics over space: regulation or production of 'illegality or informality'

Stuart Plattner (1989) has made an important distinction between economic and socio-ethnographic view on markets: ‘market’ [is] the social institution of exchanges where prices or exchange equivalencies exist. ‘Marketplace’ refers to these interactions in a customary time and place. A market can exist without being localised in a marketplace, but it is hard to imagine a marketplace without some sort of institutions governing exchanges.

Plattner’s argument holds ground because every State has institutions that govern and regulate economic activities irrespective of its size. A multinational corporation has to abide by complex rules related to export, import, production and distribution. Similarly a street vendor is subject to governance by municipal authorities with regard to the use of space in which he or she operates and kind of commodities that he/she may or not sell. This paper would delineate how LWMs have emerged as a market of street vending of its kind in Delhi’s urban space and this has not happened without regulation on the part of the State and alternate strategies adopted by the traders to subvert, negotiate and bargain for their space in the city.

As stated in the preceding sections LWMs have emerged in urban space in a particular context related to migration and lack of employment in the formal sector. These markets have become perennial feature in many residential enclaves. But survival and growing number of locations of these markets is not as smooth as it seems to be. Conflict over the use of urban space for particular economic, political and social activities is not uncommon in contemporary times. Urban Space is gradually getting segregated and gentrified on the lines of class distinction as many urban sociologists have demonstrated. To give an example, a project by a multinational corporation for the construction of a mall would immediately be passed by the state and even land would be provided at subsidised rates; but traders and vendors who ply their trade on the street in a makeshift arrangement are threatened for eviction and their presence is considered to be a ‘nuisance’ menace and aesthetically undesirable. Or a slum would either be demolished or shifted towards the outskirts of the city for the beautification and sanitisation of the urban space (Bandyopadhyay, 2011; Ghertner, 2010; Bayat, 2000; Bhowmik, 2010; Bhan, 2009). There is much more than what eyes can meet when it comes to analysing LWMs in the wider scheme of informal economy to which it belongs and urban space in which it is subject to governance through the process of formal regulation and authorisation. The notion of governance in this regard has been best encapsulated in the definition provided by the Second United

Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in 1996, according to which 'urban governance is the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, plan and manage the common affairs of the city. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and cooperative action can be taken. It includes formal institutions as well as informal arrangements and the social capital of citizens.' This way of understanding urban governance hints at the role of the institutions within the state apparatus as well as institutions and associations developed on the basis of socio-economic networks amongst the people.

Street vending in all its forms have been matter of concern for those who govern the affairs of the city that includes state (Police, Municipal corporation, and elected representatives of people to state legislature) and non-state actors (civil society and associations formed by people). It has been observed that urban poor who provide essential services for the development and maintenance of the city live under the constant threat of the state. Veena Das (2007) observes that a particular kind of predatory state has emerged especially in the Third World that, instead of regulating the affairs of the society that can provide recognition and security, demands bribes and aligns with those who demonstrate power and authority legally unacceptable and undesirable⁵. H. De Soto who worked extensively to provide an understanding of the informal economy suggested that the state should provide legal framework and property rights, and formal market supporting institutions to unleash the market's full potential benefits, which would be inclusive of poor engaged in such markets. But Soto's views were criticised on the grounds that even when such rights and policies are in place, those engaged in informal economic activities would not be willing to adopt such a mechanism for the costs involved in getting formalised cannot be afforded by poor. However, still it remains a matter of much contention whether or not formalisation of informal economy is conducive or not and again it is related to how people perceive informality in different contexts. As Partha Chatterjee reflected on the nature of state-society relations and observed that urban sphere is clearly divided on the lines of class, one side has the elite and bourgeois minority and on the other side is the poorer majority who are bereft by the state that is they are not even considered to be the rightful citizens. This distinction is a product of post colonial project of development. He gave a concept of the 'political society' that emerged from the very centre of the subalterns that sought all measures, political party support, and other forms of legal and illegal patronage in order to create its space in the urban sphere. The way LWMs have spread out in different

parts of the city on the sheer strength of the internal networks and patronage of some powerful pradhans and political leaders is reminiscent of Chatterjee's claims. According to one of the pradhans (in the first meeting itself he objected to being referred to as a pradhan and said that he is more like a manager or an organiser of the weekly market) of one of the new weekly markets held on every Friday at Masoodpur in Vasant Kunj Delhi:

...this weekly market began without the required permission of the Resident Welfare Association solely on the basis of personal contacts with some residents and shopkeepers of the Masoodpur market and also with Station House Master (SHO) of the local police station. Now we are trying to get a regular status for this market from the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). We have filed the application but it has been four years now and we are still waiting for the letter to arrive. We continue to organise the market here because we pay a required amount to the police and to the Resident Welfare Association of the Kaveri Apartments (personal communication, 2017).

The above excerpt reflects the nature of relationship shared by LWMs with the formal institutions and that attempts to regularise the market is initiated by those who organise it. The State chooses to remain oblivious of such markets' legal or formal status. Representatives of formal institutions are able to extort money over and above the revenue that otherwise might have been deposited in the revenue department of the MCD had it been regularised. In the absence of such formalisation they are able to demand money from the LWMs. This anecdote comes from the organiser/pradhan of a relatively new LWM. Interaction with pradhan of a very old weekly market provides some different aspect of the relationship between State, market and society. Mahender, the pradhan of Mohammedpur weekly market that has been organised for more than forty years shared that:

...Authorisation⁶ is important for fixing the space of the market and its timing. It gives some legitimacy to the market. Traders who have been registered in the MCD against the payment of one time registration fee, their place in the market get secured and they have to pay to the MCD only for the number of tables that they utilise to set up their business. Authorisation is given by the MCD to use the footpath for the market and those who set their stalls on the road are technically illegal squatters. We collect money from every trader and those who sell on the road pay more than those who squat on the footpath, that is the only difference.

Out of this collection a portion is given to police and MCD and after making these payments whatever remains belongs to me. This arrangement of payment is made to prevent eviction of traders from the market. We are aware that they are more in numbers than authorised by the MCD but we need to protect them otherwise they will lose their source of income (personal communication, 2017).

Simple differentiation between formal and informal economy comes to a standstill if we take account of the everyday negotiations between those who work in the informal sector and those who are part of the formal institutions. It has many layers and it becomes difficult to draw a neat distinction between the two. Space for the weekly market may be authorised but how the space is produced to derive both use and exchange value is mired in the complex maze of legality and illegality. Pradhan/organiser of weekly market takes a positive attitude towards formalisation but at the same time contends that it has only limited benefits. In these mobile markets, traders' expectations from the State and civil society is not one of co-operation, they are aware that police would harass them, local residents would object to their presence and local leaders would not heed to their problems. So they try different means of interaction and negotiation with respect to each set of issues that arise in organising the market. As the pradhan of Masoodpur market shared:

...in the market we take collective responsibility for maintaining safe and secure environment. We develop communication with RWAs (Resident Welfare Association) with the help of few residents and convince them that we would operate the market as peacefully as we can. We hire a sweeper to clean the market, sometimes we have to take help from local goons (gunda) to deal with problems related to theft, snatching, drug peddling, et cetera. We also manage the traffic so that there may not be jams and congestion on the road. Though police takes money from us but it does not provide security neither MCD provides any facility, they don't even make arrangement for cleaning the street after market gets closed though maintaining sanitation is their prime responsibility. But we can't complain and we manage things on our own (personal communication, 2017).

Traders in the LWMs don't give up their space when they face opposition and continue to operate with the help of internal association under the leadership of their pradhan. Mahender Pradhan of Mohammedpur market did not hesitate to tell us that he uses muscle and money power to organise his markets when

circumstances demand. He shared that he faced lot of problems in starting a new LWM in one of the residential areas:

...residents of the Kaveri apartment objected by saying that it would create chaos and filth on the road. Still I did not give up; I organised the market there with just fifty traders in the beginning. But we saw that police constables came to stop us. Then I utilised some of my contacts for help. These were people who were known in the area for their dabangai (muscle power). They convinced the RWA, I don't know how, whether they bribed them or used threat or whatever I do not know, but since then I am able to organise the market in that place although the process of authorisation from MCD is still underway (personal communication, 2017).

In the above narrative provided by Mahender one can read between the lines, where he refrained from disclosing the actual method adopted by his contacts to get the approval from the RWA of Kaveri apartment. According to J C Cross (1998), through bribery a patron-client relationship is forged with those who want to maintain surveillance over the market and it carves out a 'safe space' with official control system. This relationship demonstrates 'weak state integration' which cripples the policy in practice (Huang, Xue and Li, 2013). Revanchism is a common phenomenon practiced in the cities of global South which refers to exclusionary policies sought to erase urban spaces for certain sections of the population such as street vendors, homeless, beggars and others of the like. Revanchism operations are practiced through zero tolerance, according to Smith, who coined this concept to understand gentrification in urban spaces. However, Smith also emphasised that top down revanchism is often challenged; alternative practices emerge that undermine and reshape such attitude of zero tolerance (Huang, Xue and Li, 2013). Thus, it can be construed from this that in the case of LWMs efforts at revanchism are subverted through negotiation, compromise or the use of muscle power. In some instances even the desire to formalise non-authorised markets is nothing but a strategy to create legitimacy for the market; but for majority traders/vendors things do not change much as they continue to pay hefty sums to remain in the market. In this context an interview with a trader from the weekly market who has been in the business for more than thirty years of his life is quiet illuminating, he narrated:

...I am totally against the exploitation suffered by vendors. Pradhans have become like contractors who demand money from them in the name of providing security from eviction and closure of the market. The reality is that they never want to fully

formalise all traders in the market, they don't make any consistent effort in that direction. By keeping the traders 'illegal' according to the rules of MCD they are able to extract money from them. In any weekly market only a miniscule of all traders have received license to trade, others operate illegally, and pradhans take advantage of their precarious position (personal communication, 2017).

This zone of conflict is perpetual within LWMs; not every trader in the market approves of the ways the observation of the pradhan provides but it is just that the instinct for survival is stronger than the need to resist exploitation. As a result it can be argued that illegality is doubly produced inside the market when first, a market is organised in a space where it has not been authorised and second, when the market has more traders and vendors than it can accommodate. Overcrowding of the market space is even more prevalent in authorised markets where pradhan extends the market wherever he thinks there is space for such expansion. Mahender explained how this is made possible:

...weekly market in Mohammedpur is one of the oldest in south Delhi. It is an authorised market and the MCD collects revenue from it. This market is big and on both ends of the road there was scope to expand it, so you must have noticed that vendors now sell on the path that runs in front of the school named Saksham. I got the permission for that from Bhagat Singh who is the councilor in MCD in this area. Bhagat was my classmate, we studied together and we are friends. I return the favour by giving him a certain amount for the use of the space (personal communication, 2017).

Local leaders from different political affiliations often look at vendors as their possible vote bank and therefore they make inroads in the market through various channels. Elected members of legislature and MCD in Delhi have the most direct contact with those who control the market. Since, pradhan and his men do not want their markets to come under any threat from those elected members, they build a relation akin to patron-client with such leaders. Pradhans negotiate with leaders and pay a certain fixed amount in exchange for cooperation that they receive from them. Mahender narrated one of his experiences in this regard:

...whoever is in power has to be fed with money. We used to send money every month to this councilor (he did not take his name) and it was based on mutual agreement between us. Then he lost the election and a new councilor came but we did not have any personal contact with him. He started to demand money and

when we refused he started to send trucks to confiscate goods of the traders. Traders were unable to set up their stalls and do business as regular. This continued for many days, and ultimately we had to bow down to his demand. In another market the local councilor who used to get money from us, lost the elections and when he lost we stopped giving him money but he used to threaten that he would do everything to close our market but I did not give in to his demand (personal communication, 2017).

Perception about power and authority play a crucial role in the LWMs' relationship with State. From the above narrative it becomes clear that in an electoral democracy elected representatives have more power and authority in the eyes of the people who are governed by them. Therefore Mahender was not able to continue his resistance towards not giving money to the new councilor although he did not have a personal contact with him whereas it was easier to deny any regular bribe to the one who had lost election. Mahender knew that he won't be able to create any trouble as he had no power left.

Traders in different weekly markets have their registered associations in order to resolve disputes, maintaining records related to those who belong to the market, and also to fight for their space through courts when such need may arise. In the words of Mahender:

...we have a formal registered association of the market. It gives legitimacy and the process of authorisation of the market is initiated through this association. When there are complaints made in the police station against our market we respond via association; similarly if we want to make any request on behalf of the market it is made through this association. We have a Saptahik Bazaar Welfare Association for South Zone New Delhi (personal communication, 2017).

It is worth noting that those who work in the informal sector of the economy are well informed about the political economic system and its formal procedures. Their work is informal but while dealing with the State they have to follow the formal rules and regulations. It indicates that interaction between LWMs and municipal authorities or police is both formal and informal in nature. Formal route demonstrates that these markets do not negate the State and informal negotiations reflect that those in the informal sector create alternate strategies to protect their right to work and livelihood. In this respect Ananya Roy's concept of 'subaltern urbanism' seem appropriate to understand this terrain of formal and informal

interaction between LWMs and the State, which often remain invisible and neglected in the archives and annals of urban theory.

Having outlined how pradhans/organisers of the LWMs play an integral role in not only maintaining the old weekly markets but also starting new markets in newly identified spaces in the city, it also becomes imperative to look at the schemes and policies framed by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi with regard to street vending. It is to be noted here that there is an Act pertaining to street vending which came to effect from March 2014, the Act is called 'The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 and before it became an Act, the same was treated as policy recommendation and the Supreme Court had directed the states to follow the recommendations while making schemes for street vending. MCD had also taken the recommendations into consideration when it made a scheme for hawkers and squatters in the year 2007.

Delhi has been divided into twelve vending zones and MCD has identified sites for mobile vendors, stationary vendors and weekly markets in these zones. In total there are 268 'authorised' weekly markets in Delhi (this data was shared by National Association of Street Vendors in India). But there are as many unauthorised LWMs that are organised in different places in the city, either they are organised through the use of force or negotiations and in cooperation with police, local residents and local leaders. In response to the question on the need for authorisation of weekly market, Mr. Sunil Shaha who is the President of Delhi Saptahik Bazaar Welfare Association shared that, *'we keep sending application after application to the MCD to recognise our weekly markets but it has not been recognised so far. They are not paying any heed to those applications. We feel that authorisation is important because it gives us legal status and legitimacy to fight for protection in court in case our weekly markets come under threat of closure either from the local goons, police or the MCD itself'*. This statement speaks a volume about the way the State and institutions try to maintain an illegal status for these informal markets. It gives them a free hand to extort rent from the traders and vendors and keep them under constant fear. The whole question of authorisation, its purpose, legality and illegality come all at once under scanner and we are compelled to re-evaluate the concept of informality in the light of these facts.

Another point that needs to be highlighted is that the MCD does not distinguish between weekly markets and individual street vendors and hawkers. It has adopted the definition given in the aforementioned Act wherein it is stated that, ‘A “street vendor” means a person engaged in vending of articles, goods, wares, food items or merchandise of everyday use or offering services to the general public, in a street, lane, side walk, footpath, pavement, public park or any other public place or private area, from a temporary built up structure or by moving from place to place and includes hawker, peddler, squatter and all other synonymous terms which may be local or region specific; and the words “street vending” with their grammatical variations and cognate expressions, shall be construed accordingly’. It is evident from the discussion in the previous sections that a weekly market is very different from street vending undertaken by individual vendors in different vending zones of the city. Street vendors appear on the same place everyday but weekly market traders move from one location to another. Scale of business of trader in a weekly market is relatively bigger than a regular street vendor. Street vendors who vend from their pushcart or bicycles also appear in weekly markets but their space in these markets is not protected or secured. LWMs also differ from individual street vendors in the sense that these markets are properly organised and operates under the control of the pradhan or organiser. LWMs require authorisation at two levels, firstly traders have to obtain one time registration from MCD, and then the space where it is organised also needs to get authorisation from MCD. After it is authorised, revenue or *tehbazaar* (a fixed amount is charged against the table size measuring 6x4 feet, a trader is required to pay as per the number of tables that he uses) is collected from it by the MCD. In a LWM one can find street vendors who belong to different categories and not all are necessarily registered but they are able to operate in the market as they receive patronage from the pradhan or traders who have registered⁷ themselves with MCD.

The scheme requires MCD to provide basic amenities (like protection from elements like sun, cold and rain etc.) to the vendors and traders in respective vending/tehbazari site but at none of the street vending or tehbazari site this provision has been worked upon by the MCD. Weekly market traders and vendors are subject to extreme weather conditions especially during the rainy season and they suffer maximum amount of loss during this period. Traders make all these arrangements themselves and do not depend on MCD to look after their safety.

There is a provision in the scheme which states that a centralised database of the registrations of traders and vendors has to be maintained and full details like name, address, photograph etc. along with their locations. The information would be accessible at all Zones to avoid delicacy. A public notice inviting applications from squatters/hawkers who are squatting/hawking without authorisation in MCD's jurisdiction and from unemployed persons who are desiring to make their livelihood by squatting/vending in accordance with the eligibility conditions would be advertised by the Central Licensing and Enforcement Cell, MCD in leading newspapers and shall also be displayed on the MCD website.

The aforementioned provision of the scheme has only written importance. The MCD does not maintain a systematic record of registered vendors let alone of prospective applicants. MCD has become more of an institution that creates prohibitive measures to curtail the number of street vendors in the city and in places where vendors and traders conduct their business through encroachment in legal terms in such spaces; thereby the state becomes predatory as explained before. In the words of Arun the organiser of one of the unauthorised market in Vasant Kunj area:

It has been four years that we have submitted an application to MCD to authorise this market, we have attached the details of all the traders of this market along with their photo ids and the letter from the RWA with that application. But we are not aware of the status of our application till now (personal communication, 2017).

This delay in authorisation can be construed as apathy or simple negligence or bureaucratic quagmire in which the files keep rotating from one table to the other. Non-authorisation of the market does not prevent it from being organised on a regular basis though the status of such a weekly market is labelled as illegal. In the process from being unauthorised and becoming authorised a space is created in which police, MCD and RWA come together for their respective vested interests. Begona Aretxaga's view as quoted by Anjaria explains this process appropriately, 'the power of the state is harnessed not so much from the rationality of ordering practices as from the passions of transgression, in which the line between the legal and illegal is constantly blurred. Power of the state is strengthened by keeping the status of street vendors and or weekly markets in constant state of flux' (Anjaria, 2010).

Conclusion

In economic theory 'the market' denotes a set of abstract, formally rational relationships rather than concrete cultural forms of encounter: the hidden hand of market forces should not be affected by whether they are at work in an open market, shopping mall or global electronic futures market. This abstract, disembodied sense of the market is in marked contrast to the concretely spatio-temporal original meaning of 'a market': a physical place where buyers and sellers meet at particular times, a word for the actual 'building, square, or other public place for such meetings' (Slater, 2003, p. 188).

In the light of the above quote this paper tried to see market in its everyday form. Polanyi argues in favour of a substantive understanding of economy wherein not choice but livelihood or provisioning is the vision that underlies any economic system. In its preoccupation with the mechanics of individual choice and exchange, the market theory abstracts from the underlying sociological framework and fails to delve into concrete questions of personality formation, power, and the like. Thus an attempt in this direction is made in the paper to provide the entire social, political and economic context in which the LWMs have come to become an intrinsic node in the circuit of provisioning in Delhi. These markets are neither abrupt nor naturally given but have been socially produced/made or created through a systematic process as elucidated in the paper. This making of the market is not without contest in an urban space that is managed and regulated by institutions entrusted by the state.

Another conclusion that can be drawn resonates with Schindler's take on the idea of formal and informal economic phenomena. According to his view 'formal and informal are not ontologically given categories instead this boundary is produced in the struggles and negotiations among differently empowered actors who employ juridical means (example court orders, zoning, law suits) as well as everyday practices of enforcement and subversion of land use (read urban space) regulation. Thus power is dispersed across a range of sites and rests in varying degrees with a host of state and non -state actors' (Schindler, 2014, pp. 2597-98).

There is a need to unravel layers of understanding that pertains to any economic phenomena. There are policies, schemes, and laws of governance, negotiations and conflicts that define the complex web of meanings related to market. In this paper we came to know that what we understand of informal economy is only one

side of the coin that provides a partial view of the nature of work but the process through which an economic phenomena is sustained reveals that formal and informal are co-constitutive of each other.

Jagannathan makes a persuasive argument when he says that sometimes restrictions imposed from the above become productive as they create endogenous informal institutions through which whole range of inexpensive urban services are provided and every potential income stream available in a city is appropriated and they allow small business enterprises to survive and compete in a highly unstable business environments.

Notes:

¹ Adam Smith is considered to be the Father of neo-classical economics. In his seminal book *Wealth of Nations*, Swedberg notes that the word 'market' appears twice, according to him Smith has analysed the concept of market in a different manner yet he has not been successful in deciphering the concept any further from what other economists of his time have had to say about markets.

² Social action is a concept developed by Weber that explores interaction between humans in society.

³ For more details see Max Weber. (1922). *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Vol.2. Berkeley: University of California Press.

⁴ Most residents of these places have shared history of partition. Punjabis in this part of Delhi are mostly merchants and their forefathers were once those *pheriwallahs*. Today they have retail outlets in big commercial centres of Delhi.

⁵ For theoretical insight refer Michel Foucault, Henry Lefevbre (*Production of Space*, 1991), Georg Simmel, (*The Metropolis and the Mental Life*, 1903), David Harvey (*The Rebel City: From Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, 2012).

⁶ The term 'authorised' denotes that the street where the weekly market is organised gets the no objection certification from the MCD, henceforth MCD collects rent for the use of the space from the vendors. It also gives notional protection from police harassment. A market which is unauthorised is vulnerable to police extortion for money from the vendors and if vendors are not able to pay then their goods are confiscated or they are beaten up. Hence weekly market organisers in unauthorised spaces try to get their markets formalised.

⁷ There is provision for one time registration of traders against payment of one thousand rupees.

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Suvrata Chowdhary is Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology, Presidency University, Kolkata.

Article: Interlinking Discrimination, Poverty and Social Exclusion of Scheduled Castes in Rural India: A Literature Review

Author(s): Jayashree Ambewadikar

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Interlinking Discrimination, Poverty and Social Exclusion of Scheduled Castes in Rural India: A Literature Review

--- Jayashree Ambewadikar

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to examine various aspects of the caste-based discrimination practiced against the Scheduled Castes or Dalits in rural areas. It also investigates the practice in the forms of denial of social, cultural, civil, political and economic rights of the SCs, leading to their poverty and social exclusion from their participation therein. The paper is descriptive and analytical in design, based on secondary sources of data. The study is carried out with the help of review of available literature on these interrelated institutional phenomena, which have played crucial role(s) in the life chances of the Scheduled Castes.

Key words: Discrimination, Poverty, Rural India, Scheduled Castes, Social Exclusion

Introduction

All societies in the world are stratified and the Indian society is no exception to this. Being composed of numerous castes, tribes, ethnic and religious communities, with their varying cultural and religious practices, the Indian society is stratified primarily along different belief systems, customs, religions, etc. In India, the Hindu social system is rigidly stratified and divided into numerous castes and sub-castes. This division is constructed on the foundation of hierarchy and graded inequality. Since the Hindu caste system is embedded with numerous castes and sub-castes, numbering in several thousands, each one is placed in the superior and inferior orders in the hierarchy(ies) created on the perception of purity and pollution which is invariably supported by the economic and political power or authority. Not only that, but the members of each caste discriminate those of the other caste in terms of the commensal relations for social interaction and relations of both sacred or religious and even secular in nature. Hence, social stratification and hierarchy give rise to inequality, discrimination, injustice and

exclusion in the extreme form. The uniqueness of discrimination practiced in the caste system can be seen as based on the pursuits of occupations which are clearly categorised as 'clean' and 'unclean'. The clean occupations like carrying out *poojas* (religious services), teaching, and even owning and cultivation of land relish elevated status and prestige, and are considered as superior, while menial occupations like sweeping, tanning and making shoes, washing clothes, and also cutting hair, etc. are deliberated as unclean and polluting ones; therefore, they are assigned precisely lower and degraded status. The association of sizable section of population with latter type of occupations, since the earlier time, has occasioned into the practice of observing physical and social distance resulting into practice of untouchability against them. Thus, such sections of population, regarded as low castes in the caste hierarchy, have always depended on the upper castes for their survival. Moreover, they did not at all have the right to hold property and acquire education in the past. Subsequently, they suffer from numerous socio-cultural and economic disabilities and ignominies till day. These castes, legally called as Scheduled Castes (SCs), constitute substantial portion (nearly 18 per cent) of India's total population.

Since the SCs in Indian society were deprived of convinced fundamental rights from the earliest times, they have continued to be socially, educationally and economically backward even today. Because of the basic disparities concerning the SCs and other castes and communities, the Constitution of India recognises the worth of having distinctive and extraordinary provisions to reduce their discrimination, poverty, and to include them in almost all spheres of life. Unfortunately, there is still continuation of their exclusion from the various avenues.

This present study looks at this issues in descriptive and analytical perspective with the help of literature review to focus on the conceptual framework for studying various aspects of caste-based discrimination practiced in terms of denial of rights intended for the SCs, leading to their poverty and further causing social exclusion of them in the form of lack of earning assets and income, access to social development and the benefits of other amenities in rural areas in the country.

Conceptual explanations with review of literature

The discrimination, poverty and social exclusion together or their inter-linkages have not yet been studied in social sciences, though a few studies have attempted to do so but not in a very precise manner (Thorat, 2004). This may be so as the discrimination, and that too in the Hindu caste system and not that prevailing among the inter-religious communities, has fallen precisely in the domain of sociology and social anthropology. Similarly, poverty has extensively been studied by the economist. Since the term exclusion or social exclusion is of a recent coinage, it has sparsely been studied by a few sociologists, economists and political scientists in their specific disciplinary frameworks. Nevertheless, in sociology and social anthropology, studies, discussing caste system in India, have either sparsely or fully analysed the various forms of discrimination of SCs in both rural and in urban regions. So also is the case of poverty of the general population and in particular of the SCs and their social exclusion practised both directly and indirectly. These studies have enquired into the relationship among the three, i.e., how one is both cause and effect of the other and vice versa (Ambewadikar, 2012). We shall briefly review below the available studies on these interrelated institutional phenomena, which have played crucial role(s) in the life chances of the SCs both in past and play even today.

Discrimination in hierarchical society

To understand the caste-based discrimination in India, Sharma (1974) has analysed stratification and inequality in India, both in present and past times, in the theoretical, structural and processual aspects, besides considering the varna, caste, family and individual as units of social ranking. The nature and forms of social inequality among the SCs have also been discussed in the rural-agrarian and the urban-industrial contexts. However, according to Fuller (1997), there are diverse and changing understandings of caste and inequality. He articulates that the solution is not to ignore India's contemporary relations with its past.

Thus to reflect on Indian society, it is divided into a number of hierarchically arranged strata, i.e., groupings, which have assumed numerous historical and cultural variations. In the Hindu society, it is clear that the primary unit is caste. So, the rights and privileges (or dearth of them) of individual are due to their membership of a particular caste. It means that the caste ranking is based on superiority and inferiority, i.e., graded inequality (Ambedkar, 1987a). This has reduced the opportunities, especially privileges and rights as it goes down in the hierarchy of ranking placed in caste system. In caste system the social, cultural,

civil, political and economic rights of every individual caste are secured. The unacceptability of fixed rights as regulatory mechanism which is provided through social arrangements, social interactions and social relations leads to social ostracism through socio-economic penalties. Therefore, 'the untouchables located at the bottom of the caste hierarchy have much less economic and social rights' (Ambedkar, 1987b). These untouchables were denied right to hold property and acquire education in the ancient times. Consequently, these communities have suffered from numerous socio-cultural and economic disabilities till day. Thus, the caste system implicates the nullification of equality and freedom, and also basic human rights mainly of the SCs. This is more sharply felt in the rural areas since the peculiar characteristics of caste system are still alive in practical sense and could be observed through naked eyes, though there is no doubt that caste system works in a subtle manner in urban areas also (Ambewadikar, 2016).

In rural areas, the traditional arrangement is very strong and the intensity of their social exclusion is also high; but as in the urban and metropolitan centres the pattern of social intercourse is somewhat secular and enforced by the lifestyles, their social exclusion is minute and qualified ones. They are included with qualified exclusion in social, cultural, political, educational, civil, and employment and economic spheres. In the work sphere, a large majority of them are employed as wage labour, *safai karmcharies*, and in other degraded and menial jobs to fulfil the purpose of dominant castes and classes in urban areas. In an urban context it was been analysed that SCs were still facing ritual, social and economic disabilities while examining the kind and degree of social mobility among Scheduled Castes (Patwardhan, 1974). The studies in the context of economic reform show that there is wide scale misutilisation of funds meant for development of the SCs in urban areas (Rao and Babu, 1994). Further, it is seen that the existence of vulnerability which has political lineages and caste-based schemes might lead to inflame caste-war or communal tensions rather than creating equalities in the deprived areas of the urban space (Kumar, et. al., 2009).

Village: structure and change

The plights of villages can be expressed in the words of Ambedkar who says that, 'The Indian village is not a single social unit'. Ambedkar further says that, 'I. The population of the village is divided into i. touchables and ii. Untouchables. II. The touchables form the major community and the untouchables, a minor community. III. The touchables live inside the village and the untouchables live outside the

village in separate quarters. IV. Economically, the touchables form a strong and powerful community, while the untouchables are a poor and dependent community. V. Socially, the touchables occupy the position of a ruling race, while the untouchables occupy the position of a subject race of hereditary bondsman' (1989, 20-21).

Ram (2008a) also has situated the institution of untouchability and the untouchables in the caste system, specifically in south India. More precisely, he has explained the existing social structure, change and mobility of the Scheduled Castes. It is a fact that both the caste system and untouchability are found to be rigid in the rural areas, compared to urban areas. But now, some changes are taking place in villages also. Today, the structure of villages has further changed with alteration in the relationship amongst the SCs and non-SCs. In villages, discrimination is practiced in variation which is ascribed by non-SCs to SCs. This variation is for poor SCs who face discrimination in a crude form and well-off SCs face discrimination in somewhat subtle form. According to Marriott (1955), these changes, for the untouchables or depressed castes groups, are seen in the form of their fight with the upper and landowning castes. These are also due to some modifications in the interdependency of the castes and in their tendency to find common causes in their economic or political interests. Beteille (1965) says there is change happening in village structure with in terms of caste and class system for power dynamics. However, outside the common causes and interests, members of the dominant castes in villages generally abuse, beat and grossly underpay the non-dominant castes, including untouchables (Srinivas, 1987). Mendelsohn and Vicziany (1998) say that 'the untouchables or Scheduled Castes in villages are among the very bottom elements of Indian society in both status and economic terms'. They are socially discriminated and are deprived of traditionally owning land, active political participation, entering into trade and business, and particularly, education. They suffer from subordination, discrimination and poverty in relation to public policy and the role of the State. As the various related policies are half-heartedly implemented and are not much effective, the huge majority of them again remain undeveloped. Ram (2008b) also has discussed the nature and forms of social discrimination of Dalits in different regions of India. He has explained their assertions and movements in the existing socio-economic and political arrangement.

State policy for the SCs

Because of the continued fundamental disparities between the SCs and non-SCs, the Constitution of India recognises the necessity for distinctive and extraordinary provisions related to the protection of SCs as stated earlier. The Reservation or Positive Discrimination is carried out as corrective and ameliorative measures (policies, programmes, laws, rules) for removing the cumulative disadvantage of socially, educationally and economically disadvantaged SCs, and bringing them at par with rest of the population. This positive discrimination has been initiated to provide the opportunities in social, cultural, civil, economic and political spheres which were denied to them for centuries. But these positive measures are unable to fully emancipate the SCs from the legacy of their historical background. The caste occupation with the considerable amount of degradation, has become their identity, which usually remains with them even if they change their occupations (or even religion). Hence, economic opportunities remain stagnant for the SCs and are unable to bring them out of their poverty.

There are various constitutional provisions to overcome inequality, discrimination and poverty of the SCs. These provisions have been implemented through the two fold-strategies or measures, namely (a) anti-discriminatory or protective measures, and (b) developmental and empowering measures. Such policies vis-à-vis measures or interventions are legal enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, reservations or preferential measures in education, employment and political participation through membership in lower Legislative Assembly, Parliament and local political bodies. In addition, measures have also been adopted to ensure food security, housing, civic amenities, etc, which come as part of more than anti-poverty programmes (Thorat, 2004). Constitutional and legislative mechanisms have adequately been provided and laws enacted. More specifically, the constitutional and legislative mechanisms to reduce discrimination against the SCs are the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1976 (Amended version of the Untouchability Offences Act 1955), the Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act, 1976, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993 and the various land reform Acts. Right to Equality includes the Abolition of Untouchability (Article 17), according to which 'Untouchability' is legally abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of 'Untouchability' shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law. Right against exploitation includes promotion of educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes, and states that 'the State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the

weaker sections of the people, of the Scheduled Castes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation’.

But it is not enough to set up a structure for justice and equality, there is a critical prerequisite to formulate and essentially activate the extraordinary measures to uplift their status. Although the Government has adopted a hypothetically potential mechanism known as Scheduled Caste Sub Plan (SCSP), earlier called as Special Component Plan for the economic empowerment of the SCs (Government of India, 1999-2000 & 2000-2001). Besides, it has initiated a number of poverty reduction programmes (PRP) like Public Distribution System (PDS), Small Farmers Development Programme (SFDP), Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers Programme (MFALP), National Rural Employment Programme, Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme, Employment Assurance Scheme, and Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme. The government has also adopted a scheme called Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme for the eradication of poverty of the Scheduled castes. The Jawahar Rojgar Yojna (JRY) and Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) have recently been renamed as Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY) and Swaranjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY). These programmes assist the marginal and small farmers, agricultural labourers and artisans of the SCs, besides others, with funds in minor irrigation, livestock purchases and alike, through the grants and loans provided by the government at the subsidised interest rates. The Panchayat, a village level statutory organisation, has also been made directly responsible for implementing the poverty reduction programme (PRP) (Ambewadikar, 2012).

As mentioned above, the government has also attempted to evolve the schemes to improve the access of the SCs to the public distribution of food, civic amenities like housing, drinking water, sanitation, electricity and approach road. Because the settlements of the SCs in rural areas are mostly separate out, often the civic amenities have unsuccessful to arrive to their localities. Further, a special assistance is, therefore, given to the state (Under the Special Central Assistance of the Special Component Plan for the SCs) to guarantee the delivery of these amenities to the SCs.

Needless to say the problems faced by the SC women would have occupied a special place in the government programmes. But in every programme linked to economic empowerment, educational development, etc., special focus on the SC

women is not adequately given. Through several 'credit-based subsidy projects', self-help groups, education projects, projects to reduce malnutrition, etc. are specifically designed and implemented for the SC women. Despite the constitutional provisions and development schemes, the socio-economic status of the SCs in general and their women in particular has not yet improved. This is due to the deep embedded social structure and its manifestation in most human interactions (Jain, 1981 and Sakshi Human Rights Watch, 2000). 'The possibility of poor SC females continuing to surpass the barriers of poverty, discrimination and patriarchal structures are also needed to be addressed to make the scheme incentive oriented' (George and Naseem, 2010).

Ramification of the state policy

In the economic spheres, in spite of the policies, the SCs are marginal especially in the economic sphere, compared to the non-SCs in rural India. According to Shah (2001), a vast majority of the SCs are have-nots, i.e., landless agricultural labourers, small and marginal farmers and artisans. Problems of the SCs in villages are socio-cultural and economic. The reasons behind their being landless are given by Nanchariah (2000) who says that 'the high percentage of their landlessness could be due to their weak resource position and also the discriminatory working of the land market, which reduces their access to purchase and leasing of agricultural land'. Thorat (2004) also substantiates this point by saying that the landless SCs are allowed to work for undesirable and low-paying jobs. Even the labour market has discriminatory working for the SC workers, producing low employment rate and low wage earning. He says that the SC households generally are in less-remunerative occupations like agricultural labour. It has also been said that there is no occupational mobility as there is lack of job choice for the SC individuals.

Educational Facilities

The low occupational status and low wages leading to poverty among the SCs are to be considered the main impediment of their educational attainment. The National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, through its Reports for 1999-2000 and 2000-2001, has tried to comprehend the SCs' educational status. It affirms that 'they are deprived and discriminated in educational field, causing their high drop-out rate. The SCs' drop-out rate during 1990-91 was as high as 49.35 per cent at the primary level, 67.77 per cent at the middle level, and 77.65 per cent at the secondary level'. This was largely the case

in rural areas. The other reason for drop-out is the location of schools. Jeebanlata Salam (2004) says that 'the schools, in many areas, are situated in localities inhabited by dominant castes, which are hostile to students belonging to the lower castes. Members of the high-ranked castes groups and the dominant actors of villages often see education for the working and labouring castes as a waste and also a threat to them'. Further, 'This denial is linked to the popular perception that members of the low ranked castes are incapable of being educated. If they are educated, they pose a threat to the village hierarchies and power relations'. Apart from these, the other discriminatory behaviour also causes problems in their receiving education. The differential treatment by teachers, peer groups and as well as by the society criticise them to low self-esteem, severely affecting their performance in school and causing them to drop-out in large numbers. For the poor SC students, the Mid-Day Meal is an incentive to attend the schools. But Thorat and Lee (2005b) say that 'there are reports of massive scale exclusion and discriminatory treatment in operation of the Mid-Day Meal in schools'. This concludes that the SC children, attending lower levels of schooling, remain at greater risk of being poor. Further there is non-allocation of funds by the state to the Scheduled Castes Special plan in the proportion required for the development of the SCs (National Commission of Scheduled Castes, 2004-05).

Health Security

In the health sphere also, the SCs are having low access to the nutritional and health services, provided by the state or even otherwise, due to their poverty, illiteracy and low educational level and discriminatory practices. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) has also found that 'there is significant difference between the Scheduled Caste children and non-Scheduled Castes / Scheduled Tribes children in the infant mortality, child mortality and under-five mortality rates'. According to NFHS-2 India (1998-99), 'more than three-fourth of the SCs children are anaemic, and about half of them suffer from malnutrition and under nutrition'. 'Higher deficiency of nutrition and higher percentage of anemia women and children in SC families than general population indicates lower health status of SCs' (National Commission of Scheduled Castes, 2010-11 and 2011-12). It is revealed that 56 per cent of the SC women are anaemic. Rege (1995) also has stated that the plight of the SC women in rural areas is more of concern regarding their higher health problems because 80 per cent of them are engaged as agricultural labourers. Further, discrimination in all other spheres is due to the fact that untouchability is not the fast fading remnant of our 'feudal' past or

contemporary reality (Shah, 2006). For instance, discrimination is also encountered by the SCs in their right to public services like food security, housing schemes, public water supply, post-office services, participation in the village political institutions (village Panchayat), etc. This is so as they are socially oppressed and economically marginalised (Jogdand, 2000).

Now-a-days, the SCs are protesting in villages against their discrimination or rights violation, etc. Since the state machinery like police, judiciary, hospital, etc. is administered by non-SCs, the various government provisions meant for them are less effective. Report of National Commission of Scheduled Castes (2015-16) states that 'efforts should be made to achieve the assigned target and not spend the SCSP funds on general schemes like road construction, rural telephone connections, electrification as it is done in many states and union territory. The state should give priorities to schemes which provide basic minimum services like primary education, health, drinking water, nutrition, rural housing, electrification and linked roads for SCs villages'. But discrimination against the SCs still continues, in one form or the other, causing their inability to participate effectively in the various functioning of the society. Now, discrimination in villages is visualised in public as well as private spheres of life against the SCs in their accesses to infrastructure and services, social security and protection, public safety, etc. Discrimination against the SCs or scheduled castes, as mentioned above, leads to their cultural and economic exploitation. Thus, they remain socially and economically marginalised. This marginality has further created the trap of poverty for them.

Poverty of Scheduled Castes

Thus, it is seen that the SCs are poor and are trapped. The second term to be conceptualised in the present study is poverty. Poverty in general is said to exist when a person or group of people in a particular society cannot attain a minimum level of living and well-being. The 'minimum' is dependent upon the prevailing standards of living in the society. As stated earlier, according to Sen (1985), poverty means the absence or deprivation of one or more capabilities that are needed to achieve minimal functioning in society in which one lives. He elaborates on it and reveals that 'being poor is to be hungry, lacking shelter and clothing, being sick and not cared for, and remaining illiterate and not schooled'. It is therefore, seen that for the SCs it is a creation of livelihood systems, the socio-political and economic system that shape their life chances. The additional

description of poverty by Mehta and Shah (2001) is also appropriate for the SCs. According to them, 'poverty is the sum total of a multiplicity of factors that include not just income and calorie intake, but also access to land and credit, nutrition, health and longevity, literacy and education, drinking water and sanitation, and other infrastructural facilities'. This situation of pronounced deprivation in the well-being of the SCs is seen for generations together (Thorat, 2004).

If we analyse poverty of the SCs in the context of caste system, it is clear that the upper castes have, since earlier times, subjugated and dominated the SCs, especially in the rural areas, due to their caste-based superiority. Hence, caste has created considerable amount of prejudice and discrimination against the SCs, resulting into their engagement with the occupations that have been rated lower or lowest in the occupational hierarchy, payment of low wages and even unemployment. As a result, a large majority of the SCs even today remain economically poor and face the acute poverty.

The high magnitude of poverty is suffered by the SCs due to majority of them being employed as labour, with low wages, the high rate of them being under-employed and even terms of their employment being most unfavourable, leading to low income among them. This is also reflected in 'the proportion of persons falling below a critical minimum level of consumption expenditure, what is called the poverty line. In 1999-2000, about 35.43 per cent of SC persons were below the poverty line in rural areas, compared to 21 per cent among non SCs/STs. The nature of their poverty is chronic, inter-generational, and is severely reflected in hunger and even starvation' (Thorat, 2004).

More precisely, Ambewadikar (in Joshi, 1986 and also Ram, 1988b) argued in his article that 'the several development schemes like Intensive Agricultural Development Programme (IADP), Drought Prone Area Development (DPAP), Crash Scheme for Rural Employment (CSRE), Small Farmers' Development Agency (SFDA), Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), etc. have not benefited much to the SCs or Dalits'. Kamble (1982) also has suggested that 'the Scheduled Castes are economically poor and socially oppressed, and; hence, cannot avail freely the benefits of constitutional provisions made for them due to their economic dependence on Non-Scheduled Castes' (Ramotra, 2008). 'These, in turn, lead to a lack of social and political effectiveness of the SCs. By these criteria, the SCs are also overwhelmingly poor people' (Mendelsohn, and

Vicziany, 1989). Finally, fixing the responsibility of the poor economic condition of the SCs in rural areas, Bimla Thakur (1991) has ascertained that ‘the nexus between the village leaders and corrupt administration was responsible for denial of benefits of anti-poverty programmes to the genuine poor. No doubt, there is corruption at the grass-root level due to which the benefits of the social welfare programmes do not reach the poor strata of the society’ (Ramotra, 2008). These might not cause directly the perennial poverty among them, which gives rise to certain culture of practice.

Thus, it is clear that poverty or economic poverty among the SCs is linked with their culture and social sphere. Social poverty is reflected in the form of timid and subordinated social interactions and relations with the higher or dominant castes or classes of people, low esteemed pattern of behaviour, poor access to education especially the higher and technical as well as professional one, poor health status, lack of access to proper housing, means of communications, etc. All this may broadly be attributed to their economic poverty. Similarly, cultural poverty or poverty of culture means a culture which is placed at the low in a hierarchy of cultures of different classes, ethnic or religious groups and communities, different regions, etc. in a given society. Generally, such culture(s) is not taken note of, or ridiculed and easily dismissed by the dominant culture or by the elite articulation in their cultural discourse. In the case of SCs in India, their specific behaviour becomes part of their culture which, in other similar situation, has been termed by Oscar Lewis as ‘culture of poverty’ (Lewis, 1959). Culture of poverty among the SCs may perhaps be attributed to their powerful past history, which is dominated presently by their contemporaries that narrows down their choice further. Not only that but their specific behaviour is the reaction to the lack of economic opportunities to them, causing lack of their active participation in the contemporary socio-economic processes. It may also be regarded as a symptom of the existing social and structural inequality in spite of various policies and programmes, formulated as per the constitutional provisions, to reduce their discrimination and poverty, as stated earlier. However, as there is continuation of social inequality in almost all spheres of their life, the poor SCs are socially excluded from improving their chances in one sphere or the other.

Social exclusion of Scheduled Castes

The last issue examined in this study is of social exclusion. Here, we shall briefly look at some of the available studies dealing with the various dimensions of social

exclusion. The term 'social exclusion' originated some quarter century ago, though its contents very much existed in the past, and got reflected in the study of the poor and the marginalised people of the world. Social exclusion implies the exclusion of individuals, groups or communities from participating in certain significant functions or activities in society. René Lenoir (1974) is the initiator of studying social exclusion, as he has used the term to identify the excluded people who happened to be 'mentally and physically handicapped, people with suicidal tendency, aged persons unable to effectively perform any productive role, abused children and abusers, delinquents, single parents, multi-problem households, marginals, asocial persons and other social 'misfits' in France' (referred in Sen, 2004). De Haan (1997) explains social exclusion in terms of 'the denial of equal opportunities imposed by certain groups of society upon others'. This leads to their inability 'to participate in the basic social, civil, political, economic and cultural functioning of the society'. Similarly, Silver (1994) has identified that the people may be excluded from 'earning their livelihood, secure permanent employment, property, credit, land, housing, minimal or prevailing consumption levels, education, skills and cultural capital,...etc.' Yet, at the analytical level, Sen (2004) clarifies social exclusion by distinguishing the 'constitutive relevance' of exclusion from that of 'instrumental importance'. He also differentiates between 'unfavourable exclusion' and 'unfavourable inclusion' and 'active and passive exclusion'.

Further, Gore and Figueiredo (1997) explain, at the wider plank, exclusion from participation in the functioning of a society. In their words, it is the 'loss of rights associated with work... and with their long-term unemployment and breakdown of social ties and disaffiliation.' In other words, social exclusion takes away forcefully rights of the excluded people at various levels, which results into the lack of their knowledge and participation in the various activities. However, the term social exclusion was conceptualised, nearly three decades ago, in the industrialised societies of the west and it may not be the same for many of the developing societies. For that reason, it is questionable whether the same can unqualifyingly be applied in developing societies as well. In this regards, Atkinson (1998) clarifies that 'in the industrialised societies, the concept of 'social exclusion' is related to the welfare State where the formal employment is quite advanced technologically. But in the developing societies, the concept is related to the 'basic capabilities', risk aversion, vulnerability and sustainable livelihood'. He says further that 'the people are considered 'excluded' in such societies not just because they do not have a current job or income, but because

they have few prospects for the future'. Thus, it is clear that one cannot look at social exclusion of certain individuals or groups in isolation, but in their circumstances in relation to rest of the people in a society in which they live. The 'relativeness' is, hence, an element to comprehend the concept of social exclusion.

More so, Burgess and Stern (1991) are of the view that applying the concept of social exclusion in the developing societies appears to be practically not feasible because of the lack of a well-formed welfare State, although a number of individuals or groups may be treated as 'socially excluded' on the basis of their exclusion from social security measures in whatever forms these are available there. That means, the people who do not achieve certain minimal standards of facilities related to health, food and nutrition, and education could, thus, be considered 'socially excluded'. In their conceded opinion, the coverage of the existing social security is very low. The State support for the infirm and disabled people is negligible, the educational support is limited and does not usually extend beyond primary school, the State pensions cover a minority and the subsidised health care is spread very thinly and haphazardly. So, many people in the developing societies are socially excluded. But the study of Burgess and Stern does not look into the root-cause of social exclusion of certain groups and communities as such from their active participation in certain social and cultural practices and traditions existing in the developing societies.

The need to modify the concept or conceptual understanding of social exclusion in the Indian context is emphasised by Rodgers, Gore and Figueiredo (1995). More precisely, they have dealt with the conceptual issues in terms of relationship among social exclusion, basic needs of people and their deprivation. They have synthesised the ideas in relation to social design to reduce social disadvantage of the people in India. Further, Appasamy and others (1996) have examined social exclusion as disaggregated location (urban and rural), gender, age, income level, asset-base, religion and caste. In fact, he has concentrated on the dimensions of health, education, housing, water supply, sanitation and social security. He has also mentioned about the percentages of people with no access or inadequate access to each of these avenues, which are their human rights. He says that social exclusion is to be defined in terms of exclusion from a few basic welfare rights. But the question remains as to how to overcome the social exclusion of the deprived people. In this regard, Percy-Smith (2000) provides a context by discussing policy responses for social inclusion of the socially excluded groups

and communities to overcome their social exclusion. Here, the dimensions of social exclusion are related to labour market, poverty, education and training, health, housing, access to services, political participation and the poor access to the urban resources. For policy formulation on recession of social exclusion, Abrams and others (2005) have drawn attention to social psychology theory and research on social exclusion and inclusion. The rationale provided by them is to understand inclusion and exclusion at different levels by involving different types of processes provided in social psychology.

The need of social partner like 'State', alongwith the intervention of 'the community', for overcoming social exclusion of the deprived people is stated by Byrne (1999). According to him, there is a possibility of social agency to be evolved at the level of the individuals or households which can initiate social action to change the life course. Hills (2002) also has made an attempt to formulate the effective social inclusion policies by understanding and analysing social exclusion. In the same vein, Raquel Sosa Elizaga (2002) states that 'the responsible action of the State and society is must to achieve equality, equity and tolerance in diversity as the foundations for a higher social construction'. In the case of SCs, Shah (2001) says that they are deprived of the power that would have ensured them the physical strength and security, self-respect and dignity, and economic independence and equal opportunity in all activities.

Like, it is seen that unemployment and unequal treatment in wage payment, unfair terms of work and inadequate access to income earning assets created inequality for SC resulting into high incidence of chronic poverty. Further it is revealed in many studies that the SCs people face discrimination, marginalisation and social exclusion in the public domain governed by the state (Thorat and Senapati, 2007) and also in the most dynamic modern private sector of the Indian economy (Thorat, et al, 2009).

'There are incidences of the food and nutritional deficiency which is injurious to SCs people and disproportionately to women and children because in the male dominated society, male get traditional preference for food. This also causes malnourishment and starvation deaths amongst the SCs. To mention, the health index indicated an overall improvement for SCs but by a low margin' (Thorat and Venkatesan, 2005a). This margin further creates social exclusion.

‘Benefits from the public health system have also been uneven across different segments of the society, particularly health benefits not received in an equitable manner, for SCs which is reflected in higher values of Infant Mortality Rate’ (Purohit, 2014). ‘Health services are only a part of the solution, it is food security, education, and housing conditions, including household and environmental sanitation are areas that need to be strengthened alongwith participatory development, strong public commitment, huge resources, and political will’ (Baraik and Kulkarni, 2006).

‘Adequate housing is not just the mere provision of four walls and a roof but also access to basic services such as water, sanitation, clean fuel, electricity, healthcare, education and livelihood, all of which are essential for ensuring dignified life, personal growth and social well-being in a productive society’ (Rizvi, 2011). The national policy guiding the water and sanitation sector in India in the eighth five year plan (1992-1997) emphasised that ‘safe drinking water and basic sanitation are vital human needs for health and efficiency’ and acknowledge that ‘death and disease, particularly of children,... and the drudgery of women are directly attributable to the lack these essential’, particularly in villages. The ninth and tenth plan also broadly followed the directions set by the eighth plan (Purohit, 2014). But it is found that SCs live in crumbling house in higher percentage than Non-SC/ST’s household in urban areas. This indicator of inhabitations forces the community to be in exclusive.

This situation clearly suggests ‘the challenge of school retention of children from vulnerable communities like SCs. The high magnitude of never enrolled, out-of-school children and high school dropout is because of chronic poverty. Educational deprivation of them is because of their historical socio-economic deprivations. The lower participation of SCs in higher education than the national average pulls the country backward’ (Planning Commission Report 2008 and 2013). So State should make efforts to create an atmosphere for higher education for SCs so that there is adequate inclusion of them.

Conclusion

The combine economic reform with the social reform for increasing capability towards solving the problems of SCs has made a very meager change in the society. This is seen in terms of nature and forms occupation or livelihood, employment rates, education or literacy rates and poverty rates including health

and education services and denial of security and protection. There is a betrayal of the promises of social policy and created only delusions of security since planning of India has problem of economic, social, political, administrative and international in nature. The approach of State in dealing with social policy must also take into account self-respect and opportunities for development of their capacity, social mobility and change. But it is observed that social policies are unable to encompass the complex social reality and are therefore unable to bridge the gap between policy and practice.

It is revealed in this work that social exclusion, discrimination and poverty of the SCs in the villages have been inter-related, in which their poverty has been an outcome of discrimination practiced against them, particularly in the economic sphere. So, discrimination has also resulted in their deprivation or exclusion from their participation in various other spheres of life. Similarly, both discrimination and poverty together have caused their exclusion from participation in community life as well as their access to public facilities and social development.

From the above literature review, some insights are drawn for understanding the concept of discrimination and its relation with poverty and social exclusion, particularly in the context of Indian society in general and among the SCs in particular. Some of the literature reviewed above are about the causes and consequences of social exclusion, indicating the difficulty in challenging social exclusion compared to poverty, because it has the shades of discrimination. Such literature would certainly facilitate researcher, to analyse the concepts of and the relationship among discrimination, poverty and social exclusion for the Scheduled Castes in rural India.

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Jayashree Ambewadikar is Assistant Professor at the Centre for Studies in Society and Development, School of Social Sciences, Central University of Gujarat.

Research in Progress: Fieldwork: A Process of Learning and Unlearning

Author(s): Sudipta Garai

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Fieldwork: A Process of Learning and Unlearning

--- Sudipta Garai

Abstract

The 'Fieldwork' is a 'journey' and a process of learning in itself. The theoretical knowledge on methods and methodology in conducting a research could only guide to a particular extent, whereas it is the researcher in the field who negotiate through the questions and dilemmas in their own creative ways in order to gather data, learn and interpret the given situation. This paper illustrates that 'journey' of an unknown researcher in studying 'Culture and Sexuality through 'queer' Bengali films' with reference to the questions of 'subjectivity and objectivity', 'reflexivity' and the challenges in interpreting the 'field' through a particular medium of language and structure.

Key words: Culture, Films, Sexuality, Queer

A brief overview

In the world of sociology, lies ample scope of rethinking and researching about various issues, but choosing among those diverse concerns, does reflects ones preference and willingness to know and explore a specific field more than the other. Chosen 'films' as the entry point to understand the dominant ideology in the cinematic representations, intervening deeper into the questions of culture and sexualities in the context of India is one such space where this research started with. The study extended with a discourse analysis approach trying to understand the social implications from the cinematic texts towards an interpretation through its audience. The 'fieldwork' thus takes the form of 'text and talk'. Van Dijk (2009) theorised this approach as a process of critical interrogation in the inequality and abuse that is created through various dominant 'discourses' and penetrated through the system of practice.

Critical discourse analysis explicitly tries to understand, question, challenge this social inequality that is legitimised through various agencies of the society. 'Text and Talk' is a method of deconstructing a particular text in order to critically

reinterpret the 'given' system of knowledge. Dijk mentions that rather than thinking it as a qualitative or quantitative method it could be said as an approach to rethink and reinterpret a specific problem. It is a way in which the study tries to make one aware of the problems evaluating motivations that remain hidden in others, as well as our own selves. It is not a way to arrive or solve problems with definite answers but with ontological and epistemological questions within the structure of the 'social'. It is thus a way to demystify ideological systematised power which remains in spoken, written or visual system of language through a reflexive approach. Approaching to understand a specific problem makes it an interdisciplinary methodological way of looking.

In the context where same-sex relationships are still not a norm in our society and heterosexuality remains in the fore-front, the homosexuals remain in the marginal group causing Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code a much debated law. Contextualising this scenario of differences, attempts has been made to see the impact of the selected movies dealing with the said themes on the different age-group of audiences in order to have a multiple perspective. In order to make sense of the struggle, the 'queer' goes through, around seven in-depth interviews through the process of narrative collection was taken which includes *gay men*¹, *kothi*², *male to female transgender*³, *female to male transgender*⁴, *lesbian*⁵ and one who called herself *queer*⁶. A focused group discussion was done with around twelve queer individuals. To get multiple perspectives and viewpoints about the films both from the so called 'legitimised' sexuality, that is, heterosexuals and homosexuals (LGBTQ)⁷; interviews were conducted and focused-group discussions were done with college students (aged 18-22) with around six to seven students mainly from two colleges, Presidency College and Asutosh College. Attempts were made to talk to the people associated with Rituparno Ghosh and his film making journey. However, interviews and opinions of the directors and actors are being collected through newspaper articles and television interviews, which were done through internet videos. Lastly, conversations with some of the aged people, were done (around twelve of around 50 years of age), to understand their ways of looking at these films and its content. This group was specially chosen thinking their views to be important as queer as an issue was not much in discussion until some years and thus their perspectives on issue of different sexualities was thought to be relevant. I interacted randomly with this age group in the *Nandan area*⁸ and sometimes in front of certain schools and colleges. Incorporating all age groups here in my research was not possible as it would have become time consuming and even more extensive, thus there remains

a scope for further extensive research on the same. However the initial idea was to initiate discussions on the views and opinions and way of looking at the queer and the so called 'heterosexual' people in reference to the chosen films majorly. But the conversations were not only limited to films or Rituparno Ghosh, rather on various other experiences and conversations on love, life, politics etc which to me remains extremely enriching.

The 'queer' trilogy

This research had two simultaneous aspects of both reading of cinema as text and then analysing the cinema with the collected data from the field. A qualitative study of this kind might have contestations about the validity of the interpretations, but a purely objective method would possibly not be able to grasp the essence of the study and reduce the scope of imagination. These chosen films were not released in the rural spaces of Bengal, so my informants were restricted to this space of Kolkata, where I did not have much privilege to limit myself within a particular class, though most of my respondents would mark themselves to be from 'middle class'. Class as a sociological category is an amorphous classification which is very hard to be defined in terms of one's economic status, rather the aspects of values, lifestyles and education does comes into play when we discuss on the 'middle' class which is also believed to be one of the main agency to change being closely related with neo liberal economic developments and intellectual standards.

Arekti Premer Golpo (Just Another Love Story) was the first film narrating queer experiences in Bengali Cinema to be shot after the decriminalisation of Section 377 in July, 2009 got screened for the first time in the 60th Berlin Film Festival on February, 2010. Rituparno Ghosh and Indraneil Sengupta played the lead roles in the Kaushik Ganguly written and directed film, which unfolds the life story of *Abhiroop Sen*, a filmmaker making a documentary on the life of the veteran jatra actor of Bengal, *Chapal Bhaduri*. The movie simultaneously progress with Abhiroop's present life and Chapal Bhaduri's past which brings up their feelings, emotions and trauma of being a 'gay/homosexual' in a hetero-normative social-world. Chapal Bhaduri in the film was portrayed as the first self evident, self confessed gay actor of the Bengali stage.

Memories in March was directed by Sanjay Nag where Rituparno Ghosh scripted and acted in the lead role. It was released in Pusan International Film Festival on

September 2010. The story of this movie unfolds through the memories of a deceased friend and colleague of *Arnob* and *Sahana* who also happens to be the only son of the divorced mother *Aarti*. It shows a journey that a mother takes when she comes to Calcutta from Delhi to collect her dead son's personal belongings and to perform the last rites and in the process also discover her son much better. Initially there was a resistance from the mother to open up to her son's colleague (*Siddharth* or *Babu* as she called her) but gradually through the 'memories' of her son and the sharing of those moments brought them closer and created a bond between them. However, this movie remains extremely important to reflect the reaction of the mother as she gets to know about her son's sexuality and how she comes in terms with the sexual preference of him which is seen as 'abnormal' in the hegemonic heterosexual world that we live in.

The final film is '*Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish*' which has been one of the finest works of Rituparno Ghosh and was much bold an attempt to talk about sexuality and gender than the other two films discussed before. It was released in May 2012 at the New York Indian Film Festival. It's a film of the search for one's self and identity. It is adapted and reinterpreted by the director and actor Rituparno Ghosh with his own imagination and consciousness about the Tagore dance-drama of the same name (*Chitrangada*). Tagore's piece is however different from the traditional Mahabharata. It has been a journey of *Chitrangada*, the Manipuri princess who was conditioned to be a man by her father but gradually she wishes to be a 'woman' and the dance drama narrates her inner journey of 'self'. Rituparno's *Chitrangada* also talks about an inner journey, a self realisation, a transition of being of the protagonist 'Rudra' who was born as a man but being uncomfortable with the 'body', he decides to change his sex. This whole process of sex change is quite a traumatic affair and this transition is not easy for any individual, but it however signifies one's inner strength and courage to transform one's outer being with the inner self. This film is a story of Rudra's journey of life. The mysterious and mystical ambiguity of androgyny in Tagore's text has always been a treasure in the Bengali literature and this has been a source of inspiration to Rituparno always in his own imagination and ways of expression in his art form. In this paper, discussions are done about the fieldwork rather than the sociological reading of the concerned films. Most of the reflections here are concentrated on the experiences of 'me' with my 'queer' informants who in due course of time has transformed me as an individual.

Fieldwork: the journey

Initially the plan was to see the chosen films together with the respondents in order to have a discussion, but as field is a space where predictions and planning does not really work, so certain negotiations are continuously made. Due to the busy schedules of most of the respondents, it was only possible to show certain clips of these films in the 'field' and at times stories were extensively narrated in order to initiate the discussions on these films particularly but gradually the conversations went on to different other spheres of life. While sharing their lives, the queer informants at times were also interested in my sexual preferences and personal stories that they continuously wished to know. At certain points I did feel strange and uncomfortable with the questions coming from them and their continuous curiosity of my life, but then I realised that at times there is even need to share some of my experiences in order to make them comfortable of the situation. Thus this struggle of reminding myself as a researcher and the ethics of research are continuously at play, though it's better to say that the field decides the situation rather than something I as a student of sociology research learnt through texts as the methods and methodology of research doing. Just because I happen to chose them to share their stories does not make me an irrefutable authority to speak on behalf of them. I would say my fieldwork had different layers, but that might not be enough of grand generalisations. However I have tried to understand and study the aspects of culture and sexuality through films where obviously certain insights are gained with this spectrum of reading films through the eyes of the represented and the 'spectators'. However, it's important to mention that the methodologies, methods and ethical principles might be important tools to learn which might as well form a supportive guideline to facilitate the process but can never be applied mechanically in the messy world of phenomenon that we are studying. The fixed methodological rules and criteria of choice of methods vanish in reality. The 'field' in itself emerges as a learning experience and to some extents also alters us as human beings.

The first experience of the 'field' is to unlearn many of the learnt theories and methods which were taught in the classroom. It is a space where we constantly have to adapt and adjust with the necessities and the requirements of the situation. It is a space of self realisation, self reflexivity, and thinking deep as the work proceeds. *Culture and Sexuality in Visual Representations: A Study of the Queer Trilogy in Bengali Cinema* being the topic of concern, the field intrigues into the lives and narratives of the so called queer people with the discussions on films, culture, family, marriage, love and so on and so forth. 'Fieldwork' in the present scenario is not something exclusive to the academic knowledge production rather

is also a part of many social agencies, NGOs and organisations. Consequently, I had to also explain my position and the nature of my work. There has been a constant query on how at all these studies will help in making their lives better and bring a change in the society. I as a researcher fail to answer these questions as even I as an individual is on a constant search for answers, yet I try and defend myself saying that we can at least hope for a change and moreover speaking about certain things are much better than prolonged silences.

The 'other' in the field is no more silent in behalf of whom the researcher speaks; rather there is a constant negotiation and conversation that makes the interaction possible. The researcher is continuously judged, questioned and observed through the eyes of the researched. Many informants are of the idea that these academic researches would bring no differences in their life and position in anyway but would earn the researcher a high rank job reproducing their lives into papers and publications. The anthropological 'other' is not only the element of the research but also the factor continuously transforming the life and consciousness of the researcher. In a space where a heterosexual female researcher enters the field for researching the so called alternative sexualities, there is a sense of detachment as they continuously speak of a community of their own where the researcher is not a part of and thus it remains a little challenging. With time however, there grows a bond of friendship with some of them. To be friends and to be part of their stories and tensions of life, when they called for suggestions from me, I got puzzled as in how to reciprocate. It is obviously of no question that I as a researcher would have my politics of location and motive of research. Thus the perspective I would speak will necessarily be different from someone from a different location be it caste, class, race, gender, historical, personal and social world and so on and so forth.

While studying different cultures and valorisation of cultural diversity, it is important to point out and examine the unequal nature of social relations in any culture which is known as the 'critical humanism' in the anthropological discourse. 'Critical humanism' (Plummer, 2005) as a process engages one with different research ways in a research to interact with the 'informants'. It is a process of knowing their feelings, emotions, actions, bodies, as they move around in the social space and experience the constraint of material world of inequalities and exclusion. Rather than claiming a grand generalisation, a study of this sort gives an account of close familiarity with engagements.

In this context, the so called people of alternative genders had a ‘community’ of their own where they felt comfortable in being their own selves, as they liked to be. For them, the heterosexual genders are outside their community. In spite of their lives in their family, schools and colleges they only feel the sense of community with the groups and friends of their own sexuality where they are free to express their interests, love, dress the way they wish etc. It is the sense of sharing and caring for each other that bonded their friendship with each other and served as a ‘latent function’ as Merton (1949, p. 68) would say. It is the space where they gain confidence and the power to live of their choice rather than remaining closeted for their life.

In that context, locating myself as a female researcher intervening in their lives to know about their personal experiences and narratives is not an easy task. There was always an ‘eye’ on me as to why is that I want to know about their lives, how is that important to me and how will that in return help them. There was no less curiosity on their part to know and observe me which made this process a mutual learning process to some extent but also there was a continuous need from my part to be more sensitive with the way I approach them and the words I use in order to interact and collect personal stories and thoughts.

In research of this kind, the methods we use often let us speak to or interact with them who are fluid, unstable and perpetually in the process of becoming, so at times it does get difficult to gather data from these tenuous ‘subjects’ and more in the process of writing. It thus also raises the question as to what meanings do these data hold when it is at times only momentarily fixed and certain, though however its always not the case but this constant struggle of expressing in the ‘just’ way remains on the researcher while expressing both verbally or written.

A cultural analysis reveals the way a dominant ideology is structured into the text and into the reading subject and those textual features that enable negotiation, resistance and oppositional reading of the same. It becomes interesting when the ethnographic studies are located in the historically and socially generated meanings contextualising the predominant system of culture. Texts are produced within a political economy and thus the constructions of representations and the discursively constructed textual social world however require an engagement with the social structuring of practices in order to get a broader perspective. The structured social differentiation and their historical transformations could make

sense with the multiplicity of experiences and views of the people living in similar social conditions.

In the critic of the Archimedean nature of reason, the anti foundational philosophers very rightly suggest that the formulation of a, a-historical and a-cultural 'truth' involves a radical misunderstanding, and thus to study the human social life it remains quite necessary to explore the relationship between human thought and human existence. Though the anti foundational philosophers and the phenomenologist does not question about the existence of objective knowledge, they do question its relevance for the social sciences. The new type of objectivity that Manheim (1936) would suggest about the 'critical awareness and control' of evaluations and assimilations of different and multiple viewpoints transcending a particular point of view becomes more relevant for us in the present scenario. He interestingly focuses on the fact that in a production of knowledge, the socio-historical situation of the researcher remains extremely important because all knowledge are socially conditioned and thus the perspective and location of the researcher needs to be understood while analysing the produced knowledge. The ideal of objective knowledge, that is knowledge defined as free from interpretations and social conditioning remains a false ideal that neither the social sciences nor the natural sciences should and could aspire to. Thus the approach of all means of study should be 'hermeneutic' and interpretative.

I am also reminded of Gadamer's (1989) idea of carefully understanding the prejudice and the values both in part of the interpreter and interpreted while talking about the process of knowledge production. Not only the position of the researcher and the researched but also the meanings of any given text and knowledge is only to be understood in reference to the specific time and space and therein comes the role of 'reflexivity' of knowledge with a 'historical process of self reflection'.

Criticising Marx, Manheim suggests that more than ones class interest and class position, the underlying historical and social reality would be more relevant to understand ones motivational interest and existential determination. The sociological category of 'class' according to him is quite a narrow framework that bypasses individual perceptions and reactions. The exploration of meanings and understanding is one of the basic ways in exploring into cultural sciences. The notion of the absolute truth remains questionable, and rather than looking for absolute truth, truths are to be searched as products of modes of thought.

Inclusion and combination of different ‘perspective’ or the ‘conjunctive’ knowledge as it reveals the perspective of its author and its group from which the author comes, gives a ‘larger’ kind of truth. It also throws light to the qualitative element in the structure of thought.

A researcher should thus never be apologetic about taking a definite stand point. There are different levels of objectivity possible in different levels of cultural knowledge. When observers have different perspectives, objectivity is obtained by transcending one mode of discourse into another. Objectivity thus, is not being non-evaluative rather being inter-subjective. This ‘perspectives’ which structures knowledge is collective rather than individual which Gadamer would call as ‘effective historical consciousness’. This in a way is an epistemological break and a move towards a new epistemological basis for cultural sciences. The hermeneutic way of reading multiple meanings, the scope of multiple interpretations and self reflexivity are thus some of the basic things to reflect on, before we go in the field of doing research in a socio-cultural space of human existence. The shared meanings and prejudices of both interpreted and the interpreter establish the meaning of the text creating a ‘fusion of horizons’ of the interpreter and the text.⁹

The space of study that I am looking at is diverse as the way of looking or interpreting a process of discrimination which was so inside the system of beliefs and practices in our society could only make sense when I try to understand the different ways of looking at the same phenomenon of ‘alternative’ sexualities. Thus I tried to interact and communicate with different age group of people with different thoughts and ideas. On the one hand the queer narratives were tried to be understood in context of the films, but in order to have multiple perspective of thoughts or ideas, it was also necessary for me to interact with the so called hetero-normative majority of the society and thus I chose to talk to some college students and the older generations to have a view on their idea of culture and sexual orientations and practices. Though it is also true that through limited informants, I as a research student may not be doing enough justice to the multiplicity of ideas that is intended, but I think the process of engagement does gives us newer avenue of thoughts to understand or locate the problem we are trying to make sense of. This ‘fusion of horizons’ of different individuals from different locations does give us a broader perspective of the whole social phenomenon which does have its own significance in understanding a reality from the lenses of an ‘oppressor’ or ‘oppressed’ for example.

'Reflexivity' however ranges from self-reference to self-awareness in reading of a text. In Bennett Berger's view (1981) 'reflexivity promotes self awareness and serves to establish role distance between ethnographer as the member of the society and the ethnographer as analyst so as to undercut any noncognitive cathexis of the object'. Bourdieu (1992) points three biases a researcher must be alert of in doing a research, the social origin and coordinates like class, caste, ethnicity, gender that is the social situation and position of the researcher from where the basic biases arise. The good way to keep that in control is mutual and or self criticism. In the concept of 'reflection' however, there is also an autocratic position as the thinking technology in critical thought. Haraway (1997) says that 'reflexivity' refers to the optical concept of 'reflection' which denotes a situation where light is send back, rather than which 'diffraction' would be a more critical mode of expression and interpretation, which makes up a better thinking method. 'Diffraction is the production of difference patterns in the world, not just of the same reflected- displaces- elsewhere' where the phenomena of study could be interpreted in a multifaceted way with also a possibility of bringing a change in the system through its critical analysis. The second is the academic position of the researcher concerned and the field of power associated with that 'academic' space. Lastly, the 'intellectual bias' where the researcher constructs the world as a spectacle to be analysed and interpreted rather than as concrete problems to be solved practically where we risk practical logic into the theoretical logic. However, the construction of the object should be constantly scrutinised in reference to the scientific unconscious embedded in theories, problems and categories of scholarly judgments.

Being trained to look beyond, questioning and critically looking at the taken for granted notions, it is almost impossible to go to the 'field' with an empty mind. In the time when one is in Ph.D., and carrying out a research of their own 'choice', it will be naïve to think about absolute 'objectivity' in the approach of study, rather I would say it becomes the story of diverse subjectivities that comes into play before going to the field and after. However 'field' is the space where we learn and unlearn many of our biases and understanding in the light of the different knowledge that arises in the space. For example, when a kothi or a lesbian starts narrating their own life narratives, it is almost impossible to just be an outsider in listening their struggles and dilemmas of life. There becomes an emotional bond between the researcher and the informants in the exchange of lives which can no way be avoided. Though while I entered the field, the initial identity of mine was

as a female Ph.D. scholar from JNU doing a research on Ghosh's movies and the queer lives, but gradually the relationship crossed its boundary while sharing food with them, walking through the streets in their busy world of earning a life or just spending a day in midst of the group discussions and interviews. On the other hand when I approached the college students, they initially were interested about the JNU life and system of education, and the prolonged conversations that went along with the subject of my study and their reflections on that. The formal and informal discussions overlapped each other in making a meaningful interaction and conversation. While conversing with the elderly people, I had to give a much more detailed introduction of my world in order to make them understand what I am actually looking at. Many of them were surprised, some disgusted and some with no such reactions as they had no views to share, as the concept of queer and alternative sexuality was however not even a part of their life world. The various reactions that I received while studying in the field and the way I tried to negotiate with the different informants were spontaneous, as the research methodology books that we actually read remains unable to deal with all our queries or difficulties that we as researchers experience or enjoy, more because as the topics we are dealing with are so diverse, so are our fields and our experiences with the informants. There cannot be just one way of approaching, rather it's everyone's individual's creative way of dealing and experiencing the social world and a social phenomenon in their unique way which become important.

Reflections

It was a day when I was walking with a transgender respondent-friend along the Rabindra Sarabor railway station (in Kolkata) that a woman suddenly shouted on me for stamping on her feet. I was about to say a 'sorry' when suddenly my companion clapped his hand like a 'hijra' and the woman got scared and told me a 'sorry' instead. This was a seemingly funny incident that we both laughed at after the woman was gone, but what Raja mentioned was important. He said that it is this clapping of hands in this way that a hijra is recognised. 'I am not a hijra, still I clapped such that people understand that I am a transgender because I don't wear sari and bangles.' These remains very symbolic because this sound of the 'clap' distinguishes hijras which help them to unite even among the masses and people are afraid of hijras (of their so called 'vulgar' gestures which does not go in terms with the established norm of social behavior and ethos of the 'culture' of the Bengalis) or are somewhat uncomfortable and thus sometimes 'acts like these' helps. This remains as an act of self protection. When 'laws' and 'society' stands

against, there were personal ways of negotiating with the violence they continuously faced.

Anirban (name changed), one of my informants would say that ‘laws are important in some level but when we are actually travelling around, whenever we are dressed ‘differently’ there is a ‘gaze’ that follows us which sometimes are not through words but we can read their eyes’. On the contrary, while walking with Pakhi (name changed) in the streets of Kolkata, I witnessed an experience of some school boys (who were passing by in a public vehicle) throwing derogatory comments at her randomly. This to me was a very significant point to be noted as in how we actually read violence and marginalisation. Is it always physical, verbal or sometimes very well psychological and symbolic? The laughter or the mockery, many of the mainstream films for example portrays, are very well a reason for the so called queer to feel insecure justifying the laughter it intentionally creates through its representation and projection in which somewhere the real trouble and complications seem to get undermined. However, in a positive note again, what could be seen is the acknowledgement of the queer identity, though not always in a sensible way, but something which can no longer be avoided. It also gives us a picture of the society that we stay in. It is not only the director or the script writer who gives life to a sequence rather also the reading of the audience that makes it a meaningful text. The humour that is being created or the homophobic attitudes which is being seen is also not something which is out of the world, rather is very much a part of the socio cultural system we stay in. Gopal (name changed), in this respect comments that ‘we don’t want to be “different”; we just want to be incorporated in the mainstream system. I don’t want to be seen as someone “alternative”, someone strange, rather a part of the larger society’. However in this process of mainstreaming with social and legal recognition, at times the coerce power of heterosexuality perpetrates even in homosexual relationships through marriage or role-playing which again falls in the vicious circle of perpetrating patriarchal and hetero-normative culture through an ‘alternative’ manifestation.

While walking with the queer informants in local trains, public buses and streets of Kolkata, I as a researcher, witnessed many incidents which tend to harass those who dressed and talked differently. In the park of Kakurgachi, which is a ‘cruising point’ for queer people, I as a woman was not allowed to sit there after 6 in the evening. This actually came as a shock, because on one hand it seemed that the meeting points of the queer is seen as a space of threat (for girls) and on the

other the presence of the policemen and the surveillance in the place talks a lot about how the state intervenes in various spaces of our lives to control and rectify us. It seems that even spaces are marked with special system of surveillance. The policemen actually blamed Guddu (name changed), the informant I was conversing with to not have informed me about this unsaid rule that prevails in that place which also proves that many like Guddu remains the easy victim for oppressive state acts.

The act which commonsensically is known to be 'vulgar' is also used as a form of protest and protection of these minority groups against the conservative traditional ethos of the society. Though most of the aged people would see it as something which disturbs them (*dristi-kotu*) but it as well can't be ignored that this disturbance is a result of the deviance in the behavior that they showcase in order to question the expected norms of the society in spite of fact that this becomes an attention to the public gaze and comments. It is also among many of the youth that *Rituparno*, the name itself becomes the part of the 'slang' among themselves to mock the males who behave in a so called girlish way. *Nyaka* which is a term used for females become an abusive word for males.

In an interview¹⁰ film-maker Kaushik Ganguly said that the exaggeration in showcasing one's own sexuality through dresses and behavior also calls for homophobia, which he feels would have been much lesser if 'they' were portrayed just like 'others' in reference to representation in films. However on the contrary, it could very well be seen as a conscious act of deviance to the ideas of decency and sophistication be it with the language they use or the exaggeration in the ways they dress themselves at times, that the society holds and was also an influence of the colonial Victorian morality that upholds itself through its various manifestations in laws and the societal practices. It is also true that the language we use depends on the space we are in, be it in office, family, among friends etc, it is also something that is learnt through the process of our socialisation and which most importantly is different in different spaces. Thus there cannot be anything as 'the decent' form of expression, as it differs. Thus the so called 'vulgar' language can also be seen as a means to safeguard themselves from the continuous domination from the public spaces and obviously as a conscious way of deviance in order to protest and question the established cultural order and the system of language.

Sexual differences are one among the many identities that constitute the spectators. It is sometimes through association or by rejection that the readers see the text of the film. Dodo (name changed) mentioned the film *Shabnam Mousi* and said that ‘we are not hijras but there is a sense of empowerment which happens within when we see that even a hijra can be a strong contestant in the politics’. He continues that ‘we only get attention while the election process happens; otherwise no one bothers about our existence and the continuous stigmatisation that we go through’.

In the journey of continuous stigmatisation and minoritisation, there were many questions that came my way from my queer informants. Initially ‘I’ as a researcher, was no less an object of observation for my informants and my life and objective of work also attracted them whom I was interacting with. Many questions came by as whether I with my supervisor will try and manipulate their interviews, whether they will be misinterpreted, as they believe they had been in many cases when they were interviewed by many NGOs who worked with queers. It took a lot of time to gain their trust and be friends with them. There were various reactions from the different groups that I interacted with. The college students were curious about my research and its findings and my experiences with my queer respondents. The older generation was mostly in question with my research and its objectives and they were very unsure as to why it becomes even a subject of academic research. The experiences were diverse and thus interesting. The question that came from one of my queer informants that whether I had a boyfriend and in replying a ‘no’, the comment that ‘aami tomar boyfriend ke kheyeb nebo naa’, (I won’t eat your boyfriend) at one hand made me quite uncomfortable as to how to react to such a comment, but on the other hand probe me to think that how ‘women’ who are usually viewed as sexual object remain desirable, but for somebody whom the mainstream would call as queer might as well desire a man and thus man just like woman may also be a ‘sexual object’ in the similar logic.

However, this study for me as a researcher has enriched me with experiences of the field which otherwise could never be learnt from the text books. The constant dilemma while addressing and writing about the narratives dealing with the ambiguity of one’s own body and expression, that is the gender also is something which I continuously experienced while writing. Bengali being the dominant language of my ‘doing research’ I did not face much problem talking with them as it does not have different gender terms for ‘he’ or ‘she’ but when I am writing in

English, it does become a problem to look at. There remains a constant question as to in which gender terms I am supposed to write in order to express those emotions they felt. Is it the biological self that I should refer or the innate experiences or wishes that they encounter? The hegemonic gendered society which has constructed itself with the 'language of expression' hardly has any space for the other genders, left aside fluidity. Bengali as a language as well lacks terms of identification where *somokami* (homosexually) remains the predominant term homogenising all the various identities that we can find in the vocabulary of English. Thus I feel that domination of the heterosexual patriarchal values is not only in terms of bi-polar gender binary but also present in the set of language that remains the major way of communication. The established system of language needs to be deconstructed with the newer vocabularies and linguistics creating more equal spaces for all. The politics of language thus remains central to the discussion of culture and gender which associate terms for different genders differently implying meanings attached to them.

Notes:

¹ A homosexual man

² An effeminate man

³ Who is born male but feels a woman.

⁴ Who is born female but feels like a man.

⁵ A homosexual woman

⁶ 'Queer' as she was still in a state of confusion to decide whether she belongs in any strict category.

⁷ It is the initials of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer.

⁸ The Nandan area is a vibrant cultural and social space where people of different age groups meet, and the culture of 'adda' defines the nature of the space. 'Nandan' is the government sponsored film and cultural space and the nearby Rabindra Sadan and Academy of Fine Arts makes this place of special interest.

⁹ In this study, that I have tried to incorporate the different voices of college students, NGO activists, elderly people or the so called 'queers' is because I wished to get a multiplicity of thoughts and reactions from the audiences to understand or read the text from various perspectives. Nothing gives an absolute interpretation of any text or can be said as ultimate. What as researchers we can try and do is to understand the different dynamics that work within the society, in this study, when it is about the 'different' sexual experiences or practices.

¹⁰ A talk show named '*Songe Srijit*', 11th December 2015. The interview could be viewed in <https://www.voot.com/shows/shonge-srijit/1/368527/kaushik-ganguly-and-anjan-dutta/360839>

FILMOGRAPHY:***Arekti Premer Golpo. 2010.***

Writer & Director: Kaushik Ganguly

Production: Cinemawala

Memories in March. 2010

Director: Sanjay Nag; Writer: Rituparno Ghosh

Production: Shree Venkatesh Films & Rituparno Ghosh

Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish. 2012

Writer & Director: Rituparno Ghosh

Production: Shree Venkatesh Films. 135 mins

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Sudipta Garai is a Doctoral Student at the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Research in Progress: Doing Ethnography in Urban Spaces

Author(s): Vidyapogu Pullanna

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Doing Ethnography in Urban Spaces*

--- Vidyapogu Pullanna

Abstract

This paper is a discussion of ‘doing ethnography’ of people that depend on a lake located in an urban space. Ethnographic accounts of their experiences invariably discuss how over time one builds credibility, trust, and acceptance among respondents. Applying this evidence and logic I proceeded to conduct ethnography in urban spaces, which are cosmopolitan and have ushered in modernity. My identity in the field mattered to respondents; to either reveal or conceal information. These were multiple identities, at times, journalist, agent of the government, nativity, and caste. Several complications arose due to researcher’s caste identity. Unlike identities of profession, class, race, belonging, gender, language, and such, the identity of caste hindered ethnographic work. There was continued resistance and non-cooperation from respondents. I contend that one opens up spaces of advancement by being reflexive and understanding nature of embodiment.

Key Words: Caste, Embodiment, Ethnography, Reflexivity, Urban

Introduction

In the year 2013 I decided to study the relationship between people and lakes in order to understand the process and causes of rapid degradation and decline in the number of lakes in the city of Hyderabad. After reviewing literature I found that most authors have offered conventional explanations and statistics that gave a broad picture of the nature and acuteness of the problem, and the solution(s) relied mostly on technology and finance. Sceptics saw financing massive projects as a

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built-in mechanism to siphon off public funds allotted for the purposes, which seemed like a widespread perception. In another approach to stem degradation of lakes, judicial intervention was sought. Courts were approached seeking orders that the state act in public interest. These approaches dominate the public debate on protection of lakes and are applied throughout the country. There is very little debate on alternative ways in which the problem can be addressed. Activists, for instance, have sought to shift the locus of decision-making to the people themselves, but with limited success. There is also very little discussion on the specifics of places where the problems are located, which was the beginning of the recognition that ethnographic information will be crucial for my research.

After recognising that ethnographic information will be crucial for my research, my initial effort at gathering data was unlike what I had read about how ethnography proceeds. My respondents were evasive, did not cooperate and share information, sceptical of my research endeavour, and in general, did not see any value in aligning with the proposed research work. Here again, many researchers have documented the resistance and scepticism of respondents, which then reduces with the passage of time as credibility and trust in the researcher begins to take hold among the respondents. However, this was not my experience in the field. In paragraphs below, I map the journey of doing ethnographic research in urban spaces. I argue that reflexive and embodied understanding of places or sites of ethnographic enquiry is required.

Linking research questions to ethnography

I begin by noting that there is a connection between research questions and ethnography and introspecting on this linkage is an opportunity to shape the field work. In my case, upon reflection, and in discussions with peers, I realised that initially the focus of my inquiry is on factors or variables that are posed in my research questions. Many of the variables in research questions were identified from the literature. Pursuing fieldwork in this vein resulted in gathering all information pertinent to the variables which becomes the fulcrum of data collection. This is an instrumentalist approach to data gathering. At this point I had negligible information on the processes that may contribute in the understanding of the research problem. Recognising this situation was neither easy nor straight forward. The tasks of posing question(s) and data gathering were therefore held tenuously so that I could shift my attention on identifying processes, historical as well as contextual, which may contribute in the

understanding of the problem. However, no blueprints on how to actualise this intent were available.

Similarly, from literature I learnt that the distinction between ‘numeric’ and ‘non-numeric’ forms of data per se is not significant, but revealing the ontological and epistemological limits of ‘data’ is important. In other words, one may be gathering non-numeric data, yet have positivistic assumptions about meaningful reality, for example. Confusion reigned in terms of identification of appropriate method(s) for ethnographic work. To overcome the dilemma the situation poses, I decided to gain familiarity with my field site. Here my contention is that a decision with regard to data gathering is partly learnt from literature, but also from direct experiences.

Most people residing in Shaikpet are employees in the state electricity and telecommunication departments. A few residents are engaged in small businesses and as brokers of rental housing. There is a spatial segregation of settlements, which is based on caste. In this structure, Dalits who are considered *panchamas* are mostly located on the south side of Shaikpet and are divided from the rest by a road. I also did not see direct impact of municipal administration on the overall development of Shaikpet since municipal schemes and programmes are negotiated and re-negotiated among caste groups. There are several caste-based associations in Shaikpet, however none of them have women members.

From the initial visits to field site I recognised that there is no single dedicated urban Authority that is responsible for the overall development of urban areas. Most urban problems have not been resolved due to lack of co-ordination. Lack of transparency and poor accountability of responsible authorities also contribute in delaying resolutions to urban problems.

The design of organisational network to manage urban areas is complicated. An understanding of the web of organisations that control urban areas however does not provide a comprehensive perspective of the field site. The dynamics and changing conditions at the field site are also to be accounted for in the research endeavour. For instance, I found that through ritual practices (Katta Maisamma, Bathukamma, and at Anjaneya Swami temple) a continuous effort is underway to gain access and control land around lake. These practices have also in some ways allowed controlling land, which have been converted from common property to private property. For example, land around Shaikpet Kotha Cheruvu was ‘owned’

by different caste communities of Shaikpet, but once water quality and quantum of the lake began to decline and change, the control, ownership and benefits derived by the communities also began to wane. Washermen community no longer could derive benefits from the lake, for example. This altered condition in turn created fertile opportunity for private entities (such as gated housing community, private businesses) to gain control and access to land and lake resources. A fall out of this was contestations and conflict among various stakeholders, and several responses emerged. To gain or reclaim access and control of the land, caste based associations were started. Similarly, resident welfare associations claiming to represent weaker sections sprouted and staked claim of the land -- for the poor and for the welfare of residents staying in colonies close to the lake. Claims and counter-claims also have come about by way of ritual practices in temples, which have been started by 'non-locals', and these ritual practices were strategically developed as a blend of new and old rituals.

These observations at the field site are to be found more generally in cities of India. According to Gavin Shatkin 'in contrast to many countries, in India, authority over urban development is dispersed, notably to state governments, which are accountable to a largely rural electorate' (Shatkin, 2014). Extending this argument, Sivaramakrishnan has found that

Control of urban land is not exercised through municipal institutions, and instead ownership and control of urban land are with numerous organisations in the metro region, which include parastatals, state-owned companies and departments. Similarly, land use and the stage of development is influenced heavily by private interests and local institutions, not to mention Court interventions. All efforts to bring urban land under a common city-based regime have been resisted (Sivaramakrishnan, 2014).

This combination of field observations and inferences drawn from literature begins to shape my, an ethnographer's, perspective of the field site. Thus far I described the process by which I connected research questions with a sharper perspective of the field site. However, to further develop this perspective, I delved into the notions of urban space characterisations and observations of urban because my field site is in a city.

Conventional/traditional notions of urban space come from a general understanding of how urban spaces are characterised in terms of geographical settings and sociological studies, which highlight diversities within communities by way of culture, language, caste and so on.

Urban space is commonly perceived as inclusive, and as a space of freedom, especially from people living in villages where there is subordination by persons of higher castes. This understanding of mine about urban space is based on observing the way people live, interact at events, sit, eat, and act. Urban space is also perceived as a class-based society wherein the rich and poor live in separate geographical areas and are 'zoned' in terms of social, economic, and cultural preferences. For instance, people live in gated communities, which are located adjacent to slums. This juxtaposition of opulence and poverty is an instance of inequity. Urban space is reinforced throughout my upbringing in rural areas wherein such meanings are imparted through socialisation and by popular culture forms like films (Kammula, 2007).

While contours of ethnographic endeavour became complicated and even ambiguous, I found that there are no text books that would tell on how to proceed, or do ethnography at this time. *Caution* therefore in my case becomes the watch word. I began gathering data in earnest by visiting the field site. Building on previous field experiences in rural settings¹ I began research in urban space.

Gaining a foothold: building credibility at the field site

I went with an understanding that urban spaces are cosmopolitan. Cosmopolitan spaces are easy to move around, and people mingle without inhibitions in these spaces to share views, opinions, and experiences. I even imagined completing field work in Hyderabad city within a span of three to four months, despite not being fluent in Deccani Urdu, Hindi, and English languages. I presumed that urban areas are unlike rural areas² where you have to follow certain norms to enter into the village. With this understanding I started data gathering at the field site, in and around the lake located in Shaikpet.

While searching for potential respondents around the lake area, I encountered people who are speaking languages that are unfamiliar to me and were predominantly from the Muslim community. It also was apparent that I need to build credibility with respondents, as well as secure their confidence for gathering

data. One option that I explored was to seek the assistance of an interpreter for field work. But then I met Muslim residents who speak Telugu, and who directed me to potential respondents, newly migrated Telugu-speaking communities living near the lake. Meanwhile I improved my Hindi language proficiency, mainly by listening and watching Hindi TV programs. Initially, I found that I am interacting and interviewing ‘new’ or recent migrants (1992–2015), who have migrated from the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and from within the Telangana state. They all knew the Telugu language when they migrated about twenty years ago and settled around the lake. I found that the socio-economic profile of the migrants is diverse, and most have no direct relation with the lake. During this time, I met an urban planner who was part of the team that prepared the revised Master Plan of Hyderabad, 2010. As an urban planner, he was critical of new migrants staying in spaces around the lake. I also came to know that migrants perceived that the lake was ‘owned’ by long-term residents of Shaikpet. In Shaikpet, I found buildings with signage of caste based associations. For instance, Gangaputra Sangham (Fishermen caste association), Mudiraju Sangham (Mudiraju caste association), Harijan Sangham (Dalit caste association), Gangaputra Bheeshma Bhavan (Fishermen community welfare hall), and Indira Community Hall (Village community hall) are some of the signage that I came across. I was surprised to see presence of caste-based associations in urban areas because it was counter to my imagination of urban spaces being cosmopolitan, equal and liberal space. Additionally, I found historical monuments of medieval period near the field site, which indicated that surroundings of the lake have settlements for a long period of time, and the residents therefore may have a deep and entrenched relationship with the lake. The need for building a historical context of the field site became pertinent. Slowly, but surely, I began to see a ‘village’ in the urban space. Understanding history of the place allowed me to interpret my respondents’ views in perspective.

Other than interviews, I carried out participant observation to gain insights into people’s lives and customs, which I thought they may not share if asked. This method also gave the knowledge on the intricacies of the field settings, which could not be obtained from literature.

The task of building credibility with respondents and more generally in the community is also a process through which one learns. Below I describe the success and pitfalls in initiating the steps to develop a rapport with potential respondents.

In meeting people of Shaikpet I planned on ascertaining peoples' history and their association with the lake. I found that residents of Shaikpet viewed me as an 'outsider'. There are few public places where one can spend time or speak to potential respondents. Similarly, temples are not accessed by all, which limits access to a few social groups. I tried speaking with passersby, but received a cold shouldered response. These were all, for me, signs that I was not welcome or that the place does not welcome everyone. When speaking with people I quickly found that it is not easy to interact with them unless one is a familiar face, or has some kind of link with people. With these experiences my first challenge was to figure out how to enter and gain a foothold at the field site.

At this point I took help of Hanumantu, who was Vice-president, TRS Party, M G Nagar, Shaikpet Division because he was 'credible' among the respondents, and therefore by extension I too became 'credible' for potential respondents. I first met a person from Gangaputra Sangham in Shaikpet who described to me history of Gangaputras in Shaikpet and often highlighted Gangaputra's role in the overall development of the place. Soon thereafter I met few members of Gangaputra Sangham. Their narratives gave me a sense of their status in Shaikpet, their contribution to development, their role in the making of the place as a developed area of the city, their prominence in activities of Shaikpet and their control on all the other communities. On the question of relationship between urbanisation and lake, the residents usually bypassed the question. The descriptions given by respondents are similar to what Professor S. C. Dube noted in his work titled *Indian Village* wherein he described the history of each caste community around Hyderabad and their everyday activities in relation to natural resources (Dube, 1955). Subsequently, at a later point of the field work, I was introduced to former vice-president of Gangaputra Sangham by an acquaintance of my friend. This acquaintance was a tenant of the vice president of the Gangaputra association and this link led to a breakthrough in terms of reaching out to other members of the community as well as getting data in this situation.

Caste identity as a gatekeeper

The next community I met was Harijan Sangham which includes members from both Madiga and Mala sub-caste communities of Scheduled Caste. When I was visiting potential respondents, surprisingly, they inquired first about my caste name. In response, I first showed them my student identification card, and told

them that I am from Madiga community. But they didn't believe me initially because I am from Rayalaseema region which is outside of Telangana state. To gain their confidence and to establish my credibility, I orally shared some of the common practices of Madiga community, that of their main profession as Chamar, beating drums on various occasions in various village activities and so on. Then during our conversations I brought up Madiga Reservation Porata Samiti (MRPS) movement in Rayalaseema region since they told me about their history and empowerment with the MRPS movement in Shaikpet. This interaction connected me within caste network who all shared some of their experiences of being in MRPS movement and how they fought for their rights against Gangaputras and Munnurukapus in Shaikpet. The narratives gave me insights on the power of the Madiga community as members in the Harijan Sangham. In response to a specific query as to why they gave Harijan name to the caste association, they professed to be Harijans who pray to Hindu gods and who are members of the Bajarangdal. To bolster their point they noted that they are not following Christ, which is why one doesn't find a Church in this area of Shaikpet. The president, advisor, and treasurer of Harijan Sangham opined at the end of the conversation that not much can be ascertained any further from individual members. They then cautioned me against visiting at night times because people will be in drunken state and may even create problems for me. This way they sought to minimise my interactions any further with the community.

This interaction was memorable not because of the information I got from them, but the way they received and identified me in order to speak with me. This was for the first time in the field I felt that I have to match to the expectations of respondents in the name of the caste.

During another visit to the field site I met a person who belongs to Reddy caste and has undertaken project contract to renovate Shaikpet Sarai. He too asked my name, where I come from, and what the purpose of my visit was. Though I showed my student identification card and explained the purpose of my research in Shaikpet, my respondent was visibly annoyed and did not answer most of my questions. He observed that my questions are related to land, instead of lake. For rest of the interview and in further meetings, he was subdued and the mood was dull. His facial expression changed when responding to questions. He perceived me not only as a journalist, but as an outsider from Andhra region as well. This encounter shook me, especially on the way he responded to me.

More broadly, my interactions thus far with members of the three castes shows interplay of caste of the respondents and that of the researcher, either facilitates or constrains access to the field site and in obtaining data. Various labels are attached to the researcher and these in turn become impediments to data gathering. The skills of interviewing participant observation had to be complemented with the skill of understand gestures, facial expression and oral responses. To gain perspective of my respondents' answers, I began to introspect on the context of the interviews, which I describe in the next section.

Contextualising respondents' views

I started to appreciate the role context plays when I was interviewing a member of Mudiraju caste. I introduced myself and explained about the purpose of doing research when I met him around 8 p.m. at one of his friend's house, which is located on the main arterial road. Despite sharing my credentials with my respondent, he would evade answering or speaking with me by accusing me of belonging to Andhra Pradesh region whose people are responsible for the destruction of 'Telangana area', resources, and job opportunities. This interaction made me understand how my respondents were connected with the narrative of the Telangana agitation, and were responding accordingly. At the time of this interview the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh state was about to be realised. This meeting took place at night time because I had gone to observe whether the locality at night times was the same as one of the respondents had described. I found that the roads were empty, and most people are in their houses.

Next I met members of Munnurukapu Sangham, mainly to ascertain their history with the place. This time too I was asked about my first name, my caste name, where I come from and why I wanted to study Shaikpet. Soon thereafter doubts began to be raised. My respondent inquired 'aren't there colleges close to home for pursuing studies?' One elderly person of the community however invited me to his house, and offered some juice, and started our conversation by asking the purpose of my visit. Throughout this conversation his daughter and son-in-law, and a person from Gangaputra Sangham were present. The history of Shaikpet was equated with the history of Mr. Mulle Satyanaranayana, who in their view worked for the betterment of Dalit community by giving them housing *pattas* and making them part of Bonalu festival. My interactions with Munnurukapu Sangham made me realise the structural relationship among different caste communities in Shaikpet. While the Gangaputra's claimed that they are the ones

who that are leading every activity, the narrative on Mulle Satyanarayana however indicated that Munnurukapus had influence on each and every activity in Shaikpet.

Not all castes communities responded to me. A person from Kummari caste merely acknowledged my presence by nodding his head and did not utter one word.

Additionally, I interviewed people living in slums that are in the vicinity of the lake. Here again, access to people on my own was not easy because I am an outsider. I then approached local political leaders to gain access in the slums. A few persons were contacted directly by me and rest through the assistance of respondents. On the whole, I encountered more number of people in the *basti* committees through the good offices of local political leaders. I began to realise that it was easy to enter the slum through local political leaders, but like a double edged sword, I also found resistance from some of the respondents. Their narratives were mostly about their everyday problems with the lake water. For instance, there is mosquito menace, the area along the outlet *nala* and around the lake is prone to diseases, a few deaths have occurred because there is no fence around the lake and alongside the outlet of the *nala*.

The lesson from these observations is that field experiences are not uniform. For instance, the process of consenting to interviews was mixed. Some readily agreed to share their views. Yet at other times, respondents expressed their unwillingness to share data. This unpredictability is due to my personal identity. Therefore, a 'fieldworker must accept a devil's bargain – a poor introduction with all its constraints, which is the only way to gain access to the community' (Fettermen, 2010). On the whole ethnographic work allows one to study the socio-cultural contexts, processes, and meanings within the cultural systems.

Embodied experience

A researcher needs to have an embedded sense with people in field, which will need bodily competence as well so that one can relate, observe, and experience their worlds. Most research work thus far has celebrated agency and individuality, but more recent studies are seeking to interrogate both the politics of caste and political interactions of place and caste (Jodhka, 2012; Guha, 2016). The analogy when applied to travel writing work would be as follows: studies of travel writing

should not remain focused solely on textual, but should also need to be understood as embodied practices of the travel itself. This follows that attention is required of not only the personal identity of the researcher, but also many things based on the peoples' behaviour, field setting, and time of the interaction. A few of these aspects of ethnography as Raymond Madden observed

an ethnographer's body is part of the ethnographic toolkit...the favoured way of making the most of oneself as a tool of ethnography is to do as others do, to have the same or similar subjective bodily experience of being in a particular ethnographic place and time (Madden, 2010).

There are several questions about body competence, but an example will help to illuminate the issue. For instance, don't look them directly in the eye. Raymond Madden in essence argues and I agree that, 'doing what others do and learning through shared experience is more important methodologically than face-to-face contact with participants' (ibid). The evidence from this work points to theoretical development, albeit feebly, that there is a need for understanding and interpreting past in embodied terms.

Unmasking gender aspect of the study

Thus far my respondents were only men. Women's association with the lakes in the Telangana region is unique. This is because most of the household economy is based on tasks and activities that women undertake at the lake. Women's lake-based activities include: collecting, segregating, and selling fish; washing, and maintaining the bund and weirs; participating in socio-cultural activities that are centered on women. Most festivals convey women's gratitude for the gains from the lake. Bathukamma and Bonalu festivals are two examples for this. For this reason I sought to factor in gender in my data gathering endeavours. I also found that male respondents opined that women's participation is not necessary in the village activities. One male respondent opined that women are at home, and are never part of the association, and therefore do not know anything about activities in Shaikpet.

The roles of women in festivals relating to lake are changing. Bathukamma, which was until recently a women festival, now sees participation from both men and women. Similarly, the predominant narrative on Katta Maisamma is that women on their way to fishing would first offer *bonam* (an offering of food) on

the bund to goddess and then proceed. In practice, women prepare bonam, while men offer the bonam. Take another instance of ritual practices surrounding the Bonalu festival, which is celebrated by all. In Shaikpet I found that men from two caste groups dominate planning and execution of the festivities. The roles to be played by other caste groups as well as by the women are also determined by the men from these two caste groups. While men dominate and lead the procession of Bonalu, women carry bonam offering on their head throughout the procession.

These narratives reveal replication of hegemonic practices, particularly practice of gendered and caste patterns of power.

Reflexivity

Ethnographer's politics and positionality influence research process and is to be considered part of the ethnographic methodology. Madden (2010) reflected on the politics of location simultaneously where the social-historical identity influenced the creation of the text. Reflexivity is a solution when making explicit the partial nature of the data and the contingencies into which any representation must be located, thereby improving legitimation and representation of the data (Brewer, 2000). Reflexivity allows an ethnographer to navigate varied purposes. In literature less is discussed about applying the ethnographic methodology to gather data and the potential pitfalls one may encounter in conducting the same in urban spaces. I cast a spotlight on three key observations drawn from field experiences. They are:

- Respondents brought up emotional feelings in the nature of caste, region, and cultural practices thereby strongly discouraging my endeavour.
- My personal identity in terms of caste, and region, as well as nature of questions posed became a hindrance at the field site.
- Sensitivity to different cultures is necessary in order to conduct an effective ethnographic study.

These observations are pointing to the need for understanding the field settings so that the issues become surmountable. A researcher is to become aware of natural, social, economic, and political relations at the field site.

Discussion and Concluding thoughts

The aforementioned narratives underscore the need for revisiting our understanding of ethnographic work, especially about how ethnography is conducted in urban settings. Ethnography has long been viewed as assisting in the study of people and its culture. Ethnographic studies are designed to explore cultural phenomena where the researcher observes society from the point of view of the subject of the study. In my case the selection of ethnographic methodology allows for exploration of assumptions that undergird the processes that degrade or destroy lakes. I employed semi-structured interviews and participant observation methods to gather data. Consequently, I obtained insights into people's lives and customs that one may not share orally or would be able to articulate if asked.

In *doing ethnography* I lived within a certain context, maintained relationships with people, participated in community activities, and took elaborate notes on the experience. The best way to ask right questions beyond the literature survey and a research proposal is to go into the field and find out what people do on a day-to-day basis (Fettermen, 2010). During discussions, body language, gestures, expressions also gave me clues on their stance and thinking. There are overlaps in the way ethnographic methods were used and gave meanings to pursue ethnographic research. 'The ethnographer's hike through the social and cultural wilderness begins with fieldwork' (Fettermen, 2010).

Overall, the following key points emerge by focussing on 'doing ethnography', especially in urban settings. These include:

- a) The value of de-linking methods of data gathering and methodology from research question(s) allows to develop an ethnographic perspective that combines various methods and strategies.
- b) Doing ethnography demands that the relationship between ethnographer and the field settings is open, flexible, and adept to the changing circumstances. Further, reflexivity on the part of the ethnographer is crucial to recognise not only the embodied nature of the individual, but also to guide the entire endeavour of field data gathering.
- c) By placing emphasis on *doing ethnography*, there is a recognition that one can go to the field setting for gathering data, initially, and later consult literature to advance efforts of data gathering. This observation is in contrast to suggestions in most text books urging ethnographers to familiarise with literature and theories prior to gathering data.

- d) The positionality of ethnographer seemed crucial to gain a foothold in the field settings, although very few books suggest the specifics of how one may navigate the field-settings, especially when dynamics of caste, class, and gender are at play in abundance.

Notes:

¹ My basic understanding of rural areas has come from the experiences of gathering data for developing my M. Phil. dissertation. For instance, though raised in rural settings, I was an outsider when visiting other rural areas. Initially, I went about gathering data as a researcher. However, people did not respond. 'Researcher' seemed like a new term, an idea for them, and they encountered an unfamiliar person with no credibility. I then gathered data at familiar locations and had full understanding of the communities therein. Data gathering was not difficult partly because of the privileges and reputation my father holds in the village. Most respondents recognised me as the son of sarpanch (village head). It was also therefore relatively easy to interview people belonging to higher castes. These experiences denote the need for building credibility at the field site and that rural areas are diverse.

² For instance, a researcher has to meet the head of the village first and intimate on the purpose of the visit. Only then the researcher can meet others in the village. This is the traditional understanding in rural areas. This practice also indicates the power village head wields. A researcher has to understand and take account of socio-cultural practices and structural relationships associated with each and every activity of the village.

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Vidyapogu Pullanna is a Doctoral Student at the Centre for Regional Studies, School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad.

Research in Progress: Researcher or Consumer: Problems of Access in Studying Beauty Parlour Work

Author(s): Chayanika Pal

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Researcher or Consumer: Problems of Access in Studying Beauty Parlour Work

--- Chayanika Pal

Abstract

This paper highlights the challenges of access presented by an ethnographic exploration of how women negotiate disciplining beauty practices through paid work that involves intimate body contact when the researcher is herself a consumer of beauty services. It is drawn from research conducted for my doctoral thesis on beauty work as constituted by the practices in beauty parlours, engaged in by both clients and service providers. In order to study beauty parlour work as a social phenomenon my method was to start from the familiar space of a beauty parlour as a woman and a consumer, and capitalise on the same identity to seek admittance and participation into the experience of beauty work as a researcher. This paper is a reflection on the productive tension and methodological dilemma of simultaneously being a client as well as researcher.

Key Words: Beauty, Body, Consumer, Parlour, Practice

Introduction

This paper highlights the challenges of studying beauty practices for the female body as they comprise of distinctive engagements involving a degree of intimate contact beyond normal social interaction. Beauty practices for the female body are carried out either in the privacy of one's home or availed of as the standard services offered in a beauty parlour. Beauty parlours are a distinct cultural institution dedicated to the production of women's appearances in accordance to normative standards of beauty and fashion. Quintessential neighbourhood beauty parlours are only one part of a huge globalised beauty industry, but they are the sites where commercialised beauty practices become common sense requisites in the everyday lives of urban women. With the help of instances from my fieldwork, I will illustrate how the project of conducting research was navigation through my gendered habits of beauty consumption to access the sociological phenomena of beauty parlour work.

The ethnographic vignettes described in this paper are drawn from the research conducted for my doctoral thesis on beauty work as constituted by the practices in beauty parlours, engaged in by both clients and service providers. It is a sociological exploration of how women negotiate disciplining body practices through paid work that involves intimate body contact. The fieldwork was conducted over a period of eighteen months in the city of Delhi and intermittently for about six months in the city of Kolkata during the years 2013 and 2014. The study was conceptualised as based in Delhi and the city remained the primary location by virtue of the number of parlours and beauty professionals interviewed. Long in-depth interviews were conducted with more than twenty five women from Delhi and Kolkata in the ages of 19 to 65, as clients of beauty services. These women formed a disparate group in terms of their age, spending ability, formal employment. But continuities were reflected in their class background; all of them, even the young students I interacted with came from relatively secure economic positions, had lived their entire life in cities and received at least college level education. The beauty parlours I approached for the purposes of this study, reflected greater diversity in terms of location, size, and pricing of services. Amongst others, they ranged from an establishment that was run out of a one room home in a congested urban village flanking an industrial area in North Delhi, to a twenty year old parlour in a famous market complex in the vicinity of south-central Delhi's diplomatic and bureaucratic enclaves. While I interviewed and interacted with a large number of beauty professionals, most of whom were women, the parlours studied in detail were all 'ladies only'. Even amongst these 'ladies' beauty parlours, establishments displayed clear class differentiations through devices that built a sense of exclusion like ambience, sophisticated tools, uniformed workers speaking in English, etc. I did not find the parlour setting to be marked by any immediate and obvious caste distinctions, though the work involved intimate contact with client's body and hair. However, as will be explored later in this paper, the physical aspects of beauty work does stigmatise the worker and lead to devaluation of the work.

As the study sought to follow the work involved in beauty practices that women both beauty professionals and clients engage in, it was necessary to move beyond the confines of a beauty parlour, in order to concentrate on the experience of beauty work as services purchased and practiced by women in their homes too. I have used the term 'beauty work' to denote all the various kinds of procedures, treatments and processes that are applied to and practiced on the female body,

face, skin, hair and nails in order to bring about a relatively temporary change in appearance such that it is perceived to fit the standards of normative femininity and beauty. Though the services of gyms and spas could be a part of the concept of beauty work, it was a deliberate decision to limit the focus of the study to the gamut of beauty practices that produce specific and targeted cosmetic alterations that are immediately apparent in the appearance of a woman.

As the research questions were clarified through preliminary interactions with beauticians and clients, the 'field' moved from the space of a beauty parlour which was familiar to me as a woman and a consumer, to investigating the work involved in beauty practices. While seeking distance from my experience as consumer, as a researcher I had to simultaneously capitalise on the same identity to seek admittance and perhaps participation into the experience of beauty work. Having been a regular client of beauty services I was involved in the consumption of beauty culture and it is from the recognition of the techniques inscribed on my body that I was able to access the world of beauty parlours.

The fact that I am a consumer of beauty services and products was the starting point of my research. Though my personal experience was to a large extent the basis on which the research was conceptualised and constructed, I do not foreground myself as the subject. This paper reflects on the process of fieldwork when one feels at home or relates to the cultural group and their practices that are being studied. In this context, the book *Writing Culture* (Clifford & Marcus, 1986) has become iconic of significant and identifiable tendencies within the discipline of anthropology – including reflexivity as a necessary component of doing fieldwork, the importance of critique, a growing interest in the textuality of anthropology (the 'literary turn'), and the possibility of doing 'anthropology at home' (Collins & Gallinat, 2010). It is safe to suggest that the emphasis on reflexivity, ethnography as a form of writing, anthropology at home and the idea of auto-ethnography, relates more or less directly to the emergence of the anthropologist's self in their ethnography. In a famous book contribution entitled *The Limits of Auto-Anthropology* (1987), anthropologist Marilyn Strathern observed that auto-anthropology is anthropology carried out in the social context that produced it. She argued that auto-anthropology requires that the anthropologist's representation of the people studied and representations offered by the people themselves should involve a common set of premises about social life (Strathern, 1987). Strathern's usage of terminology is not typical.

More often, ‘autoethnography’, rather than ‘auto-anthropology’, is used in reference to fieldwork in which the ethnographic self is the only or one of the main informants involved. When researchers do autoethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity (Ellis, Adams & Buchner, 2011). The important question then becomes the extent to which we can think of ourselves as belonging to any particular group. What kind of experience do we need to claim membership of a particular group, category or community? Self-evident membership was quite problematic when one took into account the various intersections between the diffuse groups of beauticians and clients I interacted with. All the clients interviewed were not clients ‘like me’, nor were beauticians a homogenous lot. Another important aspect of conducting an ethnographic study amongst familiar people was to be very careful about implicating family and friends since it was their intimate experiences and information they shared with me that I would write about. Finally, it was imperative to ask myself why on any particular occasion I deemed my own experiences to be relevant to the ethnography and what exactly it served to illustrate.

Approaching the field and its limits

The first challenge I had in approaching prospective respondents was in conveying to them a conception of my field, that is, of the larger discipline of sociology and a sense of the particularities of my research project. Every initial interaction with a beauty parlour owner, beautician and client that I had, everything said in explanation of my study and the queries posed, was an effort in making the study intelligible to the interlocutors as well as a perpetual exercise in making visible the ‘what’ of the field to myself. The contours of the field changed and acquired specific limits when I met with outright refusals, reluctance to talk about certain things, and most importantly, when I was denied at almost every parlour save one, the permission to observe the day to day routines of work.

Instead of daily observation in any one particular parlour, the method of asking biographical questions to begin with, then leading up to the course of their careers in the case of beauticians, and the history of their parlour usage in the case of clients, provided a sense of temporality, a trajectory of interviews conducted with the same person over a period of time. It assuaged somewhat the tremendous perplexity that my study invoked in the respondents; being an urban woman and a

consumer, I was presumed to know about beauty parlours and the common beauty practices. This came to be the leitmotif of my entire study: reflexively calling upon my experience as a consumer of beauty services to inform me as a researcher engaging with beauticians, their clients and beauty practices.

The unique challenge of constantly shifting between the knowhow and entitlement of a consumer to the unfamiliar and unsettling figure of the researcher defined the process of 'doing' the ethnography. While as a researcher I was constrained from observing the beauty practices that typically require privacy, as a client paying for those treatments, I would be welcome to the experience. The intimate nature of beauty work often did not allow for my presence in any capacity between client and beautician, unless I took up either one of the roles. Most salons have screened enclosures for procedures that require female clients to take off part of their clothing. It is common to have two or three clients within a single enclosure being attended to by a couple of beauticians at the same time. There is often light-hearted conversation between client and beautician and other clients and very little expressed discomfort about the varying degrees of undressing. As a paying client, it was perfectly possible for me to be a part of the process of these intimate procedures, but the space was not open to me as an observer.

I lacked the training and skills of a beautician and could not possibly undertake the financial outlay and time necessary for the training. Engaging the services of a beautician as her client for every research encounter was ethically untenable and physically impossible. In this context, being allowed to observe home beauty sessions, that is the practice of beauticians who provide beauty services at the client's homes, gave me an important vantage position. It was yet, a position fraught with the recognition of my status as the 'friend' of either the client or the beautician. Depending on how I had gained access to the session, through contacting the client or accompanying the beautician, I was treated differently and the purview of my research seemed to alter accordingly. Recognising the differential positions of power I variously occupied according to the circumstance, was crucial to navigating the situation as it occurred as well as an important analytic consideration in the writing of the ethnographic account.

Approaching clients outside of the salon, to talk about their choice of beauty practices and salon usage took the form of long open ended interviews which more often than not became involved discussions around the broad topics of

appearance and health. Being a client myself of beauty services, it is while interacting with clients that the lines between researcher and consumer were the most difficult to maintain. Clients of beauty services who agreed to speak to me repeatedly, outside of the context of the beauty parlour were often prior acquaintances. We discussed what was assumed to be a common lexicon of terms and shared experiences. I had to be vigilant as a researcher about eliciting from clients descriptions of their expectations from a beauty procedure and their reasons for undergoing it, because as a consumer, I was usually presumed to already know. In the process however, I had to examine my own reasons for regularly undergoing many of the same beauty practices.

Consuming beauty services and the methodology dilemma

Not only did I have to reflect on my purchase of beauty practices and products, but there was an unfailing curiosity and sometimes intense scrutiny from beauticians and clients alike about my 'beauty routine'. In fact, I was introduced to the common use of the word 'routine' in the context of beauty practices, when I misunderstood a query from a beautician I had just concluded interviewing for the first time, about my 'routine'. I responded with a detailed litany of how my work days are usually organised till she broke in and explained, 'What do you do about your skin care...your skin care routine?' She then went on to recommend a 'cleansing, toning, moisturising routine' and suggested 'top of the line' skin care products that she retails to achieve the routine. She also invited me to avail of the services at her famous, eponymous salon in south Kolkata on my next visit. In order to pursue a follow up interview and the chance to interact with other professionals she employed, the next time I went to the salon, I asked for a haircut. The obligation to 'get something done' was ever present in all my interaction with beauty professionals, especially free lancing beauticians who provide services at home. In the interest of establishing a rapport and in appreciation of being given the time of day, I have availed of quite a few beauty treatments. My appearance has been appraised, judged, remarked and sometimes worked upon. Any movement within a parlour, and inside the client's home was monitored and circumscribed by ideas of appropriate appearance and behaviour for a female researcher who is also a consumer of beauty services herself. I could never claim the status of being an 'outsider', instead had to exercise caution as to not let my experience of beauty practices take center stage.

From common sense assumptions about the suitability of a woman studying beauty parlours to more academic trivialisation of what was seen to be an easily accessible ‘field’ that would not involve immersion into another way of life, or even difficult physical conditions and communication barriers, I have often had to justify the sociological merit of this research project and nature of challenges it presented. There is little doubt in my mind that being a woman enabled me in the first place to seek admittance into the parlours and speak to the beauticians as well as clients. Further, women opened their homes and allowed me to observe beauty services as they were being carried out. Clients of beauty services spoke to me about their experiences quite freely because they could relate to me as a woman belonging to a similar social background as themselves. Beauticians proved to be somewhat more circumspect and slow to build rapport with, considering that they found it difficult to understand the motivation and aim of my research.

However, during instances when clients and beauticians spoke nonchalantly about the necessity of undergoing skin lightening treatments, body hair removal as ‘cleansing’ and a requirement of heterosexual intimacy, and casually disparaged other women’s skin, weight, hair and overall appearance, it was a struggle to negotiate my own stance as a fellow consumer buying into the same discourses that those conversations were drawn from. As a woman and a familiar person, if not a friend or acquaintance, clients expected me to hold views similar to theirs regarding the value of beauty practices and products and the importance of adhering to beauty standards. Women I interacted with were often very critical of their own bodies and appearances as well as other women around them. While the presence of this internalised disciplining gaze amongst women was not a revelation, but as mentioned earlier, participation in such discussions served to blur the analytical distance I had hoped to develop while conducting the study.

While many research projects owe their conception in some degree to personal experience, my challenge lay in simultaneously being an ‘outsider’ with a research agenda as well as an ‘insider’, a client of parlours like the ones I was studying. As a client at a parlour, one is often drawn into a conversation with the attending beautician or hair dresser or is privy to such conversations happening around. It was tempting to use eavesdropping as a method of collecting information, and indeed, overheard remarks were instrumental in leading me to ask questions that might not have occurred by design. Interactions that started as an interview session would become invitations to experience the services of the parlour or the beautician would, in an attempt to display her professional prowess

discuss the problems with my skin and hair and offer to work on them. Sometimes, I did accept these invitations to be able to continue the interaction with the beautician and observe her at work. However, it remained my sincere endeavor to convey to the beautician that on such occasions I was simultaneously client and researcher. It seemed to me during this process that beauty professionals found it more satisfactory to explain aspects of their work while actually doing the work.

Truly, distinguishing between the researcher's self and client's self was often quite difficult. Even when I went into a beauty parlour solely as a client to get my hair cut, or eyebrows shaped, I was not immune to observing the surroundings, the paraphernalia and routines of work, the discussions going on among the workers, etc. I actively made mental notes of these and reflected on my own experience to revise and inform the questions I asked next of my respondent clients and beauticians. As a rule though, I have conscientiously avoided representing any of my personal experiences as a client while writing the ethnography, unless it was made explicit to the beautician that the interaction will be recorded in writing and may be portrayed in my thesis as such. It is the aim of my study to understand beauty parlour work from the perspective of beauticians and their clients as they negotiate the norms of feminine beauty. I am a client of beauty services, and that makes the researcher a part of the subject, but the story is certainly not mine alone, or only an illustrative account of how I have conducted the study.

To understand how my position as consumer of beauty services affects the process and product of ethnography, let me go back to the concept of autoethnography that has been touched upon in the introduction. Autoethnography has been defined as an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno) (Ellis, 2004). The forms of autoethnography differ in how much emphasis is placed on the study of others, the researcher's self and interaction with others, traditional analysis, and the interview context, as well as on power relationships. In reflexive ethnographies, the researcher's personal experience becomes important primarily in how it illuminates the culture under study. Reflexive/narrative ethnographies exist on a continuum ranging from starting research from the ethnographer's biography, to the ethnographer studying her or his life alongside cultural member's lives, to ethnographic memoirs (Ellis, 2004, p. 50) or 'confessional tales' (Van Maanen, 1988 as cited in Ellis and

Buchner, 2000) where the ethnographer's backstage research endeavours become the focus of investigation (Ellis, 2004). Feminism has contributed significantly to legitimising the autobiographical voice associated with reflexive ethnography. Many feminist writers have advocated starting research from one's own experience for e.g. Dorothy Smith (1979). Thus, it would seem, researchers incorporate to various degrees, their personal experience and standpoints in their research by starting with a story about themselves, explaining their personal connection to the project or by using personal knowledge to help in the research project.

As I understand it, feminist reflexive ethnography challenges both the nature of the insider/outsider dichotomy and the relations of power between the researcher and researched that the dichotomy inherently inscribes. It can be said that the feminist ethnography project has been interested in exploring the ways in which one is simultaneously an insider and outsider, and how different aspects of these relational concepts come to the fore in different moments. In fact, one would do well to be cautious of 'sisterly identification' (Visweswaran, 1997) and using the term 'friend' and 'informant' interchangeably without adequate reflection on the intrinsic contradictions of power that are masked in such relations. In the context of my study, this sort of broad gender identification or generalisation would also lead to a simple deterministic stand on how to perceive the beauty practices, the hugely profitable industry built around them and the impact they have on women's lives.

The constant concern and central exercise in writing about commercialised beauty practices is to ascertain the methodological position in a fierce debate on the extent to which they represent women's subordination or can be seen as expressions of women's choice and agency. This dilemma is reflected in the words of Kathy Davis in *Reshaping the Female Body* (1995) where she investigates why women opt for cosmetic surgery, how they explain the decision and how they view it in the light of the outcome of the surgeries. Davis refers to her attempt, as a

balancing act to understand the nature of contradiction between women being agents of negotiating their desires in the given social constraints on the one hand, and a feminist critique of this "cosmetic craze" on the other. It has involved understanding how cosmetic surgery may be the best possible course of action for a woman, while, at the same time,

problematizing the situational constraints that make cosmetic surgery an option (p. 5).

While cosmetic surgery is quite removed from the ubiquity of beauty parlours with the body modifications being of a more permanent nature than those brought about by beauty practices, how they become imperative actions for women is a difference of degree, not kind.

Postmodern feminist theorists, most influentially, Judith Butler's (1990) theory on gender performativity, inspired the notion among theorists that the beauty practices of femininity adopted by unconventional actors, or outrageously, could be transgressive. Other postmodern feminists such as Elizabeth Grosz (1994) argued that the body is simply a 'text' that can be written on, and that tattooing, cutting, might be techniques of 'writing'.

Radical feminist Sheila Jeffrys forcefully argues against this entire strain of feminist and postmodern theory, in her book *Beauty and Misogyny* (2005). She is critical of the narrative of choice, (as argued by the liberal feminists) that women apparently have in a market situation, that makes the exploitative nature of beauty practices seem empowering.

Clients of beauty services I interacted with, presented great variations in the frequency and volume of their parlour use. While the variations could be linked to factors like age, employment, marital status, disposable income and personal predilections, the most common reason given for visiting a parlour was the need to maintain appropriate appearances. In fact women hardly ever referred to any glamourised conception of beauty when talking about their parlour usage. Rather, they referred to the instances of going to the beauty salon as a 'grooming' necessity. The pattern among my respondents very clearly indicated that some beauty practices are more frequently availed of than others and these were referred to commonly as 'grooming' practices. Body hair removal techniques like waxing and threading to shape eyebrows, regular haircuts and facial treatments were part of 'grooming'. In effect, those beauty practices that were availed regularly and could be distinguished from markedly luxuriant or indulgent beauty treatments that were only occasionally undertaken could be classified into the category of 'grooming'. These beauty practices seemed to be considered minimum necessities and ordinary or mundane requirements that didn't need a self-conscious justification of purchase on the part of the consumer. However,

whether the reasons for availing beauty services range from seeking an escape from the demands of paid employment and stress of household duties, or are investments in the aesthetic performativity workplaces and social status require, the work done on the body can be seen as motivated by the constraint to produce social bodies that continuously strive to live up to a complex sense of appropriate self-images.

The beauty salon is at the heart of ambivalence, the eschewing of 'beauty', while regularising, proliferating and making common-sense, certain practices of skin and hair care and modification, into the standard routines of beauty. Paula Black (2004) wrote about her experience of participating in beauty treatments and the irreducibility of women's use of beauty salons to a framework of social construct of oppressive femininity while researching the beauty industry in UK. According to Black, 'ordinary' women who visit parlours wish to 'make the best of themselves'. She argues that women enjoy the feminised space, seeking a sense of escape and pleasure. Their experience can not only be reduced to 'catch all phrase of beauty' (Black, 2004).

The aim here is not to achieve anything that would be described as 'beauty' by the clients, but rather to achieve an appearance which the woman believes will enable her to go un-noticed-to achieve normality within the bounds of an ascriptive heterosexual femininity (Black, 2002. p. 3).

I recognised from my own experience as a client of beauty services, the internalised pressure to present an appropriately groomed feminine appearance and yet have the agency to negotiate which aspects of my body and appearance I wanted worked upon. This sense of control was reflected also in my ability to make choices as a consumer in a parlour of which services and products I wished to purchase. However, as many client respondents reported, going to the beauty parlour is also often fraught with a kind of anxiety that comes from having to submit bodies and faces to the intense scrutiny of people who in their roles as beauty and hair 'experts' pronounce rather severe judgments on client's appearances in order to sell their services and products.

The often experienced tension between client and beautician is indicative of the ambivalence present in every effort made by women to aspire to a norm of feminine beauty ostensibly without invoking that norm or overt acknowledgement

of the hold that the norm has over our aesthetic sensibility, sexuality, sense of self. To sum up in the words of Bartky (1998),

Feminine bodily discipline has this dual character: on the one hand, no one is marched off for electrolysis at the end of a rifle, nor can we fail to appreciate the initiative and ingenuity displayed by countless women in an attempt to muster the rituals of beauty. Nevertheless, insofar as the disciplinary practices of femininity produce a 'subjected and practiced', an inferiorized body, they must be understood as aspects of a far larger discipline, an oppressive and inegalitarian system of sexual subordination (p. 76).

Researcher, client and beauty professional

Adding to the negotiation of the dilemma of understanding beauty practices through the lens of choice versus subordination, the practicalities of being able to observe first-hand the processes of how beauty services are carried out involved a nuanced compromise between the roles of researcher and consumer. As previously outlined, following beauty practices was made possible mostly through connections made as a client of beauty services. It was assumed by both clients and beauticians that I had some prior knowledge and experience of the common repertoire of beauty services. On occasions, I was called upon to use this familiarity in order to observe and participate in the work of beauty. To illustrate let me present my account of accompanying a beautician for a bridal make-up assignment and being co-opted inadvertently into the role of her assistant. The following instance was one of the few times when, I was identified as allied with the beauty service provider and not as a client. It served as an opportunity to understand the circumstances of the beautician's work, especially when it takes place outside of the parlour.

J, a forty five year old beautician with years of experience in a well-known beauty chain, had recently started operating her own parlour from a modest one room ground floor shop space in a resettlement colony near Dwarka in South West Delhi. The parlour was set up with basic essentials and looked simple and homely. At the time of my interaction with her, J worked alone in the parlour and had no employees. Possibly for the lack of a helping hand, J invited me to accompany her on the assignment of a 'bridal' that she had been 'booked' for in the same locality. She would take permission from the client on my behalf and I

would be required to help her as necessary. When asked what exactly I would need to do, she replied off-handedly, ‘just help with little bit of make-up, eye liner, lip stick, nothing that you don’t know how to apply’.

Upon reaching, J introduced me as her friend who is conducting research on ‘beauty’ at Delhi University and therefore wanted to observe her work. Inside the single floor house with a plain exterior, we were led into an untidy tube lit bedroom crammed with a large wooden bed, steel almirahs, and flowery half curtains on grilled windows shut against the afternoon sun. J and I were the constant objects of curiosity of all the gathered family and relatives who were however not allowed to enter the bedroom while J worked with the bride. The bride’s younger sister, in high school herself, was very intrigued by my presence and wanted to understand what exactly it is that I study, including the details of my beauty course work. She did not seem entirely convinced when I told her I study Sociology.

The sister’s waist length hair needed to be styled into curls. J gave me a quick tutorial on how to use a curling iron. Without the benefit of prior practice with the contraption, I ended up tangling the girl’s hair repeatedly. Yet, instead of being remonstrated with, I was further enlisted to help with the bride’s mother’s make-up. This endeavor was not quite successful either. Again, my evident ineptitude was not held against me, at least not overtly expressed. I wondered if J’s perceived lapses, if any, would have been left unremarked so easily. Was it my status as ‘researcher’ even though my project was not entirely understood, that distinguished me from the role of professional beautician’s assistant and made my mistakes excusable?

At the end of the evening, J expressed her appreciation for the work I had done as her helper. Half-jokingly she told me that I should start carrying a small bag with cosmetics and other essential beauty products around. ‘*Ab tum yeh kaam dekh dekh ke kitna kuch seekh gaye ho*’ (after having observed so much you have learnt much about this work). I was elated by her remark, because it sounded like the breakthrough moment of acceptance that ethnographers describe in the course of their fieldwork.

While this was not the only instance where I was required to help in the process of beauty procedures, it is important because the beautician here was outside of the physical site of her beauty parlour, the very establishment that lets her identify as

a professional and legitimises her work as skilled practice. I was unsure if my presence would add to any sense of vulnerability she might have regarding a lucrative assignment, a success which would bring much needed visibility to her new business. However, at the client's home, it became clear to me that a 'researcher' in tow, might have actually helped boost her credentials, by the sheer novelty of such a happening. The client and her family clearly perceived J to be the subject of my research, not themselves or their interaction with me. This perception was often shared by other client respondents too. I had started the study from the position of a client, and my association with clients was sharply brought into focus whenever I had the opportunity to observe home beauty sessions. As will be evidenced by the next vignette, beauticians perceived me as a curious friend of the client who must be humoured for the sake of good business relations with the client. The client on the other hand, usually displayed a proprietorial pride in having provided access for my research and therefore assumed the position of a confidante or assistant involved in the study being conducted.

I was introduced to R, a young woman who is the 'regular' beautician at a high end gated residential cum commercial building in South Kolkata through an elderly acquaintance who is a resident of that building and R's client. S, the client, had already given me prior interviews as a client of beauty services. She had offered to set up a meeting with R by engaging her services that day.

Before R arrived for the appointment, S, a soft spoken silver haired woman of sixty five, sitting in the air conditioned and tastefully furnished drawing room of her fifth floor, three bedroom home, casually remarked that at her age, she does not need any beauty treatments. She told me that 'calling her (R) home is just a way of supporting the poor girl...I don't get anything much done, just some massage and pedicures'. She also cautioned me not to 'expect much' from the interaction, because R was just 'a novice' and only had 'basic training'.

When R arrived, S introduced me as the 'didi' who is doing research on beauticians. "*Tor kaaj niye kichu jiggesh korbe*" (She will ask you about your work). I tried to explain that I was researching both beauticians and clients, and in this particular situation I would like to observe her work if possible. R was acutely aware of S's presence while responding to my questions and S kept adding to or explaining her answers to me. When I asked her about whether she feels comfortable about working in the client's home R rushed to assure me that

in fact her clients are all her well-wishers and there could not be safer places than their homes. With the help of vivid anecdotes, R distanced herself from the figure of the ‘*make-up kora, dress kora*’ (someone wearing make-up and dressed up) parlour employee who seemed to stand in opposition to her, the beautician who depends on the kind patronage of her maternal clients.

S referred to R with an easy ‘*tui*’, the form the address used in Bangla for those younger to one self and possibly inferior position. When the work was completed, we moved to the drawing room. For a moment, R seemed very unsure about where she should seat herself. Noticing R’s discomfort, S quickly intervened with these words, ‘*Eikhane bosh* (gesturing to the sofa set), *tui ki kokhono asishni ekhane, naki?*’ (Sit here, seems like you’ve never visited before, as if?)

Together, S and R both seemed to play the respective roles of benevolent motherly benefactor and simple innocent girl trying to earn an honest way of life, possibly as a reaction to my presence and the questions I asked of them. The discourse of working in the private space of the client’s home as a safe and respectable ‘inside’ came into sharp relief against the lack of S’s acknowledgement of R as a professional. R’s services were further devalued by S’s disavowal of requiring ‘beauty’ treatments. Through the very warm bonhomie that I witnessed between S and R, the beautician’s exertions were cast almost as care giving to an elderly patroness. After R left, S repeated to me, ‘See, she is a nice young girl in bad circumstances. Obviously her service is not of salon standard, but it is good enough for me at this age’.

Sociologists of the body such as Wolkowitz (2002, 2006) have proposed the concept of ‘body work’ as a means for further developing a theory of the labour involved in this kind of service. Gimlin (2007) distinguishes among several types of ‘body work’, including work performed on oneself and work performed on others, also called ‘body labor’ (Kang, 2003). Gimlin, whose own work is on power and negotiation in hair salons, gives an overview of the different (although frequently overlapping) forms of body work that have been identified in sociological literature. Apart from the work on oneself and on others, the management of embodied emotional experience and display, and the production or modification of bodies through work also qualify as ‘body work’ (Gimlin, 2007).

Evidently, beauty practices as engaged in by both clients and beauticians firmly falls under the purview of body work. However it is important to recognise that freelancing beauticians like R may be more susceptible to the pitfalls of being engaged in a form of labour that is gendered and demanded as natural. Whereas, for clients, the same body work may be packaged as relaxation and pleasure. As a researcher, I had to tread carefully between the relationships clients and beauticians shared that were cordial and friendly, but also loaded with an awareness of differences of status and class. It was further complicated by the intimate body work which required trust and familiarity as much as it also required distancing and boundary maintenance strategies. The place of work, whether it was the parlour or the clients' home significantly changed the dynamic of interaction between the beautician, the client and me, the researcher.

Conclusion

The beauty parlour is a site par excellence to understand the interplay of normative standards and lived experience at the intersection of gender, class and commercial beauty practices. The challenge of conducting an ethnographic study of the work of beauty parlours meant understanding how my identity as a researcher was informed and conflicted by my embodied habits of consumption and a thorough exploration of my own internalised norms of femininity and beauty. My experiences were significant in the analytic context of how they played into the interactions I had with beauty professionals and clients of beauty services. As a paying customer, I was an 'insider' in the world of the beauty parlour, but ironically, it was only as a researcher 'outsider' that the seeming limitations of access led to the most germane revelations about the nature of beauty work. The privacy required for beauty practices revealed the social meanings attached to the work by both those who provide the services and those who receive them.

This paper sought to describe the problems in approaching subjects of research that touch upon aspects of the personal life and individual choices of the researcher herself. It explores the idea of using the self as ethnographic resource, without making the account of my experiences of beauty work the sole focus of the ethnography. Research at home has always been the turf of sociology as a discipline as opposed to social and cultural anthropology being the study of 'other' cultures. As outlined in the introduction, it was the purpose of this paper to interrogate the degree to which I could claim to be at home amongst clients of

beauty services and how that affected the process of research. It documents the fact that researching beauty work required impinging on prior personal relationships and the dilemma of opening to sociological analysis the opinions, experiences and practices of friends and family. The ethnographic vignettes that the paper concludes with, reflect on the contrasting positions I found myself in vis-a-vis clients and beauty professionals under different circumstances and the significance of the interactions therein.

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Chayanika Pal is a Doctoral Student at the Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi.

Conversation: Margaret Abraham in conversation with Labinot Kunushevci

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Margaret Abraham¹ in conversation with Labinot Kunushevci²

[Transcript of the interview held on March 5, 2017]

“Students are the ones who have the courage and ability to challenge the status quo and fight injustice. They have a profoundly important role to play in bringing about social transformation.”

---Margaret Abraham

Introduction

Margaret Abraham is a sociologist, a writer, a researcher, teacher and an advocate for social justice. Known to most as Maggie, Margaret Abraham is Professor of Sociology and was the Special Advisor to the Provost for Diversity Initiatives at Hofstra University, New York (2008-2015). She is the current President of the International Sociological Association (ISA) and was the Vice President, Research of the ISA from 2010 to 2014. She also served as the American Sociological Association Representative to the International Sociological Association for 2010-2014. She is the author of the books: *Speaking the Unspeakable: Marital Violence Among South Asian Immigrants in the United States* (2000); *Making a Difference: Linking Research and Action* (2012) and *Interrogating Gender, Violence, and the State in National and Transnational Contexts* (2016). This is the first interview of Maggie for Kosova public and sociologists and is part of a scientific project with interviews of contemporary sociologists around the world. This research is a way to project the intersection of international and national sociology through the interview of prominent sociologists. In this interview we have discussed these topics: Abraham's experience with sociology, experience in the University of India and the differences with USA; The potential of the students in front of ideological and political tendencies for the transfer of university in device of maintenance of status quo – the case of India; The possibilities and ways of involving of small countries in transition, such as Kosova, in Activities and World Congresses of Sociology (ISA); The effect of African, Asian and Balkans migrations toward Europe; The influence of media in cultural identity and Kosova's integration in EU.

¹ President of the International Sociological Association (ISA)

² Graduate student of Sociology at the University of Prishtina, Kosovo

Labinot Kunushevci (LK): You have an intellectual experience as a Professor of Sociology at the Department of Sociology in the Hofstra University in New York, USA. Can you share with us something from your experience in the University? I'm also interested to know about your experience of sociology in university at India; the programs, curriculum and subjects; the paradigm on which sociology is being developed; the relation between the University and the market; challenges between professors and students, etc? What are the differences and what are the perspectives that in these two countries offer?

Margaret Abraham (MA): Thank you for inviting me to do this interview and the opportunity to share my perspective as a sociologist in a deeply troubled world. To the first part of your question, on my experience at Hofstra University: I joined the Department of Sociology in 1990. Since then, I have been fortunate to be part of an academic community that is engaged in issues which matter to civil society. I have always believed that apart from academic research and building strong theoretical frameworks and rigorous methodology, the sociologist is also duty-bound to proactively engage in addressing, in real time, the social problems of our world. Hence, I am committed to combining research, teaching and community action in addressing social justice concerns, especially the problem of domestic violence. It was while working at Hofstra that I got the opportunity to link research and activism that led to my first book *Speaking the Unspeakable: Marital Violence Among South Asian Immigrants in the United States*. This was the first book on the South Asian Immigrant community in the US and helped to shift the issue of domestic violence from a private problem to a public issue. I should also mention that I am glad that I am at a university where the faculty members are part of a faculty union (American Association of University Professors, AAUP). To me this also underlines the academic community's active social engagement.

Coming to specifics, the Department of Sociology in Hofstra University is focused primarily on undergraduate learning. The strength of our Department is our faculty who combine a strong commitment to teaching sociology with a commitment to social justice issues, many linking research and activism, community building in ways that connect global issues and local concerns. Our mission is to educate our students on the enormous possibilities of sociology and how it can offer important ways to examine, understand, and influence the world we live in.

The cost of education, particularly private education in the US is expensive. Some of our students are the first generation in their family to go to college. These families make considerable sacrifices to send their children to the university. Our department curriculum is geared not only to develop critical thinking, analytical and communication skills but hopefully equips our students, to successfully pursue further studies and research. It also provides them with the grounding to pursue careers of their choice and become active and informed citizens.

Let me also add that neoliberalism, increasing marketisation and commodification of education have posed a whole set of new challenges to higher education. A worrisome predicament many academic institutions in the US (and in other parts of the world too) are faced with is the growing pressure to run universities like large scale business corporations with profit as a prime focus. Education is increasingly defined in narrow ways, shaped by perceptions that focus on short-term material benefits. Such narrow defined specificities and immediate tangible outcomes often do not really consider the value that sociology and the social sciences can bring to understanding and tackling many of the social problems that confront our societies.

In terms of challenges between professors and students, I do not want to generalise but education and teaching are changing. The paradigms for teaching, publishing, learning and collaborating are continuously being reshaped. We are in an age where digital technology has transformed the terrain of education in many ways. While it offers myriad ways for both teachers and students to garner information, interact, broaden horizons and opportunities for learning, it also poses considerable challenges in navigating and sieving through the overabundance of information and misinformation. Another challenge in the US, and I understand in other parts of the world, is the transformation of the student into a 'customer' who has to be satisfied and entertained, rather than as a collaborator engaged in a shared pursuit of learning. What worries me most as a sociologist is that the current ethos where everything is linked to monetary worth is unhealthy and dangerous and cannot build a just, caring society. On my part, I think many of us as teachers have to do a better job in sparking the sociological imagination of our students and show them how sociology can be meaningful in multiple ways in understanding and transforming our world. Importantly, as teachers we must not lose sight of our responsibility to ensure that the education we impart to our students helps increase their chances of getting suitable jobs in the real world.

In terms of my own courses, although each course has its specific objectives, as a teacher I have four broad goals when teaching undergraduate sociology courses. My primary goal is to demonstrate to my students, through reading material and class lectures, how sociology offers important ways to examine, understand, and influence the world we live in. A second goal is to develop in students the important skills of critical thinking and analysis. A third important goal is to inculcate in my students a global perspective. That is, I strive to broaden their application of sociological theories and methods to global issues and encourage them to understand the interdependence between the 'local' and the 'global' in contemporary society, be it in terms of economics, politics, or culture. Finally, a fourth goal is to address the complexity of issues of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and citizenship in understanding social relations and social institutions both within the United States and globally.

You asked me to compare the study and practice of sociology in Indian and US universities but as I have not taught in India, I am not in a position to say much on this subject. I did my BA Honors and MA in Sociology from Delhi University in India but I came to the US in the fall of 1984 as a graduate student and completed my PhD in Sociology from the Department of Sociology at Syracuse University. That said, my teachers and professors who taught me in India did initiate me into the wonderful world of sociology that has sparked an enduring love for sociology and interest in power relations. I should also say that many of the sociologists in India today are doing incredible work and are an important constituent of civil society. Through their research, teaching and active participation in addressing issues of contemporary social relevance they have drawn attention to inequality and injustices and the need to ensure academic freedom and human rights. Many Indian sociologists have forged an impressive form of public sociology grounded in civic engagement.

LK: From the student's perspective, recent events at many Indian universities have had a national impact in terms of challenging established views and ideologies. In your article *India's Student Protests: Struggle for a Better World*, published in ISA Forum 2016, you have spoken for this topic and you said that sociologists have been prominent in their support. Also in the past there have been other impactful student revolts, as in 1968 across Europe and America. My question is this: while we are living in the era of the decentralisation of

knowledge, what is the potential of students regarding tendencies that university can turn into an instrument of keeping the 'status-quo' instead of fighting it?

MA: For over a year now, India has become the site of a series of student protests that have challenged the status quo and laid bare the fault lines of a society trapped in the all too familiar neoliberal culture that has heightened inequality and injustice. Apart from questioning extremist jingoism that masquerades as nationalism and the stifling of dissent and freedom of expression under the present right-wing BJP government, these youth also fight against communal, caste and gender discrimination.

The origins of the recent unrest in universities across India can be traced to the events surrounding the suicide of Rohith Vemula, an Indian student scholar, doing his PhD in Sociology from University of Hyderabad in January 2016. He was a member of the Ambedkar Students Association which, apart from highlighting the discrimination against Dalits who are at the lowest end of the caste hierarchy, had questioned the death penalty of Yakub Memon who was allegedly involved in the Mumbai blasts of 1993. It was students from the right-wing Akhil Bharitya Vidhyarti Parishad (ABVP) who complained that ASA was involved in 'casteist and anti-national activities', on the basis of which the Vice Chancellor suspended Vemula and four others and withdrew his scholarship. Rohith's poignant suicide note is a damning critique of unequal society.

Rohith Vemula's suicide became the catalyst for protests across the country, and in the last year students have defined and shaped much of the national discourse. Protests have universities in Hyderabad, Jadavpur, Allahabad, Jodhpur and Delhi. Universities have become volatile, even violent locations where right-wing and left-wing groups, with active political support, have clashed over issues of nationalism and patriotism, freedom of expression and dissent. The Central Government of the right-wing Nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has predictably thrown its weight behind the right-wing forces and ignored the violence unleashed by its student body, the ABVP. Even as I speak, there is an uneasy calm in Delhi University after a week of violence and protest marches.

I do believe that students have a profoundly important role to play in bringing about social transformation. Like in other spheres, students are not a homogenous entity and are sharply polarised. Their politics, especially in multi-cultural societies like India, are often defined and shaped by ethnicity, class, caste, race

and gender. Although a university education is meant to inoculate the student against such a narrow world view, the grim reality is that the political class uses the politics of identity to attract youth who can then be manipulated by those in power to maintain the status quo. But I will say that students are also the ones who have the courage and ability to challenge the status quo and fight injustice. For instance, students, professors, artists, activists responded to the tragic circumstances of Rohith Vemula's death to raise broader issues of discrimination against Dalits. Students across the world have been at the forefront of struggles to redress injustices which point to the potency of youth power in the pursuit of social justice. However, in our fractious post-truth world, the young are also drawn to right wing populism and narrow constructs of narcissistic nationalism instead of global humanism. However, the onus is on us as teachers to educate and nurture the young to become prime proponents for a more humane, caring and inclusive society.

You mention the decentralisation of knowledge about which I want to sound a cautionary note. Yes, there has been some decentralisation of knowledge which is good to see as it challenges traditional hierarchies of knowledge and involves great mechanisms for mobilisation for all kinds of struggles and social movements. We know that technology has been creatively used by students in struggles but also, conversely, used as an instrument of power by those who control these technologies. Technology, which has brought about many advantages and opportunities, has also created new avatars of hierarchies of knowledge production/centralisation of information and control of knowledge flows by the corporations that own them. We in civil society will need to consider this more closely and hopefully we will learn more on this from sociologists and researchers who are currently examining these processes and outcomes.

LK: You are the President of the International Sociological Association (ISA 2014-2018). In 2014 the ISA World Congress of Sociology in Yokohama was held in Japan, and in 2018 XIX ISA World Congress of Sociology will be held in Toronto, Canada. How can the projects, ideas and results of the ISA reflect for the small countries in transition, such is Kosova? What were the results of the Congress and what is the perspective that offers? What is the possibility to find ways to involve them in the ISA World Congresses?

MA: Well let me say that I was fortunate that my predecessor Michael Burawoy (ISA President from 2010-2014) who has a deep commitment to Public Sociology

conceived of the Congress theme of ‘Facing an Unequal World: Challenges for Global Sociology,’ for Yokohama in 2014. This was an important Congress that drew attention to the inequalities confronted by civil society and the threat to our discipline posed by increased marketisation. His project of creating an active sociological community through *Global Dialogue* an on-line magazine published by the ISA, and his collaborative efforts to use electronic media beyond the discipline’s academic borders, to reach out to sociologists in various countries were important for building a global sociological constituency. Also ISAs earliest electronic bulletin, *Esymposium* was initiated by the current ISA VP for Publications, Vineeta Sinha and the *Social Justice and Democratization Space* that I initiated with Sage are important platforms for greater and more equal communication opportunities on issues pertinent to a spectrum of countries including, I hope, for Kosova. The ISA Secretariat headed by Executive Secretary, Izabela Barlinska, has made a concerted effort over the years to provide more information on membership benefits and facilitate greater participation of sociologist in ISA activities.

An important new project that I have initiated as ISA Presidential project is the *Global Mapping of Sociologists for Social Inclusion* or GMSSI. One of my presidential commitments is to significantly increase ISA’s membership, addressing known geographic gaps so that our organisation is truly global, yet committed to the inclusion of the diverse sociological perspectives that can promote the forms of intellectual engagement and cross-pollination of ideas that are germane to ISA’s mission. We must creatively and collaboratively consider realistic avenues to build our institutional capacity to support sociologists, who encounter multiple barriers, economic and political, which impede participation in global exchanges. The GMSSI platform is intended to identify, connect, and enable global collaborations in sociology, and particularly to support sociologists who encounter multiple barriers, economic and political, which impede their participation in global exchanges. We hope that it will assist in developing sociological networks among the global community of sociologists. Through GMSSI, we hope to partially counter existing hierarchies of knowledge production in our discipline and association and strengthen dialogue among sociologists across the world. An extremely important part is to facilitate our mission of increasing the visibility of sociologists by compiling a database of sociologists across the world with their areas of expertise that can then help us in strengthening connections and collaborations or be an important resource for sustained interaction with the media on a range of issues. I see this as a critical

project that is required as part for the 21st century global community/networks where sociologists can play a pivotal role in global, transnational and local contexts and exchanges. This will be the first such project of this scope and format that brings together sociologists across the world in one integrated database. We will be able to strengthen the use of social media as sociologists to draw attention to complex contexts and concerns of our world.

Another ISA presidential global project to explore and coordinate a global network of sociologists and stake holders, who will draw upon local, national, regional and global experiences to provide solutions for mitigating gendered and intersectional violence. The specific goals and methodology will be worked together by the collaborating partners. I hope that such a project will help guide areas for further research, contribute to developing international norms, policies and practices in eliminating violence against women. It will also highlight the valuable contributions that sociological research can make to the study and reduction of violence against women. I have also tried meeting with individuals and groups working on violence against women and discussing the global project on ending gendered and intersectional violence. A special issue on *Gender, Violence and State in National and Transnational Contexts*, co-edited with Evangelia Tastsoglou for *Current Sociology* has provided some important insights. This volume includes a collection of ten original articles by international scholars and was published by SAGE in June 2016.

The XIX ISA World Congress of Sociology with its theme of ‘Power, Violence and Justice: Reflections, Responses and Responsibilities’ was held in Toronto in July 2018 (<http://www.isa-sociology.org/en/conferences/world-congress/toronto-2018/>). I chose this theme as I consider it particularly pertinent to the times we live. Since the inception of the discipline, sociologists have been concerned with power, violence and justice. Current social, economic and political challenges enhance their relevance. This Congress focuses on how scholars, public intellectuals, policy makers, journalists and activists from diverse fields can and do contribute to our understanding of power, violence and justice. The issue of power, violence and justice is pertinent in the context of history, structural and relational aspects of Kosova too. It is pertinent to issues of transition, what is going on presently and hopes for the future in many parts of the world. These are global issues but the context matters and that is why we need to understand these issues by noting the importance of contextual global sociology.

In terms of involvement in the XIX ISA World Congress, the primary way is by presenting a paper. I am committed to increasing representation from countries that encounter difficulties in participation in Congresses. I know that costs are a barrier to participation and we are trying to partially address this through registration grants. We have tried to increase opportunities for emerging and early career sociologists by seeking opportunities for small grants for junior scholars from underrepresented countries. In 2012 at the 2nd ISA Forum, when I was ISA VP Research, I initiated a session called *In conversation* which is an opportunity for graduate students to meet senior scholars in an informal way. This format is now an integral part of the ISA Congresses and ISA Forum and is being continuously enhanced by an ISA EC subcommittee on Junior Scholars to increase opportunities for these students. There will also be other kinds of sessions that are placed on the website.

I also want to take this opportunity to encourage individual scholars as well as institutions (e.g. National Sociological Associations and Departments of Sociology) to join the ISA and thus belong to an international community of sociologists, receive news from the ISA, and have access to SAGE publications. <http://www.isa-sociology.org/en/membership/individual-membership/benefits/>

LK: From your perspective, what might the consequences of emigration from African, Asian, but also from the Balkans towards Europe be, while you are known for your studies in Asian Diaspora and Migration (India)?

MA: Migration is a key issue of our time. Migration has been and still is a central part of the global economy and the political reorganisation of the world. Migration has always been and remains a matter of ‘boundaries’, ‘rights’, and ‘unequal opportunities’, and it can be an issue of social exclusion and a cause of new forms of social inequalities. I think the question that has to be addressed and understood is why we see emigration taking place and what the roots of the current flows of migration are. How have globalisation, neo-liberalism, corporate expansionism and state collusion, ongoing wars contributed to the current flows of migration? What are the causes and, conditions that have led to migration to Europe? In the context of migration, I think we have to also address the rising xenophobia, and anti-immigrant sentiments that are being fuelled by right-wing populist politicians and governments. The consequences are the closing of borders and boundaries in various parts of the world. Instead of targeting the real perpetrators of an unequal system, the resentment and frustration have

metamorphosed into a frontal attack on multiculturalism, secularism, LGBT rights, and so forth. Far from being a divide between the haves and have-nots, the polarisation we see is based on ethnocentrism, xenophobia, exclusionary politics, and religious fundamentalism. To this extent, globalisation has only universalised material goods and open markets, but the neoliberal character of it has given rise to hyper-nationalism and insularity where groups and individuals compete for personal advantage at the cost of humaneness and justice. A deadly offshoot of the mass anger is the heightening of hostilities between groups within nations, with the polarisation taking the ugly forms of racism, casteism, religious fanaticism, and majoritarianism. While there is clearly voluntary migration for a spectrum of reasons, the mass migrations that we see today are due to the ongoing wars and conflicts that have forced people to be displaced, dislocated and dispossessed. This humanitarian issue needs more sociological attention.

LK: Via digital technology, most of us are in touch on an everyday basis with a diversity of cultures and opinions. Distance is no longer any barrier. In this context, in a recent ethnographic research in Kosova, referring to the impact that comes from the TV series, like Saree wearing - the traditional attire of India, in ceremonies as wedding are applied by some women in Kosova. Certainly in India there are various experiences of the impact of media, so how do you explain the impact of the mass-media in cultural identity?

MA: Given India's heterogeneity in terms of religion, language, region among other, there are different life worlds that people inhabit. The impact of the media in this sense varies. However, what we have to understand is that Bollywood is a huge industry and that films and their depictions often dominate the cultural imagination of vast segments of the population. As such exchanges of gifts, bridal wear, clothing, henna designs on the hand are both symbols of culture and a source of consumerism, both in India and abroad.

LK: Since we are a small country that has just recently become independent, we are still facing many challenges, especially in the process of visa liberalisation and EU integration. This isolation is causing us inability of free movement, contact with other European countries and cultures, integration in the European job opportunity and to get known with European market, while 60 percent of our population is under 25 years of age. We feel the need of integrating and belonging in the European Union. What would you suggest our society to do in order for Kosova to integrate into Europe?

MA: Well frankly, I don't have a simple direct answer to this, specifically in the context of Kosova nor do I have the knowledge base to adequately address this. I will say that today the EU has to confront numerous challenges, including a decline in trust of the value of a neoliberal EU by significant segments of the population, capitalised by right wing national populism of political parties. In general, integration or opening of borders and boundaries for freedom of movement should be considered good and ideally should be put forth as a fundamental right. However, what one has to understand is what this integration implies in this context and what it entails. What are the conditions and processes? Does such integration exacerbate or decrease existing inequalities? What are the consequences of integration and does it really translate to a common ground for common good. It also implies a better understanding of what 'belonging' in the European Union implies for Kosova. Yes with 60 percent of your population under 25 years of age --- clearly there has to be a deeper understanding of what it will take to address the challenges of isolation that you note and to move toward greater mobility, economic, political and social participation beyond Kosova. I think the youth have incredible potential to be the prime movers in building such societies. I would like to think that the youth of Kosova, such as yourself will play an active role through critical thinking, civic engagement, dialogue and debate, through a deeper understanding of history and context to address problems confronting Kosova and help creatively build pathways where the rights and benefits are not the prerogative of just a select few but secure the safety, dignity, and wellbeing of all. This is the one of the challenges we sociologists have to take on both locally and globally.
