



Special Paper Section

Cultural Nationalism of Football in North-East India: A Sociological Study

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Abstract

The actions and behaviour associated around the institution of sports have ushered it into contemporary studies in social sciences. The emotions involved around it facilitates the formation of new identities that exist conterminously with the ascribed identities. This study locates the socio-political significance of football elucidating on the emotions attached with ideas of sub-nationalism in North-East India and how they transcend into the cultural space of football fanaticism. With data collected from the field intertwined with existing literature on sociological concepts the focus is on the NorthEast United Football Club from India, its supporters' club and the symbolic significance of the two entities in representation of a consolidated regional identity.

Keywords: fan culture, football, sub-nationalism, NorthEast United FC, Highlander Brigade

Football, fans and the Social

Sports as an institution has established itself as a significant aspect of the social. Social sciences academia historically has had the desire to orient themselves to find the immediate solutions of the socially relevant and mainstream problems of the society. It was considered a 'subversive' subject (Dunning 1999, 8). However, during the latter half of the twentieth century, sports, particularly football, shrugged itself off the tag of 'trivial' and gained academic significance in the socio-political spectrum. The mimetic experience it provided (Dunning 1999, 27), where the people involved expressed their emotions without running the risk associated with their daily lives and the interactions it entailed became a matter of scrutiny. It performed a lingua-franca function and gave a platform to develop an identity through interaction.

The nineteenth century saw the birth of modern football which became a significant part of the reality par excellence. While its genesis has been widely contested, the game seeped into the schools of Britain to

imbibe Victorian ideals of masculinity, teamwork and discipline (Koller and Brandle 2015). Professionalisation of the game then opened itself to the working class as well, first through spectatorship followed by participation and institutionalisation such as formation of football clubs.

Spectators and followers equally contribute to the sustenance of the culture of football. Audiences are usually considered as the end point of any cultural process. The elements of production are somewhat deemed less relevant than the process itself (Crawford, 2004). But fans continuously produce and reproduce the culture and contribute to the creation of an event eligible for being called a spectacle. Matt Hills (2002, ix) defined fans as obsessed individuals with an intense interest in a particular aspect of popular culture. These are frenzied, hysterical followers. Under a research report by The Social Issues Research Centre (2008) a fan has a detailed knowledge about the team's performance, statistics and a high level of emotional engagement akin to apprenticeship.

The social reality of football creates a domain for human interactions. It facilitates the cognitive spaces for imaginations associated with identity. These imaginations are usually directed towards sporting entities such as teams and clubs. The new identity positions and affixes them along with the conventional tags. These supporters often organise themselves in the form of clubs and associations and contribute in producing the culture of fanaticism. However, these fans and supporters are not bereft of the social forces. The identity connotations of a fan find itself in the socio-political realm as well. Individuals are exposed to the ideas associated with ascriptive identities such as nationalism and sub-nationalism which coexist with their identity as a fan. At the intersection of these two identities, this paper begins to trace the relationship between ideas of sub-nationalism and the culture of football fanaticism centring around the concept of identity. The aim would be to elucidate on the influence of socio-political thoughts such as sub-nationalism on the cultural platform of football fan culture. The study is conducted on the members of the Highlander Brigade, a supporters' group of NorthEast United Football Club (from hereon NEUFC), from the Indian Super League. Additionally, a comparative review of previous literature on the relationship of nationalism/sub-nationalism and football has been done to promote my argument that identity associated with a nation or a region influences the cultural habitus of football fanaticism. I intend to establish the notion by studying the sub-nationalistic fervour in North-East India and the football fanaticism for NEUFC.

The methods that I have used to understand my field and research objective includes observing and collecting data as a member of the Highlander Brigade from December 2018 to May 2020. A semi-structured interview has been conducted of the members of the supporters' group. The area of study is

primarily Guwahati, Assam. However, since many core members of the group are scattered throughout the North-East, the information was retrieved via telephonic interviews and online questionnaire. Additionally, secondary sources such as books, articles, journals have been used to accommodate my research.

I begin this work by contextualising nationalism and situating football in the discourse of national identity.

Nationalism and Football

Benedict Anderson (1983) stated that nation is an imagined political community. Even the smallest member of the community will neither completely know a fellow member, nor necessarily meet every other one of them. This is synonymous to the idea of a widely spread sporting fan base where people may not be fully acquainted with each other but share a deep, horizontal sense of comradeship. This state of mind produces loyalty and attachment of the supreme form towards an entity such as a nation (Khon 1965, 9). In my attempt to relate the idea of nationalism and football fanaticism, I find George Orwell's (2000a) notion that nationalistic thought characterises itself as obsessive and defensive in the presence of a rival culture akin to the one found in football fanaticism. This obsession transcends generations giving rise to a wave of encapsulated events, stories, including various life experiences, establishing a historicity. An analogy could be found in Anthony D Smith's (1979, 3) emphasis on the importance of culture to bind generations. It helps foster a national ideal which eventually becomes nationalism, thus creating a sense of solidarity. Akin to print capitalism that fostered nationalist identity and ideals (Anderson, 1983), sports became a medium to propagate such feelings. Football in particular played vital roles globally in establishing attachment towards a national identity. It provided significantly intense interaction rituals in contemporary times bringing people together based on an identity attached to it, such as Indians, Germans, Spanish, English etc. In a football match between England and France, fans waving their national flag or singing the anthem are rituals that would establish and affirm their identity as English/French/Indian/German and simultaneously create a sense of solidarity with fellow country-mates. An ordinary encounter is turned into a sacred one (King 2006, 6), confirming the pious nature of the identity. This nationalistic fervour gives a boost to the sense of competitiveness in a game and vice-versa. As George Orwell (2000b) mentions, sports arouse combative spirit due to the competition it creates between nations for prestige and find ways to manifest the causes of nationalism. There is an emphasis on how football became an expression of national identity. In Eastern Europe, the disintegration of Yugoslavia into Croatian, Slovenian, Bosnian and Serbian identities saw a rise in Serbian nationalism against its counterparts. Belgrade as a football club grew rivals with its Croatian opposites in Dinamo Zagreb and the baton of national identity was carried by their

community of fans (Wood, 2010). There was a juxtaposition of the mushroom identities that emerged based upon ethnic origins which transcended into footballing culture elsewhere in Europe too. The issues pertaining to FC Barcelona (1899) and Athletic Bilbao (1898) against a greater Spanish identity is conclusive proof of reflection of sub-nationalist sentiments in football.

While the West saw the concept of nationalism arising out of an idea of a nation, eastern hemisphere saw it rising out of the identities which were subjugated and yearning to be established and recognized. India saw a similar attempt to gain such a national consciousness. In the following section I would take you through the inception of football in India and the rise of cultural nationalism that followed.

Football and the rise of Indian Nationalism

In 1813, the parliamentary intervention to anglicise the colonies was a significant point in history where the Western influence of nationalism could be traced (Anderson 1983, 90; Tiwari 2019, 66). By establishing an education system in Bengal, the British tried to serve their motive to create a civilised class well-groomed in English culture. This class would serve the colonial masters while shedding their native ideals and values. It was an attempt of mental miscegenation (Anderson 1983, 91). With access to western education, they were naturally motivated to incline towards nationalistic ideals that brewed in the west. The epicentre was Bengal where Anglicization was followed by a growth of cultural expression of nationalist sentiment. Sports historian Kaushik Bandyopadhyay (2003) suggests, it might have even gained precedence over the former one.

The oldest clubs of association football can be traced back to 1878 when Dalhousie Club of Calcutta was established and the Calcutta Football Club in 1872 which was earlier affiliated to rugby (Bandyopadhyay 2003, 3). Schools and colleges helped in popularising football among the Bengali youths and was introduced to impart Victorian ideals of masculinity. The Bengalis were seen as fragile and physically effeminate and their involvement of Bengalis as military personnel in the mutiny of 1857 (Dimeo 2001, 61) created a sense of loathe in the eyes of the imperialists. Football then became a cultural mode of resistance against such stereotypes. The Calcutta Football Club became one of the most successful British controlled football entities and symbolised a colonial elitism that was antagonistic to the natives (Dimeo 2001, 59). The exclusion of the natives due to perceived physical subservience added fuel to the spark of nationalism brewing at that time. This was reflected on art and literature during the Bengali renaissance (Bandyopadhyay 2003, 2) and transcended onto football as well. Clubs such as Sovabazar Club (1887) and

Mohun Bagan (1889) established by the Bengali aristocracy became symbol of prestige creating a belief that they would safeguard the cultural identity of the Bengalis. Sovabazar became the first club to have a competitive victory over a British team and National Association became the first Indian team to lift the Trades Cup in the year 1900 (Bandyopadhyay 2003, 5). Beating the English in their own game became obsessive, awakening a sense of unity over a cultural identity; a victory of the 'feeble' natives over the 'superior' Brits. Mohun Bagan FC's victory in the IFA (Indian Football Association) Shield in 1911 showed that the Bengalis could no longer be deemed effeminate.

The Fault Lines of Cultural Nationalism in Colonial and Post-Colonial India

The 1930s saw socially tense events and football became a breeding ground of ethnic differences in Bengal. This difference was across the fault-line of cultural and ethnicity rendering competition and jealousy. Different football clubs rose with different associated identities. One of the major uprisings of a footballing entity was Mohammedan Sporting (1891). The working minds of the club had ties with the Muslim League which had significant influence in Bengal and any success associated with the club was given a communal colour by addressing to the Muslim population's collective success. This was an effect of the political rise of the Muslims that made the Hindu *bhadralok* insecure (Bandyopadhyay 2008, 384). The unified exultation at Mohun Bagan's victory in the IFA shield of 1911 was now dismantled along communal lines. The partition created further communal tension whose foul breath was naturally reflected upon football communities as well

The mass immigration during the partition of India in 1947 and formation of Bangladesh in 1971 impacted football as well. The people from East-Bengal were distinct from the 'locals' in terms of dialect and food habits. The subtle distinction created a juxtaposition of identities producing intra-regional conflict (Bandyopadhyay 2008, 386). Immigrants sustained hostile attitudes from the locals during that period. Insecurity, uncertainty and suspicion of the locals towards the identity of a foreign culture is bound to create tensions. In such a time, football again became a cultural expression to sustain everyday life by drawing energy from the sacralised cultural symbol of East Bengal Football Club (1920). The club became a symbol of culture and identity of the East-Bengali immigrants who were named *bangals* in response to which they named the locals *ghotis*. Even though Mukherjee (2013) and Bandyopadhyay (2008) claim that such an animosity was not based on ethnic identity but rather a difference in their way of life, the reflection of their association with the football club, and the consequent affinity towards the symbolic cultural identity is a result of the sub-nationalist emotions that brewed in the region.

Identity is situational. This means, people carry many identities as a social animal and it is upon them which particular identity they don in a particular situation. The collective based on a shared culture is called a community. Anthony Smith (1993, 49) defined *ethnie* as a group based on a common ancestry with shared cultural elements and a territory or homeland. A piece of land was one of the significant conditions of formation of ethnic communities. The geographical area is like a territorial identity (Knight 1982, 517) and this territory is an objectivated sense of belonging that creates a solidarity on an abstract level. According to George de Vos (1995, 15-47) one of the orientations of the belonging for an individual and consequently a community is the 'past orientation' (Knight 1982, 521) which is based on familial and cultural ties. This orientation justifies the attachment to regionalism or sub-nationalism which needs validation from the dominant community or larger identity of which it is a part of.

Mushrooms of sub-nationalism and football

North-East India has been historically perceived to be distinct from the rest of India. They were connected to Highland societies of South-East Asia rather than the mainland India (Bhaumik 2009, 25). They had resembled more to the Tibeto-Mongoloid tribes and the cultural influence of the Indic heartland was to be seen only in Assam, Tripura and Manipur (Bhaumik 2009, 25). Due to its distinct culture and historical self-determination (Knight 1982, 524), the various identities of the region already had a sense of being different from the rest of India.

With the annexation of Assam in the 1820s the British secured the North-Eastern front. The incorporation exposed the region to western ideals of modernity with establishment of Tea and Petroleum enterprise, Railways and western education. Immigration of people in search of opportunities such as clerks, migrant workers and officials along with the British in Assam changed the socio-political scenario of North-East India (Sharma 2011, 1). Sanjib Baruah (1999, 25) posits that the Imperialists started cultural homogenization for administrative convenience. Along with making Bengali as the official language of the region, influx of Bengali speaking people from Bengal and East-Pakistan resulted in enforcing a linguistic and cultural hegemony in areas like Tripura and southern Assam (Bhaumik 2009, 27-29). In a multicultural society, civic nationalism becomes a factor to create ethnic divisions and agitation (Bijukumar 2013, 23). This assimilation was resisted or accepted with hesitation by the local ethnic communities. Furthermore, uneven development leads to emergence of new social groups (King, 2006) and an unequal access to the chalice of progress stirred the few collectives who felt left behind. This economic alienation was also down to a lack of infrastructure in the region. 'The North-Eastern Region Vision 2020' (Government of India,

2008) document suggests that post-independence, the region filled with natural resources and commercial potential has lagged behind in major aspects of growth. These socio-political issues of identity and development created a political stir in the region and the ethnic groups became self-conscious of their linguistic and cultural status in the national podium. This awakening, according to Paul R Brass (1991, 22) is the first stage of nationality formation; in this case a sub-nationality. Sajal Nag (2002) mentions an extreme form of regionalism that becomes secessionist through the rise of insurgent groups such as the Mizo National Front (MNF), Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) or the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN). They have asserted their demands of ethnic-development and identity acknowledgment by triggering political processes leading to few successful establishment of separate states. However, there has been a dearth of research on how this emotion of sub-nationalism has gained a cultural platform in football in the region.

North-East India has been associated with football for a very long time. Whether it's the legend of Dr. Talimeren Ao, the first captain of the 1948 Indian Olympic Team (DIPR, 2018), or the emergence of regional football clubs such as Neroca FC (1965) from Manipur winning the 2nd division in 2016-17, Aizawl FC (1984) from Mizoram winning first division in 2016-17 and the 2nd division in 2014-15 and The Shillong Lajong Football Club (1983) from Meghalaya who won the I-League 2nd division in 2011. In 2014, the Indian Super League was announced with a vision to usher Indian football to global prominence and promote local talents. Out of the 10 state-based franchise teams, NorthEast United Football Club (NEUFC) represented the eight states of the region namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura.

The name 'North-East' has been legally used since 1971 by the Government of India (Baruah 2020, 195). The nomenclature itself was the first step in consolidating the identities of the region. Anthony Smith (1993, 50) posits that names are crucial to formulate identity from within as well as outside. NorthEast United FC was brought into the national picture of Indian football as a united cultural symbol. It mattered to the people due to its regional representation. The owner of the franchise, John Abraham stated that this team had a chance to showcase the regional talent amidst the political and governance issues (ISL Media Team, 2015)ⁱ. It was an opportunity to bring the region closer on a football field and be a collective voice of the territory which has always been a victim of negligence. The socio-political cornering and 'othering' of the place and its inhabitants have resulted in a solidarity among the people. Fans could relate to each other from an Indic-heartland reference where anyone from the North-Eastern region would be homogenised and discriminated against on the basis of looks and lifestyle. It became a case of unity in peril. In an online survey conducted,

75 per cent of the football fans from the region acknowledged the discrimination and empathized with the victims. Synonymous to the cases of Mohun Bagan and East Bengal football clubs who became a cultural symbol of identity, NEUFC provided the fans with a similar cultural tool to express themselves apolitically as a collective. In the same survey, 68 per cent of the respondents believed that football has been a cultural tool to come together and collectively express themselves against the behaviour of the rest of India.

Vikas Baruah, a football fan from Jorhat, Assam says: “The club is an opportunity to showcase unity by establishing an institution of collective regional representation. The club is nicknamed ‘The Highlanders’ which naturally points to the geographic characteristic of the region, creating a sense of realisation among the followers that the club is their very own”.

NEUFC as an institution has been able to mitigate the internal differences in the region by bringing the supporters of the club with different ethnic backgrounds of the region together. The different ethnic colours in the region that has been the basis of the multiple sub-nationalist sentiments in the region has been mixed together in the name of football. 81.3 per cent of the respondents believed that football has been a platform to forget the internal cultural differences in the region and unite as a ‘Highlander’, a nickname given to the followers of NEUFC.

The fanaticism was formally acknowledged and institutionalised with the formation of the supporters’ club named the Highlander Brigade in 2017. This club was initiated by a group of fanatics who revered the idea of a pan-Indian representation of a regional entity. It has grown in strength and expanded to various avenues of operations ranging from matchday activities to off-season philanthropism such as organising flood relief campaigns. Ivan Basumatary, one of the founding members of the Brigade says ‘the motive was to consolidate the football fans of the region. This club gave us an opportunity to represent the region in football. It is no longer just a football club; it embodies the united culture of the region’.

Dichotomy of region and country

In North-West England, the people from Merseyside identify themselves as ‘Scouse’ and this identity supersedes their English identity. They have been vocal about accepting the Scouse identity over their

national identity with pride on international platforms too. Liverpool Football Club (1892) is supported by people from the region who have felt targeted from the rest of the nation based on their Irish heritage, subtle linguistic difference and the negligence of the conservative government post World War II (Edwards, 2018).

A similar but moderate sentiment could be seen in North-East India as well. Due to socio-political negligence and cultural discrimination, the 'Highlanders' could be seen more attached to the regional identity over their national one. On October 2019, the Indian national football team played a friendly match against NEUFC. It was surprising to notice the massive support that the regional club garnered that evening. I witnessed people flocking in with club jerseys, painting themselves red, white and black. The national team consisted players from North-East India, but for many, all that mattered were the club colours. The supporters' club, Highlander Brigade with their banners and songs backed the club to win regardless of the opposition. This created a dichotomous situation between a regional and a national identity. Indian defender Sandesh Jhingan was jeered by the crowd due to his on-field antics and the history with the player as a representative of Kerela Blasters Football Club. It overshadowed the fact that he was a national level player. That night, the club mattered more.

This choice of club over the country might not be as vivid as Liverpool FC or FC Barcelona, but the underlying emotions consolidated spirit of sub-nationalism and smeared the football fans of North-East India with regional colours. This does not mean that players from North-East would not want to represent their country. The region has produced a lot of talent for the national team and is continuing to do so while becoming a 'football factory' for the nation. In the Under-17 FIFA World Cup that took place in India, 10 out of 21 members of the team belonged from the North-Eastern states of India (Joseph, 2017). But there is a strong latent feeling among the followers towards preservation of regional pride.

Conclusion

The emotions, behaviour and interaction involved in sports have become an important point of enquiry for social sciences. Development of modern football facilitated a culture of spectatorship and support that positioned the individuals associated in a cultural podium of fanaticism.

This study locates the emergence of nationalistic/sub-nationalistic emotions and its influence on the cultural arena of sports fanaticism, particularly football. The parochial ethnic and regional identities that foster cohesion, simultaneously intensify their sense of attachment to a sporting entity such as a football club

which becomes a symbolic marker of identity. The reflection of the emotions attached towards one's geographic and cultural/ethnic identity could be seen in football in Yugoslavia, Spain, England, France and India. The rise of civic nationalism in post-independence India led to the emergence of mushroom identities who demanded autonomy based on a particular area, history and culture. Sports became an apolitical expression to carry forward such ideas as could be seen in the cases of Mohun Bagan FC and East Bengal FC.

The homogenised administration of the British in North-East India followed by the hegemony of dominant cultures sowed the seeds of sub-nationalism. It was then watered by the peripheral positioning of the region in terms of development. Consequently, the desire to be acknowledged and gain autonomy rose, which in a few cases even evolved into secessionist movements such as in Mizoram and Nagaland. Additionally, the discrimination faced by the people of North-East India by the Indic heartland consolidated their identity at a similar platform of victimisation. As could be seen in Bengal, football became an expression to voice out the angst. For North-East India, a football entity such as NEUFC became a medium to create solidarity among the people of the region and mobilised the fans with a common identity a 'Highlander'. As Anthony Smith (1993, 50) posits, name is quintessential for formation of identity, hence supporters' club such as the Highlander Brigade have been successfully able to reach out to the football fans of the region. These emotions pertain to the regional identity over a larger national one as could be seen during the encounter between the national football team and the regional club. The interaction rituals such as pre-match activities involved among the members asserts the pious nature of their engagement and the community thus reaffirming the expression of sub-nationalist feelings through football fanaticism.

Interestingly, the ethnic nationalism that brewed in the region under the label of sub-nationalism is a product of the pan-Indian civic nationalism which fails to acknowledge the various shades of identity. This ethnic (sub) nationalism has however turned back to civic (sub) nationalism in the form of a club that consolidates the various identities of the region into a single form: A Highlander.

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Embodied Culture and its Contestations: *Jagoi Raas* of Manipur

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For a population who had embodied cultural knowledge in their dances through their bodies, a new cultural and religious worldview was seamlessly embodied through the stylised bodily movements that they were already familiar with. Out of multiple phases of Hinduism, or rather, Vaishnavism, that influenced the Meiteis of Manipur, the Chaityanite cult characterised by the worship of Radha-Krishna was more prominent and continues to be so. One possible reason was the concretisation of religious worldview in the form a sacred performance called *jagoi raas*. *Raas leela*, commonly known as *jagoi raas*, was introduced in 1779 by the then king, Rajarshi Bheigyachandra (1759-61 and 1763-98). It is traditionally a ritual performance that draws its 'content' from texts like Srimad Bhagvad, Geet Govinda and so on. However, *jagoi raas*' 'form' and philosophy are drawn from the pre-Vaishnavite ritual called *Lai Haraoba*. Reflecting on questions of what *jagoi raas* symbolises, and what it represents or misrepresents, it is quite likely to arrive at the contradictory position that *jagoi raas* occupies. *Jagoi raas* is an embodiment of meitei culture, defined by the synthesis of pre-Vaishnavite and Vaishnavite worldviews. On the other hand, it is a stubborn stain in the religious and cultural history of Manipur because of which a foreign religion was imposed on its people. The advent of Vaishnavism with royal patronage that culminated in assigning Vaishnavism as the state religion forms the backdrop of *jagoi raas*. The religion of the 'other' from outside impacted the religious life of the people as manifested in new forms of performances such as *jagoi raas*. However, the adoption of new religion was done in a way that suited the local culture. There is a unique local flavour that *jagoi raas* embodies that characterises the 'new' culture. 'New' refers not only to the new Vaishnavite influence but also to the 'syntheses' of the Vaishnavite and pre-Vaishnavite beliefs and practices. Hence, *jagoi raas* is a site where meitei identity and ideas of self are constructed as well as contested. The paper will attempt to understand the contestations on the cultural politics of 'identity' represented through *jagoi raas*. The cultural identity synthesised out of the seamless merger of the pre-vaishnavite religion and Vaishnavism got embodied in *jagoi raas*. What interests us today are questions of whether *jagoi raas* belongs to Meitei culture or should it be disowned. How far had it corrupted the identity of Meitei and its idea of self? How does one understand *jagoi raas* as a rich cultural embodiment recognised as an Indian

Classical dance and simultaneous movements of disowning the same? These are some questions that the paper tries to explore.

Embodying the new culture

Culture is often posed as a pool of knowledge or symbols that resides externally (as concrete objects) as well as internally (as values, moral guiding one's behaviour). Embodying a culture is considered more in terms of how culture gets internalised in a subject's mind. Various terms like internalisation, enculturation, introjections, learning etc are used to denote the process of embodying a culture. But embodiment or embodying as a process gives primacy to the body. As the meaning of embody suggests, it is to represent something in a physical form. Dance as an important cultural form and practice links the externality and internality or in other words the concreteness and abstractness of culture. Embodying implies a continual process of internalising values, beliefs while concretising it with body movements or symbols inscribed on the body. A simple definition of culture is something that includes or excludes selectively (Lee 1988). Identifying what is to be included and what is to be excluded is the same process through which one defines the self and the other in a culture. It is through this identification of self that an identity is created. The extended concern of this formation would be what and under what circumstances affect this identity formation. *Jagoi raas* as a cultural repertoire then becomes a medium through which identity is performed on one hand and culture is kept alive on the other. The physical body (both dancer's body as well as dance as a whole) constitutes an avenue in which the interconnected facets of identity-religious, cultural, political etc are stored, preserved, and propagated just as archives appraise, collect, and preserve the props with which notions of identity are built. Identity represented through *jagoi raas* is contested. The 'embodied culture' is questioned as to whose culture, why, and how it got embodied. It is confronted with the cultural, religious and political discontent stemming majorly from the controversial 1949 merger of Manipur with the Indian union.

Written historical accounts of Manipur provide information about different Vasihanvite cults that came and influenced Manipur starting as early as the fifteenth century. Not only cults but there were also different sects of what we call Hinduism today. It records the presence of Shaivism, Shaktism, Tantrism in traditional accounts, literary and archaeological and other sources (Singh 2012). Hinduisation in Manipur was a gradual process stretched over centuries accompanied by negotiations, acceptance and rejection. The earliest Brahmin settlements were in the reign of King Kiyamba in the fifteenth century and these continued periodically from then on (Paratt 1980). Commonly, the historical account of Hindu influence starts with the fifteenth century when the use of *vishnu chakra* also known as *kwarok* or pot containing the image of

Vishnu with betel nut and leaves was recorded. This period of king Kiyamba is also known for the statue of Vishnu that was gifted by the Pong king. A temple was built for the statue and a Brahmin family was given the responsibility of looking after the temple. Brahmins migrated as refugees rather than as seekers of wealth by serving the local kings. Inter-marriage with native women led to their settlement and they in turn acquired considerable power in the functioning of the royal state. However, it is not enough to assume a strong cultural and religious influence of Brahmins at this period. Instead, it was a slow process of cultural synthesis, rather than a rapid imposition of Hinduism or Vaishnavism.

The influence of Vaishnavism grew over time with successive kings endorsing the religion, it reached its peak during Rajarshi Bheigyachandra's reign in the second half of the eighteenth century. The king knew that it was impossible to wipe out the existing religious system that was deeply rooted in people's lives and bring in a different religion. He resorted to the co-existence of both religions through careful assimilation of different elements. Even though his period was tumultuous due to frequent Burmese invasions that compelled the King and the people to flee the land, the later part of his reign was well known for developments in the realm of religion and culture. Rajarshi Bheigyachandra's reign of forty years is often described in two corresponding terms- the frequent Burmese invasion and his war of liberation, and his consolidation of Bengal school of Vaishnavism and bringing his own stamp on the religion (Paratt 1980; Ibochaoba 2009). This is the backdrop in which raas leela as it is commonly known in other parts of India took re-birth in Manipur in the form of *jagoi raas* under the royal patronage of Rajarshi Bheigyachandra.

Even though the thematic content of *jagoi raas* is similar to raas leela prevalent in other parts of India, its form and mode of presentation are different. *Raas* with the prefix *jagoi*, is used more commonly in local usage and signals to the localised features of the performance that distinguishes itself from other kinds of raas leela. *Jagoi* in the contemporary usage refers to all kinds of dancing but traditionally it is imbued with deeper cultural meanings. This calls for the in-effectiveness of the term 'dance' that has come to represent all the cultural forms that result from creative use of human bodies in time and space (Kaeppler 2000). Something that is considered dance in one society can be just movements for others (Brinson 1983). *Jagoi saba* or stylised body movements is referred to as *noiba* and *anoirol* is an important part of Meitei culture. It is a traditional form of knowledge of the art of movement that is associated with Meitei performing arts which in turn shape the aesthetics of traditional Meitei community life. Therefore, *jagoi* among the Meiteis denotes an inseparable interaction between form and content, the tangible bodily movements and the cultural moorings that shape them. This embedded-ness of culture and *jagoi* is what one can witness in the

case of pre-vaishnavite ritual performance of *lai haraoba* as well as *jagoi raas*. With a blend of local sensibilities and worldview, the story of Radha-Krishna attained a new version in the form of *jagoi raas*.

Jagoi raas is believed to be a revelation to Rajarhsi Bheigyachandra in his 'dream'. He saw this dream while he had fled to the Ahom Kingdom during Burmese invasion. He promised to actualise the *raas* he saw in his dream once he regains his throne. He consulted scholars, dance gurus to craft the *raas* that was revealed to him. It was fashioned keeping in view the initial ritual performance of *lai haraoba*. Rajkumar Achoubisana, a noted scholar and dancer, shares how the *lai haraoba* ritual was once stopped for three years under the pretext of an ominous occurrence. Then the king called scholars and experts to discuss minute details of *lai haraoba* after which *jagoi raas* was introduced, drawing its form and philosophy from *lai haraoba*. The stories were transported from another cultural domain through its religious influence but the *jagoi* that people watched carried an essence of the cultural world that they were already familiar with. In other words, a new religious worldview was injected into people's lives through stories presented in the form of devotional and ritual performances. Through the presentation of Krishna, Radha and *gopis* of Brindavan, the devotees were transported mentally and spiritually to the world of Chaitanya. Both the performers and audience constructed a world of imagination in which they become participants in the world of Chaitanya and his followers (Premchand 2005). Through *jagoi raas*, people felt the longing to unite with Krishna in the form of a spiritual union. They identified themselves as *gopis* and immersed themselves in the divine play. Till today, devotees or the audience never clap but would lay prostrate as a sign of surrendering their own self to *jagoi raas* which is a personification of their lord's play. Al Basham, in *The Religion of Manipur* (1980), remarked that Hinduism in Manipur is still flourishing and the synthesis of the Indian and the local genius has produced one of the most beautiful traditional schools of religious dancing in the world. Manipuri *jagoi raas* is not a simple imitation and reproduction of other dance forms but a new creation with its unique features. A noted scholar, Arambam Lokendro commented that developing a *raas leela* is not a passive act of receiving but it involves an active engagement on the part of the locals to craft in a new different way which bears stamp of meitei culture and thus contributing a dance which would present a new image of Manipuri Vaishnavism.

Jagoi raas: a potpourri of religion and culture

The overlapping terms 'synthesis' and 'syncretism' are popular terms in religious histories and theology where disagreements on the use of the term are expressed. 'Syncretism' which is defined as a mishmash of religion has been considered derogatory. Anthropologists like Rosalind Shaw and Christen Stewart have suggested that the demarcation between 'syncretism' and 'anti-syncretism' is that of the politics of

religious synthesis associated with the former while attempts to protect religious boundaries as in the case of the latter (Kraft 2002). Generally, ‘syncretism’ denotes the blending of religious ideas and practices and has often been interpreted as a source of religious confusion and disorder. A disagreement of this sort does not surface in the discourse of Hinduism in Manipur. Majorly, it is more or less agreed that the practices that exist today are a synthesis of two cultural worlds assembled with a careful process of assimilation. This is not to say that every citizen accepts this synthesis. There are groups of people, and organised movements resisting the Hindu influence as foreign and corrupting the traditional religion and practices. Paratt (1980) also describes that the synthesis in the context of Manipur was characterised by three aspects- more visibility of some Meitei *lais* (deities) and diminishing prominence of some, identification of traditional deities with Hindu Gods and Goddesses (for example, Nongpok Ningthou with Shiva and Panthoibi with Durga) and lastly, the incorporation of Hindu ways of worship for traditional *lais*. Apart from this, one could also see the replacement of earlier festivals like ‘*Ahong khong chingba*’ as *kang chingba* or Rathayatra, *kangla echaoba* as Jhulon, *loipan* as yaoshang (Holi) etc (Bahadur 1973). Thus, Hinduism practiced in Manipur gradually bore the stamp of Manipuri-ness (even though the term itself is contentious), adopting the Meitei culture and being modified by it. It is this synthesis which is today the essence of religion of Manipur (Paratt 1980). As opposed to religious conversion or transformation where a group of people gets initiated to a new religion and thereby abandoning the earlier affinity, the Meiteis assimilated the Hindu beliefs and practices with their traditional beliefs. It does not involve complete discontinuation of earlier practices. Till date, most of the Hindu households have a separate place for *sanamahi* (household deity), *lainingthou- lairembi* (worshipped in the south-western corner of the house) and also perform rituals associated with traditional deities. For a successful *jagoi raas* performance, pounded rice, milk, fried paddy, sugarcane juice are offered to the *Sanamahi* (Ibochaoba 2009, 129).

How does one locate this ‘synthesis’ in *jagoi raas*? The performance was newly crafted based on the Raas Leela of Krishna-Radha while drawing the movements and form of the performance from *lai haraoba*. The beginning of *lai haraoba* called *lai ikouba* (calling of the gods) starts with priestess (*maibi*) dancing. Every part of *lai haraoba* involves dancing. The most important dance sequence of *lai haraoba* is called *laibou*- a dance with antiphonal singing representing the life cycle of the *lai* (Paratt 1980). It is comprised of 364 *khuthek* (hand gestures). The whole body of *laibou* has different parts of dance sequence. There is *hakchang saba* (making of human body) which has 64 *khuthek* (s), *pamyanton jagoi* (depicting agricultural activities), *Phisarol jagoi* (weaving dance). The *laibou jagoi* indicates the formation of human body by assembling different body parts, birth, and the activities one has to go through to sustain

a life like cultivation, or to make clothes etc. It is this whole body of *laibou* which became the basis for developing the basic steps of *jagoi raas*. *Lai haraoba* was stopped for three years under the pretext that something went wrong during the last observance. The scholars and dance teachers carefully studied the dance steps and reproduced it as new steps with new *taalas* (*Punglon*).

Chali is an important dance sequence of *jagoi raas*. Examining the movements of *chali*, some of movements can be said to have derived from the basic footwork of *chumsha jagoi* and *panthoibi jagoi* of *laibou*. *Panthoibi jagoi* is a dance depicting love story and union of *Panthoibi* and *Nongpok Ningthou* (these two deities are classified as Durga and Shiva in some interpretations). In this dance, the *maibis* (priestess) lead the dancers participating in the *laibou* and the movement of hands sways from side to side in a prescribed manner. It starts with the both hands moving to a side (either left or right) with the palms facing upwards and little above the waist. The posture of Radha in the *yugal roop* (Radha- Krishna standing together) is considered to be derived from the gestures of *panthoibi jagoi*. The popular hand symbol of Krishna (in other non-Manipuri dances) holding his flute is done by placing both hands slightly towards the right side with one palm facing the body and the other facing away from the body. But in Krishna's posture in *jagoi raas* both the palms are kept facing away from the body. This is again taken from the other part of *Panthoibi jagoi*. *Gopis* dance encircling Radha-Krishna and the circle moves leftwards. This follows the rule of the *laibou* in which the procession headed by *maibis* dance in circle in an anti-clockwise direction.

The *bhangi pareng achouba* which is the most crucial part of every *jagoi raas* is taken from the *hakchang saba jagoi* (making of body parts) of *laibou*. *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* assumes the *tribhanga* (three-bent posture) of Krishna. This dance sequence is enacted to develop a spiritual image of Krishna and observe a religious obligation towards the *tribhanga*. It is considered a sacred act and even a sleeping child is awakened by the guardians to remain well attended to with deep attention by everybody (Ibochaoba, 2009, 83). Similar attention and sacredness are observed during the *hakchang saba jagoi* which shares the same idea with *bhangi pareng achouba*. The *champra-okpi* (plucking lemons) and *champra-khaibi* (slicing of lemon) of *bhangi pareng* were designed after the arm movements of goddess *Panthoibi* plucking flowers to make offerings to *Nongpok Ningthou*. *Lasing-manbi* (arranging cotton), *lasing kappi* steps of *Bhangi* were also taken from the *phisarol jagoi* (weaving dance) of *laibou*. *Jagoi raas* includes separate dance of four and two *gopis* in groups which is considered to be taken from *chongkhong litpa* and *phungarol jagoi* of *laibou* (Devi 2010, 57). Therefore, the dance units symbolising different stages and activities of creation and life as enacted in *lai haroaba* are well adapted and incorporated in *jagoi raas*.

Not only the dance movements but the costumes of Krishna and Radha bear a close resemblance to the ones used in *lai haraoba*. *Potloi* worn by Radha and *gopis* has lots of similarities to the dress of *maibi*. The lower part of *potloi* is of two parts- the main skirt and *poswan*. This seems to be inspired from *maibi*'s lower garment- the usual *phanek* and a sarong wrapped above it which is slightly around knee length. The same can be seen in the *potloi*. The *kha-on*- a band like piece is hung from the left shoulder and made to rest on the right side above the *poswan*. Another piece called *khwanggoi khwangnap* is tied to bind the other pieces in place and is seen hanging in the front. This arrangement of *Kha-on* and *khwangoi Khwangnap* have close resemblance to the way in which *maibi* wears *enaphi* (a cloth) and *khwangchet* as a waistband. Krishna wears golden-orange dhoti and *gopis* wear red *potloi* except for Radha who wears a green *potloi*. The golden and green of Krishna and Radha symbolise Krishna as creator, symbolized by the sun and source of all energies, and Radha as the nurturer symbolised by the earth. This symbolism follows the Meitei cosmology wherein the sky is considered the father and the earth as the mother. It is union of the two which creates the universe. *Poswan* which is bordered with brass and mirror works with rigid and foldable border is worn around the waist on top of *potloi*. The number of curves of *poswan* for Radha is nine and seven for *gopis* (Bahadur 2011, 41). The significance of the numbers- nine and seven, could be that of the nine *lainingthou* (Gods) and seven *lainuras* (Goddess) whom the supreme God *Guru Sidaba* produced during the creation of the universe. In the traditional belief, is also believed that the *lainingthou*(s) were created from the right side and *lainura*(s) from the left side of *Guru Sidaba*. The symbolism of left and right is still maintained in *jagoi raas* as a continuation from *lai haraoba* tradition. Left is meant for women and right for men. Krishna stands on the right of Radha in their couple form.

In *lai haraoba*, dances are offered to the deity for the prosperity of the community. It is called *thougal jagoi* meaning a dance offered in the service of the deity. Similar essence is maintained in *jagoi raas* where the word *jagoi katpa* (offering of *raas*) is used to imply the service to the God. In *thougal jagoi*, initial part of the song is referred to the God and audience to accept the dance being offered to them and to pardon any mistakes committed while performing. Similarly, *guru vandana* and *sabha vandana* directed to teachers and audience are sung in the beginning sequence of *jagoi raas* as a plea to excuse any kind of imperfections. Anyone can participate in the *jagoi raas* since dancing talents are not necessarily a compulsory requirement. Rather it is the devotional sentiments that are called for. Therefore, *jagoi raas* in its form and content serves as a melting pot of two cultural and religious systems and symbolises the 'synthesis' which is the essence of cultural identity of the Meitei V aishnavite community.

Whose embodied culture? Contestations on *jagoi raas*

Cultural Studies in 1950s started problematising the concept of culture as shared commonalities and questioned culture as shared ‘by whom’, ‘how’ and ‘under what circumstances’ (Dirks et.al 1994). Likewise, performance as a medium of cultural expression, questions can be raised as to how, who and under what circumstances a particular dance was created. Beyond its artistic expressions, it represents a form of communication and manifest relations of power and representation. The ‘cultural apparatus’, as Mills (1939) argues, provides not only the way to see but also what to see and experience. *Jagoi raas* is a ‘cultural apparatus’ in itself. The creation of *jagoi raas* was creation of new cultural apparatus where the subjects were informed about the new ways of experiencing and seeing a new religion and culture. The newly introduced religious belief systems and values created a new cultural system through a careful amalgamation of the old and the new. The other aspect of *jagoi raas* as a cultural apparatus can be seen in the manner in which the king was posed as a divine figure. His power that was otherwise disrupted by frequent invasions was consolidated throughout the creation of a cultural apparatus.

Combining the aspects of who is creating culture, and for whom, *jagoi raas* could be located in two sites- one in its ritual space and the other beyond the sacred space (most commonly the stage). Zygmunt Bauman (1990) explains very what could be the main difference between nature and culture. As Bauman puts it, nature is something that men cannot control (not disagreeing with the human scientific interventions) whereas culture is something men created and have control over. Culture keeps on changing according to the needs. But somehow culture takes the form of nature where some make the culture to be imposed upon some. Therefore, it is only that ‘few’ who has control over culture. *Jagoi raas*, in this sense, is that cultural apparatus created by those workmen who formed the ‘state’. It is the ‘ritual theatre’ which demonstrated the state and king’s divine power. In short, it was a medium through which the king could consolidate his power. During those time, Manipuri king was driven out of his homeland and there were frequent wars with Burma and rebellion by one of the smaller kingdoms who wanted to gain control over Manipur. It was the time when his power and authority were put to test. During this testing times, *jagoi raas* was revealed to him by Krishna in his dream in return for his promise to craft a statue of Krishna and offer the performance. This myth still prevails. A divine connection or rather the belief that the king was chosen to be Krishna’s messenger was implanted and hence, proving the divine power of the king.

The discussions so far are about *jagoi raas* in the ritual space. The story that unfolds in the spaces beyond the sacred is the debate whether *jagoi raas* truly belong to Manipur or not. The religious revivalists would claim that it is not a product of Meitei culture but a marker of religious imposition that corrupted Manipuri cultural and religious history. The dance has archived a false history of Manipur. On the other hand, it has become very hard to disown *jagoi raas* since *jagoi raas* is marketed as one of the cultural artefacts that represent Manipuri culture and identity today both nationally and internationally. Sangeet Natak Akademy's recognition of this dance form as one of the Indian Classical dances has added to the debate. The status of *jagoi raas* as a major Indian dance form somehow enhances the strained relationship between India and Manipur which was scarred by historical encounters. *Jagoi raas* exists as a 'given' (it is considered as a gift of the king to the land) that people want to cut off since it distorts the kind of self that they originally should have.

Both in ritual performance of *jagoi raas* and a more secular version in the staged *raas*, there is a big element of a Manipuri self- an 'Indian' and 'Hindu' identity. This is the basic discontent of revivalist movements which started in the 1940s. Manipuri scholars like Kh Bijoy gave a new perspective on the understanding of the Revivalist movement in Manipur. It traces its origin in the politics and power of the state rather than the religion itself. The twentieth-century state had less administrative power owing to British colonisation. The king and his upper-class Brahmins used religion to impose various religious restrictions in the everyday life of people. They did this in the name of an administrative group of learned pandits called *Brahma Sabha* created in the eighteenth century by Rajarshi Bheigyachandra. It was against the religious orthodoxies of state in the twentieth century that the revivalist movement began. This is closely associated with the basic discontent that revivalist with *jagoi raas*. Rajarshi Bheigyachandra and his gift, *jagoi raas*, remain contested where the revivalists see it as a blot in the cultural history of Manipur.

Raas remains an irreversible marker of a Hinduised Manipur. It would be erroneous to assume it only as a symbol of imposition that distorted the indigenous culture. It is very important to uncover the local elements that went into the making of this dance giving it a unique flavour. In the post-colonial India, where there are claims of the continuing colonisation of Manipur by the Indian state, *jagoi raas'* embedded-ness in the question of identity and question of what represents 'us' and 'them' cannot be ruled

out. State's recognition of the dance could have been an act of assigning an 'Indian' identity or completing their incomplete political integration through cultural assimilation. If *jagoi raas* is a tool to assign an 'Indian-ness', then the same is also a means to assert an identity marked with a difference and a tinge of indigenous flavour.

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**Contextualising Events or Polarising Issues: A Discourse on Hindi News Channels’
Approach in Post Truth Era
(Special Reference: U.P. Assembly Election 2022)**

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Abstract

This research paper examines how, during the Uttar Pradesh assembly polls, there was competition for coverage of issues and events in Hindi news channels within the post-truth period. Various Hindi news channels were selected based on intended purpose, and the coverage-content was discoursed. It was found that most Hindi news channels attempted to generate religious polarisation in their prime-time coverage right before the assembly elections, during the election announcement, and during voting, and were mostly effective. Such a tendency of Hindi news channels to promote polarised religious fury in the garb of news, well beyond delivering fake or alternative truths, is a menace to democracy inside the post-truth era.

Keywords: Post-Truth Period, Religious Polarisation, Prime Time, Alternative Truth

Introduction

The 'continuous discursive fixation with and allegation of dishonesty, especially lying, and the public fear and distrust it generates' characterise today's 'post-truth' communication environments. Harsin defines 'post-truth' as an emphasis on “discord, confusion, polarising views, and understanding, well- and uninformed competing convictions, and elite attempts to generate and regulate these “truth markets” or competitions, citing significant theoretical and philosophical precursors” (Harsin 2018). The link between information and truth has undoubtedly frayed in today's post-truth society. Terminologies like ‘alternative truth’ have become popular in defining the concept of absolute truth. India, a democratic country, have likewise experienced the changing winds of time. The Indian media's irresponsible approach to information trustworthiness in this

post-truth era, particularly by Hindi news channels, is making life tough for those who believe in the democratic system. During the recent Uttar Pradesh assembly elections, the Indian media produced a ‘crisis of information credibility and unilateral information flow’ by highlighting extremely irrelevant subjects, fake news, and biased news frames on multiple instances. The present research paper looks at the news served by Indian media in the context of the U.P. assembly elections 2022, as well as the shifting trend of Indian media in the post-truth era.

Research Methodology

In the present study, Hindi news channels have been taken through purposive sampling and the topic of bulletins broadcasted by these news channels in prime time has been kept at the center. An attempt has been made to understand the trend of Hindi news channels through the analysis and discourse of the bulletin. Time frame is divided into three parts: 1. Before the announcement of the election i.e., 15th December to 7th January 2022, 2. After the announcement of elections i.e. from 8th January to 9th February and 3. During the voting in the election, i.e. from 10th February to 7th March.

UP Assembly Election Timeline

In the light of Corona, the Election Commission had recommended all parties to focus more on internet campaigning at the start of the election. Any *padyatra*, roadshow, cycle, or bike rally was prohibited under this law. However, by the time the third phase arrived, corona's pace had dropped significantly and all of the limits had been lifted. All of the parties began their campaigns with rallies, road shows, and street meetings, among other things. The U.P. election was conducted in 7 phases. Under this, voting was held on 10 February, 14 February, 20 February, 23 February, 27 February, 3 March and 7 March. The election results were declared on March 10th. But the U.P. Exit Poll came by the evening of 7th March.

Toxic Debate of Hindi News Channels: The Pre-Assembly Election Impact

Usually, the election comes as a big occasion for a professional journalist covering the election, when they leave the world of capital-metropolis and enter village-town-small-medium town and common life. During election reporting, there is a chance to see society, politics and life on its real plane. But on its contrary, the reporting of most of the Hindi channels was inclined towards *tamasha* or propaganda. Some of the reporting of a serious and important political event like elections was seen pulling the Kapil Sharma mark towards laughter and rhetoric (a leading Hindi news channel run by a big corporate house) and some around small-medium and big leaders of the same party.

With the announcement of the assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh in January, there was an obvious race in the mainstream media to cover the poll. Before announcement of Assembly election on 17th December, News 18's prime time show *Desh Nahin Jhukne Dunga* scrolled & blinked a header- '*2022 Mein Hindutva Hit Hai*' (Hindutva is a hit in 2022). Under this debate anchor Aman Chopra asks, '*Kya Sanatan Ka Swarn Yug Aa Gaya Hai?*' (Has the Golden Age of Sanatan come?). On 24th December 2021, AIMIM leader Owaisi delivered hate speech in a rally. India TV in its evening show *Muqabala*, held a debate on '*Agar Yogi-Modi Hate Toh Hindu Khatare Mein Honge*' (Hindus will be in danger if Yogi-Modi leaves). The headline of Navika Kumar's show on Times Nav Bharat broadcast was '*Yogi-Modi Ke Naam Par Owaisi Ka 'Badlapur*' (Owaisi's 'Badlapur' in the Name of Yogi-Modi). On 15th December, 2021 Hindu Ekta Mahakumbh was organized in Chitrakoot, various political parties connected this theme with polarised politics but the headlines of Aar-Paar, a prime time show of News 18, was '*Hindu Ekta Se Kisko Allergy?*' (Who is allergic to Hindu unity?), '*Hinduo Ke Hath Siyasi Bisat*' (Political chessboard in the hands of Hindus), '*Hindu Ekta Mahakumbh Par Siasat*' (Politics on united Hindu Unity Mahakumbha), led to a competition to polarised media houses more than political parties. On 22 December 2021, a statement of Uttar Pradesh Energy Minister Shrikant Sharma was proudly made the headline of that statement by various electronic channels; the tendency to go beyond polarisation and absorb toxic facts was shocking. The statement was, "If you do not say Radhe-Radhe, then the electricity will be cut; the louder you speak, the more current you will get...." On the basis of this statement, Zee News gave a religious color to the election coverage with the heading '*Jo Radhe Radhe Nahi*

Bolega uski Bijli Kat Jayegi (Whoever does not speak Radhe Radhe, his power will be cut), so in Aaj Tak (in Halla-Bol) with the heading '*Chunav*', *ek Mandir*' ('Election', a Temple). In a context, congress party leader Rahul Gandhi gave a statement regarding difference between Hindu & Hindutva, the News18 prime time show *Desh Nahi Jhukne Dunga*, the anchor Aman Chopra repeatedly uses the word 'Hinduphobia' to ask the spokesperson of the opposition parties, "What is the plan to spread Hinduphobia?", "Namaz in the open will not be tolerated". In this show, the headline keeps blinking continuously, '*Hindu-Hindutva Mein Fark, Kiska Bedagark?*' (Difference in Hindu-Hindutva, Whose Loss?). The extension of this debate was also conducted on 11th Feb 2022, a day after the first phase of U.P. election, where anchor Amish Devgon carried a debate on '*Hindu Vs Hindutva, Kiska Prayog?*' (Hindu vs Hindutva, Whose Use?) and asked toxic questions to saints, "What is the meaning of loving caress, we go on beating?" Here, he used the word 'we' explicitly for the Hindu religion. In this sense, constructing religious narratives by Hindi news networks even before the Election Commission announces elections does not do credit to the job of the fourth pillar of democracy.

In this regard we need to look at the characteristics of this post-truth period of misinformation and disinformation, such as a reduction in social capital, rising economic disparity, increased polarisation, diminishing trust in science, and an increasingly fragmented media landscape, to truly comprehend it. For example, media search engine Factiva returned 40 hits to the global media "post-truth" throughout 2015. In contrast, 2016 was 2,535 hits, and the first three months of 2017 were about 2,400 hits. The Oxford Dictionary led the spread of false alarms in 2016. "Post-truth" as a word of the year (Flood 2016). The rapid rise in awareness of the role of false and misleading information follow, for example, a previous warning by the World Economic Forum. It ranked the spread of false information online as one of the 10 most important issues facing the world in 2013 (WEF 2013). The democratic system has been exposed by the tendency of increasing polarisation, which is one of the dimensions of the post truth. In fact, if it had been about rigging, corruption, or deception, it could have been managed by system reforms, but in this case, the media's hysteria, as well as the growing trust in and support for it, has led to a liberal attitude toward the media. A question should definitely be raised.

The Narrative Setting Phase: Announcement of Assembly Election

In the first week of January itself, there was a buzz that soon the Election Commission is going to announce the date of elections in five states. On January 8th, the Election Commission announced the dates. The competition to serve the context on a larger scale in Hindi news channels also started with this. Although it had started before January, but now it was time to be a bit more aggressive and 'fastest'.

Leaders leaving one party and joining another is not a new topic in politics, particularly during election season. There will almost certainly be a lot of coverage on such topics, but Aaj Tak's popular show 'Shankhnad' aimed to tell a different story with its header and the connotations behind it, '*Dalbadal ka Daldal, Kaise Khilega Kamal?*' (The swamp of 'defection,' how will the 'lotus' bloom?) The usage of words like 'lotus' and 'swamp of defection', as well as the consequences, may be clearly understood in this context. Times Now's prime time debate show on this issue where Navika Kumar declares BJP's ruling as 'Ramraj' with '*5 Saal Ramraj, Ticket Ke Liye Samaajvaad*' (5 Years Ramraj, Socialism for Ticket). The same channel, on 13th January, in its another prime time show Opinion Public Ka, with headings and analysis like '*Ramji Kareng Bedapar*' (Lord Ram will help you to cross the hurdles) and '*Yogi Ki Iss Chaal Se Akhilesh Chit*' (Akhilesh loses through Yogi's master strategy), describes Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath contesting from Ayodhya, which was completely misleading and wrong.

Two days after the Election Commission's announcement, on 10th January News18's main debate show topics were '*2022 Mein Yogi Ka Rajyog*' (Yogi's Raja Yoga in 2022?), '*Yogi Ka Jalwa, 2022 Mein Bhagwa*' (Yogi's Jalwa, Saffron in 2022), '*BJP Ko Jitayenge Yogi Ke 80*' (Yogi's 80 will make BJP win), '*80 Vs 20 Per U.P. Ki Ladaayi*' (U.P.'s fight on 80 Vs 20). Such unilaterally inclined topics and headlines seem to break even the most ordinary standards of journalism.

The followings are some of the key context and narratives broadcast by Hindi news channels, among many others:

- On 3rd January, CM Yogi, in a rally, called Rahul Gandhi ‘Accidental Hindu’. News 18 prime debate show Aar-Paar conducted debate on ‘*Accidental Hindu Par Aar-Paar*’ (Aar-Paar on accidental Hindu); *Hindu Par Maha Sangram* (Mega war on Hindu).
- On 14th January, CM Yogi visited home of a party worker. Aaj Tak in Halla Bol conducted program entitled ‘*Khichadi Khao dalit Ke Gun Gaao*’ (Eat khichdi sing the praises of Dalit).
- On 16th January, Congress Party issued ticket to a disputed leader. In Halla Bol (Aaj Tak) program ran with the heading, ‘*U.P Ki Ladayi Dangaai Tak Aai*’ (The battle of UP came till the rioters).
- On 19th January, first opinion poll of Zee News (DNA) broadcasted with ‘*Jeetenge Toh Yogi Hi*’ (Yogi will do win).
- On 20th January, SP leader Aparna Yadav and Nida Khan Joined BJP. Headings appeared as ‘*Jinnavad Ki Hod, Parivar Mein Bhagdaud*’ (Race in Jinnahism, Dispute in Family) on News18-Desh Nahin Jhukne Dunga.
- On the occasion of Inauguration of National War Memorial (21st January), DNA Zee News analyzed context as *Shahadat Par Congress ‘Selective’ Kyo?* (Why is Congress ‘selective’ on sacrifice?).
- Aaj Tak- Halla Bol conducted debate on *Hindutva: Asli-Nakli* ((Hindutva: Real-Artificial)). The context was congress leader Rahul Gandhi criticized aggressive Hindutva on 24th January.
- On 25th January, under the context of crime control in U.P., News18- Desh Nahin Jhukne Dunga conducted debate on topic ‘*Tamnehavaad Vs Jinnahvaad*’ (Gun Vs Jinnah).
- On 28th January, in Gujarat, a young man named Kishan was murdered because he had made an objectionable post on social media against a particular religion. News18- Desh Nahin Jhukne Dunga conducted debate on ‘*Kattarpanth Ke Barud Par India*’ (India on the gunpowder of fundamentalism).

- Debate on Hindutva conducted on 31st January by Aaj Tak- Halla Bol under the topic of *Hindutva Ke Pitch Par Kya Hai Congress Ka Plan* (What is the plan of Congress on the pitch of Hindutva).
- On 2nd February, News 18- Desh Nahin Jhukne Dunga held debate on *'Pak- China Saath, Kiska Hath'* (Pak-China together, whose 'hand'). The context was: Criticizing the foreign policies of the government, Rahul Gandhi alleged that due to the wrong strategies of the central government, our neighboring countries Pakistan and China have come together.
- Samajwadi Party's MLA Rafiq Ansari used the word 'Hindugardi' while relating to hooliganism on 2nd February. News 18- Desh Nahin Jhukne Dunga conducted debate on *'Hindugardi Par Hindu Denge Jawab'* (Hindus will answer on Hindugardi).
- On 7th February, PM was replying in Lower House & Rahul Gandhi was absent. Times Now-Sawal Public Ka conducted debate under the topics *'Congress Ab Tukde Tukde Gang Ki Leader?'* (Congress is now leader of tukde-tukde gang?); *'Congress Ki Angrejo wali Vibhajan Neeti'* (British partition policy of Congress).

The definition of news is evolving at a faster rate than we can imagine. With national politics, film and entertainment, crime and sports consuming about half of prime time on major national news channels, from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m., one can appreciate the suffering of other vital aspects of life requiring equal attention (Garg 2016, 131). The lack of interest shown by television news channels in more essential subjects such as education, health, science and technology, the environment, and agriculture poses a severe threat. The increasing polarised news material on news channels, as well as hostility toward one another, supports P. Sainath's argument that Indian media is dominated by only three elements: A B C (Advertisement, Bollywood and Corporate Power) (Sainath, 2016). If this fact is accepted as completely true, then it is another alarm bell because the market i.e. advertising is determining such news content and the audience is being served what they want to be served and not what the audience wants. It is very clear that viewers are not considered as a

direct source of money, catering to the demands of advertisers and conveyance of advertisement agencies (Rao 2016, 30). It is critical to recognise that if Bollywood news is not taken, the media's natural propensity will turn towards politics, with the spice of 'anger and hatred'. As a result, T.R.P. and advertising will both rise. In terms of corporate control, its influence on news content is obvious and understandable.

Hijab Controversy: A fresh content from South for news channels to set narrative in North

Although the continuing controversy about wearing hijab in school started from 1st July 2021 when P.U. College in Udupi established a uniform dress code guideline. However, on February 5th, 2022, a video of a college in Kundapur, Karnataka, in which 50-60 male students shout slogans in front of a girl wearing a hijab, and the girl, in protest, raised a religious slogan against them, gained traction. This one video, defying the gravity of the situation in all aspects, prepared the spice of such content for the news channels, which they were going to taste at least for one month i.e. from February 10 to March 10. Though Hindi news channel News Nation on February 3rd, in its show News Cut To Cut, kept the topic of discussion, '*Pahle Hijab, Phir Kitab*' (first hijab, then book). Before the day of the first phase election on 9th February, News18 in its main bulletin cross-headed with a question mark, '*Jaruri Shiksha Ya Dharmik Kattarta?*' (Need education or religious bigotry?), the second topic of the debate was: '*Shiksha Ka Talibanikaran?*' (Talibanization of education?).

Indian news channels took the hijab controversy arising out of different states of South India and started a nationwide debate about it. These channels continued to explain and discuss its direct impact on the elections to the Legislative Assembly. Some of the topics and headings day wise of the shows organized by some of the leading Hindi news channels keeping the 'Hijab controversy' in focus were as follows:

- *School 'Hijab' Se Chalega Ya Uniform Se?* (Will school run through 'hijab' or uniform?) -Times Nav Bharat - Sawal Public Ka: 8th February.

- *Hijab.. Zid Ya Jihad?* (Hijab.. insistence or jihad?) - Zee News- Taal Thok Ke: 9th February.
- *'Hijab Ne Badli U.P. Ki Hawa'* ('Hijab' has changes the wind of U.P.)- Times Nav Bharat - Sawal Public Ka: 10th February.
- *'Hijab Ki Zid 'On Hold'* (Hijab insistence 'on hold') - Zee News- DNA: 10th February.
- *'Hijab Row- Kya Uniform Civil Code Hai Only solution'* (Hijab Row - Is Uniform Civil Code the only solution?) – Zee News- Taal Thok Ke: 10th February.
- *Uniform Par 'Hijab My Choice' Saajish* ('Hijab My Choice conspiracy on uniform); Sikh Pagdi Ki Tulna Hijab Se Kyu? (Why compare Sikh turban with hijab?) - Times Nav Bharat- Sawal Public Ka: 11th February.
- *'Hijab Day Ke Peechhe Kaun?'* (Who is behind the 'Hijab Day'?)- India TV- Muqabala: 11th February.
- *'Tukde- Tukde Gang Ka Plan 'Hijab'* (Plan 'Hijab' of tukde-tukde gang) - News 18- Desh Nahin Jhukne Dunga: 11th February.
- *'Hijab Dharma Ya Kanoon?'* (Hijab religion or law); *'Hijab- Hijab... Siyasi Naqab!'* (Hijab-hijab...political mask!) - Aaj Tak- Halla Bol; 10 Tak: 11th February.
- *'Siyasat 'Hijabi' Ho Gayi'* (Politics has become 'Hijabi'); *'Hijab Ki Ladayi Ghazwa Par Aayi'* (The fight for hijab came on ghazwa) - Aaj Tak- Halla Bol: 14th February.
- *'Shariyat Vs Sanvidhan kyu?'* (Why Shariyat Vs. Constitution?), *'Hindu Vote Par Bantware Ki Chal'* (split on Hindu vote), *'Hijab Par Bhagwa Vs Gajwa'* (Saffron Vs Gajwa on hijab) - News 18- Aar- Paar; Desh Nahin Jhukne Dunga: 14th February.
- *'Hijab Vs Kumkum'* -Zee News- Taal Thok Ke: 15th February.
- *'Hijab Ke Naam Par Bambaji Hogi?'* (Will there be bombing in the name of hijab?); *'Parde Ke Naam par Siyasat Beparda'* (Politics exposed in the name of visor) - News 18- Aar-Paar: 15th February.
- *'Ghajwa-e-Hind par U.P. Mein Jang Jari'* (War continues in U.P. on Ghajwa-e-Hind) - Aaj Tak- Halla Bol: 17th February.

- *'Hijab Vivad Ke Peechhe Rajneetik Agenda, Nishana Modi-Yogi?'* (Political agenda behind hijab controversy, Modi-Yogi target?) - India TV- Aaj Ki Baat: 17th February.
- *'Hijab Yuddh Mein Kiski Haar?'* (Whose defeat in hijab war?), *'Hijab Vivaad Mein Yogi Ka Bulldozer Plan'* (Yogi's 'bulldozer' plan on hijab) - Zee News- Taal Thok Ke: 17th February.
- *'Ek Hijab, Sau Vivaad'* (One Hijab, Hundred Disputes) - News 18- Aar Paar: 18th February.
- *'Hijab Ke Peechhe Naqab Mein Kaun'* (Who is behind the hijab in the naqab), *'Raar Thanenge, Kanun Nahin Manenge'* (Will decide, will not obey the law) - Zee News- Taal Thok Ke: 18th February.
- *'Karnataka Mein Katla Ke Peechhe Hijab Vivaad?'* (Hijab controversy behind murder in Karnataka?) - India TV- Aaj Ki Baat: 21st February.

The purpose of continual airing of this contentious issue by Hindi news channels was to sway public opinion in a certain direction, as this definition of post-truth explains, “Relating to or describing situations in which objective facts are less powerful in molding public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief,” (Wang 2016). In fact, most of the Hindi news channels raised this issue with great enthusiasm till the third phase of the assembly elections till February 20. By the time the fourth phase (24 February) approached, the issue kept going cold as the matter was sub-judice in the Karnataka High Court and Russia Ukraine War. Hijab issue provided a lot of spicy content for the media especially Hindi news channels regarding the Uttar Pradesh elections till the first three phases of election. The hijab controversy was bound to lead to religious polarisation, but the setting of such agendas by the media in the run-up to the Uttar Pradesh elections, bypassing the core issues of the state, must be termed as ‘extremely disappointing’.

The Electoral Phase: Time to analyze context on post-truth parameter

The news was guaranteed to raise the enthusiasm as soon as voting began on February 10. Typically, this is the time when news organisations examine and compare patterns, voter trends, political speeches, promises, and claims. The analysis done in Zee News' prime time show DNA

in the 'post-truth age' was as follows: "In the fight between 80 per cent and 20 per cent, 80 joined Yogi. Akhilesh divided 80-20 into five parts, while Yogi divided it into two. Muslim society has voted to SP and Jayant Chaudhary unitedly". The same show puts the heading after 14th February i.e. second phase voting, '*Hindu Voters Ke Kam Josh Ka Kya Arth?*' (What is the meaning of less enthusiasm of Hindu voters?), '*Muslimo Ki 'Jagrukata' Se Kisko Labh?*' (Who benefits from 'awareness' of Muslims?). In his analysis in DNA on February 20th, Sudhir Chaudhary states that BJP will win 80 per cent seats other parties will win around 20 per cent. During this the headline went, '*Koi Nahi Hai Takkar Mein*' (Nobody is in the fight). The same prime time show analysed on 23rd February, during fourth phase, "BJP will perform brilliantly in the fourth phase. SP's breath is starting to swell now. Now after today all the rounds belong to BJP". In its one-sided election analysis, the show further explained how SP leader Akhilesh had prepared an electoral formula on the basis of caste. BJP destroyed Akhilesh's formula M+Y+J+S/M+K+G (Muslim, Yadav, Jaat, Saini/Maurya, Kurmi, Gurjer) through its formula T+B+B+L+K+S (Thakur, Brahmin, Baniya, Lodhi, Kurmi, Shakya). In March 4th, before the poll of last phase, News 18 held debate on '*Kyu Chup Hai Secular Brigade?*' (Why is secular brigade silent?). Here, secular brigade stands for opposition parties.

Reality Check

When the Election Commission delivered a phase-by-phase assessment after the election results were announced on March 10th, the air of channels dissecting all this Muslim unity and Hindu partition went out. In the first round of elections, the BJP won 46 out of 58 seats, with a 50 per cent vote share, compared to 31 per cent for the SP and RLD combined. Even in the second round of elections, when news channels competed to say that Hindu voters were voting in unison, these statements surfaced when the BJP won 32 seats and the SP 23 (Shukla, 2022). The explanation is obvious: these news channels worked hard to generate religious divisiveness in politics, and they were largely successful. If the impact of its analysis is considered, then the third phase (20th February) elections in Uttar Pradesh's "Yadavland" (Hathras, Kasganj, Firozabad, Etawah,

Kannauj, Mahoba, Hamirpur, Jalaun, and other areas) where SP had a stronghold. The BJP won 41 of the 59 seats, while the SP won only 14 seats.

We must understand that debates are beneficial to serious and in-depth reporting. The debate should follow a significant news report. It helps viewers gain a better knowledge of a topic, but the situation in Indian television news is totally different. On Indian television news channels, confusing and yelling matches of arguments on small matters have grown rather regular (Singh 2016, 141-146). In fact, in this post-truth era, along with the content, news anchors also spread both their arms in a dramatic style, shouting loudly, even banging the table in front, not only asking questions but also spreading one-sided hatred issues. They also support the news in a strong way on behalf of themselves and the audience.

Conclusion

Hindi news channels, which are widely regarded as the most prominent medium in Hindi-speaking areas, contributed to religious polarisation during the recent Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly elections 2022. However, this was not the first time that the channels broadcasted such toxic conversations and content. During the hearing of a petition in October 2020, the Supreme Court termed the TV debate and content as “very toxic, polarized, and filled with innuendos”. In reality, breaking the tradition of reporting facts beyond the most basic standards of journalism, such as caste, religion, and ideology, is a plot not only against democratic values, but also a conspiracy to drive India into the fundamentalist category. Today, when information is only a fingertip away from us, media obligation grows even stronger and becomes more ethical. The loss of news channels in this manner is damage to the free flow of information in the face of political and ideological decay. In the same way that banning social media and shutting down the internet during riots is considered as an exercise in preventing riots, now, is the moment to prohibit the broadcast of news channels that promote religious panic and extremism?. Channels like Republic Bharat and News Nation have not been taken into consideration in the present study as discussion on their

content will not be construed as having a media content regulatory body in the country. However, in the midst of these post-truth nights, there are some Hindi news channels, such as NDTV and ABP News, which take analysis sincerely and strive for some degree of impartiality and coherence. As a viewer, our responsibility has increased even more in this post-truth era to thoroughly check the credibility of the news before placing entire trust in the material, or else we'll get caught in this web of toxic content.

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Writing Resistance: Exploring Disability and Sexuality in Life Writings

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Abstract

Disabled women hold one of the most vulnerable positions in our society and have been historically neglected by both the disability and feminist movement. The last few decades have seen an increase in the works that are devoted to understanding how being disabled and being a woman frames one's disability experience. These works have focused on the personal accounts of disabled women and the study of representations of disabled characters in literary works. In order to bring their struggles to the forefront of mainstream disability studies and feminism, disabled women took it upon themselves the task of voicing their concerns and their unique experiences, freely and of their own accord. One of the ways of doing this was through producing a vast amount of literary works constitutive of short stories, poetry and life writings. This paper brings together two important areas of study, disability studies and feminism to study how life writings can be seen as a means of empowerment that critically engage with issues of ableism and patriarchy both within and outside their community in an effort to articulate their authentic experiences of multiple marginalisation and present a detailed account of varied forms of oppression that disabled women are subjected to such as discrimination based on gender, damaging stereotypes, violence and sexual exploitation. My paper will look at various life writings written by disabled women to have an inside look at the issues related to sexuality, emotional and physical accessibility and social constructs that inform many aspects of the lives of disabled authors. I will also seek to address several crucial questions that these authors seek to answer which are sensitive to the issues such as autonomy, interdependency, accessibility, disability rights, the question of self-hood, the idea of 'normative body' and the relation between gender and disability.

The disability movement has largely prioritised the issues faced by disabled white men and its fight against inequality and inaccessibility over the issue of gender-based discrimination, resultantly, pushing away an array of critical issues of disabled women to the periphery of its set objective. On the other hand, It was not until the last few decades that the feminist movement was vigorously challenged by disabled women over its tendency to exclusively highlight the issues of white, non-disabled, heterosexual, women belonging to the higher socio-economic strata of society.¹ Disabled women were forced to make a difficult choice by having to choose between the mainstream feminist movement that completely ignored their issues raised by intersecting gender and disabled bodily experiences and the male-centred disability movement that incorporated their interests but merely as an act of tokenism to simply further their fundamental goals. These are some of the reasons as to why Disability activists have critiqued feminist scholarship for excluding the experiences of disabled women from feminist analysis (Fine and Asch 198). Furthermore, the scholarship that has attempted to integrate the diversity of female experience based on other markers of one's social identity such as race, class, sexual orientation, etc., have failed to take lived experiences of disabled women into account. Disability scholars have highlighted this exclusion by criticising the feminist movement for being unconcerned towards the accessibility needs of the disabled women that could have enabled them to actively participate in the movement.

Consequently, In the last few decades, these scholars have problematised representations of disabled people in literature and media. Mitchell and Snyder observe that the literary representation of disabled people is usually based on the medical model of disability and the focus of the plot is on the impairment while completely ignoring the underpinnings upon which the societal and cultural conceptions of disability have been grounded. This causes the readers to feel pity for the characters as “pathos, pity, and abhorrence has proved to be an integral part of the historical baggage of our understandings of disability” (Snyder and Mitchell 17). Similarly, Jenny Morris notes that that subjective realities of disabled bodies have not been depicted in mainstream culture which adds to the assumptions that life with a disability is not worth living. Rosemary Garland Thomson also examines the presence of disabled characters in literature and media and suggests that the disabled body symbolises physical deviance and this, in turn, causes the reader to confront their own insecurities and the possibility of loss of control (Thomson 6). Thomson and Davis go on to suggest that disabled characters are

generally not the protagonists in these narratives and they are repeatedly made to function as metaphors by completely obliterating the authentic experiences of disabled people (Thomson 10). They are seen as exotic aliens and their bodily differences force them to be seen as simply spectacles only capable of evoking responses from the other characters in the work (Thomson 9). As a result, the readers of these texts see the disabled character as a person with no agency, no voice, no personal development, and they remain an outsider throughout the text (Thomson 11).

In order to bring their struggles to the forefront of mainstream disability studies and feminism, disabled women took it upon themselves the task of voicing their concerns and their unique experiences, freely and of their own accord. One of the ways of doing this was through producing a vast amount of literary works constitutive of short stories, poetry and life writings. As a result, The last two decades have witnessed an upswing in the publication of life writings written by people of all marginalised groups. It also encompasses life writings written by disabled women who have used it as a medium to counter the dominant narratives about disability by publishing their personal testimonies. These works are seen as a means of empowerment that critically engage with issues of ableism and patriarchy both within and outside their community in an effort to articulate their authentic experiences of multiple marginalisation and present a detailed account of varied forms of oppression such as discrimination based on gender, damaging stereotypes, violence and sexual exploitation. It is crucial to note that majority of literature about disabled women has been written by themselves and a considerable part of these works consist of their personal accounts of being female and disabled with the goal of being recognised and understood. Over the years, these works have also been adapted into films, examined as spaces of political activism and greatly acclaimed in literature.ⁱⁱ

Stating the importance of autobiographies, Thomas Couser writes that an autobiography needs to be seen as a literary expression of a life that is informed by personal agency. Autobiography needs to be studied as a genre that is used as platform to question the negative images associated with disability as it unabashedly displays personal autonomy of the author (Couser 292). Accordingly, It works as an indispensable medium through which the disabled can illustrate their disapproval over multiple forms of exploitation experienced by them. Many of these writers have been able to bring forth their contribution to the disability rights struggle and to the fight against ableism and patriarchy by writing their autobiographies

and articulating their concerns. Therefore, these works need to be seen as a medium of self-expression for allowing them an opportunity to use their own voice to articulate their personal experiences, discuss contestable topics, and using this genre as a burgeoning space of political activism. It provides them with a platform where they can control their representations and their identity while resisting oppressive representations and changing the way disability is understood in society while going about revolutionising the way disabled people are understood in the world.

Some of the life writings written by disabled women that this paper will look at using the disability lens are Rebekkah Taussig's *Sitting Pretty*, Keah Brown's *The Pretty One*, Malini Chib's *One Little Finger* and Simi Linton's *Body Politic*. Since these works are based on personal experiences of the disabled authors, they offer deeply personal accounts of disabled life from a disabled perspective that allow the readers to have an inside look at the issues related to physical accessibility and social constructs that inform many aspects of the lives of disabled authors. These works are successful representatives of the idea that life writings have the potential to be a liberatory medium of self-representation. The discussion of these works would also reveal a deep disconnect between representations of disabled women in literary works and representations of personal experiences in these life writings as the analysis highlights the staggering differences between the two types of works. The study of this gap in representation further helps in understanding the layers of oppression disabled people are made to experience throughout their lives and how the experiences portrayed in mainstream literature and media may not be authentic .

These works offer deeply personal accounts of disability that allow the readers to have an inside look at the issues related to physical accessibility and social constructs that inform many aspects of the lives of the authors. Since Malini Chib and Simi Linton belong to different ethnicities and these writers have different types of disabilities, their lived realities presented in their works are considerably distinct. A writer and an advocate of disability rights, Malini Chib published her autobiography *One Little Finger* in 2011. Her work, like many other autobiographies by disabled women provides an insider's look at some of the most prominent issues experienced by disabled women in a developing country like India. At present, when disabled people experience myriad forms of exclusion in public and private life, disabled

women find themselves to be even more severely curtailed due to the exclusion and stigma associated with disability in India. At the very outset of her autobiography, Malini Chib presents a narrative that challenges stereotypes, critiques patriarchy in Indian society, questions the elitism of mainstream Indian feminist movement, challenges skewed advancement and the hypocrisy of disability movement. There is an interesting juxtaposition of Chib's experiences of personal growth and advancement in her career when she stays in London to when she stays in India and the way it impacts her mental health.

In the work *The Pretty One*, Keah Brown offers a glimpse into her experience living as a disabled Black woman who has cerebral palsy. She talks about how these aspects of her identity intersect with each other to shape her experiences and the way it influences her relationship with herself, her family, and her self-worth. Keah writes about the harm caused by consuming dehumanising and stereotypical messages promulgated from media about disabled people and the widespread idea that disabled people must long for a whole body, and also media's tendency to promote inspiration porn. She highlights the detrimental effects of the lack of representation of people who look like her in films and she says that she finds herself accepting breadcrumbs in terms of disability representation. Rebekah Taussig, on the other hand, is a professor and disability advocate and in her work *Sitting Pretty*, she presents her experiences of living with an acquired physical disability in an ableist and inaccessible world. She then goes on to discuss online dating and critiquing the role of media in perpetuating oppressive narratives and misconceptions about disability. She writes that it is important that we should be focused on bringing disabled perspectives to the forefront as these perspectives would be instrumental in making this world more inclusive, respectful, and accepting of bodies that do not fit the ideas of the norm. This work along with many other autobiographies constitute an effort to present representations of disabled people that shows the normality of their existence and everyday experiences in society without sensationalising it.

Thomson suggests that disabled women are frequently confronted with the judgement that sexuality is not appropriate in disabled people. The body of the disabled woman is assumed to be asexual and unfeminine and is therefore socially 'invisible' (Thomson 25). She writes, "sexuality is a culturally feared aspect of the body, with especially serious complications for those whose bodies are perceived as falling outside a fairly narrow and rigid norm" (Thomson

33). Davis states that disabled literary characters are frequently desexualised as the sexualisation of the disabled body is seen as a “threat to conventional sexual identities” (Hall 43). Hence, Thomson argues that sexual democracy must be recognised as an important political struggle because sexual autonomy is a basic human right and also any marginalised group’s sexual status plays an integral role in reinforcing its social and political status. Similarly, the selected autobiographies assert the issues of sexuality as being integral to one’s personhood. These authors emphasise the importance of being seen as sexual beings in their work. Simi Linton questions the astounding silence that surrounds the sexuality of disabled people, “I came to understand that linking disability to a robust sexual life is among the more radical ideas that one can put forth. It is radical because it debunks the myth of the long-suffering disabled person, but is even more disruptive because it challenges accepted ideals of sexual prowess”(Linton 83).

Rebekah Taussig talks about ableism, the way it is still pervasive in society and goes on to challenge misconceptions about disabled people who are generally considered to be asexual. She explores this topic in detail as she discusses her marriage to her husband and the internalized ableism that had prompted her to believe that it was her only chance of getting married as nobody else would be interested in her. This shows how this recurring pattern of being forced to frequently encounter ableist attitude can also result in disabled people internalizing demeaning comments about their physical attributes and develop feelings of hatred towards their own body and other disabled bodies. Similarly, for Chib, living in a physical environment that didn’t meet her accessibility needs repeatedly makes her question her self-worth, “Did I have my own personality? Was I just another disabled girl who needed things done for her? I knew that I was different and trapped in a dysfunctional body, but did others realize I had a spirit and a mind separate from this body?”(Chib 54). Keah Brown, too, talks about her internalized ableism and the way it makes her feel undesirable and dislike her body. She writes, “What does it mean that in order to keep myself from despair, I sometimes live inside my head, inside a world where I am desired by men my age and by people who see my body as worthy of love and desire, people who see me as much of the same?”. Hence, we can see that people with physical disability have their sexual identity called into question on account of their physical disability. Disabled people are thought to be sexually disabled by other people irrespective of the way they want their sexual identity to be perceived by the

world. Disabilities, especially visible physical disability, tend to affect disabled individuals so adversely that their sexual identity and desires are ignored and completely dismissed.

In this manner, these works also emphasise the detrimental effects of the damaging stereotypes about disabled people that forces them to be seen as asexual or sexually undesirable and the way these stigmatic conceptions can cause the disabled people to be deprived of expressing their sexuality and opportunities that would allow them to experience intimacy and pleasure. These works present detailed thoughts of the disabled authors and their own experiences with respect to their sexuality, therefore, highlighting and problematising the conceptual frameworks prevalent in our society that desexualise or hypersexualise the disabled people. These works also initiate conversations surrounding disability and sexuality so as to recontextualise the dominant discourse at work in the society by redirecting the conversation in productive ways.

In a similar vein, Malini Chib touches upon the issues of marriage, sexual intimacy, and birthing children. She writes, “I wondered if there would ever be a man in my life. Would a man see beyond my body? Would anyone put their arms around me and dance with me? Would anyone kiss me passionately? Would I ever be needed by a man emotionally or would I always be regarded as a burden for someone to take care of?” (Chib 65). She talks about her internalized ableism and the way it makes her feel undesirable and dislike her own body, “I have had a hard time accepting that I am trapped in a rejected body. A body that is not sexually attractive. Like any other person my age, I adore romances. Being in the mainstream of life, one sees a lot of images of a man and woman together. As I grew older, I naturally desired sex and a relationship. Like most women, sometimes I craved to be in the arms of a man. Most men look at me as asexual” (Chib 146). She finds it reprehensible that the society won’t allow a disabled person to freely explore their sexuality. She goes on to critiquing oppressive institutions in our society that perpetuate oppressive narratives and misconceptions about disabled people and their sexuality. She tries to present her views to widespread audience by publishing an article titled, “No Sex Please, You’re Disabled” in 1996 to highlight the troubling effects of silencing the disabled bodies and their sexuality. By writing this paper, she intended to alert the public that “people with disabilities were not children anymore; we had thoughts too, which could be adult thoughts, desires, feelings, passions and expectations like any other

nondisabled person” (Chib147). She observes that society cannot tolerate the disabled having sexual urges and asserts that the society truly believes “disabled women should not have sexual urges, should not even think about sex” (Chib147).

An additional theme pervasive in these works is the way the disabled bodies face exclusion in the surrounding world in the form of stares, inaccessibility, and discrimination. Chib notes that the stigmatic attitude and exclusionary environment is not just limited to developing countries as she recalls her time at a restaurant in London. Seeing the writer sitting alone at the restaurant, an unknown woman made unwarranted and offensive comments, “How is she alone? She can’t be alone as she doesn’t know her mind. I have worked with these type of people before. These people do not know their mind, they are mental.” (Chib 141). Chib describes how her parents decided to move to England when the doctors in England informed them that the Indian doctors are not well versed with Cerebral Palsy which was diagnosed as “spastic with mental retardation” (Chib 7). Chib’s parents were convinced that she would have a better chance at having her schooling and medical needs met and would face less stigma. After spending years in a foreign land that was much more accessible, coming back to India and reinstating into the Indian society was nothing short of a rude awakening for Chib as she writes of the exclusionary environment, “They treated her as if she did not have ears or could not understand”. In India, she was treated as though she was a ‘non-thinking person who needed fixing and fitting into the mould of being normal’”(Chib 16). Chib writes of the stares that her disabled body evoked, “When I went out, I became conscious of all the stares that I provoked, the hushed whisperings when I appeared, the unsolicited advice that was proffered” (Chib 6). Such instances have the tendency to make the disabled person feel that they are misfits, they are not welcome in the public spaces which is a sole territory of the non-disabled people. Such experiences at an impressionable age can translate to a feeling of exclusion following an outright rejection of their disabled identity.

Chib also echoes the primary need of disabled people to be considered an integral member of society who, if given the required resources, are capable enough to contribute to their household and society. It is the societal misconceptions and the barriers present in the society that prevent disabled from unlocking the potential of disabled people who can be just as resourceful in private sphere and community. She compares these experiences to her time in

London where she could gain the independence to be productive and felt like a “contributing member of the family, doing my bit for the house work” (Chib 121). She writes about how she was able to use the public transport system all by herself. She was rarely asked rude questions by strangers as opposed to her experience of living in India where people felt entitled enough to come up to her and “asked me a million questions, apart from staring at me” (Chib 121).

There are several other crucial questions that these authors seek to answer which are sensitive to the issues like autonomy, personal privacy, interdependency, accessibility, disability rights, the question of self-hood, the idea of ‘normative body’ and the relation between gender and disability. As Lennard Davis suggests in his work, in these life writings, disability is not just a question of impairment of the body or its treatment but it is an issue of differentiation that is intertwined with one’s culture and the concept of normalcy that is so deeply entrenched in our psyche.ⁱⁱⁱ These works don’t simply revolve around the idea of ‘inspiration porn’ but they also pay considerable attention to the different ways the disabled people use to negotiate their lives and how their experiences are specific to their culture and location.^{iv} These works exist as a way to create new self-images and new ways of being seen for disabled people. As we have seen, They are uniquely positioned for the representation of the ‘self’ in a way that validates the experience of the marginalized. As opposed to the popular view, they are not simply extraordinary or sentimental stories of individuals rather these stories of oppressed individuals should be examined as important spaces of resistance as they relentlessly act as a tool to counter the misconceptions and stereotypical representations of disability. It is seemingly evident through these examples of life writings how they are used as an effective political tool by disabled people to reclaim their agency, reclaim their identity, control their narratives and by bringing visibility to the way ableism operates in literary texts and their lives. These works as a whole present disability as socially constructed category that is not monolithic but instead includes multitude of perspectives which has the power to destabilize what Snyder and Mitchell have called “narrow cultural labels that often imprison disabled people within taxonomical medical categories”. Furthermore, this analysis shows that it is pertinent to consider the portrayal of disability experiences in life writings as an effective weapon of resistance for the disabled and any other marginalised groups as this way of communicating with the world leads to a transformation in the way people perceive and learn about disabilities. Accordingly, these narratives need to be examined as a source of social critique that “do the cultural work as they

frame our understandings of raw, unorganised experience, giving it coherent meaning and making it accessible to us through the story” (Thomson 121). Thus, reading the works that are written by disabled women themselves forces the readers to confront the difficult conversations surrounding disability and revise the overall outlook of society towards it.

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Social Exclusion, Extract Local Democracy and Corrupt Lower-Level Bureaucracy: An Experimental Approach

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Abstract

The dismantling of the Planning Commission and the creation of NITI Aayog, a new regime for implementing government schemes has given more freedom to states. The effective and speedy implementation of such schemes need active, quick decisions and response from the part of administrative machinery at the district and sub-district level and it, in turn, warrants an increased role of lower bureaucracy and local democratic institutions. The study is an introspective evaluation of the abysmal performance of our lower-level bureaucracy, delayed justice from the judiciary and quasi-judicial bodies and discriminatory approach of politicians from the bottom to the top in denying three basic rights such as road, electricity and water to a poor and marginalized scheduled caste family. This paper narrates the response of the judiciary, officers of the Kerala State Secretariat, various Directorates, Legislative Assembly Committee for SCs/STs, the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) a body constituted under Article 338 of the Constitution of India, District administration, and local bodies. Even after three years of continuous legal fight as well as media and political interventions, the said scheduled caste family is denied of the pathway, though it is a public road by government records and supply of electricity and water connection under Deen Dayal Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY) and Jal Jeevan Mission.

Keywords: - Local democracy, Fundamental rights, peoples plan, State failure, Panchyati Raj

Introduction

Modern welfare states at various levels implement an array of welfare schemes for the benefits of people at different levels of society and with special care particularly to the poor and vulnerable sections of the society. After independence, the Government of India has given a special focus for the upliftment of the downtrodden communities especially for the scheduled castes (SC) and scheduled tribes (STs) introducing several Constitutional provisions and Institutions, schemes and policies. The dismantling of the Planning Commission and the institution of NITI Aayog stressed the importance of inclusive development, increased role of self-government institutions at local level and lower-level bureaucracy. The administrative

machinery to implement such schemes at the district and taluk level play a very significant role in achieving the target of economic development and ensuring better living conditions for the historically underprivileged sections of our population, especially scheduled caste and scheduled tribes. Policies were designed to provide more investments to the relatively poorer sections and backward areas. Despite these policies and its successful implementation, denial of basic necessities such as electricity, pipe water and access to road in many areas has been a problem in India.

State governments and lower bureaucracy at the district and sub-district level can take more initiatives for economic development now than before. The responsibility of implementation of such schemes bestowed with various departments, Districts Collectors, village and panchayat officials and elected representatives. The judicial and quasi-judicial agencies are established to ensure the rule of law, prevention of injustice and expedite the implementation of these schemes. The media is supposed to report any gross violation of justice and bring the matter to the attention of concerned authorities and general public. Multiple adjudication mechanisms and enquiry agencies are established to ensure speedy delivery of justice and the greatest good to the greatest number of people caring for the poor and the downtrodden. However, people are seriously aggrieved by the official respondent's continuous failure to act on complaints of the poorest of society is a matter of serious concern. It seems to be a failure of democracy, constitutional rights and protection of social justice and it is important because the constitution of India envisages special provisions and protective clauses to the SC/STs. This is a serious threat to the rule of law as well. Elected representatives were also responsible for the proper implementation of the schemes and justice to the poor and needy. Unfortunately, there are many instances where elected representatives, political parties, bureaucrats tend to act as a nexus in violating the fundamental rights of illiterate, ignorant and downtrodden communities of the society. This paper narrates such a real incident that happened in a village named Kalluvathukkal in Kollam District of Kerala State.

A Docu-fiction

A politically influential upper-caste Hindu and Ex-panchayat member and her brother (District officer bearer of an influential and a coalition partner of ruling alliance) have illegally encroached a public pathway which is 5.2-metre width 86-meters length consists of 4 Ares of

land in Re-Survey No.196/11 of Block No.39 of Kalluvathukkal Village which found a place in the Basic Tax Register (BTR) of the revenue records as a government road. The said pathway is the only approach road to private residences in the area, paddy fields and a temple in the vicinity. The pathway was being used by the residents and workers ever since the paddy fields were abandoned. This pathway is the only recognized pathway to the residence of a poor SC household. He is poor, his dwelling is non-electrified, no piped water connection and belongs to Below Poverty Line (BPL) household. In pursuance of a series of written representations from residents of the area, a survey encroached government road was subsequently been conducted and established the illegal encroachment. The Additional Tehsildar (Land Records (LR)) has ordered the eviction of the land. The same was challenged by way of a civil suit by the encroachers in a local Munsiff Court but failed miserably. The encroachers approached the Hon'ble High Court of Kerala for staying the eviction order issued by the Additional Tehsildar (LR) Kollam Taluk. But the appeal was rejected by the RDO, Kollam. Though the Sub-Collector has ordered the implementation of the order, due to the political clout of the encroachers, the village officials were reluctant to take action and a false report is made stating that he has cleared the encroachment. They were also extending tacit support using dilatory tactics to subvert the recovery process.

The poor SC household applied for electricity and water connection through the Prime Minister's complete electrification programme named Deen Dayal Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY) and Jal Jeevan Mission. Since this pathway is the only way to the dwelling of the poor SC family, the encroachers attempted to convert a part of the neighbour's property as a public pathway and use it for drawing an electric line to the scheduled caste family and avail public path to the lower portion of the property of the neighbors. They influenced the local leadership of the ruling party and the officials of the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB) to submit a proposal to draw an electric line crossing the private properties of the adjacent property owners. The adjacent property owners objected to it. In March 2017, the Additional District Magistrate (ADM), Kollam District of Kerala had attempted to issue a sanction order permitting the KSEB crossing private property for the electrification. However, just before that, the ADM Kollam sought a report from the Village officer regarding the allegation of encroachment. The Village officer submitted a report without stating the link between encroachment of government road and the house of the proposed beneficiaries even though the

encroached government road ends in the property of the proposed beneficiary and this is the only public pathway to the house of this poor SC family. In addition to it, the Village Officer stated in the report that the two parties have encroached on government road and it is easy and shortest to draw an electric line through crossing the private property of a neighbor. This is to bear in mind that the government road is the shortest and straight path to draw the electric line. The above-mentioned report of the village officer has been a classic case of corruption and malafide response on the part of lower-level bureaucracy in delaying and denying basic rights to poor SC families.

The encroachers who had an adjacent plot used this as an opportunity to encroach on the government land. They not only planted crops on the land but also extended some parts of their house over it and slowly started building a compound wall blocking free access of the public. The public and the residents realized the gravity of the situation when the KSEB proposed to erect electric poles and draw electric lines through their property just to avoid the encroached pathway to supply electricity to a family belongs to the scheduled caste community who are very poor and engaged as agricultural labour. The adjacent property owners objected to the same and filed the Writ petitions in Kerala High court through a WP. (C) No. 9429/2017y W.P. (C) NO.15367/2018 and obtained a stay.

The local residents have brought the issue of illegal encroachment to the notice of the district authorities by submitting multiple representations to the District Collector, the ADM, Sub-Collector, Tehsildar who are the authorities concerned to take action. On 28.02.2017, one of the local residents submitted a written complaint to the District Collector highlighting the encroachment of public property. The local ward member of the Grama Panchayat (LSGD) has also filed a complaint to the District Collector towards this end. Later under influence, the local ward member jumped into the camp of encroachers even though both the encroachers and the ward member are from opposing political parties. The ward member was supported by a big fraction of her party on her approach for jumping into the camp of the encroachers of government road even though the official line of her party was against the encroachers. Then several residents of the area as well as the secretary of the local temple committee also submitted a similar representation to various revenue authorities highlighting the encroachment.

The village officer was instructed to investigate the matter and submit a report on the encroachment by the District Collector when it came to the question of drawing the electric line. Initially, in an attempt to help the encroachers, the village officer reported that though the public pathway did exist, there were better routes to draw the line. Later, he gave another report to the Sub Collector that the extent of the encroachment was indeterminable because of the lack of proper boundary lines. It is to be noted that the report acknowledged that the respondents had planted crops in this area and a part of their building extended over it as well no action was taken to clear the encroachment. The report stated that no Land conservancy case could be registered because of the lack of clear-cut boundary stones. After a prolonged delay, a survey of the area was carried out under the instructions of the Tehsildar. The land survey report along with the sketch submitted by the Surveyor highlighted the extent of the public pathway and established its encroachment by the respondents. Finally, an eviction was ordered with 15 days' notice as required.

Meanwhile, the encroachers made vain attempts to obstruct the eviction efforts through the judicial process. They first filed a suit before a Munsiff Court alleging a threat to their life from the proposed overhead electric lines. However, no reliefs were granted to the plaintiff. Later they filed a Writ Petition (W.P. (c) 35951/2017) before this Hon'ble High Court challenging the eviction order. The learned judge kept the execution of the order in abeyance and authorized the Sub Collector to decide on the issue. On 27.02.2018, following the earlier order of the Hon'ble High Court, the Sub-Collector found the encroachers were guilty and immediate clearance of the encroachment was ordered. Despite this order, the situation at the ground level remains the same.

It is submitted that despite the eviction being officially established and acknowledged all attempts to evict the respondents have been futile so far. The order of the officials remains only on paper. The village officials are hell-bent on frustrating any attempt to recover the illegally held government land/road from the clutches of the encroachers owing to their political clout and influence. Then, one of the residents raised the issue again when after a couple of months when no action was taken and wrote yet another letter enquiring with the Collector about the status of the eviction. The petitioner received a standard bureaucratic

response that '*action is in progress*. On 23.03.2018, one of the local persons reached out to the revenue minister through a letter addressed to him highlighting the encroachment problem and the official apathy in resolving the same. The letter was duly acknowledged and sent to the District Collector's office for further action but nothing happened on the ground.

Then, the village officer submitted a false report to the Additional Tehsildar stating that the encroachment has allegedly been cleared and the government land has been officially reclaimed as of 19.04.2018. He went on to even prepare a mahzor to show that encroachment is cleared. However, in response to a letter dated 12.04.2018 from the ADM, Kollam to the KSEB through official response to this letter dated 17.05.2018 stated that an encroached construction currently exists on the public pathway. Legal clearance required to draw an electric line through this public pathway is currently unavailable even though the width of the path is 5.2 meters. This letter establishes that the village officer willfully submitted a false report to mislead the higher authorities and continues to support the illegal claims made by the encroachers. It is to be noted that the encroachers were given several opportunities and all their false, baseless and illegal claims have been debunked. It is as evident as daylight that they are guilty of willfully encroaching government land and harassing the residents of the area. The public sentiment is evident from yet another mass petition filed against this unlawful act of the encroachers by several residents of the area. The order is stuck in red tape. The concerned officials are purposefully sabotaging the recovery efforts through their dilatory tactics and false reports.

The Constitutional Provisions and Failure of the State and District Administration.

The state as an important institution of the modern welfare state has a fundamental role in the overall development of society in general and marginalized subjects in particular. Any failure on the part of the state towards this end is a state failure, as well as an institutional failure (Thirlwal, 2011) Institutions, are the underlying determinants of the long-run performance of the economy and institutional constraints define a set of pay-offs to political/economic activity that does not encourage productive activity(North, 1990) There is not only a moral case for the state to help those in absolute poverty, but also a strong political and economic one(Thirlwall, 2011). Poor, vulnerable and disaffected people can be a major cause of civil unrest and political instability(Stewart, 2001). World Development Report 1997 argues that many developing

countries failing to protect the vulnerable, all of which causes unrest leads to a lack of government credibility.

There were multiple attempts to redress the grievances of the poor scheduled caste family from the Hon'ble High Court through the District Collector, the Village officer, then to the office of the Minister for Revenue, Minister for Electricity and National Commission for Scheduled Caste (NCSC), Govt. of India. Then, another complaint was lodged by the poor SC household to the PM Portal and the same is forwarded to the office of the Chief Minister of Kerala, from where it reached to the Director of Panchayat, Govt. of Kerala and from there it reached to the Deputy Director of Panchayat (DDP), Kollam from there to the Secretary, Kalluvathukkal Panchayat (local panchayat) and from there under the political influence of the encroachers, a usual bureaucratic style report with no action and even assurance was sent back through the same channel.

Another resident submitted a petition to the NCSC, Government of India for ensuring electric connection and completely evicting the encroachment. The Commission sought a report from the District Collector in May 2019 and the same was submitted by hiding more than revealed. The eviction report of the village officer was not mentioned in the report to the NCSC, Kerala and Lakshadweep Office located in Thiruvananthapuram. The first report was sought within 30 days and the same was submitted within two weeks. The Commission forwarded the report to the complainant and then the complainant submitted a rejoinder representation countering the statements of the District Collector and the Commission stated clearly in the second letter to the District Collector in his name. The commission stated on 30th May 2019 that "*it is pertinent to mention that due to inaction on unauthorized encroachment by a forward community, electricity connection to the poor hapless SC person denied, which violates constitutional and protective clauses entitled to them*". The Collector in his name was directed to take immediate and time-bound action and reply within 10 days. But nothing happened even after several months, it signifies nothing but an instance of state or institutional failure.

Biased and Corrupt Panchayati Raj system and repeated State failures.

A series of written complaints were lodged by the poor SC household in various local self-institutions against the injustice. Local panchayat and Director of Panchayat Govt. of Kerala. Thiruvananthapuram was ordered for enquiry. The enquiry reports concluded rightly that the

appeal of the encroachers is pending before the District Collector and it has been pending since 17th May 2018. Then some persons approached the Hon'ble High Court of Kerala to immediately implement the eviction order dated 28th September 2017 and appeal rejecting order dated 21st February 2018, questioned the false and fake eviction report of the local village officer without evicting the encroachment. This petition was filed to the Hon'ble High Court of Kerala on 21st August 2018 making the encroachers as the respondents. But the encroachers in violation of the *res subjudice*, submitted another petition to the Hon'ble High Court stating that the District Collector is not taking a decision on their appeal and made an alternative request to direct the Collector for assigning the encroached land. The Hon'ble High Court ordered the District Collector to finally decide on the appeal and make a decision on the request for assignment of land as per law. It is clear as daylight that based on Land Assignment Act, 1960 and Assignment Rules, that Public road cannot be assigned to private parties. The above order was issued on 29th November 2018 and asked the Collector to decide within two months. But the District Collector conducted a hearing of the encroachers on 20th March 2019 and no decision was taken to date favouring the encroachers. On 24th January 2019, The Hon'ble High Court of Kerala adjudicated three petitions pending before the Court for several months. Out of these two petitions were for seeking and extending stay for drawing an electric line through properties of two neighbouring property owners and the third petition was effectively implementing the eviction order. The Court dismissed all three petitions. The petition seeking effective implementation of eviction order was dismissed citing the order of another single bench dated 29th November 2018. The encroachers appeared before this bench with the verdict and so then the Court closed the petition seeking the final decision of the Collector. The other two petitions were closed assigning the ADM, Kollam to decide on the route of drawing electric line looking into all the germane inputs. The ADM, Kollam conducted three hearing of all the parties including the encroachers, the proposed beneficiary who belongs to the SC family. In the end, ADM decided to take the final decision on the route for drawing the electric line after the final decision on the appeal/revision petition of the encroachers. It is most pathetic to state that during the second hearing before the ADM, a local leader of the ruling party appeared for hearing on behalf of the encroachers stated that electric connection cannot be given to the SC family as his house is located on the paddy land as per the BTR of the revenue records. However, ADM ruled out the argument. It is a pathetic situation that an SC family is denied electricity and water connection though there are many constitutional rights and executive

organs to protect the interest of a poor SC family. It is interesting to note a ‘land encroachment case’ finally turned out to become a ‘land assignment case’ at the end of the judicial and administrative process. This particular incident also proclaims that the much-hyped and internationally acclaimed Panchayati Raj system of Kerala seems to be biased, corrupt and inefficient. It also exhibits the real instances of state failure.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to describe with a case study showing how do the social and economic disparities and inaction on the part of the state machinery lead to denying and delaying benefits of development schemes to poor households. This is to conclude that disparities cannot be removed through larger development schemes and enhanced role to states but we need swift action from lower bureaucracy upholding the spirit of law and justice. This paper narrates the legal fight of a Poor SC household for the right of pathway and electricity and water connection through a public road which was encroached by some upper-caste Hindus with the support of the ruling political party. Though the road was 5.2 meters in width that the household is not allowed not only to draw the electricity lines and water connection but also to exercise his right of way. Much acclaimed Panchayati raj institutions of Kerala, constitutional rights, administrative provisions and executive organs of the state failed miserably in extending his fundamental right even after three years of the intense legal fight by an extremely poor household. The active intervention of the Prime Minister’s office, NCSC, District Collector and Honorable High court of Kerala failed miserably in extending the fundamental right of a poor SC household. It proclaims that political power is the supreme power and above all legal and constitutional rights and remedies. Ironically legal fight was for the eviction of encroached land but the political influence of the encroachers and muscle power has turned the issue into a case of land assignment. The district collector has finally issued an order for the assignment of the encroached land to the encroachers by charging a market price which is a violation of the land assignment act regarding public roads. The study reiterates the need for the appointment of an impartial judicial enquiry committee consisting of independent civil society members for raising the issue of SCs and STs is being required. Ground realities also necessitate legal education among the SCs and STs especially among the youth and women and it will empower them to fight for their rights and ensure justice to live them as human beings. Shying away from demanding their legal and constitutional rights make them more and

more deprived, oppressed and suppressed. Even though the District Collector and ADM are vested with Magisterial powers, their inaction and reluctance to use such powers to the benefit of a family belong to the most disadvantaged section of the society is something very regressive and downplays the spirit of the constitution of India. The protective and Constitutional rights envisaged in the Constitution become meaningless. The district administration denies the most deserving and necessities for leading a life with dignity and self-esteem as a human being (Violates Article 21. Article 338. Article 339). Need to frame new land laws with specific emphasis on the cause of SC/STs. Appropriation of their land and government road leading to their home must be seen as a criminal offence. Framing laws and a plethora of laws have been the routine of the state: but its actual implementation should be strengthened. Decentralized planning in Kerala has become an avenue for decentralized and institutionalized corruption subtly endorsed by the executive class. Across the world and international institutions, the decentralized planning process of Kerala has been identified as an acclaimed model of development is something we must revisit citing the involvement of the poor, downtrodden SCs and STs.

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Menstrual Experience of Transmen: A Study of Trauma, Taboo and Concealment

Chaithanya K. and Dr. Niyathi R. Krishna

Abstract

The medical, academic and research discussions on menstruation are still roaming around the menstrual experience of cis women. It never documents the experience and problems of transmen who are menstruating. This study aims to understand and analyse the trauma, taboo and concealment that menstruating transmen experience; its impact on their physical and mental well-being; and the inclusion of transmen into health policy frameworks as an intervention to gender dysphoria. Using purposive and snowball sampling methods, case studies of six transmen belonging to Kerala, India, are collected through in-depth interviews carried out in the year 2020.

A menstruating body in a male gender creates an additional hurdle for them. All the respondents identified menstruation as a body process which alienates them from their gender. The respondents have faced many physical difficulties as well such as using men's public rest room during menstruation, access to menstrual products, lack of comfort, shame and trauma while using them and gender dysphoria during their menstrual days. The study suggests government initiatives and policy frameworks regarding menstrual hygiene, best practices and support mechanisms, which should include non-binary people too. This will promote sustainable menstrual practices and ensure well-being of all people who are menstruating.

Key-Words

Transmen, Gender diversity, Menstruation, Trauma, Gender dysphoria, Taboo

Introduction

The experience of menstruation is not a homogeneous one. It purely depends on each one's perception and lived experience of menstruation. Coupled with cultural and religious perspectives, menstruation is a stigma and often not talked about. However, it is not cis women alone who menstruate. The experience of menstruation

among female to male transitioning persons (transmen) can be totally different as it is often associated with a multitude of conflicts, trauma, taboo and concealment.

This can be associated with the Theory of Stigma proposed by Erving Goffman that identifies three categories of stigmatisation. First one is 'Abominations of the body', which is caused as the result of physical scarring and deformities. Second one is 'Blemishes of Individuals' which includes stigma from mental illness or prostitution, and the last one, 'Tribal stigma', the stigmas related to identity that are attributed to marginalised groups based on characteristics that include but are not related to gender, race, ethnicity and sexual preference (Goffman, 2009).

It can be argued that transmen are experiencing all these categories of stigmatisation. With abominations of the body, they are experiencing 'the lacking' of a cis man's body as they identify them with. The outer female organs such as breast and vagina make them more stigmatised and uncomfortable in expressing a male body as they conceive themselves. In the second category, blemishes of individuals, transmen are stigmatised because of the varied mental health issues they are having during the time of identity crisis, coming out and undergoing hormone therapy and surgery. They also go through different types of mental trauma as victims of transphobia and homophobia experienced throughout their life.

In addition, they are stigmatised in society as a category because of their choice of gender, sexuality, and identity which is different from that assigned at birth. This makes their lives more vulnerable and marginalised as they are gradually excluded from education, employment opportunities, familial and social structures. Here, the cultural aspects of menstruation and the menstruating body further alienate them. Since menstruation is always associated with 'femaleness', the men who are menstruating are treated as less of a man. Therefore, a trauma is developed with menstruation. Studies indicate that even the thought of menstruation creates suicidal thoughts among some transmen.

The traumas of the menstruating transmen can also be explained with the help of the concept of otherness, as proposed by Simon de Beauvoir. It is not just the body, but its association to taboos, laws, and certain values that people evaluate themselves (Beauvoir, 1962). Even under normal circumstances, "menstruation is socially perceived to be the essence of womanhood which upholds the binary and perpetuates her objectified and othered status." (Patterson, 2013). Transmen experience otherness from the female body as well as the male psyche when they are menstruating. Thus, they not only deviate from the self and become the other, but their

already othered body and mind experience the severity of identity crisis, ie, gender dysphoria, during menstruation (Bell, 2019).

Methodology

This study aims to understand and analyse the trauma, taboo and concealment that menstruating transmen experience; its impact on their physical and mental well-being; and the inclusion of transmen into health policy frameworks as an intervention to gender dysphoria. Using purposive and snowball sampling methods, case studies of six transmen belonging to Kerala, India, are collected through in-depth interviews carried out in the year 2020, at 'Sahayathrika for Human Rights', Kerala, an organisation working for the female sexual minority community.

The study employs feminist research methodology and grounded theory for data analysis. The lived experience of the respondents with respect to their gender identity; their perception of menstruation; associated trauma, taboo and concealment and possible interventions are captured through in-depth interviews.

Data Analysis

Socio-demographic profile of the respondents

Table 1: Profile of the Respondents

S N	Pseudonym	Age	Native Place	Educational qualification	Employment Status	Details of Therapy
1	Dhanush	24	Thiruvananthapuram	MSc Demography	Unemployed	Not yet undergone
2	Arjun	22	Kollam	B A History	Teacher	Taking Hormone Treatment
3	Abin	25	Ernakulam	B.Com	Teacher	Not yet undergone
4	Vishwam	32	Ernakulam	Plus Two	Unemployed	Not yet undergone
5	Jeevan	36	Thrissur	Plus Two	Lottery Vendor	Undergone top surgery
6	Sushin	22	Palakkad	B A History	Working at Akshaya Centre	Undergone top surgery

Out of six respondents, four people belonged to the age group of 25 and below. Other two people are 32 and 36 years of age. Interestingly, those who belong to the younger age group are under graduates whereas the other two are only higher secondary school qualified. Out of six, two of the respondents are settled in Bangalore, and the rest are working in their respective places in Kerala. Two respondents have undergone top surgery whereas two of them have started taking hormone treatment. The rest of the two have not yet started any of the medical procedures.

All six respondents chosen for the study are female to male transgender and they have realised their sexual identity during different stages of life. For instance, Dhanush and Sushin got a complete understanding about their identity when they were 18 years old, whereas Arjun realised his identity when he was in 7th standard itself. Abin got a complete understanding of his identity only when he was in plus two and after having a romantic relationship. Even Vishwam also recognised his identity in his school days, whereas, Jeevan came to know about himself when he was in anganwadi, i.e., at three or four years of age. Many of them were romantically attracted to girls in their school days and through the romantic encounters they got to know that they are somewhat different from their peers. In the beginning, all of them had confusions and difficulties in understanding their gender. They all have faced/ still facing difficulties to convince their family about their changed perception of gender.

"People are looking at me so ugly at times. Now, my life is that of a caged bird. To get rid of that, I need my sex reassignment surgery.", says Abin.

Among the respondents, two of them have gone through Sex Reassignment Surgery. The surgery has three stages. First one is psychological counseling, where the concerned person should undergo counseling sessions by a recognised psychologist and get the certificate for further procedures of sex reassignment. Second stage is hormone therapy, where the person should meet the doctor and start taking hormone injections for conversion. Surgery comes in the third stage. This includes multiple surgeries such as Mastectomy (breast removal), Hysterectomy (uterus removal, along with other female organs such as ovaries, fallopian tubes etc.) and finally Vaginectomy (vagina removal) for penis implantation. This third part of the surgery is very risky and costly. Therefore, all over, transmen who had undergone all the surgeries are very less in number.

Dhanush and Abin did not start the surgery procedures because neither of them have the financial capacity. Their families are also not supportive. Vishwam has a painful story to tell about his surgery. He went to a hospital in Chennai for hormone treatment. Unfortunately, when he went to take hormones, there was a mistake from the authorities in the prescription that has affected his heart functioning. However, he is going to restart the therapy as soon as possible. Arjun has started to earn and is currently taking hormones.

Jeevan is the first transgender person to do sex reassignment surgery from Kottayam Medical College, Kerala. He chose Kottayam Medical College because of two reasons. One, he is economically deprived and does not have enough money to do it from a private hospital. Second, he wished to be a model for other transgender people who cannot afford the cost of the surgery. However, he is not at all satisfied with the surgical equipments and facilities available in the medical college.

Sushin acts in plays and street dramas and found it very difficult to act in male roles, because of his breasts. His Guru, who is a transwoman, financially helped him for the surgery. In his words, *“During my surgery, despite all the problems and disagreements, my mother had accompanied me in the hospital. The surgery was both emotional and physical strain for me. Her presence helped me to overcome my struggle. I feel blessed.”*

Menstrual Experience: Trauma, Taboo and Concealment

Experience of Menarche

“In the beginning, I did not tell anyone. I didn't even know what is happening inside me. When they get to know that I am menstruating, they started controlling me.” - Jeevan

The experience of menarche was different for different respondents and it depended on caste, class and family background. However none of them were happy about their first menstrual experience. They get to know about

menstruation mostly from their mothers and friends. They were convinced that menstruation is the gateway to womanhood and motherhood and therefore inevitable.

Dhanush's menstrual periods started when he was in 9th standard. Whenever his friends discussed menstruation, he was uninterested and reluctant to respond. When he started bleeding for the first time, he informed his mother. The family arranged a function at his home where his relatives came with gifts and sweets. He felt ashamed to step out of the house and meet people. In his second cycle, he did not tell his mother, but somehow she found out through the blood stains on his cloth. For Arjun, memories of menstruation create shame and suppression. He started menstruating when he was in 10th standard. He was depressed and sad during his first periods. Even though he strongly told his mother to not inform anyone, one of his aunts came with sweets and gifts.

Abin's experience on menarche was almost similar when he started menstruating while he was in 8th standard. His mother gave him instructions on menstruation and explained to him that this is for every woman. However, he could not accept it and never think of becoming a mother. Vishwam's first period was while he was studying in 11th standard. He belongs to an upper caste family in Kerala where he was subjected to various customs on menarche.

Jeevan got menstruated when he was in 9th standard and he did not disclose it to anyone. He was trying to hide, but after a few cycles, his mother came to know. After that, his family started limiting his mobility and activities. According to Jeevan, when he thinks from his mother's perspective, she was right. Nevertheless, he hates menstruation. For Sushin, menstruation came as a natural process and he did not feel isolated or less of a man after that.

Myths and Taboos Associated with Menstruation

"I don't like menstruation. I feel that my freedom is restricted on those days. When I was under the hormone treatment, menstruation did not happen for two months, but after that, it kicked back with pain. The doctor told me to take an injection, but I have not taken it yet." - Arjun

Myths and taboos associated with menstruation are heavily dependent on religion, caste, and the demographic profile. Six respondents have shared the different taboos they have faced in their lifetime. For Dhanush, his family does not allow him to touch certain objects considered to be sacred such as lamps, plates used for *poojas*, flowers, things associated with well etc during his menstrual cycle. Arjun's father is a priest in a temple. Therefore, during his menstrual days, he is not supposed to touch his father. He is not allowed to use the bed as well and he has to lie down on the floor. He could not find out the reasons behind such practices. However, he used to pray that once he is a man, he doesn't have to tolerate such practices.

Abin belongs to a Christian family. He was unable to go to church for eight days during the menstrual cycle. Because he is not regular in visiting the church, this is not a big issue for him. If he goes to the church, he has to wear a shawl, cover his head and stand in the women's section. Even though he is a believer, because of this reason, he doesn't attend the masses regularly. Vishwam was forced to live in a room alone for seven days during his menstruation. Jeevan is a devotee of Lord Shiva and in his place, menstruating women are not allowed to go to the Shiva temple for 12 days. He is unhappy about such practices.

Some other practices like prohibiting women from eating pickles, worshipping god, touching male members etc. are common in most of the places across India. From the above description, it is clear that all the menstrual taboos are derived from the concept of *shuddhi* or sanctity, which women "lack" during menstruation.

Trauma of Coming out

Majority of the respondents revealed their gender identity in the family to their mothers first. When Dhanush confronted his mother, she reacted in a very aggressive manner. She is still not ready to accept him as a man. As a self-identified transman, Dhanush did not face any physical violence. However, his best friend, a girl, swore at him when he disclosed his gender identity and immediately broke ties with him.

When Abin completed his bachelor's degree, he asked one of his friends to talk about his gender identity to his mother as he was receiving several marriage proposals during that time. They took his mother to a psychologist and tried to convince her, but she reacted aggressively despite the psychologist's positive explanation. She strongly believed that if he dressed up like a girl, the problem would be solved and his mind would change. After that incident, his mother burnt all his clothes and those days, he underwent severe trauma.

Vishwam's parents know about his gender identity, but they are not supportive. While Viswam was studying, the school management called his parents while he was using the boys' toilet. He openly admitted that he is comfortable only with the boys' toilet and he is not going to change. Similarly, Viswam's mother wanted him to learn Bharatanatyam, but instead he learned Kathakali, which is a masculine art form. Instead of *veena*, he learned *chenda* instrument.

He had a partner, but the relationship broke up, which contributed severe mental trauma to him. He wishes to have a partner who would support him throughout his struggle. He is also facing difficulties in getting a job because of his gender identity. Many of the time, the officials were demanding sexual favours from him.

Jeevan had a 21 days forceful married life with a man and it took him 7 years to get the divorce. Currently, Jeevan has a partner who is a Transwoman and they like to have kids. He has not removed his uterus yet. If both of them stop taking hormones for some time, he believes that they will have babies of their own. "We can't imagine having conventional sex with our bodies, but for this noble cause, we are ready to do anything. It may hurt our emotion, but, we don't want to make it more complicated by adopting a baby," Jeevan says.

Sushin had a relationship with a girl when he was in 10th standard. When the family came to know about this, they took him to a counseling centre, because of which he lost an academic year. He was admitted at NIMHANS hospital in Bangalore for around 6 months. At that time, he was under the guidance of a counselor who positively channelised his thoughts. In the beginning, his parents believed that his dead father's ghost was the reason for his behaviour. They had conducted several poojas and visited temples to get rid of that. During this time, they were providing him whatever he wanted to please the ghost in his body. Interestingly, Sushin took it for granted.

Menstruation and Mental Health

"She scolded me even when I got late by five minutes. I could not go to the shop even to take a photocopy. I usually shut the door, when she tried to beat me. One day she locked the room before I came and switched off all the lights. She started to beat me with two wooden logs. She was doing such aggressive things to me only because she could not accept my identity. She reacted in a bad way when I cut my hair too. Now I am adjusting"

- Dhanush

Women of reproductive age experience blues and mood swings during, after and/or before menstruation. When it comes to menstruation of transmen, they also face gender dysphoria during menstruation. As reported by them, all of the respondents had or having different kinds of mental health issues during their menstruation. For instance, Dhanush feels anger during those days and he usually shouts at his mother. He added that he is not violent, but he just wants to express his anger. More importantly, he wishes to sit alone those days. Like Dhanush, Arjun also gets angry easily during his menstruation. He feels so depressed during the menstrual days, as he could not travel anywhere. To control his anger, he usually talks with people.

Abin is not at all comfortable with his body during menstruation apart from the aggression and mood swings that he feels. Jeevan hates menstruation and he said that he started getting good sleep only after hormone therapy. Before that, he used to cry a lot during his bleeding days. He felt introverted and not liked to face

people during those days. When he shared this with his friends, they advised him that it would change in the future. He did his surgery only to stop menstruation.

Menstrual Products

From ancient times, women are using different products to deal with menstrual blood. The products range from mud, wood, leaves and clothes to sanitary napkins, tampons and menstrual cups. In the present study, except Dhanush, all other respondents were using sanitary napkins to absorb menstrual blood. In the beginning, Dhanush also used sanitary napkins. However, since he was not at all comfortable with pads, he switched to menstrual cups when they became popular. He said that since menstrual cups hold blood as such and can be reused, it is comfortable. Moreover, the smell and spread of blood in pads make him uncomfortable. Abin, Sushin, Vishwam and Jeevan were using cloths in the beginning and later switched to napkins. Jeevan and Abin said that when they were using cloth pads, it was very difficult to wash, clean and reuse.

Similarly, they were facing difficulties in disposing the pads. When they are using men's toilet, they feel ashamed to change their napkin. In most of the men's restrooms, there are no dustbins for disposing pads. They feel like concealing when they have to use sanitary napkins while they are staying with their male friends. Apart from the discomfort due to the smell and blood, none of them have reported any physical problems including allergies.

Support System

Dhanush strongly feels that there should be a representative of transgender person in every office. It will help the other employees and the public to have awareness about the transgender community. If they are working in government offices, it can mainstream the sexual-gender minorities. This may create a support system for LGBTQ community.

Arjun also thinks that Government intervention is very much needed for mainstreaming transgender people. Nobody from Arjun's workplace knows that he is a transman as they only know his identity as a male. He is very active in social media, such as Facebook, Tik-Tok etc., but he has not faced any violence or harassment because of his gender. Also, he has a partner who understands and accepts him that is helping him in many ways. She is a cis woman and has no issue with the menstruation. He is not much aware of the recent bills and policies regarding transgender people, but he was part of some protests against the bill in Bangalore.

Abin got connected with Queerala, an organisation for LGBTQ people in Kerala which connected him to Sahayatrika, a community-based organisation for female sexual minorities. All the respondents of the study are well connected with Sahayatrika.

Findings

The interaction with transmen about their experience of menstruation reveals that the whole discourse around menstruation is dealing with cis women's experience alone, and transmen's experiences are always neglected and never taken care of. As compared to transwomen, many transmen are still concealing their identity and leading a traumatic life. Even those who have revealed their gender identity are still struggling to find a position in the society. All the respondents in this study were subjected to at least one form of violence such as emotional neglect and blackmail, physical violence and sexual violence during their transition and still at the vulnerability of being victims. All of them have migrated to different places for getting a better job and better life options. It took them years to identify their gender and they have overcome several obstacles to get comfortable in themselves.

Coupled with that, a menstruating body in a male gender creates an additional hurdle for them. All the respondents identified menstruation as a body process which alienate them from their body. It shatters their bodily expectation of a male. Menstrual hygiene is also an important aspect here. The respondents have faced difficulties while using the public rest room. They couldn't change their pads from men's toilet. In most of the men's restrooms, they had only open urinals. To bring a sanitary napkin inside the toilet is also a difficult task.

Some of the respondents are living with their male friends and using common toilets. Hence, many of them feel uncomfortable and ashamed during their menstrual days.

Access to menstrual products is also a great hurdle for them. None of the respondents are using cloth now. The main reason is that, they have to wash and dry it in the sun after every use. As they are not at all happy about their menstrual blood, they could not wash the products. Also drying it open created trauma in them. So, they chose either menstrual cup or sanitary napkin. It is also difficult for them to buy the products every time because most of them don't have money. Disposal of sanitary napkins are also a big issue. People who are staying outside the home are struggling a lot for disposing their menstrual waste.

While talking about the mental-emotional wellbeing during menstruation, similar to cis women, transmen are also undergoing strong mood swings and depression during menstruation. However, their struggles have not been addressed anywhere. They do not get enough support from the mainstream society and still the experts could not identify the severity of the issue.

Majority of the respondents are employed, but all of them are struggling to find a better job for their livelihood. They are not getting enough wages to meet their daily expenditure and medical interventions. Their gender reveal happened during different period of their lifetime, but everyone had gone through dilemma during their teenage, especially with the advent of menstruation. They all have experienced an identity crisis those days.

The first menstruation started when they are studying in high school class. Except for one, others witnessed it as the most irritating experience. Majority of them were rejected by their family for being a transgender person. Some of them are still living with their family, but except one's parent, none of them are ready to accept their children's identity.

All the six respondents belong to lower class households. Except one respondent, five of them belong to Hindu religion. So, they were forced to practice the customs, and practices related to menstruation. They were excluded from the family, they were not allowed to go to temple, they were denied certain food etc.

After the menarche, many of them felt ashamed to face the people and society. During the menstrual days, they are experiencing various mental turbulence such as trauma, stress, anger, irritation, depression, etc. People who are using the sanitary napkin are facing difficulties to dispose the pads when they are not in the home. Many of them feel irritation when they see menstrual blood. It is difficult for many of them to afford the hormone therapy and surgery. There are two major reasons: one is the financial expenditure of the surgery and the other is, the lack of moral support from the family.

Summary

The experience of menstruation among transmen is a sensitive topic. During the study, many of the people approached were reluctant to take part in the interview as they were not even comfortable in talking about menstruation. Everywhere, menstruation is associated with cis women. Even the medical, academic and research discussions are still roaming around the menstrual experience of cis women. It never documents the experience and problems of men who are menstruating.

There should be government initiatives and policy frameworks regarding menstrual hygiene, best practices and support mechanisms, which should include non-binary people too. Their physical as well as emotional well-being should be addressed in the menstrual policy framework. There must be provisions for helping them to have access to sanitation facilities, menstrual products, and disposal facilities. This will promote sustainable menstrual practices and ensure well-being of all people who are menstruating.

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Quest for the Establishment of an Identity in Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste, A Memoir Through the Lens of Ambedkar*

Tarik Anowar

Abstract

*One of the byzantine hallmarks of India is its caste-ridden social structure. Dalits are known as Shudras and therefore designated as untouchables. This marginalized subaltern community has long been suffering from identity crisis. They have been searching for their identity for a long time, either by embracing other faiths or by revolting against the caste hierarchy. The prominent social reformers like Jyotiba Phule, Sabitribai Phule, Ambedkar and other notable luminaries fought for the rights and identity of the Dalits. Being a Dalit, Ambedkar made himself educated and became the architect of the Indian constitution. He ran several movements to dismantle the vogue of untouchability shaped in the name of caste identity. Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste, a Memoire*, is a dramatic piece of writing which underscores the struggles of Damu and his offerings for the quest of identity. Damu took part in every Dalit movement activity organized by Ambedkar. He has been deeply inspired by the slogan 'educate, unite and agitate' hoisted by Ambedkar. He provided well education to his children who inculcated their position in their chosen careers and succeeded in finding their identity and space in the Indian society. Dalit people have their voice for claiming their identity through their literature which ascertains that subaltern can also speak.*

Keywords: Dalits, Subaltern, Identity, Caste system, Untouchability, Ambedkar.

The discourse of identity has been the major concern in Indian Dalit literary movements. Dalit literature emerged to quest for new identity from the negative untouchable identity imposed on Shudras by the Brahmins, the power holder. This negative identity generates a sense of identity

crisis in the Dalits. An individual is not born as a Dalit but rather becomes Dalit by the social order structured by caste and religion. Such identity crisis is remarkably addressed by Kancha Illaiah in his book *Why I Am Not Hindu* (1996). In this context Ambedkar wryly asserted that “I was born a Hindu, I had no choice. But I will not die a Hindu because I do have a choice.” (qtd. in Hegde, 2016).

The discussion of identity crisis has become an important aspect in the Indian subaltern study. A person is in identity crisis when he/she is uncertain and confused about his/her status and place in the society. According to Erikson, “identity crisis ... was one of the most important conflicts that people face in development ... An identity crisis is a time of intensive analysis and exploration of different ways of looking at oneself” (qtd. in Tiwari 6). Erikson’s concept helps us to understand that the Dalits have been suffering from identity crisis because of the negative identity imposed on them from outside by the Brahmins, the constructor of caste order. This is the prime reason for which the Dalits fail to form their own identity independently in the society. The concept of identity crisis propelled the Dalit writers to question and investigate their original heritage in the post independent India. In the context of problem of identity Mercer says, “identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty” (P. 4).

Dalit as a subaltern literature started its movement for claiming and reclaiming identity on individual as well as community levels. The autobiographies and other Dalit genres relocate and rewrite the history of their forefather which has been unseen and unknown. In the opinion of Erikson,

“We cannot separate personal growth and communal change, nor can we separate the identity crisis in individual life and the contemporary crisis in historical development because the two helps to define each other...we are born in a community which gives us an identity as we give the community its identity” (P. 33).

A human being without identity is meaningless; identity makes a person a social being. Connolly, in his book, *Identity/Difference* says, “An identity is established in relation to a series of differences that have become socially recognized.” (qtd. Khan 19).

The construction of identity can be positive or negative. The ruling class and its ideology decide whether the construction of identity of an individual or a community will be

positive or negative. The consequences become catastrophic if an individual or community is branded with a negative imposed identity. For example, in Bengal, the Namashudras were earlier designated with negative nomenclature i.e., *Chandal* (corpse handler) and the *Uchalaya* tribe of Maharashtra and the *Lodha* tribe of Bengal have been identified as the criminals, a negative identity. Sambriddhi Kharel remarks, “‘Dalit’ is self-imposed negative term that provides others an opportunity to look down upon low castes regardless of their economic status. This term reinforced the negative stereotypes and negative self-images of low caste people” (P. 102). Caste hierarchy assures the supremacy of the Brahmins and their authority over other castes. This structural social framework generates the ideas of ‘separation and exclusion’, ‘superiority and inferiority’ complex. Vipin Kumar (2003) notes, “separation, conflict and encounter alone are the subjects of theoretical considerations if identity becomes a matter of mere exclusion” (P. 56). The caste system is very much political and power oriented where the Brahmins as a ruling caste decide what would be the social status of a particular community. The Dalits have been debarred as outcastes by imposing on them the negative identity by the Brahmins and they relegated them (Dalits) on the periphery of the society. In his book *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values*, S. M. Michael discusses Dalits as “The word ‘Dalit’ is a descriptive word evocative of bondage and agony, the anguish and frustrated aspirations of a vast victimized section of the Indian population right down the ages”. (P. 108)

The social location of the Dalits exists outside the village without human identity and dignity. They have been treated as ‘other’ since time immemorial. They have been trying to search for their identity in society as long as the time of Gautama Buddha. The humanistic approach of equality and brotherhood of Buddha inspired many untouchables. The lower caste people deviated towards different faiths to search for identity and space in the society with the passages of time. A humongous number of Dalits embraced Islam and Christianity to uplift them from the inhuman condition. The religious and social reformers of different backgrounds strived hard on behalf of Dalits for reclaiming their human identity and prestige in the society. Jyotiba Phule was one of the remarkable social reformers who proclaimed equality among human being irrespective of their caste and creed. As a Mahar Shudra, Phule first raised his voice against the cruelty of caste system. He firmly stood against this untouchability and the hierarchical caste system in Hindu society. Phule has been inspired by Thomas Pain’s book *The Rights of Man*. He set up a number of schools for the untouchables with the help of his

wife Savitribai Phule. It is Jyotiba Phule who first introduced the word 'Dalit' to represent the subaltern untouchables.

At the beginning of the 21st century, B. R. Ambedkar emerged as a prophet to these untouchables to bring a revolutionary change. He took birth in a Dalit family and faced all kinds of discrimination, atrocities, and identity crisis for his unclean social status. Disregarding all the hard situations, he earned his education from this country as well as outside of the country and finally, he became the architect of the constitution of India. He endeavoured to uproot the untouchability from society and to build a society which is equal, free, and just to all. He demolished all the barriers and made it possible for Dalits to access into all public places even into the temples. In 1927, he also burnt *Manusmriti* the Hindu religious scripture which propagated about the caste system and placed the Dalits into a dehumanized position. In the mid of 20th century Dalit movement came up with the *Dalit Panther* initiated by Marathi writer Namdeo Dhasal. Like Black Panther in America, Maharashtra's Dalits started Dalit Panther Movement in the year 1972 to articulate the rights of Dalits. Inspired by Ambedkar's ideology, Dalit panther emerged to disclose the Dalit suffering and oppression into the limelight. The renaissance of Dalit literature initially appeared in the state of Maharashtra in the 1960s. Then gradually the trend of Dalit writings developed in different Indian vernacular languages throughout the country. The common theme of Dalit literature is 'who am I and what my identity?'. The main objective of Dalit literature is to destroy social hierarchy and to disseminate the message of Equality, liberty, justice, freedom, and brotherhood.

Dr B. R. Ambedkar took active participation in the Dalit mass mobilization since 1920. This research paper focuses on Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste, A Memoir* to study how the author's father Damu and his offspring are, as Dalits, influenced by Ambedkar and his movements for claiming space from marginalization to empowerment. It also highlights Jadhav, his parents Damu and Sonu and his daughter Apoorva's quest for identity through Ambedkar's ideals and principles. Ambedkar realized that it is only education that can help the Dalits to get rid of this caste trap.

Dalit writer Gail Omvedt dictates that *Dalit satyagraha* was the initiation of "untouchable liberation movement." (Omvedt 49). According to Ambedkar, Dalits would come over from their downtrodden position if they accessed in political power. In 1929 in a

conference of *Swabhimaan Samrakshak Parishad* which took place at Chittagong district in Nashik, Ambedkar addressed the public and spoke:

A strong movement alone will create proper understanding about the discrimination between the Untouchables and other communities. There is no time to debate about the emancipation of Untouchability. The time has come for the awakening about the self-respect....The Untouchables should awaken their self-respect and launch a sustained movement for their human rights. (Jadhav, Ambedkar 117)

The actual remedy of caste issues would be not to have any faith in *Shastras*, and then he further said, “Brahminism is the poison which has spoiled humanism. You will succeed in saving humanism if you kill Brahminism” (Jadhav, Ambedkar 2014, PP. 223-224). According to him, Dalits will get away from their lowliness if they avoid abiding the codes and conducts prescribed by upper caste. Ambedkar fought throughout his life for the equality, justice and freedom which were direly needed to lead a human life. The custom of untouchability and discrimination that high caste Hindus practise is inhuman and unlawful from a humanistic perspective. Though Gandhi, the political ethicist, called Dalits the *Harijon* or sons of God and tried to eradicate untouchability but he himself was patronage of caste system. When Ambedkar planned to form a separate electorate, Gandhi’s hunger strike obstructed him from accomplishing his goal, and at last Ambedkar was obliged to sign on the *Poona Pact* in 1932.

Narendra Jadhav in the book *Untouchables: My Family’s Triumphant Journey Out of the Caste System in Modern India*, discusses how his parents stood against the social injustice meted out by the upper caste. Jadhav’s parents became the subject of suppression and discrimination because of their Dalit identity. When the Dalits of Maharashtra found the caste oppression reached beyond tolerance, they started a revolt against it. They were struggling against this discrimination to achieve their self-dignity and self-respect. The political and literary protest of the Dalits aimed to challenge the Brahmins for their human identity and equality.

The upper-class people denied the Dalit’s right of getting education in order to hold their supreme status and not to question their authority in society. Ambedkar realized that education is the only tool for Dalits to raise consciousness among them and to challenge the caste politics. Ambedkar said that, “by considering ourselves to be incapable and impure for so many

generations, we have lost our inner strength and self-esteem, which are the two pillars of upliftment” (Jadhav, Ambedkar 46). And he again emphasized that “today we are lying in open, uprooted, burning under the hot sun ... I strongly advise you that you should give special attention to the best quality of education” (Jadhav, Ambedkar 80). Dalits can achieve their identity and occupy space in societal framework with two major weapons; one is education, and the second is political power. These two powerful forces might reinforce the Dalit to come out from their lamentable state. A parallel idea can be noticed between the concept of Ambedkar and Michel Foucault in the context of power and knowledge. In order to alter the social discourse framed by Brahmins, Dalits need to access power. A revolutionary spirit will sprout in the Dalits when they attain knowledge and raise a consciousness in them. As Foucault says in his essay ‘Prison Essay’ in his book entitled *Power and Knowledge* “it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is not possible for knowledge to be engendered power” (52). Ambedkar believed that knowledge and power are inseparable. Dalits need to attain knowledge and power to bring a revolutionary change.

In his memoir, Jadhav narrates his father was immensely inspired by the thoughts and principles of Ambedkar. His father Damu provided his offsprings well education and encouraged them to achieve their goals in their life. His memoir narrates in detail how Jadhav, his parents, and children worked hard to escape from casteism and to gain a dignified life. Damu and his family had to undergo religious oppression, poverty and illiteracy in Maharashtra. The power holding caste put these Dalits into many harsh circumstances to suppress their voice. In the memoir, Jadhav discusses that his father was forced to beg (*Yeskar*) from house to house and to follow the tradition which was acutely detested to him. Damu was not like other Dalits who were easily bowed down to the tradition. He started revolting when he found the *Yeskar* duty hampering his personality and self-respect. There was an incident where the authority compelled Damu to guard a dead body found floating in a well till morning in empty stomach. Damu did the same without any argument. In the next day morning, the Fauzdar arrived and ordered Damu to get into the well and draw the body out. Damu was adamant not to do so and in a voice of revolt he said, “I will die but I will not bow down before you. Come on, beat me all you can and kill me. Let the world know that a helpless Mahar was killed doing his duty. See, the entire village is witnessing your atrocities” (Jadhav, 9). A spark

of resistance and revolutionary voice comes out in the statement of Damu. In this context Michel Foucault describes:

You see, if there was no resistance, there would be no power relations. Because it would simply be a matter of obedience. You have to use power relations to refer to the situation where you're not doing what you want... So, I think that resistance is the main word, the key word, in this dynamic (Foucault 167).

Henceforth, it is clear that the Jadhav's Memoir describes the dirty game of power and hegemony and how the Dalits' protest conquers the illegal torture of the upper caste power holder. In the Memoir, it is observed that Damu begin to protest to attain his identity and due right as a human. His silent voice emerges as anger and it raises confidence in other Dalits as well.

Ambedkar was completely against such exploitations and atrocities. He encouraged the Dalits to raise their voice against all sorts of caste violations. Damu as an idea of de-Brahminization attempted to deconstruct the antediluvian social tradition that was engraved in the mind of dalits as false consciousness. He was adamant not to visit house to house and beg for *Baluta*. In a rebellious tone he said, "what kind of tradition is this that treats Mahars worse than cat and dogs? I spit on these inhuman traditions. I am a man of dignity and I will not go from house to house begging for Baluta. What will you do? Kill me?" (Jadhav 10). Damu wanted to lead a life with dignity and identity and for that he refused to follow his ancestral tradition of *Yeskar* duty. To escape the inhuman treatment in village, he planned to leave his village that very night with his wife Sonu to the city of Mumbai which Narendra Jadhav mentioned as "together they started walking towards freedom" (Jadhav 11). In the context of *Yeskar*, Damu's wife Sonu said, "it was not the question of few months; it was a question of his identity- our identity" (Jadhav 19). Damu is the symbol of his community and it reveals how Dalits in Maharashtra have been treated by the upper class. The teachings of Ambedkar agitated Damu to gather his courage to disobey the order of Patil and Fauzdar. If Dalits get the necessary education, they will be able to realize their marginal social status; one the other hand, if they have political power, then they can call for protest against it and alter the social framework. After waging a war against the Fauzdar, Damu realized, "was that really who challenged the Fauzdar?... my actions were true to the teaching of Babasaheb" (Jadhav 20).

Damu later realized whether has he done any mistake challenging him (Fauzdar), then an immediate answer comes from within, “no I had not done anything wrong. Perhaps I should not have waited so long to do the right thing” (Jadhav 20). Thus, the inspiration of Ambedkar’s teachings and principles left a significant impact on Damu.

Apart from self-motivation, he tried to influence others by proclaiming “we will achieve self-elevation only if we learn self-help, regain our self-respect, and gain our self-knowledge” (Jadhav 22). Although Damu was uneducated, he indoctrinated a goal in his children to be educated and to move ahead in their life to cherish their dreams. Damu and his family paid strenuous effort to dismantle the chain of slavery and for reclaiming their human identity. Similar to Ambedkar, Damu too believed that caste is nothing but an artificial tool for chopping off the human values of a section of people and nothing else. He believed that he is the master of his own fate. He stood against the established social customs to form his own identity as a human. Damu tells his wife, “We will go to Mumbai and I will get job. We will have a life of dignity, earning a respectable Bhakri” (Jadhav 45). As a self-conscious individual he contemplates how the people of his community have been treated badly for long and denied their identity as human being. Damu says, “did you see how they treated us in the village? We are not called by our names but simply as untouchables, the outcastes, and the lowly people who do not matter at all” (Jadhav 45). Dalit people are designated as untouchables and outcasts and they are forced to do the menial jobs. Damu rejected all their oppressions loaded by upper caste and strode to gain his identity through his own efforts. Damu was a faithful hard worker in the railway department and later in the post of electric motor mechanic centre in Mumbai. He worked hard with ardent respect to accomplish Ambedkar’s advice to attain a dignified life. He says, “as a devout follower of Babashahed, Sonu and I strive to educate our family. Babasaheb has inculcated in us the belief that education is the solution to all our ill ... I vowed that giving my children the highest possible education would be the mission of my life” (Jadhav 231). Damu was the father of six children, namely Janu, Sudha, Dina, Leele, Trusha and the youngest one is Jadhav. Damu inculcated a positive spirit in their children and helped them to raise their position in their own goal. The author Narendra Jadhav himself did PhD in economics and finally became a financial advisor and on the other side, Janu also became an IAS officer. Jadhav, like his father believes that a man is the master of his own will. He is never worried about caste discrimination and says, “if others look down on me in their belief that my

caste is low. It is their problem, not mine. I certainly do not need to torment myself over it. I pity them, for they are the victims of their own obsolete prejudices” (Jadhav 214). Their faithful and consistent endeavour finally propelled them to conquer their identity. Jadhav and Janu have also been motivated by his father and Ambedkar. Though Damu took his last breath on January 14, 1989, his immoral spirit is still visible in his children and in other Dalits who are fighting against discrimination and humiliation in this caste-ridden society. Damu abided Ambedkar’s advice that “give your sons a good education” (Jadhav 210).

Narendra Jadhav achieved success in his career and finally succeeded to bring back his identity. Similar to the author, the Dalit people can also achieve their identity when they will be aware about their position and abolish their sense of untouchability. Jadhav also mentioned that the teachings of Ambedkar will help Dalits to recognize and reform their identity. The last part of the memoir is written from Apoorva’s perspective, the granddaughter of Damu. For the first time she was addressed as a Dalit when she was 12 years old in 6th grade standard. She felt overjoyed when her class teacher informed her that her father had been a bright Dalit scholar. Besides the happiness, this information also flabbergasted her that even after gaining achievement the Dalit identity did not eliminate from his name. Then she said, “I was proud of my father, but completely bewildered as to why he had to have that little achievement to him. Why could not she just call him a scholar? Why add the Dalit tag?” (Jadhav 261). Even today, Dalit people are first addressed as a Dalit after that by their achievement. In the contemporary era, the situation of the Dalits has immensely changed. They are now enjoying all sorts of rights as a citizen of the country. Damu’s granddaughter is now free from all kinds of horrible experiences that her grandfather faced as an untouchable. Apoorva says, “my grandfather worked hard to make my life just like that of any other girl in the world. I have the torch they lit for me and nothing can stop me” (Jadhav 263). The ancestors combatted arduously with caste issues to pave the path of progress for the coming generation. Damu’s granddaughter has also bagged all her academic achievements and accomplished her dreams. Apoorva says, “now I think, I know who I am. I am Apoorva, not tied down by race, religion, or caste” (Jadhav 263). The constitution of India declared untouchability as a punishable offence and also formed different articles to assure Social Justice and Empowerment, protection and safeguards for the Dalits. There are a number of articles in the constitution that deal with special reservations and betterment for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe. Dalits finally made it possible to gain

their human identity and a respectable life as a citizen of India. They are no longer treated as outcaste. They have constructed their own literary and cultural identity, which ensures that subalterns can also speak. The voices of self-identity and self-dignity of Damu and Sonu reverberate in the author's words, "we sensed a change in the way we carried ourselves. We proudly proclaimed ourselves Dalits, with our chin up, and we looked everyone in the eye. We began to lose our former servility, associated with being born in a low caste" (Jadhav 178).

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Visibilisation of Womens' Unpaid Work: Aspiring Towards Recognition

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Abstract

The existing institutional structures, power relations, societal norms prevent women from accessing basic services indispensable to a dignified life. Over the last few decades, the gendered roles of men and women and the power hierarchy they breed are often contested. At the heart of gender inequality is the unequal division of unpaid care work and sharing of domestic responsibility between men and women. Besides contributing to the growth of the economy, unpaid care work is imperative to the well-being first and foremost of the family, society, and a developed nation. Social customs deep rooted in patriarchal structure, define unpaid work as female birth right. Irrespective of women belonging to different socio-economic strata, cultures or their place of residence, spend their time and energy in investing in social reproduction which is often unpaid. The gendered bias towards domestic responsibilities is an encroachment of women's rights (UN, 2013) and an impediment on their economic empowerment. In India too, the burden of unpaid work falls disproportionately on women as social norms view men as the provider of the family and by default women as the caregiver, subordinate to men. Women due to biological reproduction are assigned the responsibility of sustaining the care work which is unpaid and thus entrenches women's unequal status (OECD, 2014). Covid-19 pandemic has further embedded women's critical role of care both as frontline health care workers and care providers in the family. Against this backdrop, the paper analyses gendered unpaid care work, the impact of Covid 19 on the crucial role of care, and the systematic sharing of responsibilities. The redressal of issues concerning care by the policymakers has important implications towards ungendered 'care work'.

Keywords: unpaid work, care, gender, recognition, empowerment

Introduction

The importance of investments in “human capital” recognized by the new growth theory has renewed interest in social policy after its neglect in the decades following the 1980s. It is widely affirmed that investments in education and training nurture the capabilities and provide opportunities to children. However, the recognizable provisions of health and education to the formation of human capital involves- ‘care’, often ignored in research, policies, and lacks political will.

Over the years the prevailing index to assess women’s health and wellbeing has been accessed to activities traditionally demarcated as men's arena. Women's participation in paid jobs, professional or managerial jobs, or participation in representative institutions are seen as indicators of the development of women's capabilities. The existing institutional structures, power relations, societal norms prevent women from accessing basic services indispensable to a dignified life. Over the last few decades, the gendered roles of men and women and the power hierarchy they breed are often contested. At the heart of gender inequality is the unequal division of unpaid care work and sharing of domestic responsibility between men and women.

However, social reproductive roles of women defined as “inputs” into care make a compelling demand of measures focused on bearers of the burden of domestic responsibilities. Feminist call to recognising unpaid care, are critical of the “universal breadwinner” model that professes change in the nature of work undertaken by women, akin to the jobs performed by men (Fraser,1996). While women have been disempowered by their traditional specialization in care work — both within the family and outside— care work provides important resources for the development of human capabilities. World Bank (1997), points out that for economic development and growth, nurturing and forming of social capital is an essential prerequisite.

A growing literature considers methods of assigning a market value to human capital. For the most part, however, this literature values human capital simply in terms of its impact on future earnings, devotes scant attention to the cost of producing human capital. Scant attention is given to inputs of time, energy, and money expended by parents in nurturing and growth of human capital. (Haveman and Schwabish, 2002; Wei, 2003). By contrast, expenditures on education and health are treated as investments in a market economy with an income output (Abraham and Mackie, 2004).

The orientation of human capabilities is care work, mostly carried out by women resulting in their disempowerment -within the family and outside. Time devoted to non-market household work like care of children sick or disabled individuals, elderly people during the day is much more than the market activities which are rewarded with income or wages. Responsibilities and nurturance of dependents besides involving emotional factors impose financial and temporal constraints contributing to greater inequality.

A great number of researches since 1960s have dwelled on the disparity in the socio-economic status between men and women. Rania Antonopoulos in a working paper has the view that gender equality can be addressed by alleviating gender disparities in paid and unpaid work, a contributory factor to reduce poverty, promote social cohesion, and improvements in overall human development (World Bank,1997). United Nations studies and other research have compared the amount of unpaid work done and the agent undertaking non-monetary activities. On average, time spent on unpaid work amounts to hours a week in comparison to hours worked in paid employment. Women aged 15 years and above worldwide on an average spend 12.5 billion hours each day in work that is unpaid, an Oxfam report from January 2020 estimated (Oxfam,2020). The data brings to light that woman spend disproportionately more time on unpaid work than their men counterparts. The role of men as wage earners is given public recognition while the unpaid work of women remains invisible as it is confined to the boundaries of homes and undervalued (UNDP, 1995).

Care Work: Conceptual Overview

Care work is an indispensable provision in the process of social reproduction which makes the possibility of each unit whether of individual, family, or society to exist and develop. Given the magnitude of work under social reproduction making it a general rubric, care work has often been ignored. 'Unpaid care work' as household activities encompassing-cooking, cleaning, washing and providing care to the dependents - children, the sick, and the elderly, are seen as women's responsibilities, ignoring such interaction with the family promotes close emotional bonding (Elson, 2000). The concept of care work also encompasses, paid jobs for the services rendered in market economy, the nature of jobs akin to unpaid work provided by women at home (Caliyurt,2016). Women across the globe offer services of teaching, taking care of children, sick or elderly and providing care and nursing at a price much lower than offered to jobs inhabiting similar traits (Budig,2002).

Singh and Pattnaik in a study (2020), assert that despite its critical role in the sustenance of society, unpaid household work is considered Non-System of National Accounts (SNA) or Extended SNA (ESNA) work (SNA, 1993). Consequently, unpaid household work assigned overwhelmingly to women is made non-contributory to the growth of the economy while tabulating statistics in the development of economic growth and development. Recent change in the outlook of states at the national and international level have pushed governments to incorporate this vital aspect of work in their national and international development policy (Antonopoulos and Hirway, 2010; Hirway, 2015). The Indian scenario is somewhat different. In India, The Indian Central Statistical Organization (CSO) while computing GDP, does not incorporate the handling and collection of basic goods. This has severe implication of non-inclusion of women mostly engaged in these activities, from the estimated workforce of the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) and the Population Census (Singh and Pattanaik,2020).

Literature Review

The decades following 1960s saw a surge in the studies done by female economists to incorporate women's household work into the domain of economics as compared to paid work and to create awareness of the work performed by women that goes unrecognized. These attempts aim to recognize domestic labour performed by women and to bring forth the reality, that absence of women from labour market is due to unfavourable economic conditions and low opportunity cost and not a self-chosen path. (Folbre and Yoon, 2008).

Nancy Fraser in the essay 'Crisis of Care? On the Social-Reproduction Contradictions of Contemporary Capitalism', explains that capitalism underestimates social reproduction, globally triggers a broader crisis of capitalism leading to the crisis of care (Fraser, 2017). Contemporary nature of capitalism characterized as financial capitalism has engendered a social structures and systems that affects women in the Global South adversely. Therefore, this form of capitalism has successfully externalized care work onto families and communities while reducing their ability to perform it. Consequently, a twofold system of social reproduction is operational-as a commodity offered at a price, and personal for those who cannot afford the services at a price.

Shahra Razavi and Silke Staab in their book *Global Variations in the Political and Social Economy of Care* (Razavi and Staab, 2012), also assert that under the existing care arrangement the rich make the most out of it but the poor are disadvantaged. Antonopoulos and Hirway in the chapters in the book *Unpaid Work and the Economy: Gender, Time Use and Poverty in Developing Countries* (Antonopoulos and Hirway, 2010) explain how women in global south perform excessive work in comparison to men and suggest its redressal. Solita Collas-Monsod in a chapter 'Removing the Cloak of Invisibility: Integrating Unpaid Household Services in National Economic Accounts – the Philippines Experience' brings to light the role played by UN-SNA in rendering invisible women's economic contributions and explores the ways of integrating these contributions in national income accounts. Indira Hirway in an another article 'Missing Labour Force: An Explanation's (Hirway, 2012) brings to light the limitations of NSSO surveys in India and recommends integrating the data of NSSO surveys with Time Use (TU) data. Jayati Ghosh in the book written by her, *Never Done and Poorly Paid*, points out the harsh realities that women in the Indian subcontinent face due to the interaction between structural and conjectural forces which tend to strengthen patriarchy (Ghosh, 2009). Therefore, much work is on the importance of making unpaid care work visible and the challenges that stand in the way of achieving this goal (Tasnim,2020).

Statement of the Problem

Feminist critique of Marx's analysis of the role of labour in the accumulation of capital and the emergence of exploitative structures did not address the crucial issue of women's domestic labour which is unpaid and an important contributor to capital accumulation. The critique was first taken up by Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Selma James, Leopoldina Fortunati, initiated a Campaign for Wages for Housework in 1972. Karl Marx emphasis on value produces work and criticism of commodifying labour could not apprehend the full extent of capitalist exploitation of labour. The wages given by capitalist is not only exploitation of labour but also created a divide between men and women (Federici, 2012).

Since ancient times women across the globe have been assigned the responsibility of taking care of household work and dependents in the family. The prevalent values, rituals social practices have provided a gender orientation to work performed at home and outside. The onset of capitalism and the market-driven economy denied women their due and the roots of patriarchy entrenched firmly by defining the housework for women as suited for female

physique and personality traits. The Wages for Housework movement attempted to revolt against capitalism as well as patriarchal domination over women. This movement strived to make visible women's work which was hitherto earmarked as falling into the domain of women's responsibility. Women in India too perform unpaid work without due recognition which is harmful to the wellbeing of the agent as they are left with no time to enhance their educational, health, political, and economic capabilities (Singh and Pattanaik,2020).

The paper is an exploratory study relying on existing data, literature, articles, and news briefings print and digital.

The Salience of Womens' Unpaid Domestic Activity in India

With the adoption of the neoliberal economy in the early decades of the 1990s and its continuation women's participation in the labour and workforce has considerably declined. In India, lower literacy rates among women and poverty compel women to be confined to domestic spheres and take up domestic responsibility. Singh & Pattanaik, point out that, "Women are engaged in unpaid domestic work because of three factors—Constraints (social and religious), Choices (failure of the market and states to provide essential provisioning), and Career (low opportunity cost of unpaid work in the market)" (Singh and Pattanaik,2020).

The discussions on women's unpaid work in India, point out towards low rate of their participation in labour force and that too has been declining over the past few years (Singh and Pattanaik,2020). This could be probably because a majority of women voluntarily or non-voluntarily are assigned 'domestic duties' (Fletcher et al., 2017). A dismal number of women in India about 22 per cent are employed in the workforce and that too larger number are engaged in activities with scant or no wages and no social insurance (Mehrotra et al., 2014). Most of the women's engagement in informal sectors of the economy is not visible, often goes unrecognized, and resulting in unpaid work. Additionally, the task of unpaid work is reinforced due to inadequate public arrangements in strategic sectors of basic necessities- health, water, sanitation, and livelihoods (Hirway, 2015). Data collected across the globe bring out the stark contrast in the amount of time spent by men and women in unpaid work. On an average, men spend 83 min in unpaid domestic work while women spend 265 min, i.e., disproportionately much more time spent by women than men. However, in a country like India, women spend approximately 297 minutes every day in fulfilling domestic responsibilities while men spend

only 31 minutes (Addati et al., 2018). This division of domestic unpaid responsibilities laden with gender segregation is a reflection of the prevailing social norms and notions regarding a 'natural' household division of labour. This state of affairs goes unrecognised while framing macroeconomic policies and strategies increasing the burden in the economy (Dong and An, 2015). According to Samuel, 'While to the common observer, this might not seem like a problem, the fact that 49 percent of women in a country of 1.3 billion people don't have their work accounted for in the annual GDP, throws up several problems' (Samuel, 2019). Attending to this vital aspect of work will initiate addressal measures in the path of empowering women. The whole point of unpaid labour is that, 'you want to recognise it, reduce it and redistribute it,' said Jayati Ghosh (Sanghera, 2019).

It has been observed that in urban areas women performing unpaid work is high as compared to rural areas that continue to increase with time, in both the sectors. Due to low or no employment opportunities available to women in the cities, women are restricted to homes and perform invisible, unpaid labour. Women in rural areas are engaged mostly in the informal sector of the economy like farm activities, thereby their engagement with unpaid domestic work is low. Added to this wide gender variation in terms of unpaid domestic work is accentuated due to prevailing social norms promoting gendered work, demographic variables like fertility rate, sex ratio, composition of population, and availability of basic services like water, fire wood (Tasmin, 2020).

The sexual division of labour has relegated women to the margins of society. Poor representation of women in law-making institutions further impedes the address of recognition of domestic responsibilities of women. Women delegates in representative institutions is extremely low given the ratio of population and their chances of getting elected depends on the circumstantial win of the parent political organization to which they belong (Jain, 2006; Allendorf, 2012). Thus, their poor number in parliament has restricted to highlight the cause of unpaid labour, demanding laws favourable to this segment of labour.

The intersection of caste class, religion, social stigmas, rituals, deep-rooted patriarchy with unpaid domestic responsibility has entrenched discrimination, inequalities and consequently disempowered nearly half of the populace. The prevalence of gender-biased perception on the given role of women in household activities, prescribed economic activity, societal practices

to be observed and hesitant political institutions are the obstacle in a change of working status and closely associated social status of women in India. The socio-economic and demographic characteristics in a woman determine their position in the division of labour. Women often, after marriage take up the task of taking care of family thus over time becoming their permanent unpaid job. Low literacy rates among women often lead to girls performing a high proportion of domestic work. Lack of social welfare provisions and infrastructures as old age homes, child care facilities, and adequate and affordable private services leaves women with no choice, and are compelled by these constraints to take up the responsibility of care and domestic work which are unpaid. These impediments compel women to remain out of the paid workforce and a hindrance to empowerment (Ghosh,2021).

Women Care Work in Response to Covid-19

Covid-19 seen as a health disaster has its spill over effect on multiple spheres including gender equality particularly deepened the ‘crisis of care’ as called by Nancy Fraser which is the bedrock for the foundation of the economy, society, family, enabling structures and institutions to flourish. (Fraser, 2016). The spill over effect of Covid -19 on unpaid care has multiplied several times as women in comparison to men in countries like United States, United Kingdom, and Germany are spending more time and energy on home schooling, providing care to children and sick (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020; Oxfam,2020). The crisis has multiplied the work of women in India too, with complete lockdown in the nation, children at home the already existing care work increased manifold. This has become a challenge to women and especially for those working from home and in lower-income households.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light, in an unprecedented way, the ‘critical role of care’ (Wenham et al., 2020), spearheaded by women world over, whether as health care assistant outside homes or nurturing kids and providing care in their families. The crisis is an eyeopener to the neglect of an important aspect of unpaid work and the inclusion of social reproduction as an indicator of development, thereby reprising the call for change in the existing system and overhauling of power relations. Such an approach is indispensable to the development, meets the ethical criterion of a humane world (Dugarova, 2020). With bleak institutional and social support, the COVID-19 has intensified women’s socio-economic

insecurity, multiplied domestic responsibility, and increased domestic violence (UN, 2020b; UN Women, 2020). Hochschild's (2012) articulation of the 'second shift' is observable during the COVID-19 crisis, where women perform caregiving and do household chores in addition to paid employment if she is employed. Print and digital media reported increased care work leashed by Covid -19 crisis.

Gendered outlook on domestic chores has been reaffirmed in the prevailing pandemic, at the same time is an opportunity for women to shift these responsibilities on their male counterparts (Dourgava,2020). Due to the complete shutdown and unavailability of facilities, men at home are exposed to the burden of unpaid work of women which in some cases women perform diligently with their paid work. This may set the path for an ungendered approach to domestic work with increased involvement of fathers', which could tread a path to an equal division of care and household work (World Bank, 2020). As Carlson et al. (2020) has shared that in the USA, in several families, the burden of household work on females has reduced, and at the same time male sharing of domestic work has increased substantially since the beginning of the pandemic (Dugarova,2020).

The Urgency of Equitable Social Norms

United Nations Sustainable Development goal 5.4 'recognises and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure, and social protection policies, and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate' (CSER,2018).Unpaid work has received attention in researches and pieces of literature with a need to understand, conceptualize, measure, and close linkages to women's dignified life, more attention is required from policymakers to question the existing division of unpaid work between men and women. Such policies would result in an expansion of opportunities and choices provided to women, making freedom more meaningful.

The gendered division of unpaid care work mostly give to women on the pretext of their duty should be central to research and policy, particularly drawing inferences from those affected. Policies making domestic work be accorded monetary value along with favourable conditions of work paid sick leave, paternity leaves to encourage partaking domestic work and legal

protection for domestic workers are remedial measures to accord value to invisible work. To ensure women's diverse perspectives are addressed, the voices of sections of women should be central to developing short- and long-term responses to COVID-19. Dugarova envisages four key components of care policies to address unpaid care work – time (parental leave policies), services (childhood care, education policies) resources (financial subsidies), and infrastructure (health and education facilities (Dugarova,2020).

To address this invisible work, many nations have come up with remedial measures since March 2020. Countries like Italy, Austria, France, Norway, the USA, Uzbekistan have provided relief to parents, entitling them to leave depending on the nature of care work involved with full or partial payment of salary. Ireland and Spain have provided flexible hours of work to ease the extra burden of care work leashed by pandemic. Canada has introduced financial aid to compensate loss of job due during crisis. In South Africa, the grant provided to parents and caregivers increased from June to October 2020. Countries have also provided utility aid to address the care burden. (Dugarova,2020).

Indian Perspective

The unceasing efforts from Indian feminists to make visible unpaid work has yielded little results on the policy front. Policy framers' poor response towards unrecognized aspect of work has severe repercussions on effective decision-making, affecting women's lives (Tasnim,2020). The realities that Indian women face are put forward by Jayati Ghosh (2009) that “though countries in South Asia make policies aimed at reducing patriarchal practices and procedures, the spirit is dampened by the socio-economic and cultural practices aimed at maintaining discrimination”.

Many studies have drawn attention on provision of basic infrastructure to communities has a corresponding benefit to women in terms of time-use allocation. Many women in India take up the sole responsibility of nurturing the child after their birth. The provisions of Maternity Benefit Act 2017, clearly instructs the employers employing more than 50 employees to provide its staff the facility of creches, however this option for the economically weaker sections of society remains limited. Relief measure like free onsite childcare provided to workers under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is not

implemented in its true spirit. Added to this between 2013-'14 and 2016-'17 funds to the centrally sponsored National Crèche Scheme were considerably reduced leading to the closing of approximately 8,143 crèches which has hit hard those unable to pay for private services (IndiaSpend,12 Jan,2019).

Recent (2021) election promises in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal, and Assam tried to make this invisible, unpaid domestic and care work more visible by providing cash incentives to 'homemakers' (Express Web Desk,26 March,2021). If implemented payment for women's unpaid work could become a trendsetter to provide economic worth to the hitherto excluded aspect of work from the GDP. Prabha Kotiswaran asserts that such policies are to be implemented along with a government-sponsored wage for housework (Khaitan,2021).

Under the Relief packages provided by the Government of India by September 2020, women have been a major beneficiary under Pradhan Mantri Jan- Dhan Yojana (PMJDY).The Delhi government in March 2021announced that it strives to the inclusion of a greater number of women in the economy to empower them. Under the 'Saheli Samanvay Kendra', 500 Anganwadi hubs will be set up for incubating individual start-ups and to promote self-help groups, consequently will ease the responsibility of taking care of kids and consequently free women to take up paid work. (<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/delhi-government-to-launch-new-scheme-to-empower->).

Conclusion

Domestic household work has a gendered orientation, performed by women for over decades. The definition of work with its deep root in patriarchy needs a fresh look. By increasing women's employability or parity in pay does not promise equal opportunity to work. To empower women is to give recognition to unpaid domestic responsibilities rather than propagating women to work outside homes. Women working outside homes does not resolve the dilemma faced by women of relegating domestic responsibility to male members of the family. Domestic work is undertaken by women as this aspect of work is gendered and does not fall in male domain. Legitimizing and recognizing unpaid household work strive towards creating an equitable society. Low literacy rates amongst women and their unnoticeable

contribution to the economy, have led to assigning women of excessive share of domestic work. A significant number of women in India are engaged in unpaid domestic work because of social religious constraints, failure on part of the state, and more so after the ushering of the liberal economy to provide essential provision and ignorance of care work at home or low paid if performed in the market. All this calls for a paradigm shift in the social norms that endure patriarchal outlooks. By giving recognition and reward to the visible and invisible work we strive towards a more equitable society.

Recognition is one of the most central processes in empowerment, and giving due recognition to the primary responsibilities of women in a country will not only promote the welfare of family but also promote the wellbeing of a nation, is such that it gives them a claim to equality within the patriarchal Indian household that only recognises the work done by men (Samuel,2019). Giving recognition to the time and energy spent by women in performing this aspect of work is the need of the hour to foster gender justice and equality in real terms.

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Contesting the Labour and Livelihood: Loss of Home- Based Zari Working Women of Panchla Area, West Bengal

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Abstract

The given paper argues the different facets of livelihood loss and the gendered precarities associated with the marginal lives of home-based women zari workers located in the small town of Panchla area in Howrah, West Bengal. The paper shows how the so-called sub altern, neo literate women negotiating caste, class, religious and gendered adage of domesticity, opt for Home -Based work as means of economic emancipation. Work from home turns out to be the only rightful choice for them as it is an answer to both economic necessity and familial validation. Being left with no other alternative livelihood, these women are forced to contend with oppressive precarity of home based labour. - reducing job availability, falling wage, longer hours and the risk of suspension. The paper shows the anathema of wage loss, livelihood crisis and joblessness of zari work in women's lives, their inner being, along with the pecuniary effects. It shows the inseparability between the life process and labour process of women and argues the theory of Housewification of Women's Labour.

Key words- Zari Work, Livelihood Loss, Precarity, Gender, Labour, Household, Informal Economy.

Introduction

Based on the ontology of women zari workers and their families in the locale of Panchla Area of Howrah, West Bengal, the given paper argues the varied fronts of gendered expropriation and marginality of the subaltern piece rate zari livelihood. It has the empirical and theoretical aim of contesting the varied aspects of Home-based labour. It shows how the duality of market forces and individual family life co-act and relate to one other. It also debates how the geographical spatiality of waged labour in the realms of domesticity foregrounds the debate

on Housewification of Home-Based labour (Maria Mies).

'Women's right to livelihood is not only economic right but is women's right which needs to be validated as basic Human Rights'. - Gita Sen (2010, 2019)

A glimpse into the varied cartographies of experiences and the personal narratives of the marginal zari women workers are found to co-exist with the structural sub texts of the political economy of Panchla. These structural contents are present in the sexist norm, the semi capitalist market economy manifested visibly in home-based piece rate work, and the dwindling job market. The invariability of gendered way of living over generations has seeped deep inside the consciousness and modus operandi of Panchla. This patriarchal conditioning (of prioritizing women's domestic/ reproductive role much more than striving for independent career) mediates the livelihood choices of women. The following section of the paper, looks into these debates.

Relooking the Geographical Spatiality of Home-Based Zari Work of Panchla

One of the very critical areas of study of home-based worker is the theorization of gender and space. The geographical explanation of every day labour relations, the spatiality of household, the triadic intersection of capital, labour and patriarchy therein has been polemically studied. (P. Neethi, 2014; Kabeer 1995, Hartmann 1971) A very pertinent theoretical disposition that arises in the geographical literature on the spatiality of HBW is how capital transforms the home from a place of family life (reproductive activities) to a private place of production, specially taking into consideration the role of gendered division of labour in shaping the conditions of paid work in home. The other very critical area of consideration is how the isolation of women in the fore walls of the house affects a woman's spatial and social interaction, where women remained tied to household, leading to social and geographical isolation (Barnes, 2012).

The Feminist critique of the geography of space of home based zari work in Panchla shows the politics of labour within the institution of family. This brings forth a new narrative of livelihood research. Zari work undertaken by women in the spatiality of home forms the lowest rung of zari industry. There is the lack of recognition and regard of the said work in the public

discourse. It is devalued, subcontracted, least paid (piece-based payment) and de skilled as the feminine spare time activity while when is spaced outside in the semi-formal workshop, gets sanctified as formal masculine work with upgraded skills, regular work, better payment (Time - based payment) and above all value added.

Home based zari work in Panchla seems to be mostly influenced by the traditional gender constructs of women, essentializing on their unpaid domestic chores. Women in Home based zari work are trapped in socially encoded ideology with their primary location being domestic sphere. Studies point out that incorporating paid work into the domestic space of unpaid reproductive duties enables the fulfilment of 'housewifely altruistic responsibilities' (Paul and Singh, 2015). Naila Kabeer (2002) has shown in her study of women garment workers in Bangladesh Employers, who employ middle aged home makers and mothers claim that they are very self-disciplined, responsible, serious and punctual in nature. Speaking of Industrial homework, employers point out that they provide income generating options to women who might otherwise not find any work, HBW has been their 'only option'. Since women themselves prefer to stay at home and opt for flexible work therefore they prefer home based work. Home based work is in sync with the patriarchal norms. (Prasad, 1990). Sayantani Jafa (2003) in her work on zari workers in a village on Eastern UP vividly portrays how home-based work has been a significant site for not only protecting but also perpetuating the patriarchal bargains.

The empirical realities of the given study on Panchla also shows that for a significant number of women, especially those belonging to Muslim families, Home-based work happens to be the only opportunity and preferred choice for paid work. As a system of production, HBW helps in maintaining the status quo of Women's reproductive and productive role. The collective choice of women in Panchla happens to be HBW, despite the fact that it fails to give them the mobility, agency, a discrete Labour identity and an active negotiation with male public world.

On one hand, Home Based Zari Work in Panchla helps in maintaining the docility of women, and on the other hand it offers various advantages to the ostagars like avoiding of overhead

costs (like work space, electricity), low wage rate, piece rate payment, abdicating long term responsibilities (like pension, health insurance, maternity leave for women). Women Zari workers are the most easily used flexible labour force, having least of bargaining power, forming the major chunk of footloose labour.

Relooking the narrative of ‘Housewification’ in the empiricism of Home based zari work in Panchla.

Related to the spatiality of Household as a site of Production, the other very pertinent debate that arise is of Housewification. Maria Mies (1982) in her research on the lace makers of Nasarpur area of India has coined the concept of ‘Housewification’ of women. She explained Housewification as a process that is complementary to proletarianization of men. In the ‘Iceberg Model of Capitalist Patriarchal Economies’ (pp31) the author schematically represents the interplay between capitalism and patriarchy in creating a subversive economy. Mies has theorized how patriarchy, clubbed with global capitalist force has relegated the intricate lace work of poor housewives in Nasarpur as leisure time work and dismissed them into the status of invisible subsistence worker. These women in the process remains underpaid and highly exploited (Mies, 1982).

Mies conceptual dimension of leisure time craftwork of poor women related to the concept of ‘housewification’ and the invisibility of such work is a starting point in the feminist intervention of zari work in Panchla. There arise several grounds of contention in this regard. The first is that despite forming a huge pool of informal subcontracted labour force of Panchla, only a small percentage of women working on zari work are accounted as official workers in the Labour Index. Though Mies Housewification theory can be cited as the primary ground of justification, but a layered interpretation of the same brings forth further causal accounts. Perception, both self-perception and perception of other key household members plays a decisive role in adding value/devaluing work of women. The importance of Perception in

interpreting Gendered aspect of work has been aptly essayed in Amartya Sen's (1987) theory of 'Gender and Co-operative Conflict.'

The second, ground of argument is that the money earned by women *zari* workers in Panchla cannot be undervalued as mere 'Pin Money' (Jhabvala,1995). As a large number of women happen to be the primary economic contributors and sole earning member of the household. The Case Studies of sixty households undertaken in the given study reveals that female labour in paid work was essential to save their families from descending into total poverty. Thus, the *zari* work done by the large number of women in Panchla is much more than leisure time activity or part time activity, forming the fulcrum of their sustenance.

The relevance of these so-called housewives' economic contribution became all the more palpable during the period of job stagnation, when they lost their means of livelihood. Loss of their wage earned by the so-called housewives, devastated the economic means and quality of lives of their households.

The symbiotic link between patriarchy and home-based *Zari* work becomes evident in a very unique way in the *zari* industry of Panchla . The same work when gets spatially located outside the realm of domesticity gets masculinized, valued and notified as a discrete source of employment, whereas when located within the daily life of domesticity gets feminized, devalued and outcasted from mainstream employment picture. An indepth analysis of home-based craft work shows that it is seen as a perpetuator of the conservative stereotypes of docile, immobile woman rather than as grounds of women's emancipation. based unskilled workers are not a 'Political category of Workers.' It is in sharp contrast to male *zari* workers who have a separate workspace (outside the domain of home), who work under different terms, who are visible work force and who are united and categorized under different set of skills.

Though all the women workers happen to master the craft in an informal manner from the kith and kin or from nearby neighbors, yet a simmering sense of competitiveness prevails among them. This comes in the way of forging a collective consciousness of ‘Working class women’ or of cohesiveness of women *zari* workers. Home based *zari* workers are in fact the fragmented, atomized, dissevered individual workers, often working in opposition to the interest of one another, in the wake of fierce competition and dwindling work supply. The demand and supply terrain show that there is the dearth of work and not of workers (easily available, cheap, semi-skilled) in the given semi-capitalist operation of *zari* market. Therefore, the helplessness and haplessness of these workers remain unaccounted in the despotic condition of wage/job loss. The labour expropriation and job loss of the home based *zari* workers continues to remain a personal apolitical issue.

Perceiving the *zari* based Households of Panchla as the Locus of Gender, Class, Politics and Struggle.

Heidi Hartmann (1979, 1981) puts forth the concept of family as the ‘locus of struggle’ with the Feminist Marxist analysis of households as units of production and reproduction. According to her, Production both within and outside the household is controlled by the duality of patriarchy and capitalism. The underlying economic structure of the household reflects this. Hartmann (1981) points out that the family by itself is incomplete as a unit of study. The relation between family and the wider state keeps on changing. Differences in material interest among family members results due to their difference in relation to patriarchy and capitalism. She highlights of two types of conflict that goes on in the household – one is intra household conflict and the other is inter household conflict.

Based on Hartmann’s theoretical account, the given paper has addressed these dualities in the context of *Zari* based women – led households of Panchla. The Class Conflict of these households is evident on two layers. One is the class-gender conflict operative in the intra household level. The other is the conflict of household members with the wider institutions and State. The Class Gender conflict arises due to varied economic positions and bargaining power

of the family members. The outer conflicts of these households emerge from the threat to Zari livelihood emanating from a wide range of factors operating in the wider institutions- ranging from the Stagnation in market, to National Policies (GST and Demonetization), to the global force of Pandemic. The class conflicts palpable in the households of Panchla are not simplistic between the earning man and dependent wife, but evident in different layers like tensions between an earning woman and a dependent man, between earning children and dependent elderly parents, and so on. Households in Panchla, thus embodies Hartmann's 'grounds of struggle' over the varied axis of gender, livelihood and economy.

Doane (2007) shows the overlapping of capitalism and patriarchy in encountering the growth of HBW as a part of the broader employer's assault on the working class. The patriarchal social relations are manipulated to maximize capitalist profit list out various advantages that HBW proposes.

Naila Kabeer (2000) in her book on Bangladeshi Women garment Workers delineates how the theories of gender and capital in the international division of labour reconstitutes patriarchy. She finds a happy coincidence between the repositioning of women (especially young unmarried women) as the preferred labour choice of third world. Kabeer criticizes the dominant discourse that paid employment is the key to women empowerment and states that it is like making use of women's disadvantage.

The lived realities of the *zari* workers in Panchla shows how in the development policies and programs 'Feminisation of Crafts work' remains a stopgap to address practical and short-term gender needs and fails to bring any structural shifts in conservative gender roles. One of the very viable understandings of the paper is to visualize and present the way the patriarchal system encourages women to develop earning capabilities but within the limits and controls set

by it. This ideological conditioning gets etched deep in the consciousness of women, which develops their preferred choice.

Appraising the gendered livelihood strategies in the locale of Panchla.

One of the key methodological debates of the given paper is condensing on livelihood strategies of Panchla and looking into their gender constructs and constraints. It invigorates the politics of labour identity, labour position, the narratives of labour exclusion, market structures, demand and supply pool, livelihood activities with the gender economics of the household. The discourse of Gendered livelihood based on the empirical realities of Panchla is not merely about income, but involves a robust pool of capabilities, choices, gendered norms, felt needs, reproductive burden, kinship factors, personal endowments, and last but never the least, the opportunity structures. It graphics the multiple resources/assets at the disposal of women workers of Panchla, the constraints in furthering or maintaining them, the varied alternative livelihood options, their feasibility and sustainability.

The entire episteme of Livelihood Scholarship happens to be overtly androcentric. Polanyi's (1977) work, '*The Livelihood of Man*' is the first theoretical narrative on livelihood, where he developed a holistic and human centered approach on varied modes of life. Livelihood¹

¹ Chambers and Conway (1992) states that 'A Livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living.

A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base. Lipton (1997) gives a vivid analytical framework of livelihood aspect on the basis of capital. Livelihood depend on four categories of assets which are a. Stores- tangible assets like food stocks, gold jewelry, savings (economic capital)b. Resources- tangible assets like land, water trees, livestock (environmental capital) c. Claims – Intangible assets consisting of legitimate social demands or appeals for material, moral, or other support (cultural and social capital) d. Access- Intangible assets referring to the capacity to use a resource, store or service for one's benefit (political and coercive capital).

research, as we approached today, was first conceived in the end of 1980s which developed in the backdrop of Human Development and Capability Approach (Scoones, 2009). Understanding the gendered dimension of livelihood loss is methodologically challenging because of lack of proper baseline data and due to the complexity of the problem. Despite the foray of literature on informal sector women's work, their marginality and subversion in the context of developing countries of South and South East Asia, the gendered narrative of Livelihood study remains a relegated field of research. The fact remains that most of the Livelihood models follow the 'Add woman and stir' principle, instead of following a discrete model. One of the very contested notions in the feminist literature on livelihood studies is of 'Feminization of labour' thesis².

Arguing the loss of Selfhood of Women Zari workers, Panchla.

In the context of the fading livelihood of *zari* work in Panchla, the anathema of wage loss, livelihood crisis and joblessness profanely impacts the consciousness, subjectivities and inner being of women along with their economic ill being. The effect of both sudden and chronic livelihood crisis on the existence, survival and self-hood of woman can be expropriated aptly through Marxian theorization on Labour. According to Marx, the material life (i.e the class position) not only structures but sets limits on understanding of social relations. Labour consciousness and class consciousness according to Marxian ideology is built through socially mediated interaction in the process of production. It infact shapes human beings and the theories of knowledge. Thus in the given empirical realities of Panchla, shift in the material life of the home based *zari* worker has a strong resonance on their ontology and epistemology. Loss of work that is fitted seamlessly in the daily domesticity of a woman has multiple ripple

² This remains associated with Feminization of poverty thesis. Naila Kabeer (2007) accounts that feminization of livelihood and employment is augmented by informalization of paid work. Female labour is the flexible, easily disposable and highly exploited part of work force, who are most suitable for labor-intensive, competitive global supply chains like clothing, fresh products etc (UNIFEM 2008). An ILO report (2002) report suggests that women comprise 65 percent of non-agricultural workers in Asia Pacific. The percentage of female workers has drastically arose compared to the other regions, and women's engagement in salaried work is dramatically low.

effects not only on the quality of life of the household but on the discrete work identity of the women. One of the most notable observations in the present study of the women *zari* workers is that women's labour unlike men is mediated for the ultimate goal of well-being and happiness of the family. The altruist nature of the woman worker becomes evident by the fact that while a male worker spent a substantial amount of his income on personal consumption, (tobacco, alcohol consumption), or on personal entertainment, a woman contributes her entire income for household welfare. In very rare cases do they priorities their own consumption before their families. Along with the loss of identity as a primary contributing member of the house, there has been a deep sense of hopelessness, loss, void, vulnerability and insecurity amongst the women workers.

Socialist Feminist Nancy Hartsock (1987) has added that women's labour both for wages and for household production involves the unification of mind and body for transforming natural substances into socially defined goods. It involves concrete human experiences. Job loss, especially the work that is integrated into the cohesive wholeness of domestic lives of woman worker of Panchla, refabricates not only her concrete existential realities but alters her personhood. As the labour identity of home based *zari* worker is cohesively bonded with her holistic identity of womanhood. Based on Marxist Standpoint that the proletariat's outlook and consciousness will be organically different from a bourgeois, Hartsock in her Feminist Standpoint Theory builds up that that women's unique labour position gets embedded in her existential realities that is distinct from men. Change in the material conditions and necessities of life has altered the everyday concrete as well as the inner (read psychological) realities of women *zari* workers of Panchla. The space of domesticity that had been used erstwhile as a dual ground of productive and reproductive activities for women got relegated into sole area of domestic chores. The time that got spaced between household chores and *zari* work got consigned to mere domesticity. Thus, ceasing of subtle and silent economic contribution that women did for their families not only lessened their sense of purpose and agency but also repositated their rhyme and rhythm of life.

Conclusion –

To sum up the varied cartographies of experiences of home-based women *zari* workers, of Panchla area of Bengal, the given paper asserts the interface of the subaltern livelihood and selfhood of women. How, women by combating their gendered being, resorts to the piece rate marginalised *zari* work opens a renewed ground of theoretical debate in the genre of Gender Economics.

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Inclusive

Loss of Land and Loss of Life: A Study on The Root Cause of Infant Mortality in Attappady, Kerala

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Abstract

Following the large-scale migration of Plainsmen and development projects, an exclusive tribal area, Attappady, in Kerala has been experienced the eventual extinction. Attappady receives special attention, particularly in light of the repeated reporting of infant mortality. The common narrative regarding infant mortality is that the Attappady tribes suffer from acute malnutrition as a result of poverty. Later political parties have exploited this occasion to say that the 'current government is ineffective and detractors are eager to cast doubt on the Kerala development model. The author of this study wishes to demonstrate that infant mortality is not solely a result of malnutrition caused by poverty. Additionally, the author makes an attempt to elucidate the fundamental reason for the infant death in Attappady. It implies that reclaiming their lost lands, granting them autonomy, and transforming them into job providers rather than job seekers will resolve all of their existing problems.

Keywords: Adivasi, Attappady, Autonomy, Infant Death, Kerala, Land Alienation, Malnutrition, Tribe.

Introduction

The debates and discussions surrounding Attappady in Kerala have garnered a lot of attention, especially after 2010. More specifically, there have been intense and escalated arguments concerning infant mortalityⁱ among adivasisⁱⁱ of Attappady. It was 'THAMPU'ⁱⁱⁱ, which unraveled the story and claimed credit for bringing the infant mortality rate in Attappady to the attention of the public and State. Following repeated reports of infant mortality in Attappady, a slew of projects have been undertaken to eradicate infant mortality in the area. On the one hand, political parties took use of this occasion to promote their gimmicks and games. More directly, the infant mortality rate within a small tribal group provides an opportunity to claim that 'the existing government does not work well.' More precisely, Sri. Narendra Modi, India's Prime Minister, made a comparison between Kerala and Somalia, which directly implies the infant death rate in Attappady^{iv}. Indeed, through that election campaign, what the prime

minister intended to imply was that the present administration in Kerala had failed to perform adequately. Similarly, research experts made the same claim that government has failed to fulfill its job effectively. This article is an exploration that will provide you with comprehensive information about the tribal area of Attappady in Kerala, the issue of infant deaths in the area, the causes of infant mortality, and also provide suggestions for a permanent solution to the existing issues. This is the first study to account for both space and time when studying the complex relationship between infant mortality and land alienation in Kerala's Attappady region. Additionally, this is the first attempt to address the research question of whether geographical locations that were disadvantaged in terms of poverty, child nutrition, urbanization, female literacy, and safe delivery coverage were also disadvantaged in terms of newborn and under-five survival. Additionally, this study is new in that area in which the unit of analysis is the natural geographic region, a lower level unit than the state/province. By doing so, we deviate from state-level averages, which frequently conceal the true nature of the problem, highlighting intra-state geographical disparities in infant mortality.

Universe of the Study

Attappady was formed as Kerala's first ITDB^v and has now evolved into the state's first Tribal Taluk. It is a vast mountain valley spanning three Panchayaths in the Palakkad district: Agali, Pudur, and Sholayur. It is part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, which covers portions of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka. On the east, it is bounded by Coimbatore; on the north, by Tamilnadu's Nilgiri district; on the south, by Palakkad Taluk; and on the west, by Malappuram district and Mannarkkad revenue village. Attappady Block consists of six revenue villages: Kallamala, Agali, Pudur, Paadavayal, Kottathara, and Sholayur. In absolute order, Attappady is a fertile land for tribes, plains people, politicians, and researchers. Attappady's tribes have a divine connection to their land, which they have historically enjoyed and possessed. Unfortunately, a large portion of their fertile land has been alienated, and they have been engaged in a campaign to reclaim it. Attappady satisfies the plains people's yearning for land. Attappady provides researchers with the opportunity to conduct new research inquiries, and they have been actively engaged in digging out fresh findings.

Statement of the Problem

Numerous recent studies have discussed the higher rates and intensities of poverty, morbidity, and mortality in Attappady, particularly the higher maternal and infant mortality rates among tribes. According to environmental sociologists, the higher mortality rates among tribes in Attappady are the result of anthropocentrism; in other

words, the increased incidence and severity of malnutrition and mortality among tribal women and children is a result of environmental degradation caused by the government's and non-tribal settlers' HEA (Human Exceptional Approach), which displaced the indigenous people. "It was in direct conflict with the tribes' sociocultural informal institutional frameworks, which were successful in limiting access to common resources, striking a balance between usage and resource renewal, and conserving the Attappady common forests. In reality, such an informal institutional arrangement safeguarded and secured an existing mutually supporting or beneficial human-environment interaction without risking the fragile resource basis on which humans and their future progeny rely for survival" (Ostrom, 1994). Non-tribal settlers in Attappady, however, have upset this type of indigenously or historically evolved informal institutional organization, which supports a sustainable lifestyle and ecosystem. This study seeks to find out the long term impact of the migration over the tribals and their land in Attappady.

Objective of the Study

The article is an exploration into the fundamental causes of infant deaths in Attappady, Kerala.

Major Arguments of the Study

- a. Tribes of Attappady have faced extinction as a result of plainsmen migrating to the area.
- b. Attappady's local health system lacked an awareness of Indigenous practices and culture.
- c. The State Government of Kerala is primary culprit for the massive looting of adivasi land and therefore for the infant mortality in Attappady.

Methods and Methodologies

This is a study strictly based on the empirical/qualitative data. It is the culmination of extensive fieldwork in the Attappady tribal region. Direct interviews with respondents from adivasi groups were undertaken, and their perspectives are presented here in their entirety to protect the research's purity. The article features case studies. Archival data is used to substantiate the study's arguments. Secondary data sources included journal articles, media reports, reports from non-governmental organizations, and Reports from the relevant departments.

Discussion

Kerala and Delhi have Infant Mortality Rates that are comparable to those of high- and upper-middle-income nations such as the United States and China. Between 2014 and 2019, all states in India saw a drop in the IMR (deaths per 1,000 live births). However, the rate of deterioration varies significantly across states. It is critical to

remember that states with a low starting IMR have a harder time improving than those with a high starting IMR. As a result, IMR decreases cannot be used to determine the performance of a state. All States' IMRs were compared to those of 185 other countries to determine their global rankings. Kerala had the highest IMR of 6 in 2019 and was placed 53 internationally. (IMR 52 countries out of 185) Kerala improved 21st place in comparison to 2014^{vi}.

According to the UNICEF report (2013), 39 deaths were reported from the Attappady tribal block in Palakkad district between April 2012 and May 2013. Asphyxia, acute respiratory distress syndrome, aspiration, apnoea, preterm and low birth weight, developmental growth retardation, and Intra Uterine Growth Retardation were among the leading causes (IUGR). According to C D Rozario (2013), 36 children died of malnutrition in the last 16 months (January 2012–April 2013), compared to 25 and 32 fatalities from starvation in 1996 and 1999, respectively. The Times of India (2013) reported an even more horrific figure of "58 starvation deaths in the last two years" in Attappady tribal block. According to the Ekbal Committee Report (2013), around 30 children died within a few hours/days of their birth in 2013. A team of experts from the National Institute of Nutrition (2013) visited Attappady tribal block to research infant and child fatalities and discovered an Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) of 66, compared to 14.1 deaths per 1000 live births in the rest of the state. Between January and December 2013, the death toll among babies due to malnutrition and related health conditions increased (The Hindu: 2013). Newspapers have published startling statistics of newborn mortality in Attappady. The Hindu reports that 52 newborn fatalities have been reported in Attappady in the last 17 months (3 July 2013). According to the Times of India, as many as 58 malnutrition fatalities have been documented in tribal hamlets during the last two years (27 September 2013).

A review of the literature on malnutrition and related health problems in Attappady reveals numerous possible explanations for the region's high poverty and starvation fatalities. Among the most pertinent are "Alienation of tribal lands; extinction of traditional shifting cultivation; extinction of traditional food items such as ragi, chama, cholam, veraku, thina, thuvara, honey, tubes, roots, and medicinal vegetables; neglect of tribal people and inaction on the part of the departments of tribal and social welfare and health; the public distribution system is failing; the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is underperforming; in contrast to other areas, anganwadis do not distribute eggs, milk, or bananas to tribal children; essential drug supplies such as Mesoprestol and Magsulf for delivery and childbirth-related medical emergencies are in short supply; and the

AADI(Attappady Adivasi Development Initiative) is disempowered”(Manikandan: 2014). The disparity between the nutritional status of Kerala's rural population and that of Attappady may be as much as 50%. (Suchitra: 2013). A year after a huge number of children died from starvation in Attappady, an official survey indicated that 572 children under the age of five in the tribal area continue to be underweight. According to the National Rural Health Mission's (NRHM) survey findings, the condition of 127 children remains extremely serious, while the remaining youngsters are classified as high-risk and require immediate attention. This occurs at a time when the Central and State governments are investing over Rs.500 crore in the region through several special packages aimed at combating poverty and malnutrition, as well as creating jobs and improving basic living standards. None of these news and reports are mentioning about the root cause of the infant deaths in Attappady.

According to Manikandan A.D. (2014), ‘the continued death of infants and children in Attappady due to starvation demonstrates the state government's apathy in resolving the issue.’ Additionally, critics of the Kerala development model were quick to point out that certain segments of society are excluded from the model. It is worthwhile to consider the Kerala development model here. Kerala's development paradigm promotes rapid social development alongside low-abiding growth in the economy. Kerala Development Model is a myth and is demonstrably false in the case of dalits, fishing communities, transgenders, and particularly tribal communities. Indeed, there is a lot of material on Attappady's infant mortality. All research examining infant mortality in Attappady agrees on one thing: the primary cause of infant mortality in Attappady is, of course, a lack of malnutrition. Excessive alcohol consumption and early marriage, according to the study, also contribute to infant mortality in Attappady.

One of the mother's statements included in THAMPU's (2015) report categorically refutes the claim that alcohol intake is a cause of baby mortality.

‘The reason for child loss, including that of women like myself, is not due to alcohol intake. I have never had a sip of alcohol in my life. Much of our land has been alienated and is now in the possession of plains people. Due to a lack of water facilities, we are unable to farm anything on the remaining property. Our food can only be obtained through a coolie job now.’, Vellachi wife of Keeran, Chindaki hamlet.

According to the testimony, the prevalence of malnutrition is attributable to land alienation. Additionally, this land alienation directly contributed to the extinction of tribes' traditional food habits. According to THAMPU, one of the primary causes of malnutrition is changes in their traditional diet habits. Unnikrishnanan, a resident of

the Bodhivazhi hamlet, spreads the word that the Attappady tribes have been eating decreasingly than they did when they possessed more territory. The primary reason for the change in eating habits is land alienation.

Raman, a resident of Vadakottathara village, believes that infant mortality issues remain unresolved. According to him, starvation is not the primary cause of infant mortality in Attappady; rather, the cause is rooted in history. Specifically, he disseminates information that tribal women have been sexually exploited by plainsmen, and that this abuse was particularly prevalent throughout the 1990s. As a result, indigenous mothers gave birth to children who had no idea who their father was. Additionally, it is vital to keep in mind that such women may later remarry a tribe, in which case he assumes the status of the child's father. Raman makes the argument that there will be nearly 500 such children in Attappady. Thodhi Moopan of Goolikkadavu, Murugesh of Padavayal, and Kuppama of Sholayur all recounted similar incidents and agreed that tribal women had been sexually exploited by the non-tribe settlers. I'd want to emphasize here that the disclosed responders come from various parts of Attappady. This indicates that sexual exploitation was widespread. According to Thodhi Moopan, sexually exploited women's children exist in almost every hamlet in Attappady. In summarizing Raman's observations, he states that such children did not receive adequate care and attention throughout their mothers' pregnancies and subsequent years.

According to Ramu, *'malnutrition is on the rise. The Kottathara Tribal Specialty Hospital is not working effectively. The Mobile Units, Junior Public Health Inspectors, Anganwadi teachers, and Asha workers are present to assist the Health Department, not the adivasis. Even now, incidences of inappropriate vaccination are being reported'*. *'The majority of cases at Attappady Tribal Speciality Hospital are referred to other hospitals,'* Lakshmi confirmed.

Kali has a strong view on health matters. *'I feel sympathy for individuals who are raising awareness about malnutrition and child mortality in Attappady. I concur; newborn fatalities in Attappady are a result of hunger and poverty. Then what about similar occurrences occurring outside of Attappady? Outside Attappady, there are numerous multi-super specialty hospitals. Children are not dying there in any situations, despite the use of such cutting-edge technologies? We hold these Super specialty hospitals in contempt. If our fatalities are the result of poverty, how about those in non-tribal areas? Are they overeating?'* she inquired sarcastically.

Concerning the 'Community Kitchen Scheme,' she shares the same sentiments. The scheme's objective is to divorce tribes from their agricultural lands and practices, and as a result of the adoption of such projects, people have become sedentary. Eventually, the lands become barren, and they announce them to be dessertified. We had

our own indigenous traditional farming systems and were extremely wealthy in that regard. Our land is extremely fertile and resource-dense. If our land is not very productive and unsuitable for agriculture, why is non-tribal corporate battling for land in Attappady?" She inquires.

Here I want to urgently necessary to reiterate that my intention is not dehumanize the mothers, who have lost their children. Rather here I try to attempt to unravel the real reason behind infant mortality and I strongly assert that it is also a result of exploitation of plains people over the adivasis.

a. Tribes of Attappady have faced eventual extinction from their land.

In 1914, a Walluvanad collector provided an exquisite illustration of Attappady. He stated that the term 'Attappady' is derived from the two Malayalam syllables 'Attam' which means 'extremity' or 'terminus' and Padi which means 'house or hamlet of the Malayars or hill tribes' and that the literary definition of Attappady is the hamlet of the Malayars or hill tribes at the extreme end (of Malabar). According to the Walluvanad collector report, Attappady was exclusively a tribal hamlet. Attappady is a prominent tribal region in the Kerala district of Palakkad. Later that year, in 1955, the revenue commissioner provided a full overview of Attappady^{vii}. He writes that, 'the Attappady valley is located in the north-east of the Malabar district's Walluvanadu taluk. The valley's population is 12,923, with 11,353 hill tribes belonging to the Irulas, Kurumbas, and Mudugas. There are 120 hamlets distributed around the area. The valley's non-tribal population is 1570; they are Tamilnadu migrants seeking timber. The Irulas make up a sizable portion of the village's cultivators and live in the land of Mannarghat Moopil Nair, the feudal lord. Each hamlet has a head named Moopan who is responsible for dealing with Jenmi^{viii} on the hamlet's behalf, or as the hamlet's representative. Additionally, the report cautions that the growing migration of plains people to tribal areas will eventually result in the extinction of the valley's indigenous people'. The scenario mentioned above provides an opportunity to demonstrate that non-tribal migration to tribal areas is a primary factor for the disintegration of Adivasi existence in Attappady. Attappady's current story or image is diametrically opposed to that of 1914, as indicated by the Walluvanadu collector. According to the 2011 census estimate, non-tribal residents make up 57.05 per cent of the entire population in Attappady valley.

Table No.1

Demographic Profile of Attappady from 1951 onwards

Year	Total Population	Adivasi Population	Per cent	Non-Adivasi population	Per cent
1951	11300	10200	90.26	1100	9.74
1961	21431	12972	60.45	8459	39.55
1971	39183	16536	42.21	22647	57.79
1981	62246	20659	33.19	41587	66.81
1991	62033	24228	39.06	37805	60.94
1998	62583	25447	41.00	37136	59.00
2001	67672	28978	43.00	38171	56.00
2011	64318	27627	42.95	36691	57.05

Source: AHADS, 1998, ICDS,2002, CENSUS REPORT,2011.

When Kerala was formed, Attappady was an affluent and fertile territory. This occurred less than three centuries ago. Numerous individuals continue to exist who retain strong memories and firsthand knowledge of the good old days. In 1951, with a population of 10,200, tribes constituted 90% of the population. Over 75% of the area was forested, ensuring environmental protection. Agriculture secured food by ensuring a diverse range of crops, high productivity, and long-term viability. The settlements of the Adivasi, which accounted for less than 80% of the population, provided social and cultural stability. There were little financial obligations, and resource flow outward was essentially non-existent. There was no discernible administration from outside. However, the situation evolved considerably during the next half-century. In 1951, there were 10,200 Schedule Tribes in Attappady, accounting for 90.26 percent of the entire population. On the other side, settlers or non-ethnic groups accounted for just 1,100 persons, or 9.74 percent of the total. By 2011, the population of settlers had increased to 67,672, accounting for 66% of the 98,330-strong Attappady population, compared to 30,658 Scheduled Tribes. It is clear from this that the Attappady tribes experienced eventual extinction from Attappady.

b. Attappady's local health system lacked an awareness of Indigenous practices and culture.

In Attappady, the local health system lacked openness to Indigenous culture and practices, as well as the ability to negotiate and agree on culturally sensitive yet clinically appropriate approaches. Not only did land loss have an adverse effect on people's ability to eat nutritiously, but also resulted in the loss of livelihoods for individuals who cultivated millets and other traditional crops on their property. Additionally, various Tribal village leaders demonstrated to me during fieldwork numerous instances where cultivable lands next to Attappady's key sources of water were no longer tribal. For Indigenous peoples, land was more than a physical possession; it held a much deeper cultural and spiritual significance through their connection to their ancestors, as well as through their customs and ceremonies. Native tribes and elders expressed concern about their inability to regain what was lost. Native people expressed concern that, while the government was updating health facilities and adopting other healthcare initiatives, it was failing to make adequate efforts to restore lands and address underlying health determinants that were significant to them. As a result of this gap in development on socioeconomic determinants of health, structural inequities persisted in Attappady's tribal settlements.

Culturally safe care ensures the integration of traditional healing approaches into the local health system, as well as the administration of treatment with knowledge of Indigenous community customs and culture. Cultural safety also requires proactive contact with indigenous peoples, eliciting their cooperation and participation whenever possible. Our findings indicate that community engagement was limited and that power asymmetries between stakeholders in the health system and the community operated as a substantial hindrance. Culturally safe healthcare benefits both the ability to perceive and seek healthcare and the acceptability and approachability of the health system in the community. We discovered substantial prejudice against Indigenous communities by healthcare providers in Attappady, which corresponds to the broader sociocultural perception of these societies as broken and in need of repair. This discrimination manifested itself as unconscious bias, as evidenced by healthcare professionals' condescending attitudes and language when speaking to or about the community, their dismissal of Indigenous health traditions, and the health system's blaming Indigenous community beliefs and actions for poor health outcomes. These established assumptions obstruct real indigenous engagement with the health system and its representatives. Without a doubt, these ideas damaged communities' capacity to connect with healthcare practitioners. While some healthcare providers acknowledged the community's lack of participation, they failed to grasp that engagement should be two-way and that communities also felt inadequately

engaged by the local health system. Our findings underscore the important significance of social structures in Indigenous communities, as well as the terrible consequences of structural inequalities on their health and ability to access healthcare. Due to the lack of time-bound action on social determinants, particularly land restoration, Indigenous people developed the belief that they needed to retain their status quo while relying on government handouts and crucial structural issues were overlooked. Addressing socioeconomic health determinants, such as land restoration and access to natural resources, is crucial for rebuilding Indigenous communities, restoring faith in the system, and therefore boosting access to healthcare. By ignoring the systemic injustices that these communities face, we expose their health and access determinants to a variety of clinical disorders that require equal treatments. In other instances, this technique has been shown to perpetuate and exacerbate discrimination, as well as to reinforce low self-esteem and disempower Indigenous communities.

c. The State Government of Kerala is primary culprit for the massive looting of adivasi land and therefore for the infant mortality.

The Kerala government has failed to address the land issues of Adivasis and Dalits, whether left or right, past or present. The Kerala left administration, as powerful Marxists, constantly strived to comprehend organised workers as state agents. Non-class movements have never been debated or given importance at any level. As a result of matrimonial capitalism, dispossession and marginalization have been historically ignored. Their ancestors had enough capital, so they do too. They reject competition, quality, enterprise, and questioning. They will always demand discipline, obedience, diligence, unwavering commitment, and accept people who are fearful and have an inferiority mentality. They don't understand Marx's critique of property-less freedom in 1843. Property expands resource access. It both enlightens and empowers. The right to exist is justifiable. The state should provide it. They perceive geographic seclusion as a safeguard for untouchability. Instead, they should strengthen liberatory tools like education, employment, and political reservation. There are obvious and invisible sorts of infractions that the government has historically neglected. In reality, the state's agents of police, bureaucracy, and subordinate courts are suppressing Adivasi and Dalit issues. On the contrary, establishing peace involves suppressing reactionary movements against the State. Nationalist ideology was manipulated to portray protesters as terrorists and anti-nationalists. They also don't realize that no "ism" is static in history. They are both dynamic and contextual in nature. Kerala is a state where we have a strictly caste based society. The state should

try to fit in Marxist ideology towards that level only through which they can address the issues of the bottom level. The concept of 'little republics' is constitutional and what the state is doing is deconstitutionalisation of the rights of the indigenous people. Giving them with a helping hand in times of need and holding them with consideration should be the most appropriate democratic value which a state can provide to the Adivasis. Providing them with a number of projects without realizing their real need is never being a solution for their issues. Due to the unplanned development projects of the government what the adivasis of Attappady lost was two villages i.e., Varadimala and Karadippara. Basically the state should understand the adivasi worldview of the particular area in order to make it sustainable and self-reliant. Attappady is in no way an exception. Many fake reports are being published in the newspapers and various journals regarding the land degradation and infertility of the soil. But in reality, the land of Attappady is rich in hydrologic and other resources. Attappady is even now a dream destination for the non tribes for agriculture and allied activities. But, there is no favorable policies and schemes by the state for supporting the agriculture among the Adivasis. While the non tribes are engaged in cultivation of cash crops making use of innovative methods, the adivasis are forced to cultivate their traditional food crops and outdated methods of agriculture in the name of 'culture'. There is a hidden conspiracy works to make Attappady favourable to corporates and restrict adivasis from achieving their entitlements resulting in widening the gap between adivasi and land. There is a political agenda to make Attappady as a permanent field to pursue the political game of governing parties for their political mileage. The early and persuasive observation is that the government is primary culprit for the massive looting of adivasi land and therefore for the infant mortality.

Conclusion

'According to health department officials, seven tribal infant fatalities have been documented so far this year in Attappady, including two within the last month. Unofficial accounts indicate, however, that ten tribal infants have died in Attappady this year'^{ix}. A number of infant fatalities in Attappady tribal hamlets, mostly as a result of malnutrition, aroused widespread condemnation. The United Democratic Front (UDF) alleges that the government has failed to safeguard the health of Attappady's tribe's people. The Tribal Specialty Hospital was said to be facing numerous hurdles, including a staff shortage. Nowadays, politicians celebrate malnutrition

fatalities as a result of the ruling party's mismanagement, and NGOs are tasked with amassing finances in response to these malnutrition fatalities while simultaneously giving healthy meals to adivasis. Several non-governmental organizations are working to secure compensation for parents of dead children. I want to emphasize here that my goal is not to degrade women who have lost children. Rather than that, I have attempted to disentangle the fundamental cause of infant death, and I am adamant that it is a long-term consequence of plainsmen's exploitation of adivasis which caused for their loss of land and loss of life. Herein lays the ethical quandary of how to address this issue without offending the adivasi mothers' sensibilities. Apart from providing nutritious food to alleviate malnutrition and petty compensations, they should be provided with their traditional land, the loss of which contributed to their current unhealthy conditions, and with their traditional autonomy as a permanent solution to all of their current issues. I'm hoping that this research will yield an appropriate solution to this vexing dilemma. The intention here is not to evict all private landlords and offer the land exclusively to adivasis. Rather than that, it intends to transfer remaining government land to adivasis. This is because immigrants are unaware of the agony of eviction, whereas those who have experienced it will do everything possible to prevent others from experiencing it. Around the world, adivasis prefer peaceful coexistence. The right to common property resources, or right to the individuals, must be implemented with the understanding that numerous indigenous/traditional people have relied on common property resources for centuries. This right should ensure the tribal groups in India long-term sustenance and health security. It is necessary to enact a Special Land Distribution Act for Attappady, as the tribal communities have lost over 10,000 acres of land (The Hindu 2013, Ekbal Committee: 2013, Rozario: 2013). Safeguarding Individual Property Rights within a Collective Property Rights Framework will be an effective solution. A total transformation of the area into a self-sufficient, self-reliant, and self-supporting tribal territory by elevating them to the level of employment providers and allowing them to act as little-republics through autonomy is the need of the hour.

Notes and References

ⁱ The infant mortality rate (IMR) is the number of infants under one year of age who die in a given year in a specific geographical location per 1,000 live births in the same year and geographic location. Infant mortality is widely regarded as the most sensitive measure of a population's overall health and medical resources. Reduced infant mortality rates would occur naturally as a result of improved mortality conditions. IMR has been implicated as a cause of high fertility levels in a number of studies.

ⁱⁱ Tribes

ⁱⁱⁱ An NGO that works with Attappady's adivasis

^{iv} BBC News, 11.05.2016

^v Integrated Tribal Development Block

^{vi} The Hindu, 26th October, 2021.

^{vii} The commissioner of land revenue and development Madras presidency (1955). The enquiry report of commissioner is an immediate answer to the memorandum submitted by Adivasis of Attapady to honorable Sri. M. Bhakthavatsam, Minister for agriculture, government of Madras. The report also attach the memorandum, in which more than 200 tribes have signed along with their name.

^{viii} Feudal chief

^{ix} The New Indian Express, 27th November, 2021.

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Impact of Reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions on Women in Rural India

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Abstract

Indian politics saw a watershed moment with the passing of 73rd Amendment Act. It not only fulfilled the Gandhian dream of village swaraj but also gave a rightful space to many vulnerable sections of society. One of them are women who for long time have been relegated to private space as their participation in Indian politics was miniscule before 1990s. The reservation introduced under the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) at grass root level have given women of rural India an agency to speak for themselves as they are the most marginalized of all when compared to women of urban area in the politics of India. The central argument that the paper endeavours to put forth is that while the reservations under 73rd Amendment Act have brought changes for women in rural India in terms of political, social and economic, there still exist constraints such as caste affiliation, gender divide, sarpanch pati system and so on in rural India which hampers the participation of women in the politics of rural India.

Key words: Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), Politics, Reservation, Women

Introduction

Indian society is dominated by patriarchal notions of personal- political divide due to which women have been excluded in national politics and in rural politics particularly and treated as a class confined to the private realm doing household chores and having negligible say in the political arena. Gradually due the influence of western ideology and educational initiatives carried out for women the situation started to improve in India. Still there was lull in the participation of women in the politics in India which ultimately

paved the way for reservation of women at the grass root level. For some reason the bill providing reservation to women in the Parliament was not passed but with the passage of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 (Panchayati Raj Act) Gandhi's dream of village to be the centre of democratic activity got translated into reality. The Act ushered a new era of empowerment for women in rural India and provided a new life to Nehru's vision of social revolution. The paper would specifically focus upon the participation of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) post granting reservation (not less than one-third) under Article 243D clause 3 of Indian constitution. The Panchayati Raj Act provides 'for reservation of not less than one-third of the total number of seats for women (including the number of seats reserved for the SCs and STs)' (Ministry of Law and Justice 2015, 131). Under the impact of this Act, there are approximately 13.72 lakh elected women representatives in PRIs which cumulatively constitute 44.2 percent of total elected representatives till December 2017 (Economic Survey 2018). As per Economic Survey 2018, there were 43 percent of women sarpanch of the total Gram panchayats across the country. Despite these figures, the participation remains limited for the reason of wide spread illiteracy among rural women, system of sarpanch pati, cultural notions and so on prevalent in the Indian society.

In the light of this, the paper analyses the impact of reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in rural India. The first section lays down the features of PRIs which specifically deals with the women participation. The second section assesses the impact of reservation in PRIs on rural women in India - the changes at the economic, political and social level. The third section explicates the loopholes in the PRIs that arrest the growth of women in rural politics. The concluding section will lay down several suggestions for PRIs which would not only further improve participation of women in PRIs but will also empower women in rural India and increase their presence in political sphere at large.

Features of PRIs with Respect to Women

The Constitution of India envisaged Article 40 under Directive Principles of State Policy 'to organize village Panchayats and endow them with power and authority to function as units of self-government' (Ghosh et al. 2015, 300). To revive the Gandhian dream of village swaraj, Community Development Plan (CDP) was launched. Balwantrai Mehta Committee was appointed to scrutinize CDP which recommended democratic decentralization having a three tier framework. During this phase, the idea of reserving seats for women was not ushered in. At that point of time, the emphasis was on literacy as politics was hardly thought of as a women's domain (Ghosh et al. 2015: 300). After this phase, there was a certain sort of

reluctance from state administration and central government to make village as a unit of governance. The dream that Gandhi saw dwindled and few authors labelled post-Balwantrao Mehta as a phase of “neglect and decline” (Ghosh et al. 2015, 300). The issue came to fore again during 1977 when Ashok Mehta Committee was appointed. It put forth 153 recommendations, out of which two were for women- ‘to include women who received the highest number of votes but had lost in the Panchayat elections, and in case no women contested an election, eligible women were to be co-opted’ (Ghosh et al. 2015, 301).

As a result, few states like Karnataka and West Bengal adopted it. The year 1992 saw passing of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act which not only made PRIs a constitutional mandate but also incorporated Part IX in the Constitution that includes provisions related to reservation for women. The features include: ‘reservation of at least one-third membership and chairperson’s positions in Panchayats at all the three levels- village, block, and district - for women’ (Ghosh et al. 2015, 30; Jayal 2006, 19). Also, ‘this reservation is not only in the total membership but also within those reserved for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, thus providing for women’s reservation across castes and background’ (Ghosh et al. 2015, 301). This ensured that one-third of women will be heading the Panchayats. The devolution of function from state to village level was not kept mandatory but the reservation part of the Amendment is mandatory and cannot be subverted (Jayal 2006, 16).

As a result the participation of women in rural politics has increased between 68-78 percent. As per the statistics, fourteen states have 50-58 percent of women in PRIs wherein Jharkhand has highest representation of women this is 58 percent.¹ The quotas for women at all the levels of PRIs is an attempt to make India politics more inclusive (Jayal 2006, 15). The rationale for reservation lies in recognizing that women have been facing injustice and are systematically oppressed not only generally but also through structures build up by patriarchy. The next section assesses the impact of PRIs on women in rural India.

Impact of PRIs on Women in Rural India

The central questions that this section seeks to answer are: to what extent 73rd Constitutional Amendment has impacted the lives of women in rural India? Whether the “Politics of Presence” has translated into raising the issues with which women grapple in rural India? The paper articulates two sides of the debates. One side argues that quotas for women in PRIs have positively impacted the lives of women as it has given them an agency and made them economically, socially and politically stronger. The other side is of the opinion that the increased participation of women in village panchayats does not mean that issues faced by

these women in the rural arena are reflected on the public platform. Further, for them the real agency still lies with the male members of village.

Political Impact

At the political level, the impact that is visible is the number of women that have become sarpanch or have contested elections. Before 1985, on an average only two women in each states participated in PRIs that also through nomination. According to study conducted by Nirmala Buch, after the enactment of 73rd Amendment Act, 700,000 women of the country acquired the seats in the PRIs (Girard 2013, 528). The quotas in the PRIs have provided women the opportunity to contest elections through which they can take the issues of physical abuse, drinking habits of their husband, harassment by male especially by upper caste males at the forefront. But even in this scenario the political campaigns were handled by men thus, again relegating women to periphery. There have been studies by Nirmala Buch and Susheela Kaushik which states that majority of the women participating in PRIs are illiterate. One side to this conclusion is that PRIs have given these illiterate women a chance to participate in the politics but the other side is sceptical regarding the outcomes of such participation as the argument again boils down to the fact that the real agency is with men of rural India.

Despite this, political analysts argue that through quotas women can participate in election process, influence in decision making, and in the planning process. All of this has translated into women being politically more active than ever before. The optimistic side argues that the eventual outcome is political empowerment which is very essential for women in order to come as equals in the society. There are several works of literature which argue that quotas in PRIs for women not only provided them opportunity in political sphere but also gave them a chance to transform social sphere which from its very genesis oppresses and exploits women.

Social impact

Rural women since long have been confined to doing household chores or daily agriculture work. Most of the women in rural India have little authority when it comes to political matter not even say in the candidates they want to vote for. But the Constitutional status given to PRIs and further the mandatory quotas for women ushered a new era of social upliftment for women. They became aware of their role as a citizen. Many researchers have claimed that women sarpanchs endeavour to improve education, infrastructure in villages more than the male counterpart. There is a link between reservation in PRIs for women and rural

policies wherein the gender which occupies the seat at the grass root level plays a vital role in determining the kind of policies that will be promoted (Girard 2015, 530-531). ‘When the pradhan is a woman, more money is invested in sanitation, drinking water and children’ (Girard 2015, 530-531). Ban and Rao (2006) argued that ‘women target education more than preferred by male member’ (Girard 2015, 530-531). These results often seek to perpetuate a stereotype about women wherein they are thought to be more concerned about family, community and state because it is accepted as a given fact that women have more caring, nurturing and emotional outlook towards society. The quotas which are given to women to break the shackles of patriarchy in a way through back door has perpetuated the same stereotype which women have been battling with.

Further, it is argued that women participation in PRIs at village level has led to elimination of social evils - alcoholism, child marriages, dowry system, violence against women, untouchability and so on. Scholars such as Chandrashekhar and Ghosh illustrated this by conducting a study in West Bengal for a span of 1997-2008 wherein they found out that as the participation of women increased in PRIs due to reservation, the social impact was visible: ‘birth rate in West Bengal declined by 28% between 1997 and 2008, compared to a decline of 19.3% for India as a whole leading to population control; sex ratio has increased from 934 (2001 Census) to 950 (2011 Census); average age of marriage for girls has increased from 14 to 19’ (Gosh et al. 2015, 304). Such a major social change in rural areas have been possible due to the efforts of women representatives as they are the ones who have conducted door to door awareness campaign (Gosh et al. 2015, 304). They also conducted personal interview of women representatives holding seats in panchayats and they responded by saying that they have experienced greater degree of freedom as earlier they were prevented from venturing out but now due to the political position that they hold the level of restrictions are reduced (Gosh et al. 2015, 306). Further, the researchers also got to know that women representatives have become more aware of national and state schemes and policies (Gosh et al. 2015, 306). It is widely argued that participation of women in such huge number at village level PRIs have increased their social stature among society. After the initial reluctance against quotas for women in PRIs, the phase comes wherein women who participate in PRIs at village level are looked at and given more respect (Gosh et al. 2015, 306).

Economic impact

Economic independence is one of the most important pillars through which women can attain dignified and secure life. Reservation in PRIs for women has helped women in rural India to attain economic

independence. Women representatives at the village level have made an effort to establish self-help groups wherein women of the village are employed and become self-reliant. Women sarpanch like Arati Devi, Chavi Rajawat, Meena Behen and many others have proved that a single woman can alter the destiny of entire village. Arati Devi, a sarpanch at Ganjam district has gained name for reviving traditional folk art which has helped not only women but also local people in livelihood. Chavi Rajawat, a sarpanch from Soda, Rajasthan has handled many projects dealing with providing solar powers, building roads, hospitals. The economic, political and social impact cannot be compartmentalized but what needs to be kept in mind is that each impact operates simultaneously and leads to another and all the three are trinity – lack of even one would lead to slackness in the other sphere.

The other side of the debate

There are works of literature such as Vijayalakshmi (2002) who have argued that PRIs are quintessential example of “de facto politics” as the person in position is not exercising power rather someone else is using it (Ghosh et al. 2015, 309). This means that women despite getting elected to PRIs at village level do not have the real agency. As a result, scholars have argued that women empowerment in this scenario is a myth as women representatives do not have right to take decisions and the decisions taken up by males – representatives, husband etc. is imposed on them (Ghosh et al. 2015, 309; Girard 2015, 532). The social impact that was illustrated in the previous section is not the whole picture as women in the villages still face oppression, inequality and exploitation. Not every woman gets the opportunity to participate in politics and not everyone has the resource and power to do so. There are cases wherein upper caste male members of village stage a woman from their own caste or from lower caste to contest for election because of reservation but the real power lies with the upper caste male only. The chosen women representative is puppet in the hands of the powerful members.

The social evils are still not eliminated despite the fact 33 percent of the seats are reserved for women (Ghosh et al. 2015, 309). For instance, a local panchayat court of West Bengal gave orders to rape a tribal girl because of her families incapability to pay fine imposed on her due to reason of her affair with a boy from different community (Ghosh et al. 2015, 309). These illegal activities are permitted in spite of the fact that women are part of PRIs at rural level. It is these examples which question the level of social impact of PRIs on women of rural India. These kinds of panchayat courts are widespread in almost every state such as West Bengal, Haryana, Punjab and so on. These courts are ruled by men who penalize women if they try to resist or deviate from their so-called tradition. All the blame cannot be put together on male members of

panchayats as the women members too support these heinous acts and help these male members in maintaining the status quo which constantly exploits women. Scholars have argued that merely providing quotas to women in PRIs would not lead to empowerment for women of rural India rather they need to be educated and made aware of the oppression they are facing and the right they have at their disposal, so that these sorts of crimes can be prevented (Ghosh et al. 2015, 309).

Scholars argued that women representation in PRIs at village level will lead to reduction in the corruption that is so rampant. However, scholars like Vijayalakshmi (2008) argue that ‘there is no significant gender difference in attitudes towards rent-seeking or in actual levels of corruption between male and female representatives’ (Vijayalakshmi 2008, 1262). Therefore, to generalize that gender which is occupying the office has linkage with the elimination of the corruption is an implausible argument to make. Scholars like Ghosh are of the opinion that ‘Women need to be conscientized in order to change the plight of women rather than perpetuate oppressive customs in order to please men in the patriarchal order’ (Ghosh et al. 2015, 309).

The other aspect that needs questioning is that women when part of PRIs at village level target schemes that are for welfare of marginalized section than done by men (Girard 2015, 532). These hypothesis are based on false assumption that needs of women are totally different from male members and also that women are devoid of any bias and work selflessly for members of the community (Girard 2015, 532). Research done by Campa, Ferreira and Gyourko concludes that there lies no difference between the male and female pradhans when it comes to investing in assets (Girard 2013, 531). Downs model argues that ‘individuals operating on the political level are self-interested and mostly desire power, income and prestige’ (Girard 2013, 531). Irrespective of the gender, members follow the policies which seek to establish their power position in the electoral politics. Therefore, according to this model, reservation system in PRIs will hardly make a difference in the way in which the PRIs work as decisions are shaped by vote bank politics rather than by any other consideration be it gender of the pradhan (Girard 2013, 531).

Apart from this, the basic equality between members of gram sabha is not respected as there have been several instances in the village wherein the women members belonging to Schedule caste/Schedule tribe community (also women from upper caste family) do not sit with upper caste male members (Jayal 2006, 22). These aspects reflect the existence of purity and pollution superstition. PRIs and reservation of women therein has hardly changed the mind set of people of the village. The reservation for women in PRIs has brought women to fore but these women are not able to participate as equals in the panchayat. This is not to suggest the dismantling of reservation in PRIs rather to say that certain additions needs to be done to

bring about a change in the behavioural pattern of the village people. Scholars such as Jayal (2006) have argued that exclusion of women in PRIs is done through two ways- one is through societal constraints and the other through institutional constraints (Jayal 2006, 23). Social constraints that arrest the participation of women in PRIs are: ‘tokenism and surrogate representation (sarpanch pati or proxy representation); illiteracy makes women incapable of participating in decision making, understanding the legal language; caste is another factor as already discussed above; purdah system; in many cases women do not attend meetings for the reasons of restriction of mobility outside the household; threats of physical abuse; women are often falsely blame for sexual liaisons to win the election’ (Jayal 2006: 23-25).

Jayal has quoted several instances to highlight the ways in which women are prevented from participating or are discriminated. Jayal (2006) quoted an instance where the then sarpanch of Pipra village in Madhya Pradesh, named Gundiyabhai Ahirwar was not allowed to hoist national flag on the Independence Day because of the mindset that flag will get polluted if a person belonging to Schedule caste touches it (Jayal 2006, 25). In the same Tikamgarh district, the woman sarpanch of Schedule caste reported that OBCs impose their will because of the reason that the landless Schedule caste are dependent on their land for farming (Jayal 2006, 25). Apart from this, in many places panchayat meetings are held in the late evening, where a dalit woman would hardly dare to venture out. Often the decisions are taken and she is simply asked to put her thumb impression on paper, and there is little choice but to accept it (Jayal 2006, 25).

It these societal constraints that prevent women in general and women from lower caste community from effectively participating at village level in the PRIs. In states like Haryana, there is demand for separate room for women wherein women members of gram sabha alongwith rural women can gather and discuss issues which they are usually hesitant to discuss in front of male members (Jayal 2006, 23). There are two sides to this: on the positive side it can be argued that women are atleast active and encouraged enough to come and participate in the decision making but if one looks at the other side, one can argue that separation can never be equated with equality as separation can only be temporary phenomenon and should never be treated as a rule (Jayal 2006, 23). Looking from this point of view, participation of women in PRIs is according to the limits set up by patriarchal structures. “Politics of Presence” should have voice to articulate the interest of women instead of working on the periphery. The institutional constraints are related to loopholes with respect to PRIs which prevent women from fully participating at village level in PRIs. This is dealt in the next section of the paper.

Loopholes in PRIs

The first problematic area of PRIs is that there no uniformity when it comes to PRIs laws as each state has its own nuances. These laws reflect the local conditions but they also reflect the extent to which PRIs have power and leeway. The non-uniformity of Panchayat Acts often has an impact on the participation of women. For instance, states like Haryana, have a criterion for education up to a minimum standard for contesting elections. Looking from one side it enables people to get their children enrolled for education but if we go into the detail of it one can easily understand that it is people from marginalized section such as women or people from low caste who are facing hurdle due to such conditions. Education is an important pillar for overall development of person and of society but it cannot be the sole criteria for rejecting people in a democracy like India. Further, there are some states who have introduced two-child norm and it prevents women who violate this criterion (Jayal 2006, 26). According to Jayal, 'it places at a disadvantage woman who customarily have little or no control over reproductive decisions' (Jayal 2006, 26). All of this has prevented women from fully participating in PRIs at village level thus unable them to bring about any substantial change in the lives of rural women.

The other loophole from which PRIs suffer is not related gender particularly but has bearing on it. The unwillingness of state government to devolve enough power to PRIs has become one of the reasons of discord between state and grass root level (Jayal 2006, 26). They have little financial resource at their disposal and have few schemes to implement for betterment of village (Jayal 2006, 26). This hampers the performance of sarpanch and also of the women sarpanch. Another issue that requires attention is the tightening of grievance system so that any women sarpanch or women in general can complain if anything goes wrong in the PRIs. Currently except the reservation part for women none of the societal constraints that women face finds mention in the Act.

Further, when women come to power at village level in PRIs, they have little awareness and understanding regarding rule, functioning and process of the working of PRIs. There is no provision of providing training to new members who enter PRIs and this becomes one of the major reasons for women to depend on the male members who have more understanding about the way rural politics functions and decisions are made. The reservation in PRIs might have increased the quantity of women but the quality of participation can only be achieved when such loopholes are addressed. The other and the most debatable loophole of PRIs is its inapplicability in many parts of the country. Earlier PRIs were not applicable in some parts of the states but with the passing of Panchayats (Extension to Schedule Areas) Act 1996, the panchayats got extended to schedule areas of India. At the time of writing, PRIs exists in all the states except Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya and in Delhi. The Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) do not have the provisions of

reserving seats for women (Ghosh et al. 2015, 307-308). In fact, recently there was a huge conflict in the Nagaland over the demand for reservation of seats for women. Some sections were in support of it but some saw it as the attack on their culture. It is widely known that the ADCs are governed by laws that are deeply embedded in patriarchal structures having no space for representing women (Ghosh et al. 2015, 307-308). Ghosh et al. has cited the view of Chairperson of the Women's Commission of Mizoram who in an interview said "the customary laws of the Mizos are very patriarchal, and have been created in such a way that women are excluded from all spheres of real power – a glaring example being politics" (Ghosh et al. 2015: 307-308). This imperfect balance between gender justice and culture needs a dialogue so that it can be corrected as the individual rights within cultures are an important part which would otherwise lead to violation of most basic human rights.

There are issues related to work culture in PRIs. It is complained that the amount and quality of time given by women to PRIs are often very less due to various reasons. There is no provision or guideline with respect to time that should be devoted to working for PRIs (Jayal 2006, 21). For instance, in Uttar Pradesh it was found that more than half of the women representatives do not give time to PRIs at all and in Madhya Pradesh the time given was around three hours in a week for PRIs work (Jayal 2006, 21). This needs to be taken into account not only because it affects grass root democracy but also the quality of participation of women. The level of participation does definitely play an important role in women empowerment and merely holding a representative position cannot change anything nor can have any impact on political, economic and social aspect of rural women.

Another loophole from which PRIs suffer is the domination of administration i.e. bureaucracy imposes its will on the members of PRIs (Jayal 2006, 27). It becomes difficult for male representatives to deal with administration and in this scenario female representatives are faced with worse problem when they have to get the work done for PRIs. Jayal has given example of Haryana especially as the bureaucracy there is known for interference in the work of PRIs (Jayal 2006, 27). There is no clear cut demarcation of the extent to which state administration can intrude into the working of the PRIs. The next section concludes the paper by giving suggestions to improve the participation of women at village level PRIs.

Suggestions and Conclusion

Reservation for women in PRIs ensures that women can avail the opportunity to participate in the politics but it does not guarantee an effective participation. For rural women to genuinely avail the fruits of PRIs, they need to receive education otherwise the locus of power remains in the hands of male member (Ghosh

et al. 2015, 294). This is not to say that criteria should be introduced to allow women from literate background only rather what is required is effort on the part of government to raise awareness regarding the benefits of education. Education is the first step to achieve empowerment and most of the rural women are far behind this first step. Education can help them understand their rights and job much better which would allow them to act freely without depending on others (Ghosh et al. 2015, 308). Therefore, to make women participation efficient and agents of change they should be educated. Further, the other aspects that can be improved to make women agents of change when participating in PRIs are: training them properly before handing over the seat; devolving enough power so that PRIs can do something for village; making administration approachable for cases where women complain of domination from male members; making a fair balance between culture and gender justice as in many states reservations are not given to women on the ground of culture.

Having said this, one thing is certain that PRIs have laid down a path for women empowerment as they now have the opportunity to be in the position of power and make the change visible. Despite the weaknesses that PRIs suffer from no one can take away the positive impacts of the reservation granted under 73rd Amendment Act. It has blurred the lines of public and private distinction. Not only it has inspired women to become active in the rural politics but it has opened the gates for women to take part in state level and national politics.

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¹ <https://factly.in/representation-to-participation-women-in-panchayat-raj-institutions-state-assemblies/>

Assam Movement: the Beginning of a New Political Consciousness among the Muslims of East-Bengal Origin

Sangita Bora

ABSTRACT

The Assam Movement is the most popular mass movement that Assam experienced during the post-colonial period. A large section of the Asamiya people supported the movement because it was embedded in the question of identity. The movement, in its first inception, was a protest movement against the government policy of giving political rights to alleged foreigners. But gradually it transformed with the emphasis being shifted on the issue of identity construction by drawing upon various ethnic stands and ultimately leading to ethnic disorder. The movement brought a distinctive political awareness amongst the Muslim community in general and the Muslims of East-Bengal origin in particular of Assam. Though the Movement at its initial phase was against all the illegal foreign nationals residing in Assam, yet gradually it seemed to be stood against the Muslims of East-Bengal origin and the Hindu Bengalis living in Assam. It propelled a deep polarization between the Asamiyas and the Muslims of East-Bengal origin.

Key words: Assam Movement, communal polarization, identity, , Muslims of East-Bengal origin.

Introduction

The Assam Movement was the largest mass movement that occurred in Assam during 1979 and it lasted for six years till 1985. All communities irrespective of their religious and political affiliation supported the movement as it was a movement against all illegal foreign nationals staying in Assam. Realization of identity crisis due to influx of foreign nationals to Assam pushed a large section of Assamese to join the movement to stop the influx of foreign nationals and to protect their identity from those illegal foreigners. In the politics of Assam, the issue of migration remains a dominant phenomenon. It is believed that, the migration of population from outside Assam has been posing serious challenges towards the socio-cultural life of the Assamese people. A large section of Assamese believed that the migrant communities particularly the Muslims of East-Bengal¹ origin constituted an important vote bank in the state would have changed the politics of Assam. GirinPhukan argued that the Assam Movement was the manifestation of such apprehension (Phukan 1996:34).

In Assam, the struggle for protection of *Asamiya* identity had a long history but it got its boost along the Assam Movement. Hussain argued, “The leadership popularized the idea very strongly that the Asamiyas were losing their identity. The fear of losing their identity in their own homeland propelled the mass movement and many participants made immense sacrifice in order to fulfill the demands...” (Hussain 1993:166-167)

The *Asamiya* bourgeoisie also strongly supported the movement. The Assamese middle class, along with vernacular press popularized the idea that the Assamese were losing their identity and their control over the state politics in the face of unabated influx from Bangladesh.

After six years, the Assam Accord was signed in 1985 marking an end to the movement which still takes the centre stage of controversy. But the entire movement infected the age-old relationship between the Hindus and the Muslims in Assam in general and the Asamiyas and the Muslims of East-Bengal origin¹ in particular.

There are always some sensitive issues in a mass mobilization which may turn into harmful explosion in the society. Tilly, (2004:3-4) argues that, social movements are sophisticated forms of ‘collective behaviour’. The collective behaviour guides group actions. Group actions play a vital role in a movement. Tilly recognized social movements as a major vehicle for ordinary people’s participation in public (electoral) politics. By participating in a movement, ordinary people are able to attain direct power through collective effort. Collective participation of a large group of people has been able to bring about changes in such a manner that can bypass the established procedures and lead to dramatic changes. The Assam Movement in post-independent Assam brought about such changes in society and politics of Assam. After the Assam Accord, the leadership of the movement formed a regional party and entered to the politics of Assam. Later, that party formed government in Assam.

What forced the movement to surface so strongly was the by-poll process in Mongoldoi parliamentary seat which fell vacant following the death of Lok Sabha member Hiralal Patwari, a Janata Party MP who died on March 28, 1979. The declaration by India’s Chief Election Commissioner of that period S.L. Shakhthar on the issue of inclusion of foreign nationals in the electoral rolls in the states of north-east India added to apprehension. Alleged sudden increase in the number of voters in the electoral rolls was taken off by the All Assam Student’s Union (henceforth AASU) to launch the movement. All the leaders of the ASSU demanded the postponement of the by-elections in Mongoldoi till the names of the alleged illegal foreigners were deleted from the electoral rolls.

Subsequently a number of complaints were filed from members of the civil society demanding a correction of the electoral rolls. The foremost planned protest was with the call of a twelve-hour

general strike (*Assam Bandh*) by the AASU on 8th June 1979. They demanded “*Deletion, Disenfranchisement and Deportation*” of the foreign nationals (Baruah 2001:121). They also demanded that all who had entered the state after 1961 should be excluded from the state’s electoral rolls. The demand was whole-heartedly

(Note 1 Muslims of East –Bengal Origin were migrated to Assam during British period and they settled mostly in the river line areas. They settled both in Brahmaputra Valley and Barak Valley. They came from East-Bengal(now Bangladesh) . Their mother tongue was Bengali. The Most important fact is that the Muslims of East-Bengal Origin of Brahmaputra Valley is known as ‘Na-Asamiya’(new-Assamese) Muslims as they have declared themselves as Assamese by accepting Assamese as their Medium of Education.)

supported by a large number of people of Assam and there was positive response to the bandh. That was said to be the beginning of the Assam Movement.

Communal Polarization and the Assam Movement

The veneer of non-violence and secularism peeled off as soon as big and small incidents of group clashes rocked the movement where a section of the people belonging to a particular religion was targeted. These incidents finally resulted in a yawning gap between the Hindus and the Muslims in Assam.

Quoting Isfaquul Rahman, Nandana Dutta writes “*In the movement to push back foreigners one of the primary directions was that of Hindu fundamentalism. At the one point a BJP-RSS sentiment entered the movement and an anti-Muslim feeling emerged. Muslim was equated with foreigners. As a result, the people of Assam were divided into a majority and minorities*” (Dutta 2012:86).

Aggressive nationalism dominated the state’s socio cultural and political spheres during the movement, where thousands died, scores sustained injuries and communal harmony between the Hindus and the Muslims started falling apart at an incredible speed. Quoting Hiren Gohain, Nandana Dutta writes, “for five years the Assamese people have had their lives laid waste. A catastrophic cyclone came and spoilt hundreds of lives, destroyed age-old inter-community relationship sowed the seeds of poisonous barbs and thorns for the future” (Dutta 2007: 91).

The leaders of Assam movement demanded their detection and deportation from Assam. The leaders also demanded the deletion of their names from the electoral rolls because foreigners do not enjoy the right to vote.

Kimura depicted the picture how the migrant Muslims of East-Bengal became the illegal aliens when she stated,

“...before independence, the movement of people from the areas was regarded as interprovincial migration, as Sylhet was a part of same political unit as the rest of India. However, after, partition, the Muslim migrants became “illegal immigrants” or “foreigners”, whereas the Hindus were regarded as “refugees” (Kimura 2013:45).

Though the leaders adopted peaceful collective protest activities to achieve their demands right from the beginning, yet frequent outbreak of confrontations between the supporters and the opponents sometimes resulted in ethnic and communal violence. Such incidents stained the course of the movement from a non- violent to a violent one. Such confrontations became much more widespread especially during the time of Assembly Elections in 1983 as the leaders demanded the revision of the state’s electoral rolls before going in for the Assembly Elections. The attitude of the Central government was not very supportive towards the movement. There was conflict between the leadership of the movement and the Central government on the issue of the cut-off year for detecting and deporting the illegal foreigners. While the leaders demanded 1951 to be the cut-off year to deport the foreigners, the Government of India proposed 1971 as the cut-off year. This sharpened the conflict between the leadership of the movement and the Central government.

In 1980 an incident of mass killing occurred in North-Kamrup in which, “it was estimated that 200 to 300 persons died as a result of mob violence” (Hussain 1993:116). This pogrom occurred during the mid-term poll to the Lok-Sabha in 1980. The leaders of the Assam Movement showed their strong determination and demanded the deletion of names of foreign nationals from the state electoral rolls before holding any elections in the state. They adopted all possible means to stop elections in Assam. Gradually, the Central government took tough stand towards the movement. In 1983, the Election Commission of India announced the dates of elections for the state legislature in Assam. The leaders of the movement again demanded the revision of the electoral rolls before going in for the Assembly elections. But the government went ahead with the election procedures without revising the electoral rolls. The leadership of the movement called for the boycott of elections in Assam which resulted in the occurrence of a number of violent incidents during that period. Armed forces were deployed to hold the elections successfully. All these deteriorated the law and order situation in Assam. The situation further led to unwanted and unexpected occurrences of communal riots. The victims of these communal riots were mostly of religious and linguistic minorities² particularly the Muslims of East-Bengal origin living in Assam for generation. The progression of the movement had brought a new wave in the political course of

Assam. Several rounds of talks were held between the Government of India and the leadership of the movement that ultimately paved the way for 'Assam Accord'. The 'Assam Accord', brought a new form of polarization for power between the leadership of the Assam Movement led by AASU and the leadership of the counter –movement led by the All Assam Minority Students' Union (henceforth AAMSU). While the leadership of the Assam Movement accepted the 'Accord', the leadership of the AAMSU opposed and criticized it. Two new regional political parties came into existence in the politics of Assam. The formation of *Asom Gana Parishad* (henceforth AGP) a regional party formed by the movement leaders and the formation of the United Minority Front (henceforth UMF), a regional by the leadership of the AAMSU, changed the political equation of Assam in the post-Assam movement period.

(Note 2 The Constitution of India has acknowledged only two kinds of minorities -religious minority and linguistic minority. In, India Muslims are the largest religious minority group. In Assam also Muslims are the largest religious minority group comprising 34.22 % (Census report 2011). The Bengali –Hindus are the largest linguistic minority group in Assam).

Towards A New Political Consciousness: The Assam Movement brought a new political consciousness to the Muslims in general and Muslims of East-Bengal origin in particular in Assam. Lots of events contributed towards the growth this new political consciousness.

Birth of All Assam Minority Students' Union: The Assam Movement failed to distinguish between East-Pakistani refugee and foreign nationals in Assam (Hussain 1993:131). The Muslims of East-Bengal origin and Hindu Bengalis residing in Assam bear their origin from East-Pakistan. Therefore they were easily labeled as Bangladeshi foreigners during the movement. After the North Kamrup incident of 1980 against the Muslims of East-Bengal origin and Hindu Bengalis, they became aware regarding the real motive of the leadership of the Assam Movement on the issue of foreign nationals. It seems that, the labeling of foreign national was done consciously. All these phenomena compelled them to organize themselves against the move to detect and deport the foreign nationals. The AAMSU came into existence as a counter organization to the AASU. Both the AASU and the AAMSU were dead opposed to each other. The AASU and the AAMSU activists clashed with each others in many places.

“As an antithesis to the AASU, The All Assam Minority Student Union came into existence, and similarly as an anti-thesis to the AAGSP; the Citizens’ Right Preservation Committee (CRPC) of Assam came into existence” (Hussain 1993:131). The Centre did not miss the advantage and invited AAMSU leadership for talks in New Delhi along with the AASU leadership. The minority students further demanded citizenship to those who came to settle in Assam before 1971. But the AASU leadership was dead opposed to the idea and remained firm on 1951 as the base year. The simmering difference finally resulted in an orgy of clash which later took the communal turn. “The Assam Movement and its resultant counter movement behaved in such a way that it sharply divided the masses of Assam” (Hussain, 1993:132). It led to a total collapse of the communal fraternity and harmony between the Hindus and the Muslims in Assam.

Udayan Mishra argued that, *“Though in earlier populist agitations like the one for making Assamese the state language, the Assamese Muslims had played a significant supportive role, yet it was during the anti-foreigners stir of 1979-85 that they felt somewhat alienated and insecure for the first time in the state's post-independence history”* (Mishra 1999:1269).

The attack and counter-attack between the AASU and the AAMSU further intensified the communal polarization.

Confused Regime: Assam’s sphere of politics kept taking new trend since Anwara Taimur took oath as Assam’s Chief Minister in 1980. At the outset she got tougher with the leadership of the Assam Movement and disallowed the Government employees from participating in the movement. She patronized some bureaucrats to nip the agitation in the bud. “The process appeared to be one of the de-Assamesization of state bureaucracy and it reinforced the fear of Assamese minoritization and of immigrant power” (Baruah 2001:129). Her course of action created doubt among the native Assamese people towards the Muslim politicians and it enhanced the gap between the Hindus and the Muslims in Assam. Though *Asamiya* Muslims estranged from the movement after Taimur became Chief Minister, yet a large number of *Asamiya* Muslims stood with the Assam Movement. Examples were there, where Muslims leaders such as, Nurul Hussain became the vice president of the AASU, Nekibuz Zaman became the president of Kamrup district of the AASU, and Safiqul Hussain became the president of Jorhat district of the AASU and helped in the continuity of the Assam Movement.

Violence Against Muslims of East-Bengal Origin During State Legislative Elections In 1983: The sixth Assam Legislative Assembly failed to complete its stipulated term and was dissolved on 19th March in 1982. The dissolution of the state legislature indicated that according to the constitutional provision Assam would have to go in for election before 18th March 1983 (Hussain, 1993:147). The Centre was keen to hold the Assembly elections to safeguard their political interest

and announced the polling dates as 14, 17 and 20th February. The AASU and the AAGSP opposed the move to hold the Assembly polls without deleting the names of the suspected immigrants. Let us follow Sanjib Baruah who divided the Assam movement into five phases. The first phase took place from June 1979 to November 1980 which he calls *festival of protest* while the second phase lasted from December 1980 till January 1983 to be named as *Confrontation*. The third phase that includes the Assembly elections in February 1983 was marked as period of increasing violence. These include the assassination of E.S. Parthasarathy, a civil servant and an entry of paramilitary forces to the politics of Assam. Baruah names it as *total breakdown of order*. More than 3000 people were killed, divisions in Assamese ethnic society emerged (Dutta 2012: 84). The fourth phase that existed from March 1983 to May 1984 was marked by *the contest between the state and the movement*. The final and fifth phase which began in June 1984 and ended in December 1985 was the phase of *accommodation* (Baruah, 2001: 115-126). Each of these phases reflected the happenings of the time. The deadly incidents of violence erupted as soon as the Election Commission announced the Assam assembly poll schedule from February 14, 1983. The socio-political scene was dominated by incidents of police firing, attack on polling booths, setting vital bridges on fire.

“Clashes, which were essentially of political nature to begin with, thus ended up largely as communal massacres-even genocide at Nellie for instance-as it had happened on a smaller scale even before in North Kamrup in the early part of January 1980. The outbursts of violence both then and later were apparently preplanned” (Dasgupta and Guha, 1981:844)

Police lathi-charged on the agitators, incidents of group clashes, explosions, setting buildings and bridges on fire became burning issues of the media every passing day. Voters stayed away from exercising their franchise, willing voters were forced to confine themselves in their homes. The election was marred by many incidents of violence where the turnout was very poor. The victims of violence mostly were the Muslims of East Bengal origin. More than three thousand people, mostly Muslims of East Bengal origin, were killed during this period of skirmish before the elections (Baruah 2001:131-132) .

Nandana Dutta quotes G.B. Verghese who, has clearly depicted the picture of the outcome of the Assam Movement. “The state was racked with bomb blasts ... over 1600 bridges and culverts were damaged or destroyed. The climax came with the ghastly Nellie Massacre ...” (Dutta 2012:63).

The Nellie massacre was followed by series of massacre at Chaulkhowachapori in Darrang district ,Silapathar in Lakhimpur district. In Chaulkhowa Chapori ,the victims were the Muslims of East-Bengal origin and in Silapathar the victims were Hindu Bengalis. At Gohpur in Darrang district,

many people died because of the conflict between the Asamiyas and the Bodos. More than 109 people, were burnt alive at Nagabandha of undivided Nowgong district. The victims were the Muslims of East-Bengal origin. The ordinary people became the direct victims of those massacres occurred in different places of Assam. Among those victims, the majority were the Muslims of East-Bengal origin.

“The large number of Muslims who were victimized in violence during elections and the national and international press coverage of it as a case of Muslims being killed, strained the ethnic Assamese Muslims’ attitude towards the movement”. (Baruah 2001:136). “Several Muslim members within the AASU issued an ultimatum to the AASU leadership demanding a correction of a “pro-Hindu communal tilt”. Their memorandum demanded a “firm definition” of a foreigner” (Baruah, 2001:136).

Thus, the movement which was launched peacefully came to be marred by murder and mayhem. One of the factors responsible for these murders, mayhem, communal riots was the Assembly election of 1983. The repeated occurrence of communal riots widened the gap between the Assamese and the Muslim community and particularly Muslims of East-Bengal origin in Assam.

Illegal Migrant (Determination by Tribunal) Act:

To find out a way to reduce the occurrence of communal riots and to protect the genuine citizens from harassment, Indian authority introduced the IM(DT) Act and imposed this Act on Assam in 1983. The act was imposed to protect the interest of genuine citizens of India, from atrocities and harassment. The Act set the qualifying date for identification of foreigners as 25th March 1971 under its section 3c(i) of the Act. The act was deliberately framed for Assam to deepen the communal polarization. The most interesting reality was that only Assam followed the IM(DT) Act,1983,till 2005. The remaining part of the Indian nation was operated under Foreigners Act of 1946. But the Act remained controversial because of its several discriminatory provisions.

These have put the popularity of the movement at stake. The assassination of Indira Gandhi had marked a change in the course of the Assam Movement. Rajiv Gandhi took oath as Prime Minister and renewed talks with the AASU leaders to find a solution to the impasse. Then the AASU leadership agreed on 1971 as the cut -off year and Gandhi promised of measures to detect and deport the illegal settlers who came after 1971.The agitation ended on August 15 in 1985 after the AASU and the AAGSP leadership signed the **Assam Accord** with the Centre where the primary task was to detect and deport the immigrants who came to Assam after March 1, 1971.

Assam Movement and Assam Accord: The ‘Assam Accord’ a memorandum of settlement was signed in 1985 between the Central Government of India and the leadership of the movement in New Delhi on 15th August 1985. Various political parties and organizations stood against the Accord. Purbanchaliya Loka Parishad rejected the accord and condemned it, saying that it was “made only for political power”. (Ahmed1999:167). The Accord fixed 25th March 1971 as the cut-off date for identification and deportation of illegal foreigners from Assam, as demanded by AAMSU and determined by the Central government.

Birth of Asom Gana Parisad: The end of the Movement marked the beginning of the regionalism in the field of politics. “The AASU part of the leadership took initiative to form a regional party in Assam with the help of the supporters of the Assam Movement.” (Hussain 1993:155). Accordingly the AGP came into existence as a regional party on 10th October 1985. The formation of AGP inspired leaders of the AAMSU to form United Minority Front in Assam.

United Minority Front: After the formation of AGP, the leaders and supporters of counter movement against the Assam Movement formed UMF. While the AAMSU and CRPC(henceforth the Citizenship Right Preservation Committee) were the organizational counter to the AASU and the Assam Movement, the UMF remained as a counter political group to AGP formed by the leadership of the Assam Movement. Ahmed argued, UMF “a political party for the minorities, by the minorities and of the minorities” (Ahmed 1999:174). The main support bases of UMF were the Muslims of East-Bengal origin and Hindu Bengalis. The formation of UMF added a new chapter in the development of new political consciousness among the Muslims of Assam.

Assam United Democratic Front: A new political party was formed in Assam in the late 2005. The formation of Assam United Democratic Front (henceforth AUDF) gave a new direction to Muslim politics of Assam. Later on AUDF remained as All India United Democratic Front (henceforth AIUDF). Assam Jamiat played an important role behind the formation of AIUDF. For the first time in independent India, Jamiat (Jamiat-Ul-Ulema-E_Hind) came to play a direct role in the politics of the country” (Nath 2011:157).

CONCLUSION: The whole atmosphere of Assam was covered by slogans like *Mare Asom, Jiye Kon, Jiye Asom Maare Kon, Jai Aai Asom*, (if Assam dies, who will live? if Assam lives, none will die; long live mother Assam:), *Jodi Nuhua Asomiya, Asom eri gusi jua* (if you are not an Assamese, leave Assam). These slogans cohered thousand of Assamese to detect and deport illegal foreigners from Assam. AASU spearheaded the movement with several objectives to protect the interest of the *Asamiya* people. But in due course, acrimonious differences, fratricidal clashes took a huge toll which converted the environment during the movement to a violent and communal one.

The issue of detection and deportation of foreign nationals, the participation from RSS, Jana Sangh, leaders of BJP to the Assam Movement, occurrence of communal riots during 1983, birth of AAMSU, CRPC, the introduction of IM (DT) Act, all these led to communal polarization and the developed a new political consciousness among the Muslims in Assam in general and Muslims of East-Bengal origin in particular.

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An Ethnographic Study of *Adda* as the Production of Local Public Spaces with Intimate Sociality in Kolkata Context

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Abstract

While selecting the research area Adda, we were not thoroughly conversant with the nuances of Chakrabarty's [2000] seminal writing on Adda. But at the level of practice, we had long been the part of it with my friends and even relatives. Two central remarks of Chakrabarty [2000] that initially emerged significant to me in terms of ethos/culture and ethnos/people were, [i] "Adda is often seen as something quintessentially Bengali, as an indispensable part of the Bengali character" to "sustain and enrich" and [ii] "it is predominantly male in its modern form in public life" [Chakrabarty 2000:181].

On ethnographically exploring the actually lived public sites and practices of long traditional Addas [i.e. by listening, interviewing and unobtrusive participation] in the oldest segments of the city, we started understanding how Adda, though mourned for its past golden days, sustains over time against the grain of pervasive neoliberal time[lessness], as [a] an openly premised, historically contextual production of public spaces of the practices and promotion of [b] open-ended, democratic dialogues allowing plural voices to be equivalent [c] without enforcing any dominant conclusion about anything and positively advancing [d] affinity for vibrant gregariousness and creativity [e] in different spaces of public life (e.g. just outside home, inside home, workplaces, malls, playgrounds, clubs, publishers' space, café, street side tea stalls and shops, inside public vehicles, railway stations and market places to name the major ones) imbued with [f] different colours of reason and emotion within intimate sociality. It appears to be an open-ended articulation of differences, diversity and creativity but with changing modalities, intensity, composition and significance in the urban Kolkata.

Keywords: *adda, public space, neoliberal, sociality, gregariousness, contextual production.*

Introduction

There are several scholars and literati whose interest in one principally city-centrally developed quintessential practice of the Bengalis called *Adda*, is discussed in a few notable works [Ahsan, 2015; Basu, 2002; Chakrabarty, 2000; Chattopadhyay, 1978; Chatapadhyay, 2010; Chattopaddhyay, 1913; Guha, 1998; Mujtaba-Ali, 1975; Ray, 1990; Sen 2011;]. Much needed, though, for offering the blurred genealogical links of its arrival in colonial modernity, Chakrabarty [2000: 188] could only hint at its reckonable emergence of *Adda*.

In fact, I have not come across any use of the word *Adda* in the nineteenth century that confers respectability on the practice. What made the word *Adda* respectable in the twentieth century was its association with the spaces for the production of a modern Bengali reading public.

What is *Adda* and what it is not have long been illustrated, analysed and debated. But what the recent studies [e.g. Chatterjee, 2014; Das, 2013] do not fail to introduce is the reference to Chattopaddhay [1913] and Chakrabarty [2000], same as Chakrabarty [2000] did in his seminal writing *Provincialising Europe*. More elaborately than other citations of the same, we thought it better to quote longer

The word *Adda* (pronounced “uddah”) is translated by the Bengali linguist Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay as “a place” for “careless talk with boon companions” or “the chats of intimate friends”¹ ... Roughly speaking, it is the practice of friends getting together for long, informal, and unrigorous conversations.

Before discussing earlier literature and where the research gap lies, we would like to mention what we have observed from the actual fieldwork. Despite the apprehended decay and demise of this informal, small-group, time-consuming, apparently end in itself, leisurely, at odd with fast life in cities [Chakrabarty, 2000]

¹Chakrabarty focuses later to substantiate the “this inter changeability of talk and place”

our observation finds them out in all the sites so far famous for *Adda*, though the changes are worth of study. One might say, Chakrabarty maintains the porous, in-between and liminal nature of *Adda* when he says

Adda in the twentieth century remained a hybrid form that combined elements of the *majlish* with that of coffee-house conversation. The emergence of a democratic sensibility separates the speech pattern of an *Adda* in someone's *baithakkhana* from that of an *Adda* in a public place [Chakrabarty 2000:191].

He also releases *Adda* from being a Bengali property

The tradition of men and women gathering in social spaces to enjoy company and conviviality is surely no monopoly of any particular people. Nor is the word only a Bengali word; it exists in Hindi and Urdu and means a 'place of gathering' (bus terminals in north India are called *bus-Addas*) [Chakrabarty 2000:183].

Later to come with a few more literature to liken this study, including Chakrabarty's [2000] engaging analysis of the many-sidedness of *Adda*, we are now in a position to communicate what have been doing about it. We began experiencing *Adda* from the localities of its early emergence in Kolkata that is jokingly often labeled as '*North Kolkata ghorana of Adda*'.

Some recent works on diasporic groups contextualize *Adda* as symbolic operant of those cultures for the present for instance, Chatterjee [2014:1] introduces it as 'a type of conventional, informal discussion, most commonly practiced among friends in Bengal', also as a 'situated linguistic practice'; Bandyopadhyay [2010] denotes it as informal chat among a group of people on a wide range of subjects'; Das [2013] doing the research in the heartland of West Bengal or the capital Kolkata sees it as a 'casual chats, gossips and informal discussions, integral to the culture of urban middle-class Bengal'. She uses references, particularly of Sen [2011] to explain the infinite diversity of issues historically engaged with this intellectually creative performance that made *Adda* a marker of an urban middle-class identity as against the cultural hegemony of

British imperialism. The *Bhadraloks* or generally understood educated middle-class people, who engaged in *Addas* were a product of colonial modernity (Basu, 2002).

Objective and question

With the above backdrop in mind, the present research has the primary objective to explore the contemporary practices of *Adda* not as a historic event of fixity, but as critically reflexive of specific cultural time [i.e. socially categorized, here urban middle-class Bengali, time under globalizing regime] in particular space [i.e. socially categorized corners of Kolkata metropolis] that produce inclusionary and exclusionary space-times for private, public and in-between situatedness of *Adda*. The research questions are inseparable from ‘how’ and ‘why’ the *Addas* situated in space-time move, especially in the sessions of the fieldworkers with the research participants about *Addas* of the past?

Methodology

Approach: As my study is an ethnographic research it is based on anthropologist Sherry Ortner’s ethnographic sensibility is ‘as much as intellectual (and moral) positionality—a constructive and interpretive mode—as it is a bodily process in space and time’ (Ortner, 2006: 42).

The Site and The People: The work begun in the heartland of colonially modern Kolkata. The sites, traditionally known for *Addas* are definite to the concerned participants and local residents, thus identifiable with their cooperation. To study ethnographically these local spaces of *Adda* in Kolkata we moved to the streets and lanes of North and Central Kolkata. Mainly I have presented here Sukia Street, so far to reach on-site *Adda* at specific hours of the day. This is a neighbourhood *Adda* that did not pose very exclusionary distance for outsiders, thus for fieldworkers like us. We present below the schematic layers of the methodology used

Purposive selection of the time, place and participants was done by us in the following manner

- a. Time Criteria: Exploration from afternoon to night and morning to noon at the weekends and holidays
- b. Criteria for participants: i] the elderly gathering in leisurely gesture, ii] knowing specific history of the locality and people for *Adda*, iii] help for snowballing to get older and present network/s of the *Addas*.
- c. Criteria of movement: Walk by the streets in the afternoons to get at new *Addas* and their known networks
- d. Narratives have been collected and recorded through in-depth interview from 11 regular male participants of Sukia Street *Adda* group. Age group of participants ranges between 50 to 77 years.

For selecting and getting informed consent of the participants, the major strategy of collecting the data might be termed as ‘permissible listening, talking and observation’ and if needed, participation. The first mode needed more sensitivity to the situation of an on-going *Adda* and recording relatively more naturalistic performances of the participants when they bother less about our presence. *Rowak’s Adda* of Sukia Street in ‘older’ Kolkata has been studied is followed by transcription and analysis of the categories of the data.

Findings of the study

Before coming to the major dimensions of *Addas* as they emerged from the research engagement, we would like to emphasize again, like other lived phenomena every *Adda* has its particular situatedness. For instance, when I introduced with the participants of a running *Adda*, the welcoming the elderly research participants offered to me, was imbued with the excess of cordiality from some and uncertainty of some other about what to talk about and what not. Like their own everyday *Adda* it was an also session by the *Adda* for the participants to recall their past *Adda* days and spaces. Like Chakrabarty [2000] mentioned “the nostalgia of *Adda*”, we later observed interview sessions were least about present, but it was of different levels and layers of the past that they enjoyed engaging with us.

Siting *Adda*

Social categories of the *Adda* participants are ascribed towards the emplacement of performance of this sociality like any home-space or any other recognized *Adda* sites etc with its distinct lived spatiotemporal backdrop. Sometimes, space is provided by local elites, sometimes, it is improvising a space before a garage or tea-stall, also space created by any local club. An illustrious example of the support of local elite is given below by Prabir of 58 years old

‘This Dutta family had elaborated *majlis* [or entertaining event of performing art for the merriment of male friends and guests] at their heydays during colonial period. As they advanced in education, their *baithakkhana* turned out to be a grand space for *baithaki Adda* [with guests and friends, but not much behavioural freedom of the participants]. ... Finally, their *Adda* culminated in consolidating everyday most informal chatting that we actually call *Adda*. But for our *Adda* the family has opened our access to the *Durga Mandap* [space for annual *Durga* festival], courtyard [*chatal*], *baithak khana* [living room].’

Our query in mind was whether sites might proliferate within a locality. The response was satisfactorily positive as they explain how their *Adda* is not only confined in the *rowak* rather local club ‘*Shibsankar matrimandir*’, a later establishment, is another place of their *Adda* along with some more sporadically spaces used interchangeably by the participants according to interest of talking issues and age.

Emplacing *Adda* space with the Histories

Participants of older parts of Kolkata especially the elderly members of north Kolkata try to hold onto urban ideality of their lived past at present also. Sometimes it is through maintaining neighbourhood bonding or favoring bygone tradition or heritage of their lifestyle. During *Adda* they often sink into the past and reiterate its ideality. Thus, the glory of *Adda* was well emplaced with the local legacies of *Adda* group.

‘You might know, but notice again, it is the place of *Vidyasagar*, *Raja Rammohan Roy*, *Michal Madhusudan*, *Thakur Ramkrishna Dev*, *Swami Vivekananda*, *Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy*, the

great scientist Professor Satyendranath Bose, Professor Sahayram Bose and several others whom Indian nation salutes. *Sukia Saheb*, the street named after whom earlier, gave shelter to the great renaissance poet *Michael Madhusudan Dutta* for a long period in his house... There is the farm house of *Raja Rammohan Ray* which is now become police museum... Our most of the popular practices have historical and legendary backdrop’, said by a 66 years old Manoj, a regular participant of this *Adda* group.

It was not only about the region of the city that could be identified with remarkable history, but also the sites that the participants mention with a reckonable past. For instance, Sukia street, a colonially recognized establishment that later named after influential wealthy elite *Sri Mahendranath Srimani* as well as the adjacent market as ‘*Srimani market*’. Now this later name of the street is interchangeably used with former one.

The present elderly generation traces out the past as the naturalized negotiation between the colonial ‘refinement’ [e.g. outfit, manners and so on] and decolonizing ‘coarseness’ to become legacy in the field of knowledge of international standard. Here is an illustrative story about how everyday discourse adopted a local subculture with reference to *Adda*. It is yet to be recorded:

‘This *rowak* is also recognized by us for the legends Professor Satyendranath Bose and Professor Sahayram Bose, who were very close friends. Satyen Bose and Sahayram Bose both taught Physics in Calcutta University at Raja Bazaar Science College. Satyen Bose, whom we called Satyen *dadu* [Grandfather] and his friend Sahayram Bose the two old men would have used come here. Whenever they would come here for *Adda* we would have changed our place of *Adda* in the front lane of our house instead of this *rowak*. Satyen Bose used to wear *dhooti punjabi* and Sahayram Bose always dressed like *Saheb*. Both regularly came here for their evening *Adda*. Sometimes we would see that

they walk together from here to the junction of this street (*morer matha*) again coming back, again going and again coming back. Initially we could not understand the matter actually. Later we heard from our seniors (*dada*) that these two old men were so absent minded and would have been engaged in their *Adda* that both used to say “*chal toke bari porjonto egiye di*” [Let me accompany you to your home] then after reaching *morer matha* Satyen Bose said again “*chal toke egiye di*” [Better I take you to your home] and thus they wandered on the road till 11pm to 12 am at night. After that Sahayram’s sons whom we called *dada* [elder brother] would come and helped them reaching their home. Father and son used to call rickshaw for Satyen Bose, or they would send him by bus. He lived in a lane of *Hedo* in a one storied house. We really don’t know whether all such everyday practices of our great scholars are at all necessary for their biography’, narrated by Sujoy.

Similarly, other such orally transmitted memory, one might call it cultural memory reproduces the pride of the neighbourhood that unveils the historical incidence of conversation held between the two legends *Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Vidyasagar Mahashay*. It has been heard that in this conversation *Vidyasagar mahasay* talked only 15 minutes and rest of the time *Ramkrishnadev* talked to him. This whole event happened in *Vidyasagar mahasay*’s house.

These are how participants live the memories of past through sharing oral history of their neighbourhoods or localities, past cultural assemblies etc that bringing back them to the *Adda* places again.

Temporalising *Adda*

Adda trajectory across the time implies that *Adda* needs temporal priority in the everyday life of the residents of this neighbourhood, hence, at intervals of time they held *Adda*. According to elderly participants, this *Adda* has been started very early when television did not come to the market and they used to spend leisure

through giving *Adda*. Though intensity of giving *Adda* varies now, but to them, *Adda* remains indispensable especially in north Kolkata.

The recurrence of meanings adjusted to the changes with time hold the participants anchored to the space of neighbourhood across time:

‘This *rowak*, *durga mandap* of this *purono para*, courtyard of *Dutta* house, all are very much familiar to us since childhood. Here *Adda* was held by our grandfather, my father and now it is held by us ... I hope it to be the same by our sons and grandsons.’ said by 75 years old Sujoy, an elderly member of this *Adda* group.

Another participant 67 years old Swaraj said, ‘now the competition kills the leisure in our life’.

Though participants admitted that with changing education and economic system, intensity and frequency of giving *Adda* have been reduced. This whole management of time is fixed in such a circle that younger ones would not get out of it to have little time to join in “*parar Adda*”. The sharp decline of *rowak Adda* is accompanied with replacement of the *rowaks* by chairs and thus club *Adda* is getting popular, though people reluctant to go there as mostly politicalised. Thus participants mourn for extant *rowak Adda* or *rowakbaaji* those are getting numbered gradually.

Thus, another temporal dimension of *Adda* is the apprehension of its decay and death. Elderly participants explained how the intangible wealth of memory will be decreasing from society. They encourage preserving this culture as they think people belong to their generation only feel for this culture that enhances the bonding within people across time.

Constructing Participants/Actors

We had several narratives on how *Adda* as a space of discourses would have always been producing new and renewable narratives. In that sense, one of the central attractions of *Adda* is said to be the debates and

contests over issues and perspectives to generate challenging talks and actions. Any *Adda* is auto-reflexive provider of the positions or perspectives that the participants would adopt and improvise to mobilize *Adda* as more attractive. The intimate encounters of evoking narratives of different participants motivate for different creative actions. This becomes somewhat lucid resource for constituting multiple actions. All might become multiple actors:

‘Where is that type of friendship which we had among us till date? We would assemble in rowak to go to the playground; some people are interested in drama, theatre, some people are interested in cricket, football, and politics. It was open and optional to adopt and adapt to the choices. If there were fifteen boys come in this rowak, fifteen boys did everything together like playing, doing theatre etc, but with time according to interest small groups were also formed. Some people make a world of play (cricket, football, and tennis), news of play and debate over play and so on. Almost ninety percent people talking on play would center on the football of Mohanbangan Club; some of them involved in politics. In all these clusters there is no age limit, person of 30 years giving full-fledged *Adda* with a person of 65 years of age.’ said by Ashis, 54 years old participant of this *Adda* group.

Identification of *para* with *Adda*: Manifestation of one in the other

Whether with or without other institution[e.g. club, gymnasium, religious temple, monitored playground and so on] in such a neighbourhood or *para*—might loosely be conceived as an informal emplacement of any socially intimate neighbourhood—which is socially stronger than any administrative municipal spatial unit. The *Adda* participants illuminate what else such *Adda* group do locally are arranging sports like football, cricket, any cultural programmes for *paila boisakh*, *rabindra jayanti*, *najrul jayanti*, Independence Day, republic day and inaugural function of *Durga puja* etc and many more.

Our response raised an intricate issue: ‘In many places, such sports, celebratory, ceremonial and social service programmes are conducted by the local club institutions. Thus, how *Adda* comes essentially into them?’ The query, though not previously encountered by the participants, was responded at ease that neighbourhood and local club both exist due to an informal bonding among neighbours who initiate the practice of regular informal interactive chatting. To justify their opinion they share their view that a neighbourhood to function with or without club essentially be based on the practices of *Adda*, that produces something like some informal kinship (or *Atmiyota*) or more than kinship. On the minimum, a *para* is produced by informal, but intensive interaction among some neighbours.

Our immediate question was, ‘if some regular *Adda* participants live in distance, as you were talking about Prof. Satyen Bose, what would then be the *para* and its relationship with *Adda*, if *para* and *Adda* are the two sides of the same coin.’ They responded with not so sufficient clarity

‘You see, anybody can be a member of any *Adda*, coming in relation to somebody, in fact any stranger even appearing in certain known work or “*kaaj*”.... Any relative of anyone of an already *Adda* group, any businessman sponsoring any of our events, any neighbor shifting residence to some other locality have all become irregular member of our *Addas*. So, no problem in that! ... Then again, many *Addas* dissolve, many members depart ... we endure it. ... They also know about our *para*, ... naturally as we do not hesitate to talk about anything as we accept the outsider ..., but if he initiates to talk about his *para* ... and we feel eager about somebody, it has also happened that we invited them in our *Adda* ...’

Emplacement of the *Adda* Space with ‘New Kinship’

It discloses the *Adda* sociality create space with kinship and brotherhood among the neighbours. Participants share various memories that tell the emotional bonding grown among the neighbours is nothing but the reflection of *Adda* sociality. It is *Adda* that holds a kin like cordiality among the neighbours through helping

in crisis, spending time together during festivals, sharing views and giving suggestions to younger ones etc make this *Adda* ideal. Thus this *rowak* and *Adda* is inextricably linked to the everyday life of the neighbours as participants shared how this *rowak* is not only for *Adda* rather it becomes a meeting place of various people like hiring cook (*ure bamun*) for any occasion etc. It is *Adda* that bring people back to this place they left behind due to shifting house in other place or reside other place due to job purpose etc.

Thus, *Adda* built sociality at optimum through its ubiquity and gregariousness while telling about enmeshing of persons with *Adda* by 59 years old Ashesh,

‘If I go somewhere and return in late and see our scheduled *Adda* is almost over, yet I come here before entering the house and stay at least ten or fifteen minutes and then go to home. That short time is pleasure for the whole day.’

How the *Adda* members intervene in people’s personal life did is uncommon now but *Adda* participants shared their experience how seniors guided them as well as they are scolded by them before examination. Thus they think it’s a useful side of *Adda* to become familiar like kinsmen.

The Pluri-processual Production of Public Space

The processes that any insider of Kolkata Bengali culture would identify with key words by participating in *Addas*, like we did as well, include principally [a] taking choice of speech/silence (*bachan /mounata*) and expression (*prokash soili*), [b] freely structuring arguments (*jukti*), [c] emphasis on authentic information (*sathik tothya*), [d]both coercion (*birodh*) and persuasion (*bojhiye bala*) with words and categories of speech(*kathar dharon*), [e] making supplements (*sanjojon*) to opinions (*matamat*) and conception (*dharona*) rather than closure (*chapter close*), [f] always keeping it in mind that there is final word (*shes katha*) about any issue, even though proclaimed so at times, [g] inconclusiveness [*asamapti*], reasonable equivocality (*bohu mat*), [h] inclusionary for evoking and skilled communication (*bojha o bojhano*) and exclusionary non-communicative and separatist outsiders and [i]appreciation of meaningful novelties (*notunatwa*) or creativity (*srijansilata*) and maintenance of friendliness (*bondhutwa*) despite extreme debates(*tarka*).

Discuss and debates both are created out of interest of the participants in various subject matters. As we know *Adda* is a space with diverse issues from movie stars and their fans, sports to world politics that have been elaborated by the elderly members of the *Adda* group given below

‘Too many different issues, different orientations of talking, different temperaments, varying moods, for the particular days and so on and on But all mingle, everybody communicates, every talk is open to intervention, harsh debates and comments. ... We may start with trivial issue of my choice of Uttam Kumar [a legendary actor-cum-superstar of Bengali movie screen beginning since middle of twentieth century] my friend’s fandom of Soumitra Chatterjee [another legendary actor-cum-superstar of Bengali movie screen beginning since middle of twentieth century continuing till date] the debate of which unwittingly switches to the Bengal’s chief ministers Dr. Bidhan Chandra Ray, Jyoti Basu and again to the issue whether we should support West German football or football of Italy ... meanwhile taking several cups of tea in our familiar tea stall to notice our watches ticking 10 o’clock. Then we hesitate over the issue if some more minutes be spent for the concluding *Adda* without conclusion not to make home members waiting for us. Thus, our everyday age and *Adda* roll on without aging. *Ha ha...*’ said by Sujoy.

Another situation is supposed to stand essential as participants believe in a custom of *Adda* that here so many topics are discussed but it is for today only, until tomorrow come they don’t think more on or personalize them. They think over it tomorrow (*aajker moto sesh, kaal vaba jabe: for today it ends here, we will again think over it tomorrow*).

Despite *Adda* being considered broadly and dominantly an educated ‘middle class’ culture, but that class is in itself a heterogeneous entity includes differently educated families with different economic status. Political ideologies also vary individually which might turn the space of *Adda* into vehement contentions and acrimonies. But these differences do not affect their *Adda*.

Exclusion is most evident in the participation of the women in *Adda*. In neighbourhood *Addas* norms are constructed by the people including *Adda* participants for women. As 69 years old Pradip said,

‘Generally, women do not join our *Adda*; since our childhood we have seen it. Actually, every place has a conventional rule that the women do not come to this *rowak*, but during *puja* or other occasion they assemble together for giving *Adda* sitting on the chairs.’

Conclusion:

Adda, though mourned for its past golden days, sustains over time against the grain of pervasive neoliberal time[lessness], as [a] an openly premised, historically contextual production of public spaces of the practices and promotion of [b] open-ended, democratic dialogues allowing plural voices to be equivalent [c] without enforcing any dominant conclusion about anything and positively advancing [d] affinity for vibrant gregariousness and creativity [e] in different spaces of public life (e.g. just outside home, inside home, workplaces, malls, playgrounds, clubs, publishers’ space, café, street side tea stalls and shops, inside public vehicles, railway stations and market places to name the major ones) imbued with [f] different colours of reason and emotion within intimate sociality. It appears to be an open-ended articulation of differences, diversity and creativity but with changing modalities, intensity, composition and significance in the urban Kolkata.

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Democratization, Conflict and ‘Act East’ Policy: Challenges and Possibilities to Mediate Non-State Armed Actors in Northeast India

Athikho Kaisii

Abstract

Issue of non-state armed actors in Northeast India is a pre-state phenomenon and with the exception of Assam, the seed of institutionalising violence was sown prior to the formation of the states in the region. Experience has shown that institutionalisation of states, which was the process of democratisation, is yet to soothe the conflict in the region. With this striking reality, ‘Act East’ seen as a ground-breaking policy with a multi-prong strategy aims to overhaul the image of the Northeast through rebuilding India’s historical ties with Southeast Asia needs to embed a viable action-oriented democratic mechanism to mitigate the conflict. Against this backdrop, how an ambitious policy of ‘Act East’ is crafting a conducive milieu to alleviate the issue of the non-state armed actors is the focus of the paper.

Keywords: Action-oriented, alternative administration, democratic mechanism, ethnic groups, Southeast Asia

Introduction: Situating the Context

To reorient the policy, within months of NDA (National Democratic Alliance) led BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) coming to power after the successful of 16th general parliamentary election, Prime Minister, Narendra Modi in his maiden speech at the 12th ASEAN-India summit held in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar on 12th November, 2014 announced the transition of the policy from ‘Look East’ to ‘Act East’ (Chairman’s statement). The transition of the policy was done at a time when a non-Congress party secured a majority on its own in the Lower House (Lok Sabha) for the record in the history of Indian parliamentary democracy.

After years of the compulsion of coalition politics, the government has been empowered with adequate numbers to take a democratically wise political decision. Hence, the transition of a policy to 'Act East' could not happen at a better time. It is regarded as a ground-breaking policy with multi-dimensional strategy that aims to revamp the image of the Northeast through rebuilding India's historical bonds with Southeast Asia. Bose has summed up the policy as a 'programme related to restoring the pre-Independence connectivity, which the North East believes was key to its prosperous past' (2019, 336). Taking the policy to a new height with concrete objectives is commendable, which is an indication of shifting approach towards the Northeast in the post-Independence era. Besides, geographically peripheral, Northeast is a distinct diverse cultural region in which social taste (likings & food habits) and ways of life are closer to Southeast Asia than the mainland Indian.

To successfully materialise its grand objectives, it is imperative to embed a constructive action-oriented conflict management mechanism within the policy in order to mitigate the conflict in the region. Needless to note that the past democratisation processes had often ended up in a blame game since 'security-centric' became the dominant strategy for the region. Consequently, the nature and process of democratisation takes its processes as a justified approach in appropriating violence in the state itself. In due course of time, the existing conflict subliminally gave birth to one of the longest-running insurgency movements in Southeast Asia in the form of the Naga movement. Today, out of eight states in the Northeast region, the Naga movement is affecting the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, and Nagaland. Against this backdrop, for the grand 'Act East' policy to bear its desired goals, it needs to place in a people centric democratic mechanism to deal with the conflict.

Objectives

Not to mention the Northeast region as a whole but diversity within the state is enormous making it one of the most diverse regions in the country. On account of a huge diversity, intra-state conflict is complex besides inter-state partly as a result of colonial baggage. Within the complexity of problems and diversity in the region, the focus of the paper is limited to Manipur and Nagaland. The paper attempts to address some of the concerns like when the binary forces of the state actor and the non-state armed actor perpetuate even after institutionalisation of states, what possible variant democratic mechanisms need to be

explored? In what way does 'Act East' as an innovative policy can mend the conflict situation? In the midst of the institutionalisation of violence how 'Act East' as a novel ground-breaking policy can restore democratic space?

Literature Review: Democratizations and Conflict

Irrespective of the consequences, in any violent related problem democratic strategy has been advocated to mitigate the situation. Yet, with an exception of the relatively stable nations with strong and long tradition of democratic practices, democratisation is often mired with conflict. Thus, although democratisation is considered as an important democratic approach to mitigate conflict, not every scholar is enthusiastic about the idea that it can eventually alleviate the risk of it. Among others for instance, Mansfield and Snyder (1995) argued that democratisation can be a violent process especially in the transitional stage as democracy doesn't mature overnight (Mansfield and Snyder 1995, 12). An initial phase of democratisation can be a potential factor for conflict as Snyder (2000, 31-33) suggests that two conditions would favour such a possibility. Firstly, political elites would exploit the situation for their own ends, and secondly, the central government tacitly allows the political elites to follow the fragmentation approach. Such a situation will then allow the elite political actors (state actors) to manipulate the dividend of democratisation for their own ends. Indeed, in such a transitory situation when the 'actors find it difficult to know what their interests are, who their supporters will be, and which groups will be their allies or opponents' (Karl 1990, 6), conflict is not ruled out.

It is a situation as Savun and Tirone argue that 'the political elites have difficulty in trusting each other's intentions and promises' (2011, 234) thereby hindering peaceful transition. Interestingly, some scholars even suggested that 'the relationship between conflict and democratisation remains unclear and resembles the ancient dilemma about the chicken and the egg' (Mirimanova 1997, 87). Evidently, as Cervellati and Sunde note that 'the transitions to democracy have occurred under different scenarios, with peaceful transitions in some, and with transitions accompanied by openly violent social conflicts in other case' (2014, 1). Nodoubt, democratic transition is a crucial stage that may eventually lead towards the process of democratisation, but its process is not always free from conflict.

More importantly, how the transitional period has led to the growth of democratic institutions will have persistent effects in its democratic practices and functioning. As Rakner, Menocal and Fritz (2007, 2) point out:

Democratisation often entails diffusing power more evenly across a greater number of actors both within and outside government, whilst strengthening state capacity may call for greater centralisation of power and autonomy in the decision-making process. State-building requires, above all, the strengthening of state institutions and the consolidation/centralization of state power, while democracy promotion calls for the substantial diffusion and redistribution of state power. Thus, while the good governance agenda tends to assume that ‘all good things go together’, some tensions are glossed over.

This is because democratisation means that the state distributes power, but for it to do so needs to acquire the power first. When the process itself is at times self-contradictory, a certain amount of conflict is not ruled out, which can act as a catalyst that could intensify the tension between the state actors and non-state armed actors. Democratisation processes as a short term conflict-inducing can be protracted ‘when democratisation catalyses widespread social or political violence—either by incumbent governments seeking to retain power by force, or among clashing social forces vying for influence or control’ (IIDEAS 2006, 9). Thus, when an appropriate and systematic device is not in place to deal with the post-democratising conflict but allows conflict to perpetuate, there is every possibility that democratization and conflict operate in parallel. To make the democratising process truly democratic, it is imperative to comprehend the issue from all angles in devolving the process of democratisation so that its own consequent itself will encompass adequate measures to contain.

In Northeast India, democratisation in the form of the creation of state allows the institutionalisation of violence to continue (McDuie-Ra 2009; Baruah 2014). Democratisation in the region happened along with an excessive presence of the security forces to assist the state (Kikon 2005). The experience of democratisation in the Northeast represents ‘durable disorder’ and fragile democracy (Baruah 2014). When democratisation in the form of institutionalising state is not functioning as expected, perpetuating or even abating conflict was often deployed through centrally backed state leaders. With tacit support of the centre, leaders of the state-actors perpetuate conflict since it suits their interests.

States are created as a means to resolve the conflict but when causes of the conflict have not been adequately acknowledged and pragmatically dealt with, conflict perpetuates. With the proliferation of coercive apparatus of the state, Mathur notes, 'failures of legitimisation of state power and inability to resolve political conflicts do not appear to be consequences of poor economic performance alone. They lie at the very root of the historical and social processes of state and nation building' (Mathur 1992, 349). Indeed, democratisation in the form of state creation has not contained the non-state armed actors but as Cline elaborated that 'the Indian army has been required to conduct extensive operations throughout the area' (Cline 2006, 142) due to the large number of insurgent movements in the region. In the case of Nagaland, the formation of state resulted in what Panwar termed, 'soon, the insurgency and large-scale counterinsurgency operations took centre stage in the region, causing tremendous pain, suffering and death to innocent civilians' (Panwar 2017, 241). Democratic society and normalcy is yet to be seen.

Democratisation, Conflict and Fragmentation

Much before Nagaland and Manipur become states, the Naga Club as a non-state actor had stated its aspiration to the visiting colonial's Commission in Kohima on 10th January 1929 that their territory should not be included in the proposed reorganisation. Though the submission comes to naught, it has set the ball of the non-state actors' activity and sown the seed of the discord between the Nagas and the Government of India. The Naga National Council (henceforth NNC), formed in 1946, carry forward the legacy of the Naga Club with much vigor. The NNC from a non-state actor had turned into a non-state armed actor in 1956 with the formation of Naga Federal Government (NFG) after the failure of civil disobedience campaign to redress its demand (Means and Means 1967). Although the concept of non-state armed actor lack one universal definition, it is broadly referred to actors that are 'armed and use force to achieve their objectives and are not under state control' (International Council on Human Rights Policy 1999, 5) in which the goal is not limited to private but political and economic in nature (Hofmann 2006, 396). In the wake of a humiliated public addressed by Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru in Kohima in 1953 coupled with violent activities of the NNC, the Government of India had promulgated The Assam Maintenance of Public Act (Autonomous District) in 1953, which paved the way for the enactment of the

Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) in 1958 (Roychoudhury 2015, 300). In those days, with an exception of NNC there was no other non-state armed group in the region.

In comparison to other states in the region, the formations of Nagaland and Manipur have had a different tale. In essence, Nagaland is an outcome of the Naga movement and it was created through an agreement and not based on States Reorganisation Act. It was created out of political exigency. However, an agreement that led to the formation of Nagaland was not an agreement between a non-state armed actor (meaning NNC) and the Government of India. Instead, Naga People's Convention (henceforth NPC) formed in 1957 whose original purpose was to act as the facilitator between the NNC and the Government of India turned out to be the negotiator and final arbiter of the Naga identity when Nagaland was instituted. Such a democratisation process had changed the landscape of conflict from between the Nagas and the Government of India to within the Nagas. Besides, those excluded sections of the Nagas from Nagaland have been fragmented and made perpetual minorities in other states thereby making them dependent on the majority community.

However, till 1988 other than Naga Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) formed due to differences with the signing of Shillong Accord, 1975 by some leaders of NNC, there was no faction. The birth and growth of factional fighting in the Naga movement is not free from the role of the state actors. S.C. Jamir, the longest-serving Chief Minister of Nagaland was accused of patronizing NSCN-K. The then Governor of Manipur & Nagaland, Lt Gen V.K. Nayar (Retd.), in his special report to the President of India wrote, 'with Shri Jamir supporting NSCN (K), tribal alignments with Aos, Konyaks, Phoms firmly with him NSCN (K), and Semas, Angamis and other Southern Tribes against him and NSCN (IM) have already fermented' (Kumar 2007, 27). Although the intensity of factional killing has been reduced, thanks to tireless dedicated works of the FNR (Forum for Naga Reconciliation), fragmentation within the Nagas proliferated, both at the level of militant and civil society. In the first cease-fire (1964), there was only one single non-state armed actor (the NNC), but in 1997 cease-fire, although it has covered the dominant faction—(NSCN-IM)—there there are other non-state armed actors that the Government of India has to deal with. The policy of inclusive solution by taking all the factions on board in any settlement is the product of factionalism. The then Government of India's Interlocutor to Naga peace-talks, R.N Ravi off and on views that 'there will be only one peace process and one agreement for the Nagas' (Nagaland Post 2017) was not different either. Some of the recent fragmentations are

happening right at the door of peace-talks, which is seen as a process of democratisation that seeks for a lasting solution. When a cease-fire was signed in 1997 between the NSCN-IM and the Government of India other than factions of NNC and NSCN-K, there were no other factions. Today, besides those groups who are out of the purview of the peace-talks, those engaging in the talk are broadly divided into NSCN-IM and 7 NNPGs (Naga National Political Groups). Recently, the NSCN-K faction led by Niki Sumi has announced a cease-fire as the organisation has resolved to strengthen and support the peace process (Saha 2020). Further, in November 2021 within the 7 NNPGs, the NSCN (R) has split into two different groups and declared ‘unilateral ceasefire’ with the Government of India while maintaining that the breakaway group will retain the same nomenclature as NSCN (R).

At the level of civil society with some apex bodies such as Naga Hoho, Naga Students’ Federation (NSF), Naga Mothers’ Association (NMA) among others in some years ago, today Naga society is mired with so many organisations like Nagaland Tribes Council (NTC), 14 Tribal Hohos, etc. Of course, there are other Naga bodies such as United Naga Council (UNC), All Naga Students’ Association, Manipur (ANSAM), etc. in Manipur and in other states also. However, these organisations have been there prior to the signing of the ongoing cease-fire. Nagas in different states have every right to form their own organisations but it shouldn’t weigh down the larger interest and hinder the functions of the apex organisation. Instead, different organisations can work as extended wings to strengthen the apex organisations. As a consequence of the growing number of civil society that amounts to jeopardising the function of the apex bodies, R.N Ravi, Centre’s Interlocutor to Naga peace-talks was alleged to divide the Naga society into ‘primary stakeholders’ and ‘secondary stakeholders’ (Migrator 2019). There is an apprehension that the democratisation process of inclusiveness is a contrivance to divide and dictate the Nagas. In the absence of building a mutual respect, the democratisation process of inclusiveness can further fragment the Nagas.

At this delicate situation there is a fear that if evolving trend is not embarked upon sensibly, it may leads to further fragment the Nagas while rolling a piecemeal solution, which the Nagas have had bitter experienced beginning with Akbar Hydari Agreement or 9 Point Agreement 1947, 16 Point Agreement, 1963 to Shillong Accord, 1975. Not only had these agreements resulted in diminishing the stance of the Nagas but also led to fragmenting them. How ‘Act East’, seen as a people oriented policy that aims to overhaul the image of

the region will cope with such a crucial issue has been keenly watched. The policy as India's transforming foreign policy to re-engage Southeast Asia (Bajpayee 2017, 349) will be inadequate to meet its goal without taking care of the home front. To bring to a logical conclusion with mutually acceptable terms of the Naga issue will surely be a remarkable achievement of the 'Act East'. Not to mention the people in Northeast India but neighbouring countries are also watching the Naga peace-talks, which can form part of the 'Act East' policy.

When it comes to Manipur, the state was created while combining both the valley and the hills irrespective of the people's aspirations. Such arrangement was in sheer contradiction of the formation of other hill states like Meghalaya and Mizoram since these states were carved out of Assam as per the wishes of the hill people although their formation had its own history of struggle, not free from conflict. Tensions between the people of the hills and the valley in the region have manifested in various forms since the inception of the institutionalisation of state. Something 'Act East' policy needs to take into account is how to manage the complex relationship between the people in the hill and the valley with determined political will. Without a suitable pragmatic democratic mechanism to address the protracted conflict between the valley and the hills, it can impair the objective of the policy.

In Manipur, be it social, economic or political, there is hardly any mutual shared and common interest bond between the people in the hills and the valley save for formation of a state that brought them together in one administrative unit. Such sheer marriage of convenience, which was done for administrative convenience does not work at the level of people to people and community to community. Democratisation in the form of Manipur state further heightened the social divide between the people in the hills and the valley. The creation of state resulted in legitimising and perpetuating the hegemonic domination of the Meiteis. It leads to intensifying the tension between the state actors and the non-state armed actors since to safeguard each ethnic community's interest respective ethnic groups have nurtured its own non-state armed actors.

After years of confrontation with the breakdown of the first cease-fire (1964), the Government of India and NSCN (IM) entered into a cease-fire in August 2007, which is an acknowledgement that the issue of non-state armed actors is yet to be resolved in Nagaland and Manipur. Since then, a cease-fire has been extended on an annual basis. In the wake of

the Bangkok declaration on 14th June, 2001 between the NSCN–IM and K. Padmanabhaia, representing the Government of India that the cease-fire will be ‘without territorial limits’ has led to widespread demonstrations particularly, in Imphal valley in the name of protecting territorial integrity (Parratt and Parratt 101-2). Naga’s demand for territorial integration of contiguous Naga inhabited areas was an issue prior to the formation of Manipur state (Manchanda and Bose 2011). As the talk progresses, the ‘Framework Agreement’ was signed in 2015 between the Government of India, represented by R N Ravi and the NSCN-IM, represented by Th. Muivah in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi with a galaxy of other dignitaries. To counter the ‘Framework Agreement’, the Manipur Assembly had passed a number of resolutions to protect the integrity of the state. The resolution while seeking the content of the ‘Framework Agreement’ stated that ‘there shall not be any change in the present administrative set up of the state of Manipur and not to grant any kind of autonomy to any part of the state, as a result of ‘Framework Agreement leading to resolution of the Naga political issue’(Leivon 2019). On the contrary, the Nagaland legislative assembly had adopted a number of resolutions on territorial integration of contiguous Naga inhabited areas (Das 2013), the latest one was in September, 2018 while re-affirming the resolutions of 1964, 1970, 1994, 2003 and 2015. While acknowledging the severity of the issue, the Chief Minister of Nagaland, Neiphiu Rio asserted that ‘unless there is a settlement, (unless) there is solution, there is no perfect peace in our land and artificial peace is there and there is no peace of mind’ (Morung Express 2022). Not to forget the presence of other non-state armed actors in Manipur based on ethnic lines in Manipur, it is clear that the protracted Naga issue is affecting the functioning of both Manipur and Nagaland states.

Act East Policy: Challenges and Possibilities to Mitigate Conflict

It is hard to deny that Northeast India has been infested with various non-state armed actors with a demand ranging from autonomy, territorial council to independence making the region conflict-ridden. Nonetheless, for India to play a level field as a global player by building ties with her Southeast Asian neighbors through the region’s strategic location, internal disturbance should not derail its prospects. To rebuild an age-old historical connection with her Southeast Asian neighbors through ‘Act East’ will then require giving due importance to the region. And for any people oriented pragmatic approach towards

healing the region cannot afford to overlook the demand of the people within the Indian federal system.

Since the state formation of Nagaland and Manipur lack systematic democratic devices to deal with the non-state armed actors, democratisation and conflict operate in parallel. When the symptom of conflict is well entrenched within a democratisation process, which led to the institutionalisation of states, there is a need to observe the effectiveness of an institution as a means to conciliate non-state armed actors. Given that the democratisation mechanism through the formation of state has been unable to neutralise the non-state armed actors, as a comprehensive approach 'Act East' policy can evolve a suitable alternative democratic mechanism to mitigate the conflict. Possibly, an alternative structure of democratic administration can be an option. Every complex issue requires a unique model to be solved. To bring about an alternative administrative system of governance, an option that can be explored is a state within a state administration. Without upsetting the territorial boundary since territory has emerged as a bone of contention particularly, in a state of Manipur, devolution of powers through dual systems of governance directly financed and monitored by the Central government can be explored.

The centrality of territory for a state is obvious since it can't be created out of a vacuum. Likewise, it is the people who owned the territory, and the territory belonged to the people and not the people belonged to the territory. If the inhabitants are not the rightful owner of the land where they have resided, they will be either migrants or refugees. In general, territory belonged to those who occupied it and accordingly a democratic institution such as a state has been instituted for governance. Although the Centre government under Article 3 of the Indian constitution has the prerogative to alter and change the state's territorial boundary (Nageshwar 2014), yet such an approach is highly emotionally charged at the moment. Unconventional deterritorialise alternative administrative system of a state within a state would be an ideal approach. An 'out of box' approach of the devolution of power mechanism in which the community who owned the territory is making its own governing system can be considered. Democratic structure of deterritorialise administration and a state within a state mechanism can somehow deal with the competing and contrasting slogans of territorial integration and territorial integrity.

Territory cannot be recreated. It is fixed and immovable yet the boundary can be reorganised. So also institutions, organizations and legislations can be modified and

deconstructed depending on the situation. Based on the nature, function and requirement, the structure of administration can transcend across territories. The conventional understanding of the notion of a nation's sovereignty is changing in the fast globalising world. From a relatively spotted island, now the nation-state is slowly but steadily moving towards a club and a member of 'network society'. Likewise, most of the multilateral organisations, legislations and transnational institutions are deterritorialised in their function.

Moreover, the existence of non-state armed actors cannot be seen in isolation of ethnic tension (Barbora 2002), which had been manifested even before the creation of states particularly, in Manipur. Since non-state armed actors have been nurtured by respective ethnic communities, various stakeholders ought to express their views. The government as a dominant player through 'Act East' policy is expected to demonstrate its unbiased fearless dynamic role to bring together different conflicting ethnic groups to a common platform. It doesn't mean that serious initiatives and credible engagements among different ethnic communities at the people level are less crucial. Certainly, it is imperative to have sustained and healthy dialogue at the level of people to evolve an atmosphere of mutual respect. No confrontation can change an inherent neighborhood and co-existence. However, when the perpetuation of territorial *statusquism* is one of the legitimate reasons for continuation of non-state armed actors, it is expected that all the stakeholders spell out the options to redeem the conflict situation. Without exploring the options but just beating the drum of *status quo* will be as good as stimulating the conflict.

Conclusion

Analyses unfold that what is seen as democratic process at times becomes undemocratic. It shows that institutionalisation of states as means of democratisation can at times be bitter like any other forms of conflict. The astringent consequence of democratisation was often owing to a top-down approach. In addition, democratic arrangement that led to the formation of states does not address the issue of institutionalised violence. Instead, states function in a well militarised environment where large scale deployment of security forces is considered a necessity to contain the non-state armed actors. Thus, the compelling contemporary realities coupled with the government's commitment to bring about a facelift of the Northeast region through 'Act East' policy, it is expected that a sincere alternative democratic system of governance will be considered. To prevent the region from

deteriorating and to make 'Act East' policy truly people centric, the government needs to muster political will to come out with an alternative system of democratic governance.

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Perspective Section

Social Justice and the Humanities Classroom

Rina Ramdev & Debaditya Bhattacharya

Abstract

In 2021 undergraduate literature departments at the University of Delhi, were forced into a controversy that erupted from the university's decision to excise the works of Mahasweta Devi, as well as that of Dalit writers, Bama and Sukirtharani from the existing Women's Writing course. With the furore this created, discussion fora were rife debating not just the politics of the excisions, but also the imperiled possible futures of teaching caste, gender, class, and attendant social justice issues. In our essay while we use the syllabus fracas as our entry point, we focus on the aporias that besiege the literature classroom, and how the curating of its space as a site for the teaching of progressive politics can itself be terminal — one that might forever prevent the creation of critical solidarities with infrastructures that lie outside the classroom, and the university.

Keywords Delhi University, Mahasweta Devi, Gender, Caste, Humanities, Social Justice

Introduction

In 2021 undergraduate literature departments at the University of Delhi, were forced into a controversy that erupted from the university's decision to excise the works of Mahasweta Devi, as well as that of dalit writers, Bama and Sukirtharani from the existing Women's Writing course taught to students of B.A. Hons English. With the furore this created, discussion fora were rife debating not just the politics of the excisions, but also the imperiled possible futures of teaching caste, gender, class, and attendant social justice issues. In our essay while we use the syllabus fracas as our entry point, we will not be looking at either the history of the syllabus' drafting, or the specifics and details of the embroilment as they played out at the university. What we will instead focus on, are the aporias that besiege the literature classroom, and how the curating of its space as a site for the teaching of progressive politics can itself be terminal — one that might forever prevent

the creation of critical solidarities with infrastructures that lie outside the classroom, and the university.

Courses of discontent

While the censoring of content and the proscribing of certain writers for their politics is an attempt to thwart the classroom as a potential site for an imaginative training of the student, and in that a reasonable cause for alarm — it can also counterintuitively congeal into a self-congratulatory rhetoric that asks, ‘How do we now teach caste, class and gender?’ As a lament it seems to announce, a sudden diminishing of the power that we invested our classroom pedagogies with. Implicit in this is a paralysis, as though this recent checkmating by the university has wrought an impasse that will henceforth prevent us from doing what we had historically been doing rather successfully.

In addressing this as impasse, it is crucial that we first account for all that the university has historically sought a wily precluding and excising of, and one that the university’s neoliberal shift now promotes through policy changes, such as the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP). With the beast of technocratisation stealthily advancing upon the university, demands for a skilification of the student body as future workforce has forced Literature departments in the past decade, into a teaching of corporate utility courses like, Business English, Technical Writing, English Language Teaching — this even as institutions madly race for gradings and excellence mounted upon empty performances for bureaucratised accrediting bodies like the NAAC. Paralleling this, has been the assault on courses and centres specifically set up to promote social justice research across the country. Between 2002 and 2007, under the aegis of the Tenth Five Year Plan several interdisciplinary social science research programmes had been envisioned by the government to be set up as fully functioning centres for research. The initiative was extended to universities like Jadavpur University, Manipur University, Jawahar Lal Nehru University, among others, where similar centres were instituted within their campuses. These were to initiate research and teaching work based on guidelines that came from the Planning Commission — guidelines that were aimed primarily at the study of structural exclusions as they percolatively affect caste, religion, gender and class. Although inaugurated with a one time, non-recurring financial assistance, subsequent 11th

and 12th Plans included their funding in their budgeting — allowing thus for a degree of relative stability (Bhattacharya, 2019).

Then in a sudden move in 2013, the UPA-2 government sent notices to 32 Centres warning them of their imminent defunding. A concerted campaign by progressive groups from within civil society, along with those from academia, sought to forestall it by bringing the larger public's attention to this threat of closure. It was finally only after the National Commission of Scheduled Castes (NCSC) intervened and asserted pressure, that the move was successfully thwarted and status quo maintained. But with the Modi government coming to power in 2014, came also the abolition of the Planning Commission and the termination of its ten-year plans, with the last Twelfth Plan coming to an end in March 2017. In place of a forward looking, ten-year structured planned expenditure, the NITI Aayog was instituted— that has since, only invested itself in private, corporate interests, willfully neglecting urgent issues, be it those relating to social justice or environmental sustainability. In its trajectory thus, it carried the inevitability of the defunding of these centres.

In March 2017, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) served termination letters to several of its teaching and non-teaching faculty, and while no reasons were given, speculations read this as coming from the threat of closure that their departments faced, namely, Centre for Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, Advanced Centre for Women's Studies and Nodal Centre of Excellence for Human Rights Education, owing to the withdrawal of government funding. This came on the heels of another letter that the Registrar in JNU received, announcing a similar fate for its Centre for the Study of Discrimination and Exclusion. Fortunately, public pressure foiled the move, and also in a strange turn of events, the UGC publicly put out a clarification claiming that the letter to the Registrar was forged, and its contents untrue. While at the TISS and JNU, defunding assaults were thwarted, several other such centres and departments structured to take on issues of social justice pedagogically, were unable to escape this fating by the state. Those like Jadavpur University's School of Women's Studies, and Manipur University's Centre for Social Exclusion, are among several hundred that remain precariously balanced, still in wait for the government's decision regarding their funding status. This threatening uncertainty has also quite predictably, felled these centres irreparably — with both faculty and researchers looking to leave before they are actually forced into doing so (Bhattacharya, 2019).

Histories of neglect

While marking this, it is crucial to not forget that barring a few universities, there is a singular absence of programmes at the undergraduate level that allow for Honours degrees, in say, gender or caste studies. This marked absence along with the funding threat constantly besieging existing departments, reveals the deprioritizing of issues of social inequities by the state aligned university bureaucracy. The lack of administrative will to bring about a policy change in the way curricula are designed, is in keeping with the state's own unwillingness to invest in anything beyond tokenistic concessional gestures. This was evident in the scuttling of a core paper at Delhi University that members of the English syllabus committee had drafted on 'Caste and Literature'. This was a course that sought to demarginalize caste issues — issues that have either remained peripheralized, or been absented from our teaching and curricula. Despite the importance of this decanonising intervention, a minor technicality that could very well have been debated in light of the urgency of the belated inclusion of this paper, was deftly mobilised to move 'Caste and Literature' into a set of optional courses that students need not compulsorily study. This relegative move is indicative of the university's unwillingness to create classroom and campus cultures that foment critical conversations around 'sensitive' subjects like caste or even patriarchy and sexuality. Within this sanctimonious proscribing lies an institutionalised attempt at producing a docilised student subject — one who is unquestioning of historical hierarchies and normative representations of the status quo, and one who is to be forever shielded from imagining any critical overhauling of inherited thinking and practices.

The current day excising of certain writers from a syllabus thus comes marked through inevitabilities that have always existed. As far as the impasse forced upon the teaching of caste, class, gender is concerned, it is vital to first critically defetishise this triad, gestured at as a pedagogic blueprint — eternally propped and stationed in our literature classrooms for easy regurgitation. In the pursuit of political radicalism, it carries the promise of institutionalising our progressive utility as it were, one that can also be showcased every time the humanities are forced into answering the common public's charge of their futility and 'unprofitableness'. In fact, this vanguardism is no different from that other self-promoting messianic role that humanities scholars

ever so often accord themselves. Within their aggrandising of the discipline is the citing of a vanguardist relevance, a romanticising of the non-empirical, anti-sociological, wherein the scholar chooses ambiguity and abstraction— a vaunted Keatsian negative capability, while on his quest to read and live critically.

Curated classrooms

Mahasweta Devi's *Senanayak* (Devi, 2016) is a cold reminding of that very same hubris. As a commander of the Special Forces hunting down the insurrectionary adivasi, Senanayak wields an anti-fascist paperback— and the desire to know the enemy by being the enemy through an intimate knowledge. His narcissism is forced to confront Draupadi's naked, raped body that defies and mocks his reading. Like the self-congratulating scholar-teacher, 'dealing with' issues of caste class, and gender, he can locate himself variedly, 'if he can change colour from world to world, he can represent the particular world in question' (Devi, 2016, 20).

With this, it is important to remind ourselves that our teaching is organised through an intent that does not radically allow for the possibility of change, except in the showcased debates and discussions that we attempt to populate our classrooms with. In our teaching and conversations we bring in issues of caste, class and gender, under the assumption that subalternity is both generalisable and translatable into a language that we know and understand, within structures that we work with, through a disciplinary expertise that is ours. But when mounted thus as an act of philanthropic knowing, subalternity resists our appropriative translation. Teaching remains an exercise limited to a ventriloquising that mutes the other — until it leaps on us like Devi's Draupadi (Devi, 2016, 33), countering Senanayak's reading of the body of the adivasi. Talking of caste, class, gender within the confines of the classroom leads us to the aporias of talking, to its limits. Any talk of change will never really achieve the purpose it sets out to, for crucially we are unable to begin with an undoing of the self, that has to be initiated through an unconditional criticism of our own historical locations.

An imaginative training in the classroom must necessarily start with the self under critical scrutiny — an act of self-critique. And yet again, this cannot remain sublimated, curated within the

classroom through ‘empathised’ solidarities. It needs to exceed its pedagogic limits to become praxis, extend itself to infrastructures that exist outside the university. Our trained pedagogies of social justice must exit the classroom, and attempt a forging of coalitions outside with other precariats.

We are then talking of caste, class, gender as not circumvented by a beleaguering of the English syllabus, and the very real impoverishment that we see of courses in the proscribing of writers like Bama, Sukirtharani and Mahasweta Devi, but in a reading of their work, of the critical lessons that we encounter in their writing, and our attempt at taking these outside our classrooms, and our ivory-towered, red-bricked university walls — to create intimacies that have historically not been possible because of the exclusions that our universities have thrived on. We must read the work of these writers not just for their representations of subalternity, but as important reminders of the violence they mark. For theirs is also a writing ranged against the elitism of the university and its self-congratulatory curating of social justice issues within the classroom.

En-countering the self

Devi’s Senanayak forever haunts our teaching, reminding us of our will to translate and appropriate the adivasi, the other, read her, counter her in an encountering that will unsettle both an intellectualised expertise and the humanist empathy that marks the hubris of our teaching. In this we must allow for a willed critique of our many teaching, scholarly selves, and of the classroom we inhabit with our reading, and prepare for a radical undoing of all that we had propped ourselves on.

Finally, then it is not about ‘where’ one can bring in caste, class, gender, when spaces like the Centres mentioned earlier are being deliberately dismantled for any, or all of the pedagogic returns they might have made possible. The university at the behest of the state could close all such spaces now, and in the future too —every single time a centre’s programme or a department’s syllabus portends minimally a threat. It finally is upon us, how we wield this tragic knowledge of the university’s broken promise, as we learn to not despair over the destruction of an existing site of the ‘where’ but turn our attention to the ‘how’, to think on how we will inhabit those limits which are

guilty of such exclusions within the university, and also rearrange our imaginative resources from our caste, class, gender lessons to forge coalitions outside our privileged locations.

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The New Order to Replace the Old in Imayam's Selected Short Stories

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Abstract

The French sociologist Durkheim saw 'Modernity' as a new form of thinking that would change the way individuals functioned in society, taking away the overarching order in which humanity, nature, and God were interlinked and functioned as the higher power and order of life in traditional societies. It began to examine the relationship and function those traditional institutions, customs, and morals had on the individual and society. Traditional societies were technologically primitive and had little control over nature and the environment, though they were closely associated with them. Traditions and traditional practices united people, but modernity often distances people from one another. Writer Imayam has created a distinction between the traditional and modern way of life through a few characters in his work. In his short story collection, he explains how time changes as people adapt themselves to this modern world. In his two short stories, "Life Force" and "A House and its Door" in the collection Video Mariamman and other stories, he tells about the change that comes over in the minds and lives of people. The present paper deals with such change in the lives of people due to the influences of modern life and media.

Keywords: tradition, modernity, people, change, influence.

Methodology Adapted: Durkheim's concept of Modernity is applied in the paper to examine the lives of the characters in the stories.

“The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.”

Lord Tennyson – Morte d’Arthur

Writer Imayam, the pen name of V. Annamalai, is a Tamil novelist from Chennai, who made his mark on the Tamil literary scene with his very first novel *Koveru Kazhuthaigal* published in 1994. He has seven novels, six short story collections, and a novella to his credit. He is strongly associated with the Dravidian movement and its politics and is regarded as one of South India’s top writers. He received the Sahitya Akademy Award for his work *Selladhapanam*. He has also received awards from the governments of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and India, including the Agni Aksra Award, the Tamil Nadu Progressive Writer’s Association Award, the N.L.C Award, and the TamizhThendralThiruV.Ka.Award.

Imayam brings to the foreground the contradictions in the economic and socio-cultural spheres and the cruelties of domination prevailing in the villages of Tamil Nadu by focusing on the inhumane attitude of the dominant class.

The sociologist Emile Durkheim defines modernity in the perspective of social solidarity. His idea is that the greater the differentiation is, the more modernity there would be. Functional reliance is a result of people depending on one another and this keeps the society in a state of solidarity. Durkheim’s explanation of modernity revolves around this idea. Pre-modern societies, according to Durkheim, were characterised by people following the monotonous everyday routines, but contemporary societies are characterised by people performing highly specific tasks. Modernity, as it is a new form of thinking, would change the way the individuals function in society, taking away the predominant way in which humanity, nature, and god were interlinked and functioned as the higher powers and order of life in the traditional societies. It began examining the relationship and function the traditional institutions, customs, and morals had on both the individuals and the society.

Imayam who says “My writing helps me understand both society and the world I live in,” has created a distinction between the traditional and modern way of life through the portrayal of his characters. In his short story collection, he explains how time changes as people adapt themselves to this modern world. In his two short stories “Life Force” and “A House and its Door” in the collection *Video Marriamman and other*

Short Stories, he talks about the change that comes over the minds and lives of people. Modernity is the innovative way in which the new philosophies seek to demolish and replace the old and “established forms of knowledge that depended on religious authority, such as the world, with those new forms of knowledge that depended upon experience, experiment, and reason quintessentially science” (Hamilton 1992, P.29).

Durkheim was mainly concerned about the emergence of individualism and new thought. He believed that strong relationships were necessary to maintain solidarity, which he believed, was necessary for society to function properly.

The character Ramasami in “Life Force” argues angrily with his father regarding the sale of the land. He argued that when everyone in town is ready to sell their land his father is the only person who does not agree. In spite of the son’s persistence, the father refuses to comply saying that he would not agree to sell the land as long as he lives. The father is so much attached to the land because for so many years they have been feeding on the produce of the land. After fulfilling their needs, he has sold the rest of the produce so as to get his daughters married. Moreover, the father feels that they have respect in the town because of the land only. The writer says about the situation:

All those who owned lands by side of the national highway had become rich in just a month. Saying that he was going to build a company, a northerner had bought all the lands near the road within a month. He had paid one or two lakhs for land worth 20,000 or 30,000 rupees... The old man wondered where the money could have come from. ‘Even if he pays me in crores, I may give up my life, but not this land. Isn’t she the Bhooma Devi who feeds us?’ he [The old man] murmured. (Imayam, Life force, 2021, p. 45)

Company owners are buying lands at a high price, even the ones that have low value, to build companies. This shows that society is moving towards modern times. This collection of short stories illustrates the transformation that is taking place and the change that has come over the attitudes of people – the traditional older generation with a strong sense of belonging and the modern, materialistic younger generation mad after money. In ancient times people have been leading a peaceful and happy life with their family and relatives. With the onset of modern ideas and values, the culture of the people, their lifestyle, and behavior also change. People sell their land where new companies are built. Even the landlords who are eating from their lands have to go to the shops for buying their own goods with money. New cement has been laid across the towns which were dirty roads.

Modernization has become an unavoidable feature of human life, as nations compete for dominance over one another. Modernity has its own benefits. The only problem mankind face is preserving, regulating, and respecting the culture and tradition in the face of threats from other countries. Being conscious of the fact that the actions and changes taking place today will have an impact on future generations, people should be careful in whatever they do.

Traditional practices and customs are also frequently changed to suit the needs of the people and the day. Though people need not follow meaningless practices and customs, they should try to understand the meaning behind traditional practices. If they are meaningful and valuable, they should be upheld. It is worthwhile to make a note of what Duncan Macaullum remarks in this context: “By tradition, I do not mean that docile transmission of some deposit, but rather the living repetition that manages to suggest a fresh truth. There is no such thing as a tradition that exists of its own accord. Instead and always tradition has to be embraced and cultivated.”

T.S Eliot in his critical essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” considers tradition as a dynamic force. Tradition has to move forward because it has historical sense, perception of the pastness of past and its present thus being timeless as well as temporal. In this sense, tradition is dynamic.

In India, tradition is deep- rooted in the lives of people. Joint family system, various rituals, family set up, festivals, reverence for elders, religious beliefs, idol worship, superstitions, sainthood, belief in rebirth and reincarnation, matching horoscope prior to marriage, authorized secondary position of women are some positive and negative shades of Indian tradition. As a part of traditional society, everyone is expected to follow these traditions. These traditions and practices are instilled in the minds of the children right from their birth. But the conflict or chaos arises when a person who is adhering to modernity or non-conformity calls these time-honored traditions as meaningless. Growing advancement, technological growth, modernization, and impact of the West have given a setback to traditional Indian society to a certain extent. As in the words of Henry Puckett: “People are going ahead of the traditional role and they are eager to shape the forms and normalities to rejoice themselves. The unsettling pattern of Tradition is yoked and people are interested in settlement . . . the result in inevitable chaos and anarchy” (qtd. in Singh,1).

Tradition gives people a sense of security and belonging. It unites families and allows them to reconnect with old friends. Freedom, faith, integrity, solid education, personal responsibility, strong work ethics, and the concept of selflessness are reinforced by tradition. Cultural modernization and modernization include modern cultural change. Modernization is influenced by culture in three ways: (1) positive effects such as science and technical knowledge; (2) negative effects such as feudalism; (3) neutral effects, such as languages and the arts, and the like.

Small-scale civilizations or components of cultures that are inherited from indigenous and often ancient cultural traditions are referred to as “traditional.” The term “modern” refers to activities associated with the industrial method of production or the growth of large-scale, frequently colonial cultures. Traditions are an important part of our society. They aid in the formation of family and society’s structures and foundations. Because some items are unavailable, recipes are modified. Traditions may alter as a result of the difficulty of maintaining them in a new country or as a new community evolves or when people want a drastic change. Some people do not believe that their ethnic roots are important in their life; hence they do not keep ethnic traditions alive.

Shakunthala and Revathi, of “A House and its Door” are college friends who meet after a long time. Being good friends, they used to share everything with each other. Shakunthala comes to meet Revathi without giving her prior notice. She manages to find the house and rings the doorbell. When Revathi opens the door, she is filled with amazement on seeing Revathi and welcomes her. After having a chat with each other happily, Shakunthala sees a foreign dog in the house staring at her. Shakunthala finds that all the items in Revathi’s house are modern. Then Shakunthala invites her for her daughter’s wedding. When Revathi enquires Shakunthala about her job, she says that she is the President of the village panchayat. She tells Revathi:

I am the president. But like always, I only do the cooking, washing clothes – I continue to do only housework. . . I have completed nine years. The BDO office, the collector’s office, I have never been to any of those places much . . . I have never sat on the president’s chair . . . He does all the signing . . . He encashes the cheques . . . Wherever a lady is the president, councilor or chairman, this is what

happens. The whole town, world, knows this to be a fact. It is no secret. He even goes to schools and hoists flags, do you know that? Nobody in the village says anything about it all. (Imayam, A House and its Door, 2021, pp. 280-81)

The talk between Revathi and Shakunthala goes on like this. Revathi brings a box from the fridge and offers her chocolates and asks her if she would like to have Coke or Fanta. When Shakunthala asks her if she can have buttermilk or lime juice, Revathi replies: “It has been more than ten years since we discarded all those drinks. Nowadays, whether someone visits us, or whether we visit some house, it is always cool drinks. To what age do you belong?” (Imayam, A House and its Door, 2021, p. 282)

The two friends suffer due to the prevalent patriarchal system. Shakunthala continues to tell Revathi about her place and role in the house, “Where he gets his loans from, what he spends on, I know nothing about any of these things. I never ask. Even if I ever do ask, he says, ‘This is of no concern to you’” (Imayam, A House and its Door, 2021, p. 283). Shakunthala continues to tell her about her husband and the way of the world. The world has become so corrupted, and it is difficult to change things. People have become materialistic, mad after money and power, giving importance to name and fame and not to values. Shakunthala tells Revathi,

Only after my standing for elections, he has become a man without a character. He started by buying brandy for the people of the village, but now he has also started drinking every day. . . He keeps buying them brandy. The people of the village take advantage of this and drink to their hearts’ content. . . Who listens to what I say? I am nominated only for my name’s sake, no? Intoxication from power is greater than addiction to liquor. . . Even if the reservation quota goes up to 100 percent for women, the same conditions prevail. It looks like nothing will change. What does it matter to us what happens? (Imayam, A House and its Door, 2021, p. 284)

The two friends thus talk about their condition. Shakunthala sees in Revathi’s house all that a modern house has. The house looked grand with a flat TV, sofas, curtains; two air conditioned rooms, dining table, dressing table, and showcase. It had granite flooring and the kitchen is modular. Despite the house being filled with all these modern amenities, the husbands are still patriarchal stereotypes. When Shakunthala asked about Revathi’s husband, she started telling about her job as a teacher:

When I first went to work, my pay with all allowances including, was only 910 rupees. Now I get 64,000. The pay has gone up. The house has three floors. The number of things in the house has increased. We have two AC cars. There is money in the bank. Both the children have started working. There are jewelries in the locker, a dog of a foreign breed tied outside the building; two hundred rupees are spent each day on just the dog... I have everything; but only happiness is missing.

(Imayam, *A House and its Door*, 2021, p. 286) Revathi who appears to be very happy externally, has similar problems like Shakunthala. Both suffer under the tyranny of patriarchy. Revathi works hard and earns her salary but she never has any access to her salary. She does not know the even the pin number of her ATM card. When she wants to help her mother or brother, she is helpless as her husband will only give money for her expenses and she has to show him the bills. She has lost all the happiness and spirits she had during her childhood. She tells Shakunthala, “When we were studying, my father would send only twenty- five rupees a month. . . How happy I would feel when I get that money! My heart would be full. Now, when I get 64,000, I don’t have that joy . . . You know, all our happiness lasts only till the time we, as children, are with our parents. All laughter; all life” (Imayam, *A House and its Door*, 2021, p. 287)

She cannot even contribute her share for the funeral expenses of a person who had been working in their house for the past three generations.

My mother is a diabetic. I get a 64,000- rupee salary and my mother stands in the queue for a whole day to get free medicines at the government hospital. The ATM card is with him. . . I have never used the card and taken out money. I don’t even know its pin number . . . She wiped her tears with the corner of her sari. . . The minute the pay gets credited into the account, a message will come to him and that too, only to him. . . Do you know that every day, he would place twenty rupees on the table for bus fare? I can’t say one rupee more or less. He asks for the bill. (Imayam, *A House and its Door*, 2021, pp. 287-89)

Though the house and flats are in her name, she cannot do anything with her money because her money is in the control of her husband. “There is one kind of working woman who will say, ‘This is my ATM card. It should be with me’. . . There is one kind that says, ‘I’ll come with you,’ . . . ‘My type, who are

ignorant of their own pin numbers” (Imayam, *A House and its Door*, 2021, p. 291). She knows that she belongs to the third category.

Shakunthala’s condition is worse than that of Revathi. Shakunthala’s husband is more of a tyrant. Though Revathi’s husband seems to be modern in the outlook, has not changed. He does not accept his son’s love for a lower caste girl. He says, “If one gets educated, gets employed, can one become a person of upper caste?” While talking about her condition, Revathi starts crying and Shakunthala consoles her saying, “Each house has a door. You appear to be the house; your husband the door. It is the same all over the world” (Imayam, *A House and its Door*, 2021, p. 292) Both Revathi’s and Shakunthala’s husbands give more importance to status and position in the society but keep their wives under their control without granting them the required independence. How much ever change has come in the society, a few women are still living under the old rule. “The role of women has greatly changed since 1840. One of the most significant changes for women has been with the power to have control over their bodies. In the 1840’s women had the idea that they were only housewives and that was their duty. This idea is significantly different from that of the 20th century.”

Since independence, the position of Indian women has significantly transformed. Though women now have equal opportunities in school, work place, and politics as a result of structural and cultural reforms, the exploitation of women still continue.

The centuries of slavery has ended. Today women want equality, education and due recognition. The advancement of women is the most significant fact of modern India as Gandhiji said “woman is the noblest of God’s creation, supreme in her own sphere of activity.”

His words must be realized and women should be accorded their due dignity, respect, and freedom.

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Commentary Section

The Dilemma of Identity Crisis of Afropolitan Minds in *A Bit of Difference* by Sefi Atta

Sangavi. K, & S. Kalamani

Abstract

Identity is genuinely a multifaceted concept. The migrants living in foreign countries often face an identity crisis due to religious and cultural differences. The novel, A Bit of Difference, also deals with the identity crisis experienced by the protagonist, Deola Bello, a single woman of 39 years, working for an International Charity, and the secondary character, Bandele Davis, who identifies himself with an ambivalent sexuality stream. These characters are seen with well-adaptive and broad Afropolitan thinking due to their exposure to the Western Land and traditions. But they are not ultimately adaptive when it comes to living under the typical societal norms that are imposed on Nigerian society. Eventually, they face an identity crisis as they are unable to express themselves due to their lifestyle preferences in their native land, Nigeria. The epitome of African Diaspora is very much evident in the characters of Atta, most of whom have acquired their freedom far away from their native soil. Most of the migrants ignore the idea of returning home. This paper focuses on how the characters with Afropolitan thinking are trying to embrace the reality of societal shackles concerning their lifestyle, sexuality, and modern thoughts.

Keywords: Identity Crisis, Afropolitanism, Homosexuality, Diaspora, Patriarchy.

Methodology Adopted

The theory of Afropolitanism is broadly applied in this research paper and the Queer theory is applied with reference to dealing with the secondary character, Bandele Davis. This research paper adopts the formatting techniques and other regulations that comply with the Chicago Style.

Post-colonial countries are influenced by Western culture, language, and education. These countries adore the Westerners and express the impact by adopting their ways of life; this happens especially when the citizens of post-colonial countries travel to Western countries and encounter myriad problems in the assimilation process. One such problem is the identity crisis faced by these people, simultaneously with the cultural conflicts. Identity is a complex idea. Identity can be defined as a distinctive feature of a person or a trait shared by all members of a social group or category in psychology and sociology. It is a person's interpretation and presentation of their uniqueness or social affiliations, such as national and cultural identity.

Erik Erikson, a developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst, used the term "identity crisis" to describe one of the most crucial conflicts people face during their development. According to Erik Erikson, an identity crisis is a period of intense introspection and experimenting with various ways of looking at oneself. Migrants encounter this difficulty when they move to a new nation because of religious and cultural differences (Kabouche 2021).

The migration further leads to the development of critical thinking as they start viewing their homeland from a different perspective. This eventually pushes the migrated people to suffer another trip in the phase of identity crisis when they return to their native land. But this westernised thinking and their constant acquaintances with globalised perspectives make them develop the sense of Afropolitanism later in their life.

Afropolitanism is a concept that indicates an aspect of the African people's identity as well as their philosophical attitude towards the world. It is a conceptual area where African heritage realities are acknowledged and questioned in the context of understanding the complexities of contemporary globalisation. It is broadly conceptualised in a cultural, intellectual, psychological, cultural, social and spiritual space rather than confined to just a geographical one.

Taiye Selasi invented the term "Afropolitanism" in her 2005 article, "Bye Bye Babar." Selasi, the daughter of a Nigerian mother and a Ghanaian father, was born in London in 1979 and studied American Studies at Yale and International Relations at Oxford before settling in Rome. She describes her identity as a

local of Accra, New York, Berlin, and Rome (Selasi, Don't ask where I'm from, ask where I'm a local 2014). She describes Afropolitan as follows:

They are Afropolitans – the newest generation of African emigrants, coming soon or collected already at a law firm/chem lab/jazz lounge near you. You'll know us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes. Some of us are ethnic mixes, e.g. Ghanaian and Canadian, Nigerian and Swiss; others merely cultural mutts: American accent, European affect, African ethos. Most of us are multilingual: in addition to English and a Romantic or two, we understand some indigenous tongue[s] and speak a few urban vernaculars. There is at least one place on The African Continent to which we tie our sense of self: be it a nation-state (Ethiopia), a city (Ibadan), or an auntie's kitchen. Then there's the G8 city or two (or three) that we know like the backs of our hands and the various institutions that know us for our famed focus. We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world. (Selasi 2005)

Selasi's definition is notable for its emphasis on modernity, sophistication, success, and worldliness as if it were written with the goal of eradicating all negative stereotypes about Africa. Her age, she claims, is the new, promising African generation, born of highly skilled Africans who emigrated to the West in the 1960s and 1970s.

According to Selasi, the present generation of Africans are in the vanguard of attempting to comprehend and complicate Africa. Perhaps the most defining feature of the Afropolitan mindset is the refusal to oversimplify; the desire to comprehend what is wrong with Africa while still honouring what is good and distinctive.

On the other hand, Afropolitanism has been defined by Cameroonian cultural critic Achille Mbembe as an ethical position of being accessible to others through the occupation of multiple cultural spaces. He coined the word after conducting scholarly research on South Africa in transition, focusing on cosmopolitan Johannesburg, where he came from (Pucherova 2018).

Afropolitanism, as Mbembe noted in an interview, refers to a way—or a set of ways—in which Africans, or people of African descent, see themselves as part of the world rather than separate beings from it. Pucherova in this regard quotes Balakrishnan, “historically, Africa has been defined in the Hegelian paradigm as out of history, as not belonging to the world.” Mbembe highlights Afropolitanism as an identity

founded on existence through others or by relation, rather than exclusion or hostility; an identity whose allegiance is to the global human community. According to Mbembe, Afropolitanism is:

the awareness of this imbrication of here and elsewhere, the presence of the elsewhere in the here and vice versa, this relativization of roots and primary belongings and a way of embracing, fully cognizant of origins, the foreign, the strange and the distant, this capacity to recognize oneself in the face of another and to value the traces of the distant within the proximate, to domesticate the unfamiliar, to work with all manner of contradictions—it is this cultural sensibility, historical and aesthetic, that suggests the term Afropolitanism. (Skinner 2017)

The protagonists of Afropolitan stories are youths who are highly professional as a result of Western education or aspirations to obtain Western education, and they continually bounce between Africa and the West, nevertheless fitting into both. Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference* (2013), Biyi Bandele's *The Street* (1999), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americannah* (2013), Segun Aflobi's *Goodbye Lucille* (2008), and Zukiswa Wanner's *London – Cape Town – Joburg* (2014) are a few instances of Afropolitan books.

Sefi Atta is one of the rare authors who incorporates an Afropolitan narrative into her work. She was born in the Lagos of Nigerian, in 1964. She travels between England, the United States, and Nigeria. She graduated from Antioch University in Los Angeles with a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing. She is a novelist, playwright, and short-story writer. She is also a recipient of various notorious awards like the Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa in 2006. *Writing Contemporary Nigeria: How Sefi Atta Illuminates African Culture and Tradition*, released by Cambria Press in 2015, is a critical analysis of her novels and short stories. *A Bit of Difference*, Atta's third novel, was published in 2013. Deola Bello, the protagonist of the novel, is an independent Nigerian lady whose actions go against conventional Nigerian ideals. Deola is

blissfully single at the age of 39. She has become a British citizen who lives and works in London for an International Charity.

Even though she calls Nigeria her home, Deola sees herself as a “Nigerian expatriate in London” (Atta 2015, 11) who enjoys living there. Deola, like Ifemelu of *Americanah*, is the ideal of Afropolitanism: a successful, high-achieving, cosmopolitan African lady who knows the “ways of the world,” having attended a British boarding school and summer camps in Switzerland, and then studying at the London School of Economics. Deola is more tolerant than the usual Nigerians because of her upbringing in multicultural

London and extensive travel. Among her pals are church-going Nigerians, as well as gay Nigerian males and secular white feminists. Nigerian patriarchal and conservative attitudes are the main reasons for her preference to live in London; other reasons being Nigeria's malfunctioning infrastructure and services.

Atta's novel focuses on the functioning of government in the Nigerian society and the reasons for the individuals leaving the country, "How had Nigeria governed itself after independence? Two failed attempts at civilian governments, a four-year civil war and God knows how many military regimes in between. . . . All we have is oil money circulating in our economy. The whole banking sector is running on laundered money. The whole of Nigeria is" (Atta 2015, 55, 73).

According to Deola, charity in Africa is quite challenging since aid is frequently squandered: "I don't see Africans helping each other that much either. . . . That is why charities annoy us so much. We don't care about each other" (129). She is keen to point out that Nigerians have no compassion for other Africans or even fellow Nigerians when there are so many British and Nigerian immigration laws concerned with charity.

Deola's Afropolitanism has become more of her lifestyle choice than an ethical attitude in this sense. Deola chooses to stay in a hotel with an internet connection and uninterrupted electricity rather than at her parents' house on a visit home, which emphasise the fact, how "unhomed" she is. She struggles to completely accept the Nigerian environment for what it has become as a society with rigid societal norms when all she wants is to identify herself as an independent woman of her own choices. Deola's estrangement and uneasiness are recurring themes throughout the story.

The novel, *A Bit of Difference*, is harshly critical of Nigerian corruption at all levels, as well as the overall lack of social awareness and empathy for one's fellow citizens. Nigeria is considered an extremely unequal country, with migration to the West widening the gap between the rich and the poor.

In modern literary criticism, gender has become a contentious issue. Judith Butler, a gender theorist, has explained The Social Construction of Gender Theory as "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." In Simone de Beauvoir's concept, sex is distinguished from gender, and it is argued that gender is a developed characteristic of personality rather than a biological trait (Butler 1990).

Theories of gender, sex, and sexuality as fundamental essences have been used to establish many sexual "types" - heterosexuals, homosexuals, bisexuals, and others. Sexuality, sex, and gender are all

intertwined. Typical beliefs on masculinity and femininity are the “appropriate” ways for men and women to act, which have formed societal meanings of sexuality. Natural sexual conduct comprised only heterosexual desires and actions and was regarded as the “normal”; any other sexual category that does not comply with society’s norms is regarded as “abnormal” (Kabouche 2021). Many countries have implemented anti-LGBT legislation. Despite the fact that the regulations are rarely implemented, they have serious repercussions for LGBT people. These individuals are inclined to deal with a range of psychological disorders, ranging from self-hatred to despair to alienation, which is why the majority of LGBT people choose to live in other European nations that accept their sexual orientation.

Sefi Atta has a strong narrative voice and is not hesitant to tackle controversial topics. Atta addresses homosexuality as an issue in her novel, *A Bit of Difference*, challenging the traditional and preconceived conception of African sexuality as a homogeneous body. Homosexuality is seen as a “non-African” impact of the West on Africa. In a review of “Recent Trends,” Marc Eprechet discusses how African authors are increasingly writing about non-traditional sexualities in order to demonstrate that their texts are “not consistently and dogmatically homophobic or heterosexist” (Mtenje 2016). This involves providing homosexuals with the respect that is actively lacking in most African nation-states’ politically homophobic speech, as well as challenging the status quo of homosexuality as un-African.

In the novel, *A Bit of Difference*, Bandele Davis, who identifies himself in the stream of ambivalent sexuality, comes to England to attend a decent college. As soon as Bandele arrives in England, he starts to demolish his native identity to become a British citizen. He absorbs all Western standards of living, acting, and behaving. His quick adaptation is well described by the author as, “He sounded completely English, and all she knew about Nigerians who spoke that way was that they looked down on Nigerians who didn’t” (Atta 2015, 45).

Despite the fact that Bandele has left Nigeria and maintains a distance from the Nigerians in London, he is concerned about what others expect of him and what they would say about his sexual orientation. “Knowing what the natives are like?” (Atta 2015, 222), he acted all masculine and ruthless so that his sexuality wouldn’t be questioned because he was afraid of Nigerian judgmental attitudes towards him. He is a multifaceted, complex character who has numerous conscious motives for acting the way he does.

Bandele left his motherland to distance himself from the mainstream heterosexual culture and society because of his differences. The understanding that he is different is quickly followed by the realisation that

his difference is terrible, embarrassing, and should not be discussed publicly. Because his ambivalent sexuality is considered a sin, crime, and psychiatric condition in his home country Nigeria, he chooses to exile himself from his friends and family. Bandele chooses England as his new home because it offers him a level of freedom and security that he could not find in Nigeria. Bandele's further aversion for his native is shown in the following lines:

'Where is home?' Bandele asks.

'Where else?'

He rubs his chin. 'Nigeria is not my home.'

'It's home for me.'

'Good luck to you. I haven't been back in so long I'd probably catch dengue fever the moment I set foot in that country.' (Atta 2015, 50)

Atta gives a clear picture of colonialism's repercussions on African people, particularly homosexual individuals. Bandele conceals his true sexual identity, leading to the abandonment of his other identity and to the development of sentiments like shame and contempt for his homeland. This aids in the formation of a colonial mindset, which he feels the superior though frowned upon in his native land.

Bandele's perceptions regarding his origin and history have shifted as well. This is revealed in the following conversation between him and Deola:

... writes the same postcolonial crap the rest of them write, and not very well, I might add.'

Deola laughs. 'Isn't our entire existence as Africans postcolonial?'

'They should give it a rest, the whole lot of them. Africa should be called the Sob Continent the way they carry on. It's all gloom and doom from them, and the women are worse, all that false angst.

Honestly, and if I hear another poet in a headwrap bragging about the size of her ample bottom or likening skin to the colour of a nighttime beverage, I don't know what I will do.' (Atta 2015, 47)

When Bandele returns to his native after a while from the foreign exile, Deola's friends refer to him as "the bobo who went mad because he couldn't accept the fact that he was black" (Atta 2015, 54). This kind of mockery aggravates his aversion to such an extent that he completely boycotts his motherland and decides to live in a foreign country, where his identity is accepted as he wishes that to be. Bandele's afropolitan

thinking and his ambivalent sexuality make him stand on his ground to reflect his genuine yet constant hatred towards his native land, Nigeria. On the other hand, Deola, with her western exposure, hesitates to mingle with the native environment initially. But eventually, she understands the reality and patiently learns to relive in her country, dissolving all the differences of opinions.

Deola admitted, “I can’t live up to their expectations. Why should they live up to mine?” (Atta 2015, 224). This shows how she attempts not to fall into the stream of typical African migrants who whine only about the shortcomings of Nigerian society. She rather tries to live in her native despite the Nigerian society being harsh towards progressive thinking being pervaded by patriarchy. She realises how the societal shackles on every individual, try to cease them from being independent, expressing their sexuality and leading their preferred lifestyle. Therefore, she is not just an epitome of Afropolitanism but also a fully developed human being who has embarked on a journey of reassuring herself and exploring her identity as a Nigerian citizen.

Nigeria’s critical social and political concerns were addressed through literature by women writers. Third-generation women’s works, particularly from the Diaspora, show the ungranted identification, and women’s commitment to negotiating postcolonial reality is irresistible. The third generation of Nigerian authors, such as Sefi Atta, introduced new subjects to African literature, including sexual orientation, which was previously considered a taboo and continues to be so in some African countries. Atta’s characters are a representation of the actual world, in which homosexuals face discrimination from anti-LGBT laws, family, and society. Because of the rejection, discrimination, and pressure, these people experience mental trauma as well as a heightened identity crisis. Although they are subjected to these societal norms and their inflictions, Atta’s self-assured characters, like Deola Bello manage to survive the crisis and try to embrace the differences. Atta definitely achieves this task of exquisitely highlighting Afropolitanism and thereby throwing the light on the characters as they establish their own identity overcoming the crisis. Through her captivating narrative, she never fails to make her mission clear and relevant to both Africans and foreign readers.

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The Great Indian Kitchen: Serving the Story of an Indian Woman

Gitika Borah & Manisha Kalita

A woman in Indian society has to play various roles. She is someone's daughter, sister, wife or so. But rarely a woman is identified as an entity on her own and her identity is rarely recognized. The age-old ideas of Manusmriti and other traditions keep her tied up by the shackles of patriarchy and misogyny.

The recent low-budget Malayalam film 'The Great Indian Kitchen' dares to introduce us to one such woman in one such family which is very common to the Indian viewers. This movie very aptly depicts what a woman goes through in the family and society. Streaming in various OTT platforms, the only way we could watch it was by reading the subtitles, but that never was a hindrance to the enjoyment of the movie. Because the movie was very clear in what it wants to show. The female protagonist of the movie was very familiar to us. We were able to relate with her very easily. She made us realize how our mothers and aunts and sometimes even us, toil in the kitchen for the sake of the family.

The story of the cinema is not a dramatic one. It is the story of a very normal couple and most of the time the camera is on the kitchen and the wife doing the mundane works. It shows us her chopping, cooking, cleaning, getting tired and ending her day in bed with her husband. These scenes keep on repeating. The director is not serving us any idea. He invites the audience into the lives of the character and encourages them to feel what they are going through.

As the movie progresses it serves the viewers with many feminist issues. Women's ambition is seldom given importance. In the first scene of the movie the first thing the boy asks the girl about the prospects of her studies, but later after marriage denies her right to use her qualification to get a job. The girl after her marriage expresses her desire to apply for the post of a dance teacher. To this her father-in-law bluntly disapproves as it is not acceptable in their family. The husband later on says that he will find a solution to this. But as the movie progresses, the husband completely ignores her ambition. This shows a very pertinent aspect of our society. The ambition and dreams of women are considered as unimportant and are crushed. The legacy of family is most often such that even the women in the family consider that having an economic independent life of their own and to work outside their home is an injury to the reputation of their family. The women are considered to be best fit for the kitchen where they lost their identity and individuality while fulfilling the desires of others. This in total strips women of their economic independence as well as her role in decision making in the family.

The work of women in their home is not given due respect. For the male the work of women in home is just daily chores. There is no appreciation for that. In the movie, the father-in-law would not even take out the toothpaste in the brush or bring his own footwear. His wife and later his daughter in law had to do those things for him. The daughter in law was expected to cook the rice in firewood when they had gas stove and pressure cooker in their home. Her miseries were not a matter of consideration at all. The family was never seen eating together. The father and son ate first. The mother and daughter in law had to eat later. The mother-in-law was seen eating in the same plate that was used by her husband. The daughters are taught to eat after the male members eat from a very young age. The woman protagonist of the movie spent most of the day in the kitchen cooking food for the family, but they never get to eat hot and fresh food. The male being the bread earners, are entitled to the hot and best share of the food. The health problems of malnutrition of women, anemic death etc in women population takes birth from situation like this.

The movie excellently depicts some tiny details about how our society has conditioned us women to believe that their existence is only for the purpose of

pleasing our male counterparts. The women in our society are made to believe that they are inferior to man and that their sole responsibility is to look after the household while the man earns the bread. The role assigned to each gender are locked inside a water tight compartment by our society, so men and women are generally not allowed to switch their roles. Switching gender roles is not something our society is ready to accept yet.

The way the movie depicts fragile male ego is fabulous. Marriage is an institution for patriarchal dominance in India where the husband is regarded as the *Swami* or the master and women are taught to obey them no matter what. According to the norms of Indian society the primary responsibility of a wife is to give every kind of pleasure her husband seeks. In the movie also, the relationship between the husband and the wife is very nicely portrayed. It is more of a physical or sexual relation without any emotional attachment. When the wife expressed her dissatisfaction over their sexual relation, her husband got angry and humiliated her. Consent of wife and their desires are not taken into consideration. Marital rape has no place of consideration in India. Section 375, Exception 2 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) says that “sexual intercourse by a man with his wife, the wife not being under fifteen years of age, is not rape.” So, the patriarchy is so deep rooted that it is legal for a man to force sexual intercourse on a woman till she is his wife.

The gender roles defined by our society keep women at an inferior position than their male counter parts. The process of menstruation is one such event where women are considered to be impure. Instead of being a biological process which leads to motherhood, social stigma is attached to it so that women can be pushed down more in the ladder of hierarchy. The film shows the taboos related to the menstruation. Also, it highlights the Sabrimala Temple Verdict where menstruating women were allowed to enter the temple and the rage of the society knew no bounds. But gradually with the passage of time and advancement of educational opportunities women are questioning these man-made roles. The women have started asking for equal treatment. In the movie the mother-in-law was seen happily working inside the kitchen. Although she was a post-graduate, she compromised her aspirations to do a job as that was not allowed by her husband. She neither opposed

nor questioned it. But it was not the case with her daughter-in-law. The daughter-in-law wanted to do a job and she gradually realized that she has been exploited and started raising her voice against it. This probably is because of the generation gap. It's high time that woman should realize her worth and start standing in unity with fellow women and help in building each other.

A plethora of movies are there that reflect upon the discriminations faced by women at different levels. Movies like 'Fire" (1996), 'Water', Lakshmi etc. are there which have radicalized the genre of feminist movies. The uniqueness of this movie lies in the fact that it highlights how a woman is violated inside her own house. These instances are so small that we often tend to overlook these and such issues later on constitute huge discriminations against women.

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