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I am pleased to present the 18th issue of *Explorations*, which includes eight articles, one commentary, one conversation, and two book reviews. This issue covers a wide range of sociological topics, reflecting diverse perspectives from across India.

The first article, *Guru in the Drawing Room: Tele-Gurus, Hinduism, and 'Immersion' in the Digital Age* **by Dr. Upadhyay,** examines the rise of virtual gurus in the digital era. The second article, *Elusive Equality: Social Conservatism in India's Liberalized Economic Order* **by R. Thirunavukkarasu,** critiques the relationship between social conservatism and economic liberalization in India. In the third paper, *Customary Justice System: A Study of the Rongmei Nagas in the Valley of Manipur*, **Gaishinlu Kamson** explores the traditional justice system of the Rongmei Nagas.The fourth article, *Dietary Practices Among the Paniyas of Kottiyoor, Kerala* **by Praveen Kumar Ch & Shalima TP**, investigates the cultural significance of food practices among the Paniya community. The fifth paper, *Adult Education: Abating the Tradition of Witch Hunting in the State of Jharkhand, India* **by Sujoy Kundu & Sujit Kumar Choudhary**, examines how adult education can combat harmful practices like witch hunting. The sixth article, *Development through Community Participation: A Study of North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project (NERCORMP)* **by Yarthotchui Houshu Shimray & Biswambhar Panda** evaluates community-driven development in India's Northeast. The seventh article, *Notes on the Everyday State in India's Postcolonial Democracy* **by Aditya Mohanty & Dr. Priya Ranjan**, delves into the everyday workings of the state in postcolonial India. The eighth article, *Indian Television Soap Opera as an Ideological State Apparatus Reinvigorating the Regressiveness of Indian Society* **by Sipoy Sarveswar, Chinna Rangaiah Dandu, and Tanwin Nashit**, analyzes how TV soap operas perpetuate regressive societal values. The ninth paper, *Electoral Mandate as Development Agenda: Decoding the Verdict of the 2024 National Elections* **by Laxman Rao Sankineni & Harinath Silveru,** looks at how the electoral outcomes influence national development priorities.

This issue also includes an insightful interview with Professor Virginius Xaxa, a renowned sociologist, who shares his academic experiences and provides valuable advice to future sociologists. Additionally, we feature two book reviews by D. S. V. R. Anurag and, Vandana Rai offering critical reviews of recent sociological works.

We invite submissions for future issues and welcome your feedback and suggestions. I extend my sincere thanks to all the authors for choosing *Explorations* to publish their work. I believe the articles in this issue will inspire and enhance the sociological understanding of scholars throughout India.

Thank you for your continued support.

Prof Nagaraju Gundemeda

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Conversation: Virginius Xaxa in conversation with Joseph M.T.

Virginius Xaxa in conversation with Joseph M.T.

[Transcript of the interview held on December 2024]

Sir, I would like to thank you for agreeing to spend a couple of hours in conversation with me at the request of Prof. Nagaraju for Explorations – the online journal of the Indian Sociological Society. Let me begin by first asking you about your first foray into sociology. What led you to sociology?

The context in which I came to Sociology was the crisis of faith that I experienced while in training for the priesthood at the Papal Seminary (now Jnana Deepa) in Pune. I was in the third year of completing my licentiate in Philosophy when it struck me that priesthood was not the path of life meant for me. I needed a change of course, so I wrote to the Bishop of Jalpaiguri in whose diocese I had enlisted for training and the district I hailed from. He advised me to quit the seminary immediately and find my way forward independently. The rector at the seminary, Lionell Mascarenhas, advised that it was in my best interests to stay on and complete the Licentiate in Philosophy before thinking of the future. He took upon himself the responsibility for my stay, including the expenditure incurred for the remaining three months until completion of the course.

It was then that I approached the University of Pune for the Masters Programme. Since university admissions would take a few more months to start, I utilized the time to work at Traube India Limited, a German company in Pimpri, for three months. Fr. Lionel himself took me to the factory and introduced me to the general manager. I was given a job in the planning division, and my exposure to the factory structure and working experience there later proved valuable in the Industrial Sociology course at Pune University.

Initially, I was interested in Political Science, but I was apprehensive about securing admission since it was more sought after than Sociology at universities in those days. I approached the Department of Sociology, partly because some priests and those in training for priesthood were already enrolled there. Prof. Damle guided me to join the two-year master's programme. The move from Philosophy to Sociology transformed my life completely. I worked very hard on my studies and spent as much time as I could in the library.

Finding finance to fund my studies was an uphill task. My parents were separated and I lived with my mother. I desperately needed assistance to continue my studies, so I asked Fr. Lionel for leads. He advised me to meet Fr. Soares at De Nobili College, who told me about the 'Training for

Development and Scholarship Society,' a Jesuit organization that provides loan scholarships. With his reference letter, I approached their office in Ahmednagar. During the informal interview, when asked about the amount needed, I requested Rs. 3,000 for the two-year course, having earned about Rs. 1,500 during my three months of work. They offered the loan without hesitation, with the condition that it be repaid once I was gainfully employed.

After securing admission to M.A., I realized the inadequacy of the amount. I had to find ways of supporting my stay and studies, so I looked for a hostel where I could manage with very limited resources. Through well-wishers, I found accommodation in a hostel run by the Student Welfare Society, meant for students from rural Maharashtra studying at different colleges in Pune. Located at Shivaji Nagar on the way to Bandaranaike Institute, I shared a room with three others studying physics, statistics, and anthropology. Though initially difficult to adjust to the food and environment, I adapted over time. Later, recognizing my financial difficulties, I took up part-time work in the University sports department as an overseer of indoor games, maintaining records.

After securing First Class marks in the M.A. course, I began searching for opportunities for further studies or work. I sent applications to all possible places that came to my attention but received no response. Eventually, I received invitations for Ph.D. program admission from both the Delhi School of Economics and IIT Kanpur. The interviews were less than a week apart, with Kanpur scheduled first. Though I was selected for the Ph.D. at Kanpur, I was told to wait until the January session since I was the only candidate selected for sociology. Meanwhile, I could work on a project with Dr. Ali Ashraf, studying municipal bureaucracy and urban development in Kanpur and Ahmedabad.

Sensing that I might not stay for the Ph.D. programme due to the delay, Dr. Ashraf told his Ph.D. student, Niranjan Pant, "Hold onto him, or he'll leave." Pant enticed me with the prospect of Rs. 400 per month for the projects and Rs. 300 IIT Ph.D. Fellowship, compared to Rs. 250 at Delhi School of Economics. Desperate for financial stability and attracted by the higher stipend, I decided not to attend the Ph.D. interview at the Delhi School of Economics.

Dr. Ali Ashraf, under whose project I worked for four months and who was keen to take me as his doctoral student, meanwhile left IIT Kanpur to join Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi. Around the same time, Dr. D.N. Dhanagare returned to IIT Kanpur after his stint at the University of Sussex.

His course on 'Agrarian social structure and movements in India' fascinated me greatly, and I felt drawn toward agrarian questions. Eventually, I would focus my Ph.D. on agrarian questions in the peasant and tea plantation settings of North Bengal, my home region.

As I was completing my Ph.D., I applied for positions at various institutions and received an interview call from North Eastern Hill University, Shillong. The interview panel included both Prof. Andre Beteille and Prof. JPS Uberoi. The questions primarily focused on my Ph.D. work, class structure, plantation labour, Marx, Weber, and related topics. Prof. Uberoi then surprised me by asking, "Why should we give you the job in NEHU?" When I responded with my justification, he commented that it was "nothing but Bengali imperialism." Though taken aback by such a direct comment, I was ultimately offered the position.

My interest in agrarian class structure and the labouring class has deep biographical connections. My self-identity is intimately connected to the lifeworld of Adivasi tea plantation labour. I received my initial education at St. Joseph's High School, Alipurduar (Hindi medium). Compared to the English medium school, the Hindi medium school had its own distinct ethos. Life in the hostels at Malbazar and Alipurduar emphasized the importance of manual work. The 150 to 200 boarders were divided into 12 to 15 groups and required to perform daily various manual tasks, from working in paddy/vegetable fields to cleaning hostel toilets on a rotational basis.

Other memorable experiences from hostel life included Sunday walks sometimes extending beyond 8-10 kilometres, dealing with poor food quality, and shared experiences of ghost stories during primary school. In high school, I had the privilege of delivering a welcome address to the National Commissioner of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes during his visit to our school around 1963. In retrospect, I learned that this person was none other than Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose. Another vivid memory from school was participating in a strike against the school authority during my final year.

While at school, my dream was to become a medical doctor. When I shared this ambition with one of the caretaker clergymen in the hostel, he suggested I "become a doctor of souls" and train to become a clergyman. This advice led me to Sardhana in Uttar Pradesh, where I joined a seminary and completed intermediate studies along with basic training in Latin. From there, I was selected for further studies at Papal Seminary, Pune.

In the course of your career as a teacher, you have traversed significant milestones and served in different capacities. Kindly share with us some highlights.

I worked at NEHU from 1978 to 1990, including a year in Paris as post-doctoral fellow (1981-82) and a period as Commonwealth fellow at the Oriental Institute, London, in 1988. Teaching and reading became my passion. Over the years, I taught courses in theory, sociology of religion, economic sociology, and political sociology.

I faced a significant crisis in 1983-84 when a prestigious journal rejected an article I had submitted. This led to deep depression, and I decided to leave academia altogether. I applied for positions at various institutions, including the National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD), Hyderabad, where I was offered a Reader's post. Though initially keen to accept, I reconsidered based on advice from colleagues and friends, including my supervisor Prof. Dhanagare, and decided to remain in academics.

A breakthrough came when I unexpectedly received a hundred-rupee cheque from Economic and Political Weekly (EPW) for an article they had published. The editor of EPW at that time, Dr. Krishnaraj, offered encouraging words and urged me to write more. This encouragement helped me overcome my self-doubts about research capabilities and command of English. Subsequently, my articles were published in *EPW*, *Sociological Bulletin*, and *Demography India*.

There is an interesting episode regarding my attempt to publish my Ph.D. thesis as a book. I submitted the manuscript to Sage Publications, who sent reviewer comments. I substantially reworked the material to address all queries and comments, but due to an oversight, they treated my resubmission as a fresh manuscript and sent it to a second reviewer. Upon receiving the comments of the second reviewer, I withdrew the manuscript and decided against publication. Years later, Prof. Bhandari of the Anthropology Department expressed interest in publishing it. I agreed on the condition that I would not make any revisions, and it was eventually published by Cosmos Publishers in 1997.

By the mid-1980s, Meghalaya was experiencing significant turmoil, with frequent strikes, road blockades, social tension, curfews, and institutional closures. This situation prompted me to consider leaving Northeastern Hill University. My preferred destinations were Delhi University, JNU, and Central University of Hyderabad, in that order. The first opportunity arose at Delhi University, which I accepted. Although I had served as an Associate

Professor at NEHU for six years, I was conscious of my limited publications and applied for Associate Professor positions at both Delhi and JNU. Surprisingly, my appointment as a Professor at Delhi School of Economics came in absentia, marking the proudest moment of my academic life.

My experience at the Delhi School of Economics initially felt overwhelming. As the only outsider at that time, I sometimes questioned my decision to leave NEHU. The situation was complicated by NEHU's refusal to approve my lien, as their rules did not allow it for lateral moves. Additionally, I had to repay three months' salary to NEHU to fulfil my Commonwealth fellowship bond obligations. These circumstances eliminated any possibility of returning to NEHU, forcing me to establish myself at DSE. This ultimately proved beneficial, as it strengthened my determination to succeed. I had to adapt to DSE's distinct work culture, which included a specific syllabus, mandatory annual reporting, publication requirements, conference presentations, and invited lectures.

In your work, one can sense a subtle shift from an earlier emphasis on largely a class-based approach to later issues of ethnicity and identity. Was there indeed a shift and if yes, what was the trigger for this shift?

The specialization in agrarian movements and relations that I pursued initially followed a clear Marxist approach, influenced by my Ph.D. supervisor Prof. Dhanagare, whose work is exemplified in his acclaimed book 'Peasant Movements in India.' The influence of Marx and Weber on class theories was evident throughout. However, the situation in Jalpaiguri and North Bengal presented a complex class structure that caught my attention. The British managed the plantations with Bengali administrators, while the workers were predominantly Adivasis. The trade unions' leadership consisted exclusively of Bengali bhadralok, creating a significant disconnect between leaders and workers that had a strong ethnic component.

Scholars working with Marxist frameworks often overlooked this mismatch. Among workers, there was visible resentment toward both the British and Bengalis. The Marxist lens alone was insufficient to capture this dynamic. In my review of Prof. Bhowmik's book, I emphasized how ethnicity was crucial and how the Adivasi workers' struggle needed to be understood in the context of the Jharkhand movement.[1] Class and ethnicity were intertwined in the Adivasi workers' lives. While union leadership focused on wages and bonuses, they largely ignored equally important issues like education and healthcare

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[1] Xaxa, V. (1983). [Review of *Class Formation in the Plantation System*, by S. Bhowmik]. *Sociological Bulletin*, *32*(1), 86–90. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23619165

that deeply affected the Adivasi workers. This realization led me to examine ethnicity and identity alongside the political economy of class.

My transition from focusing on class structure to Adivasi issues developed gradually. The Adivasi question became more central to my sociological imagination in 1993, triggered by the Bihar Government's approval of the Field and Firing Project for the Indian army at Netrahat in Jharkhand. This project, originally planned for Gaya but relocated to Netarhat due to historical monuments and population density, threatened to affect nearly 300 predominantly tribal villages. The resulting displacement sparked a movement against the project, including protests in Delhi in which I became involved. I wrote about this in EPW under the pseudonym 'anonymous.'

Another significant influence was the 1998 attack on Adivasis in Gujarat's Dangs district. When colleagues at DSE inquired about the situation, I realized my limited knowledge of Adivasi issues beyond my immediate experience. In Delhi, I encountered numerous Adivasis and became involved in their concerns. When Prof. Veena Das invited me to contribute a piece on Tribes for the *Handbook of Sociology and Social Anthropology in India*, I recognized the urgent need for an insider's perspective on tribal questions in India. The prevailing anthropological lens on tribal communities and culture seemed problematic, failing to reflect ground realities.

My EPW article "Transformation of Tribes in India: Terms of Discourse"[2] marked a significant step in applying an Adivasi perspective to fundamental issues. I later wrote about indigeneity and Indian Adivasis[3], reservation issues compared to scheduled castes[4], and matters related to language and religion[5].

Whom would you consider as your mentors and what was your experience of being a mentee?

I have learned extensively from many teachers and colleagues, particularly Prof. Dhanagare and Prof. Bhowmik. My discussions with Prof. Beteille at the Delhi School were especially productive and insightful, given his academic interest in agrarian and Adivasi questions. The informal conversations with

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[2] Virginius Xaxa. (1999). Transformation of Tribes in India: Terms of Discourse. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *34*(24), 1519–1524. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4408077

[3] Virginius Xaxa. (1999). Tribes as Indigenous People of India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *34*(51), 3589–3595. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4408738

[4] Virginius Xaxa. (2001). Protective Discrimination: Why Scheduled Tribes Lag behind Scheduled Castes. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *36*(29), 2765–2772. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4410888

[5] Virginius Xaxa. (2005). Politics of Language, Religion and Identity: Tribes in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *40*(13), 1363–1370. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4416402

Prof. JPS Uberoi encouraged thinking outside conventional boundaries. Beyond the Delhi School of Economics, I learned much from Prof. T.K. Oommen and his personal interactions and voluminous writings especially on the agrarian question, caste, and tribe.

Your students fondly remember the time they spent under your mentorship with nostalgic memories of generosity, warmth, and care. What was your experience of mentoring students?

I thoroughly enjoyed supervising students at various levels and worked with a diverse range of scholars. My guiding principle has always been to avoid imposing my ideas on students. Instead, I encouraged them to follow their own inclinations, sensibilities, and theoretical and ideological leanings. My role was to ensure consistent progress, maintaining regular contact and avoiding delays on my part. I focused on helping them develop logical flow in their writing and maintain research rigor. I learned significantly from my students, especially those who worked on themes and ideas unfamiliar to me, which provided valuable learning opportunities.

Please share with us your experience in the administrative positions that you have held during your illustrious career.

I have had numerous opportunities in higher education administration, including invitations to apply for vice-chancellorship positions at central and state universities. However, I declined these opportunities as I had no interest in vice-chancellorship. I also received an offer from a political party to contest parliamentary elections from a West Bengal constituency. After careful consideration and consulting colleagues and friends, I declined this offer as well, prioritizing my teaching and research work.

Initially, I refused the offer to become deputy director of Tata Institute of Social Sciences at the Guwahati campus, but later accepted at the insistence of my friend and collaborator Prof. Bhowmik. The five years there were deeply satisfying, allowing me to recruit faculty members with cutting-edge capabilities from diverse backgrounds. In retrospect, some of our initiatives, such as establishing centres for ecology, peace studies, public policy, public health, liberal arts, and physical and life sciences, align well with the National Education Policy 2020's emphasis on interdisciplinarity.

My tenure as head of the department at DSE was also instructive. Managing faculty sometimes proved challenging. While I am generally seen as accommodating, I became firm when necessary to maintain appropriate

boundaries. Fundamentally, I consider myself a teacher and researcher; administrative responsibilities came as part of the institutional role.

How was it like to work with the Government?

Serving on the National Advisory Committee offered a unique experience. Members could choose areas of policy or legislation to develop in collaboration with experts and civil society organizations. Draft policies and legislation underwent thorough discussion across multiple meetings with council members and government officials. As chairperson of the Xaxa Committee, I interacted with bureaucrats and civil society thought leaders. Converting academic ideas into implementable policy presented a significant challenge. The committee members, appointed by the government from various fields, focused on socio-economic conditions. I emphasized consensus-building, choosing to drop matters where unanimous agreement could not be reached.

What is the extent of your involvement with Indian sociological society?

As a life member, I first attended an all-India sociological conference at Meerut University when Prof. A.R. Desai was president. I have participated in annual conferences intermittently and helped organize the 1986 conference at NEHU, Shillong. Though I declined several requests to stand for election as ISS president, I was surprised and honoured to receive the Lifetime Achievement Award. I appreciate the society's contributions to developing the discipline in India, noting the substantial growth in membership and participation levels. The society continues to thrive under its current leadership.

How do you view the current state of Sociology in India?

Teaching and research form the foundation of disciplinary growth. Current recruitment practices that compromise quality and rigor raise concerns about the discipline's future. High-quality teaching and research are essential drivers of higher education. Professional bodies like the Indian Sociological Society should prioritize excellent research, conferences, and publications. Research must transcend disciplinary boundaries, as compartmentalized approaches inadequately address complex issues. My work has drawn extensively from history, particularly regarding agrarian and Adivasi contexts, employing a historical comparative methodology.

What are the activities that you are involved in, post-retirement?

I remain academically active through keynote addresses, conference presentations, and journal publications, synthesizing years of experience and understanding. I also participate in civil society initiatives, contributing insights to various organizations, unions, and movements across India. I am grateful for recognition from both academic and civil society spheres. Reflexivity is essential to sociological practice. The critical issues I have engaged with in writing, research, and teaching emerged from life experience. A biographical connection adds passion to our academic and other commitments.

Thank you, Sir, for spending time with us and sharing your experiences and insights.

Joseph M.T. is a professor at University of Mumbai.

Guru in the drawing room: Tele-gurus, Hinduism and 'immersion' in digital age

--Surya Prakash Upadhyay

Abstract

From around the early 1990s, Hinduism has seen a new set of gurus such as a Asaram Bapu, a Sudhanshu ji Maharaj who are seen regularly instructing people to manage everyday life over expanding private satellite television channels. I prefer to call them tele-gurus even though they keep on switching over to new platforms from websites to their own channels on YouTube. Setting the context in which tele-gurus emerged, reproducing charisma and extending organizational networks, this paper focuses on three perceptible aspects in tele-guru led Hinduism– the ethic of guru *darshan* (auspicious sight); *mantra diksha* (initiation); and *satsang* (spiritual discourses). With the involvement of digital technologies and equipment, while the tele-gurus initiate followers *en masse* thus changing the essence of *diksha,* the followers achieve *darshan* of the guru regularly and receive instructions at their own convenience through various mediascapes.

The followers also organise video *satsang* in their houses and localities, invite other followers and listen to *satsang* collectively and form a community around the guru. The involvement of digital technologies and equipment, thus, makes spiritual engagement convenient, regular, colorful and entertaining. This ethnographic paper understands digital communicative technologies in material as well as ideological sense and looks at how digital technologies provide a texture to religious experiences, meanings, and history. The paper, therefore, argues that prevalent lexicons and concepts in contemporary social sciences such as division of public/private is highly untenable in understanding religious participation and spiritual practices in contemporary times. As with the entire field of social sciences, religion and spirituality in

contemporary times require innovative exploration through new terms and concepts which further helps us comprehend the entire gamut of changes that are happening in this so-called field of religion.

Keywords: Tele-gurus, Hinduism, post-1990 India, urban religion, digital media

The Context

At any point of time of the day, switch on your television and browse the channels; you will see several male, female, young, old self-styled, 'charismatic', 'spiritual gurus' addressed with honorific terms *Sant*! *Bapu*! *Baba*! *Guru*! *Maharaj*! *Bhai*! *Amma*! *Mata*! *Ma*! *Didi*! The likes of an Asaram Bapu, a Sudhanshuji Maharaj, a Morari Bapu, a Jaggi Vasudev, a Sri Sri Ravishankar, and a Baba Ramdev. Preferably, these gurus can be called tele-guru. In calling tele-guru, I trace definite and definitive associations between gurus and private satellite and cable television networks. Since the early 1990s, these television and satellite channels have played an instrumental role in popularizing these gurus and bringing them to the homes of millions. At the same time, the gurus have been optimizing ever-growing media technologies and upgrading themselves on varied technological fields and equipment, for example the Internet and the smartphone. With the explosion of the world wide web (WWW) the technologies have further consolidated and regularized their connectivity with the followers. Anyways, these gurus are available not only on virtual sites and mediums but have a significant presence in print media such as posters and billboards. Noteworthy, with the incorporation of new media technologies, the older and other forms of traditional media, including word-of-mouth, do not get obsolete. These are still utilized in advertising the gurus, their spiritual programs and spiritual sessions. Another remarkable feature of the contemporary spiritual gurus is that they have an immense presence in cities, though they may be active in rural areas as well. One might have passed through or visited their high-profile *ashrams* located in some prominent locality in your city. One might have noted the composition of their followers who are mostly young and reckon themselves as middle

class. Often, these gurus are subject to the whole phenomenon called "breaking news". Of late, a few high-profile gurus (such as Asaram Bapu, Ram Rahim, Rampal) were in the news. They were found guilty of misconduct and crime such as rape, murder, abduction, land grabbing and so on. Such news might have surprised many of us. One might have pondered why despite regular occurrences of such incidents gurus keep emerging and are popular among the public. One might have found yourself perplexed with questions in oft-repeated phrases such as they brainwash people; or, people are automatons; or these gurus perform 'tantric rituals' and hypnotize people. Perhaps, none of these lines of thinking lead to any productive exploration of why tele-gurus have become so visible and how do they wield authority? Perhaps, incidents of misconduct, especially sexual transgressions, are not new in guru organizations. The recent history is replete with scandalous gurus and one may go on to talk about a variety of scandals within guru organizations. Nevertheless, this paper is not a voyeuristic account that will uncover aspects religious authority (Keul and Raman 2024) of their private lives or "social lives and roles" (Copeman and Ikegame 2012). Rather this ethnographic essay draws attention towards some of the interesting aspects of the tele-guru phenomenon that have remained buried under voyeuristic accounts (Lucia 2018) of 'scandalous' lives of gurus.

Setting the context in which tele-gurus emerged, reproducing charisma and expanding organizational networks, this ethnographic paper focuses on three perceptible aspects in tele-gurus led Hinduism– the ethic of guru *darshan* (auspicious sight); *mantra diksha* (initiation); and *satsang* (spiritual discourses). As said, this ethnographic research is an outcome of my long-term engagement with tele-gurus, their followers and their organization. The aspects touched upon here i.e. *darshan*, *mantra diksha*, and *satsang* in Asaram Bapu's organization emerged during observations, participations in events and everyday programs as well as interviews with the followers. With the involvement of digital technologies and equipment, the gurus have also brought immense change in the meaning and practices. For example, the tele-gurus may initiate followers but the involvement of digital technologies are

offering them an avenue to initiate people *en masse* thus negotiating between growing popularity and managing the essence of *diksha.* Similarly, the followers achieve *darshan* of the guru regularly and receive instructions at their own convenience through various mediascapes. This facilitates not only regularity but facilities building up a community of followers who organize video *satsang* in their houses and localities, invite other followers and listen to *satsang* collectively. Thus, the involvement of digital technologies and equipment make spiritual engagement convenient, regular, colorful and entertaining. This paper, therefore, understands digital communicative technologies in material as well as ideological sense and looks at how digital technologies provide a texture to religious experiences, meanings, and history. The paper, therefore, argues that prevalent lexicons and concepts in contemporary social sciences such as division of public/private is highly untenable in understanding religious participation and spiritual practices in contemporary times. As with the entire field of social sciences, religion and spirituality in contemporary times require innovative exploration through new terms and concepts which could further help us comprehend the entire gamut of changes that are happening in this so-called field of religion.

It is expected that in this paper, in exploring these aspects of the tele-guru phenomenon, the reader will find answers to: who are these gurus? How did they emerge? Why do they have a high presence in cities? What is their spirituality? And, what builds their spiritual empires?

The Problem-type

Looking closely, tele-gurus started becoming visible around the early 1990s. One may recall the early morning *satsang* programs of Asaram Bapu on Sony TV or Sudhanshu ji Maharaj on SAB TV. Perhaps, they were the early entrants on private satellite television channels that began proliferating in those days. These channels were also trying out new programs to gain a larger audience. Many others such as Star TV brought some preachers from ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) and *sadhvis* from Brahmakumari. However, the tele-guru phenomenon was still in making. It

was in the early to mid-2000s that Aastha and Sanskar emerged as full-time devotional channels. Replicating the success of these channels, a huge number of channels have grown now (maybe more than 50 satellite channels). Some of these devotional channels have also begun regional channels that further deepens the reach of tele-gurus. All these channels are full of a variety of gurus. It also facilitated many 'new' gurus emerge. 'New', owing to their non-affiliation to established guru lineages or *sampradaya* or style of devotionalism.

Like the 'scandalous' life of spiritual gurus, we are tempted to know more about sources of luxuries, economy and income of guru organizations. Often, in discussing the gurus, we resort to the apparent aspects of economy such as their dress, car, ashram, and their fascination with modern technological gadgets. One cannot discount on the morality and ethics that they preach. We immediately link it with hypocrisy, a similar response when their sexual scandals break the news. However, apart from what is seen, there are several other economic aspects of gurus. The symbiotic relation between the gurus and channels is worth mentioning. While I was exploring the emergence of Asaram Bapu, I learned that he signed an annual contract worth Rs. 1.75 crore with Sony TV in 2006-2007. Perhaps, Sony TV was eager to pay Asaram Bapu because he was already a popular guru on television and could attract a huge audience. In doing so, the channels are able to increase TRP (Television Rating Point), attract more advertisements and, thus, increase revenue. We know that Baba Ramdev, now, has full control over two prominent devotional channels— Aastha and Sanskara. But the same is not the case with the not-so-popular gurus or a guru-in making. Many of them have to pay these channels for air slots. However, once they hit the market, they negotiate and get prime time air slots. Now instead of paying the channels, they are paid by the channels. The economic linkages between tele-gurus and ever-expanding devotionalism on channels is just one of the many lines that is changing the face of religion in contemporary times.

The economic aspects of spiritual gurus are far reaching. The sources of economy are multiple: from personal donation to expansive-lines of products to earning from media contents and spiritual sessions. Interestingly, gurus deal in not only in spiritual wares or sell audio and video cassettes, CDs, DVDs, MP3. The growth of digital technologies not only has democratized the ownership and distribution of contents but also personalized and regularized contact between the guru and followers (Manuel 1993). With these technologies, people can connect with the guru at their convenience. The gurus have their channels on digital platforms such as YouTube. They also stream spiritual sessions through their organization's websites. Oftentimes, these training programs are freely available while the advanced training session requires one to pay for attending the program. A few such programs are maneuvered technologically wherein a subscriber can watch or participate from only one device (for example Sadguru Jaggi Vasudev's Inner Engineering program). Definitely, there are commercial elements in such maneuvering.

The idea of the defeat of religion by modern phenomena is now a completely outdated concept. In fact, the effervescence of religion in various forms is a gift of modernity. The canonical idea of secularization thesis that the impact of religion on society will diminish with the growth of modernity seems to have reversed. Rather modernity paves the way for the resurrection of religion in various forms and spirituality is one among the many. The other varieties such as religious fundamentalism, religious marketability, commodification of religion and so on give a negative connotation; spirituality, on the other hand, carries a positive meaning and is considered to be good for mind, body and soul. It is regarded as an apparatus through which the ultimate nature of human existence can be understood. It is also believed to be a powerful mechanism through which modern lived life can be improved through the practices of yoga and meditation. The 'good values' associated with spirituality attracts people towards spiritual practices.

A range of modes— from traditional to modern— are used by tele-gurus, their organization and followers. The most rudimentary one is persuasion. How do followers pursue other people? Who are people whom the followers approach? The process of persuasion involves regular sharing of the 'improvements' in the lives of the people with spiritual practices and followers often claim certain achievements in life through the spiritual practices and association with the tele-gurus. In such persuasion, people do not only share their spiritual growth. They also communicate the 'mundane benefits' such as peace at home, improvement in health, security in employment, removal of hazards of life and so on. While sharing the 'improvements' in the life chances, the followers emphasize the grace of guru. The followers narrate their life before and after joining the guru. They share that the desired results were achieved through the grace of the guru. Often, it is the family members, relatives, friends and neighbors who are approached. The results of the persuasion are not achieved instantly. Usually, people see the results or effects on the pursuer and then accept to join the guru. The follower narrates their *'anubhav'* (experiences) and it is due to the assurance and hope of improvement that attracts people towards the charisma of the guru.

One may like to know about commercialization and commodification of spirituality. Interestingly, many organizations could be seen engaged in production, distribution and marketing of cultural products and spiritual wares. The guru organizations also deal in FMCG (fast-moving consumer goods), beauty and body care products. Patanjali Ayurveda may be considered an important example. Their stores located across the states in India. You can also choose to buy products online under the brand names such as Sri Sri Tattva, Isha Life, Hari Om, or Patanjali Ayurveda. These consumer products are pitched as herbal, organic, chemical-free and ayurvedic. This, in itself, composes a huge market and a variety of firms dealing in natural products have grown during the last few years such as Biotique, Nuralz, Kama Ayurveda, Swastik Ayurveda. These firms, like the guru organizations, claim their products as imbued with abilities that could enhance not only beauty or somatic growth but also enhance spiritual health. In all its likeness, logics of

production, distribution, advertisement and enticement of consumers in tele-guru organization are often similar to as followed by any other multinational company (MNC). But they do differ. One of the major differences could be cost incurred in production and marketing. A guru organization has dedicated consumers and, compared to other firms, they may not have to spend much on advertisement. The production in guru organization could be achieved through *seva* (service to guru) wherein a devotee or a follower is seen involved in the production units. Also, some of the prominent followers, within the guru organization, may manufacture the products while the guru organization would market the product. So, the economic aspects of tele-guru organizations are highly elaborate. It is difficult to comprehend all the aspects in this short essay.

At the same time, one cannot dismiss the political aspects of tele-gurus. They do not share common platforms only with leaders from Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) or its other wings such as the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) or the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad). Oftentimes, they are with leaders from other political parties as well. You may recall the *dharna* (demonstration) by various guru organizations, not only tele-gurus, when Kanchi Sankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati was arrested on Diwali day in 2004. Similarly, you might have noticed participation of several tele-gurus, including Sri Sri Ravishankar or Asaram Bapu, in anti-corruption demonstrations by Anna Hazare in 2011. In fact, the negotiation between the Congress government and India Against Corruption was made through Bhaiyyu ji Maharaj, a model-turned-spiritual guru (who committed suicide in 2018). The gurus assume several roles and participate in the political life of India. Baba Ramdev's anti-corruption demonstration is another example. They share platforms with political leaders, participate in demonstrations or make political statements. The intimacy and affiliations between gurus and political leaders are all well known. Almost all the gurus share platforms with political leaders from varied political parties. Some of them openly talk for Hindu nation while many gurus, inadvertently, contribute to 'glorious' Hindu past claims. What is remarkable to note is that tele-guru spirituality is properly mixed-up and there is a seamless accretion of

economy, polity and spirituality. All these aspects interest one to explore the way tele-guru spirituality camouflages their economic and political interests.

Nevertheless, thinking along political or economic aspects only reduces the logics that allow them to enter in the market or the way they enter in the political realm and influence the political opinion, not only Hindutva, but also matters of development and everyday concerns of democracy and corruption. Therefore, apart from focusing on their polity and economy, it is also important to identify what are the sources of their authority that justify their economy as well as polity interests. All these aspects of tele-guru organizations make us rethink the ways in which religion operates outside the mainstream political circle or how it generates consumer choices. This is not specific to tele-gurus or Hinduism or India but across time, regions and religions the economic-political-religious complexes have been working and this, in itself, is nothing new. However, the logic is definitely new. Therefore, we must explore: who constitutes this complex, how it is constituted, what logics form this complex, and how these logics mirror economic and political contexts and structures of any given time period.

Mantra Diksha, Darshan **and** *Satsang*

The guru faith in contemporary times has been reported by Warrier as an "individualized, personalized and highly intimate bond between the guru and each individual devotee" (2005: 1). She considers this kind of bonding as 'a religion of choice' (2005: 14). However, there are two aspects that one has to understand in order to explain the contemporary religious affiliation of people with the religious/spiritual guru. These two things are: one, religion as an institution and a system; and two, religion as practice. The second aspect indicates towards the spiritual practices which are being nurtured under the tutelage of the gurus. Though there is an emphasis on the practical aspects of religion, at the same time such practices are not diminishing the importance of religion. Rather religion as a system or institution gets strengthened. In such a process many of the practices may become obsolete but at the same time many

new dimensions get attached. Apparently, religion as an institution/system is being preceded by the spiritual practices in contemporary guru organizations.

Media, especially its digital format, has facilitated the *satsang* of tele-gurus to expand to multiple terrains. It is a pious entertainment medium for the followers where people continuously engage themselves with religious and spiritual virtues of the guru. It has become an agent for proselytization of people by their own choice towards the guru gradually and by continuously listening to the *satsang*. As the term itself suggests, the *satsang* applies to the formation of a community of 'good people'. The intervention of the media not only helps as a pedagogical tool. It also helps in sending the images of the guru, thus facilitating the *darśan* of the guru at home. Before print media or electronic media came into the picture, one essential element that inevitably needs to be mentioned is the concept of *darśan*— sight or visual interaction between the devotee and the deity in Hinduism. *Darśan* forms an integral part of devotion in Hinduism. It is *darśan* that makes the devotee realize the power of the deity and the deity in turn grants the devotee with its grace. Though few sociologists have dealt with the idea of *darśan*, I feel that we need to discuss the new trajectories that have developed with the intervention of media. The photo-iconography has a vigorous tradition in which photographs— small and big— and icons of the deity are sold and purchased. From the point of political economy, it carries a big consumer section with it. One can ask: why do people seek *darśan*? Is this a two way process or one way?

The idea of *Darśan* is important because followers feel attached with the deity and it marks various kinds of feelings. The *darśan* is not only the glancing at the god or the guru. The follower communicates his feelings in front of the photograph of the guru. The followers complain to the guru, praise, request and show affection. However, in the case of the guru, it is urged upon the follower to see the guru in person. Babb (1986) discusses different aspects of visual interaction by citing examples from various sects. He says that in the Radhasoami group, the teachings place strongest possible emphasis on seeing and being seen by a true guru. He mentions the feelings of the poet devotee.

He mentions the desire of the poet standing and facing the *sadguru* for the glance of compassion (*daya drishti*). He discusses various kinds of analogy that is made in the interaction like *dristhi ki dhar* (current of vision), *lahar* (wave). In another example, he mentions the other kind of glance that is the glance of anger. This particular visual interaction is an example from a film named "Jai Santoshi Ma". The film includes scenes of deity and worshippers confronting and interacting with each other. He mentions one other example about the transformative power of the vision. Similarly, DuPertuis (1986) talks about the phenomenon of realization of charisma of the guru. She talks about three aspects of *darśan* and suggests the imputation of charisma on three interrelated levels. She mentions that by the vehicles of *darśan*, mundane interactions are sacralized. I would like to add that the *darśan* develops the bondage between the individual and the deity/ guru. However, in contemporary times, this *darśan* has been facilitated and made easier by the cable television channels, CDs, DVDs and many other communication devices. The pictures, photographs, pamphlets and videos and so on of guru are of utmost importance in gurus' organization. The photographs of the guru could be purchased from the shops that are often situated within the premises of the ashram or at the shops owned by any *sadhak* (follower). The various forms of media have worked in lessening the spatial distance between the guru and the follower. For the followers of the guru, *Guru-dristhi* (Guru's vision) is considered so potent that it could bless any follower with self-realization and is considered more auspicious than going to pilgrimages. We see here how the mediation of television has fulfilled the devotees' desires to go to the ashram and have the *darśan* of the guru. The personal inabilities have been negotiated by the media. Though the virtual image is not real, it is considered real by the followers. The *guru-dristhi* is received through the television screen. The television, webcast and other electronic equipment are used in the tele-gurus' organization.

In this regard, one of the most important changes that could be seen is the initiation of the followers. For example, Asaram Bapu was considered as a guru because he gives *mantra diksha*. *Mantra Diksha* is the gateway for a

person to enter into his organization. Asaram recommends people to be initiated by a self-realized guru. In his view, initiation is the re-birth of the person. Symbolically, initiation develops a hypothetical connection between Asaram and his followers. They claim that they find differences in the meanings of the *satsang* before and after initiation. The initiation is also a marker of insider and outsider. As soon as a person gets initiated with the *mantra* he becomes a member of Asaram's organization. In fact, *mantra diksha* is the primary trait by which people differentiate between the followers and non-followers. Conventionally, *mantra* is whispered in the ears of the neophyte by the guru. The guru instructs his disciple to maintain the secrecy of his *mantra*. The reason for keeping the *mantra* secret is to conserve power and potentiality. It is recommended by Bapu that the *mantra* should not be disclosed in front of anyone. The purpose for initiating with a *mantra* is to engage the disciple in recalling his *ishta-devata*. It is the view of the followers that this *mantra* is primarily used as spiritual conduits, words or vibrations that instill one-pointed concentration in them. The *mantra* itself is not prayer, but 'a kind of sound form of the deity it embodies' (Parry 1985: 209). Nevertheless, it is an integral part of praying and worshipping. The *mantra* is repeated in order to concentrate in meditation.

The utility of media and change in the religious practice is the best evident in the initiation process. With the increase in number of people joining in, Asaram Bapu employed a new method to give *diksha.* As discussed in the above paragraph, the *mantra* has to be kept secret to preserve its power and potential. For it, the guru whispers the *mantra* directly in the ear of the disciple. Since the number of people coming to take *diksha* has increased very much and it would be difficult for Asaram to whisper *mantra* directly in the ears of each person, he started using a microphone for giving *diskha.* Now, the initiation ceremony in Asaram's fold is done *en masse*. The secrecy of the mantra is maintained through the use of electronic media. Asaram chants some *mantra* over the microphone and people are advised to choose any one among those *mantras*. In this way the secrecy of the *mantra* is preserved through the intervention of the media. However, it is claimed by the followers of Asaram

that Vedic *mantra* have power but when it is given by a self-realized guru. For the followers, the *mantra*s become more powerful because this adds the power of guru no matter whether the *mantra* is spoken directly in the ears or chosen from one among the many *mantras* spoken over microphone. After the initiation, the follower becomes the responsibility of the guru. After initiation, they engage in *mantra japa* and *mala—* the two other integral ritual practices of Asaram's faith line. Although this paper is not about the charisma of the guru, it is worth mentioning that these are a few methods that add up to hagiography and manufacturing of charisma (Keul 2024).

Lastly, the media ecology through its various inputs compositely works for the organizational development of Bapu and facilitates *satsang* reaching people. Along with audio-visual aids such as audio cassettes, MP3, VCDs, DVDs, websites; print media also plays a lasting role in religious mobilization. The utility of posters, pamphlets, hoardings and billboards can be seen when they are displayed at some crossroads or along the sidewall of roads inscribed with words that such and such guru is coming on such and such date to our city to give his religious sermons. However, if audio aids help in making a long distance contact and visual aids help in transcendence of physicality and facilitate *darśan* of the guru before their followers, it is print media through booklets and printed material that helps in advertising. The visualization of gurus on television gives a sense of attachment and shortens the spatial distance between the guru and his devotee. On the one hand, the televised transmission of religious and spiritual discourses gives a feeling of personal advice and guidance to the devotee (when watching in alone); on the other hand when the same thing occurs at the ashram or at some congregation it gives a feeling of group lecture and sense of live sermon in a congregation. This development in the media sector has filled the gap of physical absence of guru and communication between him and his followers through the telecast of their *satsang*. Similarly, another feature that is altogether new on the religious landscape is the change in the manner *mantra diskha* was given. The process of *mantra diksha* and meaning has acquired new dimensions. Similarly, with the help of web streaming, Bapu initiates his followers from

foreign countries. We can see the utility of media in almost all the aspects from advertising to *mantra diksha* in the Bapu's organization. In the next section, we will discuss how the involvement of the media has changed the religious practices in the private realm and how it works in community formation.

Spiritual *Bricolage*

In any case, the popular thinking that people are automatons or brainwashed or converted into the faith-line of the gurus simply ignores people's own imaginations, understanding and demands to move to a guru. Incidentally, tele-guru spirituality moves in multiple innovations and trajectories (Lucia 2014). The distinctive feature of tele-gurus is their ability to develop a *spiritual bricolage* that mixes and matches varied elements together that not only attract people with differing interests and inclinations but connect them culturally. The popularity of tele-gurus also lies in their multivocality. Some gurus are regionally and locally popular; others may command a transnational following. Few gurus speak in English, others may prefer to talk in vernacular languages. Tele-guru may knit assorted practices under specific labels (e.g. APEX Program of Sri Sri Ravishankar or Inner Engineering of Sadguru Jaggi Vasudev while many others keep discourses unstructured and deliver sermons on a broad range of themes. Anchoring in *sanatan dharma* the gurus not only buttress their persona but also modify and present spirituality as upbeat, fashionable and urban which is imbued with abilities of self-authorship and self-management of everyday life. They discuss vices of modern (read non-Hindu, western) life and valorise Hindu scriptural knowledge; involve modern science and scientific terms to eulogize vegetarianism and Hindu cultural pasts. Tele-gurus often assert that modern institutions are short of providing answers to questions of being and existence. In fact, the misery of human life, for the tele-gurus, lies in the modern political, economic and social system and they ask people to return to cultural pasts.

They discuss ideals and ideas of *moksha*, *punarjanma*, *karma*, *dharma*, *jnana*, *bhakti*, *seva, kundalini*, *vastu,* ayurveda*, astrology, naturopathy. Some of them

specialize in *Ramacharitmanas*, *Bhagavad Gita*; some are known for narrating a *Ram katha* or a *Krishna lila;* some prefer to sing a *bhajan;* and, some others teach *asana*, *pranayama* and yogic postures. In between, they bring in *sant mat* (discourses of a saint) or narrate stories from *Puranas,* or tell a story of a Kabir, a Nanak, or a Buddha. All these are again located around oft discussed questions of being: Who am I? What is my real self? Where do I come from? What will happen after death? Probably, these questions have been the bedrock of spiritual quest. Interesting to us should be how these questions are answered by the tele-gurus and why these are still important and pursued? Do contemporary political and economic structures perpetuate more anxieties? What are the anxieties? Are these anxieties ontological in nature or an existential crisis of social, political and economic aspirations and deferred gratifications?

Implicit in tele-guru spirituality is seamless accretion of capitalism and consumerism which simultaneously captures urban aspirations and accommodates lifestyle choices and buttresses religious imaginations, invokes cultural pasts, and brings cultural nationalism into discussion. This very presentation grants them abilities to occupy multiple spaces, involve in several activities and freely traverse across— historical and contemporary cultural, political and economic milieus. It not only legitimizes charismatic abilities of the guru but also allows easy camouflage of their politics and economics. Notable in this is their presence in corporate houses where they are often found delivering leadership lectures or offering personality building workshops. In such sessions, they would syncretize languages of spirituality with modern management terms and discuss time-management and development and conservation of somatic and spiritual energy. They touch upon aspects of family ties and relationships, cultivation of 'good' habits and 'expected' behavior at the workplace. Tele-guru spirituality emerges as a tool and technology to correct and control everyday life events shaped by liberalizing economies in globalizing cities (Chaudhuri 2021). It is practiced as technology of self, well-being, peace and happiness in everyday life that, in turn, is associated with contemporary urban subjectivity, urban aspirations,

consumerism and changing nature of state and economy. All these varied topics, largely, culminate in suggestions and methods for having a 'happy, healthy and prosperous' life and achievement of self-realization. They employ spiritualities that are multifaceted, polyvalent, universal and individualistic at the same time. The newness of tele-gurus also lies in theatricality of spirituality informed by '*sanatan dharma'* and their ability to traverse across and connect historical, cultural, political and economic realms. Their spirituality resonates with the language of global capitalism, political Hindutva and cultural consumption. As I have explored, spirituality cannot be seen as a by-product of economy or polity. No doubt, tele-gurus thrive on and produce novelties that enchant the urban middle class. However, it is important to look for logics that trigger interests in religio-spiritual engagement. Such an exploration also allows greater understanding of how politics and economics integrate with religion.

Apart from commanding huge clientele and espousing multitudinous approaches, tele-gurus are central figures in their organizational space. Their ashrams are well-designed, well-organized, well-managed, sanitized and skillfully operated through specialized departments such as finance, audit, accounts, production, distribution, marketing, media and personnel management. During any session, the guru occupies the center stage assisted by specialized teams such as electric and music assistants, backstage managers. In a simulated atmosphere spiritual moods are produced using equipment, paraphernalia, performances, music, dance, song and fragrances. The theatrical performances of tele-gurus are noticeable during spiritual sessions; for example, soundtrack or background music changes with the content of the sermon or how gurus appear in specific regalia on special occasions (Warrier 2005).

Now, it is alluring to explain and put tele-gurus and contemporary spirituality within some received and readily used conceptual tropes such as resurgence or revitalization of religion or new age thesis or spiritual turn. However, such approaches tend to neglect nuanced ways, as I have been discussing, in which

religion operates in contemporary times. One may hear people saying, "I am not religious, but spiritual". It implies that religion and spirituality are a thing apart. However, in reality, religion as an analytical category is neither separable from spirituality nor separate from political economy. In fact, discourses of modernity or idea of secularization are quite inappropriate in capturing the way religion operates in contemporary times. We need to penetrate a little deeper to look how consumerism and political ideology are pitched together and how charismatic authority of spiritual gurus are legitimized.

The Takeaway

In order to understand the tele-guru phenomenon, we need to locate them in the context of their emergence which, as I have mentioned, began around the early 1990s, a very critical period— globally as well as locally. Interestingly, the tele-guru phenomenon is neither specific to Hinduism nor India alone. Around the same time, almost all the religions, in India and elsewhere, experienced the emergence of similar figures and similar practices e.g. the expansion of Pentecostalism or the expansion of interest in voodoo. In many ways, the reshaping of religion and nature as well as the logic of movements is similar. Aspects such as foregrounding of spirituality; hagiographic nature of biographies; wielding of charisma; popularity among urban middle classes; use of media technologies; intertwining with the market; and the nuanced ways of religious engagements with politics seem to have developed in similar fashions.

This mapping allows us to explore how the emergence of tele-gurus and their spirituality is further linked with transformations in— technology, economy, polity— that shaped structural, institutional and ideological aspects of contemporary India. Apparently, tele-gurus started gaining visibility around the early 1990s when the broadcast sector was liberalized. This allowed private media channels to emerge and expand. In trying out new contents, a variety of programs, including spiritual gurus, began to be aired on the television. However, airing religious content on television was not *new*. As

said, the tele-gurus started emerging around the early 1990s when private television channels such as ATN, Sony TV, Zee TV began to telecast a few gurus. Tele-guru organizations proficiently utilize existing as well as advanced recording and streaming technologies. This is traceable since the early 1980s when audios and videos were recorded on tape cassettes and distributed among the followers through personal networks and guru's organization. We also all know how the telecast of some of the highly popular serials, such as the serialization of Ramayan on Doordarshan, changed the content of politics and gave rise to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its nationalist politics (Rajagopal 2001). Among many things, this period is also marked by strengthening of Hindutva politics and its claims for Hindu nation that surfaced alongside contestations of caste and incidences of communal violence that further engulfed communal divides. All these refashioned new identities and added new dimensions to identities of caste, class, religion. The telecast of *Ramayan* mutated religious contents and fed into the imaginations of *Hinduness*, Hindu nation, and helped in revival of cultural pasts.

Tele-gurus started emerging at around the same time when Hindu religious fervor escalated with political Hindutva movement; and, Hindu cultural and religious images and imageries diffused with the telecast of *Ramayan*. Amidst such extensive events and process, the broadcast sector also transformed. The gateway that *Doordarsan* opened for recomposition of religion was furthered by the opening of the broadcast sector for private media channels. Unlike the *sadhus*, *sanyasis* and guru organizations (McKean 1996), even the gurus who started showing up on television in the early 1990 might not have directly participated in the Hindutva movement. However, the moods, motivations, images, imageries made available by political Hindutva and telecast of *Ramayan* were definitely optimized by tele-gurus. Now, looking at technological, cultural, political, economic anchorage, it is clear that the world of tele-gurus is quite expensive than what is seen on television screens. Unfortunately, scholarship's emphasis, mainly, on political Hindutva has not allowed us to see how around the same time period the tele-guru phenomenon began to take root.

Therefore, we need to locate tele-gurus and their spiritualities within the context of their emergence i.e. the period from the early 1990 onwards. The recent interest in spirituality, spiritual gurus, spiritual wares and varied methods of channeling and transforming mind-body-soul cannot be answered simply by associating it with the predilections, tastes, dispositions of the urban middle class. It also cannot be assessed with its association with facilitations that are offered by transformations in digital media technologies. Such interests as well as the nature of spirituality are intricately linked with the political economy which is further linked with not only the growth of new urban middle classes but also conditions of work, employment, aspirations, risks and threats that brew in neoliberal economic systems. It is interesting to note how current interests in spirituality are further linked with contents, symbols and discourses that flow from cultural history, political Hindutva and the precursors of televised Hinduism.

The series of events and processes that either began or consolidated around that time defines and shapes spirituality in contemporary times. The post-reform phase in India is critical not just because introduction of New Economic Policy led to liberalization, privatization and globalization of markets and enhanced several flows of finance and capital. This period drastically and dramatically changed the nature of almost everything, be it political ideologies or economic choices and preference. Simultaneously, critical steps taken by the State, the economy, and the market exposed the urban middle class that began redefining consumption and cultural practices. It is from this period onwards that the Indian economy was further liberalized and multinational companies (MNCs) expanded business networks, changed the logic of consumption; and conditions of employment.

The life and career as spiritual guru, making of their charisma, spiritual instructions and philosophies, devotionalism, network of organization, and lastly their spiritual enterprise illustrate the character of contemporary Hindu spirituality and how it is promoted, projected and practiced. This essay has suggested the languages in which spirituality is spoken, shared, and shaped;

how spirituality is engaged by urban middle; and the gurus have incorporated media, market and politics to produce Hinduism that is enchanting, alleviating; and, hides or justifies political and economic interests of gurus. The tele-gurus articulate the shift from religion towards spirituality as they reconfigure values, practices, modes of conduct as well as objects and objectives of spirituality and devotionalism. The gurus locate themselves in a place of ambiguity drawing those confronted by the uncertainties of contemporary urban life and seduced by its worldly aspirations. Last, the tele-gurus thrive on and produce novelties that enchants the urban middle class that resonate with the language of global capitalism, political Hindutva and cultural consumption. These aspects of Hinduism that develop in guru organizations makes us look at the activities, discourses, ideas, beliefs and practices of the guru organizations and rethink the ways in which Hinduism operates in contemporary India. The differences in trajectories in the making of various spiritual gurus should be insignificant as each of them have devised their own style and brand and might have received support from specific individuals, groups, moments or events. The narratives, processes and logic that go into the making of these gurus are quite similar. This synoptic description has charted varied interests and activities of gurus and suggested instrumental, ideological and institutional entanglements of tele-guru and their spirituality. Perhaps, the implications and ramifications of such movements are far more reaching than what is achieved through intense explorations of political Hindutva.

Notes

[1] https://thewire.in/media/owned-by-corporates-run-by-babas-the-economics-behind-indias-devotional-television

[2] https://www.artofliving.org/apex/apex-program

[3] https://isha.sadhguru.org/in/en/yoga-meditation/yoga-program-for-beginners/inner-engineering

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Elusive Equality: Social Conservatism in India's Liberalized Economic Order

--R.Thirunavukkarasu

Abstract - *This paper seeks to contextualize marginalized communities' long struggle of establishing an egalitarian social order vis-à-vis two major economic order – first few decades of socialist pattern of economy and since 1990s the liberalized economic policies. By attempting to decipher sociologically the meaning of equality for marginalized section in the Indian society under the two major economic orders, this paper particularly highlights the inadequacies of the contemporary liberalized economic order to bring in social egalitarianism and underscores its embedded hegemonic principles to reinvigorate social conservatism.*

Key words: Caste inequality, Nehruvian Socialism, Liberalized economy and Social conservatism

Introduction

Despite a highly pejorative tirade against India's democratic polity especially in its incipient stages, the resurgence of its democratic spirit is indeed incredible. When scholars like Selig Harrison (1960) simply derided with disparaging assessment that the political leadership during the 1950s was too impatient, incapable of leading the country to embrace liberal political values, founding fathers of the republic encountered such odious and abrasive evaluation not merely as jeering rant from the highly condescending capitalist bloc but more as an insinuation to resurrect the embedded democratic spirit. As we look back, the country remains the largest democracy in the world with elections regularly conducted by a statutory body and the judiciary resolutely remains independent and the media largely enjoy its freedom. All these virtues would be construed to declare that the country is indeed an envious political success story among many post colonial countries especially in South Asia. But what is quite intriguing is the larger unanswered question – could

all these 'achievements' in the political realm embolden us to declare that we have ensured liberty and justice to all our citizens? This question looks uncomplicated but evades meaningful and precise answer.

In spite of many 'achievements' in the political realm, a few celebrated virtues of modern world – equality, liberty and justice remain elusive to overwhelming population of the country; Having realized the wretched nature of the colonial rule and the alarmingly deplorable condition in which the country was in, founding fathers of our nascent democracy were determined to draft the constitution not only be the supreme guiding principle for the newly dawned democracy; it also must be the beacon of justice, equality, freedom and liberty. India, a wounded civilization and a highly hierarchical society where discrimination remains the most valuable cultural virtue was expected to necessarily embrace justice, freedom, liberty and equality as social values. Hence, our constitution unambiguously stated its commitment towards realizing these virtues as the country progresses.

That's the reason the preamble categorically states and assures to all its citizens Justice – social, economic and political. The letter and the spirit of this statement is that what all have been denied so far would be assured to every citizen of this country. While the constitution (article 14) insists on equality before law, it also categorically declares that unequally placed members of our country should not be treated equally. This is not self-contradictory; it rather clearly exemplifies the trajectory in which the country was expected to move on. We were not clueless; it is clear we did have a document to lean on. And that document lays down unerringly the parameters which the State must adhere to – uncompromising commitment to justice, liberty and freedom. Thus, the independent Indian State declares it would follow and protect the constitutional provisions. Ensuring all these values however requires not necessarily the paraphernalia of the State but an evolved consensus in the socio-cultural realm. This may look quite simple but remains the most formidable challenge for the country since independence.

In other words, justice, freedom and liberty must have been part of a culturally sanctioned and socially approved virtue that must be the non-negotiable, irreducible and axiomatic premise upon which a *nation* ought to have evolved. Somehow our conventional wisdom tends to vivisect justice from the process of inventing a nation; it also believes that the principle of egalitarianism need not be part of the *nation*. If an attempt is made to delineate nation as embodiment of justice and equality, many political demagogues would resort to naïve rhetoric which are not only cliché but also anti-historical in its essence.

India being a welfare State, it is mandatory on its part to promise and deliver basic entitlements guaranteed in the constitution such as education, health, dignified life. In the process, it is obligatory on the part of the State to provide a level-playing ground for all its citizens since the socio-cultural and economic inequalities in India require no further elaboration. Acute poverty, culturally sanctioned inaccessibility to literacy, socially regulated economic activities, ruthlessly graded hierarchy and strictly closed stratification are all monumental challenges to the nascent post colonial State. What remain as the only hope and anchorage for the vast majority of marginalized citizens in India has been the constitutional entitlements; but the larger question remains very profound – why India as a nation, couldn't achieve all that have been guaranteed in the constitution. Why a level playing field was not or couldn't be established by the State in spite of its powerful tentacles. Why does providing equal opportunity to all its citizens look quite a formidable task? Thus analyzing the 'political' after a point may not yield concrete or objective results to realize the reasons for abject injustice and unjust social order to persist. It is therefore necessary to reiterate the need to problematize socio-cultural domain and the concept of nation which emerges as the quintessential manifestation of this domain.

Secular Polity, Socialist Economy and Hierarchical Society

When the British left the subcontinent, India was depicted as the insignia of poverty, hunger, malnutrition and underdevelopment. The country was

partitioned along religious lines but more number of Muslims stayed back in India than those who live in Pakistan. Thus, people have especially religious minorities emphatically declared their secular credentials by opting to stay back in India. It is therefore pertinent to remind ourselves of this simple fact that it was Pakistan which was created along religious lines, not India. This firmly declares the secular nature of not only the State but also the society at large.

Similarly, the newly emerged post colonial country had the opportunity to experiment with three major economic models; market friendly *laissez-faire* pro-capitalist model, the Gandhian model and finally the Soviet inspired socialist model. India chose to tread along a new path of *mixed economy*. The self styled socialist path of development envisaged by Nehru and his adviser P.C.Mahalanobis was merely a selective replica of certain Soviet model of planning and has nothing to do with Socialism per se. In fact, A.R.Desai in his no-holds-barred criticism towards Nehru-Mahalanobis strategy (thanks to Prof Sukhamoy Chakravarty) highlights the role of bourgeois state power in independent India in pushing through actually the capitalist path of development through 'initiating various measures – economic, political, and administrative, resources to apportion resources to various classes, groups and organizations and also to elaborate varieties of institutions and create new ones;' he also categorically offers his assessment that the State's three-fold functions – repressive, economic and ideological – to expose its class prejudice and oppressive nature (1984: 14). The most illuminating and succinct analysis of Desai is his elaboration of the nature of Indian capitalist class. He says,

'… the Indian capitalist class never sought the destruction of the politico-administrative apparatus evolved by the British. It was interested only in gaining control over it, making only minor modification to suit its own requirements and its own purposes' (ibid: 101).

This clearly delineates that the actual independence was to a large extent a mere transfer of power/authority from the British Raj to the caste/class elites

of Indian society. But how do we make sense of the socialist rhetoric or planned economy initiated in the 1950s? Even before independence, Congress party had established National Planning Committee as early as 1936 itself to plan for the country's development (Dandekar, 1994: 50). Less than a decade later several industrialists have drafted a policy popularly known as Bombay Plan which sought straight and active state intervention in planning, financing and in managing industrial development (Stern, 1993: 210).

The intriguing point to reflect upon here is the grand consensus steadily emerging among the caste/class elites over the concept of State sponsored planned economic model even if it was called socialist. Two centuries of British rule had virtually ruined the economy; it's devastating consequences are still being chronicled. Realising the predicaments of British rule more than anyone, caste/class elites facilitated tactically though the state intervention in resurrecting the economy. In other words, cosmetic notion of socialism was actually aided bureaucracy acquiring disproportionate power and authority in India. With caste/class elites simply monopolized the mammoth executive structure one could well imagine what would have emerged out of socialist policies. As Desai has elaborated the tactics of Indian bourgeois

(i) reshuffling the rural class structure, (ii) helping rural rich in their capital formation, (iii) evolution of adequate institutional-organisational structures to help the rural rich vis-a-vis the rural poor, (iv) evolve cultural media for the domination of the rich over the poor (Desai, 1984: 158).

When the Planning Commission finally was established in March 1950, it was formally declared that the vision of socialism would guide India's economy; it sought to combine socialism with the institutions of parliamentary democracy. The creation of 'casteless and classless society was said to be the mission of the socialist planned economy. Alleviating abject poverty and to reboot the stagnant economy, massive industrialization process and mechanization of agriculture were all envisaged in the socialist developmental model. Green revolution was the flagship program of the government in the 1950s; massive

dams and big industries were divinized as modern temples of India. What are the significant consequences of these policies half a century later? No doubt, as A.R.Desai has firmly summed it up, the Indian bourgeoisie has achieved success in its agrarian strategy aimed at fostering and safeguarding its basic interests (1984: 161).

It is however worth mentioning that the socialist policies adopted by the ruling parties and the grand consensus it had successfully evolved over it had certain merits while analyzing it retrospectively today. India's initial attempt to go along with basic tenants of socialism even if it is nascent in its policy outreach, it constituted at its crux anti-imperialist development strategy that it did not promote the export of products which directly or indirectly take land away from producing good grains (Patnaik, 2005: 9). Let's set aside for a while the mind boggling deliberations on socialist economic model; the fundamental point is socialism as a policy unlikely to succeed unless socialism as a cultural practice is strongly encrypted in social fabric. If socialist culture is not favourably facilitating, socialist economy may not yield expected dividends. What India's tryst with nascent socialist policy has offered was a more invigorated hegemony of caste/class elites.

The Crisis of 1990 and Redefining Hegemony

Little more than four decades later since independence, India began to face major crises not only in economic domain but also in social and political realms too. On 7th August 1990, the then Prime Minister V.P.Singh declared the implementation of Mandal Commission recommendations – reserving 27% seats in jobs and academic institutions for Other Backward Castes. While major parts of Southern India remained quite peaceful whereas the northern states witnessed violent protests; some youngsters even went to the extent of immolating themselves as a mark of protest against OBC reservation. The political upheaval resulted in the collapse of V.P.Singh government. Similarly, Bharatiya Janata Party leader L.K.Advani launched a long march to Ayodhya to construct Ram temple at the site where Babri Masjid stood. By late 1990, the external debt crisis surfaced which brought India close to default

in meeting its international payments obligations. The balance of payments situation was almost alarmingly unmanageable.

This was no doubt an important moment in post colonial Indian history. For several historical and socio-economic reasons, the assertion of backward castes in many parts of northern states became finally a reality. Reaction to OBC reservation announcement displayed fear, anger and restlessness among the dominant castes that what they believed as indisputable entitlement first time legally challenged and threatened. Soon, OBC reservation became a historical reality that no political party could afford to repeal it and with a few caveat, the Supreme Court approved reservation for OBC little later. This piece of legal document ensured the entry of OBCs into central government jobs including the decorated civil services in a big way. By June 1991, Narasimha Rao led Congress government initiated drastic steps towards liberalizing Indian economy; the intention behind this move was to ensure wider scope for the operation of free market by dismantling formidable structure of licences, controls and regulations which were the essential features of the hitherto celebrated socialist economic policies. The pro-market, liberalization policies highlighted not only the limitations of socialist pattern of development in India but also the impossibility of that model yielding massive success. It also implies perhaps more explicitly that the globalization of the economy is an inevitable reality; Indian caste/class elites were thrilled as the coronation of market forces became a reality. Since economic policies, accordingly constitutional provisions, remain outside the purview of Courts; hence such policies cannot be challenged legally in any court. When OBCs managed to enter with legal sanctions into higher educational institutions and in central government jobs in a major way, the State decided to withdraw some of its solemn obligations and permitted market forces to assume its role. Liberalizing Indian economy, some experts argue, was not a deliberate attempt, but an inevitable step and a compulsion.

When international financial organizations and global community seemingly lose its faith in India's economic condition, they would likely refuse to lend

monetary support; if so, slowly and steadily people would also refuse to repose their faith in their government. This led to the government taking drastic steps by opening up the market and agreed to the terms and conditions of IMF and World Bank (Bhaduri and Nayyar, 1996: 48). The emergence of service sector as a huge economic opportunity provider majorly altered India's face both domestically as well as in international forums. Suddenly India emerged as the favorite poster baby for the success of globalization. The country is seen as one of the most preferred destinations for economic growth and prosperity. Top corporate executives, policy analysts and lawmakers made a bee line to New Delhi. India was described as a 'roaring capitalist success' (Das, 2006).

First time, concerns regarding equality, social justice, gender and domestic violence, environmental issues slid down to seemingly insignificant issues in public realm. The euphoria that market forces by their very logic would bring in a level-playing ground in a hierarchical society was consistently resonating in the corridors of power. It was widely believed that India is progressively stepping into capitalist economic order. Economic liberalization has come to be perceived as the greatest panacea for all our economic crises. India's urban centers have witnessed rapid and visibly most stunning growth since 1991. These urban areas began to attract glitter and glamour; country's foreign direct investment soared considerably. Within two decades, a new middle class – quite formidable in terms of numbers and influence emerged. This class began to represent the ideological hegemony of India's caste/class elites explicitly and the interests of the State vigorously. The crisp analysis of Pankaj Mishra (2006) says it all,

'… business-centric view of India suppresses more facts than it reveals. Recent accounts of the alleged rise of India barely mention the fact that the country's $728 per capita gross domestic product is just slightly higher than that of sub-Saharan Africa and that, as the 2005 United Nations human development report puts it, even if it sustains high growth rates, India will not catch up with high income countries; nor is India very fast on the report's

human development index where it ranks 127 just two rungs above Myanmar and more than 70 below Cuba and Mexico. Despite recent reduction in poverty levels, nearly 380 million people live on less than a dollar a day'.

This effectively captures the character of liberalized India. The first four decades since 1950, the country was rejoicing over the promises of socialist pattern of economic order; with massive industrialization, mechanization of agriculture, blooming green revolution, cooperative experiments resulting in steep rise in milk production, it was promised that the country would soon be prosperous. The essential message was abject poverty, hunger and massive unemployment would be drastically minimized; an inclusive social order could emerge soon; all sections of Indian society could access resources without major discrimination.

By late 1990 and early 1991, with the balance of payments crisis became too severe to manage, many advocates of neo-liberal economic policies began to belittle the first four decades of socialist economic policies as 'Hindu rate of growth'(Nayar: 2006). Contrary to popular opinion, strong advocates of market economy have categorically claimed that India's growth rate and progress during 1950-70 was not as bad as many tend to believe; in fact, India's growth rate was slightly ahead of China during those two decades (Swamy, 1973). Therefore, the Nehruvian notion of socialism in spite of its inadequacies promised to alleviate poverty, hunger and ensure inclusive social order. The stronger State intervention into developmental activities without diluting the constitutional spirit of establishing an inclusive social order must not be looked down upon as the growth rate in the initial four decades was not flamboyant but very stable. However, when economists analyze the progress of the country, the foundational dimension perhaps unwittingly remains bypassed.

'At the time of its independence in 1947, India had: a literacy rate of 18 per cent; an investment rate of around 9 per cent of its GDP; life expectancy at birth of 32 years; an annual population growth rate of 1.25 per cent; and an average annual growth rate of GDP of around 3 per cent. In 2005/6, India had:

a literacy rate of around 60 per cent; an investment rate of around 30 per cent of its GDP; life expectancy at birth of 63 years; an annual population growth rate of 1.5 per cent; and an annual growth rate of GDP of around 8.4 per cent' (Basu and Maertens, 2007: 144).

There has been no doubt a steady progress; but by late 1980s all that was perceived positively had been depicted as major reasons for the stagnation in development. This intriguing dimension requires more sociological analysis than data based conventional wisdom offers.

It is not inappropriate to conclude that the socialist model latched its faith, limited though in bringing incipient stage of inclusive social order. However, what is truly intriguing is the way bureaucracy acquiring disproportionate role in regulating and controlling both social and economic affairs. The omnipotent nature of Indian bureaucracy was the natural and the most preferred choice of caste/class elites; with massive funding from the State, many higher education institutions including the illustrious technological institutes flourished. All of them simply embodied the 'progressive' nature of post colonial India.

Exorbitant funding from the State for industrial development in many pockets of the country rapidly increased employment opportunities for thousands of Indians. A new class of managerial jobs both in private and in public sector companies was swiftly appropriated by caste/class elites; since educational qualifications and essential skills were considered vital, it was fairly expected that those position would be occupied by the caste/class elites (Jain, 1971). In spite of being a robust license raj, entrepreneurial opportunities did spring up in many parts of the country; most of those opportunities largely manned by people from traditional business families; those people had the privilege of having hands-on experience in the everyday running of the company. Many if not all industrial firms in India have been largely administered and run by their own family members. The conventional opinion that industrialization along with modernization would radically alter and modify the traditional social structure seemingly reminds an unproven or hypothetical proposition (Panini,

1988). In fact, the traditional understanding of patron-client relations, ties of kin network, caste affinity emerged more powerful (Holmstrom, 1985).

In other words, the so called socialist model of planning for development was intended for the welfare of large section of the downtrodden masses; it's naïve to attribute ill intention to the leaders who devised this strategy. However, it is equally pertinent to underscore why agriculture sector wherein a whooping majority of Indians have been associated with received proportionally less importance? Little more than 80 per cent of the masses lean on agriculture and agri-related activities for their livelihood; they received cosmetic attention not a substantial one as happened in heavy industrial sector. Mechanization of agricultural activities may often be cited as a radical step towards realizing inclusive growth in rural areas. Mechanization and massive economic subsidies for fertilizers were necessary but not sufficient to bring in credible change in rural areas. What was more compelling was land reforms – land to the tiller; it remained merely a hollow slogan in many pockets of the country.

When the congress party leadership in almost all regions was largely controlled by landed caste groups, it was unfair to expect them work against their class interests. The land reforms were carried out successfully was in Kerala and in West Bengal. Only in these two states land reforms succeeded particularly in protecting tenants and making them owners of land. This was no doubt possible due to intense gross root political movements (Kohli, 1983). This leads us to conclude that if socialist pattern of development had to succeed it is mandatory to create conducive atmosphere in socio-cultural realm. Socialist policies certainly cannot yield expected dividends unless socialist culture is well established. That is to say, homogenization of power within culture remains the nucleus of a social order where egalitarian economic policies would bring in credible changes in the society.

Economic Liberalization and Social Conservatism – Social Hegemony Reinvigorated

Thousands of pages were already devoted explaining what led to opening up the market in India and how liberalization of Indian economy radically changed the course of its economic progress especially image of the country itself. Till late 1980s, India was projected as the typical poster boy of third world poverty and a despotic, stagnated society/economy. Any optimism of India's growth/development was summarily dismissed not only by foreign scholars even by Indian scholars too. Any hint of citing progressive symptoms in India's development received menacing sarcasm. June 1991 turned out to be a watershed moment in post colonial India as the economy braced for a new paradigm. Manmohan Singh as Finance Minister rolled out a new strategy that was popularly known as New Economic Policy (NEP) which effectively ended India's well known license/permit Raj.[1]

Let's set aside for a moment what development economists and corporate captains have lavishly eulogized on economic liberalization; also let's not bogged down by mind boggling details on GDP growth rate and per capita income spike after liberalization. But how India's image changed abruptly after liberalization is something worth reflecting; India's 'spectacular' success was repeatedly projected as a model for other to emulate; the sudden euphoria and even adulation on India's economic progress both at domestic level and at global forums was truly stunning. The newly found euphoria declared that by liberalizing its economy, India was inaugurated into new wave of globalization. One of the bestselling authors Thomas Friedman declares India's entry into new globalization is a spectacular success story (Friendman, 2005).

The developed countries – the first world, believed in the supremacy of market oriented economic order quickly established a promising bonhomie with India; policy makers, corporate executives, elected members from western countries

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[1] There has been however strong arguments that the country was preparing itself to embrace NEP for a long time; the budget presented by C.Subramaniam during emergency was the first major step towards adopting NEP and similarly, by late 1980s, the brief stint of Chandrashekhar government also laid down stronger foundation for liberalized economic policies; see Vinod Vyasulu (1996) Crisis and Response: An Assessment of Economic Reforms, Delhi, Madhyam Books, pp.19-20

welcomed India into the globalized, pro-capitalist (neo-capitalist) economic order. What kind of capitalism is it? Can market-driven economic policies effortlessly turn the country into a capitalist society? What all required for a society to be a 'capitalist society'? Moreover, can India ever become a capitalist society while India's socio-cultural complexities, its hierarchical social order retaining their supremacy? These questions may look pretty simple but requires profound analysis.

Contemporary neo-liberalism as political/economic policy postulates that human wellbeing can best be advanced by unfettered market freedom and unflinching State support to trade, heightened individual liberty and legal sanction to even limitless private property. The State does retain its sovereignty but remains subservient to the tutelage of market. Today, the manufactured consensus in favor of neo-liberal or capitalist economic order is regarded as the new normalcy. Some of its basic tenants have been steadily injected into our commonsense that neo-liberal, market friendly capitalism is the only way forward for the entire humanity. In the case of India, it was repeatedly told that market can neutralize if not annihilate the tyranny of caste; this policy was glorified that it would bring in gender parity as women would also be absorbed into new economic order as equals; since market demands only 'skills and talents', advocates of neo-liberal economic policy firmly declared that gender equity is just a matter of days once we liberalize our economy. Millions of new employment opportunities would be created and millions would be lifted from their chronic, abject poverty declared the cheer leaders of corporate world.

Globally too, the euphoria has been quite strongly orchestrated in favor of neo-liberal policies in spite of its dismal performance. As David Harvey has rightly pointed out 'aggregate growth rates stood at 3.5 per cent or so in the 1960s and even during the troubled 1970s fell to only 2.4 per cent. The subsequent global growth rates of 1.4 percent and 1.1 percent for the 1980s and 1990s, and a rate that barely touches one percent since 2000, indicate that neo-liberalism has broadly failed to stimulate worldwide growth'. In fact,

neo-liberalism has not proven effective at revitalizing global capital accumulation, but it has succeeded in restoring class power (Harvey, 2007: 33). Notwithstanding such deplorable performance we all are told to believe that the so-called triumph of capitalism is unquestionable and total.

The complex nature of contemporary global capital rests upon, as Kalyan Sanyal in his thought provoking analysis sums up, three major propositions (i) the global capitalist economy consists of interlinked complex with two distinct spheres – one defined by the circuits of capital proper i.e the accumulation economy which dominates the advanced capitalist countries (ii) there are other types – the need economy which exists outside the circuits of capital proper and is the dominant form in the postcolonial economies (Sanyal, 2007). Contemporary global capitalism continues to dispossess and disempower people/society who chooses to remain outside its circuit; however, the ideological foundation of contemporary capitalism would ensure that such dispossessed communities are not becoming antithetical to its policies and instead, they would eventually become part of the need economy. Today's capitalism in post colonial societies does not produce 'wage laborers'; it simply creates space for them to be 'excluded' (ibid, Ch:5).

Classical Marxian framework insists on convoluted trajectory of 'transition' from feudal society to capitalist society and to socialist social order. The class contradiction, if accelerated, would not only precipitate the transition but also bring in the same. Contemporary capitalism with its complexities facilitated especially post colonial societies to live with this dualism. Postcolonial countries like India are contented to put up with these two spheres. Accumulative capital effortlessly metamorphosized itself into 'crony capitalism' and the need economy is not antithetical to it; both do coexist simultaneously. In other words, we are not only into globalization, we are also into these two worlds.

For example, the government of India usually declares poverty in terms of access to 2400 calories per person per day in rural areas and 2100 per person per day in urban areas. If we take these norms as yardsticks, the proportion of

rural population falling below 2400 calories in 2004-2005 was 87 per cent, up from 74.5 per cent in 1993-4; and the proportion of urban population falling below 2100 calories was 64 per cent in 2004-5 up from 56 per cent in 1993-4 (Patnaik, 2011: 49). The point to be noted here is the changing nature of contemporary neo-liberal, market-driven capitalism especially in countries like India. Capitalism arguably must dismantle old social structure and usher in conducive socio-cultural-economic order in which capitalism could flourish. However, today's capitalism in India is nothing but a crony capitalism desperate to retain the status-quo; it pushed millions of subaltern masses into a state where they are absolutely disempowered and dispossessed as part of the need economy. One of first step towards empowerment has been education. The accelerating pace with which education sector becomes rapidly privatised is indeed alarming; millions of people from subaltern sections simply couldn't afford to access education as the State silently and deliberately withdrew from its financial obligation in supporting educational sector. The future looks bleak and that future is here and alive.

With the exponential growth of crony capitalism in India, the public sphere or civil society would continue to be influenced and even coerced. That is to say, small manufacturers, peasants and artisanal communities may have to endure the tyranny of crony capitalism. The plight of people in unorganized sector and landless laborers is all likely to be quite excruciating. This disempowerment may not result in reinvigorated class consciousness; nor does it lead to *class-in-itself* to *class-for-itself* moment. This condition is indeed part of the capitalist system itself today. If so, how does it affect the highly hierarchical caste based social system? The consequences would be truly complex, monumental and truly detrimental to subaltern masses.

A whopping majority of the subaltern masses will have to lose their means of production; however, the cunning rationality of our crony capitalism would ensure that they are absorbed into its tyrannical structure; their employment is essentially to exploit them. The compulsion of electoral politics may safeguard their political existence and may prevent them from being depicted as

'dangerous elements' in the eyes of the 'general public'. But it is a complex situation; subaltern masses will have to negotiate with both crony capitalism and with the comprador bourgeois State (Chatterjee, 2008: 62). With sizeable majority still live in rural areas in India, the rural may undergo radical transformation; however it may not vanish as it has been foreseen (Gupta, 2005). This argument is effectively premised upon the hypothesis that caste and village are organically enmeshed, hence weakening of village would effectively neutralize the intensity of caste itself. Claims such as villages are shrinking as a sociological category; approximately 24 per cent of villagers are engaged in non-agricultural activities require thorough scrutiny (ibid: 752).

Villages are not shrinking as a sociological category; the geographical and administrative understanding of village actually underwent tremendous changes in the last three decades. The idea however of village is something sociologists must necessarily pay attention to. With the changing nature village, let us not assume caste too would simply wither away. Since some of the early social anthropologists attached divine status to village-caste relation, it does not have to be a sacred truth. Many studies have strongly disputed such claims and asserted the role of politics in reshaping caste's everyday dynamics. Castes can and do live outside villages also.

Similarly, people engaging in non-agricultural activities may not guarantee that the effects and intensity of caste are weakening. Wages for both agriculture and non-agriculture do not look quite impressive; in fact the wage gap between them for regular workers in rural areas had been narrowing. The overall income inequality demonstrated a continuous increase over the period with a sharp increase during the post liberalization period (Sarkar and Mehta, 2010: 54).

But the supremacy of the new/perpetually expanding urban will have monstrous supremacy. The crucial point is the robust emergence of 'tradition' in the era of ascending crony capitalism. Tradition is virtually reinvented to legitimize the perpetual and consistent disempowerment of subaltern masses. In other words, cultural and traditional sanction for caste goes uninterrupted.

The perfect union of interest between crony capitalist greed and casteist hegemony is refurnished to be suitable and acceptable to the contemporary times. Caste based discriminations in 'new India' is not only stunning, its intensity is rather alarming. From neighborhood to higher educational institutions, intensity of caste discrimination and gender violence are truly appalling.

In fact, official documents recently began to highlight the level of systemic discrimination and marginalization of not only dalits and tribes but also Muslims. Prime Minister's High Level Committee headed by Justice Rajinder Sachar to look into social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community (popularly called Sachar committee) clearly spelt out the deplorable condition in which majority of Muslims live in India. The systematic marginalization starting from housing, health care, education, employment opportunities and financial assistance for entrepreneurial ventures has been well documented.

Thus, creating more inequality and making that process as culture became the hallmark of India's crony capitalism. The oft quoted term 'private sector' was ruthless when asked to implement reservation policy. The usual and perhaps most contemptuous response has always been that reservation would ruin merit in economic activities. 'Reservation and merit are antithetical concepts beyond a shadow of doubt' says categorically a leading industrialist Rahul Bajaj in an article (Thorat, Aryama and Negi, 2005: 250). The impression given by captains of industries is that their recruitment policies are absolutely meritorious and highly professional; the fact is as much as 72 to 85 per cent of workers are recruited through 'informal channels' (ibid, see the essay by T.S.Popala and S.Madheswaram). Actually, informal channel unambiguously proves the powerful role of caste and kin network in employment opportunities. An interesting study by Surinder Jodhka and Katherine Newman on interview data, analysing the attitudes of employer/hiring managers in India's private sector towards the caste and community attributes

of their potential employees shows the role of ascriptive qualities playing major influence in selecting candidates (Jodhka and Newman, 2007).

The highly prejudiced opinion that people belonging to marginalized communities especially dalits and tribes are not meritorious and cannot provide efficient service has been meticulously fabricated; such prejudices are not aberrations in India's crony capitalism, it is rather the culture. That is the reason when a person from marginalized community performs exceedingly well in studies or in his/her profession, it becomes news and people get 'cultural shock'.

In other words, taking pride in being a member of a dominant caste or religion is no longer an unwarranted residue of eclipses feudal era; discrimination, humiliation and social exclusion of dalits, tribes and Muslims are now infused in our commonsense and one would find them in private enterprises even in the most dynamic modern sectors of Indian economy (Thorat and Attewell, 2007: 4144). Business conglomerates that became disproportionately powerful since 1991 simply turned the responsibility on to the State when they were asked to adhere to reservation policy in private sectors. In fact, two of the major Indian business conglomerates simply dismissed the role of caste in labor market in India; they rather revert back to their favorite jargon-meritocracy and efficiency. The summary of one of their reports says,

"…competitiveness of enterprise and economy is not negotiable and must be achieved and maintained through knowledge and competence in the rapidly developing Indian economy. To accelerate growth and competitiveness of the Indian economy, institutions must have autonomy and flexibility in order to create and expand job opportunities for all section of society. Inclusiveness would ultimately be achieved through universal access to quality education which presumably is a responsibility of the State" (Jodhka, 2008: 191).

The State's fast withdrawal from spending on education especially on school education is quite obvious and education became one of the most lucrative private enterprises today in India.

What we see today is a paradox. On the one hand, the privileged castes publically denounce that caste is no longer an issue to reckon with; on the other hand, their desperation to establish or maintain caste hegemony is truly stunning. Thus, one would come across caste elites' repeated assertion that caste is the major hurdle for India's growth; caste based reservation is quite detrimental to country's progress. This may surprise especially the outsiders; they would wonder where caste is? When Andre Beteille (1996) declares that 'caste is longer an important agent of social placement or control' one would be thoroughly perplexed. This country has been witnessing several attempts by the caste elites to invent the so-called castelessness since independence; whereas the less-privileged subaltern masses have been forced to rely on caste identities as the only way to negotiate with the State for resources. This effortlessly enabled the caste elites to declare the subaltern masses as 'casteist' people and as people unwilling to contribute to the progress of the country (Deshpande, 2013).

Most interestingly the caste elites turned their culturally sanctioned and socially approved capital into different nomenclature; in other words, terms such as 'merit' and 'efficiency' are basically camouflaged words to reassert the hegemony of caste elites. Therefore, merit and efficiency are not to be treated as mere words; they are the responses of caste elites to the subaltern assertion. To put it simply, the resources caste elites have accumulated over a period of several centuries is now metamorphosized into modern capital; modern nation-state is very pleased with this modern capital; modern institutions, especially educational institutions, are legally sanctioned to adhere to it (Subramanian, 2015).

This synchronized interest between caste elites and crony capitalists establishes nefarious hegemony to be challenged by subaltern masses. Marginalized communities – Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes have their representatives – nearly eighty law makers in the parliament and roughly five hundred legislative members to various states are elected and scores of people are recruited through highly competitive exams to various levels of

bureaucracy; this representational democracy is necessary but not sufficient to be designated as liberal democracy since the spirit of substantive democracy is conspicuously missing. It would be absent precisely for reasons which are delineated above – the incredible bonhomie between the cultural hegemony of caste elites and greedy character of crony capitalism remains the most powerful stumbling block on our way to achieve substantial democracy. Market driven liberalized economic policies may have created more economic opportunities; as a result a good number of women, subaltern masses may have obtained employment opportunities; this may have elevated their economic status. But the crux of the argument remains – are we moving closer to an egalitarian society where homogenization of power within culture is assured? Are we ensuring inclusive India where humiliation of people based on their ascriptive identities is no longer declared as tradition/culture? How far we have evolved to ensure justice to all? The democracy deficit is no longer a mere scuttlebutt; it is, in fact, a glaring face of resurgent India.

Acknowledgement

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Customary Justice System: A Study of the Rongmei Nagas in the Valley of Manipur

--Gaishinlu Kamson

Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to study the customary justice system that exists among the Rongmei Naga and also highlights how the village council makes use of the customary laws of the people to administer justice. Customary village authorities like the village council have been serving as customary justice systems for as long as the Rongmei tribe has existed and continue to exist today alongside the state legal system. All civil cases and cases of conflict concerning the members of the village are tried by the village council, which also serves as the village court. In spite of the lack of a formal status, the Rongmei people of Manipur, particularly those still following their indigenous religion, continue to regulate their community and social affairs and adjudicate justice according to the customary laws and trust the integrity of the council members to impart justice.

Key words: customary justice system, customary law, Rongmei, Naga, village council

Introduction

The Rongmei people are an indigenous tribal community of North-East India and can be found in the states of Assam, Manipur and Nagaland though the majority of the population is concentrated in the state of Manipur. The Rongmei along with the cognate tribes of Inpui, Liangmai, and Zeme are popularly known as Zeliangrong. This group of people shares common origin and as a result there is a large number of similarities in their customs, traditions, and way of life. The Rongmei people along with the Inpui, Liangmai and Zeme trace their origin to Makhel in the present-day Senapati district of Manipur from where they are said to have migrated to Makuilongdi (Kamei, 2004; Lanbilung, 2018; N. Pamei, 2001). Makuilongdi is believed to

be the place where the socio-cultural and political life of these four cognate tribes evolved and progressed. Like most tribal people, the people do not have a written history and their rich socio-cultural heritage is preserved and carried on in the form of legends, folktales and songs.

In Manipur, the Rongmei tribe is concentrated in the districts of Tamenglong and Noney; they are also found in Sadar Hills and Loktak project area and there are a large number of Rongmei population settled in the districts of Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal, Bishnupur and Jiribam. Their total population in Manipur, according to the 2011 census is 103, 908 and the Rongmei population settled in the valley districts is 18, 413 (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 2011). They are the single largest tribal population permanently settled in the valley districts. The Rongmei population settled in the valley of Manipur migrated from the hill districts over the course of Manipur's ancient history. A large number of their population were settled by the Meitei rulers during the pre-colonial period to serve as workers and for helping during the wars with Myanmar. Some others settled during the British colonial period as workers of the British officers; while others came voluntarily looking for better opportunities. The Kabui settlement in the valley area of Manipur is said to have started during the reign of Khagemba (1597 – 1652). Khagemba is said to have settled the Kabui people along with the Liangmai, Zeme, and Inpui in several villages across the Manipur Valley to work in the granaries (Kamei, 2004). Some of these villages include Changangkei and Tamphakei (Lanbilung, 2018). However, Thaimei (1995) writes that the Kabui settlement in the valley area of the Meitei kingdom started during the reign of Garibniwaz (1709 – 1748) when he settled the Zeliangrong people who had rendered their help during the war against Burma (1734 – 1735) in Chingmeirong and the Langthabal hills. Most of the older villages have been in existence for more than a hundred and fifty years.

Due to their migration to the valley, away from their original habitat in the hilly areas of Manipur, the people have had to make certain adjustments in

their customs and practices to suit the surrounding physical and social environment. However, they have succeeded in emulating their old village systems and continue to the live in villages where the population of these villages, even in the municipal area of Imphal East and Imphal West, is strictly homogenous. Their villages are mostly segregated from the Meitei settlements of other tribal communities. This closed or 'gated' village system, which resulted in a kind of seclusion from the other communities, has in a way enabled them to practise their customs and traditions without much outside influence. Though most of the Rongmei people in the hill areas have converted to Christianity, a small section of the population living in the older villages in the valley area still practice their indigenous religion and conduct their village affairs according to their age-old customs and traditions. These traditional villages are governed by the village council with the chief as head of the council. The strict rule of the village by this council has also helped in the preservation and growth of the customs and traditions of the people. This might also be responsible, to some extent, for the low rate of religious conversions in these villages. The majority of the tribal people have converted to Christianity, and they are gradually beginning to shed their customs and traditions in the name of progress and modernization. In such a context, studying the culture and traditions of the tribal people becomes important. The present study attempts to understand the dispute resolution mechanisms of the Rongmei people and its relevance till date. The study was carried out through the use of both primary and secondary data. The Rongmei people do not have a written history and their traditions are passed down orally. As such, it was difficult to collect written materials about their customary laws and records of the cases that were brought to the *pei*. Elders of the *pei* of various villages, as well as knowledgeable people of the community, were consulted. Books, theses, and articles both in journals and newspapers were also consulted.

Customary Justice System

A justice system is understood to consist of 'institutions that are central to resolving conflicts arising over alleged violations or different interpretations

of the rules that societies create to govern members' behaviour, and that as a consequence, are central to strengthening the normative framework (laws and rules) that shapes public and private actions'(Reiling, Hammergren, & Giovanni, 2007). On the other hand, a customary justice system is a system of imparting justice that makes use of customs, practices, and norms that have been used by a specific group of people repeatedly for such an extent of time that they have come to be considered mandatory (Harper, 2011). Customary justice system, an informal or non-state justice system similar to other traditional or religious legal orders, has been used by tribal people and indigenous groups as a means of delivering justice for a very long time. According to the customary or traditional way of adjudicating disputes, problems and disputes are addressed as a whole. Disputes are dealt with in their entirety and the adjudication process is not divided into different stages. This not only helps in expediting the resolution process for both the parties involved but also aides in the restoration of relationships and communal harmony. Small disputes are usually first handled by the extended family or the clan elders, while more complicated disputes are handled to the village council. Only those situations which cannot be resolved customarily or those beyond the jurisdiction of the village authority is referred to the state.

Rules and procedures of customary or traditional justice systems are usually flexible. Norms are frequently modified to suit the changing social situation, economic conditions and also as a result of it changing surroundings. For instance, whenever a case is brought to the village council, the plaintiff had to give a jar of wine as fee. Now, it has been replaced by money. Another notable change among the Rongmei people is that the fine for any wrongdoing has been changed from pig to cash equivalent to the size of the pig. Punishment for inter-clan marriage which resulted in expulsion from the village has also been reduced to a fine in some Rongmei villages. Participation in dispute resolution was earlier restricted on the basis of gender but at present, dispute resolution is open with the disputants, witnesses, and other people of the village taking part in the deliberation process. The primary goal of customary justice is to restore intra-community harmony by mending relationships

between disputing parties and establishing a framework for reintegration (Penal Reform International, 2000).

Customary laws usually form the basis of customary justice system. Customary laws are well-established social practices that are used as a form of social control and sanction in many tribal societies around the world. These are age-old rules of behaviour and conduct of life which may be unwritten but strictly followed within a specific group. Regardless of its informal status, most tribes govern their community and social affairs through customary laws, which they regard as integral to their culture and fundamental to their identity. By definition, customary law is a non-state legal system 'that parallels the substantive and procedural functions of state made laws.' These, unlike state laws, 'emerge from within the community and demand social acceptance and observance' (Srivastava, 2008, p. 3). These laws reinforce the tribe's age-old traditions while also tying it together through normative rules that govern social and personal relationships among its members (Chand & Kumar, 2014). If there are any disturbances in the society as a result of non-observance of customary rules and practises, society has some socio-cultural mechanism in place to maintain equilibrium, social order, tranquility, and peace among its members (Vitso, 2003). The main advantage of customary law is that it is derived from the community and thus simple and easy to understand.

Customary law is generally defined as the aggregate of accepted customary practices, usages, traditions, and norms which are considered by the people as binding. Customary laws are a subset of tribal jurisprudence; they are approved, acknowledged, and followed by members of society, and they play an important role in fostering social cohesion (Gangte, 2016, p. 17). Customary law plays a significant role in the regulation of society and its use in dispute management is very effective among tribal groups. Customary laws are a common feature of indigenous and local communities. Each tribe have their own customs and rules to regulate society and maintain peace and harmony among themselves. Their societies did not have written laws and were instead governed by a plethora of unwritten usages that prescribed rules

of conduct to individuals and regulated human behaviour and day-to-day life. Thus, a customary law is a society's habitual course of conduct and contains d os and donts based on its norms, practises, and usages, as well as mechanisms such as taboo, sanction, and so on that restrain their behaviour   (Fernandes, Pereira, & Khatso, n.d.).

The Constitution of India provides certain measures for the protection of the cultural distinctness of the tribal people. The administration and management of Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes residing in any State other than the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram are addressed under the Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution while provisions pertaining to the administration of tribal areas in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram are found in the Sixth Schedule. Certain tribal regions are allowed to be administered as autonomous units under the Sixth Schedule. Currently, there are 10 Autonomous Districts – three each in Assam, Meghalaya, and Mizoram and one in Tripura. The Fifth Schedule designates tribal majority areas in ten tribal minority states within peninsular India including, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Rajasthan. However, the Fifth Schedule does not provide special rights for the indigenous communities unlike the Sixth Schedule. Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, and Tripura which were not parts of Assam do not fall under the Sixth Schedule and do not recognise the customary laws of the tribal people. They only have a few administrative advantages (Barooah, 2002). Amendments to the Constitution of India recognise Nagaland's (Article 371A) and Mizoram's (371G) customary law. In the case of Nagaland, it is controlled by Article 371 (A), which states that until the Nagaland Assembly determines otherwise through a resolution, no Act of Parliament shall apply throughout the State in several areas. These include the administration of civil and criminal justice with decisions made in accordance with Naga customary law, as well as ownership and transfer of land and its resources. The same applies to Mizoram under the Article 371G. When it comes to Manipur, the hill areas of Manipur do not fall under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution but under a state legislation, the

Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act. 1971 (Kom, 2010). This act established six autonomous district councils in Manipur for the five hill districts, which as of 2016 has increased to 10, with autonomy provisions similar to those in the Sixth Schedule although on a lesser level. Consequently, Article 731C of the Constitution provides Manipur with the special provisions for the legislation and administration of the tribal people (Kamei, 2008). However, provisions are only applicable in the hill districts and does not cover the tribal population living in the valley area. As a result, these provisions are not applicable to the Rongmei villages in the valley. Their village council and courts have no authority or legal power. And although the constitution recognises customary law, it is subject to conformity with statute-made laws (Srivastava, 2008). Nonetheless, the Rongmei people believe that no one can escape the consequences of violation of their customary law which has been followed since the time of their ancestors. The Rongmei people combine kinship-based political organisation with well-defined laws and procedures for punishing offenders through traditional courts. As a result, the majority of them accept the legitimacy of customary laws that are well aligned with their religious beliefs (Singh, 1993). They consider it their moral obligation to follow their customary laws and abide by the rules and customs of the society. The basic idea of community responsibility causes them to live together in compact groups and maintain social harmony. The customary law that regulates the life of the people are reflected in almost every sphere of the socio-economic and religious life and any sort of deviation from the set rules and customs is not tolerated and is punished accordingly. The concept of law as a way of life transforms law into a living concept that is learned through experience. Law, as life, is intertwined with the complex relationships that exist in many tribal communities. It is exemplified in some tribes by societal divisions based on age, which direct members' individual and kin relationships, as well as the responsibilities that individual and group members have to one another and to the community (Melton, 1995).

The Rongmei attaches immense importance to their customary laws. Like most other tribes of the north-eastern region of India, they are a patriarchal

society with exogamous clans and sub clans, governed by their un-codified customary laws. It may be noted that some customary laws and customs of the Rongmei people may vary from village to village even though they belong to the same tribe (Makuga, 2007). This is because people in their long history, did not develop a tribe or a community level polity formation. However, the internal political and social structures of the various Rongmei villages were uniform and similar with little local variation (Kamei, 2004, p. 321). The mechanisms of social control, rules of conduct, and customary law among the Rongmei people cover an intricate and wide range of issues including marriage, rules for the relationship between individuals and their kinsmen, rights and duties of the villagers, law of property in relation to inheritance, and land, cattle and other animals, and an array of wrongdoings against an individual or group of individuals. Customary village authorities like the village council have been serving as customary courts as long as the Rongmei tribe exists and they make use of customary law to regulate the lives of the people within their jurisdiction. It is through their customary laws that any deviation from the societal norms and rules are consulted.

Pei (village council)

Rongmei people live in villages and every Rongmei village, inhabited by people still practicing their indigenous religion, has a traditional village council known as the *pei*. In the past, the Rongmei village used to be a distinct political and economic unit that was also organised as a religious community and the village authority regulated the socio-political, economic and religious aspects of the lives of people within its jurisdiction (Kamei, 2004). The village council is now more of a social institution, regulating only people's social and religious lives.

The village is the basic unit of the Rongmei society, and kin groups, lineages, and clans form the social unit (Beeju, 2014). The village is constituted by the various exogamous clans, and a village always has two or more clans residing in it. Age is an extremely important element in the determination of rank within the society and in granting the rights and privileges of a person. Age

confers authority in matters regarding law and governance. The senior-most male members have the decisive voice in all matters concerning the regulation of the lives of the people in the public sphere. The Rongmei village was described by William McCulloch as a "small republic" where safety can only be gained by strictly observing the rights of person and property; anyone infringing the laws or norms of the community is punished by fine, ex-communicated, or even expelled (McCulloch, 1859, p. 49). The various villages maintain an almost independent relationship with other villages (Kamei, 2004, p. 328). No other village has the right to interfere in the internal affairs of another village and the decision of the *pei* of that village (D. Pamei, 1985). The role of the *pei* or village council is of utmost importance in administering justice to the people since this institution is the guardian of the existing traditions and customary practices.

As mentioned earlier, the Rongmei society is governed by a village council. It is the most powerful body in the village polity (Kamei, 2004). It consists of the senior-most male members of the village and no woman can become a member of the body. Power accumulates with age, but it is by no means a despotic system. Its existence is based on age-old customs and traditions of the Rongmei people. The *pei* wields all administrative, judicial, religious power. It consists of the village chief and his council of elders. The succession of the village chief, in the case of the Rongmei people settled in the valley of Manipur, is based on a specific clan system. All male members of the village can become members of the *pei* after they have attained a certain age. This rise in the social hierarchy is however, achieved only when there is a vacancy due to the passing away of an old member, or if he is unable to carry on his office due to certain reasons.

The *pei* also works as the chief court of justice in the village and hears cases of disputes and passes verdicts. According to Kamei (2004), the power and prestige of the *pei* lies in its judicial functions. The primary role of the *pei* is to maintain peace and harmony among the villagers and also to guard their customs and traditions, particularly in respect of socio-cultural and religious

matters against violations. It acts as a court of justice to decide on disputes, both civil and criminal, based on the customary law of the people. Disputes and differences between families of the same clan are as far as possible decided by the elders of the clan. But if they cannot solve the problem, the case is brought to the *pei*. If the nature of case is trivial, only the members of the council and the parties involved would attend the proceedings. But if it is a serious case, such as adultery or murder, the entire household of the parties involved are called to attend the trial. Imposition of fines, punishment and justification of any case is done on the basis of age-old Rongmei customary laws.

Dispute resolution among the Rongmei Nagas

The Rongmei people have had an indigenous system of governance at the administrative, executive and judicial levels since pre-colonial times and continue to practice it to this day. The customary justice system of the Rongmei people is simple and effective. This system is guided by the unwritten customary law, traditions, and practices that are learned by example and through oral teachings of their elders. The methods used are based on concepts of restorative and reparative justice. The *pei* decides cases of violation of societal norms and serves justice based on the customary laws of the people that have been in practice since the time of their ancestors.

The social and religious life of the Rongmei people practicing their indigenous religion mostly depends upon the customs and traditions prevailing in their region which are closely linked with their ancient culture and customs. Over the years they have developed certain customs and laws to settle disputes among them. Disputes dealing with marriage and divorce, adoption and inheritance are settled by the village council or *pei*. The Rongmei people strictly follow rules regarding clan endogamy, bride-price, observance of prohibited degrees of kinship in marriage and inheritance. On a complaint lodged by an individual of the village, a bottle of wine (*zou lai*) or a certain amount of money is offered as fee to the village council. The *peipou* or the person to whom the complaint is made, then calls the other members of the *pei*

and holds a meeting on the matter before they call the parties involved in the dispute. The *pei* mostly settles disputes arising out of matters which are essentially civil in nature. In regard to the crimes of lesser magnitude, the general aim is to compensate or reimburse the one who is wronged and to search for reconciliation between the disputants.

In cases of trivial matters among family members, the elders of the clan are first consulted. The clan elders try to resolve the disputes amicably and to the satisfaction of both parties. However, in cases where a solution cannot be agreed upon, the matter is taken to the village council. The council then holds a meeting on the matter and a decision is usually passed after much deliberations involving both the parties in dispute. Hence, the verdicts are usually to the satisfaction of both parties. Like with all cases handled by customary or traditional justice systems, the solutions to the problems are generally consensus-based and aimed at reconciliation and the maintenance of communal peace and harmony.

Customary mechanisms are usually rooted in local or indigenous tradition, religion or/and culture. The procedures and rules are flexible and the outcomes are usually the result of consensus. In addition, the customary courts strive to generate outcomes that aim at reconciliation and are based on mutual respect. Customary adjudication processes are led by the council members who are familiar with the disputants and who enjoy moral and social authority. The disputants are familiar with them and the elders also know the history to the dispute and matters that may be deemed as important to the resolution. This familiarity with local circumstances allows the council members to understand the different aspects of the disputes of both the parties and to arbitrate the dispute by taking into account the existing relationships in the community. According to Pamei (1985), emergency cases like murder were settled at the residence of the victim. And the *pei* usually tried to settle such cases on the day of the incident. In the case of land disputes, the members of the *pei* use their comprehensive knowledge of the community and history of the village to

establish ownership and minor breaches of property are settled through compromise.

The offender is punished in different ways based on the severity of the crime. Laws are mild and most of the crimes are punished only by fines; however, in more severe cases, the offender is ex-communicated or even expelled from the village. The usual punishment for any breach of social norm is that the guilty is fined a pig, a portion of which is shared with all the families in the village. This serves as a reminder or a message to everyone in the village that certain types of behaviour will not be tolerated, thus, serving as a preventive measure against future offences. This could also be interpreted as an apology by the perpetrator to both the victim and the community for disrupting the village's harmony and unity. Capital punishment is unknown and the highest punishment was banishment or ex-communication. According U. G. Bower (1950), there was no appeal from a decision of the village court. Judgement once given is irrevocable and the parties must accept it. Any family dispute pertaining to inheritance is decided as per customary law. Previously, the parental property was inherited by the youngest son and the daughters inherited only moveable assets like jewellery. Nowadays, both the sons and daughters are entitled to their parent's properties. Divorce can be sought by either the husband or the wife on grounds of barrenness, incompatibility, etc. If divorce is sought by the husband, the wife need not return the bride price but if the wife applies for divorce, she has to return the bride price. Custody of children after divorce usually goes to the father. However, if the child is still young, the mother takes care of the child until they grow older.

Criminal cases like murder were also settled by the *pei*. However, such cases were very rare. Punishment was given to the criminal by turning him out of the village for a certain period of time. Moreover, a heavy fine was imposed on the criminal (L. Thaimei, 2002, p. 73). The kind of fine imposed on the criminal varies according to the crime committed. The compulsory fine usually paid by the criminal is known as *meirung khapmei* which is paid in the form of a paddy field (in the case of valley dwellers) or plot of land (in the

case of hill dwellers). Besides this, steps such as confiscation of all his properties was also enforced.[i]

In the past, in cases where there was lack of evidence and witnesses for deciding a case, divine guidance was sought through oaths and ordeals. In other words, sometimes when the cases were vague and could not be settled peacefully, the *pei* resorted to taking of oath and trial by ordeal to resolve the dispute. This form of dispute resolution is called *sengding dingmei*. The people believe that an oath involves supernatural power. Since false oath is held to entail death or misfortune, the Rongmei do not risk their lives by pledging them to the truth of a statement of a kinsman unless they are fairly satisfied that the statement is true. Usually, oath and ordeal were directed by and under the direct supervision of the elders of the *pei* (Kabui, 2017, p. 5387). Among the Rongmei, an important form of oath, known as *ganrih tao sinmei,* is that taken on a meteoric stone (*ganrih tao*) (Hodson, 1911, p. 111). In the same way, oaths were taken by biting the tooth of a tiger (*kamang neih kaimei)* and on a grain of rice (*napgum nenmei*). Oath was also taken by the name of the *bambu*, the village deity, as it is believed that the deity shall not protect the liar. This form of oath taking is known as *bambukhou sengding dingmei* (Kabui, 2017). If the guilt of a person cannot be proven in a satisfactory manner, they are compelled to make the oaths mentioned above in the presence of the village chief and the members of the *pei*. If they can do so in the *pei*, to which great divine sanctity is attached, in the presence of all its members, they are regarded as innocent. But if they are unable to do so, their guilt is proven. It is believed that when an oath is taken falsely, the person taking the oath will be killed by a thunderbolt or a tiger in due course or they will die before a harvest (Kabui, 2017). It will be noteworthy to mention here that most of the Rongmei *peis* are still in possession of a tiger tooth and meteoric stone even though they are not in use anymore.

Trial by ordeal was also a common practice to prove the guilt or innocence of a person. Usually, the test is of life or death and survival is taken as the proof of innocence. *Duilupmei*, a water ordeal where the suspects had to dive into

water, is believed to be the most common and easiest ordeal a person has to go through to prove their innocence (Kabui, 2017). The person who could stay under water the longest was considered innocent and the first person to come up for air was regarded as guilty.

Contemporary relevance of the traditional dispute resolution mechanism of the Rongmei Nagas

The customs and traditions of the Rongmei people are passed down orally through generations. Despite the presence of formal institutions dealing with dispute resolution, the Rongmei people still continue to rely on the age-old traditional system of dispute resolution through the *pei*. The villages in the valley of Manipur fall under various municipalities and panchayats and have no legal authority over the people living in the villages. Despite this, the *pei* continues to be the highest authority in the village and continues to regulate the life of the people living within its jurisdiction. Though the *pei* has no legal authority, various cases of disputes among the villagers are still brought to the pei for trial. However, with changing times and situations, some changes have also been noticed in the functioning of the *pei* and the cases it deals with. For instance, cases involving murder are no longer dealt with by the *pei*. Such cases are handed over to the police. Cases of theft, if committed by an outsider, is also handed over to the police. Another point to be noted is that if the individuals are not satisfied with the verdict of the *pei*, can be taken up to the *pei* of the Zeliangrong Union, which is the apex body of all the Zeliangrong people.[ii] Certain practices have also been abandoned due to their irrelevance. However, since the villages of the Rongmei people are scattered across the state, some practices which may have been discontinued in the valley area may continue to be practiced in the hill areas of the state. For instance, though most of these practices of trial by ordeal or by taking oaths have been mostly discontinued in many villages, we still find some cases of it being practiced in remote villages in Khoupum area of Noney district of Manipur ('ZB Deplores Traditional Judgement Method', 2014). The continued reliance of the people on the traditional or customary justice system to resolve

disputes and seek justice shows that the dispute resolution mechanism is very much relevant in the present time.

Conclusion

The customary justice system of the Rongmei tribe is an indigenous justice system that has been responsible for administering justice to the people since before the emergence of the nation-state. Customary village authorities like the village council have been serving as customary justice system since the existence of the tribe and their authority can be witnessed to this day. This village council which is made up of elderly men is responsible not only for bringing wrong-doers to justice but also for maintaining social harmony among the villagers. The Rongmei villages are usually independent of each other and each village acts as a 'small republic' (McCulloch, 1859). Unlike Western legal systems, customary justice systems are generally 'an integrated component of a broader governance mechanism' (Harper, 2011, p. 18). The political, executive, administrative, and judicial functions of the members of the *pei* are inseparable and intertwined. There is no separation of power like in the modern western liberal democracies. The customary law and practices of the people are not merely laws that govern the people, instead it should be viewed as mechanisms of governance and social control. We find that the Rongmei people still regulate their socio-political, economic and religious life according to their customary law and treat it as an integral part of their culture and identity. Though the village council of the Rongmei people in the valley have no legal authority, the people still comply with the authority of the village council in matters of custom and social life. These customary laws and practices reinforce the age-old traditions of people and help in maintaining social peace and harmony. The customary courts hear and determine a wide range of cases including civil and criminal cases like marriage, divorce, land disputes, theft and even murder. Tribal communities like the Rongmei people place a lot of importance on harmonious community relations. As a result, decisions and judgments on conflicts are made with the goal of preserving communal harmony and unity in mind.

However, there are various constraints of customary justice system. Verdicts may lack consistency as the procedures and rules are flexible. Since the customary laws of the Rongmei people are transmitted orally, there might be inconsistencies in their interpretation and there are chances of those in power misinterpreting the laws for their benefit. Though the village council members are expected to be fair and impartial, it cannot be ruled out that they might be influenced by certain factors while judging the cases. Additionally, because decisions are based on precedent, members of the village council might not be familiar with extremely uncommon circumstances. Because, of this there might be discrepancies in the decision making. Nonetheless, despite the diminishing authority of the customary village authority, the Rongmei people have attempted to preserve the sanctity of customary practices and the traditional way of life. The preference for these kinds of indigenous and traditional or customary system of justice is due to the fact that elders and customs are still viewed with reverence. Customary courts play an important role in delivering justice and providing security to the people these courts can fill a major gap in the delivery of justice left by the formal justice system especially among tribal and indigenous people in rural and far-flung areas. Customary justice system also can contribute to the achievement of equal and effective access to justice especially for tribal, indigenous, rural and other marginalised populations.

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Notes

[i] Pantizai Longmei, Secretary, Planning and Development and Athai Kamei, ex-Zone Chairman of the Zeliangrong Union, interviewed on March 9, 2018

[ii] Khomeimacha Kamson, member of the *pei* of Ragailong village, Imphal, Manipur, interviewed on July 15, 2019

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Article: Dietary Practices Among The Paniyas of Kottiyoor, Kerala

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Dietary Practices Among The Paniyas of Kottiyoor, Kerala

--Praveen Kumar Ch **&** Shalima TP

Abstract

The present paper aims to understand the traditional food habits, notions of food, and changes in food habits among the Paniyas in Kerala. The study has identified significant changes in food habits and notions among the Paniyas in recent times. These changes can be primarily attributed to factors such as interactions with non-tribals, internal migrations, employment opportunities in towns and cities, media influence, cinema, improved transportation availability, and advancements in communication. The findings reveal a noteworthy shift in the food habits and notions on food by Paniyas in recent times, resulting from their interactions with the mainstream society and leading them to adopt new dietary practices. Anthropological fieldwork was conducted in four tribal settlements in the Kottiyoor block of Kannur District to gather primary data. The primary data collection involved case studies, key informant interviews, informal group discussions, observations, and a basic household survey. Study findings also reveal the importance of preserving and understanding the cultural significance of traditional food practices while acknowledging the impact of changing lifestyles and external influences

Keywords:Traditional foods, livelihoods, occupations, labourers, migration, adaptation

Introduction

Study of food and eating has a long history in anthropology, beginning in the nineteenth century with Garrick Mallery and William Robertson Smith. (Sidney W. Mintz, et al., 2002). For both the uncivilized and the civilized individual, nothing holds greater significance than their food choices and eating habits. In their pursuit to alleviate hunger, humans encounter a web of cultural and institutional influences, shaping their dietary behaviors. Additionally, individuals worldwide are accustomed to their traditional foods

and methods of satisfying hunger (Masuoka, 1945). Food is one of the basic needs for human beings for survival and it is not just the source of energy for physiological needs of the individuals but also a factor which has a social-cultural dimensions. The choice of food is one of the most interesting visible ways in which men and women express their cultural differences. It reflects the cultures that have been adopted in accordance with their environment.

The Paniya tribe primarily resides in the districts of Wayanad, Kannur, Kozhikode, and Malappuram in Kerala, along with adjacent areas in Coorg, Karnataka, and the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu. Wayanad holds the largest concentration of the Paniya population in South India. According to the 2011 Census, Wayanad is home to 15,876 Paniya families, totaling a population of 69,116. The term "Paniya/Paniyan/Paniyar" essentially denotes individuals engaged in laborious work. This nomenclature likely reflects their historical social position as a community primarily engaged in labor for landlords or *janmis* in agrarian settings. Paniyas traditionally relied on the collection of fruits, tubers, and other forest products for their sustenance which lasted till recent times. They were also relied on fishing and hunting activities to meet their basic food necessities. Traditionally, they are food gathers, they have plenty of information about the forest foods and conventional ways to collecting food items. Edible roots, leaves, small crab, rice, tapioca, fish, vegetables, roots are their stable food items (Josna, 2021).

For generations, indigenous tribes have inhabited forested areas, relying heavily on the forest for sustenance and economic support. Their diet primarily consists of foraged items like herbs, wild leafy greens, berries, mushrooms, as well as hunting and fishing for wild game and fish. These forest foods have been traditionally valued for their abundance of micronutrients and perceived medicinal properties. However, regulations such as environmental laws, wildlife sanctuaries, and forest regulations have limited or curtailed tribal access to forest resources and natural reserves. The forest laws and regulations have restricted hunting and collection of forest produce by Paniyas. Furthermore, recent decades have witnessed ecological

upheaval due to global climate change, leading to shifts in plant and animal species. Many naturally occurring edible plants and insects have vanished due to factors like reduced rainfall, deforestation, and a warming climate. These changes have compelled tribal communities to alter their dietary habits, increasingly relying on commercial food products or government-provided rations.

The Paniyas, who were formerly geographically isolated, have lately started having regular interaction with mainstream society, which has led to a change in their dietary habits. Over time, there have been changes in dietary habits, taking into account both past consuming practices and the practices currently employed. These changes in life style and priorities in the food habits are an impact of mainstream people who have penetrated into tribal areas. The changes in occupations, influence of outsiders, access to education and awareness, the impact of media, developments in transport and communication have contributed to the changes in the food habits of Paniyas.

The development of dietary patterns within the Paniya tribe is a complex process that is shaped by a variety of socio-economic, cultural, and environmental factors. Over the years, changes in lifestyle and priorities have caused notable alterations in the eating habits of these tribes, frequently bringing them more in line with the nutritional practices of the wider community. As tribal communities become more assimilated into the wider socio-economic structure, the impact of mainstream dietary practices becomes more evident. Paniyas migrate to urban areas or leave their settlements to work as daily wage labourers for non-tribal. The constant interactions with individuals from the mainstream have altered one's perspective on the world, leading to a shift in their perceptions regarding food habits. They began imitating the dietary preferences of the larger community. This trend can be observed by the arrival of processed foods, fast food establishments, and convenience stores into indigenous areas, providing additional dietary choices that would not have been conventionally accessible. Occupational changes also significantly influence the formation of eating habits. As traditional

means of making a living, such as farming, hunting, and gathering, are replaced by working for wages or moving outside to find employment, dietary choices often change too. For instance, those employed in metropolitan areas embrace dietary patterns that align with urban lives, adding fast food or prepackaged snacks into their meals because of its ease and widespread availability. The presence of external entities, such as government agencies, NGOs, and private enterprises, also has a role in altering dietary patterns among Paniyas. Development initiatives, nutritional interventions, and food aid programmes have the potential to introduce unfamiliar foods or modify conventional dietary practices with the goal of enhancing health outcomes or reducing food insecurity. While these efforts may have positive intentions, they can sometimes result in the displacement of traditional food systems and cultural practices.

Along with the above mentioned factors with relevance to changes in food habits, access to education and awareness on food consumption patterns play a crucial role in shaping dietary behaviors among Paniyas. The services of *anganwadi* workers and *Asha* workers also create awareness on food and nutrition related matter with Paniyas, specifically with pregnant women and children. The anganwaadi centers have been established in Paniya settlements and some of Paniya women are recruited as *aayas* in anganwadis centers. The *Asha* workers visit Paniya settlements on daily basis and maintain a close relation with Paniya women and they spend time with Paniyas while creating awareness on various issues like balanced diet, nutrition, hygiene and health. The Paniya women follow the guidelines and suggestions given by *Anganwadi* and *Asha* workers. The anganwadis centers provide nutrition to pregnant women and children, and they also explain the importance of balanced diet for the women and children. Increased literacy rates and access to educational resources expose individuals to new ideas about nutrition, health, and food preparation. This leads to the adoption of dietary guidelines promoted by government agencies or health organizations, influencing food choices and consumption patterns.

The impact of media, both traditional and digital, further amplifies the influence of mainstream food culture on Paniyas. Television programs, advertisements, and social media platforms showcase a wide range of culinary options, enticing individuals to experiment with new flavors and cuisines. Cooking shows, in particular, popularize certain dishes and cooking techniques, leading to their adoption in households across diverse cultural backgrounds. Developments in transport and communication have also contributed to the homogenization of food habits among tribal communities. Improved infrastructure and connectivity facilitate the transportation of food products across regions, making a wider variety of foods accessible to remote tribal areas. This increased availability of diverse ingredients and culinary influences contributes to the diversification of diets and the integration of new food practices into traditional cuisines. The convergence of these factors has led to a gradual but significant transformation of food habits. While these changes offered culinary experiences and opportunities for dietary diversification. They also raise questions about the preservation of cultural heritage and the sustainability of traditional food systems in the face of increasing globalization and modernization. Balancing the benefits of dietary diversity with the preservation of cultural identity remains an ongoing challenge for policymakers, community leaders, and individuals within tribal communities. Along with the traditional food habits which are part of their culture, Paniyas also adopting the new dietary practices.

Socio-cultural factors in dietary Choices

Food habits are determined by culture because what is considered as food, the decision of what and when to eat, the way of eating meal, method of preparation, portion sizes are an integral part of culture which is regulated through tradition and custom. These customs have established consistent eating practices and fostered dietary habits that align with cultural norms, serving as symbolic and significant behaviors within the specific cultural community. Food habits are shaped by social environment within the context of history and belief system (Fieldhouse, 1985). An assessment of food

availability, dietary patterns, and nutritional status among various indigenous tribes across different regions of India has been carried out (Gupta, 1980). Taylor (1970) discusses slow and evident changes in food habits among agricultural communities like the Kikuyu people in Africa. While acknowledging the difficulty of altering food customs, it challenges the notion that such change is impossible or too gradual to address effectively. Instead, it emphasizes the impact of government policies on agricultural practices and, consequently, nutrition. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of social, economic, political, and cultural factors in shaping dietary patterns and highlights the importance of understanding these dynamics in designing development programs. Despite governmental interventions, the nutritional status in Kikuyuland hasn't significantly improved, potentially even regressing compared to the late 19th century. It stresses the necessity of holistic approaches to food-related issues to avoid unintentional harm to communities. The changing food-buying habits of Hanoians represent the effects of higher incomes and changing tastes as a result of twenty years of change in the economy. (Jensen, R., & Peppard, D. M, 2007*).*

Factors such as the introduction of new food production methods, the influence of commercialized food products, and shifts in cultural norms all play roles in altering established food habits. These changes are driven by both external factors like trade dynamics, economic prosperity, and food availability, as well as internal factors such as evolving tastes and perceptions of social status. However, the most significant factor often lies in the disruption of traditional institutions due to cultural interactions and transformations. This disruption undermines the traditional controls over dietary choices and consumption habits (Masouka, 1945). The food consumption pattern in India is diversifying towards high value commodities, the decline in per capita consumption of cereals in particular, coarse cereals, has worsened the nutritional status of the rural poor. (Praduman, et al.2007).

The exchange of food across regions, nations, and continents has occurred for centuries, although the study of the relationship between food and

globalization is relatively new to anthropology. Anthropologists have long been interested in food and its production, consumption, and exchange (Miller 1995, Mintz & Du Bois 2002), but food issues have largely been examined within the context of relatively closed systems of production in households, in local communities, and in ethnic groups. The focus, historically, was on how food may reinforce, and at times create, distinct cultural worlds (Phillips, 2006).

Methodology and Area of Study

The present study has been carried out in Kottiyoor grama panchayat, in Kannur district of Kerala. An anthropological field work has been conducted in four tribal settlements in Kottiyoor Panchayat, namely Thazhe Mandamcheri, Mele Mandamcheri, Kallanthodu and Ambayathodu Palchuram. Primary data have been collected from one hundred families from the above mentioned tribal settlements. In primary data collection, anthropological techniques have been used; basic household survey, case studies, observation, key informant interviews, informal group discussions and unstructured interviews. Cameras, mobile phones and voice recorders were employed to record the information during interviews and group discussions in the field. Secondary data was collected from revenue records, gram panchayat records and relevant document and records from block level offices. The data have been collected from 462 individuals out of which 45.6% (211) are male and 54.35 are female (251), and these individuals are approached from the above mentioned settlements in Kottiyoor panchayat.

Limitations of the Study:

The study is conducted in the Kottiyoor Block of Kannur District, Kerala which shares the borders with Wayanad district. The findings primarily focus on the food habits and changes among the Paniyas of Kottiyoor. Study findings confines to four settlements of Paniyas living in Kottiyoor gram Panchayat and study does not provide any information on food habits of Paniyas from other regions of Kerala.

I) Traditional Food habits among Paniyas

The food habits and dietary practices of the Paniya community in the study area hold substantial anthropological significance as elucidated in this section. First, Paniyas exhibit distinctive culinary traditions, encompassing a diverse range of food items in their daily consumption. Historically, vegetables and porridge have occupied a central place in their dietary repertoire. Additionally, Paniyas have traditionally engaged in foraging activities, gathering edible roots, shoots, fruits, tubers, honey, edible leaves, firewood, and other valuable resources from the nearby forests adjacent to their settlements. In 'anthropology of food and nutrition,' Doshi (1995) analyses the food and nutrition in relation to culture and the dynamics of food ideology in tribal thought.

Second, Paniyas have been actively involved in agricultural pursuits, cultivating crops such as *Muthari* (ragi), and *chama* (small millet) among others. These crops have served as essential staples within their diet. In earlier times, dried paddy was processed to obtain rice, further augmenting their dietary diversity. Third, they have also involved in hunting and shifting cultivation activities, further enriching their livelihood strategies. It is noteworthy that the Paniya community adheres to cultural dietary norms which exclude the consumption of meat or fish as part of their customary practices. Instead, they rely on a plant-based diet that heavily features vegetables and porridge, forming the core of their daily meals. This unique dietary pattern represents an integral aspect of their cultural identity, worthy of in-depth anthropological exploration. Man learned to domesticate the plants for food and learnt to exploit the plant nutrients either by detoxifying them through processing or neutralizing the toxic with another food (Hossain, 2009*).* Furthermore, the Paniyas exhibit distinctive dietary practices related to pregnancy and childbirth. During pregnancy, they abstain from specific foods such as jackfruit and eggs, believed to potentially harm the fetus. Following childbirth, Paniya women adhere to a strict diet consisting of particular items like arrowroot powder, goat milk, and boiled vegetables. They also adhere to

the concept of 'hot and cold' foods, categorizing certain items as 'hot' or 'cold,' and avoid the consumption of 'hot' foods during pregnancy and the postpartum period. Moreover, Paniyas traditionally utilize specific herbs and plants for medicinal purposes, firmly believing in the therapeutical properties of certain foods. For instance, they employ neem tree bark to treat skin ailments, and they ascribe healing properties to turmeric. Overall, the dietary practices of the Paniya community are deeply rooted in the availability of natural resources and their cultural beliefs.

Remarkably, the Paniyas engage in reciprocal exchanges of goods and food items with neighboring tribes, reflecting a strong sense of community and interdependence. Historically, they have practiced balanced reciprocity, exchanging their own products with tribes like the Muthuvan and Kattunaicken. In return, they receive Minor Forest Produces (MFP) such as honey, fruits, dammer, *meenkolli koru* (poisonous seeds used in fishing), *pantham (kunthirikkam)*, among others. *Kaanthari* (small chili) holds a central place in most of their curries due to its perceived health benefits. It is worth noting that the use of cooking oils and coconut as primary ingredients in their cuisine has evolved over time, potentially influenced by non-tribal interactions, external factors, and resource availability. This dynamic adaptation reflects the ongoing changes within the Paniya culture and their culinary practices.

The Paniya community's culinary practices are distinguished by their extensive use of a diverse array of leaves in their food items, a practice not only enriching in flavor but also nutritionally significant. However, it is imperative to underscore the need for caution, as not all leaves are edible, with some, such as *Adukkalla cheera* and *kayppaka chap*, being potentially toxic, posing severe health risks including fatality, if ingested. In the meticulous preparation of these leaves, Paniyas adhere to a precise protocol. Initially, the leaves are subjected to a thorough cleaning process, followed by fine chopping; they are gently simmered in coconut oil, occasionally infused with a hint of chilli and salt to enhance their palatability. It is noteworthy that earlier

culinary traditions did not include the use of mustard and coconut in frying, a practice that has since been incorporated into modern Paniya cooking.

A variety of leaf types form the core of Paniyans cuisine after undergoing the requisite cooking procedures: *mathan chap* (pumpkin leaves), *chemb chap*, *mullancheera* (spinach), *koyippa chap*, *thavara chap*, *thakkali chap*, *vazhuthana chap*, *kandari mulakk* (small chilli leaf), *payar chap* (lentil leaves), *kovakka chap*, *muringa chap*, *kotta batti chap*, *thuvara chap*, *churali chap*, *vellarikka chap* (cucumber), *thirali chap*, *pavakka chap* (puppet), *vazhuthana chap* (eggplant), *kaippakka chap, thiralli chap, thavara chap, and adukkalacheera.* The Paniya community, characterized by their unique culinary traditions, enjoys a wide array of dishes, locally referred to as *kayivargangal* that are emblematic of their gastronomic heritage. Among these, notable dishes such as *Muthappankay*, *chadachikay*, *kollikay*, *paanalkay*, *irulkay*, and *padachikay* hold a place of distinction. It is important to note that some of these dishes, namely *Padachikay*, *kollikay*, and *muthappankay*, are traditionally consumed in colder seasons, adding an element of seasonal variation to their cuisine. Conversely, dishes like *nanjukkay*, *kottakay*, *soojikay*, *kurangukay*, *neeralakay*, and *soapkay* are strictly avoided due to their known toxicity.

Molluscs, a common dietary component among the Paniya, are typically subjected to heat and drying processes prior to culinary use. Additionally, the Paniya community has a unique practice of consuming only the palm-leaf skin. Moreover, the Paniya community also exhibits a predilection for mushroom consumption, referring to these fungi as *Kumma*. Unlike urban counterparts, Paniyas collect and savor a unique assortment of mushrooms, each possessing distinctive characteristics and seasonal availability. *Marakoon* mushrooms, a distinct category, are collected from treetops during the rainy season. These mushrooms are closely associated with the *Kumma* variety, which also thrives during this season. *Paavakoon* mushrooms are harvested from soil, while Perikoon mushrooms (*Peringali Koon*) are seasoned with a pinch of salt, pepper powder, and kandhari germination, becoming a

delectable treat during the rainy seasons. *Ochikoon, Karivekoon,* and *Puttukoon mushrooms* are harvested from trees, each offering a unique flavor profile. Karalikoon mushrooms, known for their distinct black appearance, are typically collected in the months of May and June. *Kudukkakoon* mushrooms, characterized by their round, white, ball-shaped appearance, are another seasonal delicacy. *Tharikoon* mushrooms, resembling noodles, are sought after during the rainy seasons. Furthermore, the Paniya diet incorporates various other mushroom varieties, including *Havakoon, Koyyalchattakoon, Kothakukoon, Maankoon, Kajallikoon, Ambukoon, Naayamulachikoon, and Vellarakoon.* Following collection, these mushrooms are meticulously washed, dried, and preserved with *kandhari,* salt, coconut oil, and an assortment of spices. It is essential to highlight that *Paambukoon* mushrooms are strictly avoided by the Paniyas due to their inherent toxicity. Thus, the culinary practices of the Paniya community, rich in diversity and deeply rooted in their natural environment, reflect their profound connection to the surrounding ecosystem and their distinctive cultural heritage.

Tubers hold a significant and indispensable role in the dietary practices of the Paniya community, constituting a staple food source for them. Among the tubers commonly consumed by Paniyas, the following varieties are prevalent: 1) *Kaattukizhang*, 2) *Cheenakizhang*, 3) *Koombikizhang*, 4) *Naarukizhang*, 5) *Kaalakizhang*, 6) *Bennakizhang*, and 7) *Paadakizhang*. These tubers predominantly flourish during the rainy season. However, it is crucial to note that certain tubers such as *Noolkizhang, kaattu chembaka*, and *kaattu chena* are inedible as they contain poisonous substances. Paniyas employ various culinary techniques, including boiling, frying, and cooking over open flames, before consumption. Particularly, when consuming fiber-rich *Naarukizhang*, they chew the fiber and consume its juice in small quantities.

Moving on to a discussion on the fish consumption, it is a prevailing and pivotal aspect of the Paniya diet, owing to the abundant availability of fish in their local environs. Rivers serve as the primary source of fish, and Paniyas engage in the capture of diverse fish species, including *Mannukuzhippe*,

Karikkanmeen, *Mullikotta*, *Vaalachi* (*vaalla*), *Muyye(mushi)*, *Kandankoyman*, *Koonthameen*, *Kallamutti*, *Malanjil*, *Noonji*, *Karimeen*, *Koorameen*, *Aaral*, *Therandimeen*, *Nanduand*, and *Paarali*. A significant proportion of Paniya families incorporate fish into their regular diet. In the past, fishing methods included the use of fish traps (*meenkoodu*), fishing nets, and the application of poison (*nanchu*) to catch fish from the rivers. During the summer seasons, Paniyas utilized fishing hooks (*chundal*) for this purpose. Traditional cooking practices involved the preparation of fish curries in earthen pots, and raw fish was often grilled on open fires along riverbanks, commonly paired with porridge. Therefore, the consumption of both tubers and fish speaks about the intricate relationship between the Paniya community and their natural surroundings, reflecting their resourceful adaptation to local ecosystems and cultural heritage.

Crabs hold a prominent place in the culinary repertoire of the Paniya community, residing in close proximity to their settlements. The predominant varieties of crabs consumed by the Paniyas include the white crab, *para* crab, and *kette* crabs, the latter being particularly abundant during the summer season. Edible crabs are esteemed as a delicacy by the Paniyas, and their unique method of preparation adds intrigue to this culinary tradition. The process involves cleaning and cutting the crab into small pieces, followed by a meticulous drying process using a mixture of black pepper, green chilies, coriander, coconut-flavored small onions, and coconut oil. It is noteworthy that fishermen who engage in fish-catching employ a locally known poison called *nanchu*. In the past, the Paniyas also included bison, rabbits, and wild poultry in their diet, often drying meat on rocks during the summer for preservation.

While the Paniya community primarily adheres to their traditional dietary practices, certain dishes hold special significance in their culture, often prepared for specific religious rituals and life stages. One such dish is *Karayyappam*, unique bread crafted as an offering to appease the goddess *Karayyappam*. Additionally, there is a dish called *Moorthaputt*, primarily

consumed by women during menopause, which is prepared by boiling coconut, jaggery, and other ingredients in hot water. Another noteworthy dish is *Chakkaput*, made by combining jackfruit, sesame seeds, coconut leaves, and jaggery. In the evolutionary process of preadaptation, food is seen beyond the nutritional factor and each food item is embedded with symbolic meaning and social values which is significant to that culture. Hence, health and food are very intimately related aspects of an individual's biological status and both are under the influence of heredity and environmental factors. Thus, the group belongs to a particular culture sharing the same space and food practice that tend to share a similar health status too (Rinya, 2019).

Vegetables serve as an essential dietary supplement among Paniya community. Presently, their diet predominantly consists of cooked rice accompanied by boiled vegetables or curry-style vegetables. While they often procure vegetables from local markets, they also cultivate a limited variety in their own yards or available lands. The Paniya people now regularly incorporate a diverse range of vegetables into their diet, including ladies' finger, tomato, onion, cabbage, beetroot, garlic, green chili, carrot, and leafy greens, which are commonly featured in their culinary creations. Traditionally, they relied on vegetables sourced from their surroundings, such as *ayara* (sword bean) and *muringa* (drumstick). Leafy vegetables, including *thavara* (peas), *muringa* leaf (drumstick), colocasia leaf, and *kumil* (mushroom), play a prominent role in their daily meals. These vegetables are used to prepare curries either on their own or in combination with other vegetables. The banana plant (Musa) is another versatile ingredient in Paniya cuisine, with raw banana utilized in curries, banana inflorescence (*koombu*) used to create dishes like *upperi*, and the false stem of the banana plant (*musakambu*) used to prepare fried items, particularly *upperi*. Wheat is a relatively rare component in the diet of the Paniya community, primarily due to economic constraints. The community faces limitations in financial resources, preventing regular purchases of wheat grain or flour from the market. The economic conditions of their households and their occupations do not generate substantial income, making the acquisition of wheat flour for foods like chapati a costly endeavor.

Instead, the Paniyas resort to grinding their own wheat to prepare flour, which is then used for breakfast items such as *appam*, *dosa*, *ada*, and *kozhakkatta*.

In the past, the Paniyas in these settlements cultivated *chama* (millet) extensively, but recent times have witnessed a shift away from its consumption. Items like *rava* and *midha* are now procured from markets and ration shops and are primarily used for preparing breakfast items. *Rava* is simmered with water, milk, and sugar to create nourishing dishes offered to their children and elderly members. Legumes hold a significant place in Paniya cuisine, with *parippu* or dal being the primary choice, typically acquired from nearby markets. This dal is frequently combined with vegetables such as okra, tomato, onion, and papaya to craft a flavorful dal curry. Other legumes, like green gram, are also purchased and prepared by boiling with salt, further diversifying their culinary offerings. The dietary choices of the Paniya community underscore their adaptability in the face of economic constraints, with resourceful methods of food preparation and utilization of locally available ingredients to sustain their nutritional needs.

Cereals occupy a central role in the Paniya diet, serving as a staple food item. Among cereals, rice stands out as the most significant, forming the foundation of their dietary practices. Paniya meals primarily revolve around rice, with *choru* (cooked rice) and *ganchi* (rice gruel) being prepared using rice as the principal cereal. Their food charts reveal a daily consumption of cooked rice twice a day, underscoring its prominence. Traditionally, the Paniya community cultivated rice on their communal agricultural lands and engaged in shifting cultivation known as *punam*, yielding rice, vegetables, and pulses. Seeds were sown in the *Etavam* season (July) and harvested during *Thulam* (November), with grains being processed through drying and husking before daily consumption. Paniyas worked as wage laborers for local landlords, known as *Jenmies*, receiving paddy as compensation for their labor. *Puttu* (steam cake) is a common dish prepared using rice powder, forming a regular part of the Paniya diet.

In the past, the Paniya community also gathered *mulayari* (bamboo rice) from

the forest, removing the husk, drying it, and employing it for their daily necessities. This type of rice was used to prepare *ganchi* (rice gruel), a frequent item in Paniya consumption patterns, highlighting their resourceful approach to sustenance. Hence, it is clear that the Paniya people's dietary practices reflect their deep-rooted connection to the natural environment. The Paniya community includes non-vegetarian items in their diet, encompassing chicken, beef, fish, and lamb. In bygone eras, their culinary expertise extended to hunting small wild animals like rabbits, *udumb(*monitor lizard) aaranas, squirrels, and porcupines. Furthermore, they demonstrated their hunting skills by trapping birds such as jungle fowl, cranes, fowls, and bats, utilizing specialized traps. However, in contemporary times, the practice of hunting animals and birds has dwindled within the community, largely due to the unavailability of these creatures in their local surroundings.

Presently, the Paniya community satisfies their non-vegetarian cravings by procuring meat from nearby markets, with commonly trapped animals including rabbits, *udumb, aaranas,* and porcupines. *Udumb* and a*aranas*, a favored meat among the Paniyas, is typically found in rock crevices and is hand-caught. Prior to cooking, the skin of these reptiles meticulously removed. In the spirit of community and sharing, when a member succeeds in hunting *varanas,* they often distribute a portion of their catch to relatives and neighbors. Thus, the evolving dietary practices of the Paniya community highlight their adaptability to changing circumstances while preserving elements of their traditional culinary heritage. Many households rear hens, providing a steady supply of eggs on a daily basis. Eggs are primarily utilized for self-consumption within the community. They are commonly boiled or used in omelets, forming a part of the diet for both the elderly and children alike. These taste agents contribute to the flavor and character of Paniya cuisine, reflecting their culinary traditions and preferences

The Paniyas also include fruits into their diet, sourcing them both from their natural surroundings and local markets. However, their economic limitations restrict them from consuming fruits at the desired frequency, and purchasing

fruits from markets can be financially challenging. Nevertheless, the Paniya community does purchase a variety of bananas, including *nenthara*, *poovan*, *kathali*, and *mysore*, all locally known varieties. Additionally, they acquire fruits like oranges, *perakka* (java), apples, grapes, and pineapples from markets. Apart from market-bought fruits, the Paniya community enjoys the fruits of their own cultivation, with jackfruits and papayas being commonly grown in their backyards or nearby areas. These trees are a familiar sight in Paniya homes, providing a ready supply of fruits. In the local dialect, jackfruit is referred to as "*chakka.*" Furthermore, there exists a passion fruit and cocoa plantation colony, akin to a mini-farm, within the Paniya settlements, contributing to their fruit consumption. Despite economic constraints, the Paniya community endeavors to incorporate a diverse range of fruits into their diet, balancing local resources with market purchases to enhance their nutritional intake.

Historically, the Paniyas embarked into the forests to gather honey, although they typically sold it rather than consumed it themselves. The Paniya community has access to various types of honey, including *Cheruthen*, obtained from the village, and *Peruthen* (*Valiyathen*), *Paythen*, *Kothen*, and *Valaythen*, collected from the forests. Honey, when paired with toast, exhibits a slightly sour taste profile. Harvested primarily during the summer months, honey is valued not only for its culinary appeal but also for its medicinal properties, making it a sought-after commodity within the Paniya community.

Sugar plays a significant role in enhancing the sweetness of various beverages among the Paniya community. It is commonly employed in the preparation of tea and is also a key ingredient in making *Palpayasam*, a milk porridge typically prepared during special occasions. Salt is an indispensable seasoning in Paniya cuisine, finding its way into all types of curries and dishes where it is deemed necessary. It is a staple addition to *ganchi* (rice gruel) and *ganchivellam* (rice soup), and it is consumed as a vital flavoring agent. Jaggery is a favored sweetener for coffee within the Paniya community. It is also used in the preparation of *Payasam*, rice porridge, and in crafting

Unniyappam, a sweet dish fried in oil, particularly during special and festive occasions. Tea locally known as '*chaya*', holds a significant place in the daily lives of the Paniya community, who predominantly consume black tea. It is considered one of their essential beverages, enjoyed throughout the day but particularly in the morning and evening. In fact, their breakfast typically consists of black tea, locally referred to as *Chaya*. Coffee is consumed sparingly by the Paniyas in comparison to tea.

A notable segment of the community, including younger individuals, has adopted the habit of smoking beedis. Chewing is another widespread practice among the Paniya community, regardless of age, with almost all members, except small children, participating in this habit. Chewing typically involves a combination of betel leaves, tobacco, quick lime, and arecanut. It has become an integral part of their daily life, to the extent that it is said they can endure a day without food but not without chewing. During festive occasions, weddings, and other ceremonies, chewing materials are distributed to all visitors, underlining its ritual significance among the Paniyas. They also offer betel leaves and arecanut to their deities during religious rituals. However, it's worth noting that they may not be fully aware of the health risks, such as cancer, associated with chewing. In the earlier days, alcohol consumption was prevalent among the Paniya community. They used to partake in both arrack and toddy. Historically, a significant proportion of male community members consumed alcohol, which occasionally led to nighttime quarrels. However, the use of alcohol has diminished over time, primarily due to economic constraints and the prohibition of arrack.

The Paniyas have a traditional concept of hot and cold foods as well as hot and cold diseases. They believe that certain foods have warming or cooling properties, and they adjust their diet based on their health conditions. For example, when afflicted with diseases considered "hot," they consume cold foods, and when dealing with "cold" diseases, they opt for hot foods. Foods classified as "cold" include fruits like papaya, jackfruit, and specific types of bananas. Additionally, pulses, *pazhamchoru* (cooked rice from the previous

day), buttermilk, and curd are considered cold food items. On the other hand, foods like wheat, rice-based dishes, tea, and coffee are classified as "hot" foods.

II) CHANGES IN DIETARY PRACTICES OF PANIYAS

In contemporary times, the Paniyas have incorporated various modern foods into their diet. While some aspects of their traditional diet remain unchanged, they have adapted to new food patterns and consumption habits. In recent times, they prepare rice, different curries, and side dishes. Black tea is a common morning beverage, and rice gruel is a popular choice for breakfast. Modern foods like fish fry, chicken fry, and bakery items are part of their diet now. They consume snacks such as *bonda*, *sukiyan*, *pazhampori*, and *ullivada* along with tea in the evenings, often purchased from local hotels and shops. While beef was traditionally considered taboo, it is now consumed by some of the younger generation. The Paniyas have also adopted certain convenience foods and ingredients like curry powders, masala powder, chili powder, and turmeric powder for cooking. They still eat non-vegetarian foods but now primarily purchase meat and fish from local markets instead of relying on hunting and gathering from the forests.

There are certain staple foods for Paniyas**,** historically, ragi was a staple food for the Paniyas, but in recent times rice has replaced it. Rice is processed by first harvesting it and then steaming it to make the husk flexible for easier removal. They use cylindrical wooden pounders called *ural* to remove the husk of the rice. Boiled rice is known as *puzhukkalari*, while parboiled rice is called *pachiri*. Their primary diet is *choru*, which is cooked rice, and water is boiled separately in an earthen pot before being added to the rice. Another staple food is *kanji*, a rice soup made by boiling rice in water without removing the water. A bit of salt is added to it. *Kanji* served as the primary diet in many Paniya households, especially when they couldn't afford side dishes. It is considered as a food of lower quality compared to *choru*, even though it provides their daily energy needs.

Various factors have contributed for the changes in the dietary practices of Paniyas. It is observed that the changes in food habits are due to adoption of new occupations such as wage labourers from traditional shifting cultivation. The transition in land-use pattern had brought about substantial changes in hill agricultural methods, emphasizing cash-cropping and mono-cropping. This shift has also altered food consumption patterns, giving rise to new food habits. Additionally, it has exposed both farmers and consumers to the uncertainties of the market, carrying both short-term and long-term implications for food security. In the past, Paniyas practiced shifting cultivation and relied on forest produces for their food. Nowadays, they work as wage laborers and which is leading to changes in their dietary patterns. Paniyas working as daily wage labourers leave the houses in the early morning in order to engage in labour works outside village and also in towns. The women are found working along with their husbands in the labour works. In recent times, women do not find time to collect the forest produces for the consumption purpose and even the forest laws do not permit them for the collection of forest produce. The different livelihood sources which were available in the past are not available for them in recent times. Hence there is a significant change in the food habits of Paniyas.

The impact of globalization is significant on tribal population across the regions and especially on their food habits and Paniyas are not an exception. In the last few decades, the globalization process has reached every nook and corner of the world, affecting all sections of society, both positively and negatively. The growing impact of cultural diffusion and corporate globalization of food systems have led to formation of new hybrid cultures when they interact with other food traditions. Positive aspects of globalization include a reduction in hunger and increased food accessibility. This has broadened the food options available to meet nutritional needs and satisfy culinary curiosity. Global brand foods have adapted to local cultures, influencing traditional food practices and altering the perception of traditional cuisine. Conversely, there are negative health consequences stemming from changes in the food system. Many fast foods are laden with processed fats and

excessive salt. Furthermore, genetically modified organisms are present in crops, vegetables, and fruits, posing potential health risks. One primary reason for this issue is the shift in food production methods, causing a departure from traditional food environments and an imbalance in energy intake and output in modern society. Additionally, the prevalence of globalized culture diffusion threatens the cultural wisdom associated with food, undermining not only traditional food practices but also public health (Rozin, 1999).

Transitioning from bonded, landless laborers, the Paniya tribe has undergone significant changes over time. The younger generation displays a positive response to societal shifts, with children attending schools where girls are integrated with boys and show equal enthusiasm for education. They exhibit higher aspirations compared to their predecessors. While this indicates progress, concerns persist regarding high rates of school dropouts among them, prompting serious attention from local governing bodies, school administrations, and tribal development agencies. Despite efforts to implement welfare measures, the Paniya community remains the most marginalized group in Wayanad, with a majority still lacking land ownership, and the intended outcomes of these initiatives have yet to materialize. (Vasundhara Krishnan.2019). Paniyas have incorporated modern foods like fast food and junk foods from local hotels into their diet. These changes have led to health issues among Paniyas. While traditional ethno-medicinal practices were common in the past, modern medicines are now preferred for treating diseases. The present generation consumes food three to four times a day, a departure from the earlier practice of eating twice in a day due to food scarcity. Paniyas, buy essential food items from nearby general stores and grocery shops in their locations. Paniyas also eat meals from hotels when they go to work outside their homes, citing a lack of time and interest in cooking. Nowadays, Paniyas use curry powders, masala powder, chili powder, turmeric powder, and other ingredients in food preparation, moving away from traditional cooking methods. Since these curry powders are available from the local shops in their localities, they prefer to use them which has been procured from the outsiders. While Paniyas were once dependent entirely on forest resources like tubers,

roots, fruits, and honey, but now they purchase meat and fish from markets instead of relying on hunting and gathering activities.

It is also evident that the changes observed in dietary practices stem from external factors such as interventions and regular contacts with non-tribals, interventions of Government agencies, Trusts, Social Media, Transport and Communication**.** Non-tribal influences have led to changes in food offerings during ceremonies and functions, including the types of food served at weddings and other occasions. During earlier times, Paniyas served vegetarian foods on occasions and ceremonies and marriages and the expenses on food items were very limited. At present, they serve various food items on occasions and festivals, similar to the non-tribals in their localities. The regular contacts and the influence of the non-tribals have been replacing the food habits of Paniyas. Nowadays the weddings, birth ceremonies, puberty ceremonies etc., have occupied a significant role and a lot of money is being spent on food items during these ceremonies like non-tribals. In marriages, a wide variety of food items and non-veg dishes are served.

The distribution of food items by various bodies is helping Paniyas to overcome the scarcity of food items during difficult situations. There are various agencies and trusts working for the welfare of Paniyas in Kottiyoor Panchayat. They provide basic food items such as rice, oil, wheat etc. and Paniyas also get food items from the Government ration shops. The supply of food items from the Government agencies also one of the reasons for the changes in traditional food habits. Educational institutions such as anganwadis, primary schools provide nutritious foods including eggs, milk, and grains to younger children belong to Paniya community. These educational institutions also conduct awareness programs on the importance of nutrition and suggestions with related to the pregnant women and children. There are significance changes in the food items with the intervention of these agencies and trusts among the Paniyas in recent times.

The impact of social media, usage of televisions and mobile phones have brought tremendous changes in the dietary practices along with changes in life

style of Paniyas. Paniyas started imitating the life style of main stream people in matters of food and diet. The impact of televisions, the contents that are showed on daily serials and movies also have a significant impact on the life style, especially in food and dressing habits of Paniyas. The Paniyas started consuming various types of fast foods, cool drinks that are shown and promoted in movies. The developments in transport and communication also have brought significant changes in the food habits of Paniyas. Once, Paniyas were confined to their localities where they used to engage in traditional occupations and most of them were working as manual laborers for the local landowning farmers. Due to traditional beliefs brought by occupations, lack of financial support in the past made them to consume foods those are produced and collected from nearby forests without any restrictions.

Nowadays, due to the betterment in economic conditions of the families, a condition which is having the direct effect through the employment opportunities outside the village brought betterment in overall lifestyle along with the patterns of food consumption. Paniyas started eating foods from hotels and restaurants available in their localities and non-tribals have established hotels and general stores in Paniya localities due to availability of transport facilities. The Paniyas also started buying modern food items from the local general stores and started cooking different varieties of foods. The Paniyas found working outside their localities in various works which are non-traditional occupations, they travel frequently for the employment purposes, and hence they do not find time for cooking food at their homes. They eat foods from the hotels located in their localities and travel for the work. They eat whatever is served in the hostels which are similar to the foods of non-tribal and mainstream people.

It is an interesting observation to discuss here that Paniyas maintain various taboos with related to food, imposing dietary restrictions among them. The quantitative and cultural significance of these prohibitions and purity concepts play a pivotal role in their origins. There is an interconnection between tribal dietary restrictions and Hindu culture while drawing comparisons to analogous

practices found in different regions globally (Ferro-Luzzi, 1975). The pregnant women avoid consuming fruits like papaya and pineapple given the belief that these fruits may lead to abortion. Girls who attain puberty are not given rice items and are served only fruits and bread during this period. In the Malayalam month of Karkadakam, Paniyas avoid consuming drumsticks due to such beliefs like drumsticks contain poison. During d*eath rituals* and during a mourning period which observes for a period of seven days after a person's death, the family members of deceased avoid using items like garlic, oil, mustard, red chili, and abstain from applying hair oil. They also avoid eating chicken, fish, and pork during this period as part of a ritual practice. These changes and food taboos demonstrate how the Paniya community has adapted to modern influences while still preserving some of their traditional cultural practices and beliefs. Due to the widespread discrimination against women, there was an assumption that a significant gender disparity existed in adult under nutrition in India. The recent availability of comprehensive nutritional data for both men and women across the entire country allows us, for the first time, to empirically assess the foundation of this belief (Sunny Jose, 2015). Paniyas observe certain **r**estrictions with relevance to consumption of certain food items during death ceremonies. After a person's death, the Paniyas observe specific rituals. Fires are lit in the homes of the deceased for seven days, and family members do not leave their homes until all post-death ceremonies are completed. During this period, family members of the deceased do not consume the food items prepared by using cooking oil, vegetables, and fish for a period of seven days. On the seventh day, a ritual involving a *chenda* (a traditional percussion instrument) and thumb is performed. They do not purchase rice at the deceased person's house, and individuals who take part in these ceremonies dress in white. It is believed that painting an image of the deceased with a sieve, dung, and charcoal brings peace to their souls.

Conclusion

Study on the food habits and food-related customs among the Paniya community provides valuable insights into the dynamic nature of their dietary practices and their evolving interactions with non-tribal communities. This study sheds light on how cultural shifts, economic changes, and external influences have impacted the traditional food patterns, notions and taboos of the Paniyas. Over time, the Paniyas have transitioned from a predominantly forest-dependent food system, characterized by hunting, gathering, and shifting cultivation, to one influenced by modernization. The shift from shifting cultivation to wage labor has led to significant changes in their dietary patterns, with increased reliance on purchased foods from markets and nearby stores. This transition has introduced convenience foods, fast food, and junk food into their diet, resulting in health concerns.

The adoption of modern medicines for health treatment signals a shift away from traditional ethno-medicinal practices. Increased meal frequency and the preference for hotel-prepared meals, especially when working outside their homes, signify changes in lifestyle and food preparation practices. Additionally, the influence of outsiders is observed in the alteration of food offerings during ceremonies and functions. Despite these changes, certain food taboos and traditional practices persist among the Paniyas. Pregnancy-related dietary restrictions, puberty rituals, and mourning period taboos continue to reflect their cultural beliefs and values. In conclusion, the food habits and food taboos among the Paniya community reflect a complex interplay of factors, including historical traditions, economic shifts, interactions with outsiders, and modernization. This study underscores the importance of preserving and understanding the cultural significance of traditional food practices while acknowledging the impact of changing lifestyles and external influences. Further research into the Paniya community's dietary practices and their implications for health and well-being is warranted to better address the challenges and opportunities presented by these cultural shifts.

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Article: Adult Education: Abating the Tradition of Witch Hunting in the State of Jharkhand, India

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Adult Education: Abating the Tradition of Witch Hunting in the State of Jharkhand, India

--Sujoy Kundu & Sujit Kumar Choudhary

Abstract

The diabolical act of witch hunting prevails in many communities all over the earth. The individual branded as a "Witch" is often a woman and generally belongs to the low caste and tribes. This social crime of hunting is more rooted in superstitious and the belief system of the societies rather this act is committed by the connivance of a few people who conspire against disadvantaged, vulnerable, innocent gullible illiterate tribal women, grabbing their land, animal, money, for personal revenge or even sexual favors. These atrocities are committed in the name of purging the society of a witch. Witch hunting which are the common phenomena in the state of Jharkhand, which is located in the eastern part of India. The purpose of this article is made to examine the reasons, consequences and measures taken to address this social malady the role of adult education in curbing the belief system and the social position of the tribal women which makes them easy targets in this state.

Keywords: Witch hunting, tribal, witchcraft, adult education.

Introduction

In today's world where enlightened activists are fighting against criminal consequences of gender discrimination, witch-hunting is one more atrocity against hapless and marginalized women who are either widow, childless or simply abandoned by male members of the family. Sometimes such stigmatized women turn out to be silent suffers of all these problems, social ostracism, lack of education and ignorance of socio-legal rights compound the problems of these women unfairly branded as witches1. Witch-hunting is a type of harassment that is no longer limited to a specific period of history. It's taken on a life of its own, allowing the identical procedures to be applied in a

variety of societies anytime people need to be alienated and dehumanised. (Federici, 2018). Due to Govt apathy, lack of awareness among urban areas people often tend to label ''Witch Hunting'' as a tribal issue fermenting in remote areas that will not leave any impact on their lifestyle. While many2 are engaged in a debate about the magnitude of witch-hunting and the possibility of its eradication, the incident continues to thrive among the tribal population of India (Bhil, Ho, Munda, Oraon, Santhal, etc.) (Prakash, 2007), "the term 'tribe' in the Indian context has not been rigorously investigated" by social science (Ghanshayam, 2004).

Studies and reports on current witch hunts, as well as research material on the persecution of women in India as witches, are scarce and often unsubstantiated (Chaudhuri, 2008; Mishra, 2003; Barman, 2002; Chaudhuri, 1981). Witch hunts were focused on most of the recent work in India (Behringer, 2004) is lacking of cases from current tribal settings, ignoring the documents related to hundreds of murders is evident that unrecorded ones3   will   slowly sink into oblivion.

Jensen (2007) in the book The Path of the Devil, analyzed from a sociological aspect on witch hunts during the colonial period, where he argued that women are identified as an evil can be studied from the perspective of social control, deviance and/or collective actions in sociology. There seems to be two reasons of neglected of this social problem in tribal communities. One, witch hunts in tribal communities has not gathered the dimensions of a general social problem in India. Reports on witch hunts have not been able to find their way into undergraduate textbooks and other research books in India other than fact that the majority of India's population remains victimized. Secondly, the peripheral status of tribes and tribal issues/problems in Indian society can be held responsible for the neglect of the topic (Chaudhuri, 2008). Current research scholars who do their research among the members of the tribal community tend to focus on education, health, fundamental rights and political issues with the reason that their (Tribal Scholars) upward social mobility will

terminate all evil practices like witch hunts, lynching of hapless victims, etc. This article discusses the factors contributing to witch hunting in Jharkhand, an area known for its migrant and tribal working population as well as its natural resources (Prakash, 2007; Ibid).

Witch attacks have also been extensively archived in Bihar like backward state in India (EWD, 2002; Miguel, 2005) and also in the neighboring state of Jharkhand, e.g. Odisha, Chattisgarh, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh. The article has incorporated the sociological documents on witchhunts to comprehend and elucidate the situation persuading and perpetuating witch hunts in Jharkhand, India. Analyzing the scenarios underpinning practice of branding witches and witch-hunting activities could engender solutions to prevent evil of witch-hunting in India in the future (Chaudhuri, 2008).

Situational analysis with observations on the impact of anti-witch hunting Act 2001of Jharkhand in the rural as well tribal areas will enable future policy makers to devise foolproof methods of preventing witch hunts among the tribals and strictly enforce that law of Anti Witch Hunting Act (Dain Pratha Pratished Adhiniyam) 2001 in Jharkhand. (Jharkhand Police, 2001).

The problem:

India has over 70 percent of its population living in villages sometimes without basic amenities. Over 40 percent of the total population languishes in extreme poverty and this could be responsible for various social ills and superstitions. Here in India ancient beliefs and superstitious rituals usually get paired up which results in social regression of various sections of people, especially the weak, the helpless and the under privileged. The medieval mindset of the tribal and aboriginal people is yet to change and is far from realizing modern social norms of equality and empowerment.

The quality and maturity of a nation's social development, economic expansion, and general welfare are measured not only by its economic growth

rate, but also by the woman's entire socioeconomic position, women's society, and political status. As per the 2011 Census, the population of Scheduled Tribes (notified by the Government of India under Article 342 of the Indian Constitution) in India is 10,42,81,034 consisting 8.6 per cent of the total population (1,21,05,69,573) of the Country. According to 2011 census Jharkhand (86,45,042) occupies the 6th position in view of the total number of tribal in India. Though in Jharkhand, the tribal population occupies 26.20 per cent of the total population (3,29,88,134) of the state where tribals (also known as Adivasis in the local jargon) are in dominant position in view of its numerical strength of population.

In view of the very name of the state Jharkhand, with 24 districts where there are 32 distinct Scheduled Tribes (ST) with various lifestyles and livelihoods are likewise diverse: hunting and gathering, shifting cultivation, settled agriculture, and contract work, and so on and the tribal's movement of more than seven decades for a separate state under the Indian constitution, it appears that the tribal communities are in majority and hold a dominant status. It is notable that Jharkhand was carved out from Bihar for welfare of tribal people and it is also termed as a "Tribal State" also consists of a significant percentage of the population in the Scheduled caste (Harijans) and some other backward classes (Verma, 2015). Among these sections of society, the diabolical act of witch-hunting still prevails. This paper will be looking into what are the reasons, consequences and measures of Witch hunting. It also covers the impact of gender, caste, and ethnically based social structures. An estimation of the strategy will be made and the conclusion will be discussing possible policy and responses.

Literature Review

Karlsen (1998) argues that financial issues, particularly the inheritance system in New England, expose the special position of the most prosecuted witches in relation to social inheritance laws.

Most accused women, by the presence of male legal heirs in their immediate families, turned out to be the beneficiaries of the property that had previously owned their deceased father or husband. These accused women were viewed as unduly powerful in a patriarchal society that considered male heirs as legitimate heirs.

Barstow (1994) continued the framework of gender analysis of witch hunting, where rapid changes in the economic and political situation in pre modern Europe caused serious conflicts between men and women and this as a consequence translated into witch hunts.

The witch hunts were probably as Kai Erickson mentioned in his contribution to Social Problems in 1962 "Notes on the Sociology of Deviance", a predictable reaction to the witch hunts, unpredictable social situations.

Witch hunts become a method of retaining some equilibrium in times of conflicts and witches are made to shoulder responsibility for social chaos.

Witch hunts in Jharkhand

There are researches in India on the topic of witchcraft and witch hunting, although none of these focused on the events and its consequences in Jharkhand, but they identify economic circumstances, particularly family property disputes, illness and disease, village politics, and gender conflicts as major causes of witch-hunting (Mishra, 2003; Barman, 2002; Nathan et al, 1998; Kelkar and Nathan, 1991; Chaudhuri, 1981). As Chaudhuri mentioned in her research literature in 2008, women are persecuted which depends on both micro (family problems) and macro (gender issues, diseases, illiteracy and poverty) reasons. Second, the distinctive example is tribal communities differ from other groups due to their location within it.

Women and property

Gender conflicts, property and women rights, illnesses, and village level politics or conspiracy, according to researchers investigating witch hunts in modern India, are the major reasons of witch hunts among tribal societies. Barman (2002), an anthropologist studying current Bengali witch hunts says they are a type of "persecution" focused against women, particularly widows, who are stigmatised and gradually excluded from society. In India, most witch hunts result from property disputes between widows and their husbands' families (Nathan et al., 1998; Kelkar et al., 1991; Chaudhuri, 1981).The women accused are mostly childless widows having a life interest in land that will be passed down to a male relative when they die (Chaudhuri, 2012).

Mishra's (2003) research includes a major section on health and law in tribal communities. In India's tribal regions, there are no adequate health care services. People are forced to seek treatment from witch healers and midwives (dhais) during sickness because to the lack of contemporary medical practitioners. Superstition, illiteracy, and a lack of appropriate health facilities all contribute to people's belief in witch doctors 4 (janguru), who act as 'medicine men' as well as a mediator in people's everyday problems.

These witch doctors are sometimes known as religious priests, as those closest to God, who utilize their special knowledge or talents to actively contribute in the prevention of epidemics. Witch healers play a key role in identifying witches and initiating witch hunts (Chaudhuri, 2008). According to a rough estimate every year 175 incidents of witch hunting and related killings are reported from Jharkhand alone. 1227 cases have been reported to the police and in this murder and loot have been ascribed to witch hunting. Most of these women have been physically abused and tortured in the name of Witch-hunting. As mentioned earlier, this is a part of the conspiracy to take over the wealth of the victimized woman who is wrongly accused of being a witch (Hindustan Editorial, 2010).

Village Politics, Gender Conflicts, and Witches

According to Kelkar et al. (1991), witch hunts have two purposes: first, they provide a convenient pretext for wealthy and powerful men to rid themselves of any women who disagree with them politically, and second, they help to avert social scandals by removing "unwanted females" (widows; women with illicit pregnancies).The "janguru" is the method of identifying witches for hunt. The witch hunt has active support from village level politics. Witches are usually women from feuding families who are blamed as witches for accidents or deaths (Mishra 2003).

Social structure and gender roles

In Jharkhand, women are utterly disempowered. As per the Census 2011, the Jharkhand literacy rate is 66.41% which is 7.63% lower from the National literacy level. Women in the state have an extraordinarily low literacy rate; in the 2011 census, the literacy rate for women was 55.42 percent, more than 20 percent lower than for men. (Govt. of Jharkhand, 2020).

The literacy trend of the state in last three decades is as follows-

Year	Male	Female	Total
1991	56.46	26.00	41.39
2001	67.30	38.87	53.56
2011	76.84	55.42	66.41

Source: Letter- 14/B. 1-49/2020 445/Ranchi. Issued on 10/03/2021. (DSEL). Govt. of Jharkhand.

Women also suffer from poor health. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), in Jharkhand year 2020-21, at least 67.5 % of children age ranges from 6 to 59 months were identified anaemic. However, in Jharkhand, the percentage of women aged 15 to 49 who are anaemic has risen somewhat during the last five years. Even in the case of non-pregnant women, at least 65.7 percent in the same age group had anaemia in the tribal state year 2020-21. (The Telegraph Online, 2021).

Women's participation in the formal, organized sector is extremely low, and the vast majority of them are forced to work in the unorganized sector, where they are mercilessly exploited. In tribal-dominated areas, child and female trafficking is also rampant. According to the NCRB report 2016, female trafficking has been documented in India in a total of 1,183 cases. With a crime rate of 0.9, Jharkhand had the most occurrences of female trafficking with 137 cases for the year 2016 (Khandelwal, 2018). In 2019 there were 1426 reported cases of rape (Sec.376 IPC) by NCRB. In the same year in Jharkhand crimes against women were reported 8760 cases. (National Crime Records Bureau, 2020).

A witch hunt is very common kind of violence and persecution against women in Jharkhand, and it is widespread here. Witch hunts are frequently viewed as a "pretext for oppressing women and achieving personal benefit."

Witchcraft and Witch Power

Each ethnic group in Jharkhand has its own theological version of the Supreme Power. Munda Tribal believes in "Singbona", Uraon Tribal in "Dharnesh" while Kharia Adibasi believes in "Bar Pharia". 5

 However, evil spirits like 'Maua', 'Malak', 'Curail' 6, etc, are generated when a person dies an unnatural death. It is believed that some women, endowed with evil, can control and unleash these evil spirits to do their bidding.7 Fairy tales and myths have reinforced in our minds the image of an

ungainly woman who wears soiled clothes and carries a broom with her. People are afraid of meeting her gaze because they fear that she might hypnotize them for good. Mass media continues to bring about this image of a fragile and evil woman.

The government reported that from January 1991-2006, 917 accused witches were killed in Jharkhand. This excludes cases from Santhal Paragana, which is not available. According to these statistics, every one of these victims was women, with a median age ranging from 18 to 45 years old. Along with this the records of the government about a small area in the Chotanagpur region highlights the fact that around 522 alleged 'witches' have been tormented and brutally slaughtered during the period 1991-2000. According to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB-2020) data, Jharkhand topped the list of states in terms of witch hunting killings from 2013 to 2016. From 2001 to 2016, 523 women, along with hundreds of males, were lynched on suspicion of practicing witchcraft. 127 women were executed after being labelled witches between 2012 and 2014. From 2014 through June 2016, the state experienced 1,857 witch-hunting events. According to police data, 123 persons, predominantly women were killed for the same reason between 2016 and May 2019 (Bose Editorial News 18, 2019). According to State Crime Records Bureau (SCRB) data in Jharkhand, 41 persons were murdered in 2017 and 26 in 2018, 15 lives claimed so far up to 23.07.2019 (Ranjan Editorial, 2019). According to an independent survey conducted by the Association of Advocacy and Legal Initiatives (AALI), a non-profit organization that focuses on social crimes against women and women's rights in Jharkhand, the figures are substantially higher—46 in 2015, 39 in 2016, and 34 in 2017. According to the AALI survey, the number of persons arrested under the Witch Hunting Act 2001 has continuously above 600 cases since the Act's inception (Bose Editorial News 18, 2019).

How witches are identified and targeted:

 If the suspect is in fact a witch, a simple rationalization can prove such claims to be simply false, then:

1. Why is it that they are not able to escape death?

2. Why aren't they able to predict their capture and think up an escape?

Studies show that various immoral motives lie behind accusing such women as witches, in turn denying them their basic right to live. This is done to meet one's own selfish ends. Inhabitants of Jharkhand and researchers studying the area say the murders are usually committed by family, relatives or neighbors. The present research indicates that witch hunting is not restricted to a class caste or religion. The trend also shows that in most cases, victims are young, illiterate, innocence, isolated and independent and their single status draws out the animosity of the society around them. If she is capable of defending her property or her belongings, then the attack on her becomes manifold. Unfortunately in some case studies the male members of the family, in conspiracy with village authorities, have indulged in extortion of property. Isolated within her own family circle she is forged to surrender her last vestiges of dignity. Thus the epidemic of witch hunts persists unchecked. While the majority of victims lack the courage to fight successfully against discrimination and eventual degradation.

Measures

Anti-witch-hunting Law

On October 20, 1999 the Bihar State Assembly pronounced the widely anticipated law against witch hunting: Anti-witch hunting Act named as 'Dain Pratha Pratished Adhiniyam 1999. The State cabinet of Jharkhand in its 17th meeting on 3.7.2001 approved for adoption Bihar Anti Witch hunting Act and named it as Dain Pratha Pratished Adhiniyam 2001.

In Jharkhand Anti Witch Hunting Act 2001 has provision of punishment from 3 months to 1 year imprisonment and fines range from Rs.1000/- to Rs. 2000/-, depending on the nature of the crime(Moharana, 2016). But still it is not followed properly as well as not very effective. According to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, up to 250 women have been killed in the state after being labelled witches during last decade. (Idib).
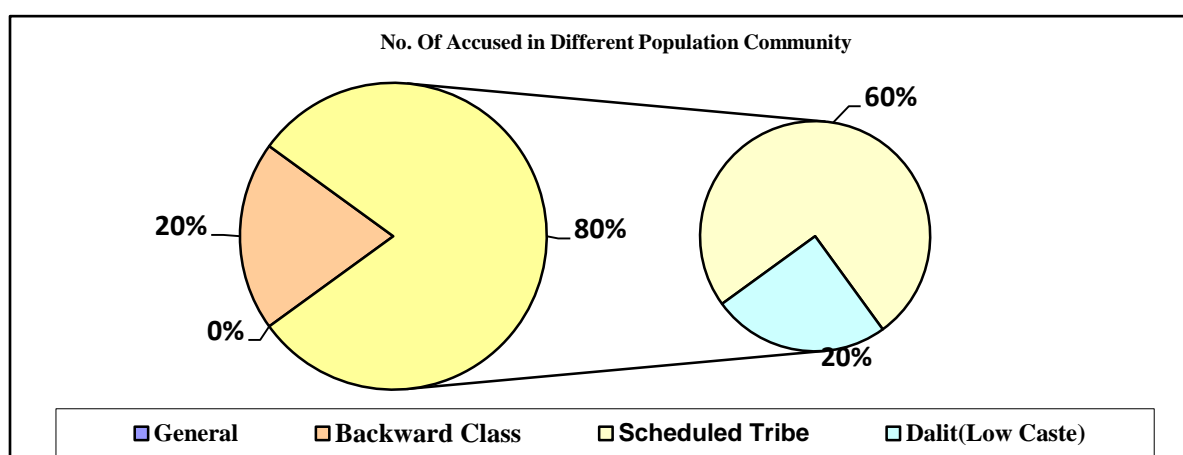
Figure1: No. Of Accused in Different Population Community

Source: Hindustan News Paper, Jharkhand Edition- Dated: 04/11/2012

After one survey and from this Figure 1, eighty percent incidents occurred in scheduled tribes and dalits (low caste) society and rest of twenty percent incidents happened among backward class community. There was no incidents happened in general category. One more significant reason came out from field research that hundred percent accused were from below poverty line category.

Role of Adult Education in abating the tradition of witch hunting for Tribals

Figure2: Literacy Level among Accused
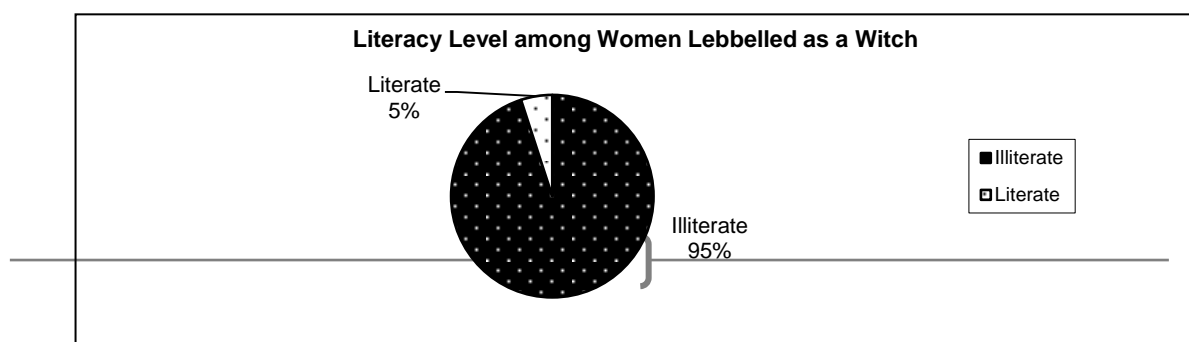
Source: FLAC (Free Legal Aid Committee, NGO)

From Figure 2, the women were tortured and harassed after accused as a witch and flee from villages among them ninety five percent were illiterate and five percent were literate (UNESCO, 2000). The SP of Gumla District, Jharkhand, added that an awareness campaign against witchcraft, mob lynching, and alcoholism that has been running over the previous three months needs to be stepped up in order to prevent such tragedies in the future.

"Because Gumla is a backwater area dominated by tribal population, and the majority of people are still illiterate, raising awareness is the only answer." "Once pe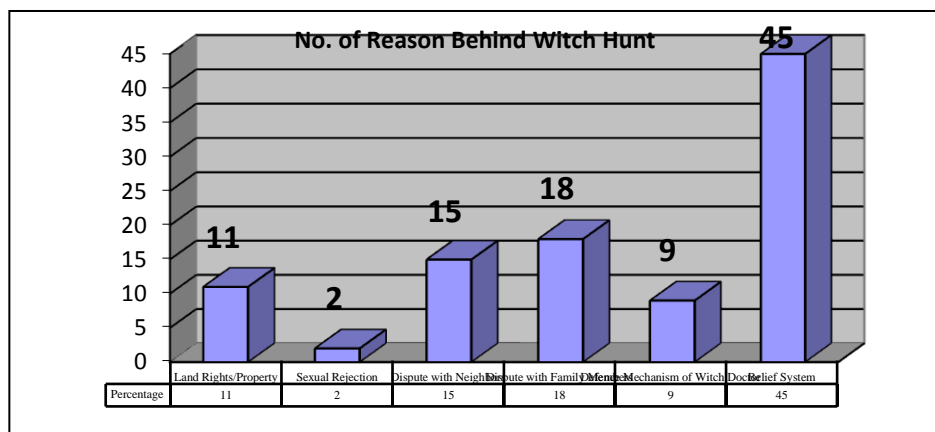ople are educated and informed, such incidences would decrease on their own," claimed the Gumla SP. (Ranjan, 2019). Instead of being integrated into the mainstream Hindu community, the tribes have been relegated to low status and are frequently physically and socially isolated due to their primitive way of life style. They are illiterate because they did not have a primary education or because the quality of their elementary education was inadequate. The most important duty of state and local government is education. It is the cornerstone of good citizenship and a nation's investment in its children for a well-functioning society. Education is the process of teaching that aims to provide individuals' all-round development with the information and tools they need to comprehend and engage in day-to-day activities. According to the World Development Report (2001), the most serious problem of poverty, aside

from a lack of food, is a lack of power, which is directly tied to a lack of education. The UNESCO defines literacy as the "ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts (Kalva et al, 2014). Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society". Tribal women's education, as a separate discipline with diverse sociocultural fabrics and challenges, requires a specific analysis to uncover the difficult realities that tribal women encounter in their educational development. Adult education has long been utilized as a strategy for improving people's lives through capacity building (Kundu, 2021). Education is a key factor of tribal group development. High literacy rates among women in general lead to lower infant mortality rates (Kingdon, 1999; Mitra & Singh, 2008), fewer pregnancies, and improved women's position in both domestic and societal settings. Furthermore, the mother's literacy and educational achievement have a considerable favourable influence on the child's human capital attainment (Sengupta and Guha, 2002; Kalva et al, 2014). Women who engage in literacy programmes have greater health and family planning knowledge; right and wrong, lodging complain against atrocities, getting benefit from different govt. schemes and they are more likely to practice preventative health measures (Kundu, 2021).

Figure 3 depicts about eleven percent of witch hunt caused from conflict over property, two percent from denied sexual favour, fifteen percent conflicts with neighbours, eighteen percent from family disputes/conflicts, nine percent due to false treatment by witch doctor or medicinal healer and majority of reason around forty five percent incidents on belief system related to ill health or diseases of such type severe ones like jaundice, tuberculosis, malaria, unspecified fever, illness or death of an infant, epidemic and sick child etc.

Figure 3: Number of Reason behind Witch Hunt

	Land Rights/Property	Sexual Rejection	Dispute with Neighbour	Dispute with Family Member	Defence Mechanism of Witch Doctor	Belief System
Percentage	11	2	15	18	9	45

Source: FLAC (Free Legal Aid Committee, NGO)

Conclusion

In the Tribal-dominated Jharkhand such incidents happen day in and day out. Witch-hunting deprives a woman of the most basic human right of survival and existence. Jharkhand has not been left untouched, in these tribal belts witch lynching is rampant. Though International Empowerment is celebrated every year with big manner but the conditions remain very pathetic for women. Dain-pratha, Devdasi pratha in India continue unabated and the administration fails to intervene in a significant manner when victims cry out for help. In a civilized society, after a long time of exploitation and negligence, even feminist thought and movements have been unable to achieve for them social equality and freedom from oppression. Another noteworthy point is that in most of the cases the victims were falsely accused of being witches in order to settle some old scores with them. Such incidents deeply disturb rational thinking people and intellectuals. Though there is a law against this social evil it has not proved to be effective. Even in today's modern times, if such incidents can happen, one can only conclude that a real change can occur only if there's a transformation of social outlook and not just by the passing of laws. If we like to present ourselves as human beings then

we should not force other people to compromise on their dignity. It is also our duty to protect the rights of people weaker than us. There are no isolated cases of witch hunting instead thousands and thousands of women fall victim to witch hunting every year, beneath those dark village social structure, women's are treated as inanimate objects to satisfy men's desires.

Notes-

1. A women is labeled a 'witch', this medieval barbarity being labeled witch is a fate of many women in the many parts of India, e.g. Jharkhand, Bihar, Chattisgarh, Rajasthan, Odisha, West Bengal, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, a name of few. Different tribal Community given different names of the 'witch' in their local languages.

2. Urban (India) part also not untouched from this type of witch hunt acts. This is also prevails in other communities like Christians, Muslims and Hindus etc.

3. Many of the cases of witch hunts are "Unrecorded", found through the "word of mouth".

4. Males are generally become witch doctors. Women are not allowed or accepted to be witch doctors (See Mishra, 2003).

5. Different tribal groups rely on spirit worship and believe in satiating the spirits and witches for the cure. There are various names of the 'spirit worship' as Supreme Power in all the scheduled tribe languages of India.

6. Different Tribals (Scheduled Tribes) have given different names of the 'witch' in their local languages.

7. For instance, interviews with tribal women branded as 'witch' at Chaibasa Block, West Singhbhum district and Saraikela District of Jharkhand on November 2021; as well as effort was made to interview the relevant policymaker and Chairman of an NGO named FLAC working on relevant issues in Jharkhand. In fact Mado Murmu, a migrant tribal women victimized

as a witch in an interview on December 2021 at Purbi Kitadih Panchayat, Jamshedpur, East Singhbhum district said that its very prevalent in tribal culture. These interviews provided a useful reality check for the study and assisted in contextualizing many of the facts articulated by other women who are tortured and victimized.

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Development through Community Participation: A Study of North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project (NERCORMP)

--Yarthotchui Houshu Shimray & Biswambhar Panda

Abstract

Community development which advocates for meaningful engagement of the community in the developmental process is considered as one of the effective modes to achieve the desired goals of development. With the goal to enhance the life and livelihood of the deprived communities, a collaborative and community centric developmental venture in form of NERCORMP was initiated and implemented through the partnership of International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and Government of India (GoI) in four states of North-East India. Based on the data collected both from secondary and primary sources, the present study examines the nature and dynamics of NERCORMP, its areas of intervention in Ukhrul district of Manipur, a North-Eastern state of India. The data have been obtained from multiple stakeholders of the project to analyse the people oriented and people centric strategies of NERCORMP. The study observed that the project has been able to create livelihood generation opportunities and establish a sustained community participation in developmental activities through its interventions in farm-based activities as well as non-farm activities.

Key words: community, community development, community participation,

capacity building, NERCORMP

Introduction

Community development has been perceived as a discipline, programme, practice and an ideology, with community participation as its underpinning principle. Though community remains the central focus, the perception and implementation of community development varies from one context to

another. In India, community development is primarily perceived as people-centric bottom-up oriented approach that strives to bring development at the grassroots through the interventions of developmental agencies. It is also seen as an effective mechanism to address the developmental priorities of the deprived sections of the society. Apart from the government, non-governmental development agencies have initiated and implemented various community-oriented projects with an objective to ensure community well-being. NERCORMP was one such project that was implemented through the partnership of IFAD and GoI in four North-Eastern states of India i.e., Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh with the broad objective to create sustainable livelihood opportunities in the rural areas. The objective of the project was 'to improve the livelihoods of vulnerable groups in a sustainable manner through improved management of their resource base in a way that contributes to preservation and restoration of the environment' (NERCORMP, 2012). The project strived to realise the potential of communities through innovative strategies such as increasing people's participation, building up of capacities of the communities and developing consensus among them. With predominant thrust on income generating activities, it aimed to achieve economic transformation through creation of physical infrastructure, active community participation and result oriented interventions.

In this paper, apart from the conceptual issues relating to community development the collaborative strategies wherein government, non governmental organisations (NGOs) and people who converged to make the community development truly a participatory and integrated approach have been addressed. The paper has made use of both the secondary and primary sources of data to examine NERCORMP's strategies and contributions. While secondary sources have helped to articulate the importance of NERCORMP's developmental strategy, the empirical data have helped to understand the nuances of NERCORMP's achievements and constraints.

Methodology

Apart from secondary data which were obtained from the Regional and

District Society of NERCORMP, the study relied on primary data collected from multiple respondents which included the respondents from four project villages, chief functionaries and staff members of the District Society and partner NGOs of NERCORMP. The four project villages namely *Kuingai, Pui, Shirui and Lungshang* are located in Ukhrul district of Manipur. It may be clarified that with new administrative arrangement, Lungshang village currently falls under the newly formed district of *Kamjong* which was carved out from Ukhrul district in 2016. The residents of these villages belong to Tangkhul community, one of the major tribes of Naga with a population of 183,115 (2011 Census). While Kuingai and Pui villages were covered under NERCORMP phase I, Shirui and Lungshang villages were covered in NERCORMP phase II. The empirical data were collected on NERCORMP's interventions in diverse areas which include agriculture, microcredit management, gender mainstreaming, infrastructure, natural resource management and marketing. Data were obtained from 120 respondents which comprised 30 respondents from each village which were selected through purposive sampling technique. Data were also obtained from four chief functionaries of the District Society of NERCORMP, three partner NGOs, and the director of Ukhrul District Women Institute of Micro Credit (UDWIM). The schedule and interview techniques were employed to collect the requisite empirical data.

Perceiving the Significance of Community and Development

Community development which consists of two integral entities namely community and development strives to bring people's well-being through its people-centric approaches and strategies. While some scholars define the term community as a process of social interaction that helps people to earn their livelihoods, some define it as a group of people who act on common shared interest. Garkovich (2011), defines community as a place where people interact and have psychological ties with each other (p. 20). According to MacIver and Page (2009) community comes into existence 'wherever any members of any group, small or large live together in such a way that they

share, … the basic conditions of a common life'. Hence, locality and community sentiment are two critical aspects that assume significance for the understanding of the term community. While locality refers to the geographical aspect i.e., a territorial area; community sentiment reflects the bond that the members share that is stemmed from common living with an awareness of sharing a way of life (pp. 8-10).

In community development, community remains the binding element. Garkovich, (2011) elucidates two definitions of community development. In the first definition, he cites the formulation of Christenson, Fendley and Robinson where community development is defined as 'a group of people initiating a social action process (i.e., planned intervention) to change their economic, social, cultural, and/or environmental situation'. Further, he cites Summers' articulation which identifies community development as synonymous with rural community development. According to Summers, "rural community development is planned intervention to stimulate social change for the explicit purpose of the 'betterment of the people' and so development is ultimately a normative activity based on someone's vision of what might be or ought to be" (p.21).

Based on the insights drawn from the above articulations, community development is perceived from the two important yet distinct perspectives. Firstly, the endogenous perspective of community development i.e., a collective social action process which is initiated by a group of people to bring about transformative changes in the prevailing social, cultural and economic conditions. Secondly, the exogenous perspective which emphasises planned interventions for explicit purposes thereby to stimulate social change in the society. Though these perspectives take divergent strategies for community development, community participation remains the nucleus for both these perspectives. Nevertheless, the nature and structure of community development varies due to the influence of specific policy priorities, ideological preferences and practitioners' perspectives.

As a complex and dynamic phenomenon, community development has been perceived as a process, programme and ideology. Those who perceive it as a process, consider it as a mechanism through which the desired social and economic goals are achieved. Various approaches, methods, technical assistance and self-help are converged to achieve these goals. As a programme, it focuses on specific activities such as housing, construction activities, adoption of cultural innovations, etc. through which restructuring of normative, social and economic order is sought. Hence, it is seen as an effective strategy towards yielding the desired socio-economic changes such as employment, housing, health care and civic engagement. As an ideology, it is perceived as an idea that promotes collective well-being (Garkovich, 2011, pp. 21-22).

Community needs to play a significant role in determining its own destination in order to achieve the desired goal of community development. Hence, active involvement of community members particularly those who have considerable degree of power and influence on the decision-making process assumes significance. Not surprisingly, community participation becomes a requisite and also a pre-requisite for many donors to extend financial support to initiate development activities (Swai, 2016, p. 42; 44). Two critical factors such as the openness on the part of the government to facilitate greater involvement of communities in the decision-making process, and the increasing community involvement in the complex decision-making process determine the nature and significance of community development. However, for greater community participation to happen, systematic understanding on the external factors that inhibit effectiveness of community participation remains important (Abbott 2014, p. 158).

Various theoretical paradigms such as evolutionary, functionalist, conflict and post-modernism have analysed the notion of community development from the standpoint of respective theoretical formulation. Community development has also been associated with the ideas of philanthropy, charity organisations, philanthropic entrepreneurs and faith-based institutions wherein people centric

developmental activities towards achieving welfare, progress and development are being carried out. Political parties too, use it as an electoral mechanism to win over people in electoral politics (Schutte, 2020, p. 3).

Drawing insights from the conceptual issues and theoretical perspectives on community development and keeping in mind the multi-ethnic cultural setup where NERCORMP operated, the operational definition of community development has been developed for the present study. Accordingly, community development has been defined as a planned intervention initiated through the collaborative developmental programme and active community participation in order to create income generating activities thereby improving the livelihoods of the deprived.

Trajectory of Community Development as a Development Approach

Citing several works on community development, Schutte (2020) states that community development is reflected through different approaches, models and techniques that are used in community development projects on diverse socio-economic issues such as education, economy, governance, health, empowerment and capacity building.

Inferring on the works of Wass, Bohan, Robinson and Green, he states that the origin of community development as a development construct and practice can be linked to the historical context of World War II. Primarily, it is linked to government policies and programmes that are devised to improve the plight of the poor or an identified community (Schutte, 2020, p.2). As such community development has been a significant component of urban political economics in the United States which has been manifested through various activities such as the construction of affordable housing, access to credit for low-income people, education and other social services, building up of community capacity and effective participation in the US political economy (DeFilippis & Saegert, 2012, p. 1). In the United Kingdom, community development has been manifested in various professions and practices such as social work, housing, education, anti-poverty work, health and economic development (Gilchrist,

2003, p. 16). In South Africa, community development is manifested in 'policy-oriented development frameworks' and 'organizationally diffused frameworks.' While policy-oriented frameworks are operationalised in terms of pragmatic initiatives, programmes and projects; the organisationally diffused frameworks are more aligned to the actual practice of the practitioners of community development that dominate the discursive field (Westoby, 2014, p. 58).

In India, community development began in the 1950s with community projects and national extension services (Bulsara, 1958). In 1952 through the establishment of a network of extension workers, community projects were initiated throughout the country for the transformation of the social and economic life of the villages for a period of ten years. The social and economic transformation was initiated through national extension service (Desai 2013, pp. 604-606); and an integrated pattern of development of rural services with inter-related administrative units of a village, a block and a district were attempted (Nanavatty, 1988, p. 95). However, these community projects failed to deliver the intended goals as the projects did not take into account the conflicts of interest inherent in the stratified village social structures while formulating their programme designs and policy formulations. Though greater emphasis was placed on the expansion of social services, same was not reflected in the efforts towards increasing rural incomes and capabilities. Top-down approach in the formulation of programmes, meagre people's participation, lack of organisational efforts at local levels to solve local problems adversely affected the effectiveness of these community projects (Korten, 1980, p. 482). At present, community development in India is carried out through the ministry of Rural Development, GoI Flagship programmes on livelihood such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) and microfinance schemes which also promote active community participation (Kumar, S., Kumar, D., Sengupta, & Giri, 2020, p. 4).

The Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) was set-up in 2001 and converted to a full-fledged ministry in 2004 to address the special needs of the North-East Region (NER) by coordinating the developmental efforts in the region and addressing the matters relating to the planning, execution and monitoring of development schemes and projects in the region. Besides coordinating the development efforts with various Ministries/Departments that are primarily concerned with development activities in the region (Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, 2021-2022). Development projects initiated solely by the government as well as collaborative projects with international agencies in the areas of livelihood, microfinance and other relevant areas are also being implemented. NERCORMP was one such collaborative project which was carried out through the ministry.

Implementation Structure of NERCORMP

The NERCORMP was initiated in 1999, carried out in three phases and implemented in four states in North-East India over 10 districts. GoI and IFAD jointly funded the first and the second phase, but the third phase was funded by the GoI alone. In its entire project period (1999-2021), 2889 Natural Resource Management Groups (NaRM-Gs), 8403 Self-Help Groups (SHGs), 290 NaRM-G Cluster Associations, 300 SHG Federations, 4 Community-Based Micro Credit Institutions and 50 Farmer Producer Groups (FPOs) were formed (North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Society, 2023, p. 3). According to this report, 1,18,843 households from 2532 villages benefited from the project.

There were four major components of NERCORMP through which the interventions of NERCORMP were executed. These were: the Regional Society, the District Society, partner NGOs (recruited by NERCORMP) and the community-based institutions such as NaRM-Gs and SHGs. The project was implemented at the regional level and the district levels through registered societies which were established specifically for the project.

Figure 1: The implementation arrangement of the project
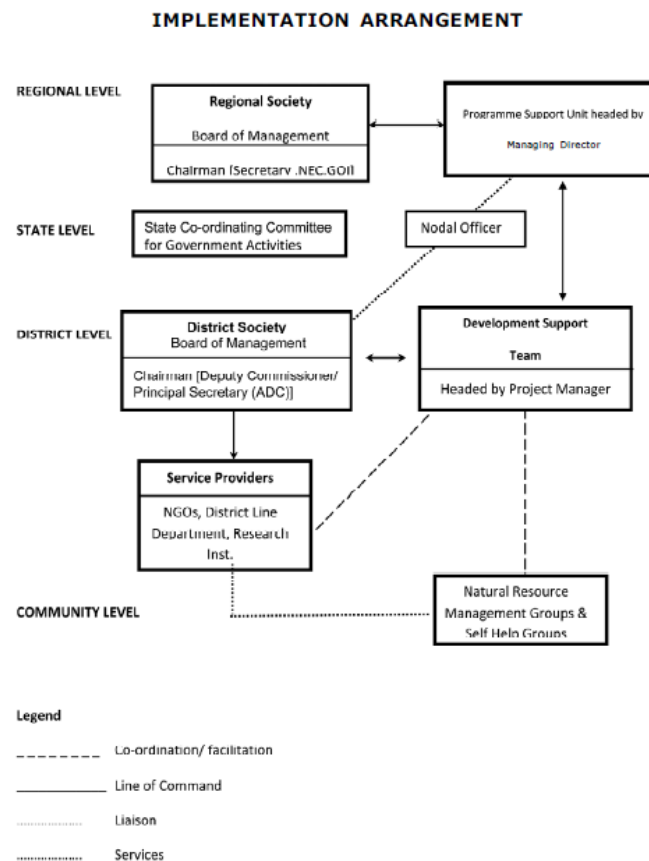
Source: NERCORMP, 2012

As displayed in the figure 1, there existed a coordinated approach where the Regional Society was well integrated with the District Society and service providers at community level. The state co-ordinating committee was also a part of the implementation process. While the Regional Society was located at Shillong, Meghalaya; the District Society was formed in every project district to carry out the developmental activities of NERCORMP effectively. However, actual implementation was carried out by the administrative unit of the Regional Society i.e., Programme Support Unit (PSU). The PSU provided direction and support to the Development Support Team (DST) of each district and DST in turn facilitated the process of community mobilisation, community institution building, and related interventions through the

communities and partner NGOs. At the grassroots level, the partner NGOs and the community-based institutions were the implementing agencies. The partner NGOs established rapport, initiated community mobilisation and enhanced capacity building. They mobilised the community members, facilitated the formation of NaRM-G and SHGs through which project interventions were carried out (NERCORMP, 2012, p. 2).

NaRM-G was a community/village level group which comprised of 20-40 households. In case of a large village, more than one NaRM-G was created. Similarly, SHGs consisting of 10-20 members were formed to inculcate saving habits and carry out microfinance activities (NERCORMP, 2012, pp. 9-10). NaRM-G Cluster Associations were also formed to function as a larger body wherein a group of NaRM-Gs came together to coordinate with a number of villages for development planning and implementation besides creating a platform to organise collective marketing. Similarly, SHG federations were formed to provide support and linkages. It offered financial and social services while at the same time promoted the formation and nurturing of the SHGs (NERCRMS, 2023, p. 4).

All the SHGs federations came together to form a collective platform which was known as *APEX* body which functions as microfinance institutions and provides major credit support to the SHGs without much paperwork (NERCORMP, 2012, p. 33). The Apex body of SHG federation in Ukhrul is known as Ukhrul District Women Institute of Micro-credit (UDWIM). However, in Ukhrul District even NaRM-G cluster associations had also emerged as an Apex institution i.e., Ukhrul District Apex NaRM-G Cluster Association (UDANCA) (Ukhrul District Community Resource Management Society, 2008, p. 38).

The project adopted community-based bottom-up-planning with participatory extension method to enhance the capabilities of the communities for management and development of their own resources.It allowed NaRM-Gs to manage the development initiatives in the areas of natural resource management (NRM), infrastructure, microcredit management and marketing.

Natural resource management intervention not only took care of conservation of natural resources and forests for the community but also addressed livelihood requirements of the people by taking up economic activities relating to crop development, horticulture, livestock/fish production, homestead garden and skill development training in non-farm activities.

Infrastructure development was taken up in NERCORMP with the objective to improve the livelihood of the community wherein importance was given to create both the main infrastructure and supporting infrastructure. The project helped the village communities to construct major infrastructure such as inter-village roads, bridges, culverts, ropeways, housing for processing units and market sheds. It also created supporting infrastructure such as water tanks, irrigation canals, low-cost latrine and community buildings to increase the access to basic social services such as safe drinking water, better health care amongst others.

Intervention on microcredit was undertaken to provide platforms for groups to inculcate saving habits and financial management. The process was initiated by establishing SHGs and supporting it through capacity building, training in credit management and accounts, training of group leaders, financing the establishment cost of SHGs and granting revolving fund to them. After the initiation process, the SHGs raised funds on a monthly basis and began providing small loans to group members. The credit flow of SHGs was ensured by encouraging SHG-bank linkages and providing support to SHGs through Apex bodies of clusters and federations.

Market interventions which consisted of product development, brand development and infrastructure development were the cornerstones of NERCORMP. While product development included value addition in farm activities and establishment of non-farm enterprises; brand development dealt with market identity through product promotion, establishment of SHG retail outlet and creation of market linkage with buyers through collective marketing, channel sales, retail sales and e-marketing. Infrastructure

development emphasised construction of processing units, construction of market collection sheds and distribution of push carts and plastic crates.

It may be mentioned here that NERCORMP has now been renamed as The North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Society (NERCRMS). As per DoNER Ministry, it will continue to implement ongoing additional projects such as the Rural Economic and Livelihood Project, cash crops, mixed cropping, fishery and livestock for sustainable farming, promotion of MAP-based livelihood opportunities in NER to augment rural income and promote resilient livelihoods (DoNER, 2021-2022, p. 74).

Community Approach of NERCORMP

NERCORMP's approach was primarily a community-based, bottom-up approach which was consistently reflected in various stages of its activities. In the ice-breaking stage of the project, it carried out the process of consultation wherein consensus building was initiated to muster people's support and cooperation. After the identification of the villages, the DST established the contact with the village heads and organised meetings with village heads and elders to brief them about the significance of project for the villages. After obtaining their consent, workshop was organised in the concerned village to gain wider acceptance of the people wherein the objectives of the project were presented to the villagers after which an agreement was made with the village authority. Thereafter, a public meeting with the villagers was organised to obtain their support and most importantly, convince them that they would remain as partners rather than mere beneficiaries of the project.

Prior to the implementation of the programmes, participatory rural appraisal (PRA) was conducted for the purpose of resource mapping and social mapping. Inflow and outflow of resources, household, agricultural and seasonal activities of the villagers were brought to its ambit to develop a thorough understanding on the socio-cultural and economic aspects of the village. One of the main functions of the PRA was to identify the needs and priorities of the village. According to the DST officials, the village came up

with various needs and priorities which were subsequently fine-tuned through discussions and deliberations between villagers and the DST. During the PRA exercise, the DST along with the selected NGOs were instrumental in facilitating the formation of the NaRM-Gs. At this stage, the formal rules and regulations with regard to membership and conduct of meeting of the NaRM-Gs were framed and clearly communicated to the community stakeholders.

The PRA was followed by capacity building of the communities which consisted of imparting training to the potential stakeholders. These training programmes were divided into two categories based on their intensity, i.e., more intensive and less intensive training. The more intensive training consised of those core activities that would contribute to the maintenance and sustenance of the project initiatives such as training on the management of the organisation, book-keeping and accounting. The less intensive training consisted of training on farming, planting technology and post-harvesting to boost the agricultural productivity. It was observed that all these procedures were systematically followed in the project villages of the study.

Areas of Intervention and its Impact on the villages

As part of its trust building mechanism, NERCORMP identified certain activities which were termed as entry point activities. The entry point activities were simultaneously carried out with the capacity building. The most common entry point activities in Ukhrul district were creation of safe drinking water reservoir, pipeline and common facility centre.The interventions of NERCORMP have been categorised into four broad categories in order to examine the outcomes. These areas of intervention are: farming, infrastructure, natural resource management and marketing.

Farm - based Intervention

As most of the villagers in Ukhrul district earn their livelihood from agriculture and allied activities, farm-based intervention was considered as the most significant for the villagers. Under farm-based interventions, various

initiatives such as procuring the saplings, creating opportunities for income generating activities, facilitating loan through NaRM-Gs and SHGs and providing training on fishery and other value addition were carried out. The priority areas in agriculture which were identified by NERCORMP was referred as focus item strategy. This included crop development, horticulture development, livestock and fishery development. In Kuingai and Pui village, banana cultivation was taken up as the focus item strategy along with homestead garden, plantation of kiwi, avocado and parkia. Besides the focus item strategy, other subsidiary income generating activities such as fishery, pig and poultry rearing were also undertaken. While vegetable plantation was taken up along with pig and poultry rearing in Shirui village, banana cultivation along with parkia, kiwi, piggery, poultry and fishery were taken up in Lungshang village.

Infrastructure

Based on the inputs received from PRA, NERCORMP along with the community stakeholders identified and constructed the village infrastructure to cater to the needs of the village. Accordingly, construction of inter village road (IVR), bridges, causeways, culverts, footbridges, waiting and marketing sheds, low-cost latrine, irrigation and water tanks were made. In Kuingai village, apart from low-cost latrine that was taken up as entry point activity, school building construction was also carried out.

In Pui village, low-cost latrine was taken as enry point activity to address the sanitation problem in the village. Infrastructure for minor irrigation was also created in form of construction of the dam to hold the water of the stream which however, was not a successful venture.

In Shirui village, a resource centre cum guest house consisting of six rooms and a kitchen was constructed which served as a source of income for the NaRM-G. The respondents in this village were also of the view that the provision for low-cost latrine made in the village encouraged the residents to

construct more such facilities to make the village hygienic which was its entry point activity in the village.

In Lungshang village, facilities in form of a community hall, two water tanks (one small and one large) were constructed. The respondents noted that the hall was an important addition to the village assets as the villagers could make use of the hall to organise meetings and hosting guests during inter village meetings. However, the respondents expressed their resentment on the leakages that surfaced in the water tank which at times affected the supply of water.

Natural resource Management Intervention

In Ukhrul district, biodiversity conservation was taken up as an important initiative. Efforts were made towards protecting the forest resources and creating awareness among villagers on biodiversity conservation. The community stakeholders were encouraged to conserve medicinal plants and timber resources besides creating hunting corridors. The social fencing system was introduced where the responsibility was entrusted to the villagers to look after their farms collectively. In Kuingai village, the NaRM-G group in consultation with the DST opted for conservation of bamboos by planting these in a designated area. Further, a significant change was achieved in the form of a resolution taken by the village to avoid usage of fire to clear areas for cultivation which was sincerely followed by putting a ban on the use of fire for this purpose.

In Pui village, the members took up the initiative to create reserve forest around the water source of the village. The respondents were of the view that it is the work of IFAD and its deditatced team which made them sensitive towards environmental issues. In Shirui village, tree plantation was carried out in a barren patch of land which was selected by the villagers whereas in Lungshang village, bamboo plantation was opted. However, the plantation in Lungshang failed to make much headway due to lack of knowledge about the

new technique of bamboo plantation and lack of greater involvement of villagers in the plantation drive.

Market Intervention

Market intervention in Ukhrul district was carried out in various ways such as construction of market shed, hosting *melas* and exhibitions, facilitating and preparing exceptional trainees or entrepreneurs to start a start-up and helping them to register under Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). In these four villages, NaRM-G members participated actively to sell their products in the *melas* and exhibitions. Furthermore, the DST opened a shop in the district headquarter to help the NaRM-G members to sell their products in bulk at wholesale price.

In Shirui village, though market shed was built, it was non-functional and the owner of the land eventually reoccupied the land and converted it into a private residential place. In Lungshang village, though a waiting shed was built in a strategic location to serve as a collection centre, it became non-functional.

Benefits of the interventions

The benefits accrued through developmental interventions can be observed in the respondents' occupation, source of income, socio-economic benefits, accessibility of loan and the ways beneficiaries had made use of the loan.

Table 1. Occupation status of the respondents

Sl.no	Occupation		Kuingai	Pui	Shirui	Lungshang	Total Response		Percentage	
1	Cultivator		26	19	20	20	85		70.83	
2	Profession	Teacher	1	0	1	0	2	12	1.67	10.00
		Post Master	1	0	1	0	2		1.67	
		Government jobs	0	0	3	0	3		2.50	
		Anganwadi/Asha worker	2	1	0	1	4		3.33	
		Pastor	0	0	0	1	1		0.83	
3	Seasonal Trading Activities	Small Scale	0	1	0	1	2	5	1.67	4.17
		Large Scale	0	3	0	0	3		2.50	

4	Skilled Labour		0	1	1	3	5		4.17	
5	Entrepreneur		0	0	1	1	2		1.67	
6	Homemaker		0	4	1	2	7		5.83	
7	Wage		0	0	2	0	2		1.67	
8	Others	Dependent	0	1	0		1	2	0.83	1.67
		Farmer	0	0	0	1	1		0.83	
		Total	30	30	30	30	120		100	

As shown in table 1, majority of the respondents (70.83 per cent) were cultivators whereas 10 per cent belonged to different professions. Among the remaining respondents about 4.17 per cent were carrying seasonal trading activities and 4.17 per cent were skilled labourers. It was also observed that 1.67 per cent were entrepreneurs, 5.83 per cent were home makers, 1.67 were wage earners. One farmer had multiple sources of income such as fishery, horticulture crops and he was successful in availing loans from various government schemes such as Kisan Credit Card, Mamata Savings & Credit Programme amongst others. Kuingai village had the highest number of cultivators followed by Lungshang, Shirui and Pui village.

Table 2. Sources of income

Sl.no	Primary Occupation	Kuingai		Pui		Shirui		Lungshang		Total Response		Percentage	
1	Cultivation	26	14	19	2	20	14	20	7	85	37	70.83	30.83
2	Animal Husbandry	0	1	0	8	0	2	0	5	0	16	0.00	13.33
3	Horticulture	0	8	0	4	0	0	0	6	0	18	0.00	15.00
4	Seasonal Trading Activities	0	0	3	6	1	1	0	1	4	8	3.33	6.67
5	Skilled Labor	0	1	1	2	1	2	3	2	5	7	4.17	5.83
6	Wage	0	2	0	1	2	2	0	6	2	11	1.67	9.17
7	Homemaker	0	0	4	4	1	0	2	0	7	4	5.83	3.33
8	Profession	4	4	1	1	5	5	2	2	12	12	10.00	10.00
9	Entrepreneur	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	1.67	1.67

10	Others	0	0	2	2	0	3	1	0	3	5	2.50	4.17
	Total									120	120	100.00	100.00

Note: The green highlighted section of the table indicates the primary occupation of the respondents and the unhighlighted section indicates the activities from which the respondents were drawing their main source of income.

Although the primary occupation of the majority of the respondents was cultivation, they did not necessarily draw their main source of income from cultivation alone, rather they were drawing it from different activities. For example, some of the respondents earned their income from multiple sources such as animal husbandry, horticulture, skill-based activities and wages. Some also relied on seasonal trading activities which were their major sources of income. As indicated in table 2, out of the total 85 cultivators, only 37 were relying on cultivation alone as their main source of income. While 16 respondents from animal husbandry, 18 were drawing from horticulture, 8 were drawing from seasonal trading activities, 7 from skilled labour and 11 from wages. The respondents were of the opinion that their active community participation immensely helped them to improve their farming practices. Through the participation in NaRM-Gs they acquired management skills and there was a marked improvement in their decision-making ability. The respondents were also of the view that their standard of living had improved.

Table 3. Programme benefits

Sl. No	Programme Benefits	Kuingai	Pui	Shirui	Lungshang	Total	Percentage
1	Standard of Living	16	15	11	22	64	46.38
2	Farming Practices	9	5	3	2	19	13.77
3	Management	6	6	7	0	19	13.77
4	Community Participation	7	3	3	1	14	10.14
5	N/A	3	0	4	0	7	5.07
6	Others	2	4	3	6	15	10.87

Total	43	33	31	31	138	100.00

As shown in table 3, the programme brought positive changes in standard of living. Majority of the respondents were of the view that their standard of living increased as they could avail loans to pay for their children's education, meet household expenditures and address sanitation issues. One respondent stated that open defecation completely stopped in the village and due to improvement in hygiene, deadly diseases such as cholera and malaria had disappeared from the village.

Out of the total respondents, 19 were of the view that there was an improvement in farming practices such as learning of improved method of farming, introduction of horticulture practice and realising the possibility of variety of crop plantation. The respondents noted that they learnt new methods of planting and farming apart from realising the potential of horticulture farming. One of the respondents in the Kuingai stated, *we became aware of the possibilities of horticulture farming which, we thought was not possible because of our deprived condition. Now we can see the changes where majority of us are planting one or two of horticultural crops*. One significant decision was taken in Kuingai where a plot of community land measuring 100 by 100 square feet was allotted to each household for the purpose of farming.

19 respondents noted that they benefited from IFAD programme on management skills, particularly the skills on accounting, financial management and record keeping. They had learnt the basic knowledge on accounting and became aware of the importance of wealth management for the group as well as to their households.

About 14 respondents asserted that community participation has increased due to the project. These respondents noted that there was a noticeable increase in community participation in the form of increased public activity and interaction amongst the members. According to them, constant interaction amongst the fellow villagers through the meetings of NaRM-Gs and SHGs and the collective action through project activities contributed significantly

towards creating a sense of solidariy and unity amongt them. Some of the respondents (15 respondents) were of the view that now there is clarity in their thinking pattern and they voluntarily come forward to support each other in times of adversity. One of the respondents stated *today we know more about value of work, there is more awareness of dignity of labour and our working spirit has increased.*

Women Empowerment

One of the priorities of NERCORMP was the empowerment of women initiated through its 'gender mainstreaming' programme. In all its interventions, special attention was given to women to make sure that they were represented equally in the NaRM-Gs, received training of accounting and book-keeping and were encouraged to form women SHGs.

Women respondents in all four villages stated that there has been increasing participation of women in public events, improvement in wealth management and learning skills in farming and income generation activities. There were also successful entrepreneurial ventures in Shirui and Lungshang villages wherein they took up food and fruit processing successfully. The narratives of the respondents suggest that there was noticiable change in their lives and practices after the NERCORMP intervention. While one women respondent said *I have become smarter in public meetings*, another opined *I am now able to participate freely in discussion and also participate in the work of the groups, I have become more confident and actively participate in the group activities.* Another respondent was of the view that *I am happier now because IFAD's arrival has brought various activities and we are actively engaged in these activities.* Another respondent noted, *we learnt something which we never thought we would learn, that is, book-keeping.*

Microcredit intervention

In the context of microcredit management, there were also definite economic outcomes in the form of loan accessibility and income from the produce. One

of the remarkable impacts of the microcredit management was the substantial reduction in interest rate from private loans which came down from 10-7 per cent to 3-2 per cent in all the four villages. Further, the women respondents were of view that there was easy access in availing loans after the arrival of NERCORMP project for women.

Table 4. Loan availed by the NaRM-G members

Sl. No.	Loan Availing	Kuingai	Pui	Shirui	Lungshang	Total	Percentage
1	Loan from group	22	25	25	23	95	79.2
2	Not availing Loans	5	3	3	3	14	11.7
3	N/A	1	2	1	2	6	5.0
5	Loan from group and private	2	0	1	1	4	3.3
6	Others	0	0	0	1	1	0.8
		30	30	30	30	120	100.0

As evident in table 4, out of 120 respondents, 79.2 per cent availed loan either from NaRM-Gs or SHGs, whereas 3.3 per cent obtained loan from multiple sources such as NaRM-Gs, SHGs, private sources and banks. Interestingly 12 per cent did not avail loan.

Table 5. Loan utilisation by the members of the NaRM-Gs

Sl. No	Loan Utilisation	Kuingai	Pui	Shirui	Lungshang	Total	Percentage
1	Single purpose	11	19	22	19	71	59.2
2	Double purpose	11	5	4	5	25	20.8
3	Triple Purpose	1	1	0	0	2	1.7
4	Quadruple Purpose	1	0	0	0	1	0.8
5	Others	0	0	0	1	1	0.8
6	Not availing loans	5	3	3	3	14	11.7
7	N/A	1	2	1	2	6	5.0

30	30	30	30	120	100.0

Another aspect that was observed is the judicious use of loan. As displayed in table 5, 82.5 per cent used it for different purposes to enhance their economic well-being. They used the loan amount to meet the expenses with regard to education, household expenses, animal rearing, skill development, medical issues, business, construction and debt repayment.

Challenges and Success

The successful outcomes of the intervention in the Ukhrul district can primarily be attributed to the constant monitoring and evaluation through the administrative channels of the NERCORMP. The creation of registered societies, namely the Regional Society and the District Society to handle the implementation of the project along with the recruited NGOs enabled flexibility and thus enhanced its effectiveness. Further, the involvement of the community members in creating consensus in starting up of the project, identifying the needs and setting the priorities of the villages and effectively implementing the various developmental initiatives contributed towards the success of its interventions. The constant monitoring also helped to understand the ground realities better and take necessary remedial steps for its successful implementation.

Another important factor for the success of the project was the approach towards the formation of various groups, thus placing the emphasis on community mobilisation and capacity building. From the beginning, the members were made to understand the necessity of transparency, accountability and conflict management. Further, they were also given training on rules and regulations of the organisation, book-keeping and accounting management, which equipped them to maintain transparency. It is important to note that implementing agency had made it very clear to the groups that there was no scope for infighting and misappropriation of funds either at the village or in the group. These preconditions ensured group cohesion and the conflict was managed by the members themselves within the group.

Despite the success, the project was not free from challenges which were observed in all areas of intervention and these were evident from the responses of the respondents from villages as well as from DST officials. With regard to empowerment of women, the implementing staff found it challenging to bring gender parity and changes in the perception due to the well-entrenched patriarchal mindset. Further the implementing staff at initial phase found that women were not encouraged to put forward their views and take active participation in the deliberations. However, women today, not only actively participate in decision-making process but also carry out other activities of the project. Though there was increasing participation of women in the project activities, ironically, men continued to take decisions. However, women participation in decision-making process and other activities of the project increased mainly through the SHGs and SHGs Federation meetings which provided platforms for the women to interact.

The lack of capital and ceiling imposed by IFAD adversely affected the desirable construction work. High cost for transportation and unavailability of raw materials in local areas provided added problems. Although cooperation, understanding, and support were obtained, it could not avail any financial assistance from them.

Challenges were also faced in the farm-based as well as non-farm-based interventions. The delay in seeds procurement, small land holding in communities, high transportation cost, irregular income due to weak marketing channels and affordability to carry out large scale horticulture were the problems faced by the various stakeholders of the project. The long waiting period of harvesting and maintenance cost of horticulture dissuaded the beneficiaries to solely rely on horticulture. While certain holticultural crops such as avocado, banana, parkia, kiwi had brought dividends for the beneficiaries, their efforts in geranium and aloe vera pantation were not quite successful.

One of the implementing staff noted that some villagers continue with the project activity as long as they received funds which was indeed a challenge as

it affected the sustainability of the project activities. Lack of mechanisms to involve the village authority and other decision-making institutions of the village in the decision-making was another bottleneck that was observed in the study.

As far as non-farm interventions were concerned, the non-availability of adequate capital was the major concern which discouraged members from taking up non-farm-based activities. Lack of support from financial institutions such as bank provided added problem.

Additionaly, the absence of proper and robust value supply chain was a major hurdle for the people to maximise their profit from their hard-earned products. Lack of bulk supply of products and cold storage, high collection cost of products due to the scattered location of villages, unfeasibility of single large-scale plantation and improper road connectivity contributed in one way or the other towards ineffective value supply chain.

Due to the lack of proper supply of seeds and technical support, the villagers could not effectively address the problems relating to infections, decay and disease of plants. The transportation cost due to poor connectivity of roads exasperated the situation of supplying raw materials for construction thereby increasing the cost of the project and decreasing the viability of value chain.

The scattered location of the villages and the poor socio-economic status of the beneficiaries made the efforts of implementing agencies, NaRM-Gs and SHGs more challenging particularly in establishing proper market chain. The poor connectivity, inadequate infrastructure, lack of marketing facilities and above all the poverty and deprivation are the reasons that can be attributed to the lack of motivation to take up entrepreneurial ventures.

Despite these shortcomings and challenges, the initiatives taken under NERCORMP created a sense of ownership among the villagers and the enhanced community participation indeed brought a sense of collectivism and

provided the scope and opportunity to the community stakeholders to excute their developmental activities collectively.

The above findings however, can be taken as an illustration of how the project was implemented in Ukhrul district and should not be generalised for the entire NERCORMP project which was implemented in other states. Nevertheless, the above observations certainly help in understanding the nature, dynamics, success and challenges of the NERCORMP intervention project outcomes and challenges besides the changes it brought in the villages through community participation.

Conclusion

Community development projects initiated by government either solely or in collaboration with international agencies undoubtedly brought desirable changes in the livelihood of marginalised community. Through its people-centric approach, NERCORMP's intervention in diverse areas such as crop development, gender mainstreaming, natural resource management and microcredit management has brought noticeable changes in the life and livelihoods of the people. Though inclined towards bottom-up startegies it has successfully blended top-down and bottom-up approaches to carry out its activities effectively and to achieve its desired objectives. Despite the initial success, the sustainability of community development interventions lies with community capacity building and the continuous support from the government line departments to build up requisite infrastructure besides obtaining support from the financial institutions. Community development without technical, professional and infrastructural support cannot flourish and sustain. Therefore, a concerted effort needs to be made to redress these issues while ensuring that there is wider and sustained community participation.

Notes

1. NERCORMP selected villages based on certain specified criteria. The selected villages were referred to as project villages in its report thus the term

project villages had been used. During the project period, NERCORMP has covered a total of 2532 villages from the four states. It has covered 860 villages in the first phase, 460 villages in the second phase and1212 villages in the third phase.

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Article: Notes on the Everyday State in India's Postcolonial Democracy

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Notes on the Everyday State in India's Postcolonial Democracy

--Aditya Mohanty & Dr Priya Ranjan

Abstract

This paper argues that in recent years there has been a renewed vigour with which the Everyday State (juxtaposed to a Weberian, hierarchical, structural state) has gained currency. Having critically reviewed the literature on Everyday State, this article draws from two case studies -- working of a government scheme and a middle class, urban social movement -- to see through how the State performs itself. It argues that such an Everyday State sees the working of an assemblage of actors (civil society groups, bureaucratic officials, populist leaders, brokers/ middlemen, etc.). Such a rendering of the Everyday State, stands in contrast to a structuralist notion of State-Civil society separation and calls for exploring its interstitial spaces. In order to do so, the paper draws from the works of spatial theorists and political sciences, to sociologically arrive at the concept of what we prefer to call as the 'Topological Everyday Sate'.

Keywords: Brokers, Civil Society, Everyday State, Intermediaries and Power

Introduction

The polyvalent narrative of social justice, transparency, civic values and accountability primarily shapes the way in which one imagines and understands the State in everyday life. This conceptual paper is a critical commentary on the working of the Indian State in everyday settings. In the first section of the paper, we articulate how in the Indian context, distinctive historical trajectories form unique hybridizations and provide differential opportunities for both State and non-State actors to coalesce in the making of an Everyday State. In the second section, we draw lessons from two contrasting case studies a) working of a governmental development scheme i.e., Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and b) a middle class, anti-corruption movement i.e., the Anna Hazare Movement, to see how

dichotomies like individual interest vs collective morality and agonism vs altruism in Indian public life are only *rhetorical* alternatives, and that instead these binaries bleed into each other. Finally, in the third section, we attempt to theorise the concept of 'Topological Everyday State' and through a diagrammatic representation show how emergent conduits of power has trasformed the key coordinates of the Everyday State.

[I] Emergence of the Everyday State as a Sociological Concept

Over the past two decades, anthropological studies on the state's everyday spatial presence have emphasized the need for an embedded analysis. Abrams (1988 [1977]), for example, argues that it is challenging to study the state comprehensively without recognizing the distinction between what he calls the "state as an idea" and the "state as a system." This perspective highlights how the state, in its daily interactions with the public, emerges through a process of "structuration within public practice." While the state-system is concerned with the institutionalization of government apparatuses, the state-idea is shaped through ongoing structuration, in which everyday negotiations are reified. This approach views the state as a dynamic entity that mediates, engages, and negotiates with its otherwise opaque boundaries, rather than as a distant, unchanging entity above its citizens.

Such analyses argue that the boundaries between formal (state) institutions and informal (societal) institutions are often blurred (Gupta, 1995), as local and district-level bureaucracies become vernacularised. For instance, in India, following economic liberalisation in the 1990s, the Indian state has experienced a crisis of the "developmental state", wherein the normative frameworks of government interventions have been thoroughly restructured. The issue with Chatterjee's concept of political society is that it does not adequately capture these "fissures of governmentality." Since Chatterjee does not clearly define the components of political society and includes anything between the "state" and the (poor) "populations" within it, a concept like the everyday state provides a more precise understanding. In this context, ensuring the long-term survival of democracy may require more than civil society

simply enduring the various challenges posed by unwarranted intrusions into public life and spaces (such as hawkers crowding pavements, polluted transportation, water wastage, power abuse, and land squatting). The rise of the everyday state (as discussed by Hansen and Stepputat 2005; Das and Poole 2004) involves dynamic intersections that are shaped by three critical dimensions of informal politics. Firstly, social affiliations play a significant role in determining access to state resources. For example, belonging to a kinship network, religious group, or having local connections greatly influence people's ability to navigate and engage with the everyday state. Secondly, these social norms create alternative communication channels outside of officially sanctioned avenues, enabling people to make claims on the state by pressuring state agents to respond to their demands. Lastly, various forms of mediation with frontline bureaucrats influence how state services are delivered, often with the expectation that recipients will reciprocate with electoral support. This dynamic is less about crafting policies that favor specific groups and more about intermediaries like NGOs or political brokers, who, with the backing of local legislators, push bureaucrats to bend the rules. The various forms of *jugaad* employed by actors within the political ecosystem force them to move beyond the conventional liberal or institutional understanding of civil society.

[II] Whither the Everyday State in India today: Lessons from two contrasting case studies

With this context in mind, we now turn to an analytical reading of two representative papers from the past two decades that exemplify the emerging trends in the Everyday State in India. The first paper, by Akhil Gupta (1995), offers a nuanced analysis of the functioning of the state within the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), shedding light on the inherent problems in viewing the postcolonial, developmentalist Indian state through unitary descriptions during the long 1980s. Gupta's ethnography of the interactions between villagers and state officials reveals the need for a more decentralized and disaggregated conceptualization of the state. Instead of assuming the state

as a singular, cohesive entity, Gupta invites us to explore the conditions under which it might operate as such. His ethnographic data, including the stories of Sharmaji, Sripal, Ram Singh, the Kisan Union, and vernacular press reports, point to the existence of multiple agencies, agendas, levels, and centers of power that resist simplistic explanations. Another key issue Gupta addresses is the trans-local nature of state institutions, which he argues must be understood as existing at the intersection of local, regional, national, and transnational phenomena. He further emphasizes the role of public culture in shaping the discursive construction of the state and argues that analyzing public culture alongside everyday bureaucratic practices allows us to understand how villagers and officials experience the reality of these trans-local entities. Finally, Gupta foregrounds the importance of representation in imagining the state.

The second paper, by Sitapati (2011), explores why the Anna Hazare movement was so powerful and demonstrates how the Everyday State can rally civil society against the state itself. Sitapati examines the reconfiguration of the three key actors of development—State, Market, and Civil Society—in neoliberal India and explains how the movement employed Gandhian motifs to amplify urban middle-class concerns about corruption and transparency. The movement's legal expertise allowed it to propose concrete legislative changes, while the energy of "India Shining" lent it media savvy and clout. Sitapati draws parallels with the Indian national movement, noting how lawyers, middle-class professionals, and Gandhi himself navigated the path to constitutional democracy, while spreading the liberal ideas of the urban elite Indian National Congress to the peasantry. The unique potency of the movement is also highlighted by its contrast with the public response to a later fast by yoga guru Baba Ramdev.

These two case studies reveal a critical facet of the Everyday State in India: the enduring distrust of the middle class toward the political class and party system as a legitimate means for programmatic change. As a result, middle-class activism often positions itself in opposition to electoral politics rather

than as an influential force within it. The resurgent middle class, acting as a civil society, has emerged as a powerful entity that both shapes and challenges the boundary between civil society and the Everyday State. This interaction offers insight into how, in the current era of populism, political agents navigate contradictory spaces. The recruitment of temporary or contractual frontline bureaucrats, as Lipsky (1980) describes, has intensified contentious politics, drawing in a mix of brokers, "naya netas" (Krishna 2003), civil society actors, NGOs, and others. This merging of civil society and state activities results in precarious working arrangements, with Government-Organized NGOs (GONGOs) like state-sponsored microfinance schemes promoting sustainable livelihoods through Self-Help Groups and decentralized participatory governance initiatives (Sharma, 2006). In fact, be it any participatory scheme like that of community councils in Latin America (Goldfrank 2017) or Joint Forest Management in South Asia (Sundar 2000), the limitations therein can be overcome by deploying a hybrid and contingent regime of 'fluid brokerage'. Such an innovative networking by subaltern community leaders facilitates marginalised/ non-expert stakeholders to successfully 're-politicise' everyday contestations by creatively working through 'technical rules' (Chiodelli 2019).

The subaltern in the contemporary setting thus practices both (a) political citizenship in the sense that members have some or other stake in governance and (b) civic citizenship in the sense that they have freedom to be members of parallel communities on different registers.

[III] Theorising a Topological Everyday State

In the next few pages, we show how the emergence of such fluid working of the contemporary political space, as evidenced in the two case studies, compel us to re-imagine the Everyday State as a topological rather than a topographic unity. Primarily, a concept in mathematical sciences, topology, may plainly be seen as a concept that is concerned with the properties of space under conditions of duress. For example, a square may be reformed into a circle without breaking it, but the diagrammatic representation of the number '8'

cannot. Hence in a topological sense, a square is topologically different from the figure '8' but is equivalent to a circle.

Fig 1 Examples of topology

Source: Authors' compilation

With regard to spatial questions, Desforges, Jones and Woods (2005) argue that although geographers have mostly been enthusiastic about engaging with the different forms of 'topology', they end up mostly reifying the 'topographical' aspects involved herein. To explain briefly, while 'topography' refers to Euclidean metrics like proximity, location and boundedness, 'topology', by contrast, prizes spatial relationality as shaped by contingent social relations. Hence, seeing the Everyday State as a 'topological' fact and not as a 'topographical' one can help us capture both the symbolic and instrumental engagements of subaltern agency with a more dynamic and capacious everyday state (i.e., a point that sociologists tend to ignore). Following the case studies discussed above, we argue, that the ways in which fluid actors of the Everyday State embody differential strategies of mediation with a dynamic everyday state necessitates an analytical reading of what Ghertner (2017) argues is the 'topological state'. The state is a topological entity in the sense that it is not a rigid Weberian rational-legal

apparatus of hierarchical governance. He first uses the most used and easily intelligible metaphors of the Mobius ribbon, to help us connect to the idea of topology (see Fig. 2). Just as a Mobius strip has an inside that seems to be the outside and vice-versa, Ghertner (2017: 739) argues that in his tracing of everyday interactions of the common people in Delhi, India with a hierarchical, Weberian compartmentalised bureaucracy, the state comes across as a topological entity '*in which the inside becomes outside and inside again in a continuous loop…The state outside itself thus represents a figure in which one's presence inside or outside of the state apparatus depends less on structural position and more on when you look…*' In so doing, he contrasts the 'topological state' with a 'topographic state'. The latter refers to the general, mundane understanding of the state as an ordered system of superordination and subordination wherein the offices in the higher echelons supervise the lower ones, viz., the commissioner supervising the engineer, who in turn directs the clerk. Each post has clearly delineated spheres of action and capacities for intervention. One simply cannot bypass the other.

Fig 2 Image of a Mobius strip

Source: adapted from Ghertner (2017)

The 'Topological State', in fact, considers how the constituents of the State function, not exactly in terms of their jurisdictional remit, but based on how the different parts connect to each other. In uncovering the 'Topological State' therefore, the focus is to map those 'powers of reach' (Allen and Cochrane 2010) that permit both individuals to exert their social capital without

compelling officials to unsettle the otherwise stifled, bureaucratic spaces of engagement. Ghertner, therefore, correctly argues that to uncover such a facet of the 'Topological State', the need is to '*... insert the more abstract spatial analytics of political geography into an ethnography of the everyday state ...focusing on the quotidian practices through which stateness is secured and undone in particular conjuncture…*'

In complete agreement with Ghertner's call for a nuanced political geography of the 'Everyday State', and coupling the lessons drawn from the case studies discussed above, we provide a diagrammatic representation of 'Topological Everyday State'. The topological model, which we propose, posits the three key entities of power contestations, viz., i) a hierarchical state, ii) elites and subalterns and iii) brokers in a three-dimensional space. An abstract and elusive entity permeates through the different constituents of the game. Ronald Burt (1977), in an excellent regression analysis argues that the bases of power are manifested via the processes of power. It is true that in every setting, postcolonial or otherwise, legal, economic and social barriers do exist, but they are differentially permeable to different actors in a system. In fact, there are such socio-economic i) *constraints*, that one actor can place on another that, it can modify the very ii) *distribution of control over resources*. Bearing these two aspects of power in mind, Burt (1977), after a complex variance-co-variance matrix, gives us a palatable diagrammatic representation (see Fig. 3 below) of what he calls the 'multi-dimensional' model of power. What one needs to simply deduce from this diagram, for our purposes here, is the fact that ***power*** has been shown as an "*.... **ability to i) convert resources into ii) influence within a system of iii) interrelated actors***, despite resistance from other actors within the system... In this diagram, the score P_{jh} is actor J's power in the hth dimension of power. Instead of existing as a single score indicating the relative overall power of actor j, the multidimensional power diagram below shows it to be a derivative of a profile of scores indicating actor j's power in reference to combinations of resources (as in resources which are valued by leaders across the K spheres of influence)...." (Burt 1977: 17)

Fig 3 Path diagram of multidimensional model of power
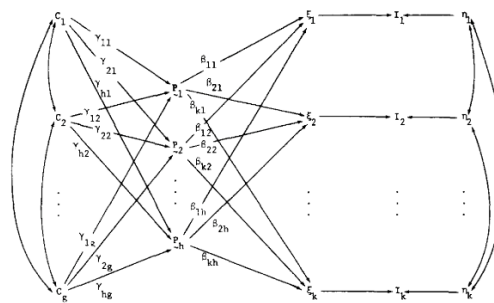
As specified for actor j in equations:

(5) $i_{jk} = -d_{jk} = \xi_{jk} + r_{jk}$

(12) $\xi_{jk} = \sum_{h=1}^{H} \beta_{kh}(p_{jh})$

(13) $p_{jh} = \sum_{g=1}^{G} c_{jg} r_{hg}$

Source: adapted from Burt (1977)

If one now substitutes the three factors of power, as outlined by Burt (1977), viz., resources, influence, and inter-relations between actors on to a topographical state, as Ghertner (2017) would concur, one gets a *damru*-shaped (see Fig 3 above) topological Everyday State model . The *damru* is a typical Indian musical instrument made up of leather, wood, and metal. Here the resonator is made up of brass and typically as the striker/player waves the drum in a twisting wrist motion, the beads which are fastened to the ends of the leather cords strike the sealed-leather ends; it produces a repetitive *dum-dum* sound. Associated chiefly with the Shaivite tradition, the sound waves generated by the *damru* are believed to slay negative forces. Drawing an analogy between the processes involved and repercussions produced by the *damru*, the arrangement of the different intermediaries or brokers within the framings of a Ghertnerian 'Topological State' and Burtian 'Topological Power', what one arrives at is a *damru*-shaped model of 'Topological Everyday State' (see Figs 4, 5 and 6 below).

Brokers or community leaders herein are no more seen as hapless, linear intermediaries or agents between the two ends of a layered-topographical state and the elites/subalterns. Instead, they form the girth of the topological state and balance the interests of both, the different spheres of the everyday state on

the one hand and that of both members of civil society (elites) and political society (subalterns) on the other hand. Topological Everyday State, thus explained as a three-dimensional space, facilitates a regime of brokerage not patronage, that permits brokers to seamlessly move across the space between the state and relationally positioned elites and subalterns. Topological Everyday State, thus explained as a three-dimensional space, facilitates a space that permits intermediaries (as seen in the two case studies -- be it ground level frontline officers in the ICDS scheme of 1980s or urban middle class activists in Anna Hazare movement of 2000s) to seamlessly negotiate the state. Such a topological cirizenship engendered by an eclectic array of community leaders facilitates a new mode of political engagement. Unlike Chatterjee (2008), who notes that the political class flexes its power levers of targeted compensations to different marginalised groups to assuage the exclusionary practices of 'primitive accumulation', we argue that Topological Everyday State creates a more hybrid and contingent space for unpacking, what we would call, the 'middle-classication of civil society'.

Fig 4 Inverted path diagram of multidimensional model of power
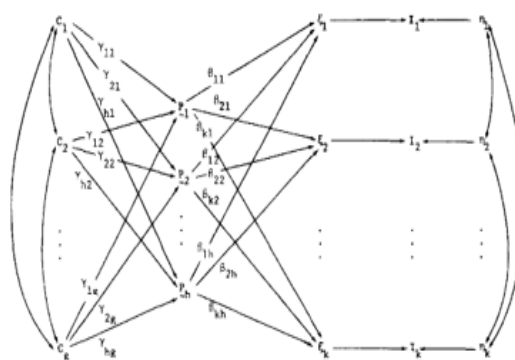
Source: adapted from Burt (1977)

Fig 5 Power-nexus in the city

Fig 6 Image of a Damru
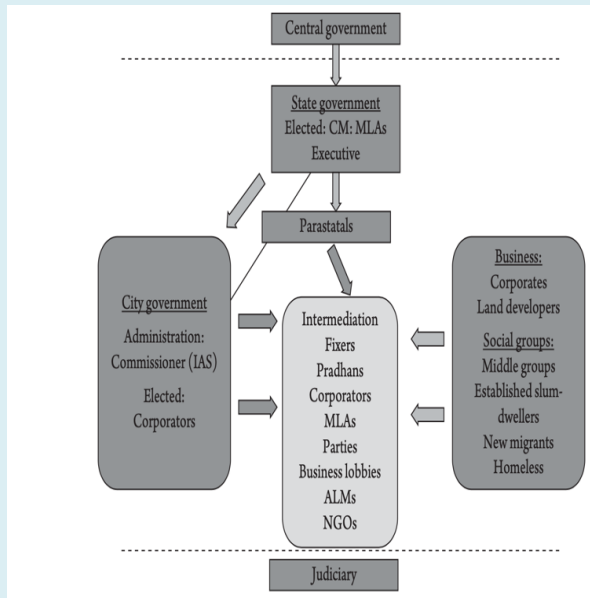
Source: adapted from Heller et al (2019)

Image Source: www.amazon.in

Fig 7 Damru-shaped Topological Everyday State
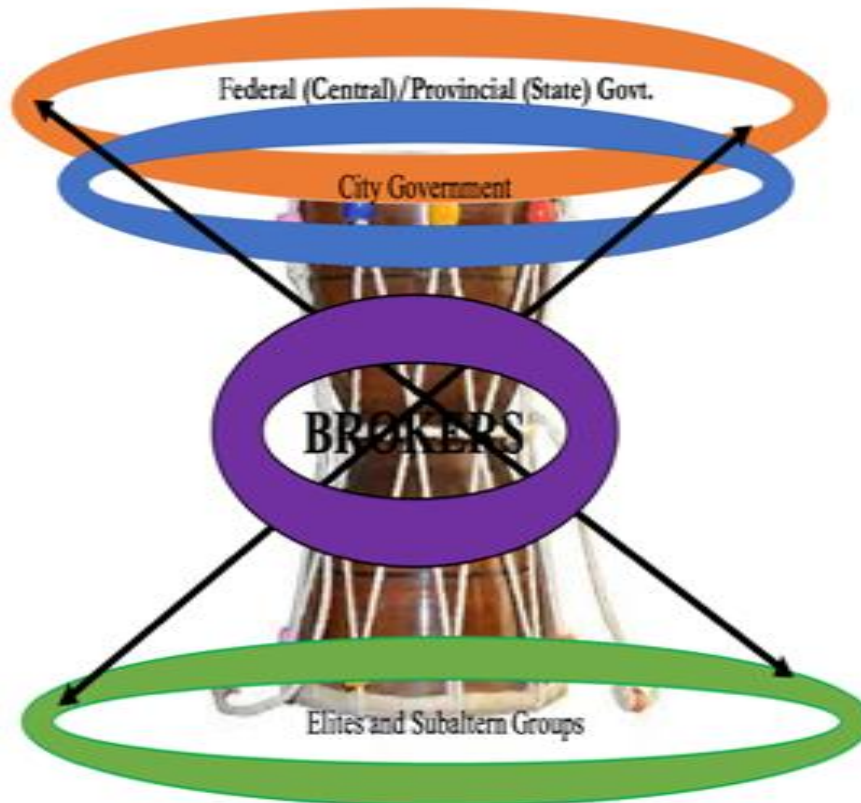
Source: Authors' compilation

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper highlights the persistent divide between the state and authentic politics in postcolonial societies like India. This divide has become more pronounced during a period of deep engagement with modern electoral politics, in which historically marginalized groups, such as Dalits, have increasingly used representative democracy as a means to assert their claims for recognition and respect. The outcomes of these efforts have been neither trivial nor straightforward. Notably, there is no clear evidence that the success

of liberal political institutions has resulted in the emergence of liberal political subjects across the subcontinent.

In this context, where neoliberalism and globalisation have led to impressive economic growth in India, the workings of the Topological Everyday State provide a strategic space for both elites and subalterns to navigate. As capitalists gain wealth and power, their commitment to democracy may become unstable. The ongoing flow of democracy must be sustained through a hegemonic effort by subalterns, which requires their ethical and cultural support for good governance, productivity, and an active awareness of rights and responsibilities. This must be paired with cooperation, a strong focus on education and literacy, and a readiness for dialogue and consensus-building. For instance, on the political front, the whole landscape of Indian politics has changed. Hindutva has taken over and there is a simultaneous deployment of a culturally right-wing discourse of vigilantism, and an economically neo-liberal discourse of capacity-building, empowerment, and entrepreneurial development among the subalterns. But that does not mean that the older vocabularies of welfare, and the pro-minority/lower-caste pedigrees of political mobilisation have melted into thin air. It is in such moments of transition in the political order that Topological Everyday State as a concept challenges the essentialisation of strands of thinking to specific political parties. Differences, as per such a conceptualisation, do not remain as differences *per se*. Instead, they exhibit difference in their moments and movements.

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Article: Indian Television Soap Opera as an Ideological State Apparatus

Re-invigorating the regressiveness of Indian Society

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Abstract

Societies are defined by the ideologies they believe in. Ideas bring people together and give them identity and membership in the society. However, the dominant ideology persists and passes on as a natural order that is contrived as an ideology of the overall society. More often than not, the dominant ideology, primarily benefiting very few privileged sections, disseminates the regressive ideas and shrouds them as an ideology of the society to maintain their *status quo* (caste, class and gender). With the 'critical realism' approach, this paper tries to analyze the content of the Indian Television Soap Operas to understand how they act as an Ideological State Apparatus in perpetuating, maintaining and normalizing the regressive ideology of the society.

__Key Words:__ Regressiveness, Ideology, State Apparatus, Critical Realism, Soap Operas

Introduction/Impact of Mass Media:

Marx conceived that the structure of every society is constituted mainly by three levels. 'Infrastructure'- the economic bases of feudalism, slavery, capitalism, socialism, and so on. 'Superstructure'- which justifies the infrastructure through the institutions of law and state. And 'ideology'- which sanctifies and makes the people accept that the infrastructure and superstructure are normal and are governed by 'natural order.' The ideology prevents rebellion and creates a submissive workforce (Althusser, 1971, p.

134). The conglomeration of a set of ideas forms an ideology that, in fact, defines society at various levels. In a society that is socially structured based on inequalities (caste, class and gender), the regressive ideology is portrayed as an ideology of the overall society. The key purpose of the ideology is to normalize and perpetuate certain ideas that mostly benefit the privileged sections (caste, class and gender). It (ideology) is mostly in coherence with the 'infrastructure' and 'superstructure' of the society.

Many scholars attempted to understand 'ideology' and offered many viewpoints on the subject (Althusser, 1971; Balkin, 1998; Eagleton, 1991; Freeden, 2003; Decker, 2004). Ideology is a complex set of ideas that reflects or at least convinces people that it reflects the 'meaningful social reality.' 'Ideologies…, map the political and social worlds for us' (Freeden, 2003, p. 2). A mixture of various fronts (religious, political and social) of ideology emerges as a meta-ideology of the society that is enrooted in the culture of the society. History proved that ideologies can make and break the world as we know it. There is a possibility of various ideologies co-existing within society at one particular time. 'We produce, disseminate, and consume ideologies all our lives, whether we are aware of it or not. So, yes, we are all ideologists' (Freeden, 2003, p. 1). However, the 'dominant ideology' surpasses the other ideologies in a society (Althusser, 1971; Eagleton, 1991, p. 18). This is mainly diffused and sustained by the benefiting sections of the society, though they are regressive and help maintain the structural inequalities intact in the society.

It is imperative for the benefitting sections of the society to keep the ideology, which this paper considers as regressive, alive to maintain the existing status quo. Over the period, the sections at the receiving end also subscribe and act as flag bearers for the oppressive/regressive ideology as it is shrouded as the ideology of the society. In due course of time, the regressive ideology becomes routine, and the people no longer differentiate between the regressive and progressive ideas in the ideology of society. Those who speak against the

regressive idea are seen and branded as the enemies of society and customs. It is, in fact, lauded and deemed ideal not to question the ideology of the society even if it perpetuates the regressiveness. In other words, as Herman & Chomsky (1988) call it, it is 'manufacturing consent' for the people in the society. 'Ideological fusion takes place when sectional interests are represented as universal. The inverse of this is ideological fission, where interests that are universal are presented as sectional' (Bhaskar, 1993, p.168 as cited by MacLennan & Thomas, 2003).

Various mediums such as myths, oral stories with moral values, literature, religion, politics, performing arts, and comedy are employed in diffusing, perpetuating and normalizing the ideas that are part of the ideology. Though all the above-stated mediums are robust and have been in use for centuries, the advent of the technology and entertainment industry have joined the long list of apparatus to spread the ideology more vigorously. Mass-communication media such as movies, television, and social media have a peculiar character that was lacking in the other mediums. They have the power to stroke the imaginative ability of human beings and make people connect to it through the visual presentation, which in turn makes people slowly blend in with the ideology of the society, agree to it and accept it as usual.

This paper attempts to analyze how Indian television soap operas (serials) that are televised every day in various languages perpetuate, normalize, and contribute to maintaining the ideology of the society. This paper also limits itself only to understanding how TV serials propagate and normalize the regressive ideology of society. Hopkins (2016) argues that TV sitcoms triggered the downfall of Western civilization and made people close to anti-intellectualism. Dam (2019) adds to David Hopkins's findings and argues that the 'lowest denominator of popular media paved the way for the lowest common denominator of populist politics.' He analyses how Mediaset (a private broadcasting company) replaced the educative programs that are aired

by RAI (Public broadcaster) with cartoons, sports, soap operas, movies and other light entertainment, which had played an essential role in shaping society's politics and 'made children dumber and enabled a wave of populist leaders.' In the Indian context, some scholars also suggested that screening of Ramayana and other epics on television paved the way for the rise of far-right Hindutva forces in India (Rajagopal, 2001; Sharma, 2018; Varma, 2019). Singer (1958) argues that modern technological media inventions were used to propagate the ongoing bhakti movement in Madras City. There is no denying that the media plays a vital role in influencing our opinions and shaping our everyday thoughts, actions, and perceptions. They assure us of the normality of our practices and encourage us to keep practising them.

Every society has an ideology that brings unity and a sense of belonging among the members (Harari, 2014). Most often, the ideology acts as a cultural marker to create identities and to differentiate the members from one society to the other. Though the ideologies keep the members intact, they are supposed to be amended and changed as times change. Those who prefer to stick to the 'old' traditional values are considered conservatives who glorify and fight to bring back the golden days and save humans from the current 'Dark Age' and mishaps. Those who argue in favour of changes in the old practices and ideologies can be considered progressive. In furtherance, we can divide the ideology of any society into a progressive and regressive ideology. These are highly subjective and subjected to change based on several factors, such as political-ideological standpoints, the education a person receives, religious beliefs, gender, time, and space.

Hence, this paper offers a working definition of the regressive ideology of society as the ideology.

'That thrives in the society to keep the inequalities alive, allowing only certain individuals, or groups or castes or gender to exercise their domination and exploit the others.'

The opposite of this can be considered as the progressive ideology of a society. Those who agree with the ideology or are not politically educated enough perceive this as a 'natural order' to spread the ideology. It is more often than not passed on as the old traditional customs and values as it is normalized to the extent that people completely blend in and accept it as a social reality.

'Ideological State Apparatus' and 'Critical Realism':

Understanding the Indian Soap Operas and their inert mechanism to perpetuate the regressive ideology of the society would be a true ontological venture. For this, the paper employs the concepts of 'critical naturalism' or 'critical realism' (Judd, 2003, p. 33). The concept of critical realism stresses focusing not only on the events (regressive ideologies in society) but also on what produces or normalizes the events, i.e., mechanisms that are involved (Indian Soap operas perpetuating the regressive ideology) (Collier, 1994; Danermark & Ekstrom, 1997; Judd, 2003; Bhaskar, 2008; Brinkmann, 2020;). In explaining the ideology, Louis Althusser (1971) states that the reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, i.e., a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class.

Certain apparatuses work as the state apparatus, helping the state or society to maintain its ideology. Althusser also differentiates between the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) and the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA). ISA are

those realities that present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions. From the empirical list of ISA offered by Althusser (1971), this paper deals with the communications ISA (press, radio, television, etc.). However, this paper sees that the other ISAs, such as religious, educational, family, legal, political and cultural, intersect with the communication ISA in this context. This paper attempts to establish the Indian televised soap operas as the ISA in perpetuating the regressive ideology of the society to maintain, manifest, and reinforce the *status quo* (class, gender, and caste) of Indian society.

Methodology:

This paper attempts to establish TV soap operas as ISA with a critical realism approach by analyzing the content and theme of Indian TV soap operas that are being televised on both Hindi and Telugu channels. The soap operas that are aired on Zee TV and Star Plus (Hindi language) and Gemini and E TV (Telugu language) are considered for the content analysis. The below mentioned soap operas were selected because of their popularity. A group of people who are regular audience of soap operas were asked to name the famous soap operas and the below soap operas frequented the response of the informants. Two TV channels from Hindi and Two TV channels from Telugu were selected. All the four channels represent larger media houses and televise and operate their channel in many of the languages. Quite often a soap opera in one language gets to be dubbed into other languages where the media corporation has presence. The Two Hindi channels are aired in almost all the Hindi speaking regions and the allied language zones. The two Telugu channels were selected as they represent the south Indian region. The soap operas that were named by informants which are considered to popular were either getting telecasted at the time of writing this paper or at least from the last seven years from the time of authoring this paper. However, to strengthen the argument, this paper also relied on the other content that is being aired on

other TV channels. Though there are various niches such as religious programs, comedy shows, movies, news, sports, and reality show that are televised on these TV channels, this paper majorly focuses only on the TV Soap operas to understand how they normalize the regressive ideology of the society. The below mentioned soap operas were selected after analyzing the overall plot or story line of the particular soap operas. As the Soap operas in India tend to televise for longest period and the storyline is progresses very slowly, the overall plot was given priority than a singular episode. The thematic analysis also represents the overall emphasis on the plot rather than the particular episode.

India and Television

Television was introduced in India on 15th September 1959 through Doordarshan. A Pilot Television Centre telecasted the first programme, aided by UNESCO, airing the programs two days a week from Delhi. Programs aimed at testing the efficiency of the medium in carrying social education (for farmers and school children) to poorer sections of Indian Society. Starting 15th August 1965, the programs were televised on a daily basis but restricted to only one hour per day. The broadcasting service was increased to two hours per day in 1969 and three hours in 1970, along with televising Hindi movies; subsequently, the airing hours were increased (Md Firoz, 2000, as stated in the annexure of his PhD Thesis).

Colour television was introduced on 15 August 1982 during the Asian Games. Later, Doordarshan started installing transmission antennas across the nation. The first Indian Soap Opera was televised on 15 July 1984 and was called *Hum Log* (We People). The poster of that soap opera represented all religious sections of Indian society, as emphasized by its title. The story plot depicts the situation of the Indian families in a situation that is close to real. In the subsequent years, the liberalization of the Indian Economy in the 1990s led to

the entry of private agencies into the television industry (Md Firoz, 2000, as stated in the annexure of his PhD Thesis).

As of (2023), the Government of India granted permission to 1031 private satellite TV channels. 892 private satellite TV channels are reported to have valid permission. There are 403 news and current affairs channels, and 489 are classified as non-news or General Entertainment Channels (MoIB, 2023). With seven Direct-to-Home (DTH) service providers, 195 million households have televisions (BARC India Year Book, 2018). As of 2018, the market value of the TV industry is estimated to be 740 Billion INR, and it is expected to reach 1.2 Trillion INR by 2022 (Sanika Diwanji, 2019). In 2018, on average, Indians spent 3.44 hours every day watching TV, amounting to 989 billion man-minutes of TV viewing per week. Out of all the programs that are televised, Indians Watched 52% of the General Entertainment Category, which includes Drama and Soap operas (BARC India Year Book, 2018). Surprisingly, on an average of 50% of the youth also watch soap operas on weekdays. The youth in rural India watch more soap operas than their urban counterparts, where urban youth are attracted more to reality shows (BARC Newsletter, 2018).

Evolution of Hindi Soap opera content over the decades (1980-2020):

Over the decades, there have been considerable changes in the content of TV dramas. The content in the earlier shows centered on having a joint-family structure; it depicted the daily struggles and issues in a family, and it tried invoking the feelings of nationalism among the individuals of a family through shows on the partition of India and its aftermath, while there were also educative and interactive shows exclusively for children. The '90s decade brought forward some revolutionary shows of that time that questioned the existing norms of society. Certain progressive shows based on the idea of feminism made the viewer realize the equal importance of women on the

screen. The content also allowed the audience to envision the women's role alternatively rather than romanticizing and valorizing the traditional 'women's job.' Some of the shows focused on the daily struggles of women in contemporary urban society, and some of the shows shed light on issues like extra-marital affairs, which were never openly discussed. The upcoming decade saw a massive shift in the content of TV dramas. The focus changed from family roles to individual roles, mainly the 'ideal housewife' roles. Importance was laid on the institution of marriage, and every other serial of this era made the viewers realize that a woman was responsible for holding the family together by means of her virtues. The villains in these serials acted as masterminds who purposely wanted to disrupt the harmony existing within the family with their schemes and plots. The contents of these serials were trendsetters, and soon, the other serial makers followed suit. These serials, in the disguise of providing agency for the women, had, in fact, undone the progress made by the serials in the earlier decade. They romanticized the notion of traditional ideal women, and almost all the serials also have an upper-class angle, as if poverty just vanished from Indian society. The serials in this period deliberately chose not to show poverty in their content. Television serials took a more vigorous, regressive turn in terms of content post-2000s. Recent shows have further downgraded the content, and most of the serials have become god-centric. However, in addition to that, these serials promote superstitious beliefs such as '*iccha-dhari naag*' where the characters turn into snakes and fly to avenge their opponents based on some historical injustice while the protagonists are left to keep their families safe by means of hope and prayer (Anand Meenu, 2007 as cited by Sen, 2019; Sandhu, 2018). Analyzing the socio-political reasons for the shift in the content from progressiveness to regressiveness would be a matter of another paper altogether. This paper is an attempt to understand how TV serials are acting as ISAs in perpetuating the 'dominant' ideology as the ideology of the state/society.

Discussion:

Almost all of the soap operas in the Indian TV channels act as apparatus on behalf of the society/state to reinforce its ideology. Indian soap operas are a form of manifestations of regressive ideology already present in society. It is essential that an educational system should teach its citizens how to identify regressive ideology. However, the education system, being one of the ISAs, is acting as an ally to maintain the regressive ideologies of the society.

Media today, in the name of soap operas, perpetuates these belief systems and normalizes the behaviour. A regressive society always ensures the continuation of inequalities among its population. It favours the process of 'self-ing' and 'other-ing,' which in turn dictates who is to benefit by maintaining the regressive nature of the society. Caste inequality, class inequality, superstitions, racism, consumerism, capitalism, and individualism favour the oppressor and benefit only a few privileged sections who have internalized such structures within the society. The regressive ideology of society helps not only to maintain the status quo but also reinforces the same. In the following section, this paper detailed specifically identified themes. This paper categorize the following themes based on the overall plot analysis and what they primarily exhibit the regressiveness of the society and how the soap operas are perpetuating the regressive ideology of our society to its viewers by first normalizing it and then making its viewers accept it as a natural order.

Racism:

Though it is most often considered a Western concept, it is undeniable that Indians also exhibit racism. As there are no strong social movements against racism or the term is not affiliated with being derogatory, racism passes on as normality. The soap operas almost never show people with dark skin

complexion in the lead characters, and even if they do, the theme revolves explicitly around how being dark is a curse or unwanted in society.

In some serials, the so-called 'average-looking' girl who, if by any chance happens to be the protagonist, is far from average in any sense; *Suhani si ek Ladki* (Hindi, Star Plus) and even for the role of dark-skinned woman, the signed actress is usually fair-skinned.

Kartik Purnima (Hindi, Star Bharat), the protagonist Purnima, who has a dark complexion, can be seen going out of her way to keep everyone happy- In the first episode, she is seen giving her awards she received from school to her step-sister make her family members happy and get their acceptance. It is good to be virtuous, but why should virtue be emphasized in the case of people who have dark complexions? Later in this plot, when Kartik falls in love with Purnima, it is glorified extensively. These are some of the questions that we need to think about while watching these serials.

Kartheeka Deepam (Telugu, Star Maa TV) story revolves around two sisters (the elder sister with dark skin and the younger one with fair skin complexion) and how a dark-skinned sister faces challenges because of her skin tone, irrespective of being good to the family and society. This soap opera is televised in five other regional languages. Though the portrayal of the dark-skinned character is shown in a good way, it is interesting to analyze the content of the serial and what it conveys to the common viewers. None of the Telugu soap operas show a protagonist with dark skin; even if there is a character that demands a portrayal of a dark skin complexion, the character is shown to be subjected to discrimination and denial and not able to succeed in her life. This propagates or manifests the worldview of the common public that being brown is unwanted and undesired, and this can be observed in various matrimonial classifieds where people seek spouses with fair

complexion. Ironically, it is not uncommon to see people with dark skin complexion in India.

As this is not enough, Indians treat people from other regions of the country with heavy racism. South Indians are Madrasis and dark. In an international forum, while refuting that Indians are not racist, one of the former Rajya Sabha (Upper house of the parliament) representative from Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) said that 'we live with black people from south India and are therefore not racist' (Kumar G. P., 2017; Chatterjee, 2017). North Indians are referred to as Hindi or cow belt. The plights of the northeastern population are uncountable in mainland India because of their physical racial features (Das, 2014; Hazarika, 2017; BBC News, 2018).

Superstitious:

The desire to follow and preserve traditions is agreeable until it does not turn into an act of irrationality. However, the superstitions that are passed on as tradition and turn people unreasonable and irrational, paving the way for a generation that does not reason, need to be studied critically. Most of the TV channels come up with programs that are religious in nature, and there are exclusive religious channels which are used to propagate their respective faith. However, it is their constitutional right. However, one should be wary when superstition is shrouded with religious colour. The visual depiction authenticates the unscientific and unreasonable claims made in these soap operas, which will create a set of the younger generation that cannot ask critical questions and create a mind that does not have a scientific temper. The rise of babas and the rule of the sadhus in our country can be attributed directly to this.

In *Nazar* (Hindi, Zee TV), the plot revolves around a vampire- a witch who sucks the vitality of a person to maintain her youth and beauty; she also kills people to keep her identity concealed. However, she can be defeated merely

by cutting her plait. In the first few episodes, Mohanna gives hints or signals of her presence, which are taken as 'bad omen' by Ansh's family. They organize several 'puja' and 'havan' until she confronts the family directly. The disclaimer for these serial states that the story revolves around common myths about a witch and is purely a figment of imagination, but the complicated rituals carried out to counter the 'bad omen' as shown in the serial, can only reinforce the already existing superstitious beliefs in society.

Nandini (Telugu, Gemini) is a serial that portrays the female anthropomorphic shape-shifting serpent Nadini, who has inherited the serpent characters from her mother, who was also a shape-shifting serpent. This soap opera is televised in seven languages, including on the Sri Lankan TV channel. Countries such as India must develop a scientific temper among their people rather than nourishing the belief in already widespread superstitions. The superstitions are regressive and sure to drag the society into the abyss. In its fundamental directives to the state, the Constitution of India in Article 51A (h) states that 'it shall be the duty of every citizen… to develop the scientific temper, humanism, and the spirit of enquiry and reform'. The deep-rooted acceptance of superstitions as traditions leads to the continuation of many bizarre practices such as 'rolling over leftovers of Brahmins to protect themselves or cure the skin disease, infertility or family curse' (Srinivasaraju, 2011; Narayanan, 2014). 'The life of the five-year-old Dalit girl was sacrificed based on the superstitious belief that the sprinkling of her blood at the construction site will give the proposed structure life and enduring strength' (Karthikeyan, 2012). 'On super blue blood moon, a Hyderabad couple allegedly beheaded a baby girl as sacrifice' (Nitin, 2018). 'Indian Judge claims peacocks reproduce from tears and that cow urine prevents ageing' (Bedi, 2017).

It is common to hear politicians, cinema actors, judges, and teachers often making statements promoting superstitious beliefs and supporting them as traditions and customs. This strong belief in superstitions is one of the main

reasons for the rise of spiritual gurus and godmen/women who often make very unscientific claims and portray them as normal in public discourses. Soap operas are not the only mediums that perpetuate superstitious beliefs, but they are certainly one of the most powerful mediums as they are televised on a regular basis and create an opinion among the people that it is natural and normal to believe in regressive superstitions.

Gender inequality:

Almost all soap operas are gyno-centric, targeting the larger female audience, same as movies that are andro-centric, targeting the male audience. In Indian soap operas, women's roles in the family are shown as submissive and obedient. The rebellious female characters that go against the idea of the 'ideal women' are shown as evil, portrayed as antagonists, and hence highly undesirable. None of the soap operas show women fighting against the patriarchal or unequal society; the female characters always had to depend on or associate with the male characters, though they are portrayed as leading characters in soap operas. This particular notion legitimizes that woman cannot be independent and always have to be associated with the male gender, which goes hand in hand with the patriarchal system. Even though she is the protagonist, her roles are either confined to family dramas, solving plot twists, or taking care of the family. If the story starts with a positive theme, highlighting an issue, it loses its significance in the course of time and sticks to family drama and a love story.

The working woman is shown as a 'superhuman' who manages work and home perfectly. This also normalizes the 'double burden of the work' the working women encounter in their daily lives and helps brand this as women's work; hence, it is natural that she does both works. It is unnecessarily glorified if the man is involved in certain house chores. The soap operas and other TV programs keep reinforcing the notion that women are unequal to men; their

role is submissive. The TV soap operas also communicate that a woman's consent is not important, and she can be coerced into 'loving' the man and can be forced into marriage. In *Tujhse hai Raabta* (Hindi, ZEE TV), an 18-year-old woman character, Kalyani, is forced to accept a married man as her husband. The serial also goes on to show that she fell in love with the man she is forced to marry. In another soap opera, Yeh Rishta kya Kehlata Hai (Hindi, Star Plus), started in 2009 continues to date, the plot revolves around emphasizing the importance of the institution of marriage, and it conveys that marriage is the sole purpose of one's existence. The soap opera also delivers a message on how marriages are not supposed to be broken no matter what, normalizing the already existing notion among the people that marriages are cemented for life. This only further stresses the notion that the wife is supposed to be with the husband even if he is abusing her. The portrayal of the women characters normalizes the unequal position of the women. It romanticizes the woman for her sacrifices to save her family, even at the cost of her life.

Almost all of the soap operas do not address domestic violence or crimes against women, even if few of them do. They try to show that the woman accepts and bears the brunt for the wellbeing of the family. NCRB Data (2018) gives us a different picture. A total of 3,29,638 women were victims of total crimes (58.8 is reported as a crime rate, which is calculated as a crime per one lakh of the population). The NCRB data (2018) also tells us that a total of 7,277 women were victims of 'dowry deaths'; 5,266 women were victims of 'abetment to suicide of women'; 1,04,165 women were victims of 'cruelty by husband or his relatives'; 34,923 women were victims of 'kidnapping and abduction of women to compel her for marriage'; 33,977 women were victims of 'rape'; 90,039 women were victims of 'Assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty,' are few among various crimes against women that are reported in NCRB data (2018).

The misogyny and bigotry are so deeply rooted in our Indian mindset that comments derogating and insulting women are taken as normal and expected. RSS chief says that women should be at home and men should be the breadwinners (PTI, 2013). A Telugu Actor and politician said, 'If you see a girl, you either should kiss her or should make her pregnant' (India Today, 2016). Another famous Telugu religious preacher commented that a wife would get her moksha if she washes her husband's gnocchi (underwear) after he takes a bath (Rambarki, 2018). Instead of nurturing the public to question their regressive beliefs and treatment of women, soap operas, movies, and almost all aspects of society are reinvigorating misogyny and making it normal by the day.

Caste:

Irrespective of ongoing caste discrimination and related violence in everyday society, the caste or its principle of working and its discriminatory and exploitative nature is never shown in the contents of the soap operas. It is given that almost all soap operas portray and romanticize the upper caste in their plots (Patel, 2014) as the digital media platform is dominated and controlled by the upper caste, who are privileged and think that the caste does not exist. Following the lead, most of the elite educational institutions such as IITs and IIMs and their stakeholders believe and argue that caste is of the past and now there is no discrimination, and hence, the positive discrimination aimed at providing social justice to the marginalized sections must end. This particular rhetoric is not only untrue (Thorat S., 2005; Thorat & Katherine, 2007; Thorat, Tagade, & Naik, 2016) but a dangerous one as it denies the existing reality and portrays the depressed classes as freeloaders, not hardworking. This particular discourse conveniently forgets and conceals the economic, social, and cultural capital the upper castes have enjoyed from time immemorial. The caste system the practice of untouchability (Thorat & Joshi, 2020; Brinkmann, 2020) and the exploitation of the lower caste are a reality,

and there is a dire need to address this on all fronts. Instead, our media addresses the problem by not talking about it, which is a method of continuing the existing inequalities and keeping the society regressive and unjust.

Romanticizing Upper and Middle Class:

The paradox of the class question in India is an exciting field to understand. Almost all classes of people express themselves as poor when it comes to seeking benefits from the government or other agencies. However, when it comes to showing their wealth to their relatives and neighbours, they indeed show themselves as well to do. In reality, Venkataramakrishnan (2015) argues that only 2% of the Indians can be categorized as a middle class against 15% of the world population. A whopping majority of 95% of them are considered Poor and low Class as per the PEW research survey. However, our soap operas create an illusion that the majority of the Indians are middle class by depicting the characters and content of the daily serials revolving around the middle class. In *Kasauti Zindagi kay* (Hindi, Star Plus), one of the male character's mother objects to his marriage as the girl is from the middle class. This soap opera hints that it is not okay to be middle class, but one has to be upper class. This serial is the remake of the earlier *Kasauti Zindagi Kay*, which was released in 2001 and was running till 2008; other than the class discrimination, the women in richer families are seen wearing heavy gold jewellery and shiny silk sarees even when they are in the home and without any occasion. When Mr Bajaj asks Prerna to go out with him, she asks for some time to get ready for the occasion as though what she was wearing until then was not good enough.

The upper class is shown as hard-working and does not entertain any nonsense in their lives, while the lower and middle class are shown as trapped in debt, lazy, wasteful of their time in gossip, and extremely greedy and cunning. Soap operas not only romanticize the upper class but also criminalize the poor and

middle class for their poverty. In other words, it is 'laying the problems of the poor at the feet of the poor'. This provides a wonderful excuse for the government to escape from their responsibility of alleviating poverty and come up with welfare measures. Soap operas encourage big-fat weddings and lavish celebrations of festivals, the attire of characters always represents the upper class, a posh residence with extraordinary interior design, usage of branded cars, and spending money recklessly are portrayed and communicated as an ideal way of life. This promotes consumerism, which benefits the capitalist system. This creates false pride and consciousness among the people that their lives are supposed to be lived to appease others. There is a dire need to make the people aware of the rising sinister capitalistic economic system, which is widening class inequalities. It is evident that class inequalities are rising in India; Oxfam (2019) reported that 73% of the wealth generated in 2017 went to the wealthiest 1%, while 67 million Indians, who comprise the poorest half of the population, saw only a 1% increase in their wealth. It should be the duty of the responsible media to make the people aware of the economic inequalities rather than romanticizing the upper class and fueling the neo-liberal agenda.

Community to individuality:

Human babies are the only animals that have a longer dependency on their parents in the animal kingdom (Harari, 2014). To cater to this need, humans felt the need to organize themselves as families, communities, and societies. It is very important for human survival to live as a community. Despite the soap operas revolving around family dramas and dealing with family problems, it also encourages viewers to develop individualistic perceptions. The general theme of almost all soap operas is 'a female protagonist with her own group of

'good' people selflessly strives to contribute to the family welfare only to be opposed by the group of 'bad' people who are also her relatives and family members tries to create hurdles for her in her selfless/relentless efforts.

Just as the men or the underdogs see themselves in the male protagonist thrashing the bad guys in the movies (Rajendran, 2017), the female audience relates to the female protagonist's character. They feel that they are sacrificing their lives for the family, and none of the family members respect or love them. They go to the extent of blaming all the other family members for conspiring against them and are not able to digest that they are 'happy,' 'successful', and becoming 'rich.' The irony is that all the other members, too, feel the same. One of the informants shared her observation, '*my mom suffers from a health ailment, and I was angry at her for neglecting to go to the doctor. My mom replied that she was busy and could not find time to go to the doctor, and no one in the family was ready to share her burden. I was so angry at her because we had two maids to help us maintain the house, and only my mom and dad lived in Delhi. I am sure she is getting this notion from the soap operas, which make women feel that their family members are abandoning them. It is a big mental health issue we are dealing with. With the given track record and awareness in our country to deal with mental health issues, TV soap operas are contributing to the furtherance of mental health issues, especially for women in our country.*' It affects viewers across classes and genders. Another informant expressed that '*his father, who was a cop and never used to watch soap operas, takes much interest in watching the soap operas after his superannuation and quite often remarks that he is not respected and loved in the family, which was not how he felt while being in service*'. However, several reasons can be attributed to this change in the perception of his father, and the informant also attributed this to the soap operas.

In line with the capitalistic and market-driven society as a part of the neo-liberal agenda, soap operas act as one of the mediums to promote individuality and competition instead of communality and cooperation. This does not equip the viewers to handle mental health issues and further leads to depression and not being able to handle the problems that are created by the system. Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India Report (2018) states that there are a total of 1,34,516 suicide victims in India. Out of all the suicides, 17.1% of the victims are Housewives (the highest percentage of all the reported suicides), 7.6% of them are students, 9.8 % of them are self-employed, and 9.6% of them are unemployed (PTI, 2019; Kumar C., 2020). In the pre-modern cycle, the presence of a strong family and community is evident against the weak state and market as well as weak individuals. With the advent of the modern cycle, the rise of state and market roles in the individual's life is altering the dimensions and weakening the family and community (Harari, 2014). Soap operas are one of the ISAs, and their role cannot be ignored in contributing to this push of individuals from the community to individuality. This leaves much scope for further research to examine the connection between loneliness, depression, and other mental health issues in relation to their soap opera viewing habit.

Conclusion:

As Althusser (1971) pointed out, ideology, which appeals to both the oppressors and oppressed to maintain the current system, spreads through various apparatus. The communication ISA in the form of mass media portals has emerged as one of the main ISAs that is being used by the society/system/state and market to maintain the ideology that favours only a few privileged sections of the Indian Society. In case of doubt, one should contemplate and ask as the ancient Romans did *cui bono.* (Who benefits?), by normalizing the regressive ideology of the society. The visual depiction that stokes the imagination of the viewers is effectively used to perpetuate,

maintain and normalize the regressive ideology of the society. Being subjected to the normalized cultural, and ideological framework, the viewers of soap operas enjoy, appreciate and welcome the regressive content.

The mechanisms (soap operas), which are an integral part of many of our lives and families, help to maintain the events (regressive ideology). The implications are more severe than we dare to measure. The perpetuation and reinforcing of bigotry, misogyny, romanticizing the wealthy class, not addressing the discomforting social issues, maintaining the gender, class and caste inequalities, and being one of the causes of severe mental health issues, the soap operas deserve to be studied much attentively in the media, cultural and anthropological studies. The dialectics involved in the content of the soap operas and the social-political overturns of that particular decade in Indian society should be an objective of all other work. As one of the fundamental duties of any citizen, our aim should be to steer our society on the path of progressiveness. Every citizen has a vital role in demanding the content to be more sensitive and productive rather than being regressive to become a mere tool in the hands of society's Ideological State Apparatus.

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Electoral Mandate as Development Agenda

Decoding the Verdict of the 2024 National Elections

--**Laxman Rao Sankineni & Harinath Silveru**

Abstract

The mandate of the 2024 general election signifies an inflection point in India's democracy and development trajectory. Each election takes place in a changed demographic and socio-economic context which shapes the voting pattern. From a policy perspective, the electoral mandate serves as a reality check on the performance of the incumbent government and conveys the people's agenda for the new government. An aggregation of the mixed mandate demonstrates that the rational voter, focused mainly on development and governance, has delivered the verdict in a context characterised by visible improvements in the living standards, leading to an expansion of the aspirational segment of the electorate. The verdict set the agenda for the new government by conveying the popular priorities of unemployment, cost of living, inequalities and good governance. The mandate also reflects a vote for decentralisation that better reflects India's federalism in which state governments play critical roles in achieving inclusive development. The electorate have offered an alternative which is more inclusive and representative of India than the previous NDA regimes.

Keywords: Parliamentary elections, electoral mandate, rational voter, people's priorities, decentralisation, governance

The Backdrop

Arguably, no other general elections in India have attracted greater global attention than the 18th parliamentary elections, the largest electoral exercise in history. As the largest democracy and the fifth largest economy in the world, India constitutes a significant part of a half of the global population that elected new governments in 2024. The elections took place in a post-Covid

context characterised by global economic headwinds and the decline of China's economy. Therefore, India has remained as a "bright spot" in the global economy as the fastest-growing large economy on the back of a quick post-Covid rebound. The context is also characterised by a global trend of democratic recession or democratic backsliding. Elections are considered as a test of liberal democracy with the rise of authoritarian tendencies and regimes across the world. It is widely perceived that institutions that underpin democracy are undermined. Elections are critical events that can either trigger democratisation, enable autocratisation or aid stabilization of autocratic regimes (V-Dem, 2024).[i]

During the run-up to the elections, the dominant narrative was that the 2024 election was a "waveless" and "issueless election"—in sharp contrast to the 2014 and the 2019 general elections—because the mainstream perception had it that there was no wave in terms of a grand or overarching national issue or narrative that could capture the popular imagination and influence the voting behaviour in a big way. The BJP succeeded in freezing the baseline narrative with its target of 400-plus seats for the NDA shaping the mainstream discourse that the BJP's win was a foregone conclusion.

The 2024 general elections can be described as an inflection point in India's democracy and development trajectory. Conventional assessments of electoral outcomes tend to reduce the election results to a binary of a victory or defeat for political parties or a triumph or rejection of one dominant ideology over the other. However, from a policy perspective, a more meaningful way of decoding the mandate is to see it as a reality check not only on the performance of the incumbent government but also as a reflection of the people's agenda in terms of their priorities for—and the expectations from—the new government.

The electoral outcome reflects a mixed mandate with each state taking its own trajectory. This resulted in a complex state-level pattern that is characterised by gains and losses for both the BJP and the Congress and their alliance partners. The BJP largely retained its popular support by clocking up 36.56 per

cent vote share, just one percentage point lower than its share in the 2019 general elections. This, however, resulted in a drop of 63 seats for the BJP on account of the "first-past-the-post" electoral system that prevails in India. Because the elections this time witnessed much more competitive and closer contests. Perhaps the most important message emerging from the mandate is the substantial accrual of 10 per cent vote share to the Congress, that is, 29.19 per cent as against 19.49 per cent in the 2019 elections which converted into 99 seats from a tally of 52 seats it won in the 2019 parliamentary elections.

The split verdict indicates that in terms of seat shares the BJP improved its performance in some states[ii] and it suffered losses in others. Likewise, the Congress' showing also reflects a mixed performance with the party gaining in some states while losing in others.[iii] Therefore, there is a need to aggregate the mandates to identify the broader pattern and messages emerging from the electoral outcome. A macro perspective on the mixed verdict indicates that the BJP has essentially retained its class and caste support since the 2019 election. Among the poor the BJP has retained its highest vote share of 37 per cent. Among social groups its support among Dalits dropped marginally by 3 per cent but this was more than compensated by a 5 per cent swing in its favour from the STs. The Congress has not gained any significant incremental support from the poorer voters. Among the historically disadvantaged social groups (Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Castes), the BJP has broadly retained its shares; and by contrast the secular erosion of support among all social groups for the Congress largely continued despite its efforts to regain support from the SCs, STs and OBCs.

The overall satisfaction level with the performance of the BJP-led NDA government has dropped from 64 per cent in 2019 to 57 per cent in 2024. Likewise, the share of the electorate who are of the view that the development that has taken place over the past five years has benefited only the rich has risen to 32 per cent in 2024 from 24 per cent in 2019 indicating a growing popular perception of inequalities. And the question of inequalities was among the most important issues that were considered by the electorate in the 2024

election. The party choice of the voter in the general election is influenced by the performance of the state government as well as the Central government. The Lokniti-CSDS survey found that only 22 per cent of the electorate said that the work done by the Central government matters more in making their choice while for another 22 per cent of the voters, the state government's performance is more important; and for 40 per cent of the voters, the track record of both the governments matters equally. The ascendance of the BJP over the past three general elections, in large measure, can also be attributed to the secular decline of the Congress which anchors the opposition alliance at the national level. This has helped the BJP in steadily consolidating its position.

Over the past three general elections, the BJP has secured electoral gains as a preferred national party. An analysis of the voting trends over the past three terms shows that the popular support for the BJP (in terms of vote shares) has consistently risen between the assembly and the parliamentary elections, indicating the advantage of a split-ticket voting accruing to the BJP. The vote share gains clocked up by the BJP are (compared to the vote shares secured in the assembly polls held prior to the general election): 11 per cent (2014), 11 per cent (2019), and 9 per cent (2024). The corresponding figures for the Congress are: 0 per cent, 4 per cent and 8 per cent respectively; the trend shows that the Congress, as a pan-India alternative to the BJP, is on the road to recovery with a dramatic boost to its support base in the 2024 elections. This is corroborated by the fact that more than a tenth (12.2 per cent) of the 2024 voters reported that they voted for the party (that they voted for) because there was no better alternative, clearly indicating the edge from which the BJP benefited. This short-term shift in party preference is partly explained by the finding that the parliamentary elections are about decisive leadership while the assembly elections are more on the line of better implementation of welfare schemes for the poor (Mohanty and Verma 2023). This broad trend, however, entered an inflection point in the 2024 directional election indicating a major setback for the BJP and a revival of sorts for the Congress.

Locating the 2024 General Election

Electoral process is dynamic and complex as it follows a five-year cycle. Resultantly, each election takes place in a changed demographic and socio-economic context which influences the voting pattern. India was the tenth largest economy in the world when the first Modi government took over in 2014. As the world's fastest-growing large economy, India is expanding at the rate of 6 -7 per cent. Currently the fifth-largest economy, it is likely to rank third by the end of the current election cycle.

Table 1: Performance of the BJP and the Congress in the past three general elections

STATE/UT	BJP						INC					
	2014		2019		2024		2014		2019		2024	
	Seats Won	Vote %	Seats Won	Vote %	Seats Won	Vote %	Seats Won	Vote %	Seats Won	Vote %	Seats Won	Vote %
Andhra Pradesh	3	8.5	0	1.0	3	11.2	0	11.6	0	1.3	0	2.2
Arunachal Pradesh	1	46.6	2	58.9	2	48.9	1	41.7	0	20.9	0	30.4
Assam	7	36.9	9	36.4	9	37.4	3	29.9	3	35.8	3	37.5
Bihar	22	29.9	17	24.1	12	20.5	2	8.6	1	7.9	3	9.2
Chhattisgarh	10	49.7	9	51.1	10	52.7	1	39.1	2	40.7	1	41.0
Goa	2	54.1	1	51.9	1	50.8	0	37.0	1	43.6	1	39.7
Gujarat	26	60.1	26	63.1	25	61.9	0	33.5	0	32.6	1	31.2
Haryana	7	34.8	10	58.2	5	46.1	1	23.0	0	28.5	5	43.7
Himachal Pradesh	4	53.9	4	69.7	4	56.4	0	41.1	0	27.5	0	41.7
Jammu & Kashmir	3	32.6	3	46.7	2	24.4	0	23.1	0	28.6	0	19.4
Jharkhand	12	40.7	11	51.6	8	44.6	0	13.5	1	15.8	2	19.2
Karnataka	17	43.4	25	51.7	17	46.0	9	41.2	1	32.1	9	45.4
Kerala	0	10.5	0	13.0	1	16.7	8	31.5	15	37.5	14	35.1
Madhya Pradesh	27	54.8	28	58.5	29	59.2	2	35.4	1	34.8	0	32.4
Maharashtra	23	27.6	23	27.8	9	26.1	2	18.3	1	16.4	13	16.9
Manipur	0	12.0	1	34.3	0	16.6	2	41.9	0	24.7	2	47.6
Meghalaya	0	9.2	0	8.0	0	0	1	39.0	1	48.7	1	34.0
Mizoram	0	0.0	0	5.8	0	6.8	1	49.3	0	0	0	20.0
Nagaland	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0	0	30.2	0	48.2	1	52.8
Odisha	1	21.9	8	38.9	20	45.3	0	26.4	1	14.0	1	12.5
Punjab	2	8.8	2	9.7	0	18.6	3	33.2	8	40.6	7	26.3
Rajasthan	25	55.6	24	59.1	14	49.2	0	30.7	0	34.6	8	37.9
Sikkim	0	2.4	0	4.74	0	0	0	2.4	0	1.1	0	1.1
Tamil Nadu	1	5.6	0	3.6	0	11.2	0	4.4	8	12.6	9	10.7

Tripura	0	5.8	2	49.6	2	70.7	0	15.4	0	25.6	0	11.5
Uttar Pradesh	71	42.6	62	50.0	33	41.4	2	7.5	1	6.4	6	9.5
Uttarakhand	5	55.9	5	61.7	5	56.8	0	34.4	0	31.7	0	32.8
West Bengal	2	17.0	18	40.6	12	38.7	4	9.7	2	5.7	1	4.7
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	1	48.2	0	45.6	1	50.6	0	44.1	1	46.3	0	38.5
Chandigarh	1	42.5	1	51.1	0	47.7	0	27.0	0	40.7	1	48.2
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	1	49.8	0	41.5	0	0	0	45.9	0	4.4	0	0
Daman & Diu	1	54.7	1	43.7	1	52.8	0	43.9	0	32.2	0	25.0
Lakshadweep	0	0.4	0	0.3	0	0	0	46.7	0	47.0	1	52.2
NCT of Delhi	7	46.6	7	56.9	7	54.3	0	15.2	0	22.6	0	18.9
Puducherry	0	0	0	0	0	35.8	0	27.2	1	57.2	1	52.7
Telangana	1	10.4	4	19.7	8	35.0	2	24.5	3	29.8	8	40.1
TOTAL	282	31.0	303	37.4	240	36.56	44	19.31	52	19.49	99	29.19

Source: The Election Commission of India

Estimates and projections based on the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) for 2022-23 show that rural poverty currently stands at 7.2 per cent (as against 25.7 per cent in 2011-12) and urban poverty is pegged at 4.6 per cent (versus 13.7 per cent in 2011-12) (SBI Research 2024). Based on the findings of the HCES 2022-23, the NITI Aayog says that poverty levels in the country could be closer to 5 per cent or lower indicating that extreme or absolute deprivation has almost been eliminated. Extreme poverty is now eliminated in India, according to The World Poverty Clock update which shows India's extreme poverty at less than 3 per cent. The share of the population living on less than $2.15 a day in 2017 prices, a global measure of poverty, has fallen below 5 per cent from 12 per cent in 2011.

As per the multidimensional poverty index—which takes into account health, education and standard of living—prepared by the NITI Aayog, the proportion of the population who are multidimensionally poor has fallen from 24.85 per cent to 14.96 per cent between 2015-16 and 2019-21. The bottom line of this brief reference to poverty data is that in light of the progress the country has accomplished over the years, it can be stated that the incidence of absolute poverty or deprivation is so low that it has ceased to be a major determinant of voting choice in a general election (see Table 1).

The secular decline in absolute poverty has paved the way for visible improvements in the living standards. The latest available data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-2019-20) shows that the country witnessed significant improvements in housing and household amenities even during the first term of the NDA regime. Results for key indicators covered by the NFHS-2019-20 are as follows: population living in electrified households (97 per cent); population with access to improved drinking-water source (96 per cent); population with access to improved sanitation facility (71 per cent); and households using clean cooking fuel (59 per cent). With respect to housing, the total number of houses grounded in rural areas under the PMAY-G (Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Gramin) stands at 29.46 lakhs and the corresponding figure for urban areas under the PMAY-U (Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Urban) is 114.3 lakhs.

High and sustained growth rates and rising per capita incomes over the years, however, have not resulted in commensurate and decent employment avenues for some 8 million persons joining the labour force each year. In 2022, India's Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) was 55.2 per cent (much lower than the global mean of 59.8 per cent). It has seen a steady decline over the past two decades, from 61.6 per cent in 2000 to 50.2 per cent in 2019. The open unemployment rate (usual status) remained relatively low – a tad higher than 2 per cent - until 2012, which spiked close to 6 per cent in 2019, although the rate declined to 4.1 per cent in 2022.

Employment in India is of poor quality and is predominantly self-employment and casual in nature. Close to 90 per cent of the workforce is informally employed. The earnings are either stagnant or on a downward trend. The real wages of regular workers either remained stagnant or declined. Youth unemployment increased from 5.7 per cent in 2000 to 17.5 per cent in 2019 but declined to 12.1 per cent in 2022. The youth unemployment rate increases with the level of education, with the highest rate among those with a graduation or higher qualification. In other words, the youth account for over 80 per cent of the unemployed in the country.

In the 2024 pre-poll survey, "development" was reported by only 13.3 per cent of the electorate as the most important issue influencing the voting choice; and 10.2 per cent of them reported "poverty" as a disfavoured work of the Modi government. The 2024 post-poll survey question related to the current household economic status reveals that only 12 per cent of the households reported that they were unable to fulfil their needs and face difficulties in doing so. The share of discretionary ("aspirational") spending by rural households accounts for nearly 30 per cent of their total consumption expenditure, as per the HCES of 2022-23. A large section of the expanding middle class has become aspirational. These emerging trends do matter, particularly in the light of the fact that the victorious party secures less than 40 per cent of the popular vote in a parliamentary election.

Extreme poverty has virtually ceased to be a major political and electoral issue in a general election. The election outcome is a reminder that India's sustained growth rates have not translated into improvements in critical indicators such as employment although they have resulted in near elimination of absolute poverty through a welfare-based redistribution of resources. Hence the shifts in popular priorities towards higher order concerns. As evidenced by the survey results presented in Table 2, by the 2024 general election, unemployment has emerged as the single most important electoral issue. Therefore, the 18th parliamentary election verdict was delivered in a context of changed priorities and rising expectations.

Rational Voters and Their Priorities

The 18th parliamentary election witnessed an elevated visibility of the rational or pragmatic voter. Individual or household well-being has emerged as a major determinant of voting behaviour. The pragmatic voter is aware of their interests and how these are addressed by the government. As a result, redistributive policies and welfare interventions have become the most decisive factors with non-economic factors playing a secondary or minor role in voting preferences. In other words, the poll mandate also signifies the return of "normal politics" revolving around livelihood issues and welfare and a

critical assessment of the performance of the incumbent government on this front (Bhalla 2024; Gupta 2022; Yadav 2024). In the electoral landscape, this priority overrides the provision of public goods, as the evidence presented in this article shows. In the 2024 pre-poll survey, almost 75 per cent of the pro-NDA voters cited development and performance related reasons for re-electing the incumbent government.

In this context, it is the well-being of the voters that shapes the outcome of elections. Put differently, individual and community needs are the primary drivers of the choice voters make. The voter sees the election as an opportunity to make a choice that can best address their needs and aspirations. The choices are dependent upon the needs. And the needs evolve – the fulfilment of lower order needs leading to higher level needs. It is not that the rational voter suddenly emerged in the 2024 general elections but the level of making a rational choice has entered a higher trajectory in the elections.

A look at the key issues influencing the voting choice of the electorate over the past three general elections shows that it is the economic and governance issues that have been on top of their mind.

Drawing on the findings of the CSDS-Lokniti NES poll surveys, the ten most important issues that the electorate considered while voting in the past three parliamentary elections are reported in Table 2. The findings highlight the fact that development and governance related issues play a critical role in determining the election outcomes. Stated differently, the issues reported by the electorate reflect their priorities for the new government. In the 2014 election, inflation and cost of living was by far the most important concern for the electorate, followed by corruption and misgovernance. Because the UPA-2 coalition regime was dogged by corruption and scams and the opposition made them an election issue. Development (including infrastructure, housing and amenities) was also figured high on the list of major concerns. And unemployment occupied fourth place indicating that development and governance related issues of the time took precedence over employment.

By the 2019 election, unemployment had risen to second place albeit development still remained a top issue for the voters. Inflation, corruption and governance also figure prominently among the important factors influencing voting behaviour. Poverty and deprivation of basic needs were reported as issues of lowest electoral importance during the 2014 and the 2019 polls. The electorally important issues identified by the voter witnessed dramatic changes with unemployment becoming an overarching issue across the country, followed by the rising cost of living as a result of inflation. Rising inequalities and falling earnings emerged as a top concern with extreme poverty ceasing to be a major concern. Corruption, bad governance and crony capitalism figure among the top factors influencing the party choice for the voter. The issue of communalism and religious polarisation occupied sixth place in the ranking. The pattern clearly mirrors the changing socio-economic status of the electorate and their priorities and a shift towards a higher order needs and expectations.

Table 2: Important issues considered while voting in the past three general elections

	2024		2019		2014	
	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%
Unemployment/jobs	1	31.6%	2	11.3%	4	7.5%
Inflation/cost of living	2	19.7%	3	4.2%	1	19.0%
Falling income/inequalities	3	10.7%	10	1.5%		
Corruption (and how it is dealt with)	4	6.6%	5	4.0%	2	11.6%
Bad governance	5	5.6%	4	4.1%	7	4.6%
Communalism/religious discrimination	6	5.1%				
Favouring big business/particular sections and corruption	7	4.5%				
Development/economic growth	8	2.9%	1	20.0%	3	10.9%
Housing and amenities			6	3.6%	6	6.3%

Infrastructure related	9	2.5%	7	3.5%	5	7.0%
Agriculture and farmers ("rural distress")	10	2.1%	8	3.2%	8	2.1%
Poverty and deprivation			9	3.0%	10	1.9%
Women's safety					9	2.0%

Source: Compiled from the Lokniti-CSDS post-poll surveys 2014, 2019 and 2024. Only top ten issues were selected from each election; hence the total shares do not add up to 100%

Conclusion and Key Messages

An aggregation of the split mandate of the 2024 general election shows that the voter conveyed certain overarching messages, steering clear of an overwhelming atmosphere filled with narratives about the invincibility of the BJP and the inevitability of a third Modi government. The pragmatic and rational voter has set the agenda for the new government by highlighting livelihood and governance issues as their priorities. The most notable message of the mixed verdict is the 10 per cent popular swing in favour of the Congress. This indicates that a substantial section of the electorate reposed faith in the Congress and its allies as a credible alternative to the BJP which can address the priorities and concerns that they conveyed through the mandate.

The mandate reflects the emerging priorities and expectations of the people that need to be addressed through innovative development strategies and institutional reforms. Because as part of its supply-side policies, the BJP government accorded top priority to infrastructure development through massive increases in capital expenditure to build highways, airports, ports and metros. But when it comes to the electoral battleground, it is the voter perceptions and preferences that matter. Only 21 per cent of the electorate "fully agree" with the view that building infrastructure is more important than supporting the poor through welfare interventions. The electoral success of the BJP hinged on five core pillars: (1) Hindutva blended with communal polarisation (2) Strong and charismatic leadership (3) Efficient delivery of welfare transfers (4) Organisational muscle of the party (5) Decline of the

Congress system, hence the lack of a formidable and credible alternative to the BJP. The mandate reflects a dramatic setback for the BJP on all these fronts.

The Hindu nationalism and the politics of majoritarian polarisation seem to have reached their logical dead end and ceased to yield incremental votes to the BJP. The Lokniti-CSDS poll surveys show that the popularity of Mr Modi's leadership is on the wane; the popular choice of Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister has seen a drop of 6 per cent, from 47 per cent in 2019 to 41 per cent in 2024. Welfare transfers did have a positive impact but over time the beneficiaries tend to take them for granted and move on to higher level needs and priorities. The priorities of a significant section of the electorate have shifted to unemployment, inflation, falling incomes and rising inequalities, and good governance. This reflects an expansion of the aspirational segment of the electorate. The organisational machine of the BJP did not succeed in expanding the party's support base despite the massive scale of resources at its command and unqualified compliance from the mainstream media. The steady decline of the Congress is among the major factors contributing to the ascendance of the BJP leading to the popular perception of TINA factor (there is no alternative). The electoral comeback of the Congress in the 2024 elections, however, has stopped the BJP in its tracks.

The overall mandate—with truncated support for the BJP and much greater popular approval of the Congress—reflects a vote for decentralisation. A coalition government with regional parties better represents India's federalism. Governance is now more decentralised since the NDA coalition is propped up by regional parties and the Congress-led opposition alliance is also represented by its regional allies. In this era of neoliberal reforms, coalition governments better reflect India's federalism as the state governments play critical roles in a decentralised federal system in taking forward economic reforms towards achieving higher growth rates and accelerating inclusive development.

The 2024 verdict also hints at the limitations of welfare transfers and their diminishing electoral dividends over time as the country marches ahead with high and sustained growth rates. The aspirational segment of India is growing

with the steady expansion of the middle class. The dramatic defeats of the YSRCP (Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party), the BRS (Bharat Rashtra Samithi) and the BJD (Biju Janata Dal) governments—in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Odisha respectively—with strong leadership and efficient and innovative welfare systems point to this emerging trend. The message emerging from the mandate places the agenda of inclusive development and decentralisation on the policy centre stage. The mandate of the 2024 national elections spotlights the primacy of economic factors in shaping the electoral outcomes. The verdict calls for interventions that go beyond conventional welfarism and address the priorities of productive employment, cost of living, inequalities and exclusion, and good governance.

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[i] According to V-Dem Report 2024, India's status dropped to "electoral autocracy" in 2018 and it remained in this category by the end of 2023. However, many scholars and observers contest the above characterisation of India on the grounds that it is not based on objective parameters.

[ii] The BJP gained in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Andaman & Nicobar, and Telangana; and it lost seats in Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Manipur, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Chandigarh.

[iii] The Congress gained in the states of Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Manipur, Nagaland, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Chandigarh, Lakshadweep and Telangana; and it lost seats in Chandigarh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, West Bengal and Andaman & Nicobar.

Book Review: "The digital is kid stuff: making creative laborers for a precarious economy"

Author(s): D. S. V. R. Anurag

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Nguyen, J. (2021). The Digital Is Kid Stuff: Making Creative Laborers for a Precarious Economy. United States: University of Minnesota Press.

--D. S. V. R. Anurag

The tale of the rapid evolution of digital media in the last two odd decades is no new, and it is no exaggeration to claim that a significant part of our everyday lives now exists in the digital world, if not an entirely online world. Although the extensive proliferation of digital media has had a significant impact on all our lives across the socio-geographical spectrum, an important focus is on the younger generations, typically called the GenZ (and even the Gen Alpha), who are practically born and brought up with a closer influence of the digital. In such a context, the 'adults' arguably tend to become the 'braking force', who constantly watch the 'youth' closely to see if such changes have any impact on the aspects of creativity, behaviour, or the idea of life itself. To loosely understand how Selwyn (2003) puts it, the idea of 'childhood' has become an important aspect of how adults attempt to understand and shape the rapidly changing world. Now it is important to understand that such a perception of the adults about the children might not have anything to do with their actual everyday reality; it is rather a vague understanding through the notions of their idea of childhood that they experienced, which in turn was imposed on by their previous generations. Therefore, the idea of such narrative discourses about children and the aspects of their 'creativity' becomes a necessity, especially in the context of the current digital world. This is exactly what is attempted by Josef Nguyen (Assistant Professor of Critical Media Studies, University of Texas at Dallas) in his book *"The Digital Is Kid Stuff: Making Creative Laborers for a Precarious Economy"* (published by the University of Minnesota Press in December 2021).

"The Digital is Kid Stuff" attempts to examine the portrayal of children and adolescents in the digital media discourse and its implications on shaping and altering the trajectory of human future. The book argues that the idea of a digital generation has not emerged out of thin air but is rather a process of

subsequent construction. The extensive introduction part itself sets the tone by arguing that the attempts to define generations, right from the silents and boomers to GenX and millennials, have looked into different aspects that might contribute to variations in social age, which include shared experiences of major historical events, psychological characteristics, and economic circumstances of that age. Building up from such an early argument, it explores how societal perceptions of youth, creativity, and digital technology intersect with the challenges faced by parents in a neoliberal capitalist society, particularly amid the uncertainties surrounding the future prospects of emerging creative professionals in an unstable economy. It tries to underscore the importance of the creative economy as a 'crucial driver of economic growth' including fields such as media production and publishing, in discussions pertaining to the future of work within an increasingly automated landscape. In an interestingly unique take, the author investigates the reciprocal construction of 'youth as inherently creative' and 'creativity as inherently youthful', considering the children, adolescents, and youth as cultural sites where the meanings of the creative economy are negotiated in terms of politics, economics, and ideology. With an insightful methodology of building upon analyses of not only literature, but also magazines, video games, social media, and speculative fiction of the digital, the book provides a cohesive argument that the discourses around the youth, creative economy, and the digital world are deeply engraved in the neoliberal framework, therefore investigating the notions of privilege and structural inequalities with respect to the digital.

The book follows a decently presented organisational structure developed through expressively portrayed examples in four different chapters other than the extensive introduction – wherein each chapter resonates with the structural development of the digital creative worker through the phases of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood dealing with a specific problematic in each of these chapters. The introduction chapter provides a crucial background setting for the progression of the chapters and lays down the primary interests of the book, which could be summarised as to how youth, creativity, and digital

media are imagined closely in the larger neoliberal creative economy discourses. He also notes that in the process of such a study, as already mentioned earlier, one must be careful of the fact that the adult's perception of the childhood in the digital world do not essentially intersect with the absolute reality. In such a context Nguyen also quotes Boyd (2014), when he says "For adults to hear the voices of youth, they must let go of their nostalgia and suspend their fears. This is not easy". Then as he proceeds onto the main chapters, he meticulously exemplifies how there has always been a construction of multiple imageries of the 'creative youth', particularly in the digital paradigm. While each of the chapter presented could also be seen distinctively as a standalone piece, the logical progression of the book that captures the creative digital essence of all stages of human life. It is important to understand that this book, set in the context of the United States of America, does not deal with youth or the digital itself, but rather with the discourses and imageries about youth in the digital world. To be even extra critical about the outlook of the book, it could also be narrowly argued that the primary object of interest is not the child itself, but rather the adult who perceives the child in a certain social context.

The first chapter of the book, which is titled "Minecraft and the Building Blocks of Creative Individuality", engages with the discourses around education and growth of children in the digital age and how they prepare themselves for future jobs within the creative economy. It starts off with a brief history of the building toys industry in the USA and notes on the aspects of creative individuality in their design and marketing, with further linking it to the computer game of 'Minecraft' which is built on the same principle. Connecting the game with the island narratives of resistance in the western literary tradition (read Kennedy et al. (2023) for an overview), Nguyen presents how the basic structure of Minecraft and the community discourses surrounding the player-based modifications (popularly called mods) done to the game's code privileges the individual player rather than the communal values of the players. It is of the argument that the idea of individualism often overlooks the social environment that shapes individuals and hides the

disparities in privilege and structural inequality, which makes it harder to recognize the abilities and achievements of those on the margins of the society. The core idea therefore is that contrary to the neoliberal ideas of individuality and meritocracy, creative work, especially in the digital setting is inseparable from the social conditions of the individual's creativity and productivity agency.

Building upon this very base argument the book proceeds on to its second chapter – "Make Magazine and the Responsible Risks of DIY Innovation", which revolves around examining an American magazine 'Make' which addresses parents who encourage their children to be 'makers', and also advocates youth to undertake risky 'do-it-yourself' projects to enhance their innovation potential. While this chapter has nothing to do with the idea of 'digital' itself but deals with the idea of the digital children as the ideal new age future individual, which makes it an interesting classification of temporal studies of digital sociology and anthropology. Nguyen focuses on the neoliberal ideals of personal accountability and self-reliance as embodied in the concept of the 'maker', where the ideal future individual is the one who is self-sufficient and entrepreneurial. While there are various sub-themes he discusses in this chapter, the primary idea is that the magazine's focus on DIY projects and experiments reinforces discourses of privatization and deregulation, particularly in children's education and broader technological innovation. However, then he critiques that this narrative ignores the reality that not all children have the same safe and risk-free upbringing, as poorer and non-white children may face environmental injustice, increased policing, and violence - essentially, the idea of the 'maker' relies on underlying structural privileges that are not equally accessible to all children, leading to an imagined future that fails to address systemic social issues despite technological advancements.

In the third chapter, which is titled "Instagram and the Creative Filtering of Authentic Selves", the focus shifts from childhood to adolescence as Nguyen examines Instagram and the phenomenon of the 'selfie'. He contends that the

interplay between self-promotion and authenticity in this digital era reflects a broader culture of individualism and neoliberal self-branding in the United States, where the act of taking, editing, and strategically presenting selfies online mirrors the identity work expected of adolescents as they transition into adulthood. One of the most interesting arguments of this chapter is that in the current state of global economic instability, the pervasive culture of self-branding perpetuates a sense of perpetual adolescence, as individuals are constantly urged to revise their identities and self-presentations without achieving stable adulthood or success. Therefore, while he maintains the traditional idea of linear progression from youth to adulthood, he acknowledges that factors such as wealth, privilege, and structural marginalization influence individuals' ability to engage in these identity revisions.

The most interesting chapter of all is the final chapter titled "Design Fiction and the Imagination of Technological Futures", which concerns with the concept of 'design fiction' as a genre of a 'speculative narrative' centred on design as a means of envisioning imaginative futures. The chapter does poses certain challenges as the definitions of design fiction and the broader term 'design' are not thoroughly clarified. However, the overall analysis of the author in this chapter suggests that framing youth as naturally imaginative while channelling that imagination into the creative economy represents an inferred logic, wherein youth serve as both producers as well as consumers. It means that educating youth often involves teaching them to envision themselves as creative workers who generate new commodities for their own consumption, which reflects, according to him, a process that perpetuates capitalist power dynamics. Therefore, rather than focusing solely on creating new products or commodities, Nguyen proposes that practitioners of speculative narrative should direct their imagination toward envisioning more equitable future societies, thereby addressing issues of social justice. The chapter provides a good conclusion that summarises the earlier discussions on the discursive construction of youth, neoliberal influences on parenting and education, and the instability of the creative economy.

While the book primarily examines media in the United States, it critically analyses neoliberal discourses of individualism, entrepreneurship, and self-reliance that have global implications therefore appealing to the global context. One of the best aspects of this book is the author's work on creativity discourse evolves throughout the book, with individual chapters providing sufficient context to be read independently. While Chapters 2 and 3, in particular, offer accessible examples from media and to understand complex social, historical, and economic connections, making it more suitable for a general audience, Chapter 4, as mentioned earlier, could provide more context specific to the concepts that were laid down, which for a general academic audience opens up a pandora's box of conceptual imagination, while totally missing the points laid out for the purpose of the book. Although the author could have further challenged the ageist assumption that associates creativity with youth, the book consistently interrogates privilege, demonstrating a commitment to intersectional analyses, particularly regarding age and class intersections. The book not only contributes to the literature of critical media studies, but also expanding discussions on the neoliberalisation of digital labour into the fields of narrative anthropology, education studies, innovation studies, apart from digital studies in general. The book is thought provoking and offers the scope to revisit multiple everyday issues through a different lens.

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Book Review: India Moving: A History of Migration

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India Moving: A History of Migration, by Chinmay Tumbe, New Delhi, Penguin, 2018, 304 pp., 2018, ₹ 599 (Hardcopy). ISBN-13: 978-0-670-08983 3.

--Vandana Rai

Migration is a complex, heterogeneous, and multidirectional process. Scholars in contemporary are increasingly studying institutions not as fixed but as embedded in a broader flow of people, ideas, and things. This approach allows a deeper understanding of society, the nation-state, and its people. In an attempt to map such networks and histories of human mobilities, Chinmay Tumbe's India Moving describes and analyses the long-term historical account of migration from, to, and within India from prehistoric to the present times. The books arrive timely when the controversy over migration across the world is on the rise, there is an increasing atmosphere of hostility to migrants, and the infrastructural facilities continue to fail the migrants, as seen from the migrant's exodus during COVID lockdowns. It helps us investigate and interrogate the role of migration in modern India's history and the similarities and differences between the previous and current migration process. Moreover, the book complicates our understanding of people, mobility, and society by presenting the complex picture of migration, which is often affected by oversimplification and generalizations.

The book presents migration not merely as an unfortunate tragedy, but it is also as 'joyful explorations', economic opportunities, cultural assimilation and fusion, gender disparity, painful displacement, racial discrimination, and much more, which has its roots in the past. Tumbe centralizes the migration as a critical 'event' of the modern period, which, he claims, has crucially shaped modern Indian history yet omitted from those events list. Through his rigorous work, and deft blending of a large number of secondary works, archival documents, databases across centuries, interviews, and popular literature and art forms, he presents a picture quite contrary to the long-held notion that Indians were static, rooted in their stagnant villages due to caste taboos on traveling.

Drawing on a wide range of scholarship across the disciplines, Tumbe divides the book into six chapters that have overlapping themes and accounts. Chapter one, 'Indian Diversity and Global Migration,' demonstrates the process and nature of migration over three historical periods: ancient, medieval, and modern India. These historical trajectories of migration explain the diversity of Indian culture through in and out migration and assimilation and fusion of the culture. Migration narratives of the ancient and medieval period establish that India has never been a stagnant land of 'isolated units of self-sufficient villages'.

However, the current migration, termed 'the great Indian migration wave,' presented in the second chapter is more prominent in size, scale, and magnitude than in previous times. Using a catchy phrase, 'horse to horsepower', the author divides the agents of the modern migration phase into two types, one dominated by horses as agents. In contrast, horsepower in the second phase radically transforms the speed of spatial mobility. This wave, he characterized as a 'mass migration that is male-dominated, semi-permanent and remittance yielding' (pp. 40), began in the mid-19th century and ended in the 1930s and once again since economic liberalization was introduced in 1991. One of the essential aspects of this wave is that it linked India with the global economy. He acknowledged that the railway and post office were crucial facilitators of the great migration wave in the initial phase of it. However, the spread of this wave remained uneven not just geographically but also socially, and so did the distributions of the gains generated through it. The wave also documents how migration was a tool for escaping repressive social conditions and, for other situations, how it acted as cementing and amplifying existing inequalities.

Chapter three explores the mobility of capital and business enterprises, focusing on the migration trajectories of successful and dominating merchant communities such as Parsis, Chettiars, Punjabis, Sindhis, Marwaris, and Gujaratis, he argues that their migration trajectories started much earlier, and their destination at times differed from those seen in the great Indian migration

wave. He hinted that their social values and tight grouping helped them dispelling conservative trade and overseas travel notions. It helped them to go beyond their boundaries and emerge as merchant groups over the centuries. However, he does not provide detailed picture of why they ventured into these distant lands and how they could sustain and prosper.

Chapter four describes the creation of the Indian diaspora in different parts of the globe, especially outside the Asian continental in the nineteenth century. Drawing the evolutionary sketch of India's internal and international diaspora, he argues that the Indian diaspora is present in a diverse world in terms of professions, languages, and cultures. However, he does not present the varied narratives around the diaspora, where some Indians are successfully assimilated while some remain marginalized.

Chapter five documents the tragic events of the partition and various crisis, such as the 1947 partition of British India, the partition from Burma in 1937, the Tibetan refugee crisis, Kashmir Pandits displacement, Bangladesh formation, and the Sri Lankan Tamil fight for a separate nation, which led to the displacement of many ethnic groups within and across the nation-boarders. It marked the involuntary and forced mass migration, whose bearers were mostly lower caste/class and minority groups. He lauds India's refugee management and assimilation. However, this claim contradicts the allegations made by scholars, associations and activists who have pointed out human rights violations and pitiable living conditions of refugee camps in India.

The last chapter brings out perspectives and paradoxes of Indian migration, bringing together thoughts of B R Ambedkar, M. K. Gandhi, and Bal Thackeray on migration and their answer to the common question, 'Whose living standards are being raised by migration?' Discussing their thoughts, the author argues, the major ideological battle will in the 21st century likely be between cosmopolitism and nativism. Tumbe also brought out the issues of caste, female trafficking, and discrimination in getting citizenship, a few examples to further explain the persisting conflict between cosmopolitanism and nativism.

The book stands out for its rich data, methods, and writing style, making it useful for academic purposes and non-academic readers to learn about the history of migration. Captivating anecdotes, and dazzling and humour-laden storytelling keep the readers engrossed in the book. However, in some places, books dwindle when handling tons of information, giving way to disorganization and lack of clarity. The spread over vast periods makes it a gross generalization, which sometimes remains unexplained, simplifying the complexities of the migration. In the progressive chapter, it also feels that the author might have glorified the picture of migration than what his putting together of data and material suggests. Barring its limitations the detailed bibliography of works and the frameworks put together by the author to understand the history of migration, thereby history of India, makes it a significant read for the scholars and the general public in the times to come.

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