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Editor's report April 2025

I am pleased to present the 19th issue of *Explorations*, which includes seven articles, one commentary, one conversation, and three book reviews. This issue covers a wide range of sociological topics, reflecting diverse perspectives from across India.

The issue brings together a rich and diverse collection of scholarly works that offer critical, grounded, and interdisciplinary insights into contemporary Indian society reflecting a broad spectrum of academic engagement across education, electoral politics, tribal studies, social justice, and public policy. The contributions collectively address issues of curriculum reform, caste-based inequalities, identity politics, indigenous traditions, and socio-political transformations under recent national policies. Drawing from ethnographic research, policy analysis, and theoretical critique, these articles enhance ongoing academic dialogues and offer fresh empirical and conceptual contributions to their respective fields.

Mihira Gaddam "*The Promise and Praxis of the National Education Policy 2020" A theoretically grounded critique of NEP 2020's vision of curriculum reform, multidisciplinarity, and the Indian Knowledge Systems"*. The paper highlights the conceptual ambiguities and ideological motives embedded in the policy, offering a nuanced commentary on academic autonomy and reform agendas. Sili Rout's article *"Marriage Practices among the Bonda Tribe in Odisha: An Anthropological Perspective*" is an ethnographic study of Bonda marital customs, with emphasis on exogamy, dormitory traditions, and bride price. The article excels in its fieldwork depth and clarity in representing indigenous knowledge.

Comparative insights with other PVTGs could further enhance its scope. Erram Naveen Kumar's article *"Territorial Identities and Voting Preferences in India"* discusses an innovative exploration of territorial identity in shaping voter preferences during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The article challenges dominant models of electoral behavior, offering a fresh lens for political science research in India. Bibhuti Bhushan Malik, Vijay Laxmi Mall & Nirakar Mallick "*The Global Pandemics: A Sociological Approach*" A dense and conceptually rich reflection on the sociological implications of COVID-19. The paper critiques the failure of technocratic modernity and explores everyday disruptions in normative life. Akanksha Sanil "*The Question of Representation: Revisiting India's Policy of Reservations in Employment*" A data-backed and theoretically sharp assessment of reservation policies through lenses of "politics of presence" and "human idea of representation." This article makes an essential contribution to debates on equity, representation, and social policy reform. Chandraiah Gopani "*The Invisible Citizens: Dalit Nomadic Caste Identity and Struggle for Justice*" highlights diverse facets of marginalization of Dalit nomadic castes in Telangana. This work fills a significant gap in Dalit studies, highlighting the internal heterogeneity within SC communities and their struggle for visibility and justice. Sunkari Satyam "*Swachh Bharat and Social Equality: A Policy Perspective*" An incisive critique of the Swachh Bharat Mission's intersection with caste-based occupational hierarchies. The paper questions the assumptions of universal participation and challenges whether the initiative genuinely promotes social equality.

The issue includes one reflective conversations of Tiplut Nongbri with Hoineilhing Sitlhou that bridge academic and policy domains, enabling a dialogic understanding of complexity in shaping the policies and practices of sociology. Three book reviews by Srinivasulu Karli, Akankhya Panigrahi and Himabindu. M engages with recent publications in the fields of education, gender, health and social stratification, further enriches the quality of the volume.

Conclusion

The April 2025 issue presents an impactful collection of scholarship that speaks to the diverse and evolving realities of Indian society. It is hoped that this volume will inspire further inquiry and debate across disciplines, particularly in education, public policy, identity politics, and marginality.

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: Tiplut Nongbri with Hoineilhing Sitlhou

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Tiplut Nongbri in conversation with Hoineilhing Sitlhou

[Transcript of the interview held on April 2025]

Introducing Prof. Tiplut Nongbri

Prof. Nongbri was awarded the prestigious Life-time Achievement Award by the Indian Sociological Society in 2024. The recognition speaks volumes of the momentous contributions made by her to the discipline of Sociology, and particularly to the Sociological understanding of Northeast of India and the regions within it. She has been engaged in teaching and research over a span of 30 years and had taught Sociology in Jawaharlal Nehru University (New Delhi) till 2017 and a short period in between at the Department of Sociology, North-Eastern Hill University. She held the Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew Chair (2017-2021) of the Centre for North-East Studies & Policy Research, Jamia Millia Islamia. She was also one of the founding members and the first director (2007-2012) of North-East India Studies Programme in JNU. She has also written extensively on the subject of kinship, family, gender, development, ethnicity, identity, migration, matriliny etc. of Northeast India.

It is indeed a great honour for me to be given this opportunity to interview Prof. Tiplut Nongbri—for which I thank Prof. G. Nagaraju, the Editor of Explorations.

1. H.S (Hoineilhing Sitlhou): *Madam, we thank you for agreeing to this conversation that will delve around the service you gave to the discipline of Sociology as a teacher, researcher and administrator. Let me begin by asking you about your rendezvous with the discipline. Why did you choose Sociology?*

T.N (Tiplut Nongbri): Thank you Hoineilhing .It's a pleasure to talk to you.

T.N: My entry into Sociology was driven by sheer providence than a planned move. I had just returned home from giving my B.A. final examination at St.

Mary's college one summer afternoon in 1972 when I saw the day's newspaper *The Assam Tribune* lying on the table in our verandah. I picked up the paper and flipped through the pages when my attention was caught by a notification put up by the Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, and University of Delhi inviting applications from students in Northeast India to its MA programme in Sociology. The opportunity to study a new discipline, one I have only distantly heard of, and that too at India's premier university was too good to ignore, so I applied for it. Three weeks later, I received a letter from the department asking me to submit the mark sheets and certificate of my BA degree. At that time, St Mary's college was under Gauhati University and the BA results would usually come by late August or September. As the session at D' School starts in mid-July I ruefully thought I had lost my chance of doing Sociology. But as fate would have it, when I wrote to the department and apprised them of the situation, I was granted provisional admission to the programme on the basis of my BA Part 1 mark sheet and certificate. However, the encounter with the metropolis where D' School (a name fondly used by its alumni for the conglomerate of departments within it) is located was not as uneventful as I anticipated. Delhi and the University was a cultural shock in many ways. The vastness of the city, the sea of people, and the bustling academic circles of the Delhi School of Economics were both exciting and unnerving. As I began my study, I soon realized while the course was expansive, most of the categories and concepts used in the books and lectures were not only alien to my world but also missed the nuances of societies and cultures at the margins. Feeling lost and out of place, I expressed my dilemma to my teacher-cum-tutor, Mrs. Veena Dua telling her of my intention to leave Sociology and return to Gauhati university to pursue the master programme in Education. After she heard me out, she asked, how could I take a decision to leave the course without giving myself a chance to study it. Her question made a lot of sense, so I decided to stay back and carry on with Sociology. I'm eternally grateful to Mrs Dua for her wise comment and the underlying lesson that one needs to work for it to gain mastery in anything.

2. H.S

Do tell us about your academic journey as a teacher and research mentor to students? What have you learned from the profession and the students you have interacted with over the years?

T.N:

My career as a teacher started as a Research Associate in my alma mater, the Department of Sociology, University of Delhi in the summer of 1984. Although the primary responsibility of a Research Associate is to engage in research for which you were awarded the fellowship, Prof J.P.S. Uberoi my former teacher who headed the department at the time of my joining thought otherwise. Research Associates, he pointed out, must be involved in teaching and other activities of the department as regular faculty members. Translating this idea into practice, I was assigned a tutorial class and a course to teach to the first year MA students. My first teaching assignment was *Industry & Society*, a course usually taught by Professor E.A.M. Ramaswami who recently went on premature retirement, and *Symbolism and Society* for the tutorial. The two years I spent as an RA in the department ended on an unremarkable note. What stood out in my memory was the intelligence of the students and the encouragement and support I received from my teachers, particularly Professors Andre Beteille and A.M. Shah, who liberally gave their time and attention whenever sought. It was also a time I discovered that Patricia Uberoi was more than my teacher's beautiful Australian wife, but a serious scholar and mentor in her own right, gifted with a friendly and affectionate disposition, a quality I was to see more closely as colleagues at JNU.

In 1986, I was selected as an Assistant Professor at the Centre for the Study of Social Systems (CSSS), School of Social Sciences, JNU. I entered JNU with trepidation in my heart as it was not only a place, I was unfamiliar with, but also because of what transpired at the interview for the position. The interview largely centred on my Ph.D thesis that focuses on religion and social change

among the Khasi. One particular question from Prof Yogendra Singh, an erudite scholar whose reputation and works I was familiar with but had never met, put me on the back foot. The question was, 'how do you view the role of Christian missionaries in tribal politics?' I was aware that many Indian scholars view western missionaries as imperial agents to 'divide and rule' using conversion and schools as tools to brainwash the colonised subjects, particularly backward communities located at the geographical and social periphery of the Indian society. Instead of giving a politically correct answer, my subjective-self got the better of me. I proceeded to express my disagreement with the mainstream view and highlighted the contribution of missionary education to the development of tribes, adding "Sir, if it weren't for the education provided by the Christian missionaries, I wouldn't be sitting here today for this interview."

After blurting out these blunt words I was filled with remorse fearing that I had burnt my boats and shut my entry to JNU. As I sat on the DTC bus on my way back home, tears silently rolled down my cheeks. After two anxious days of waiting for the verdict, Tribhuvan Kapoor my fellow RA and roommate at D' School informed that he had learnt from a reliable source that I was selected for the post.

The initial fear I had of JNU soon evaporated after I entered the portal of CSSS. Far from the regimented ambience of D' School with its structured syllabus and set reading list, CSSS was a different world altogether. Known for its liberal ethos and socialist bend of mind, teachers at JNU enjoy considerable amount of autonomy in designing the course they teach and how its delivered, with emphasis on dialogue and participation by students. This fervour finds vivid reflection in *Techniques of Social Research,* a course I opted to teach shortly after joining. Teaching *Techniques*, a compulsory paper, to the fourth semester students was an initiation of sorts into the JNU system. Designed as an introductory paper to research, the course comprised a research project where students are expected to apply the theories, concepts, tools and techniques learnt in the classroom to the field situation. Working with the

motley group of students in their research assignments was a priceless experience. JNU's admission policy that placed special emphasis on diversity in regional and socio-economic terms, meant that the classroom represented a mini-India. This was buttressed by the popularity of the course which attracted many students from centres like Economics and History where, for a long time, such a course was absent. The friendliness of the students, cutting across caste, class, gender, ethnicity and disciplinary boundary, and the rapport established during the initial years went a long way to consolidate my position at the centre.

CSSS, with its spirit of collegiality and close student-teacher relations, provided a conducive space to take up courses that align with my interest. Apart from *Techniques* which I taught for several years both at the M.A. and M.Phil levels, I found teaching Sociology *of Family Life and Kinship* and *Tribal Sociology* highly rewarding both in academic and social terms. *Family Life and Kinship* not only helped me to see more sharply the complexity and diversity of Indian culture and practices, it also acted as an impetus to my research on matriliny and gender, an issue that is shrouded in ambiguity but received little attention from sociologists.

My engagement with *Tribal Sociology* however was driven more by circumstance than interest per se. Although I have been perturbed by the way in which tribes are represented in colonial writings as the 'primitive' other, located at the bottom of the evolutionary ladder, what led me to offer the course was the presence of a large number of students working on tribal issues for their Ph.D thesis and M.Phil dissertations, but no course on the subject was available from which they could draw on for their research. While *Tribal Sociology* appears in the list of courses prescribed for the MA students, it failed to make its way to the classroom. My colleague, Maitrayee Chaudhuri in her paper on the practice of Sociology at CSSS (2011, 172)[1], attributes this

[1]Maitrayee Caaudhuri, 'The prac2ce of Sociology in CSSS/JNU' in Sujata Patel (ed) *Doing Sociology in India: Genealogies, Loca4ons and Prac4ces,* Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2011, pp.158-1-187.

failure to the artificial distinction between Sociology and Social Anthropology, which views the former as the study of one's own society *aka* modern society and the latter as the study of the 'primitive' other. Seen as the domain of social anthropology, there is little place for a course on tribes in sociology. What added to my concern was that almost all the substantive or India-based courses on offer at the centre revolved around caste society with little attention to other groups. Central to this state of affairs is the strong influence of the Dumontian approach that sees Indian society as coterminous with caste. Uncritical acceptance of the approach by sociologists, has served to push tribes and other non-Hindu groups to the back burner.

While my humble attempt to bring tribe within the ambit of Sociology may fail to achieve the desired effect, the course provided a platform for exposure of the subject to a larger audience other than those directly working on it. It also provided an opportunity to systematically debate, critique, and refine outmoded theories, concepts and perspectives on tribes and indigenous peoples, advanced by colonial scholars and their followers in the former colony.

Teaching tribal sociology was to take me to *Ecology and Society,* a course floated as an optional paper to the MA students. The course was prompted, partly by the difficulty I experienced in applying the widely-received Durkhemian dictum that '*the social can be explained only by the social'* in my study on tribes and their belief system, and partly by the unrelentless destruction of the environment brought about by the process of development and the consumerist and materialistic ethic that has wreaked havoc on the natural world globally. There was no course in the syllabus of CSSS that addresses these issues. So, taking help from Professor P.S. Ramakrishnan of the School of Environmental Sciences, JNU, I designed *Ecology and Society* which was passed by the faculty committee of CSSS, Dean's Committee on Advanced Study and Research, and Board of Studies of the School of Social Sciences.

The rationale for the course came from the awareness that we live in an era where human life and its institutions are seriously threatened by natural forces, such as, climate change, bio-diversity loss, droughts, floods and forest fires, that seem to lie beyond our control. These processes seriously question the adequacy of our sociological paradigm and the anthropocentrism of our discipline that tend to view human beings and human society as the centre of the world detached from nature. This cannot be farther from the truth. Man/human being, the most dominant organism on earth is intimately linked to nature: the air he breathes, the water he drinks, the food he eats, the product he uses and throws away all come from nature. Any change in nature affects human life in significant ways. In turn, how humans live, the products they make, consume, and dispose of affect nature. This not only calls for a change in our approach towards the natural world and a re-working of our theoretical tools and paradigm to take stock of the effect of the natural on the social world but also a change in our perspective to primal cultures and worldview as embodiment of a sustainable way of life and ecological prudence.

For an optional course, *Ecology and Society* attracted a fairly good number of students not only from CSSS but from allied centres as well, notably the Centre for Historical Studies where the critique of colonialism and its social and political impact had set the ground for the re-evaluation of the western idea of development and policies like scientific forestry and land use system. However, the continuing thrust on the Social and the process of transformation and change it engendered, environmental issues remain tangential to the intellectual universe of CSSS. So much so, that in a paper mapping the institutional history and addition of new courses to the syllabus, while courses centering on religion, culture, symbolic communication, social thought, globalization and change received prominent attention, ecology and society fails to find a mention.

A year spent at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex as a Commonwealth Fellow laid the groundwork for the integration of gender in

my research. At that time gender as a subject of inquiry and/or perspective had yet to receive the attention it deserved in Indian universities. Although my colleagues, Patricia Uberoi and Maitrayee Chaudhuri were already on it, both subsequently taught the course at CSSS, gender as a subject was relatively new to me. Interaction with Naila Kabeer and her powerful book *Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought*[2] and reading works by Henrietta Moore, Shirley Ardener, Hillary Standing, Leela Dube, among others, made me see the importance of gender as an important analytical category for the understanding of human society and human relations. Closer interaction with Patricia and her monumental works on gender and kinship further cemented my interest. Our fieldwork together in China's Yunnan Province was particularly a rewarding experience. It gave me a chance to learn firsthand from the master about the value of conceptual and methodological rigour. Years later, when I joined the Department of Sociology at the North-eastern Hill University, one of the courses I taught was Gender and Society.

3. H.S

As one of the pioneering academicians from the region (NEI) to have taught in a central university like Jawaharlal Nehru University, was it challenging to teach students of different backgrounds (regional, religious, ethnicity, caste etc.) in an era when the Northeast of India was almost an unknown entity?

T.N:

Far from being a challenge, teaching students from different background is in fact a valuable opportunity that contributes to intellectual development and growth. Interacting with students from different cultures and background not only widens your horizon but also deepens your understanding of the problem.

[2] Naila Kabeer, *Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought*, London, Verso, 1994.

I have benefitted immensely from interaction with my students both in the classroom and outside.

In so far as my identity as a person from Northeast is concerned, this has never come in the way of my interpersonal or professional relations. JNU is a cosmopolitan university with students and teachers coming from different parts of the country with mutual respect for each other's identity and life ways.

If there was a challenge it was really in the academic realm. While Northeast as a geo-political entity is a known fact to many, there were lots of misconceptions about the region and its people not only among the ordinary folks but among the educated as well. The world outside not only had limited knowledge about India's North-East, a region that boasted of eight states, each with its unique culture, language, and traditions, but also many stereotypes have been floated that called for serious interrogation. Countering this misconception and presenting Northeast in the correct light as it should has been my endeavour both in my teaching and research.

4. H.S

Your students remember you as an empathetic, encouraging, conscientious and meticulous teacher. We were all elated when you received the ISS Life-time achievement award in 2024. How does it feel to win the award?

T.N:

I would be dishonest if I say that I do not feel honoured by the award. It is a prestigious award. I am grateful to the *Indian Sociological Society* and its selection committee for conferring this award on me. It humbles me because there are many scholars more deserving than me who should be given this award. What makes me happy is that I see the award not only as a token of love and respect shown by my students and colleagues, but also a recognition of the cause to which I am committed, which is to take Northeast India to the centre stage of social research. As many would be aware, North-East India has long been a neglected area in Sociology. The award reflects the changing

attitude of sociologists to the region and its varied culture and institutions. The credit for this goes to the large number of young scholars who in recent times have ventured to carry out research on various aspects of Northeast. I owe much of my own research on the region to these scholars whose enthusiasm and novel ideas acted as a stimulus to me. My special thanks to each one of them.

5. H.S

Of the articles, research papers and books that you have written, which one was the most memorable and why?

T.N:

It is difficult to single out any particular work as such, as I put in a lot of effort in whatever I write. From the methodological perspective, readers may find 'Researching the Khasi: Encounter with the Self', a paper I wrote for Professor N. Jayaram's book *Knowing the Social World: Perspectives and Possibilities*[3] useful to read. Biographical in nature, the paper provides an inside view of my journey as a researcher from my student days to the later years and the challenges I experienced working on my own society. Caught in the intricate interplay between ethnicity, gender and identity politics, this has not only added to the challenges I faced in the field, but also starkly brings out the vulnerability of women who failed to conform to the societal norm/s.

I also found working on the book *Development, Masculinity and Christianity: Essays and Verses from India's Northeast*[4] a fulfilling experience. Standing at the intersection of social science research and poetic musings on the flux and flurry of life, the book comprised essays I delivered as lectures at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla and 'stories in verse' (poems) that

[3] 'Researching the Khasi: Encounter with the Self' in N Jayaram (ed) *Knowing the Social World: Perspectives & Possibilities*, Orient BlackSwan, Delhi, 2017, pp. 323-344.

[4] *Development, Masculinity and Christianity: Essays and verses from India's Northeast* Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 2014, pp. 65-109

capture the multifarious problems Northeast India and its people encounter as they come into contact with the forces of modernisation and change. What is distinct about this book is the novelty of the approach. By putting different themes and genres of writing within the cover of a single book, it allowed me not only to focus on different sets of issues but also to simultaneously bring to the fore the angst and trauma, dreams and aspirations of a people long seen as the peripheral and cultural 'other'.

6. H.S

Your research clarifies the misnomer around the understanding of the Khasi Matrilineal Structure, that it is 'matrilineal' and not 'matriarchal'. Tell us about your experiences and challenges (professional and personal) in researching from an insider's perspective.

T.N:

I am grateful to my profession for giving me the opportunity not only to teach and interact with generations of students but also for the chance to work and write on my society, the Khasi of Meghalaya one of the few communities where the matrilineal system, which privileges the female (mother) in matters of descent, inheritance and residence continues to be alive and active. One of my earliest works on the subject was to correct the long-standing definition /description of the system as 'matriarchal' which conveys the idea that power devolves on the woman/mother. Such a definition is contrary to facts on the ground and arises from the conflation of 'descent', a principle that relates to social identity and group placement with 'authority', which deals with the exercise of power and control in decision making. Among the Khasi, while descent is traced through the mother, that is, the children belong to the mother's group, authority over the family lies with the male, *U Kni* the maternal uncle or mother's brother. This makes it clear that characterising the Khasi as matriarchal is erroneous. In conceptual terms, matriarchy is the reverse of patriarchy where all the facets of kinship: descent, inheritance, residence and authority centre on the father. This is not so with the Khasi as is

the case with most societies practicing matrilineal descent, where women's rights are primarily confined to children and home with authority vested in the hands of men. Hence while the Khasi can rightly be defined as matrilineal it cannot be called or described as matriarchal.

Studying one's own society however is not an easy task. There are many practical and methodological challenges that come with it. On the practical plane, researching on one's own society runs the risk of incurring the displeasure or antagonism of your community members or sections of it to your work. Especially where ethnic patriotism runs high, writing anything that goes against the perception of the group can invite trouble.

But there are also definite advantages in working on one's own society. It equips you with insights and perspectives that only insiders are privileged to have. In my own research, my regional and socio-cultural identity aided me to convey the richness of Northeastern societies, their power and gender dynamics, unique kinship structure, and tribal complexities, to the wider academic community. My research projects often took me back to my roots, where I worked closely with people on the ground, understanding their histories, struggles, and aspirations. These engagements provided valuable insights not only into the interplay of gender, kinship, and ethnicity in Northeastern societies, but also the power of Sociology and its theoretical tools to uncover the hidden dynamics in human society. For instance, while my birth and upbringing in the Khasi family helped me to understand the intricacy of the matrilineal system, long seen as a haven for women, it was Sociology and the methodological tools it developed that opened my eyes to the inner dynamics that lie beyond and below the surface level. Some of the papers [5] I wrote clearly illustrate this fact. The findings not only exploded

[5] [5] See in particular, 'Ethnicity and Gender: Ethnic Poli2cs among the Khasi', Chapter 8 in Tiplut Nongbri, *Development, Ethnicity and Gender: Select Essays on Tribes in India*, Rawat Publica2ons, Delhi & Jaipur, 2003 and 'Researching the Khasi: Encounter with the Self' Chapter 16 in N Jayaram (ed) *Knowing the Social World: Perspec4ves & Possibili4es*, Orient BlackSwan, Delhi, 2017, pp. 323-344.

the myth that matrilineal descent confers superior status to women but also succinctly brings to the fore how a woman's body and her sexuality becomes a site where ethnic politics are fought and debated.

However, for all its power, excessive reliance on the insider's perspective can have its own pitfall. It can blunt your objectivity by making you look at a problem only from one side. This could put your work at risk and be seen as tinted with regional bias. What is needed is maintaining a healthy balance between the inside and the outside. This is the golden rule of research. Striking a balance between the insider and the outsider's perspective is a constant battle that I wage in my teaching and research on India's Northeast.

7. **H.S**

I had the privilege of being your student in my JNU years (2002-2011) and I remember how you would organise seminars, lecture series (PhD students and teachers) on Northeast India exposing us to researches on the region done by academicians from all over the world. Later on, you served as the Director of the Northeast India Studies Programme in JNU and acted in various capacities to contribute to academic scholarships on Northeast India. Kindly, tell us about your experiences, challenges and future plans in this aspect of your journey.

T.N:

Serving as the Director of the newly established North-East India Studies Programme was perhaps one of my most challenging experiences at JNU. Interdisciplinary in nature, NEISP was conceived to serve as a platform where students and teachers from different schools and centres pursuing research on the region can come together to share their ideas and flag new areas of research in a spirit of cooperation and dialogue. Catering to five schools: School of Social Sciences, (SSS), School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies (SL&CS), School of Arts and Aesthetics (SAA), School of Environmental Science (SES), and School of International Studies (SIS), the

programme not only brought scholars from different schools and disciplines together in a collective endeavour, but also catapulted North-East India from the footnotes of Indian history into the centre stage of the academic landscape. It is heartening to recall students and faculty from diverse disciplines - ranging from arts and literature to social and environmental sciences— converged in a spirit of cooperation and statesmanship to deliberate on the complexities of the region. Under this initiative, we were able to invite scholars from diverse backgrounds, from within India and abroad, to delve deep into the region's nuances and its obscure history. Through seminars, workshops, and conferences we strived to come up with a comprehensive picture of Northeast India, encompassing its diverse socio-cultural landscapes, historical ties, and future potentials.

My time at NEISP also witnessed one of the most tumultuous periods the people of Northeast experienced in India's metropolitan cities. The large-scale migration of people from the North-eastern states to India's metropolitan cities for education and employment exposed them to diverse forms of racial discrimination and violence hitherto unheard of in the history of the region. While this raised pertinent questions about the Union Government's policy on Northeast and the place of its people in the Indian psyche, it also opened new areas of research that shifted the focus from the region into the cities. NEISP was able to play a catalytic role in the matter by organizing special lectures on the issue, engaged in constructive interactions with members of Delhi Commission for Women, Delhi Police, social activists, and officials of the Bezbaruah committee that was empowered to look at the issue and come up with appropriate measures that could be taken up by the government for resolution of the problem. Most importantly, we were able to use the opportunity to engage in research on the subject which translated into a book *Migration, Identity and Conflict: Lived Experience of Northeasterners in Delhi*[6] I co-wrote with A.S. Shimreiwung a Research Associate at NEISP who

[6] Tiplut Nongbri & AS Shimreiwung *Migra4on, Iden4ty and Conflict: Lived Experience of Northeasterners in Delhi*, Delhi, Rawat, 2017

now teaches Sociology at Tezpur University. The book not only interrogates some of the long-held views on Northeast but also brings out in vivid detail the problem of 'othering' Northeasterners encountered in India's metropolitan cities, and their amazing resilience in the face of severe challenges.

Today, NEISP has transformed from a small programme with borrowed faculty and budget into a Special Centre with its own retinue of faculty, staffs, and budget. While welcoming this development, I see it as a tribute to the collective effort and active cooperation of scholars from various schools during its formative years.

My post-retirement appointment at the Centre for North-East Studies and Policy Research, Jamia Millia Islamia further enriched my experience. Working in a multi-disciplinary centre with its strong emphasis on creating a bridge between policy and the field, and between Northeast and the rest of India, through collaborative research, workshops, lectures, and seminars gave me a chance to expand the work we did at NEISP. Although Covid cut my tenure short, one of the high points at JMI was organising an international seminar with my former student Rashi Bhargava of Maitreyi College, University of Delhi who is now an Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology, North-Eastern Hill University. The papers presented by eminent scholars in the field resulted in a book on material and visual culture in Northeast India[7]. The other is working on a research project on tourism[8]. These engagements were highly fulfilling and challenging at the same time, taking me into areas I had not ventured before. Other significant and memorable experience at JMI was working with junior colleagues of diverse specializations. The range of interests they brought in and insights into issues not only lend freshness to academic discussions but also illustrate the

[7]Tiplut Nongbri & Rashi Bhargava (eds) *Materiality & Visuality in North-East India: An Interdisciplinary Perspec4ve*, (eds), Singapore, Springer, 2021

[8] Tiplut Nongbri, *Heritage Conserva4on & Tourism in North-East India: A Study of Meghalaya & Nagaland*, submi^ed to NEC, 2019

importance of reciprocal learning and joint knowledge production. It is my firm belief that true knowledge cannot be created singlehandedly without taking into consideration the body of works already available in the field, the views and insights brought in by young scholars, and ideas of the people we observe.

With respect to your question on my future-plans, apart from working on long pending papers and attending meetings of committees of which I'm a member, my major preoccupation for now is looking after Iaikyntiew College, an institution set up by my family to provide education to students from the marginalized and deprived segments of the society.

8. H.S

What do you think are the prospects and methodological constrains of doing research on a difficult and conflict-ridden region like the Northeast India?

T.N:

Northeast India can be described as a researcher's paradise, an important hub of research and a viable ground for the testing and validation of theories. The complexity and diversity of the region, contradictions and paradoxes, shifting and multiple identities, and fast pace of change that descended on the region provide ample scope for scholars to venture into new areas of research and experiment with new approaches and paradigms.

However, doing research in Northeast India is not an easy task. It is fraught with several challenges that researchers working elsewhere do not usually encounter. To begin with, as you rightly said, the history of conflict which has rocked the region makes field-based research of the kind Sociology is committed to, a risky venture. But we can also look at the other side of it. Research carried out amidst the action can provide a more authentic picture of the problem than a post-facto study can ever do.

But a more serious challenge that confronts researchers in and on Northeast is not the field perse, but the lack of relevant tools and concepts to map the structures and processes we study. Most studies on Northeast India are marked by the perspectives and vocabulary of the dominant groups making it difficult to capture the lived reality and life-worlds of the people which in general are at sharp variance with those of the majority population. This problem is closely linked to the way in which sociology is taught, which is dominated by conventional courses that largely revolved around models developed by European and American thinkers with little attempt to address the socio-cultural and geo-political specificity of the region. Even courses like Indian Sociology offered in many universities tend to focus on the life and cultures of the dominant groups with scant attention to societies at the margins.

Another challenge that confronts sociological research in Northeast is the nature of the discipline which is oriented towards the study of structures and processes on the micro plane. The tradition of village study which sees the village as a microcosm of India tends to confine sociological research to social institutions and social relations at the level of the village or community, in isolation of the wider context within which it is located. This is compounded by Sociology's concern with protecting its disciplinary boundary. This close-door approach robs sociological research of the edge it would have got by a more open approach that incorporates perspectives from allied disciplines, such as, history, geography and environmental science. This narrow vision also deprives students the ability to look beyond village and tribe to mega entities, such as, region, which is generally considered the domain of geography or economics.

If Sociology is to be relevant to India's Northeast, it is imperative that it sheds off its nationalistic and disciplinary-centric approach and be sensitive to the geo-political and socio-cultural specificity of the region both in teaching and research.

9. H.S

Of the three roles taken up by you –as administrator, teacher and researcher/ writer, which one did you enjoy the most?

T.N:

Each role has its own challenges and possibilities, I enjoy all of them equally. While teaching and research are what I would call my primary occupation which I immensely enjoy doing, I also love the work of administration. Each of the positions I held, whether chairing the office of CSSS or Directorship of NEISP provided me with the opportunity to learn and grow. Looking after the office of CSSS and NEISP not only gave me an inside view of the working of the university: how policies are formulated and implemented, resources and workload allocated, and decisions made, it also taught me the importance of cooperation and mutual respect among colleagues. A leader or head will never be able to realise the goal of the institution on his or her own without the cooperation and support of colleagues. This is true not only in administrative matters but also in teaching and research. Many of the activities accomplished during my tenure whether in JNU or JMI would not have been possible without the active support of colleagues and students and the larger community of sociologists outside the university who form the backbone of the academic enterprise. Without their cooperation, seminars, conferences, workshops and committees on which the university thrive, would be non-starters.

10. H.S

How do you view the current state of Sociology in India today? What advice would you give to the students doing research in sociology?

T.N:

The frontiers of Sociology in India today have expanded considerably. Seen as a discipline with potential to contribute significantly to understanding and

addressing the country's multifaceted social challenges, it has become one of the most sought-after subject in the social sciences. Its popularity can be gauged not only by the large number of civil services aspirants opting for it but also by its inclusion in many professional courses. While this is a matter of pride to the discipline it also poses serious challenge to it to shed off its disciplinary-centric approach and incorporate views and perspectives from other disciplines, notably, environmental science, information technology, public policy and history. This is imperative if the discipline is to retain its relevance and produce graduates and scholars that are equipped with the right kind of knowledge that could take it to the next level of excellence. There is also need for greater democracy within the discipline. While voices from the margins have succeeded to bring in hitherto neglected areas like gender and Dalit studies within its ambit, a lot remains to be done.

The success of a discipline depends not only on the number and types of courses in the syllabus, but also on the kind and quality of research produced. Research is the backbone of any discipline; a lifeline that is critical for its growth and helps the discipline to remain relevant, rigorous, and responsive to change. My advice to students doing research in Sociology are:

1. Identify gaps in research by discussing the matter with your teacher or mentor, then choose a topic that genuinely interests you and not because it is popular or in fashion. Working on a topic that stems from interest will help you navigate the various challenges that come with research.

2. Ground your work in theory. Research is not a casual or haphazard activity that can be carried out in any manner we like but a scientific inquiry that has to be systematically executed. Grounding your work in theory will help you design your research in a doable manner and frame questions that are specific and relevant to the problem you study.

3. Familiarise yourself with existing literature in the field. Research is not a monologue or activity that can be carried out in isolation from the prevailing works, ideas and theories on the subject. Reading existing works will help

you gain better clarity of the problem you study and enable you to come up with better explanation of your findings.

4. Choose your research tools wisely. There are variety of tools—observation, interviews, surveys, case study, ethnography, content analysis, or statistical techniques available to a researcher. While all are equally good in their own way, choose ones that suit your field and problem best. A wrong choice of tools can seriously affect the quality of your research.

5. Also be open to alternative approach, methods and perspectives in your research. Relying on a single approach or method can reduce the ability of your research to capture the complex dynamics in the field, thereby reducing the value of your research. Evidence reveals, triangulation of methods and an inter -and/or multi-disciplinary perspective produces better research results.

6. Adhere to the principle of objectivity and parity to the best possible by refraining from value judgment and keeping your personal and socio-cultural preferences in check.

7. Never conduct your research without seeking prior and informed consent of your informants. Respect their privacy by keeping the information sought confidential. Also avoid adopting a superior attitude towards the people you study especially when working among the vulnerable or marginalized segment of society.

8. While not all research are directed towards problem solving in the empirical world, you must keep in mind the likely effect of your work on the people you study.

9. Research is a laborious and time-consuming activity. You need to be patient and avoid coming up with premature conclusions.

10. Ethics demand that researcher's share their findings with the people they study. Hence share the results of your work with them, acknowledge their

contributions, and try to ensure that the research you conduct has its use beyond the classroom and conference hall.

We thank you for your time and sharing your experiences and insights with us.

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Article: The promise and praxis of the National Education Policy 2020: A critical analysis of curriculum reforms, multidisciplinarity and Indian knowledge systems in higher education

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The promise and praxis of the National Education Policy 2020: A critical analysis of curriculum reforms, multidisciplinarity and Indian knowledge systems in higher education

--Mihira Gaddam

Abstract

This paper critically examines the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, focusing on its promises of curriculum reform, the shift towards multidisciplinarity, and the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) within higher education. It explores the historical trajectory of curriculum reforms to highlight issues of genuine transformation, homogeneity, and threats to academic autonomy. Drawing on scholarly frameworks, it interrogates the conceptual ambiguity between multidisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity, and transdisciplinarity in the NEP's vision and its praxis. The paper further questions the ideological motivations behind the NEP's depiction of ancient Indian universities and the imposition of IKS across disciplines. By analysing curriculum frameworks, policy documents, and faculty training guidelines, the study shows how the policy ends up reinforcing biases and exclusionary knowledge structures. Ultimately, it argues that the NEP's vision for holistic education is more aspirational than plausible.

Key Words: Curriculum Reforms, Academic Autonomy, Multidisciplinarity, Indian Knowledge System

Introduction

The National Education Policy of 2020 enlists several issues with higher education system of the country that include severe fragmentation in the educational ecosystem, lack of focus on development of cognitive skills and learning outcomes, rigid disciplinary silos and early specialisations, lack of teacher autonomy, weaker emphasis on research and its funding, and more. The document proposes significant revisions to overcome the above-mentioned challenges. The first and crucial revision being a move toward

multidisciplinary universities and colleges, suggesting at least one located within or near each district, and HEI's offering these programs in local/Indian languages. Several other changes too were proposed including, but not limited to, transitioning to a more multidisciplinary undergraduate education; reformulating the curriculum, its pedagogy and evaluation; and greater faculty and institutional autonomy (Policy 9.3 a, b, c and d) (National Education Policy [NEP], 2020 p. 34).

Methodology

The focus of this paper is to examine the move toward multidisciplinarity and how it pans out within the Indian context. This will incorporate deconstructing the term multidisciplinarity as an idea/an ideal and its praxis. The paper is divided into three sections. The first discusses the history of curriculum reforms including a move from annual to semester mode, Credit Based Choice System (CBCS) in 2015, and Learning Outcomes-Based Curriculum Framework (LOCF) in 2019 and the influence of the NEP on academic autonomy and curriculum development. This would entail examining the guidelines of each curriculum framework and its translation into select curricula; and critically analysing academic autonomy in the NEP. The second section examines the concept of multidisciplinarity within the NEP and its praxis—how this idea has unfolded within academic institutions in recent past and the challenges it may pose in the future. This includes deconstructing the NEP document to unearth the underlying assumptions and biases in reference to multidisciplinarity as well as contrasting it with the functioning of already existing models of multidisciplinary institutions and its challenges. The third section discusses Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) advocated by the NEP as part of its vision toward multidisciplinarity and analyses their implications within India's current political context. This constitutes critically analysing several documents including NEP in reference to IKS, *Guidelines for Training Orientation of Faculty on IKS*, and juxtaposing them against the backdrop of the current political ideologies and divides.

History of curriculum reforms and the National Education Policy

There is a set curriculum framework for school education called the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) that all schools abide by. This is not the case with disciplines of higher education. In the 90's, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has formulated a model curriculum for each discipline for postgraduate and undergraduate program. The last revision made to these model curricula dates to 2001. There have been several curriculum reforms since, and they include moving from annual mode to semester system in 2011, introduction of Credit Based Choice System (CBCS) in 2015, and Learning Outcomes-Based Curriculum Framework (LOCF) in 2020. The intent behind these revisions was to move from a teacher centric approach to a learner centric one, promote holistic education by integrating plenty of choices with the curricular structure and above all, standardise the curriculum framework. The NEP too emphasises this and articulates changes proposed for HEIs that aligns with this intent. However, there are several issues with such above mentioned reforms and their intentions – i) issue of genuine transformation; ii) problem of homogeneity iii) threat to academic autonomy.

Issue of genuine transformation

With move from annual to semester system mode, the existing curriculum was split in two across two semesters. This eased the burden on students and teachers, to not have to wait an entire year to sit for their examinations and the evaluation process, respectively. This shift also matched the global education standards which made mobility of students to countries abroad for higher education easier. That said, there were no significant changes made to the content of the curricula – the courses and suggested readings. The Credit Based Choice System (CBCS) of 2015 was introduced aiming towards interdisciplinary education that was student-centred with greater choice and flexibility to elect courses (University Grants Commission [UGC], 2015, p. 2). The CBCS guidelines mention that this framework would bring uniformity to the syllabus as well as the evaluation system across the country to ensure global standards and ease the mobility of students from one institution to

another (UGC, 2015, p. 3). Learning Outcomes-Based Curriculum Framework (LOCF) of 2020 too states that it takes a learner centric approach that focuses not only on providing students with greater choice and flexibility in electing courses, but also on outcomes – programme outcomes, course outcomes, qualification descriptors and graduate attributes (Gaddam, 2021). This framework too aims at 'ensuring national standards and international comparability' to meet global standards and help student mobility (University Grants Commission [UGC], 2019, p. 2). Both these frameworks have been criticised for their cafeteria approach to education which displaces the problem of quality with mobility by homogenising curriculum in the name of uniform standards and national integration (Academics for Creative Reforms, 2005, pp. 26-27). Such frameworks only let the student choose electives from different disciplines – this does not allow for any real integration of knowledge systems. No meaningful changes are made to the disciplinary curricula to accommodate or integrate methodologies, epistemologies or knowledge of the other disciplines. Another major issue with these frameworks is that there are no significant changes made to content – the courses or their readings. What is really happening is that the same content is being 'fit' into newer frameworks. With the CBCS and LOCF frameworks, the same courses (core and optional) from the semester system have been fit into a newer structure to meet the number of credits and have opened up a few courses as general electives. Furthermore, with LOCF, the curriculum was fit into a template where each course had to enlist its outcomes. In many universities the actual changes made to the courses or its readings are few to insignificant.

Problem of homogeneity

Highly regarded curricular models aim for an inclusive, multicultural education that is sensitive towards the diversity of learners. However, the above mentioned frameworks hold national integration and standardisation as the highest value and this is achieved through promoting uniform national curriculum which essentially means homogenising curriculum. The homogenised models reflect a sense of unity while, the multicultural models

reflect diversity. 'Balancing unity and diversity is a continuing challenge for multicultural nation-states. Unity without diversity results in hegemony and oppression; diversity without unity leads to balkanisation and the fracturing of the nation-state' (Banks, 2008, p. 133). There is a constant struggle between these two objectives. What goes into the curriculum is then decided by the shifting ideological currents that either favour values of national integration or accepting the diversity of learners.

Hegemony, as put forth by Gramsci, is not mere domination but domination with consent. It is cultural, ideological and historical that shapes civil society (Gramsci, 1971). Educational institutions and their curricula as part of this civil society play a pivotal role in shaping and maintaining the dominant ideologies. Gramsci says, 'every relationship of 'hegemony' is necessarily an educational relationship', where ideologies are carefully reproduced until it is turned into everyday knowledge or common sense (Gramsci, 1971, p. 350).

The guidelines for both CBCS and LOCF place immense emphasis on national integration, standardisation and mobility but hardly addresses the issue of diversity. It clearly indicates an inclination towards the value of unity. But for a multicultural nation-state like India, standardisation/homogenisation of curriculum in pursuit of unity would amount to 'balkanisation'. What remains within a curriculum then, is the dominant/majoritarian narrative of the particular discipline – that which is achieved not by organic, historical or even need based selection but by displacing the minority and multicultural narratives. The rationale presented for this motive is to help the students pass examinations like UGC-NET that determines if a scholar is eligible for the post of Assistant Professorship and also Junior Research Fellowship (as this qualification is mandatory when applying to any government college or university) and makes mobility of the student from one university to another easier (Gaddam, 2021). A framework that favours unity while displacing diversity is necessarily hegemonic in nature, especially in the Indian context.

This overlooking of the multicultural aspect resonates, not just within curricular reforms, but the way in which inclusion is addressed within the

NEP. The overarching term Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDG) includes, under one head, the 'gender identities (particularly female and transgender individuals), socio-cultural identities (such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, and minorities), geographical identities (such as students from villages, small towns, and aspirational districts), disabilities (including learning disabilities), and socio-economic conditions (such as migrant communities, low income households, children in vulnerable situations, victims of or children of victims of trafficking, orphans including child beggars in urban areas, and the urban poor)' (Policy 6.2) (NEP, 2020, p. 24). The terms 'Dalit' or 'Adivasi' are altogether missing for the policy document. This linguistic restructuring undermines the historical significance of these terms and at the same time blanket all the marginalized identities and their issues. The attitude towards reservations reflects a tokenistic approach, where students are admitted based on reservation policies, yet the curriculum lacks flexibility to accommodate students from diverse social and educational backgrounds. Beyond admissions, hardly any systemic measures are taken within classroom spaces to address the socio-cultural and linguistic barriers faced by marginalized students.

Moreover, a uniform national curriculum would compromise the academic autonomy of teachers - 'such homogenization would stand in the way of innovative pedagogic practices and incorporating new courses based on emerging issues' (Academics for Creative Reforms, 2005: 27). This will be discussed further in the following section.

Threat to academic autonomy

Academic autonomy is essential for revision, transaction and transformation of curriculum. The NEP recognises the lack of autonomy as one of the major issues of higher education and proposes significant changes in effort to rectify it. The Draft National Education Policy (DNEP) of 2019 within the ambit of Institutional governance conceptualises three types of autonomy – academic, administrative and financial (Draft National Education Policy [DNEP], 2019, p. 31). Concerns of curriculum are not just related to academic autonomy, as it

may seem, but are also highly influenced by the functioning of administrative and financial autonomy. It has also been that the kind of autonomy granted (financial especially and to an extent academic too) to universities is perceived as burden rather than freedom and as a shift toward privatization.

The most important policy document to be considered before looking at the NEP to understand autonomy is the Graded Autonomy Regulation (GAR) that was out in 2018. In 2018, sixty-two HEI's were declared autonomous by the UGC. This implied that these sixty-two universities had the freedom 'to fund their own study programmes, establish their own variable emoluments and incentive structures for faculty and office staff, devise their own service conditions for faculty and staff, and recommends collaboration with other high-ranked institutions, both national and foreign. But it does not insist on any qualitative or quantitative inputs that will ensure equity, access, and quality in the education provided' (Ghosh, 2018). The basis for granting this autonomous status is NIRF and NAAC score of the universities. However, these scores often fail at attempting to quantify quality. Krishna Kumar examines the dubious basis of these scores, that questions their methods of evaluation, the inspectorial approach, and the parameters used to arrive at a mathematical average (Kumar, 2018, p. 16). The document enumerates twelve dimensions of Autonomy and elaborates on way in which this autonomy can be exercised or actualized. The sixty-two universities that have been granted autonomy now have the freedom to start new courses, centres or schools 'provided no demand for fund is made from the Government' (clause 4.2) (University Grants Commission [UGC], 2018). They are also able to establish off campus centres as long as they are 'able to arrange both recurring and non-recurring revenue sources and does not need any assistance for the same from the UGC or the Government' (Clause 4.3) (UGC, 2018). Universities are allowed the freedom to introduce skill-building courses, create spaces for research and innovation like parks or incubation centres, and build stronger connections with surrounding communities. But this freedom comes with a condition—they must do it all without asking for government support, relying instead on their own resources (Clause 4.4, 4.5, 4.7, 4.9) (UGC, 2018).

The DNEP mentions that autonomy, particularly financial autonomy, will not 'mean cut in funding, but rather the freedom to decide how best to spend funds to maximize educational attainments' (DNEP, 2019, p. 208). It states that financial autonomy will only be granted over time when the public institutions demonstrate to able to handle such responsibility. When these statements are juxtaposed against the clauses of GAR, it is evident that this would lead to inevitable commercialization of curriculum and fee hikes to withstand the self-financing model.

The DNEP, as it is a much more elaborate document than the NEP, discusses all three kinds of autonomy (financial, administrative, and academic) in detail – from faculty appointments to decision makers involved in funding allocation. The actualization of academic autonomy relies heavily on the direction of flow of funding and process of faculty recruitment. To elaborate, the DNEP proposes that increased administrative autonomy would empower HEIs to implement and design innovative programmes, integrate local knowledge systems and govern more locally (DNEP, 2019 p. 208). Furthermore, it states that universities will be financially supported by the National Research Foundation (NRF) which will be supervised by a Board of Governors (BoG). The policy emphasizes that the BoG will be operating independently – free from political or government interference, with the aim of upholding public-spirited character of the institution rather than a commercial body (DNEP, 2019, p. 313). That said, this board will be constituted and regulated by the Rastriya Shiksha Aayog (RSA), a central body that is chaired by the Prime Minister (Policy 23.3) (Roy, 2018). Additionally, the members comprising the Board of Governors (BoG) will include one-third from within the HEI—comprising faculty and administrative leadership; and the government that provides maximum funding – State government and Central government will be able to nominate members. New members are to be selected based on their commitment to the institution and their capacity to contribute meaningfully but the draft is a little vague about who decides who's committed and capable (DNEP, 2019: 314). The BoG is also responsible for the appointment of the Vice Chancellor—redesignated as

the Chief Executive (CE). The CE is in turn responsible for the appointments of faculty and administrators (DNEP, 2019: 315). This institutional governance model is hierarchical and certainly not free from external influences (government or political). The is no real decentralization or dissemination of power happening here for the autonomy to actualize, instead seem to be a strategic deflection from the rather pressing issues like sweeping budget cuts and faculty disempowerment.

The issues of financial and administrative autonomy finally trickle down to academic autonomy as the fundamental function of both financial and administrative autonomy is to enable and support academic activities. The policy states that academic autonomy 'will include freedom to start programmes across fields (including professional) and disciplines, devise and decide the curricula, decide the educational resources required including faculty and their qualifications, develop research programmes and pursue them, decide the criteria and number for student admission, run multiple campuses, run ODL programmes, and on all other academic and educational matters' (DNEP, 2019: 318). To begin with, the freedom to start interdisciplinary programmes, expand campuses, and establish research and distance learning centres all require substantial financial investment. According to the GAR, the state is unwilling to provide the necessary funding. The freedom to revise and restructure curricula depends on the faculty appointments and according to NEP the appointments are made by the CE who is appointed by the BoG that is regulated by the RSA under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister. This proposed system still has political influence on appointments at every level. This influence determines the formulation and restructuring of the curricula – the political influence informs the ideological within the classroom space. In addition to this, the NEP hardly discusses the issue of faculty vacancies and increasing numbers of ad hoc and guest lecturers that hinder the process of curriculum development as the temporariness of these appointments is highly demotivating for the faculty.

Multidisciplinarity as holistic education

The NEP places immense emphasis on the need for multidisciplinarity and discusses it in detail with an entire section devoted to it. As mentioned in the introduction, it hopes to resolve the issue of severe fragmentation of higher educational ecosystem and rigid separation of disciplines with early specialization (Policy 9.2 a and c) (NEP, 2020 p. 34). The policy aims to resolve this issue by transforming all the universities into multidisciplinary institutions and it aspires for much more including providing holistic education for all students.

There are several issues with these aspirations, many of which stem from linguistic confusion. Julie Thompson Klein (1990) articulates the issue of ambiguity relating to words such as interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinarity. She notes that these models of education are often praised without a clear indication of what they stand for. She specifies three sources for this confusion, i) terminological vagueness – many instances fall under disciplinary exchange can be considered interdisciplinary; ii) field-Specific perceptions – different disciplines interpret interdisciplinarity through their own lens, a physics department might not understand interdisciplinarity same a social science department would; iii) lack of shared discourse – scholarship on interdisciplinarity and the like is quite fragmented across disciplines and domains - academic and otherwise, there or no unified or shared literature (Klein, 1990, pp. 12-14). A brief clarification on various types of disciplinarity and the discourse around it would help analyse the NEP and its aspirations regarding multidisciplinarity clearer.

Typologies of disciplinarity

Monodisciplinarity refers to scholarly work conducted within a single discipline, maintaining its established boundaries, methods, and epistemologies. Julie Thompson Klein denotes it as a structure in which knowledge remains intact and boundaries are in its original form (Klein, 1990, p. 56). Davies & Devlin affirm this view, explaining it as ‘academic

disciplines as autonomous and discrete areas of study which do not normally cooperate or coordinate their academic efforts across disciplinary boundaries' (Davies & Devlin, 2007, p. 19).

Multidisciplinarity involves the parallel engagement of multiple disciplines working side-by-side on a shared problem, without any integration. Klein describes that 'multidisciplinarity juxtaposes disciplines... its additive, not integrative' (Klein, 1990, p. 56). Davies & Devlin, citing Petrie (1976), stress that multidisciplinary contributors typically work independently, often without requiring mutual goal (Davies & Devlin, 2007, p. 20).

Crossdisciplinarity refers to the application of methods or theoretical framework from one discipline to another. It involves mutual interaction or integration between disciplines. Davies & Devlin characterize it as investigating a subject from an external discipline, often without reciprocal collaboration or influence between the fields (Davies & Devlin, 2007, p. 20).

Interdisciplinarity involves the integration of concepts, theories, or methods from various disciplines to create common knowledge. Klein states that 'interdisciplinarity integrates knowledge and methods from different disciplines, using a real synthesis' (Klein, 1990, p. 56). Davies & Devlin describe it as an act of combining or deriving disciplinary perspectives in novel ways (Davies & Devlin, 2007, p. 21).

Pluridisciplinarity refers to collaboration between disciplines without complete integration. Davies & Devlin describe it as combining expertise to engage a common concern, while the structure of the disciplines remains intact (Davies & Devlin, 2007, pp.22-23).

Modification Interdisciplinarity involves coordination and adjustment of disciplinary inputs throughout the research process. It implies a hierarchical structure guiding integration (Davies & Devlin, 2007, p. 24).

Transdisciplinarity moves beyond the traditional academic disciplines by integrating even non-academic knowledge and societal actors in addressing

complex real-world problems. Klein writes that it 'transcends the disciplines...and is problem-centred…involving stakeholders and non-academic knowledge' (Klein, 2004, p. 524). Davies & Devlin emphasize that it involves the 'collapse of academic borders and the emergence of a new discipline' (Davies & Devlin, 2007, p. 24).

Klein's foundational work, *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory, and Practice* (1990), grounds the discourse of disciplinarity and its derivatives in history. She characterizes interdisciplinarity as a conceptual cluster where Multidisciplinarity (MD), Interdisciplinarity (ID), Transdisciplinarity (TD) reflect varying levels of knowledge integration – MD represents juxtaposition without synthesis; ID involves conceptual or methodological integration; TD seeks to transcend disciplinary constraints entirely (Klein, 2017, p. 23). Central to this argument are the metaphors of 'bridge-building' and 'restructuring,' which explore the possible forms such integration can take (Klein, 1990, pp. 55–57). Klein additionally describes how disciplines unfold both as epistemic frameworks and institutional regimes, making interdisciplinarity not merely an intellectual exercise but a challenge to structural and ideological configurations.

Davies and Devlin, in *Interdisciplinary Higher Education* (2007), take this further with a focus on pedagogical transformation. Their emphasis lies in practical implications—particularly in curricula and teaching. While they adopt Klein's terminological distinctions, they contribute an operational dimension to the discussion. They assert that interdisciplinarity is a 'mode of knowledge production' that relies upon shared epistemological commitments, rather than just a structural collaboration.

This is further elaborated in the *Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity* (2017), in Klein's chapter 'Typologies of Interdisciplinarity: The Boundary Work of Definition.' In this context, typologies are not just classificatory frameworks but rhetorical and political instruments, central to what Thomas Gieryn has described as 'boundary work' (Klein, 2017, p. 22). Typologies embody ideological contests over legitimacy, authority, and recognition.

Klein identifies encyclopaedic, indiscriminate, and pseudo-ID as 'false' forms, marked by shallow or nominal combinations of disciplines (Klein, 2017, pp. 23–24). In contrast, contextualizing, composite, and integrated forms of ID are seen as increasingly substantive. Theoretical interdisciplinarity, for example, involves the development of new conceptual frameworks that fundamentally reshape the process of inquiry. This aligns with Davies and Devlin's approach, as they stress that 'true' ID transforms underlying epistemological assumptions rather than merely aggregating content (Davies & Devlin, 2010, p. 20).

Bridge-building and restructuring resurface in the Klein's work as two different modes of integration: the former maintains disciplinary foundations while facilitating dialogue, whereas the latter disassembles those boundaries to forge a new unified epistemology (Klein, 2017, pp. 26–27). This resonates Klein's 1990 original framing, but here the metaphors are situated in a wider set of historical examples—such as the emergence of social psychology and area studies in postwar era—as forms of restructuring that eventually solidify into new disciplines.

She further distinguishes between instrumental and critical forms of interdisciplinarity. Instrumental ID typically serves operational, often policy-driven goals—for example, interdisciplinary programs in biotechnology or sustainability that prioritize problem-solving efficiency. In contrast, critical ID is concerned with questioning and modifying dominant epistemologies, often surfacing from feminist, postcolonial, or radical pedagogical traditions (Klein, 2017, pp. 28–29). This tension between mere accommodation and critique echoes in Klein's 1990 argument, in which she suggests that institutionalization can simultaneously empower and constrain interdisciplinary movements (Klein, 1990, pp. 111–118).

Klein and Frodeman in the chapter, 'Interdisciplining Humanities: A Historical Overview', highlight how interdisciplinarity here often adopts a critical form. The humanities' deep-rooted entanglement with philosophy, history, and literature already lends itself to disciplinary interweaving, but in

the late 20th century, this overlap was spurred by poststructuralism, cultural studies, and feminist theory. These movements introduced not just new content but alternative ontologies of knowledge, deconstructing the very foundations of disciplinarity itself—a process Davies and Devlin briefly allude to but do not explore it in depth (Klein & Frodeman, 2017, pp. 132–135).

Anne Balsamo in 'An ethics of Interdisciplinary Research,' outlines practical ethics of interdisciplinarity-emphasizing that the real-world enactment of ID requires fluid identities, collaborative literacies, and the ethical commitment to mutual learning. This positions disciplinarity not solely an epistemic grid but also an affective and ethical space—a lived boundary that must be negotiated rather than merely traversed (Balsamo, 2017, pp. 256–257). This ethical perspective reframes earlier typologies as inherently political commitments rather than neutral: choosing to restructure rather than bridge-build, or to pursue critical instead of instrumental goals, is a declaration about the kind of knowledge one values and the world one wants to help build.

What emerges from this complex discourse is not a single map of disciplinarities, but rather a multidimensional system. The types of disciplinarities function not merely as frameworks of organizing knowledge, but are embodiments of ideology, power, purpose, and method. Whether one is engaging with a composite ID model that conforms diverse disciplinary tools to a shared problem (Klein, 2017, p. 24), or pursues a transdisciplinary model that dissolves disciplinary boundaries altogether in favour of collaboratively produced knowledge (Klein, 1990, p. 66; Balsamo, 2017, p. 257), the effort is never neutral.

Thus, across decades, genres, and institutional contexts, these authors collectively show that defining types of disciplinarities is a deeply critical act. It entails classification not only forms of knowledge, but also articulating the aspirations of those who create, teach, and institutionalize them.

Understanding multidisciplinarity of the National Education Policy

The NEP states 'moving to large multidisciplinary universities and HEI clusters is thus the highest recommendation of this policy regarding the structure of higher education' (Policy 10.2) (NEP, 2020 p. 34). It envisions reconceptualizing the perception of what a HEI should constitute – a multidisciplinary institution that offers both graduate and undergraduate programs with focus on high quality teaching, research and community engagement and stress the teaching and research will go hand in hand and that all universities will be research-intensive universities (Policy 10.3) (NEP, 2020 p. 34). The NEP states it aims to turn all HEI's into multidisciplinary institutions by 2040 and at least one large multidisciplinary HEI in or near every district by 2030 while gradually phasing out single stream HEIs (Policy 10.7, 10.8 and 10.11) (NEP, 2020 p. 35). As well intentioned this may seem, there are significant hurdles in terms of preparedness of the teachers to handle such curricula. In 2013, a Four-Year Undergraduate program (FYUP) was introduced in Delhi University with similar aims – that had greater curricular flexibility and was interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary in nature. This was eventually rolled back in 2014 with a great deal of resistance from the Teacher's Association as it was seen an arbitrary imposition and as an effort to erode teacher's autonomy. The issues raised included a compromised curriculum that non-rigorous in nature and a considerable fee hike that burdened the students.

The NEP states that the aim of multidisciplinary education is to nurture the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral and aesthetic capabilities and develop well rounded individuals who are equipped with essential 21st century skills across all fields – as it holds that studies show integrated education (humanities with STEM) produces positive learning outcomes (Policy 11.2 and 11.3) (NEP, 2020 p. 36). It aims to prepare students for not just their first job, but the second, third and fourth owing to the fourth industrial revolution (DNEP, 2019, p. 224). Multidisciplinarity is said to be achieved through establishing and strengthening department like Languages, Literature, Music,

Philosophy, Indology, Art, Dance, Theatre, Education, Mathematics, Statistics, Pure and Applied Sciences, Sociology, Economics, Sports, Translation and Interpretation across all HEI's; and by granting greater autonomy to the faulty to develop flexible yet rigorous curriculum that incorporates community education, environmental education and value-based education (Policy 11.6, 11.7 and 11.8) (NEP, 2020 pp. 36-37). It is evident that the policy believes humanities education is essential to its proposed model. However there have been many humanities departments, especially philosophy, that shut down their departments in the last decade due to lack of funding, lack of faculty and takers. With the current state of humanities in the country, the proposed model and timeline, is more aspirational than plausible.

To begin with, a multidisciplinary model of education cannot address the issue of disciplinary silos or 'severe fragmentation of disciplines' or produce 'well rounded individuals' as the NEP claims, as there is no real integration of disciplines or disciplinary knowledge taking place. A university with multiple departments of humanities and sciences offering courses parallelly to choose from would prove insufficient towards these aspirations. The envisioned outcomes clearly require integration over assimilation, this is what Klein refers to as pseudo-ID – an assimilation of shallow or nominal combination of disciplines. There seem to be confusion or ambiguity regarding the typologies of disciplinarity and what they can achieve – here multidisciplinarity is confused with interdisciplinarity or pluridisciplinarity. Furthermore, with already existing models of multidisciplinary institutions like IITs, IIITs and IISERs (except few), where graduate courses of humanities are offered, are treated as second class or service departments to support science departments – the priority given to science departments differs significantly from the humanities departments (Sarukkai, 2019, p. 10). This divide between the sciences and social sciences/humanities, within any given university is stark and is not a mere epistemic grid but is affective and a lived boundary that is sociopolitical and economic in nature like Balsamo argues. The marginalization that humanities and social sciences departments face when compared to the sciences and with one another, in a university space, needs to

be dealt with diligently before attempting any kind of integration. Failing that, the already marginalized disciplines could get further alienated within an integratory model of education. In addition to this, the objectives of each integration within any typology (MD, ID or TD) need to be clearly defined so as to reconstruct the curricula to accommodate multiple epistemologies and methodologies without conceding to the dominant epistemologies or methods (considering that methods of science differ significantly from that of social sciences and humanities).

In the section on multidisciplinarity, the policy gives examples of ancient Indian universities Takshashila, Nalanda, Vallabhi, and Vikramshila that were multidisciplinary in nature and were successful in producing well rounded and innovative individuals (Policy 10.2) (NEP, 2020 p. 34). It is also suggested that the modern liberal-arts education has its roots in 'knowledge of many' model of ancient India where sixty-four kalas (that included scientific, artistic, vocational education and soft skills) were taught. Understanding multidisciplinarity through lens of Takshashila and Nalanda is based on unfounded claims and generalisations that are drawn from romanticising ancient history and will not stand with scrutiny (Roy, 2019) and, if at all, the idea of liberal arts is to be understood in terms of sixty-four kalas, the universities need to completely rid themselves of its colonial elements, including the way disciplines are structured and divided, the way job market works, and the way economy works (Gaddam, 2021). The ideological inclination towards glorification reflects and affirms that disciplinary boundaries are not neutral but inherently political and reinforce specific agendas. This inclination becomes increasingly apparent in the document released by the UGC on *Guidelines for Training/Orientation of Faculty on Indian Knowledge Systems* in 2023.

A return to tradition through Indian knowledge systems/ bhāratīya-jñāna-parampara

Although the NEP describes at length the rich intellectual past of the country throughout the document, the agenda of integrating ancient Indian Knowledge

System into the curriculum was only explicitly regarding school education. In the section on higher education, references to Nalanda and Takshashila serve primarily as examples of institutional restructuring rather than content integration. The policy does mention incorporating value-based education that includes 'development of humanistic, ethical, Constitutional, and universal human values of truth (*satya*), righteous conduct (*dharma*), peace (*shanti*), love (*prem*), nonviolence (*ahimsa*), scientific temper, citizenship values, and also life-skills; lessons in *seva*/service and participation in community service programmes will be considered an integral part of a holistic education' (Policy 11.8) (NEP, 2020 p. 37), but that is all. The IKS guidelines published by the UGC in 2023, tries to impose, ancient Indian Knowledge System (whether it's a relevant integration to the discipline or not), across all levels of higher education.

The Preamble of the guidelines celebrates 'the rich heritage of ancient and eternal Indian knowledge' and makes it mandatory for faculty of all disciplines across HEI's to partake in an induction program followed by periodic refresher courses (University Grants Commission [UGC], 2023, p.1). This is said to be carried out but the agencies including the HRDCs and Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya National Mission on Teachers Training (PMMMNMTT). The induction program is divided into three parts where; i) overview of philosophy, methods, and Indian civilization as compared to other civilizations and their exchanges; ii) Accomplishments made by ancient India in various fields; iii) pedagogy specific to IKS that avoids bookish teaching, including field studies, micro-research projects and avoid exaggeration and glorification (UGC, 2023, p. 2). The curriculum reforms of the past as well as the NEP prioritizes outcomes-based models, and outcomes for courses such as these need to be considered diligently. The information on accomplishments of ancient Indian culture in various fields and the place of Indian civilization as compared to others, cannot escape the romanticizing and glorifying nature of the course – no alternative outcome can reasonably be expected from such content. This is, as Klein and Balsamo would call it, a pseudo-ID – where integration of the content is merely representative and politically charged to

further the nationalist agenda. The guidelines also state that IKS would be integrated into the General Paper of UGC-NET for all subjects with sufficient weightage (UGC, 2023, p. 4), making it mandatory for everyone to know of the glories of the past and compromising on the curricular flexibility that the NEP so intently insists on.

The guidelines for the refresher courses too emphasize over and again on exposing all faculty to common underlying philosophical foundations and its vocabulary across disciplines and importance of field visits to Temples, Gurukuls, Historical sites and more. Furthermore, there are three aspects to the refresher courses; i) Multidisciplinary courses, that focuses on exploring the interdisciplinary aspects of IKS; ii) Discipline-specific courses, that incorporate ancient Indian histories/method particular to a discipline; specialized courses, that work with one particular text and debates surrounding it (UGC, 2023, p. 5). A model syllabus is presented in the annexure that reflects a typical philosophy curriculum's course on Indian Philosophy. It includes familiarization with the types of literature and vocabulary; philosophical schools such as Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisesika; and pramanavada and vada traditions as methods (UGC, 2023, p. 8). Now there are several issues that philosophy curricula already suffer from, particularly Indian philosophy, that are now being transferred into the IKS curriculum.

The discourse surrounding the place of Indian Philosophy within the Historiography of Global Philosophies prompts an essential question: What do we mean by 'Indian' Philosophy or 'Indian Knowledge Systems'? While it is true that 'Indian' Philosophy has been excluded from the historiography of Global-Western Philosophies (as many other philosophical traditions from the Global South) it is crucial to recognize that 'Indian' Philosophy (especially Classical) is itself exclusionary in nature. Cultural context profoundly shapes both individuals and societies, with histories playing an important role in shaping collective thought and identity. However, historical narratives are inherently selective and tend to omit a lot that is relevant. They are sometimes misrepresented, misinterpreted and often manipulated (Gaddam, 2021). These

constructions of historical narratives then, at times, propagate epistemicides. Indian Philosophy too does not escape this process of narrative construction. It is a victim of epistemicide as well as an instigator. The classical Indian philosophy as conventionally represented within philosophy curriculum in India includes the six orthodox schools – Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisesika, Mimamsa and Vedanta; and the three heterodox schools – Carvaka, Jainaism, and Buddhism (a categorisation proposed by Max Muller) and the contemporary Indian philosophy includes Gandhi, Tagore, KC Bhattacharya, Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda, Ambedkar and Daya Krishna (only taught in few universities) (Gaddam, 2021). This formulation of the classical excludes non-Vedic philosophies such as Saiva, Tantra, Sufi, Sant, Regional and Tribal philosophies. The text *Sarva Darsana Samgraha* written by Madhava Acharya in 14th century shows that there were sixteen schools of thought (Acharya, 2010, p. 1). These sixteen schools have nearly halved in representation with the current categorisation.

Furthermore, many indigenous philosophical traditions of India, such as various schools of Saivism, Bhakti movement, Sangam literature from South India, oral traditions from the North-East, and Sufism have not been a part of mainstream academic philosophy (Oinam, 2018: 9-11). Oral narratives, in particular, are dismissed as mere 'traditions' and excluded from the current categorization, despite their rich insights into social circumstances, human actions, and philosophical beliefs (Bhargav, 2018: 93). There are also several interpretations that depict women as unfit for higher pursuits and as impediments to men's spiritual progress (Natarajan, 2001: 1403). This has led to the representation of women in Classical Indian Philosophy to be limited to non-existent and stereotyped. If this structure and understanding of Indian philosophy were to be used as reference, then the IKS too would be inherently exclusive.

The move towards IKS can be viewed as a skewed attempt at decolonising mainstream curricula or a counter-hegemonic movement that attempts to overthrow colonial ideologies embedded within curricula. However, with

many countries and educational institutions taking up the project of decolonising curricula, view modernity or coloniality, as 'global modernities imply global colonialities' (Mignolo, 2011), in opposition with tradition. Hence a return to tradition is proposed to counter coloniality. The problem with this move is that, especially in the Indian context, while trying to escape one form of hegemony it succumbs to another form of hegemony, i.e. nationalism. While it is counter hegemonic to attempt decolonisation, one needs to be careful with what happens after decolonisation. Does the new curricula then involve integrating diversity or asserting unity in the name of nationalism and thus continue the cycle of hegemony?

Conclusion

While the National Education Policy 2020 envisions a holistic, multidisciplinary education rooted in India's rich intellectual traditions, its conceptualization and implementation seems to draw significant hurdles and ideological contradictions. The historical trajectory of curriculum reforms show that structural changes were repeatedly prioritized over epistemic reconstruction. It also reveals that emphasis on standardization, national integration, mobility and global competitiveness has compromised the ethos of diversity and academic autonomy. The NEP's emphasis on multidisciplinarity is entangled in conceptual ambiguities - confusing different models of disciplinary integration and the proposed model lacks consideration for the sociopolitical realities of Indian higher education. It fails to acknowledge the complexities of disciplinary integration. Without genuine epistemological integration, establishing multidisciplinary institutions would only amount to a superficial exercise where it offers disciplinary courses parallelly without addressing the structural and ideological barriers between different disciplines. Furthermore, the mandatory integration of Indian Knowledge Systems through rigid guidelines reflects politically charged romanticization of history that reinforces the existing biases and exclusionary narratives rather than fostering inclusivity.

Without carefully considering the ideological, administrative, and financial frameworks that shape curriculum development, the NEP's aspirations will not be actualized. For a genuine transformation to happen, knowledge systems need to be critically reimagined – one that recognizes and engages with India's diverse intellectual traditions, acknowledges historical exclusions within and outside the curriculum, fosters academic freedom and resists the politicization of education. Without addressing these concerns, the policy risks perpetuating the existing hierarchies and fragmentations it claims to address.

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Article: Marriage Practices among the Bonda Tribe in Odisha: An Anthropological Perspective.

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Marriage Practices among the Bonda Tribe in Odisha: An Anthropological Perspective.

--Sili Rout

Abstract

The Bonda tribe, one of India's Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), inhabits the remote highlands of Malkangiri district in Odisha. Despite ongoing socio-economic transformations, the Bonda have preserved their distinctive cultural identity, language, and traditional practices. This paper explores the social organization, kinship structures, and marriage customs of the Bonda, emphasizing their unique exogamous rules, the role of dormitories (*Selani Dingo*) in mate selection, and the institution of bride price. The study highlights the tribe's preference for age-differentiated marriages, the persistence of polygynous arrangements under specific conditions, and the gradual shifts in gender roles due to external influences. Additionally, it examines the implications of economic changes and inter-community interactions on Bonda marital traditions. By drawing from ethnographic sources and historical accounts, this paper seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of indigenous matrimonial institutions and their adaptability in the face of modernity.

Keywords: Bonda Tribe, Marriage Practices, Mate Selection, Selani Dingo, Tribal Kinship, Bride Price, Exogamy

Introduction

The cultural heritage of the tribes of Odisha is a vivid tapestry woven from centuries-old traditions, unique customs, and profound connections with nature, reflecting the region's distinct anthropological fabric. Odisha is home to 62 indigenous tribes, including 13 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). Each tribe has its own cultural identity, practices, and beliefs that are intricately tied to the forested landscapes and hills they inhabit. These communities have sustained age-old rituals, festivals, and social structures that

are not only integral to their daily lives but also serve as a means of preserving their ancestral wisdom and cosmology.

The Bonda tribe, one of India's most distinct indigenous groups, resides in the hills of the Malkangiri district in Odisha. Known for their unique culture, language, and traditional practices, the Bonda community holds a deep connection to their ancestral ways, which anthropologists find intriguing for understanding India's tribal heritage. They reside in the Khairput Block of Malkangiri district, alongside other tribes such as the Gadaba and Didayi, within the Eastern Ghats. Historically, the Bonda were known for their hostility towards outsiders. Due to their long-term occupation of a specific region and their relative isolation, the area they inhabit is often referred to as "Bonda Country" or "Bonda Hill." The Bonda are of Proto-Australoid descent and speak their own dialect, Remo, which belongs to the South Munda branch of the Austric language family.

The Bonda are a numerically small tribal group compared to other communities in the state. In 1941, their population was recorded at only 2,565 (Elwin, 1950). This number increased to 4,677 in 1961 and 3,870 in the 1971 Census. The population continued to rise, reaching 5,895 in the 1981 Census, 7,315 in the 1991 Census, 9,378 in the 2001 Census, and 12,231 in the 2011 Census. The decadal growth rate showed an upward trend, with a 10.43% increase during 1971-81, 24.09% during 1981-91, and 28.20% during 1991-2001[1].

The Bonda community, based on settlement location, geographical diversity, and socio-cultural ties, can be broadly classified into three groups: the Bara-Jangar Group, the Gadaba Group, and the Plain Group. The Bara-Jangar Group consists of villages such as Mudulipada, Kirsani Pada, Tulaguram, Bandapada, Bandiguda, Bausupada, Salanpada, Gopurpada, Pindajangar, Kichapada, Dantipada, and Pandraguda. These villages are considered the original Bonda settlements and function as a confederacy for political and

[1] Source: https://tribal.nic.in/ST/StatisticalProfileofSTs2013.pdf

judicial purposes. The Gadaba Group, comprising villages like Andrahal, Dumuripada, Katamguda, Antamguda, Bodbel, and Bodapada, is characterized by significant influence from Gadaba culture and dialect, leading to the identification of their inhabitants as Gutob-Remo or Gadaba Bonda. In contrast, the Plain Group, which includes Kadamguda, Pandraguda, Puchaguda, Similiguda, and Fat-Kanguda, has witnessed a substantial departure from traditional Bonda culture due to prolonged interactions with neighboring no-tribal communities [2]. With few exceptions, most Bonda villages are ethnically homogeneous. Even in mixed communities, the majority of households are Bonda, who live alongside other local groups such as the Gadaba, Mali, Rana, Paiko, Dom, Teli, Lohara, and Brahman.

Review of Literature

The anthropological study of the Bonda tribe has been shaped by both classical ethnographic documentation and contemporary socio-developmental analyses. Pioneering ethnographers such as Verrier Elwin (1950), in his classic work *The Bondo Highlander*, laid the foundation for understanding Bonda social organization, kinship systems, and the cultural role of youth dormitories in courtship and marriage. Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf (1943) provided valuable comparative insights from his work on other tribal groups, noting institutional similarities in dormitory systems and kinship regulation. While these classical accounts were richly descriptive, they often lacked critical engagement with evolving gender dynamics and socio-economic transformations.

In recent decades, scholars like N. Patnaik (1992) have shifted the focus toward the intersection of tribal traditions and development policies. His research emphasized how external interventions—particularly education and state welfare schemes—have influenced tribal practices, including marriage systems. Institutional reports such as the *Statistical Profile of Scheduled Tribes in India* (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2013) and SCSTRTI (2020)

[2] Source:https://www.scstrti.in/index.php/communities/pvtg/113-pvtg/447-bondo

provide updated demographic data and highlight the pressures modernization places on traditional Bonda customs, such as the reduced role of polygyny and changes in dormitory-based courtship.

Comparative studies with other PVTGs like the Kutia Kondh, Gadaba, and Didayi shed light on regional continuities and divergences in tribal marriage practices. While cross-cousin marriage is normative among some groups like the Kondh, the Bonda strictly prohibit such unions. Similarly, the Muria's Ghotul dormitory resembles the Bonda's Selani Dingo, yet each institution has different social meanings and ritual processes.

Despite these contributions, notable gaps persist particularly the underrepresentation of women's agency in marital decision-making and the nuanced role of dormitory culture in present-day Bonda life. This study contributes by combining classical insights with ethnographic fieldwork to capture contemporary shifts in mate selection, kinship rules, and cultural continuity amid socio-economic change.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative ethnographic methodology to explore marriage practices among the Bonda tribe. Fieldwork was undertaken across multiple villages within the Khairput Block of Malkangiri district, focusing on settlements classified into three clusters: Bara-Jangar, Gadaba, and the Plain group. The research involved extended periods of residence in selected villages, during which the researcher actively participated in daily activities, attended marriage ceremonies, and conducted both informal and structured conversations with community members.

In-depth interviews with tribal elders, married couples, young adults, and community leaders to capture intergenerational perspectives on marriage practices and values. Participant observation of marriage negotiations, ceremonies, and dormitory gatherings (*Selani Dingo* and *Ingersin Dingo*), facilitating a rich, immersive documentation of rituals, gender dynamics, and symbolic practices. Focus group discussions with women and youth to gather

collective narratives, shared experiences, and emerging aspirations related to marriage and social norms.

In addition to primary field data, the study incorporated secondary sources such as archival records, Census of India reports, SCSTRTI documentation, and classic ethnographic works by Verrier Elwin and Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf. These sources offered a historical framework for interpreting contemporary practices, enabling a diachronic perspective on cultural continuity and transformation within Bonda society.

Marriage in Bonda Society

In every human society across the globe, there are no known instances of absolute promiscuity; rather, all cultures impose specific limitations on sexual conduct. These cultural injunctions serve to regulate mating and reproduction, establishing a framework within which individuals can navigate their relationships. Marriage emerges as a crucial institution that provides the legal foundation for family structures. As noted by Hoebel (1979:368), marriage establishes institutional frameworks that guide the formation and activities of the family unit.

Among the Bonda community, marriage is a significant life event that marks a transition into independence and full societal responsibility. The Bonda society is intricately influenced and regulated by three primary sets of relationships:

the relationship of an individual with their village community,

their *soru-bhai* (spiritual kinship), and

their clan or *kuda* members.

These relationships establish the rules governing marriage within the community.

In Bonda culture, the young men and women of a village belong to a single *kuda* or multiple *kudas* that are associated with one *sindibor* (village meeting

place), and they are regarded as brothers and sisters. Consequently, marriage among individuals within the same village is strictly prohibited, regardless of the overarching clan exogamy rule. To the Bonda, all women in their village are akin to mothers and sisters, regardless of their different clans. This cultural understanding fosters respect and prevents the mistreatment or inappropriate joking among villagers. However, interactions with women from outside the village, particularly those from different clans, do not carry the same restrictions. To ensure adherence to the village exogamy rules, Bonda society prohibits young men from visiting the *Selani dingo* (girl's dormitory) of their own village during the evening, as such visits could lead to relationships that are considered incestuous.

Similar to the practice of village exogamy, the Bonda community adheres strictly to the principle of *soru* exogamy. The Bonda community, like many others, strictly adheres to the practice of ***soru* exogamy**, a custom that governs their marriage and social interactions. The term "*soru*," derived from Tamil and meaning "food," refers to a specific type of sacred food offered ceremonially to *Patkhanda Mahaprabhu*, an important figure in their spiritual tradition. According to Bonda customs, those who are entitled to share in this sacred food are considered ***soru bhai*** or brothers, creating a bond that prohibits marriage between them. This belief underscores the sacredness of their food-sharing practices, intertwining social relationships with spiritual significance.

Initially, the practice of *soru* was observed primarily between two villages: Mudulipada and Dantipada. However, as the population of Mudulipada grew, two additional hamlet-villages emerged: Podeiguda and Bandhaguda. Members of these new villages also began sharing the *soru* relationship with those from Mudulipada and Dantipada. This interconnectedness led to the formation of what are known as ***kutum* villages**, a cluster of four villages that are ritualistically linked. Consequently, marriages between individuals from these *kutum* villages are forbidden. As noted by Verrier Elwin (1950:24), “A man's neighbours are his *soru bhai* brothers who have eaten the same

sacrificial food, a privilege that is rigidly restricted to members of the same village". He further explains that, upon marriage, a woman enters her husband's soru group, but if she becomes widowed, she retains the option to remarry within her original village (1950:25).

In addition to the *soru* fellowship observed in specific villages, the Bonda community follows strict exogamous rules within different ***kudos***. The ***kuda*** (or ***manda***) is a significant element of the Bonda social structure, representing an exogamous patrilineal clan. Bonda individuals take pride in their kuda and often incorporate its name as a suffix to their own names, reinforcing their clan identity.

The Bonda society is divided into nine distinct kudos: *Bodnaik*, *Chailan*, *Dhangara-majhi*, *Kirsani*, *Mudululi*, *Sisa*, *Dora*, *Jigri*, and *Mandra*. Notably, the latter three clan names are more recent additions to the Bonda social fabric. Historically, Bonda villages were predominantly uniclan in composition. However, population growth, along with the migration of households, has led to increased diversity within these villages, disrupting the once homogeneous *kuda* structure.

Evidence of this change can be seen in the nomenclature of the villages themselves. For example, Mudulipada was traditionally the homeland of the Mudulis, Kirsanipada was associated with the Kirsanis, and Chailanpada with the Chailans. In the current study, it has been observed that all seven villages now comprise families from various *kudos*, highlighting the evolving nature of Bonda social organization and the intricate web of relationships formed through both *soru* and *kuda* practices.

However, over time, the *kuda* homogeneity within these villages has diminished due to population growth and migration patterns, resulting in a more diverse social landscape. This evolution has not only impacted the *kuda* structure but also the broader social dynamics and marital practices within the Bonda community. The persistence of exogamous practices highlights the

importance of maintaining social cohesion and cultural identity amidst these changes.

Age Dynamics in Bonda Marriages

In contrast to many other tribal groups where adult marriage is common, the Bonda tribe follows a unique marriage custom where boys marry between 8 to 10 years of age, while girls marry later, typically between 16 to 18 years. Unlike many other tribal groups, the readiness of a boy for marriage is not based on maturity or responsibility, whereas for girls, factors like physical capability and household skills are crucial.

Bonda women often explain this practice by stating that a boy with facial hair is considered "old" and less desirable, making a younger, beardless boy a preferred match. This age gap allows a Bonda woman, especially during the initial years of marriage, to hold a position of authority, as her young husband relies on her guidance and support. In this dynamic, she acts as a mentor, helping shape her husband's character and personality according to her preferences.

Anthropologist N. Patnaik and others provide an economic rationale for this practice, highlighting that a younger husband ensures financial and physical support for his wife in her later years. Similarly, the anthropologist Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf notes that older girls enjoy the advantage of continuing to sleep in the *Selani Dingo* dormitory after marriage to an immature boy, thus prolonging the period of social freedom and camaraderie with their peers. In some cases, young wives also find alternative companionship in the dormitory, compensating for any lack of marital fulfilment due to their husband's youth.

Pre-Marital Relationships in Bonda Society

For the Bonda community, pre-marital sexual experiences are taken seriously, with strict cultural boundaries discouraging such relations. Despite enjoying social freedoms, Bonda youths avoid flirtation or indecent humor. Anthropologist Verrier Elwin noted that while boys and girls might experience

non-physical excitement during shared dormitory stays, it rarely led to sexual activity. Any expression of sexual intent before marriage was considered akin to betrothal.

Bonda beliefs associate pre-marital sex with supernatural disapproval, particularly for girls, who fear its impact on future marriages. Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, studying the Bonda in the 1940s, found pre-marital sex rare but observed that dormitory encounters were not strictly forbidden, as pregnancy was believed unlikely unless cohabitation lasted a year or more. If a girl became pregnant, marriage was typically arranged, but even if not, she faced no severe social stigma and could still find a spouse.

However, increased interaction with neighbouring non-tribal communities and other tribal groups has led to cultural shifts, with a growing emphasis on female chastity before marriage.

Dormitory Institutions and Mate Selection Practices

Dormitory is a traditional courtship practice among the Bonda tribe of Odisha, India, playing a crucial role in their unique marriage system. Unlike many Indian communities where marriages are arranged by elders, Bonda youth have the autonomy to select their life partners, and dormitory provides a culturally sanctioned platform for this process.

Bonda villages have separate dormitories for boys called *Ingersin Dingo* and for girls called *Selani Dingo.* Traditionally, these dormitories were underground but are now smaller above-ground structures built collectively, with the girls' dormitory becoming an exclusive space after completion. Boys often visit neighbouring villages, participating in social gatherings held in communal areas. These vibrant events, filled with singing, dancing, and storytelling, provide opportunities for boys and girls to interact freely. More than just entertainment, the *Selani Dingo* serves as a critical space for evaluating potential partners on the basis of character, skills, and compatibility, rather than familial pressure or external expectations.

During these gatherings, young men often display their physical strength, hunting abilities, and musical talents to impress prospective brides, while young women showcase their knowledge of traditional songs, dancing skills, and their ability to manage household tasks an essential skill in a subsistence-based society. Elders in the community recognise the legitimacy of *Selani Dingo* as an institution that fosters stable marriages by allowing individuals to make informed choices about their partners. Because Bonda marriages are based on mutual affection and practical compatibility, the rate of divorce within the community is relatively low. However, when separations do occur, they are usually handled with traditional customs and family mediation, often after much deliberation. The freedom of choice offered through *Selani Dingo* ensures that most marriages are entered into with a strong foundation of understanding and shared expectations, reinforcing social cohesion within the tribe.

Marriage in Bonda society follows strict kinship rules, prohibiting unions within the same village or kin group. The *Selani Dingo* serves as a vibrant social hub where girls, from the age of eight or nine, gather in the evenings, beautifully dressed, to welcome boys from nearby villages. These interactions, filled with songs, playful banter, and gift exchanges, foster friendships and eventual romantic connections. Respect and restraint are upheld, with widowed women acting as guardians to ensure decorum.

A key tradition is alternate singing, where boys and girls exchange melodies, expressing affection and promises of a future together. If a boy's love is reciprocated, he proposes with a brass bangle; the girl’s acceptance signifies engagement. While not all connections lead to marriage, the dormitory remains a cherished space where social bonds form, shaping the lives and memories of Bonda youth.

In recent years, it has been observed that, despite its cultural significance, this tradition faces challenges in the modern era due to external influences such as formal education, economic migration, and exposure to non-tribal customs. While some younger Bondas are adopting alternative ways of forming

relationships, many still uphold *Selani Dingo* as an integral part of their heritage and identity. It represents not just a courtship practice but a deeply embedded social mechanism that reflects the values of independence, personal agency, and communal harmony within Bonda society. Preserving such customs is vital for maintaining the cultural integrity of indigenous communities like the Bonda, ensuring that their traditional ways of life continue to thrive amid the pressures of modernization and globalization.

Types of Marriages in Bonda Society

The Bonda tribe observes two distinct types of marriage practices: 1. Marriage by Mutual Consent (*Sebung*), 2. Marriage by Capture (*Guboi*)

While both forms are recognised within Bonda society, marriage by mutual consent, or *Sebung*, is regarded as the ideal and prestigious form. Though marriage by capture (*Guboi*) does occur, *Sebung* remains the preferred and more common practice.

Marriage by Mutual Consent (*Sebung*)

Marriage by mutual consent is highly structured, socially sanctioned, and involves elaborate, often costly ceremonies that signify the union as a prosperous and prestigious affair. It is generally the pursuit of wealthier families, as the expense and complexity make it a difficult ambition for poorer households.

In this form of marriage, social approval is nearly guaranteed, and formal negotiations are more of a tradition than a necessity. The pairing between young men and women is typically established during their communal dormitory visits, where they meet and develop bonds. When these visits conclude, families often speculate about potential matches, waiting for confirmation from their children. Upon being informed of the choice, the parents readily bless the relationship, initiating the wedding rituals.

Engagement and Betrothal Rituals

Once parental consent is given, the family of the groom consults with the *Kudo* a community council and the news of the engagement is shared with villagers, extended family, and other close relations. The engagement is marked by a formal visit from a small group of the groom's friends and family to the bride's home, where they are warmly received, though they do not partake in food there. The bride, adhering to custom, initially feigns reluctance, hiding or resisting the visitors' request. Eventually, she joins them, accompanied by a close friend, to the groom's village.

Upon arrival, the bride adheres to customs by neither eating nor sleeping in the groom's house; instead, she takes food from friends and sleeps in the girls' dormitory. During her three- to four-day stay, the bride participates in various household tasks, such as fetching water, husking grains, or gathering wood. These tasks serve as a way for the groom's family to observe her capabilities, patience, and adaptability. The groom, meanwhile, is also evaluated by his future in-laws through his participation in farming work, showcasing his skills in the fields.

After this visit, a second visit may occur within a month, with similar customs observed. This second visit signifies the end of the engagement period, and the actual wedding date is often set for the month of Push (January-February). In some cases, the wedding may be delayed by a year to allow the families time to gather resources for the occasion. Should there be an extended wait, the couple may resume dormitory visits during the next rainy season if they wish.

Wedding Ceremony and Celebration

The wedding day is an occasion of great festivity. A date, chosen by the village astrologer (*Disati*), sees the groom's family travel to the bride's village with an array of cooked foods and rice beer, sharing a meal with her relatives. Afterward, they return to the groom's village with the bride, who brings rice, meat, and beer to distribute to her new family.

Upon arrival, the bride is ceremonially welcomed by her mother-in-law, who performs a ritual with turmeric water and rice paste to bless her. Elders and spiritual figures, including the village priest and shaman, offer blessings. The groom is then playfully forced into a room with the bride, where the two share a brief, symbolic confinement a practice that gives social recognition to their union as husband and wife.

Following this, a grand feast is organised, attended by family, friends, and community members, including *Kudo* members and *Sorubhais* (close kin). The wealthier families may arrange a more lavish celebration with buffalo sacrifices. In such cases, the groom's maternal uncle may lead a procession, taking a buffalo adorned with garlands to various relatives and family friends. The buffalo is ceremoniously fed by each household visited.

On the wedding day, the animal is further adorned with turmeric, flowers, and cloth before being ritually slaughtered. As it dies, attendees rush forward to cut pieces of meat amidst shouts and cheers, sometimes leading to minor injuries, which are brushed off in the spirit of festivity. The meat is then shared in a communal feast, solidifying the bond between the families and the community.

This vibrant and multifaceted celebration exemplifies the deep cultural and ritual significance of marriage by mutual consent among the Bonda people.

Marriage by Capture

Marriage by capture among the Bonda community represents a distinct form of union that is less elaborate and more cost-effective compared to other traditional marriage practices. Rooted in symbolic or actual abduction, this practice involves taking a bride sometimes with force followed by negotiations for parental consent and the customary bride price. Anthropologist Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf (1943) emphasized that the capture is often symbolic, as Bonda women rarely marry against their will; if a girl disapproves of her captor, she is likely to escape. Despite its unconventional nature, marriage by

capture is preferred under specific social conditions, such as when a young man fails to secure a partner at the *Selani Dingo*, when remarriage is sought by widowers or divorcees, or when financial constraints prevent a man from affording traditional marriage rites.

The process typically involves a swift and discreet abduction, where a young man, aided by his friends, captures a girl from her dormitory, marketplace, or fields. If she struggles or resists, the act continues until she is taken to the groom's home. A crucial moment follows: if she accepts food offered by her captor, it symbolizes her consent; refusal signals rejection. The next morning, she returns to her home, escorted by a delegation bearing sago-palm wine as a peace offering, initiating formal marriage discussions. While marriage by capture operates within the cultural framework of Bonda society, it raises questions about consent, gender dynamics, and economic stratification, illustrating how tradition adapts to social constraints while maintaining symbolic legitimacy.

Preferential Marriage among the Bonda Tribe

In Bonda society, marriage is based on individual choice rather than prescribed kinship obligations. Unlike some neighboring tribes, Bonda individuals are not expected to marry cousins, as such unions are strictly prohibited due to cultural perceptions of kinship. Verrier Elwin (1950) notes that Bonda youths enjoy an unprecedented degree of freedom in selecting their spouses, unbound by familial pressures. While sororate marriage is absent, a rare form of senior levirate marriage exists, where an elder brother may marry his deceased younger brother's widow if both consent. This contrasts with other tribal practices, where the younger brother typically assumes this role. Elwin attributes this preference to age compatibility, as younger widows are more likely to suit elder brothers. The proposal for such a marriage is symbolized by the elder brother placing his foot over the widow's; if she accepts, she remains still, and otherwise, she withdraws. However, these marriages can lead to disputes, as illustrated by a case where unresolved bride

price payments resulted in conflict and forced remarriage, underscoring the complexities of marital negotiations in Bonda society.

Polygyny among the Bonda Tribe

Polygyny among the Bonda tribe is generally uncommon unless specific circumstances make it necessary. For a Bonda man, having multiple wives involves significant responsibilities: it means constructing additional houses, supporting more children, and procuring greater quantities of food all of which can be burdensome. As a result, polygynous marriages are typically only pursued when additional labor is required, such as for agricultural tasks, or when the first wife is unable to bear children or is considered too old to fulfill the husband's sexual needs.

In polygynous arrangements, there is no formal restriction on the number of wives a man may take. In such cases, while the first wife is generally acquired through customary negotiations, subsequent wives may include unmarried girls, married or divorced women, or even widows. Despite these allowances, polygynous marriages within the Bonda community are often fraught with interpersonal challenges, as co-wives frequently engage in conflicts driven by jealousy and competition. Such tensions often make these marriages difficult to sustain.

If the first wife is barren, a second marriage can be arranged with her consent. However, if the husband's motivation is primarily for sexual gratification, the first wife typically disapproves. She may respond with anger, refusing to eat for days, breaking household items, or in extreme cases, even deserting her husband. If the husband proceeds to marry without her approval, it can lead to significant strife, and in some cases, abandonment of the marriage by the first wife.

A notable cultural aspect of Bonda polygyny is the arrangement that co-wives do not live under the same roof; instead, each wife resides in a separate hut with her own children. This separation reduces direct confrontation but does

not eliminate feelings of rivalry and resentment. Jealousy often persists, leading to strained relationships between co-wives, although occasional cases of mutual support and affection towards each other's children have been observed.

Bride Price Practices among the Bonda Community

In tribal societies, the custom of paying a bride price, also referred to as bride-wealth, holds significant cultural value in the marriage process. According to Beals and Hoijer, bride-price should not be viewed as a practice of purchasing women as property. Instead, it reflects a cultural tradition that enables the bride's family to receive compensation for the loss of a daughter, while helping the groom's family secure a spouse for their son. Similarly, dowry, in other cultures, serves not as a monetary incentive for marriage but as a means for the bride's family to assist her in establishing a financially stable household with her new husband. These customs highlight that, in many cultures, marriage is predominantly a family-oriented affair, involving more than just the interests of the bride and groom (Beals and Hoijer, 1971: 404).

The bride-price, however, should not be misconstrued as an exact transaction equating to the value of acquiring a bride. Instead, it serves as a symbolic gesture, through which the groom's family acknowledges the bride's inherent social and economic worth. This practice underscores the respect and esteem tribal societies traditionally hold for women.

Among the Bonda tribe, bride price referred to locally as *gining* is a customary requisite in nearly all types of marriages, with the exception of those involving levirate unions. Prior to marriage, the bride's and groom's families negotiate and agree upon the amount of bride price. Upon marriage, the groom's family presents the bride's family with the agreed amount, which typically includes both cash and goods. Commonly, the bride-price package comprises several cattle, pots of locally brewed liquor, and a cash sum. However, there is no fixed standard for the bride-price amount; it varies depending on negotiations between the families, the type of marriage, and the economic status of the

groom's family. For instance, a lower bride price is often paid in cases involving a widow or divorcee, as compared to arranged marriages carried out with mutual family consent. In marriages involving the capture of a married woman, double the standard bride-price is required.

Bonda men are permitted to marry outside their community, provided the bride belongs to a caste or tribe considered equal or higher in the social hierarchy. Such marriages do not carry any stigma, and men who marry outside the community are treated with the same respect as those who marry within the tribe. Although rare, Bonda men have formed marital ties with the Kamar caste, which is regarded as superior in their social framework. However, this flexibility does not extend to Bonda women, who are strictly prohibited from marrying outside their tribe.

Divorce in Bonda Society

In Bonda society, marriages are generally stable and enduring, largely due to the emphasis on mutual affection and personal compatibility between spouses. Unlike many communities where parental influence plays a strong role in marriage arrangements, Bonda youth independently select their partners. This choice is based on more than physical attraction; Bonda men and women are well acquainted with each other's habits, skills, and virtues before entering into marriage, laying a strong foundation for a lifelong partnership. Although divorce is socially permissible within the community, it is a rare and somewhat stigmatized occurrence, regarded as an undesirable disruption attributed to unfortunate circumstances or "ill fate."

Divorce in Bonda society is not taken lightly. It is a family matter requiring thoughtful deliberation, often involving extended family members to help mediate and provide support. Divorce can be initiated by either spouse on reasonable grounds, but seldom does it happen impulsively or without mutual agreement. The grounds for divorce are similar to those observed in other tribal societies and may include adultery, cruelty, harassment, economic non-cooperation, serious illness, unfaithfulness, and physical or mental disabilities.

While these are common reasons for divorce, a unique aspect within Bonda culture is the acceptance of a second wife if the first wife is unable to bear children. In such cases, the husband may be granted a second marriage, though the first wife typically retains her status and is treated with respect. Generally, Bonda men do not seek additional wives simply due to childlessness; however, if the couple agrees, it is a solution sometimes pursued for family continuity. The first wife, often more mature, is valued for her economic partnership, while the second, younger wife is seen as fulfilling a companionable and intimate role.

The process of divorce in this community is relatively straightforward and involves a traditional approach that underscores both familial involvement and social customs. When a husband decides to divorce his wife and forcibly sends her away, she returns to her parental village to inform her family of what has transpired. In response, a delegation typically composed of her father, brothers, and other male relatives travels to her husband's home to advocate on her behalf. They attempt to persuade him to take her back, aiming to resolve the matter amicably and reunite the couple.

However, if these efforts fail and the husband refuses reconciliation, the wife's relatives may engage in a customary act of retribution: they kill one of his pigs before leaving. If the husband does not own a pig, he is expected to buy one specifically for this purpose. Should the pig belong to someone else, the husband must compensate its owner to avoid disputes or escalation into a serious confrontation. Failure to provide compensation typically leads to a bitter quarrel.

In cases where the husband initiates the divorce, he forfeits any claim to recover the bride price previously paid to the wife's family. Conversely, if the wife seeks the divorce, the husband retains the right to reclaim the bride price.

Following the divorce, regardless of the party responsible, the wife relinquishes all rights to her children. She is not entitled to take any children

with her, as the husband assumes full custodianship and guardianship over them, becoming their sole legitimate guardian under this tradition.

Divorce in Bonda society, while socially acceptable, is infrequent due to the careful selection of partners and the high value placed on enduring partnerships. However, when issues such as age disparity or incompatibility arise, divorce becomes a viable option, though approached with serious reflection and often as a last resort. The Bonda community's approach to marriage and divorce reflects a blend of traditional values and practical flexibility, allowing individuals the freedom to seek fulfilling relationships while maintaining cultural integrity.

Conclusion

The marriage practices of the Bonda tribe one of India's Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) serve as a vital lens to understand their unique social organization, gender dynamics, and cultural resilience. Rooted in principles of exogamy, spiritual kinship (*soru-bhai*), and clan affiliation (*kuda*), these practices function not merely as customs but as integral social mechanisms that ensure cohesion, resource redistribution, and inter-village solidarity. Institutions such as the *Selani Dingo* (girls' dormitory) and the preference for mutual consent marriages (*Sebung*) over capture (*Guboi*) further illustrate the community's embedded norms around autonomy, courtship, and gender roles.

Significantly, the practice of younger males marrying older females, alongside the bride-price system (*gining*), highlights a reversal of dominant patriarchal patterns and offers an alternative model of marital authority and valuation of women's roles. Although polygyny and divorce exist, they are regulated and infrequent, reflecting the tribe's emphasis on social balance and reproductive strategy.

However, these practices are not static. With increasing interaction with neighboring communities, state institutions, and mainstream society, the Bonda are experiencing gradual yet notable changes in their marriage customs,

age norms, and gender roles. Integration efforts, economic challenges, and exposure to dominant cultural narratives are contributing to the transformation of traditional matrimonial systems.

In this evolving context, Bonda marriage practices should not be viewed as relics of the past, but rather as dynamic, living traditions that reflect a negotiation between cultural continuity and change. These practices offer critical insights into the adaptive strategies of indigenous communities as they navigate socio-economic transitions and processes of cultural assimilation.

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Article: Territorial Identities and Voting Preferences in India

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Territorial Identities and Voting Preferences in India

--Erram Naveen Kumar

Abstract

One of political science's most significant practice topics is voters' choice. Typical models presuppose voting as a logical decision based on non-policy information (such as social identification and personality) and policy viewpoints (such as important issues). While these models account for some of the more noticeable aspects of elections, they also highlight significant irregularities that have eluded explanation. In particular, policy stances and social identities do not mix in merely additive fashion; instead, they fight to influence voter preferences. This model not only explains several key anomalies in voter choice but also suggests new directions for research in both political science and cognitive science (Jenke & Huettel, 2020). Studies on Territorial identity and voting behaviour are under-researched in the Indian political scenario compared to the above-mentioned factors. Thus, the study on Identity and vote preference is a significant aspect of research undertaken in the domain of electoral studies. This article examines the impact of territorial identities on voters' preference for the choosing of National or Regional Parties in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

Keywords: Voter Preference, Territorial Identities, Regional, National, Political Parties, India, Party Competition Systems.

Introduction

Voting preferences among the electorate primarily operates on the lines of caste, language, ethnic identities, state-policies, and religion. As per the Pew Research Centre study, 16% of Sikhs state that they voted for Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in 2019. SAD is a regional party representing Punjabi interests; according to the census, 77% of India's Sikhs live in Punjab. The case of Shiromani Akali Dal shows that religion is tied to the regional parties in India. Although these categories have been instrumental for a party to mobilize

voters towards their camp, sub-national and National identities have become dominant categories that overlap these criterions among the voters. These preferences are instrumental in polarizing voters to a political party advocating certain ideologies. In this context there is a need to look into the factors of sub-national and national identities function during the elections. The intricate interplay of caste, language, ethnic, regional, and national identities significantly influence electoral outcomes in India, underscoring the complexity of voter preferences and the pivotal role these factors play in shaping the political landscape.

Identity as a concept is fluid made up by categories of language, land, caste, traditions. Language becomes an important marker of identity that can be used to define the other (Kaviraj, 2010). It becomes a defining line among communities and hence demarcate boundaries among the voters, then becoming an instrumental factor for a regional or a national party to pull voters towards their camp. There are various examples where regional parties have looked upon language as a benchmark to start movements. One such striking instance was marked when the newly formed Gorkha Jan Mukti Morcha in 2007 gained prominence after a strong opposition to the implementation of Bengali as a language in Darjeeling hills, a district in West Bengal with a dominant number of Nepali speaking population, the party could successfully furnish the notion of territoriality while winning seats during 2011 and 2016 assembly elections changing the political scenario in the region. In essence, the dynamic nature of identity, particularly shaped by language, caste, and territoriality, serves as a potent force in political mobilization, as exemplified by instances like the Gorkha Jan Mukti Morcha's success in leveraging language-based opposition to redefine political landscapes and secure electoral dividends.

Politics around land also presents a vantage point in understanding identity politics. Though in very different ways, the movements' advocacy of regional identity politics might be successfully translated into the field of electoral politics. Mamata Banerjee's regional Bengali nationalism in West Bengal

effortlessly integrated the land wars in the region into her political campaign to safeguard, as she puts it, "ma, mati, manush." The politicization of land by the Trinamool Congress under Mamata Banerjee can be seen as an ideal instance where the metaphor of land was subsumed into her political campaign against the developmental policies brought in by the CPI-M government in West Bengal. This movement under Mamata Banerjee was instrumental in her party winning 184 out of 294 seats in the 2011 assembly elections. Hence, identity influences voter's preferences and has received increasing attention in election studies and political psychology. In the realm of politics, the strategic incorporation of regional land issues, underscores how the politicization of land can profoundly shape electoral outcomes, highlighting the discrete interplay between identity, political strategies, and voter preferences

Numerous academic works delve into the complexities of territorial identity. Some noteworthy literature includes Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities," which explores how territorial boundaries shape national identities. Additionally, Rogers Brubaker's "Ethnicity without Groups" provides insights into the fluid nature of territorial identities. For a regional focus, Anthony D. Smith's "National Identity" delves into the historical roots and dynamics of territorial nationalism. Overall, these works contribute valuable perspectives on the multifaceted nature of identity in the context of territory.

In the present scenario, Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) "Double Engine Sarkar"[1] narrative has gained prominence. During various election campaigns and rallies in the country BJP leaders have actively portrayed the regional parties as anti-development factors working against the collective interest of the nation. BJP has actively worked to curb the space carved out by the regional parties which has resulted in creating a vacuum between the sub-national identity and national identities among the voters. In the pretext of a high-octane campaign centred around Nationalism for Lok Sabha elections -

[1] It is BJP's metaphor used in State Elections in India to bring the same BJP government at the centre and state level.

2019, there is a need to make an inquiry on how sub-national & national identities affect the vote preferences. This compelling development in the field of electoral politics subsumed under the nuances of sub-national and national identities certain intriguing questions arise. Do voters cast vote for national parties or regional parties based on their identities? How do voters prefer their vote choice based on National or State identity? In this context, research on identities and vote preference draws attention in the domain of Indian electoral politics and survey studies.

The Identity of National and Sub-nationalities are common in the minds of Indian voters. In particular, the politics of regional and national parties has an important role in shaping the Indian Political Spectrum.

Table1: The Party type wise no. of Member of Parliament (MP)s across the 3 Lok Sabha Elections in India

S. No	Year of Election	National Party MPs	Regional Party MPs	Others
1	2009	372	162	9
2	2014	376	164	3
3	2019	393	146	4

Source: Election Commission of India

The Election Commission of India (ECI) now designates parties as National Parties in accordance with its prescribed rules and acts. My calculation of the number of elected legislators from recognized national parties is based on ECI notifications. For regional parties, I consider factors such as the party's territorial activities, functional regional alignment, and its spread. The term "regional parties" encompasses state-recognized parties and other unrecognized parties at the state level.

Regional parties, including state-recognized and other unacknowledged entities, assert their regional sentiments, pride, and culture. Their political presence primarily revolves in and around the core state of their base. However, a notable limitation is the absence of a standardized measurement or definition in the process of recognizing or determining a party as regional. To address this gap, scholars in Indian Politics and party politics must delve into formulating a comprehensive definition and establishing a litmus test for the identification of regional parties in a more general sense.

The Table 1 comprehensively gives the inference that, the number of Lok Sabha MPs elected from National Parties are predominant than regional parties. However, the number of MPs from Regional Parties are also significant in numbers. The rising number of MPs from the National Parties indicates the eclipse of National Parties in the Lok Sabha.

Table 2: The Party type wise No. of Legislators in the two election cycles of Indian Assemblies

S. No	Election Cycle	National Party MLAs	Regional Party MLAs	Others	Total
1	2014-19	2803	1270	53	4126
2	2019-24	2478	1566	79	4126

Source: Election Commission of India

The table 2 represents a comparative overview of the distribution of legislators across different party types in two distinct election cycles of Indian Legislative Assemblies, 2014-19 and 2019-24, The election cycle, spanning from 2019 to 2024, reveals a clear distribution of legislators. During this period, there were 2478 National Party's Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA)s, 1566 Regional Party MLAs, and 79 legislators categorized under the 'Others'

classification. The table serves as a snapshot of states and Union Territories except Jammu and Kashmir during the specified time frames, offering insights into the numerical representation of different party types in the legislative bodies.

I have also compared the trend of National Parties presence in state assemblies. The table 2 is giving the inference that, on an average 2/3 of MLAs belong to National Parties. However, the rise of MLAS of regional parties is also an increasing trend that is clearly visible in the State Assemblies. In totality, it also indicates that, the competition dichotomy of National and Regional Parties is stronger in the Assemblies.

Review of Literature:

Voters are assumed to choose candidates whose policy stances most closely align with their own in canonical rational choice models of voter preferences. Yet, much of the electorate often appears to prioritize identity over policy considerations. (Jenke & Huettel, 2020). Jenke and Huettel use the paradigm of social psychology to study the patterns in voter preferences using measurement techniques of social groups, variables used to determine political participation, emotional reactivity and lastly the group identity of the voters. With the study, they argue that affective polarisation can become a significant vote arbitrator and a contributing factor to implicit political prejudice when voters' identities are the primary motivator behind their choice of candidates.

While most prominent studies suggest that voter's identity, especially the social groupings and community interests play a key role in the voting preferences, an important layering of community formations lie in regional politics. As organised groups working together in the political, economic, cultural, and military spheres, regions have unique identities, languages, customs, and cultures. A number of discourse analyses hover around the theme of regional parties' increasing influence in Indian politics. However recent electoral trends reveal a surprising degree of stability in the balance of power between national and regional parties. (Vaishnav, 2019). The regional

identity politics that the movements espoused could be successfully channelled into the domain of electoral politics, albeit in very different ways. In West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee's regional Bengali nationalism easily incorporated the land wars there into her political campaign to protect *ma, mati, manush*.

Many authors contend that under the BJP administration, India is becoming a majoritarian state and is either now an established ethnic democracy or is rapidly approaching that position. The majoritarian worldview in India has its roots in Hindu nationalism, which makes the majoritarian tendencies even more problematic as political decisions are thus taken in accordance with Hindu nationalist ideas, with Hindu rights given preference (Witt, 2021). At the same time, the success of the BJP in four of the five states risks reinforcing Narendra Modi's long-held belief that elections in India are not won on economic grounds, but are rather determined by identity politics. (Jaffrelot, 2022)

The scholarly discourse on India's political landscape under the BJP rule, particularly in relation to the emergence of a majoritarian state, has been a subject of extensive analysis. Jaffrelot (2022) asserts that India is undergoing a transformation towards majoritarianism, with the BJP's policies and electoral strategies contributing to this shift.

A foundational aspect of this argument is the prominence of Hindutva ideology within the BJP. Witt (2021) contends that this ideological framework, rooted in Hindu nationalism, has led to political decisions aligning with Hindu nationalist ideas, favouring Hindu rights. This inclination, as highlighted by Jaffrelot, poses challenges as it potentially marginalizes religious and ethnic minorities. Policy implementations under the BJP, such as the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), have come under scrutiny for their perceived discriminatory impact on Muslim communities. This critique supports the notion that the BJP's governance is marked by majoritarian tendencies, reinforcing the concerns raised by Jaffrelot regarding the prioritization of Hindu interests.

Furthermore, the BJP's electoral success in states, as noted by Jaffrelot, reinforces the belief that identity politics, particularly centred around Hindu identity, plays a pivotal role in winning elections. This perspective challenges the traditional understanding of electoral victories based on economic considerations, signalling a shift towards majoritarian-driven electoral strategies. Cultural nationalism, as promoted by the BJP, is identified as another key factor contributing to majoritarian governance. Critics argue that the emphasis on a specific cultural identity, often aligned with Hindu values, may contribute to the exclusion of other cultural and religious groups, reflecting a majoritarian trajectory in governance.

Regional nationalism has long been a source of conflict for mainstream Indian nationalism. The Indian National Congress (INC) could barely have avoided it under the weight of the nation's diverse regional identities. In actuality, it evolved into an interregional alliance of forces over time. Robust mobilising devices that can win over a large portion of the populace to fight a regional conflict are regional identities expressed via food and land. However, they might need to travel better and be more effective in other situations. Rather, such scaled orientations produce a situation in which the regionalised articulation and forms of resistance to land dispossession may in effect preclude national mobilisation (Bedi, 2013). Politics against dispossession has been and will probably remain dominated by local, one-issue organisations that strategically exploit supralocal coalitions when necessary. Bharucha argues that the evolving regionalization of interests indicates a shift toward issue-based policy-making at the local level. The state government's discretion and objectives wield considerable influence over post-election policies. To encourage politicians to establish a positive reputation, emphasis should be placed on incentivizing good governance and coherent policy direction. The Indian electorate holds the key to shaping the rules of the political game in this era of uncertain verdicts.

In August 1963, the Anti-Hindi Agitation committee of the DMK was established, and a decade later, Karunanidhi, a prominent DMK leader,

assumed responsibility for orchestrating and leading a meticulously planned protest. The party strategically leveraged the language issue, culminating in its electoral victory in 1967, with DMK's leaders, acting as cultural entrepreneurs, successfully instilled Hindi-phobia, orchestrating anti-Hindi protests that varied in intensity. These protests, in turn, contributed to the defeat of the monolithic Congress party in the 1967 Tamil Nadu elections. While the linguistic factor proved instrumental in the DMK's rise to power, the passage suggests a limitation in its ability to restore Tamil to its former cultural prominence (Chidambaram, 1987)

Voting is not an act of choice, based on a rational weighing of alternatives, or a way to further self-interest, but an expression of group allegiance. Ferree and Horowitz delve into the concept of allegiance, framing it as a construct deeply rooted in identity. They propose that political party allegiance, being forged from the raw material of identity, transcends the realm of negotiation. In their analysis, individuals align with a political party not merely based on policy considerations but as an intrinsic part of their self-identity.

This perspective aligns with broader discussions on the social identity theory in political psychology, where individuals are seen as motivated by a desire for positive social identity and group belonging. Literature exploring this phenomenon often highlights the emotional and psychological dimensions of political affiliation, shedding light on the non-negotiable nature of allegiance to a particular political group. (Ferree & Horowitz, 2007)

Methodology and Data:

The Hypothesis of the study is that the State or Regional identity claiming voters are more likely to vote for State or Regional political parties in India. This paper also intrigues the aspect of how voters prefer to cast their vote based on their national or state identities.

The hypothesis posits that voters who strongly identify with their state or region are more inclined to cast their votes in favour of political parties that

prioritize and represent the specific interests of that state or region. This notion suggests a link between voter identity and party affiliation, emphasizing a preference for regional parties that are perceived to better understand and advocate for the unique concerns and aspirations of the local populace.

This study resorts to deploying Quantitative methods of analysis using the available National Election Survey (NES) conducted by Lokniti in 2019 from the archives of CSDS and using the framework of Regression Analysis Model. From the Data set of NES Post-Poll Survey-2019, I have chosen the standard question regarding Territorial Identities (How do you identify yourself – Indian or State) and Vote Choice (whom did you vote for). The unit of analysis for the study is Lok Sabha Elections held in 2019.

In this study, the independent variable is defined as the level of national or state identity claimed by voters, while the dependent variable is the vote preference of these individuals. To provide more specificity and operationalize the dependent variable, it is redefined as the vote preference for party categories, specifically distinguishing between National and Regional Parties. The hypothesis suggests that individuals with a stronger national identity may be more inclined to support parties with a broader, national focus, while those with a pronounced state identity may exhibit a preference for parties that champion regional interests. By categorizing parties into National and Regional groups, this redefined dependent variable aims to capture the nuanced ways in which voters align their preferences based on the interplay between their identity orientations and the perceived ideological and policy orientations of political parties. This distinction allows for a more granular examination of how national and state identity dynamics influence the electoral choices within the context of party categories, shedding light on the complex relationship between identity and political affiliation.

The control variables are used in this model to know the impact of the Dependent Variable. In this process of checking the relation between identity and vote preference. The assumption is that above control variables are

determining factors to check the relationship between Identity and Vote preference.

By systematically integrating these control variables, the research seeks to isolate and understand the specific impact of national or state identity on the electorate's inclination towards different party categories. This methodological approach enhances the rigor of the analysis, allowing for a more comprehensive exploration of the complex dynamics that underlie the interplay between identity orientations and political choices in the context of the identified party categories. Both the main variables fall in the category of nominal scale.

For the purpose of recording, the used variables for the study are identity, party type, modes of party competition in states, education and language. Identity is recorded as National identity (Indian) and regional /state identity as per voter's responses. Party Type is to analyse Vote preference for regional party or National Party. I recorded the party type as National Party and Regional Party as per Election Commission status in 2019 elections. Party Competition Type is basically party competition in the Indian states. It is recorded as the competition in states such as National Party vs. National Party, National Party vs. Regional Party; Regional Party vs. Regional Party. Education is recorded as Non-Literate, Secondary and Higher levels of education to know their attitudes about identity and impact on vote preference. Language is an important factor of dichotomy between Regional and National party politics. The researcher has recorded the languages as Hindi and Non-Hindi.

In this study, the research question has two categorical variables. Hence the chi-square test is appropriate to check the relationship between the variables. In the Pearson's Chi-Squared test, the p values are less than or equal to 0.067, therefore the values are statistically significant.

In this comprehensive research framework, identity is meticulously documented, distinguishing between National identity, signifying a sense of

being Indian, and regional/state identity based on individual voter responses. The dependent variable, categorized into Party Type, scrutinizes vote preference, specifically discerning whether voters align with National Parties or Regional Parties. The classification of Party Type is derived from the Election Commission's status in the 2019 elections, providing a reliable basis for analysing voting behaviour. Additionally, the study incorporates Party Competition Type as a vital control variable, capturing the intricate dynamics of political competition within Indian states. This variable discerns the nature of electoral contests, categorizing them as National Party vs. National Party, National Party vs. Regional Party, and Regional Party vs. Regional Party. Such a nuanced exploration enables a thorough understanding of how party competition influences the relationship between identity and vote preference.

Specifically, I am using the term Territorial Identity rather than Geographical Identity in this article to attribute the Identities of Sub-National and National. As per the Cairn International, Through a shift in scale, territorial identity—originally an individual's sense of being bound to a place—is politically instrumentalised in creating regional or national identity. As to Fabio Pollice, the territory is essentially a relational place that develops over time due to cultural sedimentation; the identity relationship between a community and the space it occupies serves as the driving force behind this process. whereas the notion of Geographic contains the limitation that it doesn’t hold the lived space community all the time. However, there were numerous debates on these two aspects in the academia of geography.

Education is another integral control variable, categorized into Not-Literate, Secondary, and Higher levels, to discern how varying levels of education impact attitudes towards identity and, consequently, influence vote preferences. The language factor, crucial in the dichotomy between Regional and National party politics, is considered by recording languages as Hindi and Non-Hindi. This comprehensive approach to data collection ensures a nuanced analysis, offering insights into the factors affecting the electoral framework in the Indian scenario.

The Logistic regression model is used to determine the effects of Territorial identities on vote choice and also to know the impact of control variables. These regressions were performed on R using the zelig function. The Regression model can be expressed as follows.

Logit $\pi = \beta0 + \beta1$ (Identity of Indian) + $\beta2$ (Identity of Regional / State) + $\beta3$ (both) + Control Variables. Where π is the preference of Vote choice for the Category of the Party.

Discussion and Analysis:

To find out the effects of the Territorial identities on voter preference, as an initial step, I have taken the frequency table of Identity. The outcomes of the frequency table are as follows. 54 % of the respondents claim to be of Indian identity, whereas 24 % respondents claim to be with Regional or state identity and 21.6 % of respondents claim both identity such as Indian and State identities.

Table 3: Frequency of Independent Variable (Identity)

Identity	Count	Valid percent	Percent	Responses, %	Cumulative responses, %
Indian	6313	54.4	26.0	54.4	54.4
State identity	2783	24.0	11.5	24.0	78.4
Both	2508	21.6	10.3	21.6	100.0
#Total	11604	100	47.9	100	
<NA>	12632		52.1		

Source: CSDS-Lokniti Post-Poll Survey, 2019

Table 4: Frequency of Vote choice for Party Category

Vote choice for Party Category	Count	Valid percent	Percent	Responses, %	Cumulative responses, %
state Parties	5642	29.5	23.3	29.5	29.5
National Parties	13459	70.5	55.5	70.5	100.0
#Total	19101	100	78.8	100	
<NA>	5135		21.2		

Source: CSDS-Lokniti Post-Poll Survey, 2019

Table 4 illustrates that, the vote choice of respondents for the state parties or regional parties are 29.5 % and for the national parties is 70.65 % in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

Table 5: The Cross Tabulation of Vote Choice for Party Category & Territorial Identity

	Vote choice for Party Category	
	state Parties	National Parties
Identity		
Indian	26.7	73.3
State identity	35.5	64.5
Both	32.8	67.2
#Total cases	2784	6475

Source: CSDS-Lokniti Post-Poll Survey, 2019

This table shows Cross Table Analysis of Identity and Vote Choice for National & Regional parties. In the context of voter preferences in India, the survey analysis reveals distinctive patterns based on the respondents' identification with national and regional identities. Among those who identified themselves solely as Indian, a significant majority of 73% expressed a likelihood to vote for National parties, while 27% indicated a preference for regional parties. This suggests a prevalent inclination towards national political affiliations within this demographic segment.

Conversely, when considering respondents who identified primarily with their State, a different dynamic emerges. In this group, 65% of voters are inclined towards National parties, while 35% lean towards regional parties. This indicates a more balanced distribution of preferences, with a notable percentage favouring regional political entity within the category of State identity.

An intriguing intersection is observed among respondents who identified with both National and State identities. Within this dual identity category, 67% of voters expressed a preference for National Parties, and 33% indicated a likelihood to vote for regional parties. This pattern suggests that even among those acknowledging both Indian and State identities, a clear majority aligns with national political affiliations, albeit with a slightly reduced margin compared to the exclusively Indian identity group.

These findings contour the complexity of voter preferences in India, with identity considerations playing a discernible role in shaping electoral choices. The distinct patterns observed among those identifying solely as Indian, State-centric individuals, and those acknowledging both identities provide valuable insights for understanding the layered dynamics of political allegiance within the Indian electorate.

The Table 6 gives the inference that, the layering of Party Competition with Identity and Vote Choice. In the States where the Party Competition system between National and Regional Parties (NP Vs. RP), the respondents are more likely to vote for National Parties, who are claiming with Indian Identity. It is also observed that, who are claiming regional / state identity, those are more likely to vote in a balanced manner between both the party categories.

In the states where Party Competition systems exist between National Parties (NP Vs. NP), 92 % are more likely to vote for national parties and interestingly who claim regional identity, those are also more likely to vote for National Parties.

In the states where Party Competition system exists between the regional parties (RP Vs. RP), the respondents are more likely to vote for Regional Parties, who identify themselves with Indian Identity. It is also observed that 83 % of respondents with regional identity are more likely to vote for regional political parties. At the outset we can conclude that from the comprehensive layered table, Territorial identities and vote preference is totally co-related

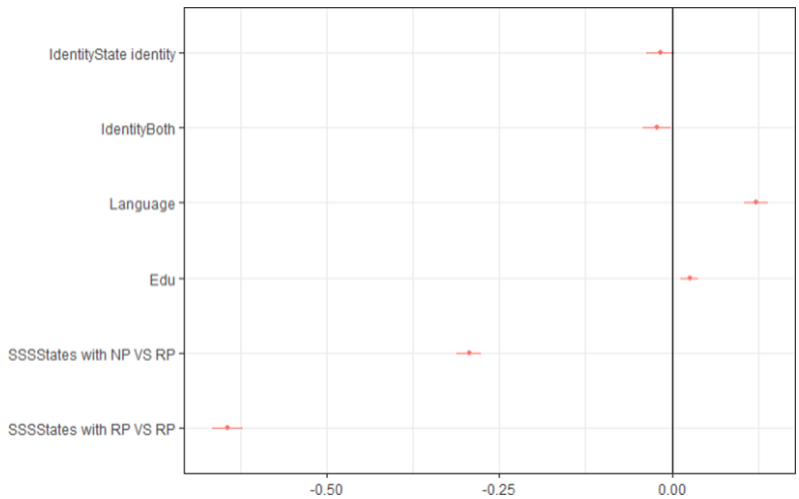
with the layering of the Party Competition system. The Regression Analysis model too validates the same argument.

Table 6: Layered Cross Tabulation

			Vote choice for Party Category	
			state Parties	National Parties
State Types				
States with NP VS RP	Identity	Indian	32.2	67.8
		State identity	41.7	58.3
		Both	43.8	56.2
		#Total cases	1274	2220
States with NP vs NP	Identity	Indian	8.5	91.5
		State identity	4.8	95.2
		Both	8.2	91.8
		#Total cases	314	3823
States with RP VS RP	Identity	Indian	69.2	30.8
		State identity	82.9	17.1
		Both	69.0	31.0
		#Total cases	1196	432

Source: Source: CSDS-Lokniti Post-Poll Survey, 2019

The Plot of Regression Analysis:



Source: Author draws the plot with the data of CSDS-Lokniti NES-2019 Post-Poll Survey

The Results of the study-based logit regression model show that the Voters (respondents) identify themselves as state identity compared to Indians, they are less likely to vote for National parties. But it is not statistically significant, hence the hypothesis is null and void. Those who identify themselves as both compared to Indians are less likely to vote for National Parties. It is statistically significant slightly, but it also does not concretely validate the hypothesis. Those Voters are Hindi speaking, compared to non-Hindi and are more likely to vote for National Parties. Statistically highly significant. Higher the level of Education of voters increases, voters are more likely to vote for National Parties. Statistically highly significant. States, where there is party competition between National party vs regional party, in those states' voters are less likely to vote for National parties, which is statistically highly significant and States, where there is party competition between Regional Party vs. Regional Party, in those states' voters are likely to Vote for Regional Parties, which is statistically highly significant. Based on this regression model results, I am arguing that the party competition in the states matters while making the vote of choice in comparison with the claimed identity of the voter. It is also observed that, the Language also plays a crucial role in the preference of voting choice while choosing between National and Regional Parties.

The impact of voters' identity on elections requires closer scrutiny. To the degree one is concerned about the regional connotation in national election scenarios, formations of identity through party types, languages and intersectional elements provide an additional analytic lever-age. Insofar, with the aid of available data, it was evident to notate identity playing a crucial role in determining the course of election.

Conclusion:

We can conclude that identity is not the primary force behind the preference among voters; but the controlling factors like party competition type in states, language and education affect the voter preference. The political landscape of India unfolds a narrative shaped by the forces of identity politics, regional

dynamics, and the ascendancy of majoritarian ideologies under BJP rule. The conventional wisdom of rational choice models faces a formidable challenge as voters appear to prioritize identity over policy considerations, thereby redefining the contours of electoral decision-making. As India navigates the complexities of its political scenario, the liaison of regionalism, majoritarianism, and identity politics will likely continue to shape the contours of its democratic experiment. The electorate holds a pivotal role in the political game, transforming itself to a dynamic force capable of reshaping the common interest and steering the nation towards a future defined by inclusivity, diversity, and robust democratic values.

Identity politics is an umbrella term, it includes factors such as the religious identity, caste, social group and other cultural aspects in India. The study is focused mainly on territorial identities, religious identity, social identity or caste and cultural aspects such as their daily life style pertaining to their own cultures such as local phenomena of *Basavanna*'s[2] principles in Karnataka, *Bathukamma*[3] festival in Telangana and other symbolic local cultural rituals or habits.

At the regional level, the evolving regionalization of interests signals a shift toward issue-based policy-making, where state governments wield considerable influence over post-election policies. This localization of politics underlines the importance of incentivizing good governance and coherent policy direction to align with the diverse needs of the electorate.

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[2] Basavanna is Lingayat Social Reformer in India spreading across particular regions of Karnataka, Maharashtra and Telangana.
[3] Bathukamma is the festival of flowers celebrated by women in Telangana to worship nature.

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Article: The Global Pandemics: A Sociological Approach

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The Global Pandemics: A Sociological Approach

--Bibhuti Bhushan Malik & Vijay Laxmi Mall &

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Abstract

The sociology of everyday life, especially during the coronavirus pandemic vis-à-vis COVID-19, has undergone hardship and challenge beyond doubt. Till now, people also lived in bad shape, surrounded by bitter anxiety and fear psychosis. If not oversimplified, both coronavirus and COVID-19 in unison have adversely affected the social space and human relationships covering their family, kinship and allied life. The irony is that the two value-ridden and intriguing institutions, coronavirus and COVID-19, are not understood, and most people are confused about them. The conceptualisation of both has not yet been done systematically and adequately. When most people are stranded, unaware of their genesis and aftermath, the duo inexorably have ravaged humankind. Their fastest surge and spread brought a severe pandemic. Hence, the extant format of COVID-19 is discursive, and likewise, it dares to de-shape the normative life of people. Cutting across the political economy and socio-historical barriers, COVID-19 forcefully entered everywhere. On the one hand, the failure of the highly specialised technocratic healthcare of flamboyant modernity and, on the other hand, the lack of scientificity of ideas and knowledge have created a significant vacuum and restlessness for and among people. The intense health-related imbroglio has overtly vitiated normal peace and the psychological edge of people. Problems of labour migration, exclusion and belligerent human suffering are on the rise. This is owing to the negligence of the hegemony of the super-state and its lacklustre governing machinery. The COVID-19 and corona pandemics and vice versa have bewildered most people to such an extent that rising tension and turmoil have pushed them into the extreme corner of darkness and structural suffering. In this context, the sociological approach tries to unravel hidden facts, figure out the universal duality of labour, and, likewise, focus on the state of

condition diffused by coronavirus in society. In this exercise, an attempt is made to attain, contain and address righteously the emerging crisis of the coronavirus pandemic in its present form and scenario, including adopting viable methods and alternative measures against the probable pandemic that may revisit any moment to affect humankind in future.

Keywords: Corona, COVID-19, sociology of duality, labour

Introduction

The world order, especially during the very recent time, is in deep crisis. It is interfaced with high tension and turmoil. This trend is alarming as the coronavirus pandemic and COVID-19 have ravaged people and brought severe ramifications against humankind. Structurally, the pandemic remains active in people's minds since it has induced and endangered them in various ways. During the initial outbreak, COVID-19, almost within a six-month occurrence, caused rampant ruckus and inexorable discomfort for people. The coronavirus pandemic has assaulted and jeopardised the economic and civic life of people. Homelessness and alienation grew among people across societies, cutting territorial boundaries wherein many people became poor, poverty-stricken and excluded. Most people develop severe fear psychosis besides family-level crisis. The high intensity of the pandemic has forced people to think that the coronavirus is highly deadly, incurable and outside the purview of medicine and scientific control. As experienced and witnessed, the coronavirus surge aggravated problems of all kinds, reaching every nook and corner of society. Amidst enormous unstable conditions and confusion prevalent everywhere, everybody, including educated and conscious people, had failed to adequately visualise and understand what the coronavirus pandemic is about, where it lies and to what extent it penetrates among whom. To study the coronavirus pandemic magnitude and its impact on people and society, examining the overt and covert aspects of both the coronavirus pandemic and COVID-19 is crucial. The objective is to develop a nuanced, meaningful, balanced sociological knowledge and understanding of coronavirus and COVID-19. It is expected that by engaging with a

sociological approach, methodological parameters and perspective, the plausible social implications of the coronavirus pandemic and COVID-19 can be systematically and adequately gauged and addressed. This can be systematically undertaken by examining, interpreting, and understanding the issue and challenge since both coexist in terms of the civic and social life of the people in general.

Corona and COVID-19: A Conceptual Exercise

Like any institution or aspect, coronavirus and COVID-19 together have confused almost all people. The etymology bearing the two words is plausibly simple, similar and close to each other. Both words are mutually inclusive, congruent, and coterminous, but their structure and function remain highly ambiguous. Without proper ideas and knowledge, both aspects become potential sources of upheaval and uproar among people. Regardless of the degree and kind of variation prevalent in the nature, features and character of the coronavirus or COVID-19, the people are always the worst sufferers empirically. The virus often spreads and becomes uncontrollable among people and across global boundaries, cutting economic, social, political, cultural and other barriers in such a high-risk scenario where poverty and deprivation, lack of education and general awareness and unavailability of civic amenities force people to get into a global pandemic. The paradox is that after almost five years of occurrence, most people yet do not understand the two words. They do not anticipate and oversee how much harm they receive and to what extent their life and careers are affected; the people do not adequately understand these. Suddenly, people got into the coronavirus's furious death knell, but they had at least realised the emerging pandemic and possible disease endemic. The conceptual clarity and contextual validity regarding two distinct terminologies are not yet carved out and systematically delineated. Hence, people usually believe that the coronavirus and COVID-19 together, in whatever form or content, have brought significant damage and irreparable loss to their everyday lives. To them, both had rattled their life and

careers as the fastest damage, devastation, and deluge affected them to the worst.

When the virus struck the global order, hardly any country took it seriously. The social structure could not immediately react to the menace of COVID-19. The conscious mass of people also failed to visualise its consequences. The World Health Organisation (WHO) viewed it lightly. To its primary concern, the report reflected, 'A coronavirus is a very common virus that causes infection in nose, sinuses or upper level of throat'. However, within a very short time, the coronavirus spread very fast. The International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses (ICTV), on February 11 2020, declared the virus' severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)' and accordingly added a new name to the virus. At that time, ICTV recommended that SARS-COV-2 be one of the seven types of coronaviruses. Simultaneously, the WHO recognised this and gave final approval. As per certification of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) on February 11 2020, the WHO accorded the final name of COVID-19. From that day onward, the coronavirus is given a new nomenclature known as COVID-19, diffusing the pandemic at different levels among people.

COVID-19 is a disease that is also produced and caused by the SARS-CoV-2 symptoms. Doctors say it affects peoples' respiratory tracts, causing infection, breathing difficulty and weakening body function. It directly attacks a person's upper respiratory tract (sinuses, nose, and throat) or lower respiratory tract (windpipe and lungs). Gradually, it spreads in the same process as other coronaviruses move through person-to-person contact. Its infection degree and range vary depending on the situation and person-specific condition. It may broadly disturb people in mildness or even be deadly if precaution is not taken immediately. The WHO and other research organisations in different countries have undertaken multiple experiments over time and broadly suggested some novel findings. However, to date, no mechanism or medicine has been invented for the COVID-19 disease by any country nor even by the solely dedicated experimentation centres and services of any individual in the specific context.

While the COVID-19 historiography has little glare, it is equally ambiguous. COVID-19 may turn out fatal if one behaves casually or takes it carelessly because it is a social fact and a complicated and complex social phenomenon. The political economy of the ongoing pandemic is supposedly caught and superseded by the heresy of academic quibbles, but its ravage has not been measured or adequately calculated. States and people are constrained and still fighting to escape the disease in everyday situations and circumstances. Amidst the sporadic development of irreconcilable thought and exercise, it is rather evident that the coronavirus pandemic and COVID-19, both in unison, engulfed the whole world. Both have acted in such a devastating manner and process that people are forced to live in shackling conditions, almost being static. Simultaneously, they rattled the daily habitual life of people and skirmished their possible congenial relationship. No one is spared, not even the most developed countries, which are known to claim to possess the vintage of wealth and resources and have the best technocratic medicare system. No society and people got rid of the wrath of the global pandemic.

The United States and the European societies, potentially considered the major flag-bearers of coercive development, are likewise caught by the vicissitudes of the worst happenings as the powerful pandemic hits them. COVID-19 has thus unleashed the hard value of social mishappening to invite the most vulnerable condition. It has affected all people and somewhat fixed them in endemic life. Owing to its discursive and invisible attack, people, in a general sense, are caught by enormous suffering. COVID-19 has affected all sections of people, irrespective of having any reservations or making any gradation of difference between rural and urban and elite and have-not people. Therefore, more than what they meant and did negatively for people, a deep fear psychosis emerged, and societies made them terrorised, confused and riddled with conundrums. Only a mere technical differentiation in name usage does not make both the heavyweights fade, fluid and frolicsome because of what they evidentially rendered or further implied to do; people, society and world order have suffered horrendously at large.

COVID-19 and Nuances of Duality: Kabir and Giddens

COVID-19 pertains to challenging the hegemony of an individual prowess or such societal institution forever. If at all that phenomenal object resists and is questioned, the exigency of the universality of social evolution and the need for change may become ease. To simplify, it arguably conveys that nothing remains forever universal and static. The situation, thing, phenomenon and material possession are bound to be different and mobile during the gradual evolvement of the societal order. In this context, and because of the existing COVID-19 upsurge, which adversely affects a vast chunk of people, the contribution of 14th-century saint Kabir becomes adorable and novel. Though neither Kabir is alive today nor did he experience the situation that presently happens or resembles the COVID-19 upheaval, his legacy and worldview are regarded undisputable and recognised as universal fact. To augur his commentary, Kabir echoed the normative social order and denied plausible deviation in the course of the upcoming society's happening. According to his central thesis or forecast, '*Any mere looking at the grinding stones speak volumes. These static stones do not unequivocally bespeak only singularly about aggrieved people but vividly denote and convey loud cries and perpetual sufferings of people, portraying inherent hidden meanings relating to the everyday life of people and society.*' Kabir unravelled deep meaning imprinted in those static stones that behold people's life facts, figures and dynamism. His inner line of forceful message depicted in the portrayal conveys that social phenomena and the integrated social life of the people are deeply embedded in the practical happening of good and evil. These are devoid of falsification of fact and absolute dogma. Nevertheless, in another ostensive statement, *Diya Kabira Roye*, Kabir adds a new chapter with a somewhat different articulation of meaning to human suffering. He organised, construed and conveyed the actual image and facet of all evolving societies to signify it. In the present context, when most people encounter continuous corona conundrum and pandemic, the phraseology *d*iya Kabira *roye* pinpoints Kabir's cry in endless pain in people's sufferings. He used *Doha*, i.e., prayed, to save the lives of distressed people. For Kabir, Doha has a multi-level effect:

it makes everything possible and helps people recuperate from chronic illness and suffering. He believed that people would understand Doha's underlying meaning, which would heal their wounds. To ensure this relief, *Dui Patan* (both sides), the earth, and the sky come to the forefront to release tension and people's woe. Within the ambience of the two potential powers, human life is created and guided by the super manifestation of all-natural phenomena of duality: day and night, life and death, joy and sorrow. Such a dramatic continuity keeps people's lives in motion (*Chalti Chakki*), ensuring a smooth and never-ending process. Locked in such a duality, it is generally assumed that whatever happens during the present juncture of the rapid spread of the coronavirus pandemic is supposedly palpable and perishable. To Kabir's account of understanding and analysis in duality, a thing beyond the comprehendible is not considered eternal. In the case of the coronavirus pandemic, however, an intriguing meaning is nurtured and superciliously exists. The corona has thrashed everyone in its sanction and motion. Like the ecological disaster, COVID-19 has sparked a high volume of fire and affected almost all. Further, nature fails to control the simultaneous exploitation and greed of the modern metabolic society in the name of development, growth and prosperity.

He narrated and justified this by bringing some burning exemplary notes and accounts for humankind's healing and alternative path process. To reiterate his philosophical-sociological discourse, tension or upheaval like COVID-19 is phenomenally spatio-temporal. He aptly defines 'people unknowingly invite or fall into any trap of difficulty and problem, but such circumstantial and man-made imbroglio does not continue for long duration'. This says to him that nothing remains intact or fixed permanently. Further, according to Kabir, the message depicted in the dwelling of the incredible wheels and sun-sitting stones exemplifies that the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic will not continue indefinitely and disappear soon. This will bring better prospects and possibilities for people and society.

Kabir's austerity challenged the dominant thesis that most things centre on supra-natural, static and non-transcendental in society. To him, the residue of a thing and situation evolves and moves regularly, not fixed or static. They supplement and complement at a particular time but may contradict at another time. Like two sides of the same coin, the only side that changes depends upon place and situation. Situation and context constantly oscillate, momentary and impermanent. So, the present COVID-19 world situation is similar to Kabir's message 'eternity of duality' with the 'circulation of elites' of Vilfredo Pareto. In this regard, Kabir's prediction is tantamount to correct because, given the present COVID-19 epidemiology, all societies, in unison, have been experiencing adverse situations and may suffer more. However, that unreceptive condition may, in every likelihood, result in a better yield, happiness and prosperity among people.

Anthony Giddens, a British scholar of the most current time, is useful in magnifying his contemporary idea of duality to understand the present emerging complexity. In the *Central Problems in Social Theory* (1979), Giddens developed a novel idea, the 'theory of structuration', an intensive exercise to the interrelationship between agency and structure. According to him, agency and structure are mutually inclusive and reciprocate at equal length, whereas primacy is difficult or impossible to accede to either way. Both agency and structure supplement and complement each other instead of having any gradation, which is vital and what comes next. The connection between structure and action is fundamental and habitual. Structure and agency always move in tandem or function in a duality that cannot be separated, hence the duality of structure. People are makers of society but, at the same time, are constrained by its other actions and supremacy. Action and structure cannot be separately analysed, as structures are created, maintained and changed through actions, while actions are made to express meaning through the structure. Therefore, duality or causality moves in both directions, making it impossible to determine what changes and vice versa. In Giddens's words, 'social structures are constituted by human agency, but at the same time are the very medium of that constitution'. To him, the structure may act as a

medium of constraint on action, but it may be facilitated by action to develop a standard frame to attribute the structure's actual meaning. This argument of Giddens justifies that the duality of every happening is blended with continuous, perpetual and universal inter-linkage of relationships. Accordingly, in the present COVID-19 circumstance, people and pandemics in duality are vying without overlapping or substituting each other.

Besides, when the coronavirus pandemic or COVID-19 has engulfed the greater devastation among people, it has also created a vacuum. Even though people have not yet acquired conceptual clarity, it established a modest impression that no society is omnipotent enough to stop and remove the prevailing epidemiology. Secondly, without the invention of medicine or alternatives to prevent people's deteriorating lives, the coronavirus has almost become invincible. The politics of the virus and the disease are not getting toppled, and the coronavirus uproar and rampage are not swinging high unconditionally forever. All countries, including the most developed, are suffering uncompromised. However, people experiencing poverty and a less organised society with disarray technology and an unorganised healthcare system have become soft targets with high vulnerability to the pandemic.

Indian conditions to combat or address COVID-19 are relatively weak and deplorable. India, of late, received a big jolt and was worst hit by the existing abnormal situation created by COVID-19. The very essence of Indian society, whatever it may be, in a true sense, is plural, diversified and heterogeneous. India is an equally and highly stratified society of societies having innumerable castes, ephemeral classes, dogmatic religious beliefs, uneven regions and racial segregations. Some other implicit and explicit values and institutions also guide India to make it intolerant. The paradox is that society and almost all its people do not have proper access to health-related avenues and awareness about the Corona effect. The intensity and impact of the pandemic vary significantly, and the processes of variation could be measured suitably based on the above diverse parameters. The rural-urban dichotomy is becoming prominent and reaching a new height during the coronavirus

pandemic. The analysis of the pandemic can be appropriately undertaken following these stipulated categories beset with the existing parameters. The difference in the coronavirus impact, varying from rural to urban and the plight of the weaker section can be understood, analysed, and interpreted in the sociological framework based on the above diverse identified parameters.

A Sociological Framework

Let us focus on discussing the fundamental issues and perpetual problems faced by the migrant labourer. People belonging to such community, class and caste are usually poor, poverty-stricken, deprived and neglected at every level. They are marginalised and socially excluded too. Most of them live in vulnerable conditions and health hazards. They are forced to keep moving to different places in search of work and engage in such kind of work, which practically poses a serious challenge to their life and livelihood. In a true sense, the poor living condition often keeps them in great hardship, intensifying their health problem. During the recent coronavirus pandemic, almost all of them had positive symptoms of COVID-19. Males and females, including old age people and children, are caught by the coronavirus disease.

In this regard, the role of sociology becomes relevant. Sociology believes in intensive exploration to comprehend and understand the impact of the pandemic. In his magnum opus, *The Division of Labour in Society*, Emile Durkheim instils an appropriate and alternative framework to understand the dynamics of present society. According to his categorical classification, two types of societies– normal and pathological—exist everywhere. The significant question before us is identifying the criteria for distinguishing between normal and pathological society. Durkheim tried to define a healthy (normal) and pathological society. According to his testament, both normal and pathological are hallmarks of every society, and both are interfaced and intertwined to absorb societal requirements. Anomie and forced division of labour are also integral aspects and functional aspects of society. Therefore, he mentioned that sociology can recognise the attributes of a healthy society

because similar conditions may exist in other healthy societies and may have similar and dissimilar stages and prerequisites of social order.

Sociologists can identify and analyse the prevalent circumstances existing in similar conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the rise of similar situations across the globe. Nevertheless, it needs to be analysed and comprehended using different parameters. This will help develop a fair idea about whether the present society is in a sound stage of normal function or reeling on a pathological and unusual problem. Social scientists and scholars must analyse such situations, adopting every context. Durkheim further said that if a particular society deviates from a similar fact and is found in a healthy (normal) society, it is said to be a pathological society. Likewise, the coronavirus pandemic has universally affected all societies (countries) worldwide.

Nevertheless, what immediately needs understanding and systematic debate is how different countries coped with the coronavirus situation of the global pandemic. We want to emphasise that the Indian government has acted quickly and smartly to tackle the emerging situation promptly, efficiently and skillfully. Durkheim has classified the problems of labourers in three ways: (i) anomie division of labour, (ii) forced division of labour, and (iii) poorly connected division of labour. The demographic profile of the migrant labourers can be gauged using two specific parameters based on the 2011 census. One is inter-district migration, and the second aspect is inter-state migration. In the inter-district migration, 121.2 million people have migrated to different places for work, employment and livelihood. Furthermore, the inter-state migration count stands at 56.3 million. The impact of the migration has been significant and manifold and needs to be adjudicated based on several parameters.

Likewise, C. Wright Mills, in his work, *The Sociological Imagination*, portrays a very touching illustration of the condition of labourers in industrial society. He writes, 'When a society is industrialised, a peasant becomes a worker; a feudal lord is liquidated or becomes a businessman. When classes

rise or fall, the man is employed or unemployed; when the rate of investment goes up or down, a man takes a new heart or goes broken. When wars happen, an insurance salesman becomes a rocket launcher; a store clerk, a radar man; a wife lives alone; a child grows up without a father.' Mill's viewpoints match this context and the wake of the pandemic as he comprehended the situation well. His contribution is further relevant because the COVID-19 pandemic has instilled and added many kinds of problems wherein societies, in general, have come to a standstill; factories, industries, government offices and educational institutions like schools, colleges and higher learning centres have faced the alarm of uncertainty and challenges that are spread by the corona pandemic that remained beyond human imagination and calculation. With the fast spread of the virus and deterioration in human life, special rules and regulations are made to control and contain the spread of the disease. Visiting guests at home or any such social gathering is prohibited. Life, work and regular private and public activity are legally minimised, curtailed or declared closure indefinitely. The psyche of ordinary people is now heavily disturbed because the coronavirus pandemic has affected them to a large extent. The present pandemic specifies that irrespective of societies, problems emerging out of the corona have caused major human suffering and instability. Earlier, people faced similar alarming situations where the lack of civic amenities and essential services badly affected them. No quality difference exists between present and past societies regarding human suffering and probable social pathology. The rapid spread of the disease has now caused several social problems. Physical distancing is not regarded as indicative enough of social distancing to prevent and check the disease from going out of proportion. It is just that the prevalent uncontrollable conditions have made it compulsory for people to follow COVID-19-related norms and precautionary measures to absorb their interests and well-being. This is how and where C. Wright Mills's authoritative work fits the world order, especially in India. In the present perplexing situation and moment of human anxiety, it would be proper to present a theoretical framework following C. Wright Mills to arrive at a new form of societal condition. To his idea, social connection strengthens social

solidarity among people and societies on one side while maintaining physical distancing intact on the other—digital culture. This has occurred and is moving fast into the nook and corner of society due to the expected advancement in the cyber world.

Again, like the earlier instance, the sociologist Manuel Castells and the book *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture* makes an insightful observation that primarily attends to four important aspects: economy, society, culture and information. Castells's entire exercises covered all these important aspects that cannot be undermined. Hence, he adopted the following deep-rooted factors to rigorously focus on the idea behind the potential growth of virtual culture during the present era of societal expansion. In the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic, it is observed that we are heading towards a more open and vibrant virtual culture space and, most importantly, an economy of virtual grandeur. To him, since society has become global, technology has a significant role in bringing people closer to its intended consequences. Also, it is worthwhile to mention the contribution of the *Aarogya Setu* App, developed by information technology professionals, brought by the Indian government at the most crucial moment for the people's large consumption, convenience and interest. Using the application has helped us safeguard ourselves and remain vigilant on how to check the spread of the pandemic. It has brought people together under one umbrella of cooperation to resolve the health crisis in the wake of the corona. Also, the popular slogan and governmental drive 'One nation; One ration card' has united the people to receive government-given benefits in the most terrible situation of the present society. This new mantra infused by the present government has inculcated a safe and secure feeling among most people as they thought the public distribution system (PDS) would be equally available to them. These pro-people measures of the government feel imperative and appropriate and could address the adverse situations arising out of the coronavirus pandemic and its profound consequences, if any.

Labour Migration

Look at some burning issues and problems that accrued high momentum during the coronavirus pandemic. The labour-related matter becomes an immediate concern arising from the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The coronavirus's last eight months of upheaval intensified the labour problem, with multiple injuries and woes. The labourers have not only lost their lives but equally also experienced nightmares without getting any relief. They are caught by various problems—health, income and livelihood—that remain grim across societies. One needs to empirically underline the probable factors to emphatically understand why some citizens of the country become labourers and migrate. Why are labourers, and above all, the number of migrant labourers, increasing fast? It happens due to various 'pull' and 'push' factors, or is there any other cause that forces people to migrate from rural to urban areas? Because they only earn up to a very meagre level, paucity of income and rare availability of resources and opportunities keep the individual or collective mass of people in distress.

Furthermore, being poor and poverty-stricken, social conditions deny and deprive most labourers of getting work to sustain and maintain their minimum daily life. The plausible curtailment of rights and duties and imposed constraints without giving them any source of living avenues within their locality coerced the working people to go for forced out-migration. The worst-hit community in the COVID-19 pandemic are the migrant labourers, the majority of whom belong to the poor, marginalised sections of society. They do not possess any land, capital, or other available resources. Therefore, for their livelihood and to support family sustainability, they must come out of their natal village and migrate toward urban areas, particularly to work and meet their minimum family needs.

Further, they are attracted to the glamour of urban areas. This happens because, in their rural habitats, resource scarcity keeps them reeling in destitution, poverty and backward conditions. In fact, contrary to popular view, rural India is still beyond the proxy of civilisation and a self-sufficient economy. During the recent past, and especially in the present India, the

overall conditions of rural India have been deplorable and almost remain upholding the static character of time antiquity. A mere peasant and a daily wage labourer in rural India are found loitering with problems and becoming poor to poorer in everyday life. Firstly, owing to their hapless, alarming condition and secondly, a high trend of urbanisation, industrialisation and development of communication technology, maybe all in totality, have pulled the people of rural India out of their ancestral village. Whatever way we may freely attribute to meaning and understand with our self-propelled arithmetic and equations about the cause of migration of the people, their primary purpose of out-migration is to search for avenues for livelihood and support the family. It is a tragic issue and certainly an appealable trend that, though India is most and best known for its concern, care and curative measures for uplifting labour, the government has not yet been able to address and efficiently manage the related issues. However, the problem that may crop up in the post-COVID-19 scenario will help pave the way for us to face the challenge.

In addition, many layers of implicit and covert socio-economic factors force the bulk of the labourers to migrate without having any option. That is why they leave their native place and search for a second place to work. The small and marginal farmers are not paid minimum remuneration for the labour they put into work. The government has fixed a Minimum Support Price (M.S.P.) to address this problem. Nevertheless, surprisingly, the M.S.P. is only seen to fix for wheat, rice, food grains and sugarcane. Other cash crops are not covered in the ambit of the M.S.P. The factors responsible for other important crops not being brought into the M.S.P. fold must be empirically studied. There is every possibility that due to the absence of adequate cold storage, the farmers or peasants cannot store their produce in case any distress situation arises. Due to the poor transportation network and warehouses, the farmers do not get the M.S.P. in case of bumper crop stock. The problem faced mainly by Indian farmers is the lack of proper market vis-à-vis marketing facilities. It is also evident when we see the difference between Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh farmers who are prosperous because they have a readymade

market available nearer to their demand and disposal. However, the farmers of east Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and other similar regions work as labourers on their land and farms. Thus, many poor people with low yields, poor cash crops in stock, and the lowest income chance have been forced to migrate from their villages, which is seen around 121.2 million inter-district and 56 million inter-state migrants.

Government Milestone and Citizens' Chapter

These issues and viable options are regarded as the best possible measures that can be suitably adopted and augmented to handle the prevalent social havoc, crises and health hazard of people engaged in different courses of work with or without their will. These work pressures are a direct manifestation and outcome of the present coronavirus pandemic, especially during the recent time in India:

1. People should be adequately trained or oriented to refrain from being panicked and hallucinating. Rehabilitative measures must be adopted to address the symptoms of anxiety, frustration, mental disorder and worry in the minds of the people. These processes may contribute to the best to help the poor and poverty-stricken people. Rigorous counselling and training can spearhead this on a massive scale; online teaching to older adults and children is one such yardstick to raise their consciousness. To organise this action-oriented programme, active voluntary participation is necessary and needs encouragement at every level of society. This may be an uphill task, but it may lead to the proper and meaningful resolution of problems for many people with their individual and collective woes, pains, and problems. A unified action plan and dedicated unit of people with an altruistic service attitude is essential to lead the war against the pandemic to every extent.

2. One important aspect that has to be implemented by the government is the cash transaction process for poor people. It should be implemented as early as possible without delay and deviation. This can endure and be organised massively by the employment generating and guaranteeing programmes such

as MNREGA. This kind of drive would boost our economy and bring about a tangible change among the poor people residing primarily in rural society. Another notable aspect that the government must remember is that most migrant labourers who returned to their village do not have a job card like MNREGA workers. So, a viable and alternative method should be chosen so that they can be aligned with the necessary jobs available under the MNREGA. Schemes ensuring food security should also be launched on a war footing. The same problem arises here: most migrants do not have ration cards. So, a database must be developed to help the government work in this direction. Different sectors may be encouraged to develop their respective data to cater to the needs of people with low incomes deserving people. The hour needs to unify the people and match them with the food safety net. This measure may help ensure the distribution of the ration card process to the migrant labourers.

3. The most relevant alternative and solution during the pandemic period is for the government to devise a formula and strategy on a priority basis to transfer direct cash benefits to the bank account of the migrant worker. This may help and provide immediate relief to the poor migrant labourers who are deprived and do not get two square meals in a day. One of the glaring problems most people are likely to face today is the pitiable condition and growing discontent among the migrant labourers. During the post-COVID-19 era, many workers lack interest in returning to their workplaces. Most of them say that during the lockdown period, they have been maltreated and humiliated by the local populace, police and administration. They now feel alienated from the place where they worked earlier. Exploitation, discrimination, and unjust treatment of them are adequately aired on news channels and print media too prominently, discouraging them from engaging in the same work.

4. The workforce or the labourers of *Bihar origin* are now stiffly averse to the idea of returning to their workplace. The same condition is seen in Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and other labourers in the backward regions. In his letter to the Odisha Chief Minister, Sri Naveen Patnaik, a person from Odisha,

mentioned that he had gone to Surat 10 years ago to work in a cotton mill. Now, he owns a cotton mill there. He says that about 800 people from Ganjam district of Odisha work in Surat alone. If the cotton mill had been established in Ganjam district itself, there would have been no need to go to Surat. He also questioned the willingness of the government on this front.

5. The government, too, is trying its best to fight the coronavirus pandemic. However, since it has limited resources and revenue generation, people who can pay may come forward to contribute at such a crucial time of society and human suffering. The need of the hour is to invite and involve the private sector to work with the public sector to help the government in this crisis. The self-help groups (SHGs), NGOs, civil society and those working in the developed sector should come forward. A collective and unified effort is needed to tackle this problem.

6. One last but significant point is the need for enhanced skill mapping. If such a stipulation is followed and a person gets a job based on his/her skill and meets the proximate distance, the person may not like to migrate to far-off locations in search of a job. Another important social aspect of the migrant problem is based on the caste criterion. In this regard, the upper caste people mostly find it derogatory to indulge in menial and low-paid work at their native places, be it village or urban area. Their caste ego is hurt. This happens because the feudal character society still exists prominently in large areas of the country. Nevertheless, they do the job in exactness in nature to far-off places in Gulf countries besides India, such as Haryana, Punjab, Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, and other metropolitan centres. This sociological parameter can be regarded as valuable and fruitful in systematically analysing the gravity and implications of the Coronavirus problem.

Conclusion

To conclude aptly, let us not forget and admit a simple but empirically verified fact that the coronavirus pandemic and COVID-19 inter alia, wherein the people's sufferings have become manifold and surprisingly on the increasing

order. The duo is in elasticity-condition to manifest hypertension among people and give rise to myriad hallucinations among them, which certainly affect their normal physical and psyche. During the recent era, poverty, destitution, exclusion, and marginalisation have acquired a new meaning, momentum and image amidst the coronavirus pandemic. Lewis Coser's seminal work *The Function of Social Conflict* perfectly matches the current perplexing situation. We inappropriately encounter a random period of mass conflict, tension and duality. To his say, a loosely framed society strengthens mutual bonding during the conflict. So, Indian society is a burning example of a highly differentiated society, but the endless contradiction keeps it undoubtedly united in its distinct form. In great harmony and togetherness, the society and its people will surely inculcate and ensure organic solidarity after the pandemic, thus solidifying the loose, structured group or band of people. Because of COVID-19, people are truly united to brave every adverse situation. The mantra and master key for ultimate success has to be unambiguously positive and assertive with high optimism-*Hum honge kaamyaab ek din*.

Endnotes

[1] *'Chalti Chakki Dekh Kar, Diya Kabira Roye; Dui Patan Ke Beech Mein, Sabut Bacha Na Koye.'*

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Article: The Question of Representation: Revisiting India's policy of reservations in employment

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The Question of Representation: Revisiting India's policy of reservations in employment

--Akanksha Sanil

Abstract

Issues of caste are both emotive and deeply contested in India. While it is recognised that caste is embedded within a specific historical, socio-cultural discourse, the legal-policy arrangements enforced during post-Independent period assumed salience, particularly for the deprived social groups. Based on a critical analysis of data available in public domain between 2010-11 to 2019-20, this paper questions if numerical presence alone can justify the extent of representation. It focusses on two central things: *Firstly*, how can we study the existing structure of representation and those being represented? *Secondly*, to what extent can representation challenge the historical order that operates to maintain a definite socio-economic hierarchy? Data indicates that though reservations in government jobs has exceptionally benefitted the targeted groups, they remain underrepresented in positions commonly recognised as more reputed. It argues that the problem is neither of representation, underrepresentation or misrepresentation, but more about the underlying 'politics of scarcity' in context of debates on the policy of reservations in India. Theorising representation therefore, through the lens of "politics of presence" (Phillips, 1995) is insufficient to strongly advocate what Pitkin (1967) advocates as the "human idea of representation".

Keywords: Caste, employment, representation, reservation policies

Introduction

Issues of caste[i] are both emotive and deeply contested in India. While it is recognised that 'caste' is primarily embedded within the socio-cultural discourse of Hinduism and the basis of justification for hostility and

unfavourable treatment towards those historically marginalised, the emphasis on legal-policy arrangements enforced since post-Independence in the quest for social justice have assumed salience, particularly for the deprived social groups. The desirability of a definite social policy of affirmative action was based on the optimism that it was possible to annihilate what was once a barrier to social integration and human solidarity, by conforming to constitutional principles and legal remedies. In India, the conceptualisation of social policy for a country representative of multiple forms of socio-cultural diversity was largely influenced by post-colonial British legacy (Pellissery et al., 2015:785). Traditionally, this diversity has never been limited to geo-climatic or demographic differences alone, but equally reflects the diversity of how people live, work, and experience differential outcomes of disadvantage in resources, risks, and rights. The question then is, how to engage with social policy interventions when the idea of "social" is itself being defined by the sense of one's affiliation to a definite community identity – religion, region, and caste (Pellissery 2021:122). This paper delves into two interrelated questions, firstly, how can we study the existing structure of representation and those being represented? And secondly, to what extent can representation challenge the historical order that operates to maintain a definite socio-economic hierarchy? Based on data available in public domain between 2010-11 to 2019-20, it aims to critically examine the impact of employment-based reservation policies on Scheduled Castes[ii] (henceforth referred to as SCs) in India.

Constitutionalising Representation: The construction of reservation policies in India

The British conquest of India firmly recognised and accommodated identities of caste and religion by maintaining a strict non-interference to transform the Indian social order (Galanter 1984). Indeed, their reluctance to interfere with social reform that improved inter-caste relations was profound. In context of reform, mobility, and politics under colonial rule, Galanter (1984:18) rightly

observes that, "non-interference implied doing what rulers in India had always done, actively upholding and supporting the caste order. But it also implied an aloof neutrality". Not surprisingly then, the legal instrument mandated under colonial rule created opportunities for the higher order *varnas* to increase their claims in education and government services (Galanter 1984). This meant that struggle for a fair share to utilise the same valued resources were automatically rebuffed by the government. Nevertheless, duality in the reform process continued throughout most of the 19th and 20th century. This was because, mainstream social reformers did not consider practices that involved caste hierarchy and inequality as a significant problem as their notion of reform constituted the Hindu family (that is, practices of the so called "higher" castes), rather than a collective attack on the caste system (Ambedkar 1936:29).

In this context, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, who personified the voice of those belonging from the so-called "low" castes, devised an alternative political approach to social reform based on constitutional safeguards that acknowledged indifference, indignity, and the neglect of deprived groups. While his vision of constitutional order was yet to formalise, the colonial rule opened new arenas to accommodate communal and caste differences. On the one hand, was the growing apprehension that colonial power and its collusion with Hindu dominance would gradually relegate the interests of Muslim population channeled a political momentum to promulgate special provisions for them. On the other, concerns over the practice of "untouchability" itself gained political significance. Interestingly, in the year 1909, when separate electorates were provided for the Muslim population, the problem of "untouchability" for the lowest social stratum was also conceptualized (Galanter 1984) [iii]. Concerns were raised when the colonial government initiated the experimentation to enumerate the "untouchables" (then known as Depressed Classes) as separate from the Hindu "touchables". As a result, the Census of 1911 marked the beginning of population estimation of the former

category which was subsequently carried forward in the years of 1921, 1931 and 1951. After Independence, the locus of caste that initially emerged as a census variable became undeniably linked to its political space that guided politically motivated imperatives to accommodate social justice in redistribution of opportunities and resources through affirmative interventions by the Indian welfare state. For Ambedkar, such mandatory constitutional reservation for the deprived castes in administration, legislature and the executive would help develop, what he referred to as "social endosmosis" with the use of state power, "[f]or endosmosis among groups brings people together; in place of the old, it creates new like-mindedness which is representative of the interests, aims and aspirations of all the various groups concerned'." (Chakrabarty 2016:139-141)

In addition to the colonial state, the practice of untouchability gained recognition even among several princely states. For instance, the princely state of Mysore classified all groups, excluding Brahmins, as "Backward Classes" and devised a system of reserved positions for them in colleges and state services back in 1918 (Galanter 1984:26). As Deshpande (2013:50) notes, "this was meant to redress a situation where Brahmins, who were roughly 3 percent of the population, extensively dominated elite positions – civil service jobs and related prestigious jobs". This became a major initiative in the history of quotas in the Indian subcontinent. While these developed as compensatory support mechanism, it was primarily dominated in regions of southern India as an outcome of liberation efforts adopted by the non-Brahmin social reform movements. For instance, efforts by Justice Party [iv] in Madras proved significant in redistributing positions of public offices to non-Brahmin castes and communities, included the then Depressed Classes (Shah 2004:307; Chalam 2007:95-96; Deshpande 2013:50). The demands for greater share in political representation culminated in the enactment of the Government of India Act, 1919 that provided few nominated seats for the Depressed Classes.

As observed by Professor Eleanor Zelliot, by 1920s 'the principle of special attention was firmly established' (Galanter 1984:27).

Beginning 1920s, a major development at the national stage was the political visibility of Ambedkar (Galanter 1984:28; Thorat and Aryama 2007:62) and his idea of self-government as an ideal instrument to foster unity and nationhood among people of different creeds, languages and cultures. For this, however, he insisted that 'the centre of power in the Constitution of a self-governing India must recognise not only the diversity of people but equally the diversity in their social conditions' (Mungekar 2017:121). A prerequisite to his belief was to build and sustain a democratic state, entrusted with the power to decide on the concerns and aspirations of all, without a tendency to favour the common membership as a result of wealth, education and social standing. On the contrary, Ambedkar argued that a non-recognition of the realities by political power would be most pernicious for the untouchable castes (Mungekar 2017; 121). This is because the operative psychology was governed by the firm conviction which held the Hindu social order as infallible.

Thus, caste-related inequalities and more importantly, the question of remedies was vociferously articulated by Ambedkar. His approach indicated a sharp critique of the *varnashrama dharma* that 'stressed on the denial of civil rights and economic opportunities and seeks to combat them by vigorous government intervention, and political action to obtain it and liberate all by dissolving the graded inequalities of caste into the common bond and common rights of citizenship in a secular state' (Galanter, 1984:27). His arguments on the representation of untouchables was testified for the first time in the Southborough Committee on Franchise in 1919 where his address to the Committee as an advisor to the British, and also as an adherent of the rights of the untouchables, clearly outlined the necessity to provide adequate legal-constitutional protection to most victimised social groups (Chakrabarty 2016:141). The demand for legal guarantee of rights was not limited to elected

representation for the depressed classes, but it also included their legitimate recognition of being designated as equal citizens. Ambedkar argued that, 'citizenship rights included not only personal liberty but also the right to hold property, equality before law, freedom of opinion, and speech, right of political representation, and right to hold office under the state. Untouchability, however, placed these rights far beyond their reach' (Thorat and Aryama 2007:62-63). While the Southborough Committee failed to accept the recommendations, the policy was partly implemented in provincial assemblies (Galanter 1984).

The visit of Simon Commission in 1928 initiated a new round of negotiations for constitutional reforms with full-fledged participation of the untouchable castes (Galanter 1984:29). During 1930s, the demands for political representation of depressed classes intensified, despite differences in the scheme of representation among the then political formations. The contestation culminated in the Second Round Table Conference that simultaneously witnessed the colonial government's "transitional arrangement" (Chakrabarty 2016:142) to reach an agreement through the British policy of "separate electorates" for the depressed classes. The announcement of Communal Award in 1932 not only assured that "special constituencies in which only members of the depressed classes who were qualified to vote would take part" to members of the untouchable castes (Chakrabarty 2016:142), but they were also equally entitled to cast their regular vote in general constituencies, or as members of general/joint electorate (Galanter 1984:30; Gajendran 2007:190). In light of the disagreements between Gandhi and Ambedkar on the issue of separate electorates, the Poona Pact provided a system of primary elections for the depressed classes who were entitled to have only joint electorates with reserved seats (Gajendran 2007:190).

These dynamic political changes during the Poona Pact further highlighted the practice of untouchability in public domain, and established the political

necessity for special representation of the untouchables in modern India. Thus, the process of constitutionalisation of numerical representation became central in the construction of reservation policies. However, as Ambedkar suggested, electoral protection was insufficient to institutionalise representative participation in a typically segregated society,

Caste, Constitution and the Employment Quota

The implications of pre-Independence institutional arrangements played a distinctive role to consolidate the affirmative policies not only to safeguard various social disabilities, but also targeted to redress claims represented by SCs. This implied that a radical transformation of the prevailing social order became crucial to develop an enduring constitutional apparatus that would ensure "equal opportunity and fair access, and representation of the untouchables in social, political and economic processes in the society" (Thorat and Aryama 2007:64). Mandated by constitutional provisions, policies for positive discrimination transcended from 'equality in law' to establish 'equality in fact' (Deshpande 2011:217; Deshpande 2013:54-55).[v] As a result, the Constitution sought to empower those at the periphery of the social hierarchy through protective or "compensatory discrimination" policies (Galanter 1984). This gained a particular significance especially among the socially disadvantaged groups as employment in public sector are considered better opportunities as they provide a regular and decent salary, a degree of security, prestige, and authority, not obtainable elsewhere (Galanter 1984:83; Prakash 2020:3). As Shah (2004:308) puts it, the idea of reservation was "not supported as a principle, or an ideal solution, but as a device that could narrow the gap between the advanced and deprived sections of society".

Some of the relevant constitutional provisions on the Reservation Policy in employment includes Article 46 under the Directive Principle of State Policy (Part IV) of the Constitution of India which declares that, "The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the

weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, or the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation". While Directive Principles of State Policy are themselves not justiciable, Article 37 mandates that the State must ensure legislative processes applicable to these principles. In addition, the various clauses under Article 16 are equally relevant in this context. For instance, equality of opportunities for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State (Article 16 [1]), and prohibition of discrimination on all grounds in employment or office under the State (Article 16 [2]).

A closer reading of the Articles suggests that Article 16 (4) [vi] permits employment of SCs (and STs) in services and posts under the State. This implies that while employment or appointments provided under Article 16, the preferences must be within the scope of Article 16 (4). This includes judicial office, as well as administrative posts, but it does not include elective office (Galanter 1984:368). Moreover, unlike Article 16 (4), Article 15 (4)[vii] enlarges coverage of social policies which include preferences in housing, education, welfare, government contracts, and representation in local governance.. While reservations may be used as a conventional method, alternate ways such as fee concessions, scholarships, special facilities (housing, medical, etc.), which do not involve reservations at all may also be used to implement Article 15 (4) (Galanter 1984:372). As a result, "…reservations have involved not merely setting aside reserved places, but also such preferential rules of recruitment as waiver of age requirements, of application fees, and of minimum educational qualifications; establishment of a lower minimum of qualifying marks on competitive examinations; special assistance and training in preparation for competitive examinations" (Galanter 1984:371). Therefore, multiple manifestations of preferential policies indicate that these are not limited to reservations per se, but also includes measures such as waivers and capacity enhancement program for marginalised social groups.

Unlike employment under central government, the development of reservation policy within public sector enterprises in India demonstrated a different path. Public sector consists of all activities funded by the Government of India's budget (Thorat and Aryama 2009:76). Before Independence, state-owned enterprises, popularly known as the Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs), included the Railways, Post and Telegraph, Port trusts, Ordnance factories, and other enterprises like the Government salt factories, quinine factories, etc. which were managed by different departments of public sectors. The number of CPSEs have increased substantially from only five in 1951 to 84 by 1969. In 1954, the constitutional provisions for reservations were largely introduced in public sector enterprises, though it made mandatory to implement during late 1960s[viii]. The number of CPSEs based on 2019-20 stands at 366 (Annual Report of Public Enterprises, 2019-20). The following section provides analytical data on reservations in employment sector.

Reservations and Government Employment: A Critical Analysis

Reservations for SCs in government employment has been in existence since 1943 through government order which was eventually formalised under provisions of the Constitution of India since Independence. It declared 12.5% of total direct recruitment posts by open competition on an all-India basis as reserved for the SCs (Galanter 1984:85). Based on the resolution of the Ministry of Home Affairs released on 13th September 1950, this percentage was gradually increased to 15% in 1970 and 16.67% on an all-India basis with and without open competition respectively (Galanter 1984: 84). It noted that no fixed percentages of reserved positions were found to be instructed for lower posts, as it was to be determined based on their respective population in that particular region. According to the prevailing rules, reservation for SCs is provided at the rate of 15% and 16.66% in case of direct recruitment on all India basis by open competition and otherwise respectively (Press Information Bureau, 2019).

Data Sources

Primarily, this paper aims to examine the outcome of the policy of reservations in employment in India. Given the purpose, two publicly accessible reports with caste-wise segregated data released by the Indian government is retrieved and analysed accordingly for a ten-year period from 2010-11 to 2019-20. Reports identified as representative for the formal sector employment includes the Annual Reports of Public Enterprise (PE) Survey released by the Department of Public Enterprises, Ministry of Finance, (to estimate representation of SCs in CPSEs under different Ministries/Departments), and Annual Reports by Department of Personnel & Training, Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Training (to estimate representation at central government services). For a review of public enterprises, six Ministries have been selected for analysis keeping in mind two aspects – the 'relative importance' of a particular Ministry in the overall administrative apparatus of central government, and 'conventional association' between the primary functions of a particular Ministry and its historic interlinkages with the institution of caste, for instance, the relationship between untouchability and water or artisanal work, including those related to textiles. Table 1 below lists the chosen ministries and indicates the rationale adopted thereby.

Table I: Ministry-wise rationale for selection

Ministry* *(In alphabetical order)*	**Rationale for Selection** *(Relative Importance/Historical Association)*
Ministry of Commerce & Industry	Relative Importance
Ministry of Finance	Relative Importance
Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)	Historical Association
Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment	Relative Importance Historical Association
Ministry of Textiles	Historical Association
Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation	Historical Association

Source: Author

***** During 2010-11 to 2019-20, names of various Ministries/Departments (including those listed above) have changed. However, the study uses names of such Ministries/Departments as mentioned in the Annual Report of Public Enterprises 2019-20, Department of Public Enterprises, Ministry of Finance, Government of India.

Admittedly, the question of economic deprivation experienced among any social group is not only related to the magnitude of control over productive resources, but also their representation in employment (Pellissery et al., 2015:789). In the years after Independence, Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs) of the Indian economy were mandated to undertake large-scale infrastructure developmental projects to overcome the limited capacity of the then private sector. Its obligations were not only to pursue commercial interests, but also meet the objectives of wider social responsibilities (Annual Report of Public Enterprises Survey, 2019-20). In view of this, the public sector became an important instrument to redress the problem of unequal distribution of

opportunities in terms of access to employment among SCs. Hence, the size and pattern of representation are clearly an important determinant to observe changes in their distribution across job categories determined by the level of skills needed for it.

Table II: Group-wise job classification under government offices in India[1]

Group	Levels of job classification
A	Managerial/Executive
B	Supervisory
C	Skilled
D	Unskilled

Source: Public Sector Enterprises Report, 2010-11 – 2019-20

Ministry-wise change of status of employment among SCs between 2010-11 and 2019-20 reflecting different categories of employment - Group A, B, C and D. Based on available data sources, it was observed that there were greater instances where the composition of SCs (per cent) in both Group A and B had either decreased or remained stagnant despite improvements in number of employees in respective Ministries. While overall transition between the years has been positive particularly for SCs employees in Group C and D, what is intriguing is their disproportionate composition as against the mandated 16.66% reservation formula.

[1] This scheme to classify jobs is adopted at both central government level and PSEs. For central government services, from 2012-13 data on Group C includes Group D (including *Safai Karamcharis*).

The Annual Report of Public Enterprises Survey 2019-20 observes a decrease of 9% in the total employment in CPSEs over a period of one year – from 2018-19 to 2019-20 (Annual Report of Public Enterprise Survey 2019-20:156). It further underlined the gradual reduction of 'regular' employees as against the other employment categories, casual/daily wage laboureress, and contract workers/employees. This reduction however, was offset to some extent by a corresponding increase in casual employees. Clearly, increase in the share of non-permanent workers and employees from 2015-16, points towards the phenomena of "casualisation of workforce" in India's public sector – partly an outcome of downsizing permanent employees in CPSEs as a result of large-scale automation since 1998 (Edwin 2021). It must be realised that casualisation is also characteristic of a greater degree of informality (Tafsir, 2019), and often exposes marginalised social groups into positions of aggravated vulnerabilities and deprivation.

Table III: Employment in CPSEs (2013-14 to 2019-20)

Year	Total Employees	Regular Employees (per cent)	Casual/daily work rate workers (per cent)	Contract workers/employees (per cent)
2013-14	16,90,741	79.92	1.81	18.25
2014-15	15,87,149	81.35	1.32	17.31
2015-16	15,20,650	81.12	1.25	17.61
2016-17	15,03,093	75.55	2.03	22.40
2017-18	14,66,694	74.18	2.73	23.07
2018-19	15,14,064	68.21	2.04	29.74
2019-20	14,73,810	62.55	3.60	33.84

Source: Annual Reports of Public Enterprises Survey, Department of Public Enterprises, Ministry of Finance (Edwin, 2)

It is important to recall that representation of SCs in CPSEs is only one part of the assessment of their formal sector employment. The other constitutes their representation in Central Government Services. Data from Annual Reports from 2010-11 to 2019-20 published by Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions reveals that there is no substantive percentage-wise change in Group C posts for SCs, especially since 2012-13. Though total number of employees have reduced (from 2744629 in 2012-13 to 1771607 in 2019-20), their share continued to remain the same at about 17.5% in both 2012-13 and 2019-20. Moreover, for Group B and C, the percentage increase in their employment is greater in the former than the latter. Moreover, there is a nominal increase of 0.8% from 16.6% in 2010-11 to 17.4% in 2019-20 of SC per cent as against total employees. Using the same technique, Group A posts has also witnesses only a 1.1% increase in the percentage-wise distribution of SCs in central services.

Critical Analysis

The above sections have put together relevant data sources to enable us consolidate key observations. Considering the representation of SCs in government jobs, it becomes pertinent to question as to what does "representation" imply? This is because, as Pitkin (1967:1) argues, "learning what 'representation' means and learning how to represent are intimately connected" .

In India, the contemporary usage of the term "representation" is widely associated with issues of social justice and equity. It is important to observe that not only representation of SCs *vis-à-vis* other social groups (non-SCs) is disturbingly low, what is further indicated is that their representation in Group A and Group B is below their entitlement. As a result, there is a greater dependence of SCs on the informal sector What reservations have intended to do, is a legal readjustment of positions of power, dignity and privilege to increase the prospects of historically discriminated social groups for better

alternatives of employment opportunities. In an article in *The Indian Express* in January 2019, it was noted that higher posts in government was persistently under-represented by all social groups entitled under reservations, including the SCs (Yadav 2019). However, the problem is not only limited to under-representation but also, in fact, over-representation of SCs in the informal sector. Pellissery et al., (2015:790) notes that, "while the scheduled caste population accounts for only 16.6 per cent of the total population in India, their representation in the unorganized sector is 20.2 per cent (NCEUS 2007)". They further observe that, "participation in the informal economy implies minimal state control and therefore high levels of vulnerability of the participants on various fronts, some of them being high livelihood insecurity, bad working conditions, the absence of social security and lack of scope for unionization" (Pellissery et al, 2015:790).

The data sets revealed three distinct observations. First observation evident through data of 2019-20, revealed that the proportion of employment of SCs (selected ministries) reduced considerably. The data further confirms further that the proportion has been changed even in CPSEs under different ministries during the decade of 2010-11 to 2019-20. Second observation points out that, with regard to Group A employees of CPSEs, the representation has reported to increase about 1 per cent from 16.6 per cent in 2011 to 17.4 per cent in 2019-20 nonetheless the proportion has been found to be negative with reference to the Ministry of Commerce & Industry (as a Ministry under 'Relative Importance') in terms of absolute and percentage values. A decrease in Group A in both total employees and those under SCs from 2010-11 to 2019-20, indicates that the magnitude of decrease among SCs is more than that under total employees of Group A. It is equally important to point out that, in all remaining ministries where there has been a positive change, the percentage increase in SC employees have remained below the percentage increase in total number of employees. Following data sets presented

summarises changing scenario of employment opportunities in categories of Group A and Group B of CPSEs and other central services respectively.

Table IV: Ministry-wise Percentage Change in Group A and B Employees*

Ministries	Group A		Group B	
	Total Employees (per cent)	SCs (per cent)	Total Employees	SCs
Ministry of Commerce & Industry	(-)35.2%	(-)36.7%	(-)34.2%	(-)25.2%
Ministry of Finance	94.8	45.4	65.0%	24.8%
Ministry of MSMEs	27.2%	2.5	(-)36.4%	(-)58.3%
Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment	97.8	93.3	13.1	(-)28.5
Ministry of Textiles	354	96.5	92.0	92.4
Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation	185	182	160.9	163.6

Source: Annual Reports Public Enterprises Survey (2010-11 to 2019-20) published by Department of Public Enterprises, Ministry of Finance, Government of India

*A comparison of change in two years, i.e., 2010-11 and 2019-20

Table V: Percentage Change in Representation in Central Government Services*

(Group A and B)

Category of Employees	Group A	Group B
Total Employees	(-)48.2%	1.9%
SCs	(-)43.6%	17.0%

Source: Annual Reports (2010-11 to 2019-20) published by Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions, Government of India

*A comparison of change in two years, i.e., 2010-11 and 2019-20

The third observation concerning representation of SCs in Group A services of central government as against the total number of employees has been found to be increased from 12.5 per cent in 2010-11 to 13.6 per cent in 2019-20. While this is indeed a positive change, their representation in Group B services found to be more which accounts 17.1 per cent in 2019-20 than in 2010-11 which stood at 14.9 per cent. The last point concerning overall services between the period of 2010-11 and 2019-20, the share of SCs' employement in government services have been improved though there are certain variations evident among different job categories. Representation has largely represented to large extent to be stipulated quotas in Group C in the selected decadehowever comparatively less among Group A and B services. In Group A services, the proportion is found to be much lower than the reservation norms across selected period. In addition to these observations, the proportion of stipulated norm largely absent in all CPSEs and other ministries and departments except in the Ministry of Commerce & Industry where the representation of SCs have remained to be above the stipulated reservation norms in both Group A and B posts.

Interpreting Representation: Rethinking "quotas" and beyond

The very foundation of affirmative action policies in India, and in particular, the mechanism of reservations, was to challenge the privilege of *savarna* (those belonging to a varna) identity which maintained prejudicial attitudes to

limit possibilities for those considered as *avarna* ("untouchable"). A significant mechanism to redress such discrimination therefore, was sought in the recognition of historical group-based oppression and the guarantee of institutional rights and benefits under the Constitution of India. Thus, reservations became a tool to assert representation for the Scheduled Castes at places where their presence was little or none. The paper analysed patterns of change on employment in different central ministries and other departments as their representation was strictly excluded through historical social norms. The data sets have indicated two fundamental realities. The *first* suggests that, the provision of reserved positions in formal government employment has exceptionally benefitted the targeted groups. The assertion is an indirect indication of the fact that, marginalised social groups have a correspondingly higher dependence on the informal spheres of employment. However, it must be stated that the positive role of reservation policy for SCs should be understood in the context of simultaneous decline in overall public employment in India. As Thangaraj (2014:180) has observed occupational changes during economic reform period, 'the brunt of slackening public employment has fallen more heavily upon Scheduled Castes'. The *second* observation indicates that, in services commonly recognised as more reputed, SCs continues to remain under-represented. Greater representation in lower grades of jobs is not only indicative of the lack of socio-economic mobility, but also points to cleavages that extends beyond the reservations debate, and in fact, shows the underlying challenges for the disadvantaged communities to embrace radical transformations through accumulation of social capital.

A valid question therefore is essential, can numerical presence alone justify the extent of representation? Any instance of "fair representation" is part of the larger observation of the power to influence decisions and articulate competing interests. In a strictly political sense, the act of representation was never applied in the modern framework of elections, democracy and rights (Pitkin 1967:3). Precisely then, it is not possible to confine its meaning

primarily to political representation, something that is perpetually discussed. To trace this work as a conceptual analysis of a technically political word (Pitkin 1967:7), an alternative attention – the non-political application of the term is used to mark the 're-presence' of Scheduled Castes in the sphere of formal-informal sector employment. The instance to count is a beginning of such a phenomena. For Pitkin (1967) the model of "descriptive representation" considers that representatives should reflect the social background of those being represented (Verma 2019:9). The discourse on social representation has been limited to the perception of better chances to represent interests of the most vulnerable sections. A careful analysis of data suggests that, over the years an incremental increase in their representation can be noted at higher positions. It is equally important to highlight Ambedkar's conceptualisation of "representation" and its application within constitutional guarantees. For Ambedkar, the term *representation* had a two-fold meaning depending on the nature of the constituent society. At the one end, there was the representation of interests and opinions "for those minorities that cannot otherwise secure personal representation or grant communal representation" (Ambedkar 1989:252). However, for a multi-cultural setting – with different needs and interests of diverse groups (Gajendran 2007:188), Ambedkar viewed the idea of representation as a group's personal representation (physical count) to secure collective interest of a specific community. For him, the most visible application of this was in the electoral sphere through reserved constituencies and the provision of communal electorates. In addition, the argument for representation at positions of services within the state was theorised by Ambedkar differently – as 'the inalienable right to self-determination of the groups' (Gajendran 2007:188), and the right to be represented under offices of the state was inextricably linked to their evolved status as legitimate citizenship (Ambedkar 1989:256). It is here that the "human idea of representation" by Pitkin (1967) assumes significance. The ideology that group opinion is being represented is questioned on the conviction that works against the feeling of being represented (Pitkin 1967). This implies correlating

caste and decision-making – the feeling of participation and accountability within an organisational setting. Therefore, "Politics of Presence"[ix] (Phillips, 1995) is insufficient to strongly advocate the case of "human idea of representation" (Pitkin 1967).

Conclusion

The struggle over positive discrimination policies is embedded in its effect to correct past discrimination. It is more about the question of where do we stand since its implementation? To what extent have such interventions benefited the targeted groups or, are the benefits limited to the advancement of few individuals or families? Discussion over affirmative action necessarily involves testable research on these and many other underlying questions. However, as is known, the most certain proposition is, that although a general clarity over measures of affirmative action exists, there also persists the most open and blatant criticism for the same. Perhaps, the diversity of arguments by those who oppose the policy clearly reveals that the debate never produces simple answers. However, the discourse of politics and policy stresses an alternative argument to be developed. Importantly, given the analogy, a pertinent point to mention is that the problem is neither of representation, underrepresentation or misrepresentation, but more about the underlying 'politics of scarcity', and access to inclusive opportunity for all to enhance social capital. The term *scarcity* holds multiple meanings embedded in the socio-political and economic perspective. The interpretation of the 'politics of scarcity' here centers on the struggles over meaning and access – specifically, how welfare policies can either reinforce or challenge the social and political ideologies that shape the unequal distribution of scarce opportunities. These opportunities are crucial for transforming the relationship between caste and employment.

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[i] The 'caste system' originally started with the four-fold varna classification within the religious-scriptural tradition of Indian society. For a review on the discussion on caste, work and employment in India, refer "How Caste Shapes the Origin and Transformation of Work and Employment in India" (Sanil 2024).

[ii] In India, Scheduled Caste is an official category of population historically considered as an 'untouchable' group at the bottom of the caste system (Galanter 1984:121). According to the Census of India 2011, they are estimated at about 16.2% of the overall population in India (Thorat 2009:1).

[iii] In a footnote to his volume, Galanter (1984:24) traces the precise textual reference of the English term "untouchable" in print to the year 1909.

[iv] The Justice Party (South Indian Liberal Federation) founded in 1916, initiated a non-Brahmin movement in Madras.

[v] The principle of 'equality in law' mandates that the State does not deny to any person equality before law, whereas the principle of 'equality in fact' "gives the State an affirmative duty to remedy existing inequalities" (Deshpande 2011:217).

[vi] Article 16 (4), states that "Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favor of any backward class of citizens which in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented in the services under the state."

[vii] Article 15 (4) states that, "Nothing in Article 15 or Article 29(2) . . .shall prevent the State, from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes."

[viii] See the First report of the *Committee on the Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes* (CWSCST) 1969, for a detailed history of compliance of the reservation policy in public sector employment in India.

[ix] In flourished democracies, Phillips (1995) argues, when representatives be themselves members of groups for which they speak, their interests can be articulated more effectively.

Article: The Invisible Citizens: Dalit Nomadic Caste Identity and Struggle for Justice

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The Invisible Citizens: Dalit Nomadic Caste Identity and Struggle for Justice

--Chandraiah Gopani

Abstract

Dalit nomadic castes in India represent a historically marginalized and socioeconomically disadvantaged group, often subjected to systemic exclusion and stigmatization. While there are few studies on pastoral or nomadic castes, the studies on Dalit nomadic castes are largely neglected within the social science disciplines in general and Dalit studies in particular. Dalit studies tend to present the Scheduled Castes (SC) as homogeneous groups and fail to understand the heterogeneity of the Scheduled Castes/communities in their socioeconomic disparity. The paper deals with Dalit nomadic castes in Telangana. There are several castes in the Scheduled Castes (SC) list in almost every state that are officially recognized for administrative and legal purposes. However, very few castes among Dalits are visible and organized themselves, leading to better negotiations with state institutions and political parties, while others are invisible. The Dalit nomadic castes like Dakkali, Masti, Malajangam, Chindu, Gosangi, etc., are numerically smaller and the lowest among untouchables in Telangana. Based on the fieldwork which is conducted from 2021 to 2023 and observations, the paper explores the status of Dalit nomadic castes' invisibility, social mobility, and struggles for justice in contemporary times. The exploratory method has been used for data analysis.

Keywords: Dalit Nomads, Citizens, B.R Ambedkar, Invisibility, Social Justice and Democracy

Introduction

The caste system in India hierarchized and divided human beings and sanctioned the ascending order of reverence and descending order of contempt. Scheduled Caste (SC) popularly known as Dalits are untouchables subjected to discrimination, exploitation, and humiliation in Indian society (B.R. Ambedkar: 1989). Historically untouchables are referred with many

nomenclatures like Panchamulu or Panchamas (the fifth group) or Chandaluru or Chandalas (indigent), antyajas (the lowest class), Avarnas (those outside the Varna system), Antaranivallu (untouchables), Asprusyulu (untouchables), Peddintivaru and Kadagottujati (the last caste), etc. There are several terms gained currency in society to identify the ex-untouchables (Gopal Guru: 1998). The terms with the prefix 'Adi' came in general parlance from the 1940s and mean original inhabitants. The word Harijan (connote the meaning of children of God) was popularized by M.K. Gandhi as a new appellation to the untouchables which is disparagingly opposed by B.R Ambedkar. The Urdu term 'Past-akhwam', which means 'the oppressed', was coined by the Muslim rulers of the former state of Hyderabad to distinguish between the untouchables and caste Hindus (Gundimeda Sambaiah: 2000).

The Madiga caste is one of the numerically largest Scheduled Castes in Telangana state. Traditionally the affiliated subcastes of the Madigas are nomad and follow pastoral life. They used to move from one village to village and perform various art and folk dramas. The literature on Madiga communities and their movement has recently started to explore several dimensions of their life-world with the emergence of Dandora movement (1994) [i] . However, the scholarly engagement on Madiga-affiliated and nomadic Dalits is limited. T.R. Singh (1969) explored the social and cultural structures of the Madiga community and its dependent castes (satellite caste) in his study. Further, he also documented and analysed the kingship relations cultural performances of various castes, and so on. He focused on the internal differences of Dalit castes and the practice of social hierarchies among SCs (T.R. Singh, 1969). Simon Charsly in his intensive study on the Madiga and its dependent communities explored the cultural roots of Madiga identity formation. The plays of Jambavapuranam, Chindu-Yachaganam, Yellamma Katha, etc. argued that folk traditions of Madigas' sub-castes foregrounded the anti-caste and anti-Brahmanical legacy (Simon Charsly: 2004).

Conceptual Framework

The study primarily revolves around the concept of invisibility, which highlights the broader issues and concerns of the life of Dalit nomad castes and their struggles, and empowerment. The concept of invisibility also captures the nomad Scheduled Caste's exclusion and their lack of representation, education, employment and politics. The concept of visibility is used with the relatively better-off Scheduled castes like Mala, Mahar, Chamar, etc. Both concepts are explored in elaborating and explaining the historical injustice, exclusion, social justice, and "collective consciousness" of Dalit nomads in Telangana. To understand the daily life world of nomads Scheduled Castes, cultural resources, oral narratives, and folklore have been used. The study is attempted to critically comment on the practice of Hierarchies of untouchability and emerging disparities within the Scheduled Castes. The study is documents and analyses the life, culture, struggles, and political representation of the Madiga-affiliated castes like Dakkali, Chindu, Masti, Bedabudugajangam and Mala affiliated castes like Gurram Mala and Mala Jangam and their struggles for justice and citizenship rights. This study helps us to understand how the Dalit nomadic castes are far away in accessing various government schemes due to their nomadic, semi-nomadic life and endanger occupations. This study also makes us to understand the internal emerging disparities and untouchability practice within the Scheduled Castes (SC) particularly from the experience of nomadic Dalit life. At theoretical level this study makes us to understand the concept of Social Justice, inclusion, equity in affirmative action, representation, recognition and redistribution in its broader and deeper sense from the perspective of Most Marginalised Dalits.

Methodology and Scope of the Study

The data for the study is collected from secondary as well as primary sources. The secondary sources comprise government reports, archives, books, articles, and publicity material (Pamphlets, manifestos, literature). The researcher visited the residents of nomad Dalit communities to collect primary sources.

Since these communities are nomadic in nature and numerically smaller, choosing a particular village is not considered to be adequate. The respondents are selected from across generations to know the perceptions and views on the changing nature of community development. For collecting the primary and required information, extensive face-to-face personal interviews are conducted and tape recorded. The interviews are held in Telugu with a semi-structured questionnaire with open-ended questions. The questionnaire is focused on getting information from. 1) Dalit nomad castes members 2) Scholars: 3) Movement Leaders: 4) Activists 5) Poets, writers and cultural artists from selected nomad castes in particular and Dalits in general. The pilot study was conducted before actual field work was started. The narrative and explorative methods are used for the analysis. The fieldwork, online and offline discussions, and conversations were conducted from 2021 to 2023 on the Dalit nomad's life, literature, and struggles.

Socioeconomic, demographic profile of Dalit nomad castes in Telangana

There are total 59 castes within the SC (Scheduled Castes) list in Telangana and among these 59 castes there are two major castes, Madiga and Mala. Furthermore, these two major castes historically carried the affiliated sub-castes. For example, Madigas have affiliated sub-castes like Dakkali/Dakkaliwar, Masti, Chindu, Arundhatiyas, Baindla/Pambala, Nulakachandayya, etc. Malas carried Malajangam, Maladasu, Gurram Mala, Mala, Pambala. Jayadheer Thirumala Rao argues that the lower caste has a sub-caste of their which are important to protect the culture. Edgar Thurston called castes a "Mendicant Community", Dr. M.V.T Raju called these castes "satellite castes", and Pulikonda Subbhacharry called them "dependent caste". In the caste structure, the main caste is known as patron caste and sub-caste is called a dependent caste. Sub-caste is associated with patron caste. Sub-caste is socially and economically dependent and subservient to its patron caste. One patron caste may have more than seven sub-castes and all of them are ex-untouchables, they have different caste occupations and are interwoven around the power hierarchy in the society. For example, Malas feels superior to

Madigas, Madigas, and Malas feels superior to Dakkali. The caste occupation is different for each caste for example the traditional occupation of the Madigas is tanning and leatherwork, whereas the Malas work as agriculture labourer/other occupations, Madigadasu, Dakkali, Chindu, and Madiga Masti/Masteen are singing, folklore, narrating tales and exhibiting street plays and dramas during fairs and festivals, etc. Since, all these castes and subcastes differ in their cultural, occupational, and belief systems, they should be treated as separate independent castes (T. R Singh, 1969). B. N. Srikrishna Committee (2010), appointed by the Central Government in the context of Andhra Pradesh bifurcation has identified the statistics about Scheduled castes populations across three regions Telangana, Rayalaseema and Coastal Andhra. The below table indicates the region-wise demographic data of Dalit population.

Table:1

Percentage-wise Regional Distribution of Scheduled Caste Groups in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh

Caste	Andhra Pradesh	Telangana (including HYD)	Coastal Andhra	Rayalaseema
Mala and Adi-Andhra	42.8	29.4	57.7	38.0
Madgas	49.2	61.3	36.6	51.9
Relli	1	0.1	3.4	0.0
Othes	7	9.3	2.3	10.1

Source: Sri Krishna Committee (2010), pp-369

The above table indicates that SCs including the Malas and Madigas subcastes dispersed across three regions; costal Andhra, Telangana and Rayalamaseema which were part of the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh. The government reports submitted by Justice Ramchandra Raju (1997) and the Usha Mehra Commission (2008) found that Malas and Adi-Andhras [ii] are politically, economically, educationally, and employment-wise more visible in the state

institutions because of various historical factors, they also greatly benefited fromthe provincial blessing of colonial education imparted by the Christian Missionaries and the early Ambedkarite movement whereas other castes like Madigas and other castes are claim to be invisible in education, employment, and politics. Here we have to understand that the communities who historically have nomad life are backward invisible. The following table documents the identified communities.

Table:2

List of Scheduled Castes Denotified and Nomadic communities inTelugu region

Sr.No	Caste	Denotified Communities	Nomadic Communities
1	Dandasis	Yes	
2	Rellies	Yes	
3	Paidies	Yes	
4	Bavuri		Yes
5	Budga Jangam		Yes
6	Dakkal		Yes
7	Dom, Dombara, Pano		Yes
8	Ghasi, Haddi, Relli Chachandi		Yes
9	Godagali		Yes
10	Holeya Dasari		Yes
11	Hatkar		Yes
12	Holeya Dasari		Yes
13	Madiga Dasu, Mashteen		Yes
14	Mala Dasari		Yes
15	Malajangam		Yes
16	Mang Garodi		Yes
17	Sindholu, Chindollu		Yes

Source: Status of inclusion of denotified, nomadic, and semi-nomadic tribes among Scheduled Castes/ Scheduled Tribes/Other Backward Classes (provisional), report, 2016, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

The commission also failed to identify the nomadic nature of Gurrammala caste, traditionally affiliated with Mala caste. In Telangana, their number is very small, they are spread in various districts like Karimnagar and Rajana Siricilla, Siddipet, etc. The table below shows the traditional occupation of various numerically smaller castes. The occupation of Dalit nomad castes is diverse. The below table indicates the selected SC nomadic caste demography across Telangana state.

Table: 3

Selected SC Nomad Caste Population

Sr.No	Caste	Female	Male	Total Population
1	Dakkali	1344	1214	2558
2	Beda Buduga Jangam	55420	56290	111710
3	MalaJangam	1660	1527	3187
4	Sindhollu, Chindollu	1916	1956	3872
5	Madiga Dasu, Mashteen	835	828	1663
6	Gurrammala	NA	NA	NA

Source: Census, 2011

The above table shows the selected nomadic caste population in Telangana. The population indicates that they are numerically scanty. Among the nomadic caste, Bedapudagajangam is numerically more compared to others. Gurrammala caste population is not even recorded in the Census. It means they might have clubbed with their major caste which is Mala. This also reiterates the question of how a particular community or caste claims their representation even when their population has not been recorded in the official records. The recent commission (Bhiku Ramji Idate, 2016) appointed by the Central Government identified the various castes as denotified and nomadic communities in Telugu region.

Table: 4

Caste Occupations of Dalit nomad castes

Sr.No	Name of the caste	Traditional Occupation
1	Arundatheeya	NA
2	BedaJangam, Budagajangam	Hunting, Flowers and cultivators
3	Bindla	Priests of Madigas, Appeasers of Goddesses
4	Chamar, Mochi, Muchi	Shoemakers and leather workers
5	Chamabar	Shoemakers and leather workers
6	Dakkal Madiga, Dakkalwar	Mendicants, Bards of Madigas, leather workers
7	Dhor	Leather and tanning works
8	Godari	Leather andshoemakers
9	Jaggali	Leather workers and agriculture laborers
10	Jambavulu	Agricultural laborers
11	Kolupula Vandlu	Foretelling, appeasers of goddesses.
12	Madiga	Leather, tanning, chappal making
13	Madiga Dasu, Masteen	Spiritual advisers, acrobatics storytellers to Madiga
14	Mang	Drum beaters, Basket, Mat making, Tanning, Jugglers, snake charmers
15	Mang Garodi	Snake charming, Buffalo shaving, Acrobats, Jugglers
16	Matangi	Begging, singing, Tanning
17	Samagara	Leather and tanning works
18	Sindhollu, Chindlollu	Drama, dancing

Source: P. Muthaiah. 2004, pp-197-198[iii]

The above table reflects the diverse occupations of the nomadic caste groups among which there are priest castes like Bindla, Madigadasu,

Nulakachandaiah, etc. These priest castes perform the marriages and initiate rituals and festivals to Dalit communities. The caste like Sindhollu or Chindhollu perform dance, drama, and narrate the antique stories of the ancestors.

Social Hierarchies among Scheduled Castes (SC) and Dalit Nomad Castes

It is worthy of attention that within the SC communities also there exists a kind of social hierarchy that hierarchises the Dalit communities in terms of ascending order of reverence and descending order of contempt. Usha Mehra commission observed:

There are certain rules that restrict the taking of food, water, and access to the temples among Scheduled Castes. The Mala does not take food or water from the Madiga, the lower caste. Mala Jangam, Mala Dasari, and Mitha Ayyalwar do not eat or drink from Mala, Madiga, and Dakkal castes. Similarly, other castes do not take cooked food or water from these castes. Mala and Madiga castes have separate wells and temples. Mala does not take food or water from the Masti, Gurrammala, and Madiga castes. But all these castes take food and water from the priestly class of Mala. The Sangari, the Gurus to Madiga. Strictly refrain from eating food touched or cooked by Madiga or other satellite castes. Bindla, though enjoys a higher social status among the Madiga satellite, the higher castes do not take either cooked food or water from Bindla caste. Being worshippers of Shakti (the power), they do not take food or water from the hands of their satellite castes, since they consider themselves sacred. But T. R Singh in his study found that Bindla accepts food and water from Madiga and vice versa. Sindu, the entertaining caste of the Madiga caste does not take food or water from Dakkal caste. But their food or water is acceptable for Madiga. Dakkal Caste whichoccupies the lowest social status in the social hierarchy accepts food and water from all castes, except Vishwa Brahaman. The food or water of Dakkal caste is not acceptable to any other caste. The Dakkal caste has to take food or water standing outside the Madiga house.

Thus, the Scheduled castes do not drink or dine in common. These commensalities indicate the foundation of Panchama hierarchy and caste cleavages within Scheduled Castes in Andhra Pradesh (Usha Mehra Commission, 2008).[iv] It is not only cultural hierarchy that exists among untouchable castes, but also the residential arrangement that indicates the hierarchical relationship of the various scheduled castes. Usha Mehra Commission observed that

"It is empirically proved that houses, the living quarters of Scheduled castes and other castes are not together, as they were planned to the tune of social hierarchical values. Among the depressed classes, Mala lives next to Shudras. Mala and Madiga live in separate hamlets. Generally, the habitations of Madiga and its satellite castes are away from the outskirts of the villages, located at a distance of about 0.4 km from the cluster houses of washermen (Shudras). Usually, the dwellings of Madiga are onthe outskirts of villages where the dirt of the village is lodged in heaps. Dakkal, the last one in the social hierarchy lives away from the Madiga living quarters. Persons from Dakkal caste are not allowed to enter the living quarters of Madiga, but they pitch their huts of bamboo mats at a distance from Madiga houses.

This physical distance of scheduled castes from upper caste and Shudras and between their satellite castes is the best indicator of social and cultural distance among the different castes in village India. The social distance, which is rooted in the notion of purity and pollution is a mechanism that deprives Scheduled Castes of their opportunities in various fields. In descending order, the Scheduled Castes are deprived of opportunities, as many times as there are social layers. In other words, the last man, Dakkal is deprived of the culture by its upper castes, that is, the Brahmin, the Kshatriya, the Vaishya, the Shudras, the Mala and the Madiga".(Usha Mehra Commission, 2008)[v]

During the fieldwork, it is also observed that the social hierarchy is deeply rooted in their everyday relations, however, there are gradual changes in the social relationships.

Dalit Nomad Castes, Culture and Their Folklore

Dalit nomadic communities have a rich source of folklore and cultural heritage which help propound their method of preserving the cultural history of the communities and transitioning it to the next generation. These folklores mark their existence through oral tradition communicated through the folklore performances. Jayadheer Thirumala Rao argues that the affiliated subcastes traditionally earn their daily bread primarily by entertaining the villagers with the help of their ancestral skill of performing folk dance and music. They narrate myths pertaining to the origin of the patron caste by going from one village to another village. These performers narrate about various legends and caste genealogies (*Gotras*). These performers are folk bards or folk singers. They hold '*mirasi hakku'*, (right to perform in a particular region). They have the right to go every year to their patron castes and ask for *'tyagam'* (fixed money or grains for their performance). The table given below presents the various performance and the musical instruments that they perform and use in their folklore.

Table: 5
Madigas subcastes and their art forms and musical instruments

Sr.No	Subcaste or Dependent Caste	Patron Caste	Art form/Oral Narrative	Musical Instruments
1	Chindu	Madiga	Chindu Bagotam/ChiduYakshaganam/ Janaba Puranam	Harmonium, Thabala, Thalalu
2	Dakkali (Performenrs)	Madiga	Jambava Puranam	-
3	Dakkali (Musicians)	Madiga	Jamba Puranam/ Ballads/	Kinnera (Stringed Instruments)
4	Baindla/Bawan / Pambalu	Madiga	Bandla Katha/ Jamukula Katha	Jamidika/ Pamba (Percussion)
5	Sangadivaru	Madiga	Recitation of Puranam	-
6	Asadi	Madiga	Asadikatha	-
7	Madiga Masti	Madiga	Madiga Bagotham	-
8	Nulaka Chandayya	Madiga	Recitation of Jambava Puranam	-

Source: Jayadheer Thirumala Rao, *Hakku Patrallu*[vi]

Though in the wake of globalization and technological advancements, the recent years have noticed significant positive changes, the era has also marked a catastrophic decline in the usage of traditional folk culture and musical performances. Thanks to the Dalit nomadic communities who enliven the legacy of various forms of folklores and musical instruments. The Government also takes support of these nomadic art forms and musical instruments for advertisements related to policy awareness programmes[vii]. These days some of the art forms and musical instruments are being used in popular cinema and musical albums for example, Kinnera musical instrument, played by Mogilaiah has been used in 'Bhimla Nayak' movie. Mogilaiah has also received the Padma Shri in the year 2022 for his service to Kinnera folk musical instruments. The other Dalit folk artists from the nomadic community Gaddam Samaiah and Dasari Kondappa received the Padma Shri Award in 2024 for their Chindu Yakshaganam and Burra Veena performances respectively.

Chindu caste people perform the art form accompanied by musical instruments like Harmonium, Thabala and Thalalu. They compose different rhythms for different performances. When Chindu artists perform street plays like *Yellamma Katha, Chindu Bagavatham*, etc. they use these instruments. The artists themselves learn these instruments from senior artists. Whenever these instruments get damaged the players of these instruments know how to repair them. Children are also interested in playing these instruments. However, Chindu Shyam argues that "due to technological advances, and the emergence of social media and television, the performance of Chindus has swiftly declined. In the contemporary age, Chindu artists rarely perform these art forms in villages. A new generation of youth is not showing much interest as there is no livelihood with these art forms"[viii]. Budugajangam is another Dalit nomadic caste in the list of SC. Traditionally, they are preacher of Shaivism. They worship Shiva and move village after village. In their nomad life, they used *Gumeta* and *Dinkilu* in narrating the folk tales. By performing Tambura, they narrate Balanagama, Balurikondaiah Katha, Kambojuraju Katha, Budavengala Reddy Katha (story), Alli Rani Katha, etc. In their folk

narration,one personleads, and the othersfollow in chorus singing. In their folk performances, both men and women equally partake. (N.R Venkatesham, 2002)

Jilukara Srinivas Says "Bavanilu is one of the affiliated subcastes to Madigas. This caste is semi-nomadic. Traditionally, they used to perform priesthood to Madigas. They also used to do some cultural performances and sing folk songs dedicated to local deities like Veera Yelamma, Maramma, Maisamma, Bhavani, Durga, etc. While they are performing their folk performances, they use 'Jamidike'musicalinstruments"[ix]. Ganisheti Ramulu is a organic intallectul from Gosangi community. He lamented that"Gosangi is also one of the significant nomadic castes. This caste narrates many folk tales and is destined to ask for alms in various places. In their folk narrations, they use instruments like Tambura, Harmonium, Thalalu, Maddela and narrates mythological tales of Poranika Natakalu, Ramayana, Mahabharatam, Bobili Yuddham, Alluri Sitharamaraju, Ambedkar and Gandhi, Nehru, etc[x].

Dalit Nomad Castes' Cultural Assertion through Literature

The Contemporary Dalit Literature (CDL) emerged as an alternative discourse in mainstream literary production. However, the experiences and struggles of the Dalit nomad communities are yet to be documented. The life experiences of Dalit nomad communities are distinct from those of the settled Dalit communities. This section is aimed at mapping the literature of the Dalit nomadic communities in Telangana and argues that Dalit nomad literary writings have a great ability to expand the horizon and deepen the Dalit literary praxis. CDL has marked a qualitative change in the form and content of Indian literature. It became a separate distinctive genre of the literary field, taking inspiration from anti-caste movements of the underprivileged communities in different regions of India. For example,the Dandora movement was launched by Madigas for their equal opportunities in reservations and dignified identity in Telugu region. This movement inspired many Madiga writers for their literary expression. The new emerging Madiga writings questioned the homogenisation of Dalit communities and advanced

the CDL by subscribing to the emic perspective of the Madiga community. Madiga writers posed some pertinent questions, such as What is Dalit literature? Who is eligible to write it? How can Madiga experience be same as of the Mala caste since they are charred by a hierarchical caste inequality? Why Dalit nomad caste experience has been invisible in CDL so far? All of these questions are influential to understanding the dynamics of CDL. Hence, one can say that the Dandora movement created ground and gave a voice to literary writings of the numerically smaller Dalit nomad caste.

There are two categories of writings on Dalit nomadic castes: (i) Writings, written by the Dalit nomadic communities by themselves and (ii) Writings produced by the non-nomadic writers on Dalit nomadic communities. In the absence of Dalit nomadic organic writers, the non-nomadic Dalits initiated literary writings on Dalit nomadic communities. During the fieldwork it is observed that illiteracy is more common among the Dakkali and Masti. While there is some literacy among nomadic communities like Budagajangam, Madigadasu, Malajangam, etc., the percentage of intellectuals and writers is very low. Dakkalies are the lowest among untouchables. Historically this caste carried the legacy of narrating the story of *'Jambavapuranam'*. Traditionally they go from one village to another village and perform *Jambavapuranam* in Madiga colony and take whatever Madigas offer to them in the form of '*tyagam*'. There is no literary writing on this community. However, some of the university-based scholars like Jayadheer Thirumala Rao and A.K Prabhakar, K.P Ashok Kumar documented the Jambavapuranam performances and subsequently transcribed them into text. The editors establish the importance and vision of the Jambavapuranam in resisting the Brahmanical hegemony. Further, they also argue that Jambavapuranam represents the parallel tradition of subaltern communities against the Brahmanical tradition. The Jambavapuranam is also performed and orally narrated by Chindu Masti, Baindla and Nulakachandaiah Subcaste[xi].

The literature on the Chindu community is relatively visible because of the organic intellectuals belonging to the Chindu community itself. The first

person who documented *Chindu Yellamma* life was a non-Chindu namely K. Mutyam. He interviewed Chindula Yellama who is a doyen of *Chindu Bagavatam* performance. The interview was transcribed into Telugu and published in text form entitled *'Nenu Chindula Yellamma*" (I am Chindula Yelamma) in 2006 under Drusti publication. The book attracted many writers and intellectuals. Immediately after the death of Chindula Yellamma, K. Mutyam and Sabanda Venkanna brought out the memorial volume titled*"Chindula Yellamma Yadi"*(memory of Chindula Yelamma) with many articles in memory of Yelamma in 2006 under Drusti, Sabanda Publications. In English also there are few studies on Chindu Caste cultural life by Simon Charsly and Jangam Chinnaiah (2016), these works are published by internationally acclaimed journals.One important development in this community is that there are scholars from this caste who studied in universities and began to write aboutthe Chindu caste. One of the young writers and researchers is Gaddam Mohanrao. Mohan published seven books so far on the Chindu castes. He wrote a novel based on his experience titled*Kongavalu Kathi*in 2017 published by Chindu Publication. This novel also got 'Kendra Yuva Sahitya Puraskaram' in 2019. This is the first Chindu novel, moreover first novel written by Dalit nomadic castes. Mohan published a series of Chindu artists' biographies like *Chindula Yelamma* (2013), on Chindula Yelamma artistic Journey, *Chindula Hamsa* (2013) on Gaddam Samaiah life history, *Nenu Chindeste* (2015) on Chindula Sham life. All these biographies indicate the life struggles of Chindu art and artists. One of the inspiring stories Mohan did was to establish the Chindu publication house. Budagajanagam community started its caste association in 1970s. N.R. Venkatesham took up the research and actively participated in Sangam activities. He also launched a magazine called *Budugajangam Vani* in 1984 to document his caste legacy and experiences. He published a few important books on this Budugajangam culture, life, and language. N.R. Venkatesham also receiveda Doctorate from Osmania University and began to work there. For overall information on Budugajangam caste, he published a bulk volume called *Budugajangam Darshini*in 2002. Ganisheti Ramulu is a Govt. employee and one of the

significant organic writers from Gosangiwho has been proactively engaged in strengthening the cause of the Gosangies. He continuously writes about Gosani's history, life, and culture. He has produced four books so far, which are 1. Chikati Brathukulo Gosangilu[xii] (Gosangi's Life in Darkness, 2004) 2. Gosangilu Evaru[xiii] (Who is Gosangi? 2015) 3. Evari Mahanihilu (Who are the Pioneers? 2018).

Recently Gandam Vijaya Laxmi who is a first-generation university educated woman completed her Doctorate from Telugu University. She published a book titled *Gosangi Basha-Sankruthulu-Oka Parisheelana* (Gosangi Language and Culture: A Critical Evaluation, 2019). Hence, one can say that organic intellectuals through their writings presciently document their community experiences and articulate their aspiration for dignified and social justice. Chinthala Yadaiah did some research on this community. He published a book titled *Janapada Vigyanamlo Bavanilu-Oka Parisheelana*(Bindla in the Folklores: An Analytical Study) in 1990, published by Telugu University.

Nulaka Chandaiah is one of the priestly castes to Madigas. They narrate 'Jambavapuranam' using Thalapatra leaves. Pulikonda Subachari documented the narration of Nulaka Chandaiah Jambavapuranam published in book form titled *Nulka Chandaiah Adi Jambavapuranam* published in 2008. During the fieldwork the researcher could not find any literature on Madigadasu and Masti caste. There are fewer studies on Mala-affiliated castes. On the Mala Pambala caste which is priest caste Malas, Ganta Chakrapani published a book titled *Pambalas: The Vanishing Dalits Priests* in 2009. On Mala Dasaris caste Murali Manohar published a book titled "*Dalit Hindu Narratives*" in 2013 in which he argues that there is an influence of Shaivism and Vaishnavism among Dalit nomadic communities like Malajangam, Madigadasu, etc. The writings on Dalit nomadic women written either by men or by themselves are rare. However, the edited book titled *Nallaregatisallu*(2006) by Jupaka Subadra and Gogu Shyamala is significant. The book is a collection of short stories on Dalit nomadic caste women. These short stories are written largely by non-Dalit nomadic writers. However, the attempt was to bring the life and

struggles of nomadic communities. The volume also foregrounds the multiple oppression and marginalization of Dalit nomadic women. The experiences of Dalit nomadic women enable us to expand the Dalit feminist discourse. In the context of the above-emerging writings by Dalit nomadic communities, we have to critically evaluate the Dalit literary discourse in order to deepen it.

There are two comprehensive volumes that brought Telugu Dalit literature into English; One is *Steel Nibs are Still Sprouting: New Dalit Writings from South India* (Harper Collins, 2013) edited by K. Satyanrayana and Susie Tharu and the other is *Telugu Dalit Writings* (2016) published by Oxford University Press and edited by Gita Ramaswamy, K. Purushotham, and Gogu Shyamala. Both volumes fail to document and address the Dalit nomadic literature, not even including a single writer from these nomadic castes. Reasons may vary, but there is a need to pay attention to these writers and bring them to the public domain. Vemula Yallaiah argues that,

Dalit literature will never exhaust itself. The aspect of repeating oneself will not continue for longer… when the malas ran out of fuel, the madigas began to write enriching the Telugu Dalit literature. By the time the latter get repeated, the dependent castes will begin to write more powerfully. And that's not going to be the end of it. Every time you run out of fuel; every time you repeat yourself, you need to learn from the more oppressed ones who begin to write; who have so much to write. The exhausted writers are not going to stop writing either. Instead, they have to reinvigorate themselves by going back to their roots, and by learning a lesson from whom they had oppressed earlier. The future of Dalit literature lies in expressing one's asthitvam (identity) to dismantle and destroy the symbols of oppression forever. Dalit and Adivasi writing alone have the potential to do it.[xiv]

Vemula Yellaiah is a well-known writer belonging to Madiga castes. He is one of the strong supporters and promoters of the sub-caste literature. In his above quote, he attempts to elucidate that Dalit writers and literature should have self-reflective ability to incorporate new voices coming from the lowest among the low to expand the Dalit literary discourse.

From Nomad to Semi-nomad: Social Mobility among Dalit Nomad Castes

As has been mentioned above Dakkali, Chindu, Masti, Malajangam, and Gurrammala are traditionally nomadic castes in Telugu region. They used to move from one village to another or from one locality to another. However, due to growing occupational changes, the new generation is compulsively getting divorced from traditional occupations which lead to two fundamental changes: (i) They became oriented towards non-traditional informal work and (ii) They aspire for the settle life in the village. In the process, many people construct their pucca (concrete) houses, while some are compelled to live in their thatched huts but don't wish to adopt their traditional occupation. In the field work it is observed that among Budugajangam caste, the majority of families constructed their own houses, and a few stayed in semi-pucca (semi-concrete) houses. Chindu, Malajangam, and Gurrammala castes also constructed their concrete houses. The majority of the people among Dakkalies do not have requisite resources to construct concrete houses and live in huts beside roads, under bridges, and in the city outskirts, etc. The government housing schemes hardly benefit the nomad castes. The interviewed families lamented that they did not get the double-bedroom scheme which was started by Telangana Government to provide a double bedroom for the poor families. However, few among them got land for the house which is far away from the village. For Dakkali community there is an immediate requirement to buildhouses. Chandrakala, a graduate student from the Dakkali community opinionated that "having a house can bring significant changes in their life"[xv].House gives permanent address to their lives which is important to get various govt certificates.

Traditionally, nomad Scheduled Castes were depended on their caste occupations. These occupations declined due to technological advancement and globalization. When the occupation is lost or the occupation fails to accommodate substantial livelihood, the youths belonging to Dalit nomadic become jobless. In some occasions, youths are also not interested to do traditional caste occupations because of its caste stigma. Among nomad

communities youth are shifting or moving towards urban centres and cities and working in informal sector. Most of the time working with minimum pay with no security to the job always creates vulnerability. In the Government sector, there is a decline in jobs due to privatisation. Moreover, within the extant reservations system, they have to compete with other relatively advanced Dalits which is challenging. There are many youths (16-25 years of age), who become rag pickers involved in collecting garbage. During the fieldwork, the researcher interviewed two dropout female intermediate students[xvi] from Dakkali caste in Pebber (Wanaparthy district) who disclosed that they are compelled to go for rag picking and garbage collection daily to fuel their family income.

The nomadic communities fail to get financial support or loans from the government. Since, in order to give loan(s) banks demand security. These nomad communities don't have any land, property, permanent houses, or other property that they can stake for security. When nomad castes shift from caste occupation to another field, they don't have the required skills to work in the field, hence they end up working as daily labourers that doesn't help for their substantial development. In this situation many people move to cities, MNRGA's100 days of work are not accessible to them, they don't show much interest in this work. In the process, youth are also involved in various informal works like driving auto rickshaw, cleaning or become waiters in bars and restaurants. Traditionally some nomad castes like Dakkali, Budagajangam, and others practice ayurveda (natuvaidyam). Many times, in the villages, in the name of Blackmagic, village people suspect them and abuse and beat them. Thanks to digital technology, cultural globalization, and social media that have brought a drastic change in nomad castes' lives. Nomadic communities historically didn't have many channels to communicate or contact with each other when they were moving from one village to another. Now with the available communication methods, they can communicate with each otherquickly. Many of the nomadic or semi-nomadic communities' families are using cell phones with the internet. Having a cell phone also allows them to document their life. On many occasions, they share

happiness, pain, and information through Facebook and other social sites apps. Youth of these communities are creating separate Facebook pages, and WhatsApp groups for the community development. Sometimes each district people also separately maintain their pages. In the WhatsApp groups, they regularly discuss their community problems and plan for action. When group members share their success stories, others get inspired. This process creates a moral and political strength for the members.

Democracy and Dalit Nomad Castes Struggle for Social Justice

Given the above diversity and historical inequalities among Scheduled Castes both in social and economic life the government appointed a committee called Lokur Commission in 1965. The commission aimed to advise revising the SC and ST list. The chairperson of the committee was B.N Lokur (Lokur Commission, 1965)**.**The Lokur Committee observed that the designed development schemes and policies for SC and ST fail to benefit the denotified and nomadic communities that are listed in the SC and ST categories. These communities are numerically smaller and lack literacy and political awareness. Therefore, the Lokur committee suggested that they should be treated separately and provided constitutional guarantees with focused and inclusive development schemes. The recent National Commission for De-notified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (NCDNT, 2014) recognized some communities among Scheduled castes as de-notified tribes and nomadic communities.

There are new Dalit movements across India that demand for subcategorization of the SC reservation for the benefit of the most backward Scheduled Castes (SC). In Telugu region, the MRPS movement (1994) is demanding for the sub-categorization of SC reservation. There is a long-term feeling among the Madigas that the Scheduled Castes (SC) reservation policies benefit Mala caste only, while other castes fail to access these opportunities due to a lack of equal opportunities in education and employment. Regarding this sub-categorization of SC reservation there are contested opinions. Some argue that the struggles for recognition and redistribution by the lowest of the

low within Dalits have a greater ability to deepen the Dalit movement. The unity of the Dalits has to be built by recognizing each other at all levels. (C.Gopani, 2020., K.Y Ratnam, 2009., Muthaiah, 2004., Balagopal 2000., Gundimeda Sambaiah, 2009 etc). Some other argues that this kind of move and demand for categorization leads to the division of Dalits and political manipulation by mainstream political parties in the context of globalization. (Thorat, 2024, Anand Teltumede, 2009, Gopal Guru, 2009). However, in the context of the growing assertion and mobilization of the numerically smaller castes, it becomes necessary to the scholars engage with nomad Dalit castes to understand their perceptions ofthe changing nature of their socio, cultural life, the accessibility of state resources like reservations and sub-plan funds allocation in proportion to their population. The case studies of some individuals from fieldwork also reassert the need for sub-categorization of SC reservations and state resources to benefit the lowest among the scheduled castes for their empowerment.

The growing consciousness among the Dalit nomad caste also indicates social mobility and political assertion among emerging leadership. The two commissions appointed by the Government: (i) Ramachandra Raju Commission (1997) and (ii) Usha Mehra Commission (2008) in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh recommended the categorization of SC reservations based on existing disparities in accessing the reservation. The opponents went to the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court in its judgment (2004) rejected sub-categorization and suggested a constitutional amendment in parliament. The political parties are playing their politics on the issue. The cases below indicate the assertion and aspirations of the Dalit nomad caste leaders for their equal share and dignified identity.

Case: 1: Banala Mangesh[xvii] is a young leader of the Dakkali community. He is 40 years old. He studied up to the 10th class, but he discontinued his further studies due to the financial conditions of his family. In his school days, he was a Kabadi player. However, his interest was also lost because of the utter poverty he was compelled to live with. He shares the bitter experiences of his

school days where he was discriminated against by upper caste and comparatively affluent Dalit students due to his Dakkali caste identity. The villagers also watered down his aspiration to live within the village premises, rather they suggested he stay at the outskirts of the village. To get rid of his problems, he actively participated in the MRPS movement. Resultantly, he formed the DHPS (Dakkali Hakula Porata Samiti) with the support of MRPS. Subsequently, Mangesh became the president of this organization. With the help of his community youth, he has been mobilizing, organizing, and educating Dakkali people for their empowerment. He regularly communicates with his members through WhatsApp, Facebook, zoom meetings, etc. He also identifies Dakkali communities' problems, responds whenever there is a need for community. He shares his experience that "because of illiteracy, less numerical strength and economical backwardness neither parties and nor government pay attention on Dakkali caste empowerment.Further, he also reiterated on sub-categorisation of the SC reservation for the benefit of the lowest among the low.

Case: 2: Gajawelli Ganapathi[xviii]is a young leader from Chindu community. He is educated up to graduation. His family is influenced by Christianity. Because of Christian missionary influence his social life is relatively different from other normal Chindu families. Being educated he is actively involved in social activism. In 2004 he associated with the MRPS Movement, when Manda Krishna Madiga started to mobilise sub-caste of Madigas like Chindu, Dakkali, Masti, etc. under the guidance of Krishna Madiga, Ganapathi becamethe president of Chindu Hakkula Porata Samiti (CHPS). Since then, he has beenactively arguing, educating,and responding to the problems of the Chindu community. He fought for pensions for old-ageartists in the Chindu community. He also regularly organizes online/offline gatherings with employees, youth, elders, and political representatives to discuss Chindu community empowerment. He laments that "there is a need of bringing all numerically smaller castes under one banner to negotiate the development agenda of these communities with government.

The organization like Dakkali Hakula Porata Samiti, Dakali Sankshema Sangam, Chindu Hakula Porata Samiti, Chindu Kalakarula Sangam, Masti Hakula Porata Samiti, Budugajangam Hakula Porata Samiti are all fighting for their rights and proper representation. For the development of the most backward scheduled castes, many educated individuals formed an organization called 'Telangana SC 57 Upakulala Hakkula Porata Samiti'. The founder and present National General Secretary Byri Venkatesh argues that the numerically smaller and most backward castes among Scheduled castes are becoming invisible in the political process. Hence, he demands that the government should give representation to these communities in nominated posts. Further, he argues that the numerically smaller communities like Malajangam, Masti, Gurrammala, and others face difficulties in getting caste certificates from the concerned authority which is a fundamental document for accessing any policy benefit [xix] .Democracy has to ensure the inclusive participation of its all citizens and provide equal opportunities. In the case of Dalit nomad castes, they are not able to access basic needs like house, education, and reservation benefits. The nomad castes leaders are waiting for the judgment from the Supreme Court on the sub-categorization of SC reservations. The leaders believe that sub-categorization of reservations, separate allocation of state resources, and focused public policies will help them for their empowerment[xx].

Conclusion

The paper critically explored the invisibilisation of Dalit nomad castes in mainstream Dalit discourse. The Dalit nomad castes' lives and experiences are important to understand the dynamics of castes and expand the Dalit discourse. To understand the dynamics, we have to understand the diversity and differences among Scheduled Castes (SC). The study shows that Traditionally Dalit nomad castes in Telangana carried the cultural resources through their folk performances like Jambavapuranam in injecting Dalit cultural pride and anti-brahmanical thinking. The oral tradition of those communities became a repository of dissent against caste discrimination and

brahminical hegemony. While castes like Mala and Madigas are settled and lived in the outside of village in their untouchable hamlets, Dalit nomad castes are compelled to move from one village to another village to perform folklore for their livelihood. The invisibility and backwardness of Dalit nomad castes in Telangana are deeply rooted in their lower status in the caste hierarchy, poor economic conditions, and less representation in government institutions and politics. The practice of social hierarchy among the Dalits often normalized or not paid much attention. The study observes that the caste dynamics, practice of untouchability, and empowerment have to be understood through the real-life experience of Dalit nomad castes.

During the fieldwork, it is observed that there is a gradual change among Dalit nomad castes in their social mobility. The change is taking place because of slow settlement, and new generation youth positive attitudes toward technology and digital media, etc. It is also found that the conversion to other religions like Christianity is common among the nomadic castes and these converted families have comparatively better consciousness and understanding, particularly on education. The leaders from nomad castes reported that Dalit leaders don't specifically address the nomad castes' problems as they are insignificant number for them. The social mobility in occupation and the decline of the sustainability of traditional folklore performances of nomad castes are forced them to migrate to cities and towns. In the cities, they are involved in informal work or do rag-picking. The education of the children is disturbed. In the process, community-based organizations play a crucial role in talking and organizing nomad castes people through various means. There is a need of the middle class for articulating and negotiating with institutions for inclusive development and overall Dalit emancipation. The absence of proper housing is one of the biggest problems among Dalit nomad castes. In urban centers, they reside under flyovers, roadsides in slums, etc. The educated youth within the community take initiatives for organization and mobilization by using social media. They are not recognized in politics due to their lack of numerical strength. Since they have not benefited much from reservation, they demand

sub-categorization and welcome the Supreme Court judgment on SC reservation sub-classification. Through sub-classification, they get an opportunity to employment and education. Nomad castes leaders assert that representation in employment, education, and politics helps them to overcome their invisibility. Their empowerment can happen only when society and state take appropriate action and empathetically respond to their problems.

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Notes

[i]Dandora Movement, popularly known as MRPS movement started by Madigas and their sub-caste under Manda Krishna Madiga for the sub-categorization of Scheduled caste reservation in order to benefit the lowest among the low.

[ii]Adi-Andhra is a movement in which both Malas and Madigas are part and claim themselves as Adi-Andhra in the colonial period.

[iii]Discussion on 15th September 2022 with Prof. P. Muthaiah, who worked on Madigas and Sub-categorisation issues in the Telugu region. See P. Muthaiah. 2004, "Dandora: The Madiga

Movement for Equal Identity and Social Justice in AP", Social Action, Vol,54, April-June, pp-197-98.

[iv] See Usha Mehra Commission, 2008, pp. 83. The commission was a second commission on the issue of sub-categorization of SC reservations appointed by the Central Movement. The commission visited and met many groups within Dalits studied the issue and recommended the sub-categorization with constitutional amendment.

[v] See Usha Mehra Commission, 2008, pp.84.

[vi] Discussion with Jayadheer Thirumala Rao on 20th May, 2022, *Hakku Patrallu*See Source: extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://eap.bl.uk/sites/default/files/legacy-eap/downloads/eap201survey.pdf

[vii] Interview with Jayadheer Thirumala Rao on 18th July, 2023 at Hyderabad.

[viii] Chindu Shyam is a artist who performs various art forms. Interview on 25th July, 2023. Hyderabad.

[ix] Interview with Jilukara Srinivas on 24th September 2023. Warangal.

[x] Interview with Ganishetti Ramulu on 29th March 2023

[xi]See Jayadheer Thirumala Rao (eds, 2011) *"Dakkali Jambavapuranam",* Janapada Prachuranalu, Hyderabad, pp. 1-29.

[xii]Interview with Ganishetti Ramulu on 29th March 2023. See Ganisheti Ramulu (2004) *"Chikati Brathukulo Gosagulu",* Jilla Gosangi Sangam, Nizamabad.

[xiii] Ganisheti Ramulu (2015) *"Gosangeelu Evaru*", Gosangi Snshema Sangam, Hyderabad.

[xiv]Interview with Vemula Yellaiah on 25th August 2022. His writings document the everyday life, culture, and languages of Madigas and Madiga Sub-castes. His Novel Kaka has created a huge debate in the Telugu literary world, it is translated into English. Prof. K. Purushotham translated his writings into English. The quote is taken from K Purushotham's article on Vemula Yellaiah.

[xv] Interview with Chandrakala on 24th January 2023, at Shadnagar, Ranga Reddy district.

[xvi]Interview with Manjula, Rani (Names are changed) on 3rd February 2023. Pebber, Telangana.

[xvii]Interview with Banala Mangesh on 12thJanuary, 2023

[xviii] Interview with Gajaveli Ganapathi on 24thMarch, 2023

[xix] Online Interview with Byri Venkatesh on 17th July 2023.

[xx]The supreme court is reconsidered E. V Chinnaiah Vs Addra Pradesh (*CASE NO.: Appeal (civil) 6758 of 2000* Petitioner: E.V.Chinnaiah Respondent: State of Andhra Pradesh and Ors. Date of Judgement: 05/11/2004) for review on 26th August 2020. The judgment is yet to be delivered on the matter.

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Article: Swachh Bharat and Social Equality: A Policy Perspective

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Swachh Bharat and Social Equality: A Policy Perspective

-- Sunkari Satyam

Abstract

The Government of India has launched the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, envisioning a clean India. It got the attraction of the elite and had extreme popularity. The idea of environmental cleanliness and equal participation in cleaning India became a landmark proposition of the government under the Clean India Mission. The programme has been massively popularized through popular mass participation and media in which people, irrespective of their social and economic status, enthusiastically participated. The idea of social purity and impurity in a larger social domain is strongly rooted. However, in contrast to social hierarchy based on impure occupations (by certain castes include sanitation and cleaning of social environment and scavenging) and social discrimination based on caste identity in India, popular participation in the Swachh Bharat programme, which includes sanitation and cleaning surroundings, is highly evident. The paper argues whether the notion of social equality is acceptable or whether it requires more policy measures to restructure the social hierarchy, as it is evident that the practice of social discrimination is strongly evident among Indian society. Is it really necessary to relate the Swachh Bharat to the concept of social equality? This paper analyzes how the concept of social justice is relevant in this context.

Keywords: Swachh Bharat, Social Discrimination, purity and Social Impurity

Introduction

Social Equality from the Policy Perspective

The idea of social equality must be understood not only in general and abstract terms but also in more particular and concrete philosophical arguments. Contextual understanding from a philosophical outlook provides insights for policy formulations and reveals how far theoretical arguments have effectively

influenced strengthening policies from the perspectives in general and social justice and equality in this particular context. Social equality, as a concept, has recently been compared with the concept of justice (United Nations 2006). The idea of social equality is closely linked to the concept of justice, and justice has become a symbol for "ideals of progress and fraternity" (United Nations 2006:12). The conceptions of justice, social justice, and equality have been embodied with human dignity (United Nations 2006). The Greek conception of justice was conceptualized mainly from Plato's ideas as goodness (equal opportunities with good soul, for equal opportunities for men and women and for good soul) and Aristotle's willingness to obey the state (laws [Nicomachean]) to bring out the perfection in human relationships (McAleer 2020 and Irwin 1999). Modern philosophers like Immanuel Kant, an eighteenth-century rationalistic philosopher, work profoundly influenced the idea of justice in modern democratic systems. Kant's 'Metaphysics of Morals' presents the doctrine of right, which was later translated as 'doctrine of justice' and 'doctrine of law' and developed as a theory of justice. In his entire conceptual understanding, it represents that justice and rights are correlative (Allen 1993).

Contemporary political philosophy, mainly by John Rawls, one of America's greatest philosophers, extremely reformulated the conception and his principle of social justice is fairly contingent on the principle of fair distribution of resources. He proposed that each person should be entitled to the maximum degree of liberty and equal opportunities (1972:302). Rawls' idea of justice was developed based on 'transcendental institutionalism', in which the role of institutions is significant. In contrast to the Rawlsian idea of justice, modern societies developed it based on multiple dimensions, including institutional characteristics, other behavioral characteristics, and social realizations. Thus, Sen, A (1999) considered five basic human freedoms, including political freedoms, economic freedoms, social freedoms (equal opportunities of resource distribution - as health care and education), freedom of people in terms of transparency guarantees in which people deal with conditions of disclosure and lucidity, and freedom of safety net through which the state

ensures protective security policies for the unemployed and indigent (Sen 1999). Thus, Sen, A. (1999) mentions that the essence of development as a substantive freedom is the same as that of positive freedom, as he distinguishes, for instance, "it's constitutive and its instrumental role in development" (in his view, development as the goal of public policy in the context of poverty, famine, etc. to achieve individual's social and economic environment). The idea of freedom can be precisely concentrated on two basic elements: human progress and the enhancement of freedom (O'Hearn 2009). Social liberals recognized the collective responsibility to ensure genuine freedom and positive liberty through state intervention. This view was further developed by the then democratic socialists. Hattersley (1987:78) cites R.H. Tawney, 'Socialists interpret freedom as implying the utmost possible development of every human being and the deliberate organization of society to attain that objective' (1931/1964).

Based on these premises of the freedom of human beings and justice, modern political thought has brought out more and concurrent ideas of equality as a fundamental and contentious political principle. The freedom of human beings is structured in the framework of the basic formulation of equality. Conceptually, White (2007:4) classified five forms of equality by focusing mainly on moral, legal, social, political, and economic equality. Moral equality proposes that each member of the state has equal worth (White 2007:10), legal equality justifies equality before the law, social equality maintains equal status to all in the society and social organizations (White 2007:7), political equality commands equal rights to participate in formulating the laws (White 2007:5; Dahl 2006), and economic equality concerns access to and the distribution of wealth and resources. Social equality coexists with the concept of social justice, which relies on 'parity of participation' (Fraser and with Bedford 2008). Consequently, the origin of the concept of equality could be traced from different reference phases such as Greek philosophy, the medieval political thought, the Renaissance (sociological perspective), the scholarship of the Nineteenth Century scholars, the contribution of liberal thought and the contribution of the Twentieth Century to the development of

the concept of equality (Bidner 2013; Blanning 1989; Bloch 1939; Childe 1942; Elias 1994; Hayek 1960; Holt 2015). Conceptually, social equality refers "social and relational equality" (Fourie et al., 2015:1) and in a broader sense, it includes equal rights with dignity to each and every individual irrespective of their individual identity - caste, religion, race, gender or any other form of identity and equality before the law.

However, despite the broad democratic rights and constitutional safeguards that evolved through the different codified laws over a period of time and the emergence of international covenants, complex social and political issues relating to inequalities, injustice and social discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, race, gender and other forms of individual identities are predominant in democratically established societies, including India. In these complex social and political environments, democratic nations have evolved rights-based approaches through constitutional mechanisms to safeguard the individual beings residing within defined sovereign democratic nations. In the Indian constitutional framework, the concepts of equality and social justice were the outcomes of a tremendous amount of scholarly work by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (Venugopal 1998; Iyar 1991). He also advocated that equality should be considered a principle and a fundamental element for developing a nation. Thus, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar established equality and social justice as pillars of the spirit of the Indian Constitution. The Constitution ensures that the democratic political system safeguards the rights of the weaker sections of society and promotes justice on the basis of equal opportunities. The Constitution ensures justice through constitutional mechanisms. In this context, this paper attempts to explore Ambedkar's ideas on equality and social justice. It also focuses on Ambedkar's social justice ideas from an Indian sociological perspective (Venugopal 1998; Iyar 1991).

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's proposition of social justice is mainly based on the concepts of equality, liberty, and fraternity. The scheme of social justice is to eradicate all kinds of social evils and inequalities on the basis of equal opportunities in the spheres of social, political, and economic. Ambedkar's

philosophy was predominantly concentrated on three basic formulations—social amelioration, political enlightenment, and spiritual awakening—because he had deep faith in fundamental human rights and individual dignity to promote social progress (Venugopal 1998; Iyar 1991). Social progress and development processes are closely related to the equal distribution of wealth of the nation as conceptualized by Dr. B.R Ambedkar. Nonetheless, Dr. B.R Ambedkar strongly contested the idea of the Varna system (the four Varnas and the Caste order) of the Hindu Caste structure.

The hierarchical caste structure under the popular varna system has standardized atrocious acts within the framework of Manusmriti. Thus, the system has shown its heinous effects on various weaker sections of society, particularly on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The socially evil design propagated by Manusmriti was popularly considered the ancient legal document that ensured the legality of the Varnasrama dharma (Ambedkar 1990). The Varnasrama dharma was codified in such a way that it refused to recognize the fundamental right of human beings, that is, all are born equal. The Varnasrama dharma thus glorified the glaring inequalities and dehumanized the dignity of the weaker sections based on the hierarchical caste system (Venugopal 1998). The social system under the Varnasrama dharma embossed the weaker sections of society as "sudras" and "untouchables" and their occupations were standardized as manual laborers (Ambedkar 1990). Social customs under Manusmriti's formula were deprived of opportunities to attain education and dragged them to the lowest social status (Ambedkar1990). The hierarchical social structure was formed in which social privileges were limited and provided to the predominant classes, which increased the differences between higher and lower classes, and it became an oppressed and depressed social structure in the Indian social system (Ambedkar1990; Venugopal 1998; Iyar 1991).

According to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a hierarchical society or graded inequality was formed based on the caste system, and it molded every occupation into a caste system in India (Ambedkar1990). Occupational caste society has

restricted social and economic opportunities to certain fabricated lower classes, and each caste or class had to forcibly own its own traditional occupation and follow it by restricting social mobility in terms of occupations and other educational and economic opportunities (Ambedkar 1990; Iyar 1991). The caste-based social system adopted a strong hierarchical system by adopting caste-based occupations to pre-determine social status, which resulted in gross humiliation, discrimination, and social inequality (Ambedkar1990). In this socio-political context, the concept of social justice has emerged to dismantle the traditional social hierarchy and transform the existing social structure of Indian society into a progressive social system. As a result, predominant concepts like creating a just society and a just social order have evolved in this country (Ambedkar1990; Iyar 1991; Venugopal 1998).

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's vision on social order is very clear and viewed that India needs a social democracy to realize people's aspirations in terms of political, social and economic democracy as he correlated with each other. Thus, Ambedkar was very obvious with the concepts of social justice and social democracy as the chief architect of the Indian Constitution. The predominant concept of social justice developed based on unity and equality and equal rights. His strong observation was that the root cause of social injustice to the weaker sections was the hierarchical social system of Hindu society in which caste as a unit of social identity and it further emerged as the root cause of 'untouchability' (Ambedkar 1990; Iyar 1991; Venugopal 1998). Dr B.R Ambedkar was firm on providing equality before law believed that there must be guaranteed laws to rectify the existing stratified society and he strongly advocated that it requires laws by granting laws for equal protection to all its citizens within in the territory of India (Ambedkar1990). The Constitution of India has provided fundamental rights to its citizens and the Right to Equality (equality before law) and equal protections under Article 14 as it states that "The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India" (Iyar 1991; Venugopal 1998).

However, despite the fact that the Indian Constitution provided constitutional safeguards to its citizens irrespective of their caste, creed, race and religion, and India's economic growth has shown remarkable performance, "Dalits, the citizens of a free country, face discrimination in hiring, choice of employment, the conditions of work and terms of employment" (Down to Earth 2016) even after 74 years of independent India's development experience. Independent research observations further point out that "we are yet to be free from our attitude toward gender, caste and other social ills" (Down to Earth 2016) by locating India's social system. Apart from constitutional safeguards, from the public policy domain, the recent initiative, popularly known as Swachh Bharat, was commenced intending "to create a clean India" by bringing all citizens into its domain (Government of India 2023). The program has attracted the people's attention to participate in the drive and emerged as a National Movement and it has evoked 'a sense of responsibility among the people through the Clean India Movement' (PM India 2023). Nevertheless, in contrast to India's existing hierarchical social system and graded hierarchical social norms, the central question in this paper is how far India (its people) conceives being participants in cleaning India as its responsibility, since the cleaning act is traditionally considered as an inhuman activity by certain social classes.

Swachh Bharat as a Social Policy

Social Policy, in terms of its scope, involves the study of human wellbeing, the social relations necessary for wellbeing and the systems by which wellbeing may be promoted (Alcock Cliff et al 2008). As an academic discourse, social policy and administration are concerned with the study of social services and the welfare state. It emerged in the early part of the 20th century to contextualize welfare administration. Policy is an essential part of governmental activities, and governments create policies by different branches at different levels to guide and structure activities (Lister 2010). Governments develop a 'range of policies aimed at all sorts of issues and problems'. Social or welfare policies are part of public policy designed to bring out progressive

changes in the society (Lister 2010; Mcnutt and Richard 2021). Swachh Bharat Abhiyan as a welfare policy was launched to make India clean. The Swachh Bharat Mission as a welfare policy was aimed to achieve "the levels of cleanliness in rural areas through Solid and Liquid Waste Management activities and making Gram Panchayats Open Defecation Free (ODF), clean and sanitized" (Swachh Bharat Mission [Gramin] 2017:2). The Prime Minister of India launched the campaign on 2nd October 2014, and about 3 million people participated in this event including employees (public and private), politicians, students (school and college) and marked the biggest cleanliness drive. The program mainly has concentrated on the construction of individual sanitary latrines for households, especially those below the poverty line with subsidy about 80 per cent where exactly its demand drive, conversion of dry latrines into low-cost sanitary latrines (Swachh Bharat Mission [Gramin] 2017) as it is considered as the biggest problem in some parts of India, "construction of exclusive village sanitary complexes for women providing facilities for hand pumping, bathing, sanitation and washing on a selective basis where there is not adequate land or space within houses and where village panchayats are willing to maintain the facilities" (Nayak 2015). The program has also focused on setting up sanitary marts, achieving total sanitation in all the villages of India through the construction of drains, solid and liquid waste disposal and soakage pits. It further has taken up intensive campaign on awareness generation and health education. Thus, people from different sections of society have come forward and joined in this mass movement. More interestingly, top bureaucrats, entertainment personalities, sports icons, industrialists, and even spiritual leaders have been enthusiastically involved in sanitation and cleaning acts. It is also governmentally known as 'the noble work'. Finally, the cleaning activities have been termed 'the noble work'. It is challenging to read the words – 'sanitation is the noble work' by referring "Cleanliness is next to Godliness" as expressed by the government (https://indiancc.mygov.in 2023) and accepted by all social sections of Indian people including Non-resident Indians

(https://indiancc.mygov.in 2023). It is surprising to see that the elite and professional classes have largely participated in the program.

According to Indian media and publications (thousands of pictures including social media), millions of people across the country have joined in the program, and it has been mounted into many folds in terms of awareness creation, people's participation and effective governance. According to the PMINDIA website, apart from government people and departments, NGOs and local community centers have also been involved. There has been a mass flow into it to make India clean under the Clean India Mission. The mass flow into it to make India clean under the Clean India Mission was evident. The mass mobilization was encouraged through campaigns, organizing plays and other traditional music instruments, which have been extensively carried out across the nation to increase awareness levels on sanitation, hygienic conditions and the importance of the program, as the PMINDIA website states.

The web page also remarks that "Prime Minister himself has admired the efforts put by people and various departments and organizations for taking part in the Swachh Bharat Mission and contributing toward a clean India. The Prime Minister of India has always openly lauded the participation of people via social media" (PM India 2021). Another supported initiative, '#MyCleanIndia,' was launched simultaneously as a part of the mission to highlight the cleanliness work carried out under this mission (PM India 2021). It was observed that all the social classes and castes (elite) including Dalits and Tribal people, other backward/forward classes and castes have been involved in this popular program as a mass movement. The government further mentioned it as a mission mode act of the government. This program proved that all human beings born in India are equal, and the program succeeded in bringing all the castes into sanitation and cleaning toilets.

Noble versus Low-Grade Human Beings

Some premier personalities are seen in the media (media sources are available on the internet or web and print pages of Indian newspapers), stating that Swachh Bharat is a great work and needs to be continued until complete cleanness is achieved in India. However, according to the website of the Safa Karmachari Andolan (SKA), which started in 1995 by the progressive children of the families of manual scavenging and supporters of eradication of this inhuman act, there are about "2,60,0000 Community Dry latrines (CDL) and Individual Dry Latrines (IDL) are being used collectively by the people" and 'individual households and humans are employed for cleaning excreta on a day to day basis which is highly considered an indicator of untouchability in India' (Safai Karmachari Andolan 2022). About 7,70,000 sewer cleaning workers are engaged in clearing sewers, although the Honorable Supreme Court's order states that "it is a crime to force a human being to enter a sewer line unless it is an emergency, but not without the required safety gears" (Safai Karmachari Andolan 2022). Moreover, 36,176 Railway Cleaners have been engaged in Manual Scavenging activities at about 8,025 Railway Stations in the country (Safai Karmachari Andolan 2022). These stressing issues forced the state's intervention in dealing with inhuman acts (dismantle of dry latrines). Consequently, the government (the Prime Minister of India) openly stated that "people should neither litter, nor let others litter" (https://indiancc.mygov.in 2023).

The Safai Karmachari Andolan (2022) suggested that the government focus on the children of families of manual scavenging and provide a holistic and integrated policy to transform the traditional socio-economic structure of socially marginal sections, especially manual scavengers' families, to brighten the future of children under Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. Immediately after the announcement of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan program and its financial allocation, the World Bank announced its support by allocating about $1 billion toward the Swachh Bharat campaign. Successive governments can achieve complete eradication of the inhuman acts of cleaning dry latrines and

stopping their usage under the program. The Safai Karmachari Andolan (2022) report states that the government's role in cleaning India under the Swachh Bharat Mission has to broaden its activities to address the problems of Safai Karmacharies while monitoring the program continuously. The report of Safai Karmachari Andolan (2022) suggests that the government has to take serious actionable policy measures to eradicate scavenging activities. There are about 50 lac persons (according to the report of 18th Annual Report 2014-15 of National Safai Karamcharis Finance and Development Corporation Limited [NSKFDC]) of Scheduled Castes and other classes, who continue in the caste occupation of manual scavenging and cleaning surroundings.

The recent Act of the Prohibition of Manual Scavengers strongly supports the cause of ruining the dry latrines as well. In the line of functioning with Swacch Bharat Abhiyan, the NSKFDC has launched two new schemes such as 'Swachhta Udyami Yojana' and 'Sanitary Marts Scheme'. In fact, NSKFDC is a government undertaking under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment egis. It aimed at eradicating the terrible practice of Manual Scavenging, developing and empowering these families by promoting socio-economic development programs such as providing financial assistance under its various loan-based schemes and initiating self-employment programs. It also provided loans to students of these communities to pursue professional or technical education at graduation or higher levels and promoted training, quality control and technology upgradation. Common facility centers were also launched to perform sanitation works and other all-round developmental activities.

The report of NSKFDC (2014-15) mentioned that Rs. 718.18 crore of funds were disbursed to 70641 beneficiaries; however, the report's observations revealed that the support in terms of funds allocation to eligible families was not sufficient to compensate for the lives of scavengers. In addition to the schemes available for these communities, the government needs to take up a program called cleaning social inequalities and social pollution, which has also influenced the engagement with inhuman activities and its existence in

the broader social system. The government must consider social exclusion as a problem under the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan program. The state has to weaken the system of social division based on the untouchable approach. It requires appropriate actions to eradicate social inequalities. The protective and pro-active measures in terms of reservations and specifically targeted special financial allocations have limited scope in achieving the goal of social equality. The reason for this observation, as the Report of National Safai Karamcharis Finance and Development Corporation Limited (NSKFDC 2014-15) mentions, is that about 50 lac people are still dependent on manual scavenging activities even after various welfare schemes and development programs have been initiated to empower weaker sections of the society.

The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO, 2011-12) reported that the majority of youth belonging to Scheduled Castes (SCs) were found to be worst sufferers; hence, governments have to evolve different policy measures to empower their socio-economic conditions. The survey also further stated that a significant proportion of SCs were working as daily wage laborers and casual wage workers, which signifies vulnerability, insecure livelihoods and job insecurity and poor earnings. Broader perspectives and interventions to change attitudes on the grounds of caste identity must be developed and special campaigns on social equality must be adopted so long as the practice of social impurity or social discrimination on the grounds of social category or caste is continued. The social settings that include predominant classes and marginal castes (SCs and STs) need to be redesigned through protective social development measures from the spheres of social equality. The historical injustice and humiliation along with economic and political exploitation must be addressed. However, the mission of Swachh Bharat has to sensitize the severity of social exclusion through various social awareness programs along with environmental awareness on cleanliness as the program's objectives have reached in a mission mode to each and every individual of this country. The Swachh Bharat Mission has to promote social dignity along with cleaning India. There is a need to change in social behaviors that divide Indian society on both caste and occupational lines.

Moreover, the Indian caste system is strongly built on interconnecting cultural aspects of diverse social dimensions where people are hierarchically differentiated through social castes and cultures. Caste-based occupations have further divided society into different factions. This led to the emergence of a form of social divisions based on occupational specialization and economic status. Thus, the program has to reduce the differences between economically dominant classes and marginal castes by bringing socially relevant values—inherent virtue, high morality, righteousness, decency, worthiness and intellectuality—in the minds of both the economically wealthy and the socially poor. It also requires reform of the social understanding on the basis of social purity and impurity in the context of social inequalities.

Social and Environmental Purity

The social structure has close proximity in the Indian context. The Swachh Bharat Mission has mainly advocated the idea of social dignity, which can be modified through a policy perspective. The reason is that the act of cleanliness was considered a traditional occupation of the lower castes of India. In contrast to such social phobia that cleaning activities are related to a particular community, the program highlighted the sanitation work and recognized persons who have been in these activities with pride and honor. Thus, it could be understood that the popular social narration could be modified the social phobia of social identity from the perspective of social exclusion as this fact was largely undermined by socially and economically affluent groups who have been in the decision-making spheres. The popular mass program, the Swachh Bharat Mission, has strongly influenced the idea of social dignity as a concept of purifying social minds and promoting the importance of a hygienic social environment. Another important issue is that sanitation workers at all levels—village, block or mandal, district and other urban local bodies. Their involvement in sanitation activities and its importance was largely undermined in the broader policy context, and sanitation workers' daily involvement in cleaning social surroundings is also very significant.

The Swachh Bharat Mission must focus not only on municipal workers but also on village level workers who have been involved in cleaning activities for years. In villages, it has been for centuries and in India even today, at least two persons engage in cleaning drainages and roads. Their wages are meager, and they have to be with the Panchayat office throughout the day with a tiny financial package or on a daily wage basis. The reason why such an observation needs to be discussed here is that the persons who have been working as sanitation workers are mostly from socially marginal communities. This means that socially marginal workers are forcibly tied to marginal incomes. This proposition standardizes historical social marginality that has been forced to continue with marginal lives. This cycle needs to be broken down as the idea of the Swachh Bharat Mission has brought a dynamic approach of state and social responsibility within complex social settings.

In general social conditions, "inequalities in wealth lead more or less directly to stigmatizing differences in social status" and "differences in income and wealth become problematic in conjunction with the creation of structural inequalities" (Fourie et al., 2015: 123). In India, both social and economic differences lead to stigmatization of the social status. Most sanitation workers have connected with the professional tradition of their parents as they were also engaged in sanitation works. This became a standard formula in social relations. However, it was a well-known fact that the sanitation workers' aspirations were trying to refill by repositioning with their children despite the inherent riskiness of work (Garg 2019). Under the Swacch Bharat mission, governments (both state and center) have adopted the latest technologies in cleaning drainage systems. The sanitation workers' daily engagement includes the collection of domestic waste, commercial waste, industrial waste, hospital and clinical waste and waste from other sources. The major source of domestic waste is households. The quantum of municipal solid waste (MSW) generated from urban households in India is estimated to be around 1,600,38.9 tons per day (TPD), of which 152,749.5 TPD of waste is collected at a collection efficiency of 95.4 per cent as mentioned by the Annual Report on Solid Waste Management (2020-21). The household waste mainly consists of organic

waste including vegetable waste, food, and other household wastes that can be easily disposed. Commercial Waste includes waste from commercial establishments such as hotels, restaurant shops, trading units, small-time street traders, and social function halls. These sites generate solid waste, which mainly consists of waste paper, plastics, food left-over and other organics. Industrial Waste generated from major industries in urban areas, hospital and clinical waste, especially from maternity homes and hazardous waste and waste from other sources include street sweeping, drain desalting and construction.

Existing data sources clearly reveal that the state of affairs of the people involved in Indian towns and cities are in disarray. There is a lack of data on sanitation workers, especially on manual scavengers, as the report of Water Aid (2019) mentions. The government surveys provided limited data on sanitation workers, which led to very limited coverage of people under various schemes in terms of welfare and development programmes. Studies also observed that there is limited impact of the socio-economic conditions of manual scavenging families (Ravichandran 2011; Katiyar 2017; Katiyar 2022). Moreover, the severity of sanitation and manual scavenging workers was severe as significant deaths were reported during the cleaning of the septic tanks and other sewage drains (Socio Economic and Caste Census 2011).

The Government of India has banned manual scavenging by introducing the Employment of Manual Scavenging and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act in 1993 and the Prohibition of employment of Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 to prohibit employment in manual scavenging, construction or continuance of dry latrines and regulation of construction and maintenance of water-seal latrines. Further, the act was modified and replaced with the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act (PEMSR) in 2013 by expanding the definition of manual scavengers to include most categories of hazardous sanitation work. It was also mandated that the state identify persons engaged in manual scavenging to assure them a dignified life through liberation and

rehabilitation (Water Aid 2019). Moreover, the Supreme Court of India ruled that manual scavenging violates international human rights commitments in 2014 as there was evidence of experiencing violence and untouchability (Water Aid 2019), which are quite against the fundamental rights guaranteed under Articles of 14, 17, 21, and 47 of the Constitution of India.

The inhuman practices in terms of manually removing human excrements from dry toilets with bare hands, brooms or metal scrappers, carrying excrements, and carrying baskets to dumping sites for disposal are still prevalent in many parts of the country. Sanitation workers who have been involved in cleaning sewerage pipes and who have engaged in waste treatment plants, cleaning of public roads, cleaning of community and public toilets, school toilets, sweeping, and drain cleaning are under serious and problematic conditions. The data and various reports suggest that there is still social discrimination and social and physical attacks on socially marginal communities. The very question is that the scheme of Swachh Bharat has promoted a clean social and political environment by promoting public awareness on the importance of cleanliness but other side, there are incidences of social indignities. This is where the Ambedkarism has raised important concerns on social dignity based on caste structure as there are social encounters in marginal communities, especially in terms of verbal and physical attacks being reported. The caste system standardized the practice of 'untouchability', which led to the deniability of equal rights of individuals in larger social spaces and it further escalated hurdles in achieving justifiable social progress. In this background, the concept of social dignity is essential to promote through the Swachh Bharat program, locating social equality as a practice. The reason is that the program has attracted mass participation across Indian social sections. It has relevance to relate social equality with the program because it has space to change caste-based attitudes of people, which has been significant across social spaces. Caste-based social hierarchy could be achieved faded away at least to some extent, if not at all, in larger social spaces. Thus, the Swachh Bharat mission must focus on deconstructing social impurity and reconstructing social purity as part of the cleaning of India.

Question on acceptability

It is truly a remarkable feat of the mission to bring all the social sections into the Cleaning India Mission. Cleaning the surroundings is the basic element that excludes certain sections of society. Rigid traditional religious orders in terms of the varna system denied certain social groups' basic human rights. The cleaning of the surroundings and human excreta through forced human labor became a formal social identity to exclude these social groups. History further strongly recognized them as outcasts and branded them as untouchables. Moreover, Indian hierarchical society is structured on the idea or the belief of purity and pollution; hence, cleanliness is considered as a significant value in Indian society and the caste system enforces this idea (Ambedkar 1990). Thus, the Indian society, under the mission of cleaning India, unintentionally accepted the truth that all are equal.

The arguments of equality for all on similar lines are put forward by the messiah of the downtrodden, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar received both sides of views—acceptance and opposition (Panikkar 2004). The fundamental idea and practice of equality is the question of social order. It is obvious that all social groups have participated in the cleaning India Mission, which is quite in contrast to the idea of the caste system, which is primarily based on purity and impurity (Ambedkar 1990). Recent acts on caste-based discriminatory attempts further reveal that public participation in cleaning the India Mission is quite different from private social relations as caste-based discrimination is still prevalent (Thorat 2009). Thus, the notion of social equality among Indian social groups is not clear in general and not fully adopted in particular. However, these aspirations require a constrictive policy apparatus like the Swachh Bharat Mission with a refined social reform approach and quality education to all irrespective of caste, religion and gender. However, the idea or practice of social dignity to some extent was promoted in other frames under

the cleaning India program, and it does not matter whether people accept it or not.

Will people accept the idea of social equality and dignity in practice? However, India requires not only knowledge-based education but also value-based human approach education. It has to clean the idea of social inequality under the broad objectives of the Swachch Bharat Mission, which has also shown experiences that cleaning individual toilets for themselves is also a noble cause.

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Commentaries: Problems with Defined Research Ethics in Ethnography in Changing Times

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Problems with Defined Research Ethics in Ethnography in Changing Times

--Nyamath Hussain Shaik

This commentary is an outcome of my field experiences in a rural village in Andhra Pradesh. In this, I aimed to problematise some Ethnographic research issues like payments to the interlocutors, confidentiality and the validity negotiation, leaving the field in current times, researchers' dilemmas in collecting data, and the role of emotions in shaping our data collection. As Ingole (2014) opined, Ethnography as a methodology is an over-exploited data collection method in social sciences. In recent times, there has been an increase in the use of ethnographic methods in behavioural sciences. Ethnographic research is shifting its form and content due to the demands of the 'busy readers'; it is opting for flash ethnographic essays of 750 to 1500 words, which are against the spirit of Ethnography, which prioritises extensive fieldwork and thick description.

a. Payments to the interlocutors

Direct payment or "fair return" to interlocutors is a classical debate in ethnography, as it is believed that such compensation might compromise the validity of the research and create difficulties for future researchers, especially those who are poorly funded (Das & Parry, 1983, pp. 790–791). However, Srivatsava (1992) problematises this position for two main reasons. Firstly, the 'ethical guidelines for good practice' by the Association of Social Anthropologists of the Commonwealth (1987) allow for payment in terms of a "fair return" for the assistance provided by the respondent. Secondly, the payment is not for the information given but for specialised knowledge shared with the researcher, akin to *guru dakshina* (a tribute to a teacher), which also helps maintain rapport even after exiting the field. The problem with Srivatsava's argument is that he does not view this as a 'slippery slope.' The degree of exploitation by the researcher and the respondent depends on the moral values of both parties, which are very difficult to foresee. Additionally,

respondents have their own agendas for collaboration, making the exchange reciprocal (Liu & Burnett, 2022, p. 6).

In my field, it is not about money but rather about 'returning favours', as expected by respondents. They put me in a moral position where I could not say no to them, be it doing online mobile recharges, paying electricity bills, booking railway tickets, filling out job applications, filling out forms 6 and 8 for inclusion of voters, applying for passports, or collecting parcels on their behalf. For all these tasks, they paid me the money sometimes immediately or later. However, my presence made their tasks a little easier, as otherwise, they would have had to travel to town and pay someone to get them done. In exchange, I gained access to the respondents, which helped me connect with broader networks. Respondent Hasan (male, 32) asked me to accompany him while collecting donations during Ramadan to write the names of the donors. I was introduced to every Dudekula house in the village and to the Dudekulas who had migrated to a nearby town. I also learned about the people's names and kinship groups. It is not just my respondents who put me in a moral compulsion; it also works vice versa. I try to be accommodating towards respondents, as I understand the importance of maintaining good relationships that may be helpful during the data collection process.

b. Negotiating Confidentiality

Maintaining the anonymity, confidentiality, and privacy of participants and the data collected is a paramount duty of a researcher (Reeves et al., 2013, p. e1368). However, achieving complete confidentiality is impossible in a social setting rather than an individual private space. Winfield (2022), who conducted three years of ethnographic work in a United States Military Preparatory school among three batch cadets, problematises confidentiality since cadets are constantly under surveillance by superiors or peer groups. Negotiating confidentiality through informal groups of friends was challenging; some even asked her to interview friends with unique experiences. Winfield also invoked the dilemma of using pseudonyms, as they

wash away the unique aspects of an individual and reduce them to mere subjects of the study.

Though I did not work in an all-encompassing institution as conceptualised by Winfield (2022), I was always under watch in the small village, and some were interested in knowing about my work status or findings. Maintaining the confidentiality of one respondent among the others is challenging, primarily when family members practice different faiths, as most discussions happen in open spaces on their porches or in places where people usually meet. This also restricted me from asking provocative questions. Moreover, I had to 'bargain confidentiality' for validity, as respondents often concealed some details. Primarily among them were their economic aspects, fearing it might impact the welfare schemes provided by the state. Additionally, Dudekulas in the field often followed different kinds of faiths within the same household, leading to respondents hiding their Christian faith as it is associated with the scheduled castes.

Whenever I told my interlocutors the names of the houses or streets I had finished in the household survey, they would ask whether the residents had talked about government employment, business, differences in faiths, or eloped marriages. Initially, I felt uncomfortable with my interlocutors' interest in others' private affairs, but I understood that these were not private affairs for the villagers. Thus, it is hard to define what is confidential in this context. It is me who is not aware of the information; however, the confidential information was part of the collective memories of the villagers in the form of open secrets. This dynamic constantly challenges balancing confidentiality with the need to gather valid and comprehensive data. During group discussions, I primarily relied on opportunistic listening to verify potentially contentious data. Subsequently, I engaged with the concerned individual, leveraging my rapport with them and choosing an appropriate moment for the conversation.

c. Researchers' dilemma

Spontaneity plays a crucial role in fieldwork, as the field often presents challenges that are not anticipated or taught in classrooms. One such challenge involves knowing *when* to ask questions, *what* questions are appropriate, and recognising moments when observation and active listening should take precedence in data collection. As Karen O'Reilly (2009) emphasises, it is essential for a researcher to remain sensitive to the context and to the emotions of research participants. This sensitivity often requires going beyond rigid, classroom-taught methods, reflecting the inquisitive and adaptive nature necessary for fieldwork.

In my case, one of the core research questions focuses on ritual practices surrounding death, which required me to document sensitive cultural processes. Although I attended the death ceremonies of five individuals, I found myself unable to ask questions—either to the bereaved family members directly involved or to other attendees—as doing so could have disrupted the emotional tenor and decorum of the mourning setting. Moreover, I consciously chose not to approach grieving families even after some time, as I did not wish to compel them to revisit painful memories. Similarly, I had to pause my household survey during festivals, weddings, or other significant or unforeseen events because I felt that they might compromise the data quality.

d. The Emotional Side of Fieldwork

Emotions play a vital role in understanding human thought and behaviour, yet they are often difficult to capture and may go unnoticed in academic writing (Beatty, 2014, pp. 553–560). Beatty (2014) contends that semantic, structural, and discourse-based approaches frequently overlook the most significant aspects of emotions—what truly matters to those experiencing them. In ethnography, fieldwork is inherently an emotional endeavour, evoking a range of emotions for both researchers and respondents. For instance, frequent quarrels among villagers, sometimes escalating into physical violence, deeply unsettled me, as did the presence of a snake near my residence.

One particularly personal and challenging moment was when I chose to avoid asking a respondent about her late husband, who had died of an electric shock, as it reminded me of my own mother's loss under similar circumstances. However, when an older woman shared the story of her daughter's death at the hands of her in-laws, I listened empathetically. In both cases, whether by intentionally avoiding sensitive questions or unintentionally inviting them, the outcome was the same: the women opened up about their traumatic experiences. After encountering numerous such incidents during and even after my fieldwork, I often reflected on the ethical complexity of my role. At times, I felt as though researchers—especially ethnographers—are akin to parasites, building their careers on the suffering and misfortunes of others. However, the respondents' openness in sharing sensitive information with the researcher—in this case, me—helped me overcome my own sense of vulnerability and continue with the fieldwork. In some cases, it is the respondents who challenge the researcher's personal biases and enable further progress in data collection.

e. Leaving the field

After collecting enough data and spending considerable time in the field, ethnographers are required to depart from the field in order to document their findings. However, they need to formulate a strategy for their departure (Gobo, 2008, pp. 306–312), as respondents may not wish to let the researcher go for various reasons (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 95). In my field site, whenever I took short breaks to go to university or for personal reasons, Narasimhulu (male, 46) would tell me that I had become scarce (*Yṭṭa abbā iṭaitē, karuvai pōtāv ga māku*), or many respondents with whom I maintained cordial relations would inquire about my whereabouts.

Leaving the field is a conscious decision, and I wanted it not to be abrupt. To manage this, I used a gradual withdrawal strategy. I left the field for a month without vacating my room, assuring my interlocutors that I had not left permanently and that all my belongings were still there. During this time, respondents would call to confirm my status, and I would reassure them of my

return. Fifteen days before Eid-ul-Adha in June 2024, I returned to the field, stayed until Eid, met all my well-wishers, and then left again completely. When I met the respondents for the last time, I assured everyone that I would return to the village for festivals and important events like my friends' weddings. This approach helped ease the transition and maintain my relationships with the community, making my eventual departure less abrupt and more acceptable to them. By emphasising my intention to stay connected, I could leave the field in a way that respected the bonds we had formed.

However, the process of leaving the field raises several questions that modern ethnographers must consider. With the advancements in transportation and communication technology, the dynamics of fieldwork have changed significantly. Researchers are no longer as isolated from their field sites as they were once. Maintaining regular communication with interlocutors is now possible even after physically leaving the field. Social media and other digital platforms enable researchers to keep track of their respondents and stay updated on events and developments within the community. Given these changes, the traditional notion of "leaving the field," as described by early ethnographers who conducted research in distant, unfamiliar places, may need to be reconsidered. In contemporary ethnography, leaving the field does not necessarily mean cutting off all ties with the community. Instead, it involves navigating the complexities of ongoing relationships and the potential for continued engagement with the field site, albeit in a different capacity.

This shift in perspective raises important questions about the nature of ethnographic work in the modern era. How does the ability to remain connected with respondents through technology affect the depth and authenticity of the research? What ethical considerations arise when maintaining ongoing relationships with the community after the formal conclusion of fieldwork? How do these continued connections influence the researcher's interpretations and conclusions?

These are critical issues that ethnographers must grapple with as they adapt to the evolving landscape of fieldwork. While maintaining relationships with

respondents can provide valuable insights and help researchers stay informed, it also requires careful consideration of the implications for both the research and the community. Balancing the need for ongoing engagement with the responsibility to respect the boundaries and autonomy of the respondents is a delicate task that calls for thoughtful reflection and ethical sensitivity.

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Book Review: Gramsci and South Asia, Routledge, London

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Arun K Patnaik (2024), *Gramsci and South Asia*, Routledge, London

--Srinivasulu Karli

The volume *Gramsci and South Asia* is a welcome addition to the growing scholarship on India with Gramsci as an important intellectual influence and reference. The fact that Gramsci has been recognized and sought to be studied with Indian concerns even by the subaltern vernacular intellectuals of course apart from the English educated is illustrative of the increasing serious interest in his thought and practice. The present volume with Indian focus would be of immense interest across the intellectual and activist spectrum.

The volume comprising of nine chapters is organized in three parts each focusing on a critical idea/ theme, that is, Part I Common Sense (chapters one and two - with chapter one being Introduction), Part II Religion (chapters three to five) and Part III Political Society (chapters seven to nine –ninth being Conclusion). Of these except for four chapters published first time here (chapters 1, 6, 7 and 9) all others were published earlier in journals and as book chapters - noted at the end of each chapter. They are revised, chapters three and five substantially, to suit the theme of the present volume to be included in it.

This volume apart from numerous other articles that are part of Patnaik's work since the 1980s covering the above broad themes of course centred on Indian specificity is a testimony to his long time interest and sustained engagement with the Gramsci's *Oeuvre.*

The book begins by clearly stating that the treatment is guided by the instructive distinction between "assimilation route" and "hybrid route" proposed by the "Swaraj-in-ideas" theorist KC Bhattacharya. As the author finds it appropriate to follow what he calls the "translation-cum-assimilation" subject to critical scrutiny especially in the context of colonial modernity under British rule and its apparent continuation – at least its aspectual or vestigial presence – in the post-Independence period. This is the caution promised to be followed given the universalist claims of western provenance

(including Marxism) in mapping the Indian specificity through his engagement with Gramsci.

I

Methodological and Conceptual Issues

Gramsci's position in the history of the Marxist thought without any exaggeration is unique for in comparison to his contemporaries within the Marxist theoretical tradition he has been viewed as a major source of intellectual- theoretical reflection as a philosopher of *praxis*. The plethora of concepts identified to be central to Gramsci's thought like civil society, hegemony, political society, passive revolution, war of position, of movement, etc., have been seen as providing an alternative theoretical prism to the understanding of and also for the transformation of the capitalist state, society and culture. This is seen as an alternative to the predominantly economistic, reductionist interpretations of Marxism dominant during the Second International and continues to prevail till today in one form or the other.

There could be identified two kinds of approaches to a thinker: one is seeking to apply his ideas, concepts and theories to diverse contexts; two, in contrast to the 'application' model is what we can call 'dialogic' model. In this instead of applying what is sought to be aimed at is to have a dialogue with the thinker in consideration.

The application model with respect to Marxism has been quite well known in India both in the intellectual and political spheres. If the celebrated 'Mode of Production' debate marked by a competitive eagerness to assess capitalist development in agrarian India with profuse citations from the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Kautsky, so on, to authenticate their analyses is an instance in the scholarly sphere then in the debates on the revolutionary strategy among the communist parties in India on the relevance and application of models based on the revolutions in Russia and China is a well known one in the domain of political practice. If in the former one was not very sure whether it was India or Europe or Russia or Prussia or China under

consideration then the disastrous consequences of the latter are rather well known. For Gramsci, revolutions (see, "Revolution against *Capital*"[i]) have no models!

Seen thus it is a welcome move that Arun Patnaik in contrast to application mode favours critical dialogic mode implicit in his preference for the translation-cum-assimilation approach.

II

Strategies of Reading Gramsci:

The second issue in the critical consideration of Gramsci relates to the uniqueness of his *oeuvre* in the Marxist tradition known for the insistence on logical order and consistency of theoretical and conceptual structures.

Gramsci's writings are of two kinds: one, his journalistic pieces contributed to the party organs *Avanti* and *L'Ordine Nuovo* (which are available in English in two volumes as *Political Writings* I and II [ii]) and two, his notebooks (the *Prison Notebooks*[iii]) composed during his decade long incarceration in the fascist prison. The latter pose a unique problem not only related to the extreme prison conditions in which they were composed more so because of the very structure of these 'writings' which are essentially 'notes' and compositionally fragmentary and elliptic in style understandably to evade the prison censorship. The self-clarificatory and provisional nature of the ideas and concepts in these notes is reflected in the multiple versions indicating continuous attempt at improvement and clarification. Further the absence of any determinate addressee, present or future, complicates our relation to the 'text.' In other words, Gramsci's notebooks due to their "work in progress" character deprive them of finality in terms the authorial authentication a published work would have - the analytical importance of which Gramsci himself notes in one of his letters from prison. This calls for an important caution, as the enthusiastic reception of Gramsci evident especially in the non-academic and activist writings tend to treat Gramsci's thought as a complete system that can be applied to concrete situations.

This poses two critical problems to us who are interested in drawing on his thoughts for our own questions and concerns obviously because of the perception of similarity and comparability with Gramsci's concerns (question of ruling ideological hegemony, socialist revolution and fascism as a reaction, etc.): first problem as suggested above relates to the structure of his compositions and thoughts; and, second relates to their helpfulness in reflecting on our own concerns.

Given the format in which these writings are available to us – arduously edited and presented and in English published by credible international publishing houses like Lawrence and Wishart (London) and International Publishers (New York) – there is undoubtedly a careful, understandably spirited and highly motivated editorial intervention at work that has given the shape that they have now. These notes which otherwise had a fragmentary and provisional original state are now available to us today in an organized and structured format; in other words, the imposition of a structure and order on an otherwise notes format gives the reader a 'text' that is external to these compositions.

This point is worth noting as many interpretations of Gramsci do not tend to engage with this dimension of the notes. A conscious engagement with this fact would in my view lead us to have a different kind of relationship that would be more open to dialogue rather than to a spectacled relation. Further it would make us view Gramsci's *oeuvre* rather than as a system more as an inquiry and facilitate our participation in it as companions!

Another issue that deserves to be noted concerns with the object of Gramsci's inquiry. In the Marxian analysis there could be identified two paths in the transition to capitalism. What has happened in Western Europe following Marx can be conceptualized as the 'classical' path of capitalist development. The second path is what can be called the 'belated' capitalist development; what happened in the eastern and southern Europe can be considered under this category. While in the former, the bourgeoisie having a historical advantage emerges as the leading organizer of capitalist development and its

class power in the latter bereft of this initiative it makes compromises with the pre-capitalist classes and enters into an alliance. Gramsci's concept of passive revolution characterizes the belated path and its internal transitional problems - in this the specific case of Italy is reflected on.

Seen thus the central concepts in Gramsci's thought like civil society, hegemony and war of position would have more relevance to the understanding of the classical case and only by implication to assess their limitations/ inadequacies in the case of passive revolution. Further the concept of passive revolution acquires significance for its criticality to Gramsci's perspective on fascism.

Coming to our subject: South Asia was by no stretch of imagination could be Gramsci's research problem (despite the author's observations on Gramsci's interest in colonial world) yet the similarities between the belated capitalism of Italian variety and post-colonial South Asia[iv] are instructive. In view of this any engagement with Gramsci's thought and his relevance to south Asia requires to note a two fold problematization.

Firstly, to recognize and engage with a theory that is not fully worked out, developed and authenticated by its author and therefore the need for a methodological and conceptual caution to be attended through a critical engagement in a dialogic mode with the Gramscian work as a theoretical resource.

This is important as most of the writings – historical and interpretative - on Gramsci fall into the application category rather than dialogic one.

Secondly, the colonial and post-colonial context of India further complicated by the neo-liberal corporate and Hindutva shift seen as a critical departure could render the otherwise established theoretical procedures, conceptual tools and methodological protocols problematic.

It is quite possible to consider the present work by Arun Patnaik, as he promises at the very beginning, pursuing the dialogic mode though the

interpretative problems are not totally avoided perhaps may also be unavoidable. Let us now examine at what levels – classical to passive revolution to post-colonial – they appear and are addressed.

A detailed methodological and conceptual treatment of the above concern would have been instructive for the very subject the book is concerned with – Gramsci and south Asia – requires and aims to benefit from the open conceptual world that Gramsci promises us.

III

Thematic Issues: Post-Colonial State and Hegemony in India

The central principles on which the hegemonic project of *national-popular* is sought to be pursued in the post-Independent India can be narrativised in terms of, firstly, the nation-state imagined in the Westphalian image, secondly, secularism defined largely in the western modernist terms, and thirdly, development discourse premised on the superiority and necessity of modern science and technology. Thus the post-colonial reconstruction was to make a decisive departure from India's past and present in terms of political imagination, social and cultural practices and caste-occupation based social production. The Nehruvian modernist project, in sharp contrast to the Gandhian imagination, could be seen deviating from the deeply political cultural contestations that dominated the nationalist movement in all three respects – nation and state seen from a pluralist - diversity perspective, conception of secularism configured in terms of *Sarva Dharma Sama Bhavana* (equal respect to all religions) instead of separation of politics and religion format and even development seen in terms the labour resource-employment viewpoint. Curiously enough, the power of the centuries old dominant structures were undermined and the contradictions in Indian society based on caste, religion and values assumed to be resolved through the modernist development: economic development seen as panacea for all the problems of the new nation.

The instrument to carry this out is the state apparatus with the modern middle class playing the active agency. In this Nehruvian state-centric/ bureaucratic project the popular classes instead of seen as an agency of change are pushed to the receiving end; their values, beliefs, hopes (commonsense worldview) get to be treated almost contemptuously as traditional, backward, religious-superstitious needing rational intervention from outside and above. This project following Gramsci can be christened as passive revolutionary one in which national-popular is lost out or subjected to the state-legal-bureaucratic complex.

Even the Left politics in India can be seen sharing the elitist rationalist view of the modernist project - the roots of which in fact run deeper. The dominant perspective(s) in Marxism from Marx to Lenin and beyond have treated popular classes as being under the sway of the dominant ruling class ideologies[v] thus in essence denying the subalterns of autonomy in thinking and action. Marx's well-known characterization of the peasantry as "a sack of potatoes" (*The Eighteenth Brumaire*) and Lenin's emphasis on economistic "trade union" consciousness of the working people (*What is to be Done?*) are illustrative of this thinking which is in effect a continuation of Enlightenment rationalist tradition. In this context Gramsci's reflections on commonsense assume serious theoretical and politicial importance.

Central to Gramsci's dialectical thinking is the emphasis on contradiction as an integral aspect of class societies: this critical aspect pervades through his views on common sense, civil and political society and religion. It is this dialectical view that is key to Gramsci's openness to possibilities of transformation, which appear bleak in the deterministic and rationalist strands of thinking from the Second International to Frankfurt School and beyond, for this reason even in situations of dire pessimism and dark times like fascism Gramsci offers optimism and hope. This basic premise in fact informs his serious attention to contradictory nature of subaltern commonsense worldview which though composite, ambiguous and definitely inconsistent[vi] but to treat it

as stupid, superstitious and ignorant for him is to close the counter-hegemonic transformatory possibilities.

Arun Patnaik's effort in highlighting this aspect of Gramsci's thought assumes importance in view of the fact that most of the Marxist thinking in India – both scholarly and political – is premised on the assumed irrationality of subaltern consciousness inseparably linked to the pervasive presence of caste and religion in our social life. Subaltern commonsense thus seen blended with popular religion persuades him to pay deeper attention to religion which is also is seen as depository of superstition and likened to opium[vii].

Hindutva Project:

The challenge to the so-called secular project from the Hindutva forces is a decisive turn in India's post-Independence journey. This with the establishment of Hindu Rastra as the political objective seeks to ground itself by demolishing the bases and resources of the secular project. Given the fact that the Hindutva can no longer be brushed aside as a passing phase – as continues be done by some sections – but has to be recognized as a mass movement therefore it is necessary that it is engaged with utmost seriousness it calls for. The Hindutva project, seen along three coordinates of the secular nationalist project discussed above, presents anti-theses to them in terms of "one nation" premised on Hindu majoritarianism (the religious minorities to be pushed into second class citizenship) and diminished civil and subaltern society and an extreme political society tuned to the interests of neo-liberal corporate capital. The attempt to shape popular consent through a particular unitarian rendering of Hinduism as a uniform and monolithic textual religion and parallel singularisation of Islam and treating Muslims as a monolithic "other" when in reality both are internally differentiated and correspondingly orienting the political society to serve the objects that have been set as part of the project. Thus any critical inquiry into the contestation between social imaginaries of the secular and Hindutva projects has to be centred on the popular commonsense, religion and political society – three concepts central to Gramsci's thought and quite appropriately to this book under review.

What is noteworthy about this book is its engagement with Gramsci's view of religion which is perhaps the least explored dimension of Gramsci – in fact in Marxist - scholarship. Further Patnaik highlights the point, which in my view is methodological significant, that in Gramsci there is a keen attention to immanent contradictions and conceptual differentiation and variations. In other words, in Gramsci's thought no idea or concept is rendered linear or unitary but subjected to a detailed scrutiny to capture and elucidate its complexity.

These insights when applied to religion and political society especially seen in relation to subaltern commonsense, the central concerns of the present study, illuminate their complexity and multiplicity. These are worth emphasizing as hegemonic politics tend to render them homogenous and unitary.

Thus in Gramsci religious imaginary defying singularity gets to be differentiated in terms of high intellectual religion, religious commonsense, folk and subaltern strands. There are both differences, tensions and also dialogic interaction and mutual transformative exchange between these different levels. Interestingly, popular commonsense presents a *melange* of these different elements of religious mosaic thus making it internally composite, inconsistent and even contradictory.

This methodological insight could illuminate the Indic religious mosaic in a more productive ways for unlike Abrahamic religions Hinduism being historically indeterminate, aTextual, ritual practice-centric and internally broadly differentiated into Brahminical and shraminic traditions of course with mutuality and responsiveness defying singularity in spite of elite attempts to impose it from above. Given the geographical, sociological and linguistic diversity and religious ritual plurality as the context even holy book centric Islam and Christianity in India can be seen imitating, internalising and displaying indigenous Hindu-shraminic features in belief and practice if not in thought. Caste among Indian muslims and christians is an irrefutable sociological reality[viii].

Seen thus the Hindutva attempt to render Hinduism unitary through a centralized deity/ idol, temple (Ayodhya), standardized rituals and solo sloganeering (Jai Shri Ram) though paradoxical of course as part of a definite political project not only goes against the history and spirit of polytheistic Hinduism but it is no exaggeration to suggest could face multiple obstacles/ challenges at local, regional and national levels from an actual/emergent or potential/ prospective alternative national popular imagination.

Further, Patnaik in the same vein in his treatment of political society highlights the variations or multiplicity of versions of it in Gramsci. They are delineated in terms of hegemonic, passive, extreme and integral forms which could further be complicated by ideological drives with possibilities of combinatorial manifestation. Thus in Gramscian thought political society defies singularity. Political society being the site of subjecthood and civil society enabling citizenship the way their dialectic plays out is decisive in the autonomy of the subaterns and the quality of governance in a democracy. Thus the variations in political society are critical for these when seen in relation to civil and subaltern spheres and help us in appreciating the nature of hegemonic politics and resistance to it.

Thus the multiple variations of these critical ideas in their definition, meaning, significance and deployment break the simplistic perhaps comforting definiteness thus opening up varied possibilities that could enable us to capture the complexity of live dynamic contexts. In a significant sense it is a recognition of the openness and multiverse of Gramscian *oeuvre* that is promising and liberating.

What needs to be critiqued and demolished is the dominant doctrinaire take on Hindutva that seeks to view ideology as singular, homogenous and internally consistent and easily and unproblematically translated/ translatable into popular commonsense to rise into hegemonic position in opposition to the secular social imaginary.

For Gramsci hegemony as a process is never and can never be accomplished totally as it finds being continuously (actually and potentially) resisted/ challenged by the subalterns making counter-hegemony a simultaneous or parallel process and the dominant forces persistently negotiating/shifting/ recoopting them with civil and political society as the sites.

The dominant analyses and perspectives, both liberal and left, on Hindutva seek to understand it by privileging certain writings of Savarkar and Golwalkar as canonical texts of Hindutva and seek to offer a standard textualist view of the Hindutva when in practice or on the ground the concrete socio-cultural milieu shapes the popular perception, reception and conception of Hindutva, especially given the multi-nationality context of India. In reality no ideology gets translated in its pristine doctrinaire form into the popular subaltern consciousness. In the process of negotiating through the contradictions of subaltern everyday life they get transformed in myriad ways often with shifting meanings and emphases. It is instructive to reemphasise that the subaltern commonsense is an ideological *mélange* both in its form and in its receptivity.The realisation of this is imperative to pursue counter-hegemonic politics – a prime lesson to be learnt from Gramsci. The value of this book lies in driving this point effectively.

The Hindutva project, it must be emphasized, by seeking to transform the national popular imaginary centred on *One* nation both rhetorically and through policy initiatives premised on the three coordinates discussed earlier could be seen relentlessly trying to marginalize and impoverish the civil and subaltern spheres to close the prospects of subaltern autonomy so as to effect an extreme authoritarian political society in which citizen is reduced and forced to reconcile to the state of a dependent *labardhi* – an object of populist give aways and manipulation and subjected to the interests and rule of neo-liberal corporate capital.

Yet following the Gramscian perspective, the antidote to the accomplishment of the above project lies in the very nature of popular commonsense and its internal contradictoriness due to its material groundedness which complicates

the hegemonic process thus opening up spaces for the autonomous subaltern assertion and radical transformatory politics as resistance and potential counter- hegemonic process.

There could be numerous micro instances fracturing the smooth run of this hegemonic project. The book provides an instance of this through the case of Kandhamal (chapter 6). Kandhamal, the site of anti-Christian rioting in 2007 ignited by the Hinduvta forces, provides a concrete instance of subaltern reconciliation through dialogue and the necessity and eagerness to return to normalcy and sanity following a bloody conflict that was seen as irreconcialable. When like in many conflicts legalese is forwaded as the only available, often preferred, mode of settling disputes people's initiative and drive could pave the way for the restoration of peace and communal amity centred on civil society. It is a sad fact of our political society that most of the social and cultural disputations instead of being resolved in the domain of civil society are sought to be pushed into the legal realm, a facet of statist stance, apparently to prolong their resolution often with an eye on the political electoral gains and thus invariably procrastinating and overstraining the already overburdend judiciary. It is instructive that dialogue is the best, doable and durable mode of addressing social tensions as the very rhythm of lifeworld is based on mutual dependence and trust. Kandhamal, as discussed in this book, has provided for in fact renewed the hope for civil society initiative to put a check to the regressive hegemonic politics.

IV

Tagore and Gandhi – Question of Indic Sensibility

The book displays an enthusiasm, which in my view could have been cautious, to figure out Indian thinkers like Rabindranath Tagore, M K Gandhi, along with BR Ambedkar, RM Lohia and Periyar through Gramscian prism despite the civilizational differences in the sensibilities, epistemological and substantive positions of some of these thinkers from that of Gramsci and his theoretical provenance.

Patnaik's engagement with the above Indian thinkers from the Gramscian angle raises certain critical issues related to both the problematic and thematic (see, chapter 5 and *passim*). For both Tagore and Gandhi are thinkers who sought to offer varying Indic civilizational critiques of the West and modernity. In a major way the critiques of modernity have been internal as they come from within the framework of modernity using its own resources. Methodologically there is a possibility of critiquing modernity from pre-modern vantage point(s) as Tagore and Gandhi have shown. Tagore and Gandhi[ix] (Ambedkar and Lohia in a different way) were deeply skeptical of modernity and its emancipatory potential and thereby tried to offer a holistic critique of modernity from a pre-modern epistemic position using its resources. In fact, Tagore's critique perhaps because of his poetic-aesthetic sensibility appears more fundamental. For him India differs from the West in terms of the organising principles and logics of social organisation and articulation. If in the West, it is the state then in India it is *samaj* (the social) that has been the central agency in development and social welfare. Correspondingly while the social/cultural has been of principal significance in understanding the Indian reality, then primacy of the political has determined the developmental trajectory in the West.[x] The fact that Tagore's attempt as a literary giant at this task was creative rather imaginative cannot be glossed over.

It comes out clearly that Gramsci's thought engaged in its creative multi-layered complexity could become an important intellectual resource for understanding the Indian question or Indian ideology in its polyphony negating an increasingly politically driven monotonous singularity sought to be imparted rather imposed. The present book with its serious engangement with Gramsci, despite the differences in the constitutive context of Gramsci (early twentieth century fascist Italy) and India of 21st century with a neo-liberal Hindutva swing, holds up hope and insights helpful in pursuing the serious and urgent challenges facing us in India today. Thus this important and timely contribution deserves to be thoughtfully studied and seriously engaged with.

Notes and References:

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[iii] Gramsci, A (1971), *Selections from Prison Notebooks,* International Publishers, New York. also, (2014), *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks,* Aakar, and (2005), *Selections from Cultural Writings*, Aakar, Delhi.

[iv] For attempts to view the colonial in Gramscian perspective, see, Srivastava, N and B Bhattacharya (2012), *The post-colonial Gramsci*, Routledge, London.

[v] Marx, K and F Engels(1976), *German Ideology*, Progress Publishers, Moscow

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[vii] Marx's popular characterization of religion is more complex than being mere "opium of the people" as it captures the humane side of it:

"Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions."

Marx, Karl (1843-4/ 1992). "Introduction", *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, *Early Writings*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, p. 244.

[viii] The work of Imtiaz Ahmed and Muzaffar Assadi's recent book deal with the sociology of caste among the Muslims in India. See, Ahmed (Ed) (1978), *Caste and Social Stratification among the Muslims in India*, Manohar, Delhi; and, Assadi (2023), *Colonial and Post-Colonial Identity Politics in South Asia: Zaat/Caste Among Muslims*, Routledge, London

[ix] Gandhi, M K (2010), *Hind Swaraj: A Critical Edition* (Translated and Edited by Suresh Sharma and Tridip Suhrud), Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi.

[x] For this radical conceptual distinction between India and the West, see, Tagore's essay entitled '*Swadeshi Samaj'* (1904) published in English translation entitled 'Society and the State', in Government of India (1962), *Rabindranath Tagore on Rural Reconstruction*, Director, Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, Pp. 9-21.

Also relevant in this context is Tagore's universalist critique of nationalism, Tagore (2015), *Nationalism*, Fingerprint, Delhi.

For an analysis of these aspects, see, Srinivasulu, Karli (2022),'Rabindranath Tagore, Rural Crisis and Recovering Community: Relevance of a Legacy for Liberalising India', *Mainstream*, Vol LX No 15, April 2.

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Book Review: Cancer and the Kali Yuga Gender, Inequality and Health in South India

Author(s): Akankhya Panigrahi

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Cecilia Coale Van Hollen. *Cancer and the Kali Yuga Gender, Inequality and Health in South India*. University of California Press, 2022.

--Akankhya Panigrahi

Van Hollen's *Cancer and the Kali Yuga* is a significant contribution to medical anthropology and sociology. She locates her work within feminist critical medical anthropology. Based on field work (2015-16) in rural Tamil Nadu, this book brings out the voices of marginalized women, oppressed in terms of caste, class and gender. It traverses through an illness which has become an alarming health concern globally. The lower-class dalit women in South India, who constitute the focus of the book and are consciously termed as 'interlocutors' of the research, are often the targets for global public health programs. Using ethnographic methods of observation, interviews, focused-group discussions, Van Hollen describes and analyses the everyday life experiences of her interlocutors. It is in their narratives that a critique emerges, which questions and complicates the dominant ideas about cancer.

The beginning lines of the introduction captures a core argument: "Cancer is a process of proliferation. Proliferation of cells, of suffering, of medicine, of technology, of stories" (p.1). Cancer as a proliferation of malignant cells is a biological understanding. Cancer as a proliferation of suffering, medicine and stories presents sociological insights. It demonstrates how health and illness are constructed socially- a primary assertion in medical sociology and anthropology. The book focuses on women's suffering of cancer, especially breast and cervical cancer. Van Hollen argues that oppressed women in rural Tamil Nadu have a holistic understanding of the disease taking into account socio-economic factors. The reference to *Kali Yuga* was common in their narratives which also inspires the book's title. Through the image of *Kali Yuga*, the contemporary time is signified where there is lack of income, resources and respect along with an increase in stress, competition and chemicals. This entire socio-economic environment has led to an escalation of cancer.

The book covers a range of aspects within the experience of cancer. It highlights perceptions, stigma, diagnosis, treatment, public health programs, complexities of institutional care, coexistence of different belief systems etc.- all of which is shaped by the nuances of gender, caste and class. The chapter 'History and Hospitals' looks at development of healthcare institutions from the colonial to post-colonial period, particularly in Tamil Nadu. This state has recorded high cancer rates as well as renowned institutional establishments for cancer cure. Van Hollen analyses the varying historical trajectories and political philosophies of prominent cancer-cure institutions using primary data as well as official records. This chapter helps the reader to understand the institutions that people have to navigate through.

The chapters 'Poverty and Chemicals' and 'Women and Work' craft marginalized women's understanding of causes of cancer which provide a critical social perspective. The narratives reflect that due to factors like water shortage (associated with hydro projects and sand mining), poor irrigation as well as increased use of chemicals in agriculture, the nutrition level of women has become marginal making the contemporary generations weaker. Van Hollen builds on their narratives to argue that socio-economic changes, especially post- liberalization, have adversely impacted the lives of marginalized women. Most of her interlocutors were *kuli* workers or agricultural labourers. Increasing unemployment and lack of resources makes it difficult to care for health. There is an additional burden on women as they engage in unpaid labour in their homes along with *kuli* work. Women often prioritize the health of their family before themselves. These socio-cultural, economic factors increased stress or 'tension' considered to cause cancer. The ideas of women's bodies being more exposed to the chemicals in agricultural fields is also emphasized.

Van Hollen argues that the marginalized women have a more holistic understanding of causality of cancer than bio-medical discourses. These discourses pin the cause of cancer to individual behaviour such as tobacco consumption, early marriage, lack of family planning and engaging in sexual

promiscuity. Most public health programs attempt to correct these behaviours. Contrary to this, the narratives bring out a nuanced and complex understanding. For example, though the interlocutors accept that tobacco consumption may lead to cancer, they justify that tobacco is used to ease severe toothaches, given there is no affordable dental care. By highlighting such nuances, Van Hollen reflects on how it is essential to learn from the marginalized women's perspectives instead of a top-down approach which considers them ignorant.

Not all women experience cancer equally. The ideas and experiences of marginalized women differ from that of higher caste-class women surviving cancer. The chapter on 'Screening and Morality' highlights the gendered, caste and class based notions of public health programs. The image of an idealized Tamil married woman is the centre of the educational programs on cancer prevention (and general healthcare) that target lower-class, dalit women. They are expected to become more like middle-class women by getting married "on time" (not too early, not too late), have monogamous marital sex only, have limited children, breastfeed for a year, use contraception, eat healthy and avoid tobacco, do yoga regularly, etc. This portrays a discriminatory approach questioning the morality of marginalized women. Not only is the idealized figure not relatable to them but the messages are arbitrary. For example, asking women who are already burdened with excessive work to 'exercise' regularly can rightly enrage them, as reflected through an anecdote (p. 125). The thick ethnography also reflects on complexities of breastfeeding.

Though the participants of screening camps get disturbed by these discriminatory messages, they appreciate the camps as sources of information and testing. Similarly, the interlocutors did not doubt the effectiveness of bio-medicine or the quality of treatment. They believed that without bio-medical treatment, their cancer cannot be cured but the entire process was stressful. This is emphasized in chapters on 'Disclosure and Care' and 'Biomedicine and Bodies'. Though most of the treatment that people of marginalized sections received were free of cost or subsidized, they still had to pay 'out of

pocket' in navigating through the institutions. The major concern was the disrespect that they received from medical professionals in various ways.

The work also touches on Iatrogenesis, connoted through this line *"What keeps you alive is medicine, what kills you is also medicine"* (p. 168). Hollen analyses how the very processes of cure- chemotherapy, hysterectomy, mastectomy etc. impact women's lives. Hollen does not question the necessity of the bodily interventions, but looks at how women deal with stigma associated with the side-effects of these procedures. Loss of breasts and hair are considered the most difficult experiences. Marginalized women, unlike middle-class women, cannot use wigs or prosthesis to conceal parts of their bodies. A fear of stigma constituted a major aspect of women experiencing cancer. Some women sought solace through religion (particularly, hair loss is also associated with religious sacrifice). They considered religion as helpful in both therapeutic healing and mitigating social stigma.

The theme of medical pluralism is highlighted in the chapter "sorcery and religion". While some of her interlocutors used bio-medicine exclusively, some relied on a combination of bio-medicine and local healing practices, none of them relied completely on local healing. Though bio-medicine was appreciated for its effectiveness in curing the disease, it did not provide a spiritual satisfaction, an answer to- why did this happen to *me*? (p. 210). Overall, people believed that treatment was essential but without faith, it cannot heal the body. Van Hollen brings out more nuances. Many women preferred to attach the cause of their disease to sorcery than to question their own morality like bio-medical discourses did. The chapter also reflects on religious conversions and its association with cancer. It further looks at the paradox of modern medical institutions accommodating temples (hinduaised rather than local deities) within their premises.

The book is a holistic work towards understanding ground realities of healthcare from the perspectives of marginalized women, who are often the target of global public health practices. The aim is to convey their voices to policy makers and public health practitioners. One of the central arguments is

to focus on the socio-economic realities that shape the experiences of an illness. The book does not extensively critique the welfare state although references to structural violence are hinted at. Perhaps a justification for this is provided by Van Hollen when she highlights the fear that her interlocutors have, of their basic needs being snatched away if they question governmental practices.

The book begins and ends with a note on the hypocrisy of privileged researchers talking about marginalized sections and how the research benefits the latter, which many sociologists and anthropologists deal with. Perhaps as a compensation, the book tries to draw its arguments as much as possible from the perspectives of the marginalized women and finds a critique there. Further, the aim is to convey their perspective to public health practitioners who can bring about real changes in the field. Yet, certain questions remain- who has social-scientific research really benefited and why are we continuing its hypocrisies. These are crucial points raised throughout the book for us to reflect, not just self-reflexively but also in practice.

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Book Review: "Development Strategies and Governance in India: Predicaments and Challenges"

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"Development Strategies and Governance in India: Predicaments and Challenges" by Bala Ramulu Chinnala published by Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, London and New York, 2025.

--Himabindu. M

The book starts with the development processes in the political regimes between 1950 and 2020. In learning the challenges and difficulties in the development processes, the author identified the lack of an ideological roadmap to lead the marginalised/neglected classes and institutions out of competitive capitalist society. The continuation of the top-down model of making public policies for the downtrodden communities made them mere receivers. The major difficulty identified is the contradiction in implementing the constitutional goals with the existing governmental approaches to development. The author critically analyzed how the capitalist approach is adopted for a socialistic pattern of society in different regimes. A very important question has been raised about the controlling factor of public institutions and the structure of power at the grassroots level.

The categorical observation on the role of decision-making institutions was worth reading on which caste or class plays the major role. Whether the poor and marginalised communities can be empowered without radically transforming the economic structure and controlling the globalised economy? He explained that the existing model of development with modern technologies and differences in society with traditional technologies can ever coexist.

To elaborate further, the first section discusses various models of development with models of growth, development concerns and empowerment. The second section explores on decentralised governance and the development of weaker sections and certain programs at the micro level concerning the state of Andhra Pradesh (united).

The post-independent India gave much importance to public policies where the state intervened in the developmental process. The book explains the

importance of public policies and elaborates on structural policies like land reforms, abolition of the bonded labour system and incremental policies like subsidy-based and anti-poverty schemes that have been prominent since the 1950s. The focus of these policies is on fulfilling the goals of the Indian constitution, socio-economic justice and United Nations sustainable development goals, though the achievement is still debatable. Considering the notion of 'development is about the people, not objects'; after World War-II, development is seen through various aspects from rapid growth to inclusive growth towards growth with happiness, has emerged as a new combination with the concern on poverty, unemployment and inequalities which are interrelated and the prominent challenge to the modern states. States intervention in the development process can be understood between state-led and market-led interventions. Here, the 'Structural economies' are witnessed by the Southeast Asian economies in promoting industrial and technological development through state intervention. The objectives of growth and poverty alleviation, is explained through the 'structural change policies'. The latter process is explained through 'new style development models' with the state's limited role and market as decision-makers. It resulted in poverty, unemployment and inequalities due to dependency on foreign aid. The destination towards globalisation with a market economy model that was accepted universally to deal the social problems.

An important discussion was highlighted in the debates on globalisation and poverty that is still debatable between the two schools of thought. The support of globalisation for being a solution for poverty and inequality and at the same time, globalisation being the reason for the social problems. The question is how far globalisation as a cause and effect or the reason for the problem, is working towards strengthening democracy?

The book further explains the 'decentralised governance and development of weaker sections' through the development models under the Indian scenario, in one of the states- United Andhra Pradesh. The growth with trickle down to inclusive development till the present 'self-reliance' has witnessed various

segments like a mixed economy model, market economy model, to the new economic policy. The discussion on the shift at the political level from 'government-centric' to 'governance-centric' explained the process of giving the upper hand to the private agencies to bring changes by ignoring local issues. This resulted in a challenging task for the policymakers in balancing societal needs despite being the fastest-growing economy. The aspect of the diminishing role of the state in developmental policies and programmes is explained in 'Social Relevance of Development' by various policies like watershed management. Further, the work provides an idea of the need for clear policy purposes and trustworthy governance systems to empower marginalised communities. The work identifies the lack of ideological clarity and dilemmas between growth and welfare. The evolution of development perspectives and the administrative systems in India is well explained to know the process. It highlighted the challenges and complexities in implementing development policies by examining the contradictions between justice and growth and the impact of globalisation on decentralised governance.

Certain questions were raised through the work on the concepts of inclusive development or social justice or growth, whether they are supporting or creating further problems? Whether the state intervention is supportive or the market economy? The major question on participatory development through democratic decentralisation has seen or will see the benefits? The shift in the socio-economic conditions of the marginalised sections as a major challenge is viewed further, by knowing whether there is a possibility of transformation in the existing power structure at the grassroots level. The probable solution lies with the policymakers, in having well-validated information to make authorities rethink and identify the gaps and execute the policies.

The book elaborated clearly on the importance of achieving the goal of greater democratization and a higher level of social inclusion in the development process. Hence, the solution is given through the discussion in a cross-cultural context that focuses on the dynamics of social transitions.

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