

Volume 4

ISSN: 2348-6538
March 2017
UGC Approved

SOCIAL TRENDS

Journal of the Department of Sociology of North Bengal University



UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

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Journal of the Department of Sociology of North Bengal University

Volume 4, 31 March 2017

ISSN 2348-6538

E d i t o r

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ENLIGHTENMENT TO PERFECTION

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Editor's Note

It is indeed gratifying that the fourth volume of *Social Trends* is being published on time. This year, an important landmark has been reached and that is the journal has been approved by the UGC. This recognition has already motivated the young scholars to write for the otherwise young journal.

The developments guide me to approach my task with greater vigour. I can see the young minds inching towards maturity, ready to take on new challenges. I thoroughly enjoy passing on the editorial tips out of my experience to the scholars who are not my direct students. In a way, thus, I get an opportunity to dialogue with a larger body of inquisitive minds. I enjoy doing this meager service to the growth of the discipline.

The journal offers an opportunity for the young and established scholars to write experimental papers. One can see that the papers by Pinaki Roy, Jhuma Chakraborty and Sritama Basu, and Sanjay K. Roy in this volume have been written applying auto-ethnography, in line with the tradition set by scholars like S. C. Dube, M. N. Srinivas, C. Wright Mills, to mention only a few. The idea is to explore the rich reserve of our personal experiences, reflect on them dialogically, objectify them and draw discourses, which would give us some idea about how people in general organize their everyday life, coordinating consciousness and actions.

Since we published the last volume of *Social Trends*, we have lost our beloved Prof. Sharit Kr. Bhowmik, a member of the Advisory Committee of the journal, a former faculty of the Department of Sociology, NBU, and a leading sociologist in the country. We have included an obituary on Prof. Bhowmik, in this volume.

Prof. Rajatubhra Mukhopadhyay, a faculty of the Department of Sociology and a member of the editorial team of the journal, has retired on 9 November 2016 after serving the Department for 31 years. We have included in this volume a note of appreciation, which was accepted in his farewell meeting, held on 16 December 2016 in the Department of Sociology.

I would thank the members of the Advisory Committee, my colleagues on the Editorial Board, the contributors and the reviewers for their kind help and suggestions in bringing out the fourth volume of the journal.

Sanjay K. Roy
31 March 2017
North Bengal University

Journeys of the Self: Everyday and the Question of Ethics

Pinaki Roy

Abstract: In this paper, I talk about my journeys, along different routes, at different points or moments in life. Journey here is conceived of in dual sense. I speak of physical journeys – journeys which transport us from one spatial and temporal locale to another and simultaneously invoke the conception of life as a journey. We encounter moments of ethical crises, both in the physical journeys and in the journey called life. Ethical living and ethical action, the universal prescriptions guiding them and the particular contexts and modes of ethical articulation are significant aspects of our everyday life. It is in the context of the everyday that we negotiate these moments of ethical crises. This paper is composed of such moments from my own life, from my own journeys.

Keywords: everyday life, self, ethical crises, journeys of the self, physical journey, self-actualization.

I

In this paper, I talk about my journeys, along different routes, at different points or moments in life. It is not a saga of the self – its trials and tribulations, and its ultimate triumph, in its journey towards self-actualization. At least it has no conscious objective to romanticize the journeys I have been compelled to undertake or I have chosen to embark upon willingly. There is no denying the fact that my life as a narrative, is very close to my heart. I believe all conscious and reflective human beings conceive of their lives in the narrative mode, and perhaps the narratives of their very own selves attract them the most, given the fact it is after all their own narrative, their own story. But for a person trained in

disciplinary sociology and anthropology, her own narrative or story is special, not merely because it belongs to her or because she owns it. The fact that the narrative or story, in all its immediacy, centres around her life or a particular moment or event in her life as the core of the narrative, experientially disposes her to creatively imagine the threads which link her life, her narrative and the objective and impersonal social world around her. To be a sociologist or an anthropologist is to be perpetually troubled - to lead a life where she desperately wants to surrender the baggage of concepts, theories and methods she has so dearly learnt during her training, just to preserve the supposedly lay-man like innocence. Yet this troubled life inspires her not to view her training, her work, as a limited domain of activity, but as a mode of being which facilitates merging the personal life and objective academic protocols - the storied self and the imperatives of disciplinary sociology and anthropology. It is understandable that the narrative mode is the perhaps the best way to come to terms with the nuances of the personal life or the storied self. But is the narrative mode a simple chronicling of the events in life, the lived, experiential and intimate, in a straight manner? No! Unlike chronicles which present life stories in a chronological one-after-another format, narratives choose not to *chronologically order* the major moments of the life course based on norms of causality, but throw up larger questions about life and living from the point of view of a moment or few *discrete and disparate moments from the life story*.¹

What I present in this paper is definitely not a chronicle. It is a narrative because both consciously and unconsciously I present here few disparate moments from my journeys, disparate yet having tremendous implications for how it impacted my psyche, my vision about what life is all about - what is its purpose. Another point, in my view, chronicles talk about great men and their achievements. Narratives, on the other hand, talk about the ordinary people; it is the favourite mode for ordinary people like us to share our experiences - not of our achievements but failures, not of our resolution of ethical dilemmas but our perpetual suffering for not having addressed ethical issues adequately and in the *right* manner.

Journey here is conceived of in dual sense. I speak of *physical journeys* - journeys which transport us from one spatial and

temporal locale to another and simultaneously invoke the conception of *life as a journey*. The difference between the two conceptions of journey I talk about over here is only conceivable at the analytical level; both intermingle with and inter-implicate each other in our everyday lives. At the analytical level, physical journeys are constituted of several singular experiences of moving across geographical spaces, having their own unique history, politics and culture and life as a journey is a more holistic experience, an all-encompassing summation of all singular experiences of physical journeys *plus an x factor*, too difficult to pin point through empirical indicators, which makes life as an experience, mind boggling and euphoric. But isn't this a too academic and disciplinary rendition of life as an object of reflection? Is it life, as constituted of several singular physical journeys and itself holistically as a journey, which necessitates its narrativization or is it the disciplinary imperative, the academic zeal, that creates the possibilities for its narrativization?

The decision to write about one's own journeys does not necessarily derive from necessities imposed upon by the discipline itself. Rather crisis as it is lived and experienced predisposes the author to write about the conditions from which crisis emanates and impinges upon how life is lived and reflected upon. Crisis makes reflective autobiographical writing possible and bestows upon it a narrative form. As long as life is well equilibrated, the urgency to narrativize it is felt less and less. The more equilibrium ceases, the reflection on what went wrong gains prominence, culminating in sustained internalized conversation on what has changed in life, how life is now at this moment, coupled simultaneous effort to narrate to others how life reached this state of flux, the present "critical" period from its previous "organic" state.²

II

As a child, I enjoyed the company of my father, accompanying him to the local market, listening to ghost stories, and in adulthood, I completely relied on him as my sole career-planner, but his retirement, his sudden hospitalization, culminating in his two months' struggle with needles, antibiotics, and pipe forced into

his lungs first through his mouth and then through a puncture in his trachea has indelibly marked my thoughts about my life, my journeys. When I graduated from college he was in hospital. As an undergraduate student, I hardly had any ambition to migrate somewhere else to pursue a higher degree. My father represented that generation in which sacrificing one's career, *suspending one's dream*, just to sustain the family, was not uncommon. Although he once told me that he should have got into academics, but he had to discontinue his studies beyond post-graduation to join the Banking sector. A steady monthly income was what my father, my grandmother and my uncles wanted at that moment. Pursuing academics and becoming a teacher appeared to them *too indulgent a dream*, too luxurious a career choice! Like most middleclass parents, who failed to pursue their dreams, owing to various constraints, my father too wanted me to achieve what he could not, but never pressurised me to blindly follow what he said. He ardently wished that I get through a central university for my post-graduation. Starting from applying for admission to the courses to accompanying me to the examination centres, every step was well planned and well executed by him. He had just then retired from service and channelized all his energy to set the stage for me to perform well and get into a central university. I was however reluctant and apprehensive. It is not that I did not want to appear in the entrance examinations. I was always curious about ascertaining my location in the national merit lists, thanks to meritocracy. But the thought of leaving my family, my *comfort zone*, appeared too absurd to me. I thought that shifting my base would be detrimental to my capacity to concentrate and work hard. My father was however positive and always motivating, whereas I was ever doubtful.

It was just the second month post his retirement, when he was suddenly detected having acute pancreatitis and an abnormal secretion of bile choked his lungs. He could not breathe and was put on life-support system. I was waiting his recovery, my graduation result and the merit lists of the national post-graduate entrance examinations. The merit lists of the national level entrance examinations were soon put up in the university websites, the graduation result was soon published but he never recovered. In that unbearably cold, hauntingly green curtained and pale white-washed Intensive Care Unit of the private hospital, I told him

that was shortlisted for admission to the post-graduate program in JNU. He was very happy but I was still unsure. He asked for a piece of paper from the nurse and wrote in illegible hand writing, *Rajdhani*, possibly indicating *Rajdhani* express. He could not speak; the pipe of the life-support system was put into his lungs through his mouth, thereby disabling him to utter a single word. I preserved and carried that tiny piece of paper with *Rajdhani* inscribed on it with myself, when I was in Delhi and even after that, until I callously misplaced it. Although initially he was overjoyed, he did not hold the same opinion throughout. Struggling with needles, heavy antibiotics and life-support system is extremely difficult. More psychologically draining for a retired person admitted in a private hospital is the fear of impending bankruptcy, especially if he has an unmarried daughter! He even insisted that I do not leave the city for the time being, and get enrolled somewhere over here in Kolkata. His facial expression conveyed to me the doubt that had crept into his mind-the fear that he may not be able to breathe his last amidst his loved ones. But by that time, I could hardly stick to my initial opinion about not leaving my city. I suddenly become too restless and ambitious. I thought that this opportunity will never come back. My mother was as indecisive as I was. My sister, who is six years elder to me, was also doubtful whether she would be able to manage in my absence. Just when I had resolved that I have always craved for the comfort of being-with-my-family, now in a state of crisis, I cannot leave them alone, that would amount to a massive betrayal, something happened which made me alter my decision. My paternal aunt and my maternal uncle convinced me and my ailing father that this opportunity cannot be wasted, once he recovers, which he never did, we all shall repent for not having been sufficiently brave when circumstances needed us to be so. Soon the preparation for the journey began. But at the hospital front, I did not know whether things changed for better or worse. The intensive care specialists kept on using a language charged with medical jargons and clinical parameters, which conveyed to us nothing concrete about our ailing father's condition.

Soon I landed up in New Delhi. It was a big leap. I befriended the simplest and most supportive people as friends and teachers, as my intellectual collaborators, in the unknown campus. Only three

weeks had just elapsed in the new campus, when my maternal grandmother's sudden death brought me back to Kolkata to support my family hit by a double-crisis. By that time my father was back home. The doctors had surrendered. The struggle with an imminent *multiple organ failure* and a feeble mind and memory came to an end six days after my maternal grandmother's passing away. There was no question of going back to the campus immediately. Managing family finances and negotiating a life without him appeared too bleak to all of us. A new phase of life began. On the other hand, the campus beckoned to me. I realized I have fallen for its beauty, its intellectual fervour, with its wonderful people with many whom I did not share the same language, skin colour, facial and physical features, culinary practices and culture. When my father fell ill, he was planning my elder sister's wedding. After the period of profanity was over, I left for the campus with a promise to my mother to immediately come back after my post-graduation is complete. The journey from Kolkata to JNU and back continued for some time with the view that I have to go back; that my stay at JNU is already timed. When I returned after successful completion of the MA program, the only thing that I had in my mind was my elder sister's wedding and supporting my cope with another socially ordained separation.

III

Living in a demographically and culturally diverse and intellectually active campus completely changed the ways in which I conceived of myself, my relationship with my family, my peers and acquaintances, with the society at large, and most importantly with my discipline. It made me comparatively more independent than before, more capable of thinking beyond the curriculum and envisioning alternatives to the dominant ideologies, practices and institutions. Life-in-the-campus is a life where the world-is-the-home. Events and occurrences in the global order affect the campus dwellers in all their immediacy. They are rendered ethically and ideologically perturbed. Politics centres on a deep sense of discomfort with whatever unjust is happening around. But when one leaves the campus the home becomes the world. *The Arab spring*, the execution of Saddam Hussein and the *Selwa Judum* became

external concerns. Getting the *Aadhar card*, paying the electricity bill or at least getting someone to do the work for me, and taking the doctor's appointment for my mother's routine checkup became more pressing issues of internal-familial equilibrium. When my mother fell ill, especially during winters, when arthritic pain and pulmonary disorder is more acute, I discovered the home-maker in me, dealing with the maid and the cook, which my mother otherwise strictly believed to be a feminine concern, like asking the maid to attend to the remotest corner of the house for dirt and convincing the cook to use less oil and simmer the flame while cooking.

I often wondered, and still genuinely do, how my elder sister managed everything for three weeks after I left for JNU. Balancing her duties at the professional front and a hospitalized father and a devastated mother at the familial front, must have been an uphill task. Even after my father's demise she managed everything for two long years.

I must admit that the two years of living away from home had thoroughly changed me as a person. Readapting to family life and the household structure after return was like a process of *resocialization*. Saying good night at 10.30 appeared too abnormal to me! Soon I realized that in that distant island, all passively accepted norms and regulations are subverted. There a dignified living indicates not a passive acceptance of received wisdom but a constant exploration of newer possibilities – experimentation with ideas, practices and institutions. Back home all those possibilities became restricted to the world of *Facebook* activism.

Beyond the walled empire life fell into a definite track, a good job was all that I needed at that point of time. It is not that the two years of M. Phil. were not eventful. I learnt a whole new lot of things. But somewhere down the line I did not nurture the same ambition which my batch mates did. They wanted to go to abroad, I did not.

Fortunately, financial insecurity did not last for long. After a short stint as a full-time teacher in a marginal post-graduate department of sociology in Kolkata, I joined the *West Bengal Education Service*. A new phase began and a new set of challenges ensued. I was posted in the Hooghly district and journeying for hours to reach

my place of work for doing what I like to do the most was not easy to accept initially. But eventually I was at peace with this fact of my new life. Robert Frost once talked about the merger of vocation and avocation in the context of the profession one is engaged in. Teaching for me is both a vocation and avocation. Thus, it is not merely an occupation, which helps me earn my bread and butter. It has a lot to do with the visions I nurtured and cherished along with my friends and teachers, in different intellectual spaces and institutions. Chandernagore was the site for endeavouring to realize those visions. Journeying every working day to this beautiful place, where I got to work with colleagues, who were my teachers back in Presidency college, and meet my students, was initially indeed tiring, but never painful, and I soon got habituated to this. It was the best place perhaps to lecture on the influence of European countries on social change in India, read Yogendra Singh's *Modernization of Indian Tradition* and pay a visit to the *Institute de Chandernagore*. Which place could be better than Chandernagore for knowing about European colonialism and its shaping of material spaces and intellectual imperatives of the non-western world? The journey, the exhaustion and the gradual internalization of how government colleges function as bureaucratic institutions became a part of my everyday reality and experience. Let me not overemphasise exhaustion, the pleasure derived from the dissemination of ideas, fruitful engagement with my students and intellectual dialogue with my colleagues also constituted my everyday experiences at Chandernagore.

Then arrived, the order of transfer! My apologies for sounding too dramatic! When one is suddenly dismembered from a particular affiliating institution, awaits a new membership, one embodies *liminality* and undergoes what Van Gennep calls *rites de passage*. And all passages from one state to another embody crisis and tension. Several projects were yet to be completed and some had just been planned. A question occurred in my mind: is it bureaucratic rationality or something else which is responsible for this sudden shift? But I sought not to pursue this question any further. My friends and fellow colleagues had been struggling in remote places well known for Maoist insurgencies and volatile political climate; they too have been uprooted and endangered, and as part of that collective teaching community I thought I

should also experience what it means to be exposed and endangered. A teacher cannot afford to live a sedentary life. A teacher needs to journey, journey constitutes her being. Journey exposes the teacher to unknown landscapes and forms of experience, and widens her vision. In short, journey enables the teacher. If the teacher refuses to accept this philosophy of journey, she becomes stunted, she refuses to grow. When one journeys from *South 24 Parganas*, to the periphery of the *Burdwan* district through *Kolkata, Howrah, Hooghly* and *Burdwan* to reach Mangalkote, one passes through unknown 'life-worlds' which widens her intellectual horizon and strengthens her sociological vision. When, the teacher reaches the place of work, after journeying for about 160 Kms., she is indeed tired but there is a celebration of a gratifying indebtedness. But how can indebtedness be gratifying? It is not a definite learning outcome which constitutes the essence of teaching-learning process but the recognition that the teacher is ontologically insecure without her students. Her students constitute her subjectivity, impels her to undertake the journey every day - wake up early morning, freshen up, quickly recapitulate the key points to be addressed in the lectures, get dressed up, pack the reading materials, official documents and most importantly the lunch boxes and the water bottle in her bag, and begin the journey in search for her communion with her being.

Perhaps all this sounds too idealistic and virtuous, as if, no negativity is part of the narrative. I obviously feel frustrated when I realized that a lot of time is being "lost" in the entire process, which could have well been utilized for reading and completing my immediate academic obligation, my PhD. At times, I envy people who have to travel less. Kilometres and hours have become more meaningful to me than ever before. A colleague once said why I don't rent a room near my college; the *housing rent allowance* is allotted for that purpose. True! But certain obligations are unavoidable and unexplainable. Perhaps living closer to my college would have helped me contribute more as a teacher, and would have enabled me overcome my city-centric bent of mind. It would have helped me become a true ethnographer. That would have indeed constituted a great experience and on the practical front helped economise on time and money. But somehow, I have developed a great love for this journey. The journey connects the urban and the rural, allows two different "life-worlds" and

mentality-types to collapse and melt into each other. This journey, the rickshaw, the metro railway, the bus, the express train, the pool car, and even the launch sometimes, connects me to my mother, my home, its routines and requirements, and its soothing warmth on the one hand, and with my students, with their world, its unique time frame and emerging dependencies and friendships on the other. This journey helps me recreate the possibilities I envisioned with my intellectual collaborators in that walled empire, and as undertake the journey every day, I see those walls getting gradually displaced, encroaching *SH 7*, the green pastures and the adjoining shanties, finally engulfing that white and blue building. The spirit of liberation that I once celebrated in that walled empire has now extended its walls to include my place of work. I know it is a “strange hybrid” but it is here only that I can seek my liberation, through learning together, waiting for another bureaucratic decision to extend the walls of that empire once again, and hence enhance my possibilities of seeking liberation.

Through teaching I do not seek to liberate others, I desperately seek my own liberation. The incessant journey renders this seeking possible, enables me to approximate that vision.

IV

Journeying from one place to another, whatever may be the distance and time involved shape human subjectivity. The specific context, cause, course and compatriots in the journey infuse it with certain uniqueness – energy, joy and struggle, and innumerable possibilities for learning. Whether it is for studying or for eking out an everyday living, journeying is not something one can cease to do. In our hyper-complex societies, while the techies throng to the city centres to serve the interest of corporate capital, we, the educators, in many cases, travel to the urban fringes or the remote rural areas to serve public interest. In this incessant journey from the city to the urban fringe or the remote rural areas, the station and the vehicle, primarily the train, local, passenger or express, are rendered the dominating metaphors for coming to terms with the ever-moving experience called life. However, journeying is not the sole preserve of the educators, college and university students, other public servants are also

witness to the same experience. We are collectively the 'daily passengers', victims of precarity, experts of trickery.

When I came back from JNU, I thought journeying was over, but it never ceased. While at JNU, towards the end of every semester, I used to book two or more tickets in advance, for two or three consecutive dates. Such was the restlessness to go back home. The exact date of the end of the end semester examination was always unpredictable and this strategy proved useful, although involved incurring financial loss. Some of my friends were highly irritated with this homesickness of mine. A dear friend once said, '*... ek do din hum logo saath bhi rahe jate, hum logo ko pasand nehi kya?*' But I always thought, once the semester is over there is no question of spending any more time in the campus. However, that happened only in the initial phase. Later on, as involvement in the campus activities increased, I so ardently wished my home, my weakness, and the campus I loved so much, were physically located in the same city. But my experiences would not have been so rich and myriad had they not been miles apart. The beginning of every semester was marked by the journey back to the campus. On the one hand, there would be immense curiosity about what the new semester has to offer intellectually and in terms of newer friendships and associations. On the other hand, there would be a deep sense of helplessness at not being able to deliver what I should have done for my family. Those days going to the railway station contained in itself a different sort of preparation. In most cases, I used to reach the station too early, especially if it was a case of coming back home. Waiting at the station hardly mattered. As the vacation has kick started, JNU has nothing to offer for now, I thought, so the destination has to be my home, my city. Perhaps there is an intellectual life in JNU even during the vacations, but that hardly mattered to me. Every time the Kolkata bound train appeared at the edge of the platform, whether it is *Poorva*, a *Duronto*, or *Rajdhani*, I thought of no hierarchy, they all appeared to me as my city embodied - my city ready to trans-port me to my city.

Even these days on my way to Mangalkote, where I am currently posted, I usually board the *Poorva Express*, a popular New Delhi bound train. Now it has a different meaning altogether. As a daily passenger reaching the station too early is a matter of failing to

economise on time. *Poorva express* is more of a local train for us. It is enough to board the train 10 minutes ahead of the time of its departure. But post transfer, negotiating with the fact that I am travelling in reserved compartment with a monthly ticket has not been easy. Getting into the shoes of people whom I have always disliked the most has its own pain and sense of guilt. Being implicated in illegality initially disturbed me a lot, eventually paving way for the rationalization that perhaps for the teachers and educators, doctors, students, and other professionals, who have the compulsion to reach the place of work within a stipulated time, which is far away, engaging in this illegality on an everyday basis is unavoidable and may be normal. Hiding in the train toilet or walking down the entire length of the train to avert a surprise check by the railway magistrate is in fact a matter of great expertise. The moment when the daily passengers resolve their sense of guilt, and convert their anxiety into expertise, they all, despite the differences in their profession and thus their purpose of travelling, coalesce into one category of people, which I have called "the precarious tricksters". The railway officials are generally at peace with these *rouge* travelers, apart from penalizing them occasionally, just before *Holi* or *Durja Puja*. During such times of the year, they turn into "ruthless" defenders of the Indian Railways, and appear too unsympathetic to our cause. Experienced daily passengers believe that the railway officials need to show a stipulated number of cases per year to the Indian Railways, which is necessary for their promotion.

Journeying thus, is not only a literal expression to come to terms with what does for survival (vocation), for the work one loves (avocation), metaphorically speaking, beyond the physical movement the expression assumes, journeying everyday comes to have different meanings for different people, at different spatial and temporal frames. There are different ways in which one might think of the idea of journey. One way of doing this is that of thinking journey as one among different frames, which allows the text called subjectivity to gain a shape and a posture. The specificities of the journey undertaken, short or long, regular or intermittent, safe or hazardous, routine or erratic; the type of copatriots involved in the journey, known or unknown, mere colleagues or dear friends, and so on, shapes the subjectivity of those who undertake the journey. It is through thoughtful

involvement that the individuals bestow upon the journey with subject-specific meanings and relevance. Through the individual's or the subject's effort to narrativize the journey, the journey is transcended from its essential literal or physical basis to the plane of metaphors, where the journey becomes the object of profound reflection. The patterns, shifts and halts, the events in the journey; routine, well anticipated and some untimely and shocking, and therefore destabilizing, transforms journey into a metaphor for life - the experiences we have as living individuals. The subtle play of certainty and uncertainty which is so deeply felt in our physical journeys across spaces, times-frames and locales, also inhabits the narrative of life - the journeys of the lived self, who encounters stabilizing moments and destabilizing ruptures at different moments in life, and hence resorts to strategization in negotiation with them.

V

We encounter moments of ethical crises in our everyday journeys, both in the physical journey from place to another and the journey called life. Ethical living and ethical action, the universal prescriptions guiding them and the particular contexts and modes of ethical articulation are significant aspects of our everyday life. If we think reflectively, much of our everyday life, our journeys as human beings are full of moments of ethical crises, and the ways in which we sought to negotiate those moments. In fact, everyday life is inconceivable without ethical crises. Now the question is: if everyday life and every day journey, both in their structuring capacity and the unpredictability built into them, offers the ethical crises the human subjects are supposed to encounter and negotiate, then what guides and informs ethical action and living in the context of everyday life and life as a journey? Is it universal norms and prescriptions or particular and contextual exigencies which guide human subjects in their ethical posturing? But when one reflects on one's journey in life and the journeys undertaken every day, one is confronted with the question as to what extent one has succeeded in leading an ethical life, whether ethical living has at all been possible thinking from the plane of universal moral prescriptions? Although it is understandable that one creates an alternative frame of thought and ethical mode when one negotiates

with the transfer and the new posting as a teacher in rural Bengal as an expansion of intellectual horizons and sociological visions but a son who is convinced by his relatives to migrate to another for higher studies even when his father is fighting with impending death and a “precarious trickster” who bypasses law hardly conforms to the universal moral prescriptions?

There is clearly no straight cut answer to the universal-particular dilemma in moments of ethical crises. Sometimes we succeed in keeping up to the universal moral expectations, sometimes resolving or at least addressing the particularistic issues at stake appear more pressing. After all ethical action emanates from the slippery ground of interplay between the ideal and the real, between what one aspires to become and what one ends up becoming and it is at the level of the everyday that the negotiation with this interplay materializes. Deciding with certainty whether one has gone wrong in a particular situation is not possible. If structural constraints require an individual to surrender to the universal moral prescriptions for action, then in many cases, agential prerogatives override the structural constraints, to carve out a space for individual moral articulations. Perhaps it is ethical responsibility rather than conformity to the structure or action based on individual will and intention, which guides us in situations of ethical crises. It is at the level of the everyday life that the human subject negotiates this ethical responsibility.³

Ethical responsibility here does not stand for the human subject’s responsiveness to and reiteration of the structural imperatives or some higher principle or duty. Neither the subjection of the human subject to the structure nor the human subject’s pure will to live up to the higher moral expectations can explain ethical responsibility. It is derived from the human subject’s recognition of the relationality that binds her to others and the fact that the realization of the ethical in our everyday journeys is subject to a whole lot of uncertainty. The ethical therefore is not realized in its realization; its realization is continually deferred. Its continuous deferral however does not either amount to its wholesale suspension. To say that the ethical is realized in its deferral is a *contradiction in terms*. Yet this constitutes the moot point I am trying to convey. Ethical responsibility is not mere taking responsibility for one’s own action. It is the responsiveness to the fact that the

ethical is something we strive to realize, but it is not realizable. Its (un)realizability however need not necessarily result in moral paralysis. It is true that as humans we are thrown in conditions which are beyond control - conditions which conspire to suspend and render meaningless any willful ethical action. But the constant seeking of the ethical on our part as humans recognizing that there are structural constraints and conspiracies continually at work to suspend its realization constitutes ethical responsibility. There is no panacea for the ethical crises we encounter in our everyday lives. Perhaps the secret antidote to such crises lies in the realization that the (un)realizability of the authentic ethical moment need not necessarily render it redundant, the ceaseless striving for realizing it in our everyday social relations and encounters may nonetheless remain relevant.

Notes

1. See Gurpreet Mahajan, *Explanation and Understanding in the Human Sciences*. Delhi: OUP, 1997, for a discussion on the difference between narrative and chronicle.
2. These expressions are inspired from Auguste Comte.
3. The discussion here is inspired by the writings of Peperzak, Adriaan T., Simon Crithley and Robert Bernasconi, *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996, and Anirban Das, *Towards a Politics of the (Im)possible: The Body in Third World Feminisms*. United Kingdom: Anthem Press, 2010.

Everyday Social Relation: A Feminist Reading

Jhuma Chakraborty and Sritama Basu

The relations, even in a middleclass urban educated nuclear family, can be complex when all the members of a three-member family have strong and unique agencies, and have different perceptions of life. All three, absolutely reasonable caring human beings, live with a sense of alienation, with a perpetual grudge that the other two do not understand him/her. None of them are happy. The three-dimensional relationship, apparently simple, yet, deep down, is very complex. The complexity of relations disturbs the three members because they truly love one another. This paper endeavours to provide a possible solution to this problem from a feminist perspective.

Keywords: Family relations, complexity of relations, alienation, feminist perspective, gender stereotypes, ethics of social relations.

Introduction

Anjana, Arka's mother yelled 'Arka wake up fast, you will be late for school. You will be missing your school bus.'

Arka jumped out of bed. After school Arka has more than one tutorials and a special class for the science group. Anjana thinks that Arka must be on his toes for she has seen her younger brother getting carried away in spite of being very bright. In the present world of competition, she has no other alternative left but to keep a constant vigilance regarding Arka's activities. She is lonely and distanced from Animesh. Her only important identity is that she is Arka's mother.

Arka's father Animesh being a doctor can hardly spare any quality time for his son. Animesh is a renowned doctor in his town and there are very few dedicated doctors in this pocket of the city. He feels obliged to care for each patient. He feels that he can lead a meaningful life through caring and working at every relationship whether personal or professional. But probably he is not being able to create a balance between his personal and professional

life. He feels that both Anjana and Arka are suffering because of his romanticism or idealism regarding his profession.

Anjana was a good dancer and wanted to pursue her carrier as a dancer. Everything was fine but the birth of Arka and the sudden demise of Animesh's mother changed the scenario in the home front. Animesh feels that he has little to say about Anjana's decisions regarding Arka.

Arka is 10 years old. He doesn't have any close friend in school. He can hardly recall a Sunday he woke up late. A few months back he was caught reading one from the Feluda series on a Saturday afternoon; from the next Saturday, the private tutor started coming. His self-made multi-coloured bookmark is still there in between the last read page of his story book. Arka has no dreams in his eyes; he is just like the clock on the wall tireless and mechanical. Deep inside his mind Arka has the suppressed desire to laugh out loud, to run on to the field, to embrace the wind with his hands, to make new friends, to draw, to read story books. Actually, Arka wants to be an artist or probably he wants to be a bus driver... he is not very sure about his desires....it keeps changing.

Rabindranath Tagore in his poem "BAUL" has portrayed the innocent desires of a child just like Arka,

nebe amae sathe

Esob panditeri hate...Amae keno sobai maro,

...Bhulie die pora... amae sekhao sure gora,

Tomar tala bhangar path

ar Kichhuna chai...jeno akash khana pai,

Ar hariye jawar math.

[My mind wants to vanish

And sing the words you speak

Could I unlearn all this forever?

Will you take me with you?

All these men of learning

Why do they make me suffer?
 Make me forget my lessons
 And teach me the song
 That unlocks all doors,
 I want nothing too precious
 But an azure blue sky
 And endless fields and no more.]

This is a very familiar story with marginal exceptions. These days' parents are too worried about the career of their children. Their concept of a successful future means becoming a doctor or an engineer or a scientist or a lawyer or choosing a profession of social prestige. The unemployment problem, the values of the society influences the priorities of the family. There is a vicious circle here. Family being the most important unit of the society, the influence is vice -versa.

In the above-mentioned story, none of the members are wrong; they have their own commitments and they have the right to look at the world from their perspective.

But all of them are alienated in one sense. None of them are happy. The three-dimensional complex relationship is apparently very simple but if we probe deep into it the relationship shared by the three and also in one to one form, has shades and complexities; for example, in the above-mentioned story the relationship between Anjana and Animesh is different from the relationship between the dedicated doctor and his 10-year-old loving imaginative son. This scenario is common which is badly affecting our well-being. Probably no one is at fault but we all are alienated from each other.

This paper endeavours to provide a possible solution to this problem from a feminist perspective.

Feminism introduced

It must be noted in this connection that feminism or Feminist philosophy is an umbrella term that accommodates innumerable

feminist perspectives. The common agenda is to question a patriarchal position which is characterised by top down power structure where women are necessarily marginalised. In the minimalist sense Patriarchy designates male domination that controls the reproductive and productive rights of women.

The biological distinction between a boy and a girl is not problematic. But the story of distinction is inseparably tied up with the story of discrimination from time immemorial. This discrimination is universal without any exception and is manifested either in overt or covert form. Sociologists might argue that there are a good number of exceptions, since there are many small pockets in which the discrimination does not exist; for example, in the north-eastern regions of India and in some pockets of Nepal there are tribes which are matriarchal; e.g. Naga, Khasi, Garo etc. But these are actually matrilineal tribes where the power is centralised and the male members take all the major decisions though the properties etc. are apparently in the hands of women. What is interesting about gender discrimination story is unlike other forms of domination there is a love relation between the male and the female. This makes this hierarchical relation more complex. This feature is not present in any other top-down power relation e.g. between white and black or between Brahmin and the Sudras or in the Bourgeoisie, proletariat relation.

Within this patriarchal structure, it is accepted that the males are rational, courageous, intelligent, objective and competitive. Women in contrast are emotional, docile, soft, affectionate and motherly. The problem arises because the male traits are considered as superior. Gender stereotypes have always played a very significant role in shaping the behaviour patterns of men and women. It is not a description of the characteristic traits of men and women, it is essentially a prescription supported by the culture, customs, religions and other important institutions of the society to sustain and perpetuate this power imbalance. Patriarchal values are so deep rooted in us, that most of the women support this power play. Women who deviate from traditionally prescribed gender roles are looked down upon. Gender stereotypes have hardly changed in the past fifty years despite the spread of education in all the levels of Indian society. In Indian context, even in the urban educated pockets the parents expect a girl to give preference to

marriage even when the girl is highly educated and holding a very good job. One can hardly imagine that the boy can be less qualified than the girl, or can draw less salary in comparison to his mate.

This power game of domination is critiqued by the feminists. There are two misconceptions that need to be addressed in this context:

1. It is often thought that patriarchy or gender discrimination focuses only on women exploitation. But this is a misunderstanding; patriarchy victimises both male and female, simply because it determines what a male and a female should do, ignoring their individualities. A male might feel very happy with the house hold works and might not be interested in getting a job. But patriarchy will not allow and give space to such choices.

2. Secondly, it is again a misunderstanding to think that feminism supports a bottom up approach of power play which means that feminists would endeavour to hold a power position to dominate men. It must be kept in mind that feminist positions are not homogeneous, there are internal debates within feminism, and some are serious enough to cause chasms within feminism, resulting in different schools. But all of them will critique the power hierarchy that has existed from decades.

In fact, feminism is one major outcome of the Post-modern movement that endeavoured to dethrone Reason that dominated the intellectually enlightened world right from the Greek civilization. The post-modern movement started in Europe from early twentieth century; it questioned the dichotomy between

- ◆ Reason\emotion
- ◆ Man\women
- ◆ Mind\body
- ◆ Man\nature
- ◆ Normal\abnormal
- ◆ Author\reader etc.

The root of this discrimination can be traced in the universal acceptance of the primacy of Reason. This conceptual structure is based on two valued logic, where there is a clear cut

compartmentalisation between “right and wrong”, “truth and falsity” and the former is necessarily superior to the latter.

The post-modernist movement critiqued the overpowering of Reason, the neat compartmentalisation based on two valued logic; It must be noted in this context that post-modernists were mainly critiques, they never proposed any alternative theories; but there are few exceptions where philosophers not only critiqued but also gave us new theories e.g., Jacques Derrida’s work on *Grammatology* (1967) It actually paved the way for pluralism and opened the gate for multiple voices. For example, in the Man\ Nature relationship, we were used to the idea that Man can use nature for its own purpose; but there are at least three major movements that consider nature to be intrinsically valuable. The possibility of other theories is open.

Present scenario

Every human being in our society is suffering in some way or the other. In this age of advanced technology relations are defined and understood in a different way; everyone is sucked into their own make-believe world. Even after staying under the same roof, we are unaware of the whereabouts of our family members; this results in an invisible wall between the partners, siblings and children. Everyone is participating in the rat race to achieve a respectable position in society. This leads to anxiety, stress and depression. Most of us feel that there is something terribly wrong in this life style.

Our grandmothers and great grandmothers had a very different life style. The joint families had many members of different generations supporting each other financially and emotionally and otherwise. Stress, tension were unfamiliar concepts for them. But things are different now. Consumerism, advanced technology has alienated us from nature, family members, and from our own essential nature. We are compromising our values.

In this connection, we would like to focus on the theory propounded by the eminent feminist philosopher Carol Gilligan. Gilligan in her famous book *Ina Different Voice* (1993) questions

the traditional, two-valued, patriarchal ethical systems prescribing same rule for every individual across the board.

Carol Gilligan observes that women's lived experiences show that they tend to see moral life in terms of care, connectivity and responsibility rather than justice, detachment and rights. Gilligan observes that women think, respect for humanity should be the underlying criteria for judging any moral situation. They prefer the care standpoint that responds to common humanity by extending the web to all people. Instead of viewing moral problems from a detached, objective, rule-oriented standpoint, women tend to evaluate the situation through the mode of care and responsibility to others. These differences in conceptualizing a moral problem between women and men tend to reflect deeper differences in their attitude towards resolving a moral dispute.

Gilligan is providing us with an alternative ethical theory where she provides us with an alternative perspective. Her theory revolves round the concepts of care, voice and relation. The traditional models of ethics consider an individual to be atomistic. Gilligan claims that an individual self is essentially relational. The relational nature of the self is the chief pillar of her "care" theory.

To have a voice is to be human. To have something to say is to be a person. But speaking depends on listening and being heard; it is an intensely relational act. Gilligan wanted the backbenchers to have equal respect with the front one's; that is to give equal importance to all voices heard or unheard.

Voice according to her is a powerful instrument and channel, connecting inner and outer worlds. By voice Gilligan means the voice that comes from the core of the self

Patriarchy according to Gilligan provides us with a conceptual framework that is deeply internalised. Cultural constructs have mechanisms for silencing female voice. This systematic silencing of female voice is the most pervasive form of covert violence. Women internalise the patriarchal values to such an extent that they are mostly unaware of their inner voice; consciously or unconsciously they suppress their voice. Even if there is a desire and possibility to speak, one does not express it probably because no one would listen to it or acknowledge it.

According to Sheila Rowbotham, silence is created and maintained as the oppressed; particularly women are denied access to relate their inner selves to an outer movement of things. They are only allowed to see through the lens men have provided for them through the ages. All theories, all communicative languages, all concepts and ideas, which can make women see themselves in relation to a continuum or as a part of the whole are constructs of patriarchy. Since women have no part in making them, such theories, languages and conceptual frameworks cannot capture the lived experiences of women. In this sense, a language of silence is not created around the real-life stories of the pain and suffering undergone by women, which the patriarchal society neither tries to hear nor feels eager to understand.

Gilligan would insist on listening to our inner voice. After we become aware of our inner voice we must try to share it.

The problem is actually rooted here; we neither speak nor share our own thoughts nor do we listen to others. The self needs to talk in a different voice and express its needs. Such a self asserts its freedom by raising its voice, within the relational structure. Every individual self must strive to maintain relations and fight the oppression that constrains the self from being related.

Caring is an experience of acknowledging and nurturing the interdependence of one another. It is an experience where the more one extends her/ his hands of care, the more she/he is making the world a better place to live. This gesture perpetuates the well-being of the individual who is caring for others.

Gilligan's care ethics gives more importance on the prospect of dialogue and consultation between the caregiver and the person at the other end. It is because this conversational approach in the ethical decision-making procedure can reveal the dynamics of relationships in a better way.

One might argue that in today's world of technology and consumerism, relations are very different. We don't have the time or inclination to listen to others. Gilligan's care ethics would argue that this is the atomistic view of the individual which does not acknowledge our essential relational nature. The non-acknowledgement of our essential nature is the cause of our distress. This alienates us from our essential nature and from other

relations. Once we acknowledge our real nature we can work for overcoming the constraints that prevent us from getting related. Moral decisions judged from the care perspective promise a complete good life. Care is a concern for peace, for survival and for enrichment of all forms of life.

It must also be noted that an individual is not necessarily constrained by conventions and existing power relations. In the midst of the interdependence between individual and frameworks, one can carve out his\her individual space and here lies the scope for a different voice.

In the story narrated, Animesh, Anjana and Arka have never tried to listen to their inner voice; this is probably because they are not aware of such a voice, over and above that they have no time to listen to their inner voice. Their inner voice remains unheard in this busy almost meaningless daily schedule. In other words, none of them have ever endeavoured to understand the demands of their individualities; they are caught up in the midst of role playing web, within a stereotyped conventionally determined family structure. The application of the 'care model' can change the entire scenario.

In the story narrated Animesh the doctor, can give importance and space to Anjana's voice, and can have repeated dialogue to make some arrangement for their well-being. They should also give equal importance to Arka's voice, where Arka's opinion should be considered with equal importance. On the basis of dialogue, it can be decided that Anjana can form a dance school; this decision acknowledges Anjana's potentialities and Animesh can think of spending his Sundays with his family and guide Arka in Physics and Maths. Animesh is actually a good teacher and Arka insisted that his father should teach him.

It has already been mentioned that ethical decisions judged from the care perspective promise a healthy happy life. It is inclusive. Gilligan's care model can be applied to larger institutions as well. It is the most fundamental need in today's world for it ensures peace and well-being.

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Rabindranath's Idea of Alienation: An Interpretation of *Raktakarabi*

Sayantan Ghosh

Pen of the social thinker Rabindranath Tagore reflects the pain of human beings in any social order that is exploitative and alienating, be it industrial capitalism or traditional religious order. He was in favour of cooperation - cooperation in production, cooperation in consumption and cooperation in celebration. He advocated reaching the state of "Ananda"/happiness - creative happiness and collective happiness. He criticised any social order that alienates man from the product he produces, from other human beings and from his own creative self. He emphasised on the role of senses in alienation. This paper would try to outline Tagore's idea of alienation and the process of liberation of an alienated self to humane self. This concept is reflected in many of his writings but this paper would particularly focus on Raktakarabi. Regarding the idea of alienation, there are certain similarities between Tagore and Marx but there also exists significant uniqueness in Rabindrik philosophy.

Keywords: Alienation, humane, self, creativity, senses, cooperation, happiness.

Introduction

To discuss Rabindranath's idea of alienation, first it is necessary to outline how alienation is often defined. Alienation is '...the estrangement of individuals from one another, or from a specific situation or process' (Marshall 2006: 13). In the words of Coser 'Alienation is a condition in which men are dominated by forces of their own creation, which confront them as alien powers' (Coser 2007: 50). According to Tom Bottomore alienation of a worker is a fourfold process - 'an action through which (or a state in which) a person, a group, an institution or a society becomes (or remains) alien (1) to the results of its own activity (and to the activity itself), and/or (2) to the nature in which it lives, and/or (3) to other

human beings and - in addition and through any or all of (1) to (3) - also (4) to itself (to its own historically created human possibilities)' (Bottomore 1991: 11). The idea of alienation is often associated with Karl Marx as he wrote about estrangement of labour in industrial capitalism (Marx 1844). Now, how this issue of alienation is dealt with by the humanist Rabindranath Tagore is the point of discussion here.

Rabindranath's pen reflects the pain of human alienation as he criticises the exploitative nature of industrial capitalism. He was not against industry or modern technology but he opposed the exploitation of many in the hands of few. He did not support the idea that production of some would be appropriated by others. He opposed any kind of social order that puts shackles on human creativity and possibility and alienates them from their own selves. He has portrayed alienation in different social orders in many of his writings. Here I would focus on his idea of alienation as represented in his play *Raktakarabi* (translated as *RED OLEANDER*).

Alienation from the product

Raktakarabi is a story of Yakshapuri and Maharaj (the capitalist king). It is also a story of alienated labourers and how they came back to their senses overcoming the state of alienation. The labourers of the gold mine in *Raktakarabi* work throughout the day and it continues for their entire lives to draw out the nuggets of gold which the king stores in his mountain of gold. He accumulates the gold, plays with it and thereby appropriates the labour of the workers. The workers have no right over the product they produce. The worker cannot appropriate the product. The more he produces, the more he becomes alienated from the product. The product is only produced for the pleasure of the capitalist/king. The product which becomes the commodity stands larger than and in isolation from the worker. But they themselves could not appropriate the product that is to say those gold nuggets. This is alienation from the product. The king believes in the philosophy of unlimited accumulation and the workers' toil continues.

'Chandra But when will your work be finished?

Bishu *The calendar never records the last day. After the first day comes the second, after the second the third. There's no such thing as getting finished here. We're always digging – one yard, two yards, three yards. We go on raising gold nuggets - after one nugget another, then more and more and more. In Yaksha Town figures follow one another in rows and never arrive at any conclusion'* (Tagore 1925: 47).

The workers who were human beings in their villages are reduced to gold producing instruments. They lose their human selves and become only numbers-

'Bishu ...We are not men to them, but only numbers. – Phagu, what's yours?

Phagulal *I'm No. 47 V.*

Bishu *I'm 69 Ng'* (ibid.)

In their village, they were human beings but here they have become numbers.

Thus, the devaluation of the human world increases in direct relation with the increase in value of the world of things. In the words of Marx, '... the *increasing value* of the world of things proceeds in direct proportion the *devaluation* of the world of men... This fact expresses merely the object which labour produces – labour's product – confronts it as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer. The product of labour is labour which has been congealed in an object, which has become material: it is the *objectification* of labour. Labour's realization is its objectification. In the conditions dealt with by political economy this realization of labour appears as *loss of reality* for the workers; objectification as *loss of the object* and *object-bondage*; appropriation as *estrangement*, as *alienation'* (Marx 1988: 71). The workers sell their labour power to the capitalist. They produce the product for the capitalist and thereby making the capitalist powerful. The more they produce, the more powerful the capitalist becomes and the less becomes their power. The capitalist in turn uses that very power to dominate and coerce the workers and to make them more and more powerless.

Rabindranath realized the dark side of industrial capitalism as he portrays in *Raktakarabi* the aspect of unending accumulation of wealth just for the sake of it. In *Raktakarabi*, the tower of gold is represented as the manifestation of power and wealth. The more the tower grows and glows the more is the amount of dead or squashed human beings (workers) who are referred to as "rajar ento" – the leftovers of the king. The greed of the king for the gold nuggets becomes his addiction.

'Chandra Brother, they've hoarded such heaps of gold, what is the need of more?

Bishu There's always an end to things of need, no doubt; so, we stop when we've had enough to eat. But we don't need drunkenness, therefore there's no end to it. These nuggets are the drink – the solid drink – of our Gold King' (Tagore 1925: 48).

Yakshapuri becomes a cage, escape from which seems impossible and at an ultimate point of exploitation, the will of the worker to emancipate himself from the cage vanishes. This is the height of power exercise of the capitalist where the very longing for freedom of the worker is also bought by him. The worker not only abandons any practical possibility of escape but it is as if the very notion of freedom becomes absent from his thought.

'Bishu ... as soon as one enters the maw of Yaksha Town, its jaws shut fast, and the one road that remains open leads within wards. Now I am swamped in that interior without hope and without light...' (Tagore 1925: 45-46).

This is the height of exploitation.

Process

The workers are not only alienated from the product but also from the entire process of production. In an assembly line, each worker performs his own part only. He has no idea about the entire process and cannot produce the product by himself. The entire process is fixed and appropriated from above. The workers of Yakshapuri are numbered and categorised into alphabetical groups like V, Ng, etc. and none of the individual or group know the entire process.

Agreeing with Marx it can be said that alienation not only occurs from the result (product) but also from the very activity (process) of production. This is because the work comes to be a meaningless activity, offering little or no intrinsic satisfaction. To the authority, working capacity, that is to say the labour power, is what only matters, not the worker as a human being. This alienates the man because above all man is "Homo Faber" – Man, the Maker. This generates the psychological discussion about alienation as a subjectively identifiable state of mind, involving feelings of powerlessness, isolation, and discontent at work – especially when this takes place within the context of large, impersonal, bureaucratic social organizations.

Self

Being alienated from the product and the process of production, man becomes alienated from his own self. In Raktakarabi the human beings become fragmented beings or "tukro manush".

'Phagulal Our mad Bishu says: to remain whole is useful only for the lamb itself; those who eat it prefer to leave out its horns and hooves, and even object to its bleating when butchered' (Tagore 1925: 35).

They are no longer Phagulal, Bishu or Gogu but become 47 V or 69 Ng. Paloan who was the best in fencing in his village and was full of life and enthusiasm becomes a squashed entity and loses all the life within him. Capitalism sucks the blood of the worker and the workers know that there is only entry but no exit from it. The king of gold mine Maharaj resembles a crocodile where a man may crawl in but once the teeth close, there is only one choice and that is to be engulfed. The life span of the worker is determined by the Sardar.

'Nandini Look over there what a piteous sight! Who are those people, going along with the guards, filing out from the backdoor of the King's apartments?

Governor We call them the King's leavings.

Nandini What does that mean?

Governor Some day you too will know its meaning; let it be for to-day.

Nandini *But are these men? Have they flesh and marrow, life and soul?*

Governor *Maybe they haven't.*

Nandini *Had they never any?*

Governor *Maybe they had.*

Nandini *Where then is it all gone now?.....*

Nandini *Alas, alas! I see amongst these shadows faces that I know. Surely that is our Anup and Upamanyu? Professor, they belong to our neighbouring village. Two brothers as tall as they were strong. They used to come and race their boats in our river on the fourteenth day of the moon in rainy June. Oh, what brought them to this miserable plight? See, there goes Shaklu – in sword play he used to win prize garland before all the others. Anu-up! Sha-klu-u! Look this way; it's I, your Nandini, Nandin of Ishani, your very next village' (Tagore 1925: 107-110).*

The workers do not and perhaps cannot respond to Nandini. Maybe, they themselves have forgotten that they are Anup, Upamanyu or Saklu. They have ceased to believe that they are human beings with feelings of joy, sorrow or pain. They regard themselves as nothing but gold producing machines.

Nandini's cries are falling on deaf ears. As the play unfolds, we can infer from Nandini's comments that many of these young men in their village life were attracted to Nandini. Nandini was a sort of heart throb to the youth of her and her surrounding villages. They liked her, adored her and were attracted to her. This attraction and desire for love are the symbols of liveliness and youthfulness. In their village, they were complete human beings with desires and passions. But here these "tukro manush" or fragmented souls lack those desires and passions. Those attractions and longings for love have all gone. The youth lack youthfulness and life lacks liveliness. This lifelessness has resulted into lovelessness. Moreover, their heads have fallen down. They do not, rather cannot, turn their faces back towards their memories. They exist as if there were no past or no memories in their lives. As if they were, are and will be here forever to produce gold. It is not only that they could not stand up straight, held their heads high, look forward and dream but rather they do not want to, the

very desire to do so has gone. That is why Nandini's calls (whom they had desired so much) remained unanswered.

'Nandini ...Kanku, look back at me! Alas, he whose blood would dance in his veins at a mere sign from me now leaves my call unanswered.

Gone, gone, all the lights of our village are gone out!' (Tagore 1925: 111)

This slaying of desire is perhaps the height of capitalist exploitation. Thus, they are no more Anup, Gogu or Saklu but are objectified and have become gold producing instruments. This is alienation from the self.

Species being

In the holiday, the workers search for alcohol – their addiction. Phagulal becomes crazy for it and demands it from his wife Chandra.

'Phagulal My bottle, Chandra? Out with it!

Chandra Must you drink just because it's a holiday? In our village home, on feast days, you never drink –

Phagulal Freedom itself was enough for the holidays in our village. The caged bird spends its holiday knocking against the bars. In Yaksha Town holidays are more of a nuisance than work.

Chandra Let's go back home, then.

Phagulal The road to our home is closed for ever.

Chandra How's that?

Phagulal Our homes don't yield them any profit.

Chandra But are we closely fitted to their profits only, - like husks to grains of corn, - with nothing of us left over?' (Tagore: 34-35).

The workers become caged birds as is evident from Nandini and Chandra's comments that in their village they had a community life where they participated in social occasions as social beings whether in games, music or dance. This social is undermined in Yakshapuri where workers become isolated and estranged human beings. This resembles Marx's views:

Finally, alienated man is also alienated from the human community, from his "species - being." Man is alienated from other men. When man confronts himself he also confronts men.... each man is alienated from others.... each of the others is likewise alienated from human life' (Marx 2005: 129).

Senses and alienation

Senses play a key role in Rabindranath's depiction of alienation both as a manifestation of alienation and as a key indicator of overcoming the same. Rabindranath believed that human beings can overcome the inhuman state of alienation and return to their consciousness, that is to say, into their human self. This return is accomplished into and experienced through the senses.

The workers of Yakshapuri lack their sensory experiences. The exploitation became so intense that at one point they could not feel anything, not even pain. Whenever there was an opportunity, say during holidays, they would submerge themselves into a state of drunkenness. Thus, they do not even want to experience sensory happiness - the very desire is gone. Here the workers are deprived of and exploited in terms of their senses.

In this situation arrives Nandini wearing *dhaani ronger sari*, *raktakarabi fuler mala* (paddy coloured sari garland of red oleanders) and with music of *poush* (the ripening season). Thus, she brings the absent *roop*, *ras*, *gandha* of the village life into Yakshapuri. Nandini brings light into the dark tunnels of Yakshapuri. Yakshapuri, which so long seemed to be colourless, is suddenly shone with the bright red colour of *raktakarabi* and the paddy colour of her sari. This takes them miles and years away to their villages and reminds them of their fond memories. In Yakshapuri there was no music, no dance and no life. It is only when Ranjan comes, he brings melody and rhythm with him. He starts the "digging dance" (*khodai nritya*) with the alienated

workers of the gold mine. Previously, the workers worked like machines but now they are dancing and digging with the rhythm of Ranjan's music. They start playing with gold nuggets. The prohibition is removed from inside; the hypnotism of gold is now gone and instead there is the music of *poush* and the desire for life. Nandini and Ranjan bring and inculcate desire within the workers. That is why Bishu calls Nandini the *ghumbhanganiya* (the awakener) and the *dukhojaganiya* (the awakener of pain). The workers start to feel the pain and the desire of happiness. This proves that they are coming back to their senses. Just as sensory deprivation is alienation, similarly returning to one's senses is the marker of consciousness. As Bishu recovers from the state of alienation, comes back to his senses, feels sorrow and realises humanity; he admits the change saying: 'The pain of desire for the near belongs to the animal, the sorrow of aspiration for the far belongs to man.'

Thus, senses play a key role in understanding alienation in particular and human life in general. Senses are the gateways of knowledge and human feelings are felt through the senses. Marx recognizes the importance of senses in human life as he comments, 'Man is affirmed in the objective world not only in the act of thinking but with all his senses' (Marx 1972 cited in Synnott 1991: 73). Rabindranath also put emphasis on the senses of human beings both in his writings and in Viswa Bharati where the students were taught in the midst of nature and were encouraged to explore all their senses. Thus, according to both Tagore and Marx, sense deprivation is alienation. In *Raktakarabi*, we see it is only when the workers come back to their senses; they come back to their human selves. At that stage, they realize the exploitation of capitalism and their will to reach the state of "Ananda" led them to conduct a revolution against the exploitative capitalist social order.

From Kurma to Baraha

'Gosain ...We Preachers have this charge of turning these people towards this unlimited life. So long as they remain content with that, we are their friends.

Nandini *Then will this man with his very limited life have to remain lying here half dead?*

Gosain *Why should he remain lying down anyway? What say you, Governer?*

Governer *Quite right. Why should we let him lie? From now he won't need to walk by his own strength alone, we shall carry him along with ours. Here, Gajju!*

Wrestler *Yes, Sir Governer!*

Gosain *Good Lord, his voice has already become ever so much reedier. It strikes me we shall be able to make him join our choir of the Holy Name.*

Governer *Gajju!*

Wrestler *At your service, Sir!*

Governer *Report yourself at the Headman's quarters, parish Y-Z.*

Nandini *How can the poor man possibly walk?*

Governer *Look here, Nandini, it is our business to drive men. With the right kind of push a man can be made to go a good distance, even when he is at the point of collapse. Get along with you, Gajju!*

Wrestler *As you command, Sir!' (Tagore 1925: 123-125)*

Gajju was almost butchered by the social order and he wanted to kill the Sardar had he got back his strength once only. But as soon as the Sardar and Gosain entered and ordered him, he immediately followed them without asking a question. Thus, even when the workers were alienated from the system and had little or no strength left they were maintaining the order. The workers of Yakshapuri are not only alienated from the economy but also from the state and from religion. There is a nexus between the political and religious authorities. It is Sardar who appoints Gosain to whisper "*shanti mantra*" in the ears of the workers. That is to say, to justify the capitalist exploitation in the name of God. Gosain reinforces capitalism and tries to remove the grievances of the workers from inside by logicalising capitalist order (production relations). He not only expresses this as the will of God but

sometimes tries to hypnotise the workers by glamourizing their role as he portrays them as the “kurma avatar” of Vishnu.

‘Gosain These people? Are they not the very incarnation of the Sacred Tortoise of our scripture that held up the sinking earth on its back? Because they meekly suppress themselves underneath their burden, the upper world can keep its head aloft. The very thought sends a thrill through my body!’

Just think of it, friend 47 V, yours is the duty of supplying food to this mouth which chants the holy name. With the sweat of your brow have you woven this wrap printed with the holy name, which exalts this devoted body.’ (Tagore 1925: 54)

The “antaat” between state and religion is clear from the conversation of Bishu, Phagulal and Chandra -

‘Phagulal Don’t you see Chandra? Their armoury, temple and liquor shop are adjacent to each other?’ (trans. mine)

The Sardars, the political authority, have established and are maintaining the capitalist social order from outside through coercion using military power. While Gosain, being appointed by the Sardar is addressing them from inside by justifying the order in the minds of the workers and thereby trying to establish the unfair as fair and the exploitative social order as “just” one. Slowly but surely, he is creating an image as if this is the only option, there is no other alternative possible. He is misinterpreting religion, glamourizing the workers’ role and killing any desire of questioning the existing order and thereby helping sustenance of the established exploitative social order. This optionlessness and death of desire are the highest manifestation of exploitation. Bishu reveals this secret nexus -

‘Bishu They have whipped me, with the whips they use for their dogs. The string of that whip is made with the same thread which goes to the stringing of Gosain’s rosary. When they tell their beads they don’t remember that; but probably their God is aware of it.’ (Tagore 1925: 134)

This is how the Sardar and Gosain, who symbolize the state and religion, try to alienate the workers from their own selves. In the process, the workers become alienated from the state and religion. Even in this context, the humanist Rabindranath puts his trust on

human beings. He portrays the workers' return to their own consciousness where they realize that in Yakshapuri through Gosain religion has become their opium. This realization helps them in developing a class consciousness and contributes to their preparation for revolution. The journey from alienated acceptance to coming back to their awakened human self is metaphorically represented as the transformation from one *avtar* of Bishnu to another, from *kurma* (tortoise) to *baraho* (boar). The indication is clear from Bishu's comments –

'Bishu ...The Gosain called them the incarnation of the Tortoise. But, according to scripture, incarnations change; and when the Tortoise gave place to the Boar, in place of hard shell came out aggressive teeth, so that all-suffering patience was transformed into defiant obstinacy.' (Tagore 1925: 58)

The midday Sun

'Voice ... I, who am a desert, stretch out my hand to you, a tiny blade of grass, and cry: I am parched, I am bare, I am weary. The flaming thirst of this desert licks up one fertile field after another, only to enlarge itself, - it can never annex the life of the frailest of grasses.' (Tagore 1925: 28)

Rabindranath is unique in his idea as he believed that it is not only the exploited who get alienated but also the exploiter who can and does get alienated. In his view, as represented in *Raktakarabi*, if someone deprives and oppresses the other, he cannot help but suffer from alienation. Here the Makor Raj knows that he is exploiting the workers for his own benefit, his own pleasure. Perhaps he is getting pleasure but he is deprived of happiness or "Ananda". Rabindranath distinguished between *sukh* (pleasure) and *ananda* (happiness) (Chakrabarti and Dhar 2007) and regarded the second one as the desired one. Pleasure is materialistic and individualist while happiness is often non-material and more importantly, collective.

Here the king was maintaining an image of a great supreme power, an image which draws fear, something which distances human beings. The self-hypnotism of the king as a supreme authority (who can take anyone's life whenever he wants) alienates him from his own life. He feels empty and tired and regards himself as a desert.

His power and his image confront him as something greater than him and isolate him from his own self. His image does not allow him to mix with other human beings on the basis of humanitarian ties and that very image frightened and did not allow anyone to be close to him. That is why when Nandini started to talk with him, he expressed his loneliness and companionlessness as he expressed to Nandini - 'Does the midday sun have any companion?' (trans. mine)

Rabindranath's uniqueness is not limited to portraying the alienation of the capitalist or the exploiter but he also depicts that this person can recover from the state of alienation. There would be a transformation of the soul and the exploiter would join the exploited to fight against and destroy the social order that he himself had established. As in the climax of *Raktakarabi*, this is the dialogue between workers and Raja -

Phagulal ...King, are you sure you don't mistake us? We are out to break your own prison, I tell you!

King Yes, it is my own prison. You and I must work together, for you cannot break it alone.

Phagulal As soon as the Governor hears of it, he will march with all his forces to prevent us.

King Yes, my fight is against them.

Phagulal But the soldiers will not obey you.

King You will be on my side.

Phagulal Shall we be able to win through?

King We shall at least be able to die! At last I have found the meaning of death. I am saved!' (Tagore 1925: 173-175)

The king also summons Nandini -

'King Be brave, Nandini, trust me. Make me your comrade to-day.

Nandini What would you have me do?

King To fight against me, but with your hand in mine. That fight has already begun. There is my flag. First, I break the Flagstaff, - thus! Next, it's time for you to tear its banner.

*Let your hand unite with mine to kill me, utterly kill me.
That will be my emancipation ...*

*A great deal of breaking remains to be done. You will come with me,
Nandini?*

Nandini I will.' (Tagore 1925: 169-170)

Conclusion

Rabindranath's idea of alienation can be compared to that of Karl Marx as both of them - (i) realized the alienating aspect of industrial capitalism where the wage labourers get alienated from the product they produce, the process of production, from the religious and political authority, from other human beings and finally from their own selves (ii) realized the importance of the senses in human life - how sensory deprivation can lead to alienation (iii) believed that however intense the alienation is, the workers would get over from this alienating state, would return to their senses and thereby to their human selves (iv) believed consciousness of each worker would lead to class consciousness and ultimately to revolution (v) emphasized on the creative selves of human beings. Both Tagore and Marx believed in collective production and collective appropriation. They celebrated happiness, creativity and the humane self.

However, Rabindranath is distinct in his own ideas. Firstly, he believed an alienating social order alienates not only the exploited but also the exploiter like Raja in *Raktakarabi*. This very order also alienates other groups, i.e., the intellectuals (for example, Bishu Pagal and Professor) and even some members of the political authority (like Mejo Sardar). Secondly, it is not only industrial capitalism which is alienating but Tagore believed it can also be the traditional religious and social order which can and does alienate human beings (as he portrays in *Tasher Desh*). He criticizes all those social orders that alienate human beings from their own creative humane selves, that is to say, from that self where "Man is the Maker". Thirdly, Rabindranath has deep faith in the transformation of the soul of virtually everyone and in the rise of "Atmashakti" (a prominent example is Raja in *Raktakarabi* who ultimately fights with the workers against his own army and against his own order). Fourthly, Tagore criticized any kind of

bias and supported the balance between nature and humans, agriculture and industry, east and west and the material and spiritual.

Nandini brings with her “Pousher Gaan” (the music of the reaping season) –

Hark, 'tis Autumn calling:

“Come, O, come away!” –

Her basket is heaped with corn.

Drunken with the perfumed wine of wind,

the sky seems to sway among the shivering corn

its sunlight trailing on the fields.

She helps the workers to remember their forgotten agricultural and rural civilization. The workers came to Yakshapuri by getting attracted and misled by the great gold tower but deep in their hearts they longed for their village community life. Tagore always emphasized on community and social life. His entry point was society rather than the state (Chatterjee 2005; Bandyopadhyay 2004; Nandy 1994).

He applied his ideas first in Silaidaha and Patisar and then in Santiniketan and Sriniketan where he emphasized on the union within human beings and between human beings and nature. He believed that work and profession should be creative and should be driven by “Ananda” (happiness). That is why Nandini is calling for agriculture – a farmer can have creative satisfaction but a wage labourer cannot. Ranjan comes and infuses life within the numbered or instrumentalized labourers of Yakshapuri. He moved them with his melody and rhythm and freed them from their shackles. They were doing the same work but not in boredom rather in rhythm with the digging dance of Ranjan.

Rabindranath’s ideas are sometimes criticized in terms of their practicality and contemporary significance. Questions are raised regarding the practicality of alienation of the powerful. Will a person or a group belonging to a beneficial position become alienated? A person who is powerful and exploits others, will he/she ever realize or give up his position voluntarily? Where the realization and alienation of the powerful is questionable, the

joining of the exploiter with the exploited to fight against his own exploitative order is a dream. But the author of *Valmiki Pratibha* believed in the transformation of the soul of virtually any human being. Rabindranath deeply believed in this idea/1 as he expressed it in his different writings (for example in his play *Tasher Desh* [of Raja], *Bisarjan* [of Raghupati], *Mukut* [of Raajdhar], *Sarodotsav* [of Raja Sompal] etc.).

The practicality is often questioned but we must not forget examples like transformation of Ratnakar Dashyu to Valmiki, although only in fiction. There are many other examples but I would here like to mention a real-life example of contemporary times of Nigel Akkara who was transformed from one who used to take others' lives (as there are charges of murder against him), to someone who provides security to others' lives (as he runs a security agency now named Kolkata Facilities Management Pvt. Ltd). Satyajit Ray in his *Hirok Rajar Deshe* has spoken about a similar possibility, i.e., the transformation of the self of the exploiter.

It is true that the transformation of the soul is possible. Rabindranath had deep faith in the return of the alienated self to the humane self and in the fact that these humane selves would establish a humanitarian social order. A capitalist/king may also be transformed from inside as is portrayed in *Raktakarabi*. Thus, Rabindranath was unique in his philosophy of alienation and social change.

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Tuberculosis in India: Is it just a Medical Problem?

Paramita Barman

India features among the 30 High Tuberculosis (TB) Burden Countries that together accounted for 87 per cent of the global TB burden in 2015 in terms of the highest estimated number of incident TB cases (Global TB Report, WHO 2016), despite the prolonged operation of a disease-specific, focused national health program in the country to address TB and considerable expansion of TB care services. The disease is believed to be strongly correlated to socioeconomic gradients of the population. Also, the contagious nature of pulmonary TB coupled with misconceptions is often the source of strong social stigma that impacts health-seeking behaviour of individuals. This paper tries to track down from literature factors that might be partially offsetting the success of the conventional "diagnosis and treatment" based efforts to curb the disease in India.

Keywords: Tuberculosis, contagiousness, socio-economic vulnerability, risk factors, awareness, stigma, health-seeking behaviour, treatment default.

Introduction

Tuberculosis, a dreaded disease from ancient times, continues to haunt the global public health scenario despite efforts and interventions both at national and international levels to combat the disease. It stands as a major health challenge and a prime killer in developing countries. Often referred to as the *White Plague* in history, TB continues to thrive thousands of years after plaguing ancient cultures from Greece to Egypt, more than a century after the bacillus *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* causing the disease was first identified by Robert Koch in 1882 and decades after the first antibiotic-based treatments were introduced. It typically affects the lungs (pulmonary TB) but can affect other sites of the body as well (extra-pulmonary TB). The disease is spread in the air when people sick with pulmonary TB expel bacteria while sneezing,

talking or coughing without cover. The most common and accepted method for diagnosing TB worldwide is sputum smear microscopy as it clinches diagnosis. TB is an opportunistic infection and chances of latent disease developing into an active one diminishes with the presence of conditions like lower body immunity due to malnutrition etc., which act as catalysts. Any expected health benefit from improved diagnosis and treatment may be nullified by increase in risk factors like poor nutrition, HIV infection, diabetes, tobacco and alcohol abuse, exposure to indoor air pollution, poor ventilation, and crowded and unhygienic living conditions. The conventional treatment regime for emerging cases of drug-susceptible TB constitutes the administration of four first-line antibiotic drugs viz. isoniazid, rifampicin, ethambutol and pyrazinamide, spanning over six months. Treatment for multi drug resistant (MDR) TB lasts for twenty months and requires the administration of more expensive and toxic second line drugs.

TB was declared as a global public health emergency in 1993 by the World Health Organization (WHO). Despite conscious attempts both at national and international fronts to fight the disease, the global burden of TB remains enormous with an estimated 10.4 million incident cases, that is new and relapse cases of TB worldwide in 2015 and 1.4 million deaths from TB. In 2015, TB ranked above HIV/AIDS as one of the leading causes of death from an infectious disease (WHO 2016) despite being treatable and largely preventable. People fall ill with TB mostly in their productive years (15-59) of life that receive greater exposure to the outside world, posing serious socio-economic hardships for the household. According to studies, India loses an estimated 23.7 billion US dollars to TB annually in the form of direct and indirect costs. 3 to 4 months of work time is lost as result of TB with an average lost potential earning of 20-30 per cent of the annual household income. This increases the burden of debt particularly among the poor and marginalized sections of the population in addition to problems of social exclusion on public revelation of TB status, etc.

Global progress in combating the disease relies heavily on major advances in TB prevention and care in particularly the high burden countries like India, Pakistan, China, Indonesia, South Africa and Nigeria, to name a few. In India, the National Tuberculosis Control

Program (NTCP), which had been operational since 1962, was reviewed in 1992 and the Revised National TB Control Program (RNTCP) was formulated with the Directly Observed Treatment, Short Course (DOTS) strategy as its cornerstone. Nationwide coverage of the RNTCP was achieved by March 2006. Nevertheless, India housed the largest number of incident TB cases (2.0 million-2.5 million) in 2011, accounting alone for more than 21 per cent of the global TB burden. Although the initiation of affected persons into the treatment trajectory has been taken care of to some extent with the advent and effective functioning of the RNTCP, the adoption of adequate preventive measures and ensuring of compulsory diagnosis of persons with symptoms and completion of treatment have not been satisfactorily attended to. Conventionally, socio-economic vulnerabilities coupled with TB related misconceptions, lack of awareness and strong social stigma are supposed to play an important role in perpetuation of TB in developing societies like India by impacting the health-seeking behaviour of people, despite all-out efforts globally from clinical and medical perspectives to bring down the burden of the disease. The paper tries to identify from literature some such socioeconomic and cultural aspects at play, without addressing which, attempts at fighting this health menace is likely to remain largely incomplete.

Literature looking into perspectives on TB beyond medical and clinical stereotypes

A dreaded disease and a threat to community health, especially in developing countries, TB has inspired many studies on broader and crucial socio-economic and cultural factors including knowledge, awareness and stigma related issues that have contributed to perpetuation of the disease in our society.

Helden (2003) emphasizes that TB is not just a medical problem, but also a problem of social inequality and poverty. The poor will remain a breeding ground for TB until it is realized that it is not only the microbe that is to be blamed for the disease but also the gross defects in social organization and management of individual lives. What is urgently needed along with ensuring methodical administration of antibiotics is counselling of the patient and family to make them correctly aware of the disease and discard

stigma. Biomedical research needs to be combined with thoughtful political, social, economic and cultural research to look for an effective means to fight the disease.

Ghosh and Kulkarni (2004) have looked into whether household and individual characteristics play a role in the pattern of causes of deaths, and more specifically, the proportion of deaths due to communicable diseases in various age-sex groups in India where both large income inequalities and social stratification have traditionally been well defined. The paper finds that epidemiological transition is in progress in India, but its advance varies along socioeconomic lines with growing prevalence of non-communicable diseases among the better-off, educated and urban population, while communicable diseases remain relatively more prevalent among the rural based, illiterate or semi-literate poor masses and the socially weak.

According to Lonnroth et al. (2009), while the current health program based strategy to control TB is effective in curing patients and rescuing lives, its epidemiological impact has so far been less than predicted. To reach long term epidemiological targets, additional interventions are a necessity to reduce society's vulnerabilities for TB. Risk factors that seem to play out at the population level include poor living and working conditions and factors that cripple the host's defense against TB infection like HIV, malnutrition, smoking, alcohol abuse, diabetes and indoor air pollution. Identification of such risk groups help to better target strategies for early detection of people in need of treatment. The disease follows a strong socio-economic gradient between countries, within countries, and within communities. Studies focusing on TB burden among specific vulnerable populations such as prisoners and inmates, the displaced and homeless and certain ethnic minorities hint at the existence of a strong link between social deprivation and risk of TB.

Geethakrishnan et al. (1988) attempts to assess why there are so many undetected cases of tuberculosis when diagnostic facilities are available in each and every district of India and why patients default on treatment even when drugs are freely available. A survey was carried out in the South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal, India. Misconceptions and persistence of negative attitudes towards TB, particularly the belief that TB is incurable, were

identified as factors discouraging patients from continuing treatment.

In their paper, Mathew and Takalkar (2007) highlight that in India TB patients experience rejection and social isolation. Common misconceptions that fuel stigma are that TB is incurable; drugs for TB treatment harm the patient causing impotence and sterility, etc. Beliefs that TB spreads through unsafe sex practices like the case of HIV, through shaking hands and sharing food with an infected person, etc., cause patients to become secretive of their health conditions for fear of being shunned, even by their own family members. The myths and stigma revolving around TB contribute greatly to poor, delayed and inadequate health-seeking by individuals with symptoms as well as patients.

In the study by Subramanian et al. (1999), respondents from a number of randomly selected villages of a district in Tamil Nadu, India, were interviewed to find out the initial level of TB related knowledge on symptoms, diagnostic and treatment facilities available in government health institutions, preventive measures etc. Subsequently, the community was educated on basic facts about TB by various health education methods like pamphlets, film shows, exhibitions, etc. by volunteers. When interviewed after two years with the same set of questions, the same households were found to have gained an overall improvement in knowledge varying from 31 to 58 percent under different heads. The study thus draws attention to the effectiveness of direct and indirect methods of making community more aware about the disease.

The paper by Sreeramareddy et al. (2013) observes that knowledge about TB transmission in the general population of India was very poor and misconceptions were widely prevalent. Among traditional mass media, only the frequency of listening to radio was associated with knowledge about TB transmission. Majority of the respondents had heard of the disease called 'TB', nearly half the population knew that TB transmission occurred by air when coughing or sneezing but simultaneously believed in other modes of transmission like touching a TB patient or sharing his utensils, etc, thus propagating stigma. Only a quarter had idea about the correct mode of transmission without nurturing any misconception.

Sharma et al. (2005) have made an attempt to assess the impact of an intensive Information Education Communication (IEC) campaign in connection with the RNTCP launched by the Government of Delhi on generation of awareness and improvement in self reporting in Delhi, India. Results revealed that self-reporting, though more frequent after the campaign, was still low. IEC messages had less impact on the disadvantaged sections of the city's population. They being among the groups most exposed to the threats of infection and disease, the study suggests the use of specific, more effective IEC tools to reach out to such sectors, to cater to the special needs of illiterates, lower socio-economic classes and women to ensure higher self-reporting and demand for direct sputum smears.

Jaramillo (2001) presents an evaluation of a media based health education campaign with respect to case finding for TB control in Cali, Colombia. Results showed noticeable increase after the endeavour in the number of direct smears examined, in the number of people being tested with smears and in the notification of positive pulmonary TB cases in Cali. Increasing demand for smear tests is one way to achieve an increase in diagnostic coverage which is an objective of TB control programs across the globe. This piece of research highlights that complete reliance on passive case finding driven by public health institutions is insufficient to reach targets for diagnostic coverage - providing certain basic information regarding early symptoms of TB, costs, diagnostic and treatment facilities through mass media can strongly influence health- seeking behaviour and enable people to demand direct smears thereby increasing case finding and strengthening the effect of control programs.

According to Rubel and Garro (1992), the twin problems of delay in seeking TB treatment and treatment drop-out are a result of complex factors like people's confusion regarding implication of symptoms, time and monetary costs of accessing health facilities, social stigma, uncertainty regarding curability despite medication, etc. Socio-cultural factors in connection to TB have not received adequate attention in the drive to control this disease. Salient among those factors is the health culture of the patients, that is the understanding and information people have from family, friends and neighbours as to the nature of a health problem, its

causes and implications. It is of particular importance to determine the extent to which patients' comprehension of their health condition is influenced by the education and attitude they receive from clinical staff members.

Dodor, Neal and Kelly (2008) have explored the attitude, behaviour and understanding of TB by communities in a district in the western region of Ghana, Africa. In-depth interviews with respondents revealed that primarily fear of infection gave rise to negative attitudes towards TB leading to imposition of socio-physical distance and participatory restrictions on patients. Stigma in fact led individuals with obvious symptoms of TB to attribute it to other non-stigmatizing conditions or conceal diagnosis from others as well as default on treatment. The study indicated that TB related stigma, ingrained in most developing societies, including Ghana, was a major setback to the success of the National Tuberculosis Control Program (NTCP) globally, in particular with regards to case finding and adherence to treatment.

Kelly (1999) highlights the inadequacy of an entirely disease-specific focus on TB control without simultaneously understanding the broader family, community and social context of occurrence of the illness. Interviewed patients perceived themselves as transmitter of disease and on diagnosis becoming public, most of them suffered shunning and hostile behaviour from friends and family, to which they reacted by isolating themselves, becoming secretive about their illness and even abandoning treatment midway. Awareness about symptoms of the disease, its path of transmission etc. and freedom from stigma are crucial factors determining health seeking behaviour on the part of patients.

Courtwright and Turner (2010) have reviewed available literature on stigma to identify the causes of stigma surrounding the disease and to assess the impact of the same on diagnosis and treatment of TB. Most authors have identified the contagiousness of tuberculosis as a leading cause of stigma. Even among people with relatively good knowledge of TB transmissibility, the perceived risk of transmission can lead to isolation of individuals with TB. Among other factors fuelling stigma are the perceived associations of TB with malnutrition, poverty, low socio-economic class, HIV and TB co-infection, etc. Several authors have also tried to capture the prevalence of perceived, internalized and actually experienced

TB related stigma and compare its extent in different geographic regions. Concern about suffering the consequences of stigma prevent at-risk individuals from undergoing TB screening and seeking medical assistance after surfacing of symptoms. Even after start of treatment, fear of revelation of positive TB status may result in treatment drop-outs. Some interventions in the form of TB clubs and other awareness-raising initiatives have been shown to decrease TB stigma and improve treatment adherence.

Findings and discussion

Available literature at large as well as pertaining to the case of India succinctly supports the adoption of a wider and more holistic view towards TB, involving an understanding of the broader socio-economic and cultural context of occurrence of the disease, rather than a conservative, purely medical outlook. Poverty in general is recognized as a major barrier to health and health care and the links between poverty and disease burden have been well documented over the years in case of TB. Poverty is not only a cause but also a consequence of the disease due to loss of productivity and earnings, associated costs, etc. Crowded living conditions as often presented by refugees and displaced population provide an ideal situation for infection spread. Level of TB among prison population has been observed to be much higher than that among civilians. Late diagnosis, inadequate treatment, overcrowding, poor ventilation and repeated prison transfers encourage easy transmission of TB infection. Gender norms and gender inequality also create barriers to TB services. In case of women who are affected by TB in their economically and reproductively active years, the impact of the disease is strongly felt by their children and families. Women may have less access to TB treatment and prevention services than men due to unwillingness among male members of the family who do not consider women's health to be as important. Again, men might be more vulnerable to TB due to gender-specific occupations like mining or blasting, with exposure to particulates. They may be more likely to migrate for work, which can both increase spread of infection and cause interruptions in treatment. Men may also smoke or use drugs more in some societies, both independent risk factors for TB. Such documentations and observations do call for

other social considerations beyond the narrow, clinical aspect of TB for a more exhaustive understanding of the causes of the disease and its consequences on society.

Inadequate knowledge base and misconceptions that build around this largely communicable disease and encourage stigma, assume an important role in partially negating efforts at national and international levels to curb the incidence of TB and cure the disease in the affected population. Stigma constitutes negative attitude towards personal characteristics or circumstances that are not in sync with the norm. Concern about suffering the consequences of stigma and fear of isolation from society may compel individuals with TB symptoms to keep their health condition secret, avoid diagnosis and even practise non-compliance to treatment, thereby exposing the community to threats of new and more resistant strains of the bacterium like MDR and extensively drug resistant (XDR) TB. Stigma, which is moulded and disseminated by institutional and community norms and interpersonal attitudes, is a social determinant of health. Perception of self as a transmitter of disease may lead patients to conceal or not avail themselves of diagnosis and even to attribute their illness to other non-stigmatizing conditions. It is more often than not fuelled by incomplete and incorrect information as well as misconceptions particularly in relation to the path of transmission of infection, uncertainty about curability of the disease, etc. Persistence of lack of awareness and thus negative attitudes towards TB cause individuals with symptoms to go without diagnosis despite availability of adequate diagnostic facilities, resulting in a significant number of undetected TB cases. This helps the disease to perpetuate, by accommodating undiagnosed, infected individuals as well as treatment non-compliant or defaulter patients in the system. Among other factors feeding stigma are the perceived associations of TB with malnutrition, poverty, low socioeconomic class, HIV and TB co-infection, etc. The issue of stigma that has crippling social consequences can however be taken care of by undertaking general awareness enhancement campaigns and devising methods of reaching out to the people, particularly the vulnerable strata of the population, with effective information relating to TB, like its correct mode of spread, symptoms, availability of concerned health facilities, treatment specifications, curability, etc. Attempts to make the general

population correctly aware about the disease through health-education endeavors and/or accepted forms of media have huge potential to generate prompt health-seeking on the part of individuals. Targeting forms of media that are more popular among sections of the population can be a particularly effective means for spread of awareness and knowledge relating to TB. A more aware and knowledgeable community can shake off stigma, be less hesitant in coming out with TB in the open and take advantage of available specific medical facilities.

Conclusion

Despite a comprehensive national TB control program in place in India for quite some time, which now guides the states regarding implementation of TB diagnosis and treatment, the country accounts for a quarter of the world's annual incidence of TB. It is therefore clear that although TB is a medical condition *per se*, the larger socio-economic and cultural context of occurrence of the disease should be an equally poignant consideration as far as addressing and elimination of this global health menace is concerned. In a developing country like India, the broader scenario constituting mass poverty, malnutrition, ill health, poor and unhygienic living conditions, displacement and marginalization of population groups, illiteracy, glaring social stratification, unequal access to health care, lack of awareness, misconceptions and irrational beliefs, strong social stigma etc. provide the most fertile environment for breeding of the TB infection and its perpetuation, often in more drug resistant and virulent strains.

Every sputum-positive case has the potential to infect 10-15 individuals in a year; therefore, there is need to make the population aware of the correct route of TB transmission, symptoms, importance of diagnostic promptness and adherence to treatment. Awareness about the path of transmission of the disease (TB infection spreads from affected individuals through air when they cough, talk or sneeze without cover) and elimination of misconceptions not only provide primary prevention from infection following cough etiquette but also ensure that people do not nurture stigma, by dispelling myths and baseless fears about the disease. Success of the tuberculosis control program in India relies heavily on passive case detection and self-reporting by

patients to the health facility. However, this largely remains as only a supply-side response to the medical havoc. Lack of knowledge and association of negative attitudes like embarrassment, isolation, self-identification as a disease transmitter, etc. with TB continue to act as deterrents to timely health-seeking and treatment adherence. Reduction in stigma can potentially increase the demand for smears for stimulating, for which effective measures need to be undertaken in the form of awareness enhancement, convincing patients about curability of the disease, etc. With such demand issues remaining grossly unaddressed, effectiveness of TB control program in India is always under cloud. Failure of efforts at curbing the disease hints at the clear inadequacy of an entirely “diagnosis and treatment” based focus on the tubercular pandemic. TB is essentially a public health issue. Singular focus on treatment of reported cases leaves out many diseased individuals who are potential threats to community health but have not been medically diagnosed because they did not seek medical assistance by self-reporting due to fear of loss of livelihood and TB related stigma.

It is thus crucial to look beyond the eye-catching “detection and cure rates” as TB control programs most often tend to focus on, India being no exception. Treating the TB pandemic as merely a medical phenomenon without identifying the nexus of larger socio-economic and socio-cultural elements at play that feed the infection, appears to be a gross underestimation of the gravity of this health menace. This calls for addressing the deeper issues to arrest problems of underreporting and treatment default which cause perpetuation of the TB infection, mostly in more evolved and drug resistant strains. Lack of awareness and acute social stigma often result in violation of basic human rights curbing liberty, privacy, right to appear in public, etc. of the affected individuals. Stigma and the resulting discrimination can be devastating for patients and households as they may cause the affected to refrain from diagnosis and treatment, which is clearly a violation of the right of all to be benefitted from the highest attainable standards of available health care services. The IEC wing of the public health program relating to TB in India, which is responsible for generating community awareness, should be more consciously directed to information dissipation and delivery of TB related messages via alternative forms of media. Socio-economic

vulnerabilities like poverty, low and semi literacy levels, etc. pose further challenge to ensuring the effectiveness of awareness raising and stigma reducing efforts of such campaigns whereas the poor and disadvantaged sections of population happen to be among the most susceptible groups for TB. There is thus need for health program managers to explore and design more effective tools to reach out to such sectors with special needs, apart from meeting the information requirements of the public at large. Door to door campaigns to raise the general level of knowledge and awareness about TB and convince patients about its curability conditional on disciplined medication might improve the situation in India to a great extent.

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Culture Shock at Universities: Suburban Students and their Experience of Marginality

Arunima Bhowmick

Marginality is a condition of disadvantaged individuals and communities that arises due to unfavourable environmental, cultural, social, political and economic factors. The vulnerable situation that they confront can be either societal or spatial, very often, both. This paper seeks to understand predicaments and vulnerabilities of students coming to universities in metropolitan Kolkata from the margins of the city, more often referred to as the "suburbs".

The study is an attempt to relook marginality in the face of globalisation and dissect the context of regionalism in this light. The study has gathered strength from case studies of students coming to universities from these regions and an account of their conditions and sense of discrimination has been recorded. Their sense of marginality finds manifestation in difference of language, more precisely their speech and diction, fashion and most importantly lifestyle. Tracing the origin of the concept of marginality back to the one who coined it, Robert Ezra Park (1928), young students were found placed between multiple cultures and their negotiations give rise to a "hybrid" personality or the marginal man. Students from suburbs might not necessarily have pronounced class differences with the local residential students, but their possession of "cultural capital" and further access to it in the universities often become a ripe condition for furthering marginalization. Finally, the paper engages in addressing the vital question – whether to uphold "affirmative action" and support the marginal status, or create a collective of poorly privileged?

Keywords: marginality, suburbs, cultural capital, culture shock, affirmative action, hybrid personality.

Introduction

Marginalisation of a certain section of the society can be perceived as a natural social process following the changing dynamics of socio-cultural situations. Marginality experienced in modern times can be traced back to several historical factors such as caste, class, ethnicity and gender. Sometimes these factors work individually and sometimes in combination.

In the globalised world, however, marginalisation has come to redefine itself, thanks to the changing hierarchy in the established social ladder of a hitherto-stratified society. Subtle yet strong differences in the form of fashion, language, speech, everyday habits and knowledge distribution have come to the fore like never before.

Universities, as they bring youths together, try to dilute the old boundaries between the urban and the rural, and, in the process, resurrect new ones - between the mainstream and the marginalised. Students from the fringes of the society, mostly suburban, seem to be culturally attacked by the dominant urban culture particularly in the areas of habits and lifestyle.

However, the attack is as real as it is perceived by the victims and the so called "attackers". The suburban students' sense of stigmatization is varied and partially influenced by the information cascading upon them from past experiences of others. The attacker's role is also marked with a lot of fluidity, with many having a different story to tell; there are stories of self-subjugation and sense of inferiority among the suburban in contrast to the much-popularized tales of domination and discrimination.

Marginality is generally seen as a condition of disadvantage, arising out of unfavourable environmental, cultural, social, political and economic conditions. The vulnerabilities that the marginalised students confront can be defined either as societal or spatial. The "societal" elaborates dimensions such as religion, culture, caste, class, ethnicity, gender and economic condition. The "spatial", though not exclusive of the societal disparity, is usually about geographical remoteness of an area from mainstream development (Brodwin 2001; Müller-Böker, et al. 2004). However, social and spatial marginality occurs everywhere and often overlap.

The idea of “stranger” and “marginal man”

While discussing modernity, one surely cannot miss out on the logic of social exclusion at the level of social and spatial. And talking of this spatial and social exclusion, we need to reflect upon the Simmelian (1858) idea of space and the idea of “proximity and remoteness” that defines the social group.

Simmel’s sociology of space emphasizes that the “social” emerges with a lot of distance and movements within spatial boundaries, wherein the social life is merely not influenced by static structures. Hence, it follows that “sociation”, as a pattern of interaction, fills the space: ‘Social interaction among human beings is – apart from everything else it is – also experienced as a realization of space’ (Simmel 1908/2009c: 545).

In the context of the sociology of space and Simmel’s work called ‘Metropolis and Mental life’ (1903) he claims that the city is not just a locus of social differentiation or complex social interaction, but also subsumes endless number of collectives. Its inherent openness and opportunities draws close different social groups and, at the same time, separates them. Simmel upholds spatial relations to show how social distinctions arise and continue. According to him, distances are both spatial and social, as they are bodily and symbolic, real and constructed. Hence, Simmel observes, the “stranger” comes to exist and his position is quite relational, or, to be more specific, transitional in the group he establishes contact with.

Influenced by Simmel, American sociologist Robert K. Park (1928) introduced the concept “marginal man”. For him, the marginal man is the one who bears in himself the cultural conflict emerging from intermingling of various groups, cultures, communities. The outcast develops a personality that belongs to his native and not organic of the host culture. Here Park’s marginal man is identified with the stranger as a social type. However, the marginal man is remarkably different, in terms of concept, from the stranger, as the former forms a cultural hybrid, who doesn’t have equal membership in a new group although he might be consciously asking for it. But, Simmel’s “stranger” consciously seeks no assimilation and lies like a wanderer, coming in and going out of the group. Park’s scholarship and subsequent analogies have been heavily influenced by the social circumstances experienced

by the immigrants in the United States – a person between the “old” and “new” cultures (Allen 2000). But Simmel’s understanding of the stranger was quite independent of any particular ethnographic account and thereby illustrates how engagement in interactions produces a personality that is spatially close to the other yet socially distant.

Personification of both the “stranger” and the “marginalized man” is common in any marginalized social condition. The university campus is an amalgamation of students with diverse cultures and confronting ideals, if not in a state of complete antagonism. The struggle and bargains of the ones retreating to the margins because of the cultural hegemony of the widely accepted gives birth to the intermediary or the cultural hybrids. The relative “proximity of space and social remoteness” is very well maintained so that they retain an identity distinct from the mainstream.

Culture shock and stigma

The concept of social distance and spatial proximity opens up the narrative of symbolic culture and its material references. The newcomer confronts contradicting experiences between his original and host culture. Such contradiction often precipitates into a sense of anxiety, often a state of shock, as one fails to find common symbols and beliefs in the new social intercourse.

The suburban youth, needless to say, are taken over by a feeling of inferiority. In response, they either withdraw or blame the other for looking down upon them and criticizing their way of life, as they are far from the mainstream. The idea of “stigma” (Goffman 1963) gradually seeps in at this phase; the stigmatized begins anticipating attributes that are deeply “discrediting” and fear those that could be “discreditable” in their social setting. But it is often the language of relationships, not attributes, which transpires to build this state of discrimination and defines the status of the marginal. An attribute that stigmatizes one type of possessor can confirm the usualness of another, and therefore is neither creditable nor discreditable as a thing in itself (Goffman 1963: 4-10).

The exchange of symbols in our everyday life ranges from habits to language: the clothes we wear, the type of food we eat, the

time and space of our eating, the gestures we deploy in communication and their significance, and so forth. Physical proximity to the strange environment is mostly met with ethnocentrism initially or more precisely “culture shock” (Oberg 1960). The newcomer or stranger in the university campus rejects everything he or she encounters, as all the beliefs and cues of symbolic interaction are foreign and discomfoting to him, more so because of his “anticipated” sense of usual and conceived sense of discrimination.

There are cases where response of every individual to such cultural import - and at times perceived imposition - isn't the same. The youth at the university often experiences a sense of “euphoria” (honeymoon phase) with the new surroundings and finds everything quite enchanting. Unlike the ones displaying ethnocentrism, the ones in the euphoric state can grapple with the sense of marginality less.

In fact, the sense of alienation defines the marginalised condition of those who reject the new beliefs, ideas and the ways they are exposed to. The marginalised enter into a “regression stage” whereby they begin to glorify the culture they had been born into and begin “stereotyping” the other.

In *Practical Anthropology* (1960) Oberg divides culture shock into four stages and says that it's the reactionary attitude that makes the group experience cultural shock to design “stereotypes” about the host culture, and to romanticize one's own. Finally, as a sense of “resignation” sets in among the university students, the marginal comes to term with their social and spatial contrast and develop various coping mechanisms, at times ideological and often political.

Case studies from the campus

In order to illustrate of some of the observations outlined above, which are essentially conceptual in nature, I have done some case studies of students from different university campuses in Kolkata. The narratives presented below are based on experiences of the newcomers to the university from the suburban locales.

These go on to build a foundational position of difference and association between the suburban and urban students, as perceived by the former. The university as a new space of social interaction for the youth has been revisited through their ideas of and agency. Several ethnographic details echoed similar understanding of the plight of a marginal identity, while some did reflect variation in response.

A girl from Hooghly district said: 'We are considered the *geyon bhoots* (the uncouth and uncivilized coming straight from the villages.' She recalled how initially everyone made fun of her diction as she stressed on the *shh* syllable, which is so common to the sub-urban and rural Bengalis, making her sound funny to others. Her experience made her unlearn her native diction and correct her speech. On doing so, she says, she felt less humiliated and her ideas got relatively better attention. However, the acceptance of the marginalized that we see here does not speak of a change in the definition of the normal. Rather it's more of an acknowledgement of the "transformed self", trying to get into the mainstream.

One boy from Cooch Behar shared a slightly different experience. He said: 'From the very first day everyone was quite interested in my stories about the princely zamindar of the place I belonged to, though I am not very adept in speaking English fluently.' But he also mentioned that he faced scornful remarks from his urban counterparts when he showed displeasure about girls smoking on the campus. His understanding of gender rights and equality was heavily questioned. So, his acceptance and rejection became a negotiating point, where, on one hand he celebrated his originality and on the other, prepared himself for the adoption of an unknown culture like a "hybrid".

One of his close friends from the city, when asked about his interactions with the boy, said: 'They live with clichés and often do not like to experiment.' He also added that their attempt to abandon old ways and adopt the urban style often make them look like "wannabes". Some elaborated the idea of wannabes as the 'ones with disastrous fashion sense and who do everything in excess, such as smoking, drinking and speaking on topics that they seem to know nothing about.' Such and many more

“stereotypes” surfaced over several interviews with the respondents.

It has been noted that the cultural hybrid flourishes most in terms of fashion. A girl revealed how she felt ostracized because of the supposedly old-fashioned clothes that she wore on the university campus: ‘I was asked if I wore my mother’s clothes from her younger days’. Presumed ideas about what is normal made her copy everything blindly that would give her a modern look. At the same time, several urban students elucidated on how they celebrated the look that is otherwise widely unacceptable to the people outside the campus. Thus, we see how the concept of “ideal look” varies from one group to the other and is dependent on the position they occupy in the scale of power.

Further, participant observation aided in gathering common terms and phrases specific to this space and ones that symbolically represent the practices and politics of marginality % such as “bourgeois canteen”, referring to expensive eateries; or “café culture”, meaning intellectual exchanges during leisure time – from which the participation of the suburban youth is mostly discounted.

Forms of marginality

1. Language, speech and diction

Language defines one’s identity, and while the knowledge of language is one thing, diction is quite another. Diction makes all the difference, even though universities and higher educational institutes develop a “standard” language ideology – the belief in a common, “correct” medium of communication for the educated individuals (Lippi-Green 1997, 2012; Milroy 2001). This standardisation of language permeates beyond the classroom into the “more social” spaces shared by the students during their leisure time, but students from the suburbs who attended municipality and government schools because of the subsidized fee structure remain skeptical about the use of a single uniform language, that is English. Students from the departments like Bengali and Sanskrit also experience heavy dependence on English language for social communication while their medium of instruction and study, both, do not require the same. Suburban students see this as a cultural

“fad” adopted by the urban students. It generally seems true that members of a social category may strongly support a standard of judgment that they, as a collective, feel more inclined to agree upon, even when it does not apply to them directly. It often helps them redefine themselves in relation to the one negated and that opens up a new debate around marginality.

Bourdieu (1991) has suggested that educational institutions propagate standard language ideology, which raises doubt among certain speakers regarding the correctness of their speech and diction. They not only start considering their medium of communication as less prestigious than the so-called “standard” promoted by the dominant urban class but also begin to question the meaningfulness of one’s ideas and stock of knowledge. Thus, students with stigmatized speech and diction often suffer from insecurity of rejection on the grounds of being considered less educated or intelligent (Lippi-Green 1997: 2012). Since language and identity are inextricably related, rejection of a person’s language or stigmatization of a particular diction in a sense manifests xenophobia. Many students feel a tension between their speech back home and that expected at the university; therefore, they try unlearning and associate the pain of leaving the comfort zone as a tool of discrimination. Scott has observed: ‘language is a critical issue for scholars and practitioners in educational leadership for social justice because it is such a powerful vehicle of culture’ (2008: 59). Hence such homogenization into a single uniform speech threatens students’ smooth interaction on the campus. A sense of marginalization creeps in leading to stereotyping of the host culture as close-minded and discriminating.

2. Knowledge exchange and cultural capital

In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984) Bourdieu explored the concept of cultural capital and mentioned about the conventional hierarchies of the arts and cultural activities (visiting art galleries, reading or listening to the classics, going to the theatre or to art cinema etc.) He mentioned that education system patronizes participation in legitimate culture and continues to serve as a marker of social distinction. Such culture reflects the choices of the dominant class and plays a

significant role in the selection and assessment practices of the university systems. Cultural capital is a scarce resource that the young borrows from the family and educational institutes. This over-the-years accumulation helps further acquisition of knowledge, skills, and a sense of the rules-of-the-game in the educational system, which is recognized as the yardstick for success by the institutional gatekeepers and peers.

It has been observed that the students from the urban background are more privileged, as they belong to more economically affluent families and consequently have better access to cultural and social capital. Although, it cannot be concluded that the urban students always belong to higher class and students from the suburban represent the middle or lower class and thereby lack requisite cultural capital. There have been several cases where respondents of this study have mentioned about their regional knowledge and experiences finding wide acceptance in the mainstream academic structure. However, these voices though absorbed and celebrated are done so with a fair recognition of their marginality. Hence anticipation of attributes of any stranger plays a strong role in defining him and his scholarship - be it mainstream or marginal.

Rich in cultural capital back at home, urban students at the universities often have an advantage of replicating the same capital for academic pursuits and scholarly engagements. In fact, the suburban students have expressed their lack of social contacts in the cities and thereby a deficit of requisite stock knowledge for initiating further exchange. In contrast, the urban students enter the classrooms with much preparedness for academic interaction, use of the institutional facilities (such as library facility) and accumulation of knowledge. It is here and beyond the classroom, during their leisure time and interaction with peers that the suburban students miss a level ground to initiate an equal exchange. Certain kind of knowledge hierarchy exists in the interactions between the urban and suburban students and that moulds the conceptualization of "the other" (by the urban) as less powerful and less informed. There have been experiences where students of both groups -urban and suburban - have designated an assigned seating position to each other. Famously, "the first bench" is marked out as an area for the more interactive urban and hence avoided by the suburban students. This

acceptance of the hierarchy in everyday discourse and action speak aloud of their lack of self-confidence and a sense of alienation based on their preconceived notions of reality.

Besides, the suburban students predominantly come from families, which can be bracketed as "salaried, middle income group", guiding them into a similar career choice for early economic benefits. Hence, knowledge exchange also becomes quite structured and oriented towards a purposive end. On the contrary, their urban counterparts often do not have such limiting forces working against them. This contrast in value orientation also marks them separate from each other and pushes them to a state of group solidarity based on similar interests and goals of livelihood. However, it has also been observed that often some suburban students gain impetus from their contact with the urban and show ambitions of transcending their marginal modalities and engaging in a career that is outside the defined periphery of the so-called marginal. But the struggle of defining the marginal and living those traits, handed down over time, remains.

3. Fashion and habits

Fashioning a style and setting trend is predominant among the university students, particularly in urban space. Fashion, in broad sense, refers, among other things, to dress, appearance and style, which give a material foundation to identity formation. The youth often associates and asserts themselves through their clothing and styling of their bodies and hair. It produces a significant material culture and acts as a symbolic system to transmit an identity, which both, aligns to a particular group and states its distinctiveness. According to Simmel (1858), fashion can be seen as a non-cumulative change in cultural features, emerging from a tension between the social and individual existence of man. On one hand, students at the campus try to imitate the predominant clothing standards maintained at the university, mostly helping them recreate their identities as a loyal member of the group. On the other, there is a strong tendency to distinguish one from others. Hence, one must not mistake this imitation as an attempt at building any sort of uniformity because individual deviations are plenty. Undoubtedly, some tend more towards imitation (and thus

to conformism) while others tend to distinction (and thus to eccentricity and dissidence). In short, Simmel argues that an individual tends to imitate those whom they admire and distinguish themselves from people they are indifferent to or despise.

Fashioning of clothes, mannerisms and styles, ranging from haircuts, body art, tattoo, clothes, to smoking and eating habits, by the students at the campus, reflect imitation of the global trends, which is guided by their ownership of requisite cultural capital. Urban students' sense of fashion reflects more experimentation, westernization and, at times, is more eclectic. There can be no doubt that a certain class hierarchy is embedded in their styles and habits. For instance, the brands that they wear and the kind of food they eat at the canteen definitely reflect higher price margins. However, imitation of the popular style is also prevalent among the suburban students. Since the sense of marginality descends upon them with the greatest force in terms of their clothing, food habits and gestures; the eagerness to transform is also maximum. Whereby, they engage into heavy smoking, drinking and other "infamously famous", attributes that are assigned to the popular urban by the suburban themselves. The popular and dominant style that initially shocked the suburban youth, primarily due to its distinctiveness and secondly, its deviance from the values and standards of their original cultural symbols, now becomes a part of them. Thereby the concept of "normal" or "usualness" becomes a mere perception allowing one to switch positions between the idea of marginal and the mainstream. Hence, distinction is often diverted into a discrimination discourse due to the assumed sense of alienation among the suburban and the claimed sense of superiority of style and lifestyle of the urban youth.

4. Activism for solidarity and action for strengthening boundaries

While discussing youth activism in the universities, one has to acknowledge the close link between activism and xenophobia and anti-xenophobia. Anti-xenophobic activism often tries to play against the discrimination and silent ostracization. Student activism lies as much outside the premise of political affiliation as much within it. Student political organisations in the universities

display vote bank politics similar to their national counterparts, making a clear demarcation between the urban and suburban student voters. There is a tendency among the students from the suburban to carry their familial political lineages into the universities and cast their votes accordingly. This trend often assures affiliation to a party that has prominent state presence, ensuring group solidarity among suburban students by drawing them under one political umbrella.

On the other hand, urban students explore their political rights and tend to remain outside the ambit of any political activity that has linkages to or sponsorship of state level parties. Hence, youth activists try to tap this xenophobic character of political participation at universities and split their voters on the basis of urban and suburban residents. This, in turn, widens the gap between the two but helps develop solidarity within the group based on the principles of conflict. In fact, the marginality politics subtly creeps in to ensure further estrangement.

My case studies and other ethnographic accounts have unravelled several cross cutting factors of discrimination which are at play against the suburban students. These students in most cases suffer a minority status too in terms of class, ethnicity or caste and enjoy "selective system bias" (Jencks 1998) through affirmative action programmes. Thus, the burden of discrimination is doubled, impacting them socially as well as culturally. They feel doubly disadvantaged, as the protective policies aggravate their sense of marginality with regular contact with the urban students on the campus. Thus, an unintended consequence of affirmative action is experienced in the form of reverse discrimination that further heightens intergroup tension (Lynch 1992).

Conclusion

Marginality has its roots in the older structures of social divisions. Culture shock, stigmatization and stereotyping find explanation in the older forms of caste, class and ethnic conflicts that still survive in the present social order. The apparently egalitarian structure of the university remains infested with a sense of discrimination and marginality simply because of the denial of better life chances to many sections of students. But the persisting question: is the

sense of alienation gripping the non-mainstream students that makes them accept the status of being marginalized, or is the dominant "culture of power" that is pushing them to the margin? While arguing the predominance of one over the other, one cannot dismiss the struggle against social dissociation by those at the margins, especially in a higher education institution. Also important is the question whether the other struggle to deliberately remain a "stranger" to the dominant culture. The truth is that when students at universities feel marginalized, they find themselves misfit and begin to wonder if they "matter" (Schlossberg 1989: 9) and this feeling often defeats the whole purpose of academic learning and personal growth. Thus, the social disparities and maladjustments at the level of larger structure are often negotiated at the expense of the suffering agency.

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Lepcha Dress: A Marker of Cultural Identity

D. C. Roy

The unique and typical Lepcha dress is one of the important markers of their cultural identity. The pattern or design of Lepcha dress is sober and elegant. The length and style are gentle and weather friendly. The accessories are simple and need based. All materials and accessories of Lepcha dress are locally available and eco-friendly. Weaving and dying are done most systematically and scientifically. Lepcha women are good weavers and they acquire the skill of weaving all parts of both male and female dress as part of their socialization.

Keywords: Male dress, female dress, hat, knife, bag, bow and arrow, scarf, ornaments, colour, design.

Introduction

The Lepchas of Darjeeling hills have their unique dress, which they have been using for generations. Their dress is colorful, comfy, soothing, relaxing but attractive, gorgeous and elegant and at the same time without being flashy or showy. Lepcha dress is unique in its style and has no similarities with any other dress. They have developed their dress over long time as per their need with the materials available locally. It is a one of the important markers of Lepcha identity and represents high sense of Lepcha wisdom and culture. The dress of the Lepchas is typical to the community and all materials used in it are collected from the resources found in the forests and local areas.

Male dress

Lepcha male dress is known as *Dum-praa*. Although *Dum-praa* is only one part of a complete male dress the word is generally used to mean the Lepcha male dress in its completeness. Like the

medieval dress of the Romans and the Greeks the length of Lepcha male dress reaches between knee and ankle. *Dum-praa* is a long flat blanket or shawl which is woven domestically. It is about three and a half feet in width and four to four and a half feet in length. Two pieces cut out of this cloth are joined together width wise to wrap the whole upper portion of the body. It has a dual role; it is used as garment during day time and as blanket at night.

L. S. Tamsang (1998) has mentioned about three types of *Dum-praa* on the basis of varying patterns or designs. They are: (1) *Tagaap*, the oldest design which is woven with floral design, (2) *Khemchu*, a scissors design of inverted and upright V's and (3) *Tamblyoak*, a butterfly design. On the basis of materials used there are another three types of *Dum-praa*: (1) *Koojoo Vaadoah*, the oldest dress made from *Koojoo*, a nettle plant. It is light, soft and of natural plain dark cream colour without any dye or embroidery. It is costly, scarce in supply and thus rarely used. (2) *Thokroah*, stripes on thin and soft fiber with black and white colour without any embroidery. It is multi coloured with typical Lepcha design. (3) *Menchhyo*, a multi-coloured dress with a lavish splash of embroidery at the top from where the *Dum-praa* drops down. The typical Lepcha pattern has vertical lines of varying thickness and colours. After wearing the patterns beautifully drop from the shoulder covering the chest.

Tom Tshering Lepcha and Tar Tshering Lepcha (2010) have mentioned nine types of *Dum-praa* on the basis of their differential patterns. They are: (1) *Tsulot-tyet*, (2) *Tungbrik*, (3) *Tungblyok*, (4) *Poo-chak*, (5) *Sumok*, (6) *Samok* or *Sabok*, (7) *Tungtoksor*, (8) *Aa-shyer* and (9) *Aa-thyap-alyot*. *Tsulot-tyet* is a pattern that carries arrow tips. Bow and arrow are the traditional community weapons, which are widely used in the hunting and fishing. The tips of arrow are poisoned with substances obtained from the poisonous shrubs found in the locality. The tips of the arrow appear as one of the patterns of the Lepcha male dress, *Dum-praa*. *Tungbrik* and *Tungblyok* are the patterns showing the stylist insects and butterfly. Lepchas are traditionally dwellers of forest which is rich in bio-diversity. They live among the insects and butterflies which have become their constant company. The pattern *Poo-chak* shows close association of the Lepchas with bamboo. Their love for bamboo and its multipurpose use are reflected in the bamboo knot

pattern of their dress. *Samok* or *Sabok* is the symbolic representation of traditional arms. When this pattern is used in Lepcha headgear, it is called *Samok Thyaaktuk*. *Tungtoksor* is a design of fern which the Lepchas use in their day to day life as food item. Use of fern as pattern in Lepcha dress shows close association of the community with nature. *Aa-shyer* is a pattern of thin strips of different colours. It has no significance other than the love of the community for colourful dress. *Aa-thyap-alyot* is a design where the ends of the cloth are left with frill of threads.

Lepcha shirt is known as *Tago*. It is loose with high neck at the back side and slightly open in the front. Major part of *Tago*, barring the sleeves and the neck, is covered with *Dum-praa*. *Tago* has a rigid collar which runs around the neck and opens up at the throat in a small V towards the chest. It is made of thick cotton fibre and is mostly white or cream in colour.

The top corners of each end of *Dum-praa* is most scientifically tied with *Zet*, a safety pin made of sharpened bamboo split or with iron or bronze or silver, preferably on the left shoulder of the shirt so as to allow free movement of the other shoulder and both the arms. Lepchas leave one arm, generally the right, arm free.

Dum-praa is gathered around the body at the hip and is fastened by a scarf or belt known as *Naamrek*. It is a waist belt made of cotton cloth to tie and hold the upper dress items of the Lepchas.

The Lepcha trouser is known as *Tomoo*. It is three quarter in size and can reach between knee and ankle. It is made of thick cotton fibre and is mostly white or cream in colour. The short size of *Tomoo* helps the Lepchas to work in waterlogged fields and leech infested jungles.

Lepcha shawl is known as *Yaanglo*. It is usually maroon or white in colour. It has no pattern or design. It covers the chest area of the Lepcha men. Lepchas use *Yaanlo* during winter. It is also worn during marriage, rituals, festival, and other social functions. The *Yaanglo* is made gorgeous with embroidery work at both ends.

Lepcha shoe is known as *Dyaang Hlaom* or simply *Hlaom*. But the Lepchas have no tradition of wearing shoes or any other kind of footwear. Even today they remain barefooted in the villages but

while in town they wear the normal shoes available in the market. Lepchas call socks as *Dyaang Syuk*.

Tanggyip, a long-handled bag hanging across the shoulder, is a typical marker of Lepcha identity. *Tanggyip* is also known as *Takvyoal*. It has spot marks all over which is known as *Taak Tik*. Lepchas carry all basic support items inside the *Tanggyip*. It is a very useful dress item and remains across the body of the male Lepchas when they move in the village or town during agricultural operation, forest, fishing, hunting, marketing, and so on.

Thyaaktuk, the Lepcha hat, marks the uniqueness of the Lepchas. Depending upon the shape and size, Lepcha hat has different names like *Samok Thaaktuk*, *Paapree Thaaktuk*, *Auanaok Thaaktuk*, *Syeraaboo Thaaktuk* and *Soring Thaaktuk*. *Samok Thaaktuk* is an example of fine Lepcha craft. It is unique and takes a lot of time and skill in preparing it. Lepchas use *Ru* or cane and sturdy but small bamboo in preparing *Samok Thaaktuk*. The Lepcha hat is decorated with bird's feathers or tails. *Noombong Pho Takseem*, rocket-shape Drongo's tail is used to decorate hat on special occasions.

Ban, a short knife, which is kept at the waist hanging in wood or bamboo sheathe, is another typical dress ornament of the Lepcha male. It is sharp at one edge and blunt at the other side. There are three types of *Ban*: *Ban-pok*, *Ban-mok* and *Ban-Payook*. *Ban-pok* is about a foot and a half to two feet long from the tip to the handle and two to two and a half inches broad. It is slightly curved at the top. *Ban-mok* is gently curved on both sides of the knife at the tip and in earlier days it was used against the enemies. Now it is used as ceremonial knife. *Ban-Payook* is a Lepcha sword, which was used during war earlier. It is not sharply pointed but gently curved at the top front-end side only. The Lepcha *Ban* is of typical shape and has no similarity with any of the weapons of the neighbouring communities. *Ban-pok* is commonly used as dress item by the Lepchas. It has multipurpose use. Lepchas use it for cutting forest, making utensils, constructing house, and agricultural operations. It is also used for protecting themselves from the attack of wild animals or strangers. *Ban-pok* is thus the source of self-confidence and strength. J. D. Hooker has admired the use of *Ban-pok* saying: 'with the simple resource of a plain knife he makes his house and

furnishes yours, with a speed, alacrity, and ingenuity that wile away that well-known long hour when the weary pilgrim frets for his couch' (Hooker 1855). L. S. Tamsang has narrated the unique character of *Ban-pok* observing: 'it is stuck, unlike other knives of the world, the other way around in the scabbard; the blunt part of the Baan faces the front and the sharp cutting edge of the knife is kept, always, towards the back. When a Baan is taken out or unsheathed, the blunt of the knife initially confronts the proposed target' (Tamsang 1998). *Ban-pok* is a part of the ordinary Lepcha dress item and is always kept hanging at the left side of their waist.

Salee-Taong, i.e., the bow and arrow are typical items of Lepcha dress. On his way to hunting, Lepcha men carry *Salee*, hanging on shoulder and the quiver containing *Taong*, or arrows on their back. Earlier, Lepchas depended completely on forest for food and the *Salee-Taong* comprised an integral part of Lepcha dress. *Salee*, or bow, is usually made with split bamboo dried and hardened by keeping them in the smoking area. The strings of forest creepers or animal veins are firmly notched at both ends of the bow. The bow is flattened at the middle to withstand the tension from the bend and tapers towards both ends. *Taong*, or arrows, are made with matured dry split bamboos or canes. The *Taong nyak*, or arrow head, is made pointed with iron tip while *Taong gro*, the arrow feather end, is made by tightening the bird's feather in round shaped four different equal parts. Bird's feather is used to confuse the animals or birds during hunting. The *Taong nyak* or the tips of the arrow are made poisonous by collecting poison from the roots of the poisonous plants available locally. Bamboo or cane is used to make the *Taong Saloo*, quiver for resting the arrows at the back of the hunter. *Salee and Taong* are considered as accessory dress items of the Lepchas and compulsory items for the hunters.

A group of moving Lepcha men with their traditional dress comprising of *Dum-praa* with *Zet*, a safety pin; *Naamrek*, a waist belt; *Tago*, the loose shirt; *Tomoo*, Lepcha trouser; *Yaanglo*, Lepcha shawl; *Dyaang Hlaom*, ordinary shoe; *Tanggyip*, long handled bag; *Thyaaktuk*, Lepcha hat; *Ban-pok*, Lepcha knife; *Salee-Taong*, bow and arrow is exceedingly picturesque, elegant and graceful.

Female dress

Lepcha female dress is known as *Dum-dem* or *Dum-bun*. The traditional *Tamaan-dam* is a coarse silk dress and cream in colour. *Dum-dem* or *Dum-bun* or *Tamaan-dam* is worn by covering the body criss-crossing just below neck. It is a long dress which covers the whole body up to feet. Lepcha females do not use colourful dress; they use simple, sober dress and most natural colour. The *Dum-dem* is a flowing dress brightly coloured and smooth as the cloth was derived from cocoons of caterpillars from the forest. The coarse silk threads are dyed and woven into this simple flowing dress.

Females use *Tago*, long sleeved loose blouse, inside the *Dum-dem*. Both *Dum-dem* and *Tago*, the blouse, are plain in colour. *Dum-dem* is normally of light colour while *Tago* is red. Females do not use multi-coloured dress like the ones used by the males.

A married Lepcha lady uses *Jyoordong Tago*, a flowering long sleeve gown over her *Dum-dem* or *Dum-bun* or *Tamaan-dam*. *Jyoordong Tago* is used symbolically to indicate that she is married. Lepchas use either black or blue velvet for *Jyoordong Tago*.

Dum-dem or *Dum-bun* or *Tamaan-dam* is tied with *Zet*, a safety pin made of sharpened bamboo split or iron or bronze or silver on both the shoulders with their *Tago* or *Jyoordong Tago*. The *Zet* keeps all the weight of *Dum-dem* or *Dum-bun* or *Tamaan-dam* allowing free movement of both the shoulders and arms.

At the waist, the females use *Naamrek*, a waist belt made of cotton cloth, to tie and hold the upper dress items.

Lepcha females use the hanging portion of the front side of *Naamrek* as bag known as *Dam-pyoom*. It is used to collect fruits, vegetables etc. *Dam-pyoom* is traditionally used by the Lepcha females to greet a person. While greeting a fellow Lepcha the females hold the *Dam-pyoom* with two hands and say *Khaamree*.

A scarf known as *Tarao* is used around the head of the Lepcha females. It is small in size and normally white in colour. *Tarao* is the female counterpart of *Thyaaktuk*, the male hat. It protects the females from cold and dust.

Ban-hoor, a small knife is kept at the back of the *Naamrek*. It is used to protect them from animals and enemies. This is the female counterpart of the *Ban-pok*. *Ban-hoor* is used in searching roots,

edibles in the forest and also to cut grass, vegetables, fruits, fire-woods and also used as tool in agricultural operation. Girls are given the *Ban-hoor*, the sickle, when they reach eight or ten, both as a piece of ornament and as a weapon to protect themselves from animals and enemies.

Lepcha females are the lovers of *Pansa-an-palan*, jewellery and ornaments. '*Zet*, a pair of silver safety pins to hold *Dam-bun* on both sides of the shoulders; *Kakyoop*, a ring, *Kaawo*, an amulet with *Panzin*, silver chains hooked to the amulet, and especially *Sambraang Boor*, silver chains with a *Sambraang* flower design, fastened by the side of her right waist; *Kakel*, a bangle, and *Takvil Lyaak*, a necklace, made of fine, intricate cane splits, designs, and patterns enhance her charm, beauty, and personality' (Tamsang 1998).

Both the males and females keep long hair but the style of plait distinguishes the sex. The male's plait their hair in single braid while the females plait double braids. Unmarried women's double plaited hair style is called *Chohem Chombi* while the married women's hair style is called *Gi Pamoal Chom Phy oak*. The *Chohem Chombi* is compared with hair crest or *Spangled Drongo* bird's tail while *Gi Pamoal Chom Phy oak* is compared with the black shiny cobra.

A group of Lepcha female with their traditional dress comprising of *Dum-dem* or *Dum-bun* or *Tamaan-dam* with *Tago* or *Jyoordong* *Tago*, loose blouse; *Zet*, a safety pin; *Naamrek*, a waist belt; *Dam-pyoom*, a pocket; *Tarooa*, a scarf; *Ban-hoor*, Lepcha sickle; *Pansa-an-palan*, jewellery and ornaments; *Gi Pamoal Chom Phy oak*, double plaited hair style is exceedingly picturesque, beautiful, gorgeous, polite, elegant, attractive, pretty, cute and charming.

Materials used

Lepchas are the great naturalists of the eastern Himalayan region. They not only know the details of the fauna and flora of the region but use them in their day to day life. All materials used in Lepcha dress are collected and processed from the raw materials available in the local forest. The forest not only supplies fruit, root and other food items but also supplies tough fibers and sinews for weaving

coarse blanket like cloths which the Lepchas use in their upper part of the body. 'They dwelt in pretty cottages, around which they cultivated their plot of ground ...cotton, from which they spun their cloth' (Mainwaring 1876: ix). They collect silk from forest caterpillars for weaving cloths. The various trees, flowers, shrubs, roots, leaves are used for dyeing their cloths. They not only use descent color but the colors are enduring. Roots and leaves of two types of *Syam Rik*, *Rubia Manjith* are mixed with cold water to make red color. This gives permanent red colour for Lepcha *Dum-praa*. Maize is first roasted until it turns black and then the maize is grounded into powder. Black colour is made by mixing the powder with cold water and solution of tender leaves of *Takmel*, a type of forest shrub. This black colour is also used as black ink to write Lepcha manuscripts particularly the *Naamthoo Naamthaar*, the holy manuscripts of the Lepchas. Blue colour is made by mixing the ground matured seeds of *Gyabukhanak*, *Dichroa febriguga*, a shrub, with cold water. Thus, all the three important colors - red, blue and black are made of the natural materials which are locally available. The art of making colours is an integral part of Lepcha culture which is transferred from one generation to another

Lepchas have different types of hats or headgears like *Samok Thaaktuk*, *Paapree Thaaktuk*, *Aanaok Thaaktuk*, *Syeraaboo Thaaktuk* and *Soring Thaaktuk*. These hats are normally made from fine canes, bamboos, straws and leaves and fine velvet cloth.

Colors used

In Lepcha tradition, earlier, only white and blue colours were used in *Dam-praa*. But in recent time, beside white and blue, Lepchas also use red, green, orange and black colours in *Dam-praa*. In Lepcha culture, white colour is a symbol of purity and perfection; blue symbolizes wisdom and progress; red stands for strength and energy; green is used for nature, peace and harmony; orange symbolizes material wealth and black stands for vibration of dignity.

Dum-dem, Lepcha female dress, is simple, sober and natural in colour. *Tago*, the blouse, is also plain in colour. Sometimes *Dum-dem* is light in colour while *Tago* is red. Females do not use multi-colored dress like the males.

Lepcha dress in the eyes of Western scholars

One can draw an understanding of different aspects of Lepcha dress from the existing literature, written primarily by the Western scholars, on the community. A. Campbell, for example, describes the Lepcha dress as thus: 'The Lepcha dress is simple and graceful. It consists of a robe of striped red and white cotton cloth crossed over the breast and shoulders, and descending to the calf of the legs, leaving the arms bare; a loose jacket of red cotton cloth is worn over the robe by those who can afford it, and both are bound round the waist by a red girdle; some strings of coloured beads round the neck, silver and coral earrings, a bamboo-bow and quiver of iron-pointed arrows, and a long knife complete the dress of the men. The knife, called "ban" by the Lepchas, and "chipsa" by the Bootias, is constantly worn by the males of all ages and ranks; it hangs on the right side suspended from the left shoulder, and is used for all purposes. With the "ban" the Lepcha clears a space in the forest for his house and cultivation; it is the only tool used by him in building; with it the skins of the animals that fall a prey to his snares and arrows; it is his sword in battle, his table knife, his hoe, spade, and nail pare. Without the "ban" he is helpless to move in the jungle; with it, he is a man of all work: the expertness with which it is used by the boys of a few years' old even is the astonishment of strangers. The women are less neatly dressed than the men: a piece of plain unbleached cotton cloth, or the cloth of the castor oil insectâ •" the Indi â•" rolled round to form a sort of petticoat, with a loose red gown of the same, and a profusion of mock coral and coloured bead necklaces, form their entire wardrobe' (Campbell 1840).

J. D. Hooker spent some lines on the *Dum-dem* and discussed about some important aspects female dress. He wrote: 'When in full dress, the woman's costume is extremely ornamental and picturesque; besides the shirt and petticoat she wears a small sleeveless woolen cloak, of gay pattern, usually covered with crosses, and fastened in front by a girdle of silver chains. Her neck is loaded with silver chains, amber necklaces, etc., and her head adorned with a coronet of scarlet cloth, studded with seed-pearls, jewels, glass beads, etc. The common dress is a long robe of indi, a cloth of coarse silk, spun from the cocoon of a large caterpillar

that is found wild at the foot of the hills, and is also cultivated: it feeds on many different leaves, Sal (Shorea), castor oil etc.'. Hooker also discussed about the hair style of the Lepchas of both males and females as thus: In these decorations, and in their hair, they take some pride, the ladies frequently dressing the latter for the gentlemen: thus, one may often see, the last thing at night, a damsel of discreet port, demurely go behind a young man, unplait his pig-tail, tease the hair, thin it of some of its lively inmates, braid it up for him, and retire. The women always wear two braided pig-tails, and it is by this they are most readily distinguished from their effeminate-looking partners, who wear only one' (Hooker 1855).

L. A. Waddel has discussed about *Dum-dem*, the female dress, hair style, scarf and jewelry. He writes: 'the indoor dress of the women is a close-fitting gown without sleeves, and this was probably their full dress originally. But now, for out of doors, they wear over all a long, loose, wrapper like white cotton gown with long wide sleeves turned up in Tibetan fashion at the cuffs to show the red lining—a dress which effectually masks the figure and has little grace in its drapery. Their hair is parted in the middle and done up into two pig-tails which are usually gathered in a knot on the crown and secured with a silver pin. And over the head is thrown a gaudy silk handkerchief, drooping negligently over the neck, somewhat in the fashion of a Spanish peasant-girl's. Around the neck they wear as much jewelry as they can afford. Their stocking less foot is unshod'. In another place, he writes about *Dum-dem*, the female dress, hair style, scarf and jewelry as thus: 'the indoor dress of the women is a close-fitting gown without sleeves, and this was probably their full dress originally. But now, for out of doors, they wear over all a long, loose, wrapper like white cotton gown with long wide sleeves turned up in Tibetan fashion at the cuffs to show the red lining—a dress which effectually masks the figure and has little grace in its drapery. Their hair is parted in the middle and done up into two pig-tails which are usually gathered in a knot on the crown and secured with a silver pin. And over the head is thrown a gaudy silk handkerchief, drooping negligently over the neck, somewhat in the fashion of a Spanish peasant-girl's. Around the neck they wear as much jewellery as they can afford. Their stocking less foot is unshod' (Waddel 1899).

Lepchas, particularly the females, are expert in weaving both Dum - praa, their men's dress; *Tunggip*, a long-handled bag; *Thyaaktuk*, the Lepcha hat etc. for the male members of the family. Almost all houses have their weaving apparatus and the females weave during their leisure time and it is a part of their household task. 'The women weave at the looms their grandmothers used, and, if they will only keep to the good stuffs and dyes of the old weavers, produced excellent work. A weaving school in Sikkim, and a few European looms and spinning wheels, introduced by missionaries throughout the district, have only affected the few at present. The ordinary Lepcha and Bhutia woman and her Nepali sister are quite content to work in the old ways, and spend months over a gaudy Lepcha chadar or a Nepali cloth, which will certainly, at least in lasting wear, repay the long time spent on it' (O'Malley 1907).

Fred Pinn has noted down the material used, the colour, length of shirt, belt, safety pin and other details of Lepcha dress. He has observed that the Lepcha dress 'is nearly the same for male and female, except that the latter wear it rather larger in the skirt; its material is of thick cotton or woolen, generally of its natural colour, but occasionally dyed blue; it consists of a kind of tunic reaching to the knees, and fastened on each shoulder by a metal skewer, sometimes of silver, leaving the turn of the shoulders and the arms bare and confined by a belt round the waist; to this, such as can afford it, add a kind of jacket, or short shirt with loose sleeves' (Pinn 1986).

Conclusion

Lepcha dress is unique, significantly different even from its neighbouring communities, and is, therefore, one of the identifying markers of the community culture. Dress represents the culture of any community. The pattern or design of Lepcha dress is sober and elegant. The color used is typical for the community and is eye soothing. The length and style are gentle and weather friendly. The accessories are simple and need based. Weaving and dying are done most systematically and scientifically. Materials used are eco-friendly and locally available. All materials and accessories of Lepcha dress are available and collected from the local areas.

Forest provides them cotton, dye and everything they need for weaving the dress at home. Lepcha women are the good weavers and they acquire the skill of weaving all parts of both male and female dress. Lepchas do not depend on the market for the supply of any item of their dress. This not only establishes close association of the Lepchas with the forest but also shows the knowledge of the community about the forest. This supports that the Lepchas are the original inhabitants of the place.

Three concluding observations are: (1) Lepcha dress marks the distinctiveness of the community; looking at the dress one can make out the person is Lepcha; (2) the technology of dress making is pristine and completely indigenous and the Lepchas have kept it unaffected by the modern market forces; and (3) the collection of materials from the nature around marks their symbiosis with nature.

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Lower Caste Movement and the Idea of Social Equality under the Raj: Jyotirao Phule and Maratha Renaissance

Shilajit Sengupta

Post-Colonial Indian state was fraught with high level of caste discrimination, illiteracy, agricultural failures and many such grimy situations which now partially have been addressed by systematic and strategic planning since 1951. Considering the vastness and incredibly heterogeneous demography of the nation bringing in social equality by eradicating caste hierarchy, education for all and agricultural development policies are the key areas where India has been performing well unlike other South Asian countries of third world. The seed of the idea behind many such policies especially in development of mass education was sown by great Indian thinker Jyotirao Govindrao Phule. In primary and higher education for masses, right to the farmers and the true realization of a just and egalitarian society which would be neither caged under the clutches of foreign rulers nor dominated by hierarchically structured class and caste based Hindu society this erudite Marathi Activist-Writer-Thinker has made commendable contribution. Phule's work brought an era of renaissance which gave voice to the lower caste marginalized population unlike the mainstream upper caste-bourgeois led nationalist movement which failed to include the age old cultural and social deprivation of sudras and untouchables of the land. This article will focus on Phule's view on social reform during mid and late 19th century colonial India which later influenced emancipatory movements of lower caste people and their struggle for social equality in Independent India.

Keywords: Social Reform, Caste, Mass Education, Social Rights, Equality.

Introduction

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, later widely popularized as Right to Education or agricultural development policies such as Integrated Rural Development Policy (IRDP) are now widely referred to as the key resource mobilizing programmes for uplifting the socio-

economically backward section of the country and eradication of chronic poverty. Most debated yet relevant, the affirmative action of state viz. caste based reservation has been playing a key role since its introduction in fields of education, employment and political representation for inclusive development and establishing social equality. The root of these policies can be traced back in the writings of Jyotirao Phule, much before Ambedkar started asserting legislative rights and embarked on annihilating caste during Indian Freedom Movement. Phule, born in Maharashtra in a lower caste family (*mali*-gardener) was blessed with the opportunity of receiving education from Scottish Missionary Institution and employment under the Raj in Poona Municipality. Missionary education and employment under the British Govt. did not make him contended with life, rather his observation and experience of the social inequality in social and political sphere drove him to bring a revolutionary change in the existing exploitative condition of low caste peasants by fetching some fundamental reforms in the Hindu social system based on caste hierarchy and reinforcing education for the masses. Along with this, he questioned the reluctance of the British governance in alleviating the condition of the peasantry which was subjected to double deprivation, first by the *Bhatjis* and *Sethjis* (village upper caste land owners and moneylenders) and then by the harassment of the [white] Govt. officials as they fail to communicate with them due to illiteracy.

Low caste protest: Crafting revolutionary ideology

Decline of the Peshwas' rule and dominance of the British East India Company brought a fundamental change in the elite structure of Western Indian provinces. Brahmin and the upper caste *Khatriyas*¹ were the predominant elites of the agrarian economy. By the entry of the British rulers they sought the benefits of the writer's job namely the clerical posts in the bureaucracy under the Raj due to their traditional association with the education and access to the government offices of the urban and rural centres. Thus, a little but available hope during Peshwas of upward mobility by improvement of economic situation or by pursuit of higher rituals were gone and the closed society went through a transformation in case of access to education to

somewhat an open society in where the services would be available for all. The Company rule did not help in the process of establishment of educational institutions but the Christian missionaries took it as a fertile ground for carrying out their process of evangelization. But the happy days were soon vanished in thin air when in the practical field the upper castes, as mentioned earlier, started wielding power by assuming administrative positions in the government and influencing the lower caste local masses. Rosalind O'Hanlon has rightly observed: 'Most importantly, they would gain a strategic mediatory position between the Company's government and the larger masses of western Indian society. This dimension of control in administrative institutions - from local educational establishments to the conduct of rent and remission assessments, and even the ability to influence simple administrative procedures in the local courts - impinged forcibly upon local society'²(O'Hanlon 1985: 6).

As the fundamental mediatory agency between the government and the newly born civil society the upper caste working class started asserting political power as well, establishment of *Pune Sarvajanic Samaj* in 1870. We need to remember that these were the first traces of the so called nationalist movement which later fully realized by the establishment of INC (Indian National Congress) in 1885. However, sociologically speaking, Phule and his colleagues viewed these so called "reform" activities as purely upper caste - upper class oriented political endeavors. The establishment and practicing of upper caste reforms were, in Phule's view, aimed at revitalizing the old Hindu social system [moral and ethical codes] as the moral and spiritual base on which the modern Western liberal economy could be bestowed upon. The upper-caste-led movements aimed to keep caste hierarchy intact by accepting the Aryan theory of race and identifying with the alien rulers and by the pseudo-scientific justification of linking *varna* to race (Omvedt 1971: 1969). Phule's ground of revolutionary reformation was clear on the fact that the upper caste led nationalistic transformative movements refused to consider the existing inner contradiction of traditional Hindu society where the dominance of Brahmins over the Shudras and land lords over serfs were more ethnic than freeing Indian political-economy from the exploitative bonding of the English rulers. Phule successfully identified the dominant elite class of the society and

not specifically colonial rulers only which traditionally ascertained their class position and cultural hegemony in a society. Therefore, instead of “nationalist revolution” he propagated a non-Brahminic social transformation by overthrowing the dominant authoritarian caste and religious traditionalism and vouched for *Sarvajanik Satya Dharma* or the true religion of the common people. In this regard it must be mentioned that Phule was influenced by the works of Thomas Paine who stated: ‘Human rights originate in Nature, thus, rights cannot be granted via political charter, because that implies that rights are legally revocable, hence, would be privileges’³ in support of French Revolution and overthrowing hereditary monarchical rule which is very much similar to Indian hereditary caste privileges. Hence his ideology is distinctive since it embodies equalitarianism and rationality.

As we can now locate the background and core of Jyotiba’s ideas on social equality during the development of early nationalist movement, our point of departure would be to have glimpses of his views on mass education and condition of the peasantry.

Connecting condition of the peasantry with slavery (Goolamy)

Phule closely observed the condition of the peasantry and developed an understanding of the practice of slavery and deprivation. Phule saw *Baliraja*, who has been depicted in traditional Marathi as the lord of the land or of the peasants, not only as village leader but as common man unlike the Patils who were mentioned as the village headman by most of his contemporaries (Omvedt 1971). His scathing remark on Brahminic anti-equalitarian view can be related to the upper class exclusionary nationalism in colonial India. Jyotirao essentially attached religious preaching of the cunning Brahmin class for blinding and blunting the intellectual faculty of the cultivators. Before that he had chronologically shown how the West Indian present *shudra-atishudra* caste was losing their land, belongings and socio-economic agencies to the Brahmins. In support of this analysis he has given arguments on Brahminical brainwashing which made even the traditional *samsthaniks* (Rulers of princely states in colonial India) convinced and remain ignorant to knowledge and virtue: ‘blinded by religion and incapable of

governing their kingdoms on their own, they throw their lot in hands of fate and depend entirely on their Brahmin administrator; and generate virtue by donations of cow during the day and progeny by night.⁴(Deshpande 2002: 118) The psychological blockade of considering “the Brahmin is the one I worship” thus killed all the possibilities of improving “the lot of their brothers”. In such a situation, the Brahmins assumed superior position not only in the social hierarchy but in the administrative governance as well. Further, he explains in work “Cultivators Whipcord”, how peasants were toyed between white government officers and Bhatjis/Shethjis of the villages: ‘Oh Lord!, please open your eyes. So many times, have I given money to [God] so that [the Devil] should not harm you, and that too sometimes without your knowledge, selling of grains and have made the Brahmins sit with his rosary in front of [the deity] and fed so many Brahmin women!! Dear Child so many times I have spent money without telling you so that god speak through the collector’s mouth today, and allow you to pay the taxes in installments?’⁵ (Deshpande 2002: 161) O you cunning Brahmans, from the very birth of my dear child you have threatened me with ill-favoured stars and taken money from me, where is all the virtue that you collected? O, you have cheated me so much in the name of *dharma* that with that money I could have saved my child’s neck!’ (Deshpande 2002: 162).

Educating masses

Observing the miserable condition of the farmers and their duped condition by the religious dogma Phule urged on changing the social structure by educating the masses through which the non-Brahmins lower caste peasants could come on par with the Brahmins. His view here is strikingly similar to the way Syed Ahmed Khan urged the large Muslim masses to go for modern western education who were otherwise backward than the Hindus (Guha 2012: 78). However, Phule stands out distinctively different from Khan who under the influence of Rammohan Roy testified the Education Commission of 1882. Jyotirao was aware that the upper caste rich Brahmins ripped the benefits of Western education and eventually assumed the administrative position under the company rule, which widened social inequality along the caste line. He criticized that the education system that was

heavily funded and administered by the colonial government educated only the upper caste although, he argued: ‘...It is an admitted fact that the greater portion of the revenues of Indian Empire are derived from the ryot’s labour – from the sweat of his brow.’ (Deshpande 2002: 103) While rejecting the colonial education which was essentially for the upper castes he strongly advocated for the mass education administered by the sufferers themselves.

Views on educating the poor peasantry through community initiative

Phule questioned the moral and intellectual foundation of the advancement policy pursued by the British which specifically educated and helped raise the standard of education of the upper castes. With hegemony over the education and intellectual practices the Brahmans systematically excluded the lower castes from the opportunities of employment and upward mobility. It is not that the British did not establish any facility for primary education for the masses but again the teachers and the school administration were full of the Brahmans. Thus, de facto, the schools were meant for the upper caste children. Thus, unless the Shudras taking control over the education and other development initiatives there would be little or no possibility for them freeing them from the ‘trammels of bondage which Brahmins have woven around them like the coils of serpent.’

In carrying forward his ideas Phule stressed on several policy implementations which would trigger change in the way certain professions are tagged with the practice of *varna*. He points to the social mechanism by which certain castes and classes turn apathetic and disrespectful towards certain jobs like cultivation or sanitation. As the students and teachers in the primary schools primarily represent upper castes they develop a clear inclination towards government/administrative services and an aversion for the conventional works which involve hard physical labour and low-status. Phule viewed that if both the teacher and students come from the lower and “untouchable” castes who also represent the cultivating classes there would be a continued interest in agriculture and sanitation and thus the stigma and the “purity-

impurity" divide due to the nature of profession could be removed. Phule condemned the privatization of education which, he argued, would make the middle and lower-class people suffer unlike the wealthy classes representing the Brahmins and *Purbhoos* who had an opportunity to live by the pen. Being in an administrative profession under the Raj, he, unlike the nationalists, never advocated a total overthrow of the existing system of governance. The real problem was not essentially the alien rulers but the native upper caste-upper class combine which had institutionalized its hegemony over all the means of production, land and education in particular, and also on the fruits of labour of the untouchable castes. The upper-caste-class combine accorded social and ideological legitimacy to a system which was iniquitous and exploitative by manufacturing concocted religious teachings and falsification of knowledge. To him, the bourgeois nationalist revolution was meant to mere circulation of elite while keeping the low-caste exploited masses mere flag bearers of the elite in power. Phule was able to verify and understand the issue of exploitation and connect it to the revolutionary values of equality and rationality and successfully problematized the path of social transformation.

Conclusion

Phule was the first amongst his contemporary thinkers/reformer to advocate structural change to overthrow the hegemonic culture built by the Brahmins and the upper classes. He challenged the predominant discourse of his time that the human beings are arranged in a hierarchy of caste order ordained by divine dispensation. He was the one who pointed out that the arrangement of exploitation is primarily based on the socio-economic construct of what is fair or just. While the Marxists believe that the quantum of labour used in production determines the value of a commodity, in *laissez-faire* economy it is the market. The theory of exploitation fails to objectively determine the phenomenon if it is taking place in a given exchange guaranteeing agreement between theory and the perception of the ones who are taken as exploited. This was precisely what was happening to the lower caste peasants under the Raj-Brahminical collaborative dominance. Phule explored the area of false consciousness which

explained why the subjective feeling of the peasant class failed to understand the root of their misery. The claim of equal right was thus first located by Jyotiba much before other stalwarts ventured into the area which empowered the peasants from the lower castes to have a moral claim over the village resources and challenge the traditional elites. A peasant or an exploited person born into a society and culture that provide him with a set of moral values and more or less stable set of social relationships which, in turn, generate in him expectation about others' behavior.⁶ Phule, being born much before the era of academic theorization of power and exploitation understood that the moral universe and notion of justice that people share collectively make them loyal to the order, thus blunting the possibility of a radical social transformation. By identifying "nation" and "nationalism" as Hindu derived from the Vedic times he identified them as the creation of the Arian people. By exploring the historical origin of the caste system, he propagated better policy formulation by the Raj for the eradication of caste system. His project was bringing enlightenment amongst the illiterate and helpless lower caste farmers without being aligned with the mainstream anti-Raj nationalist movement. For him the need of the day was an all-out anti-Arian movement which was later popularized by another legend leader Ambedkar.

Ambedkar claimed through his prolific writings such as *Annihilation of Caste* that the Hindu caste system does not allow change of occupation even when it is required in an industrializing society. Hence, caste system which advocates 'division of labourers than division of labour' is actually the root cause of poverty. Phule, had little faith on the Hindu reformists and the nationalists rather he appealed to the colonial government for educational and agricultural policy reformation to make lower caste people capable and place them on par with the upper caste Brahmins. He had no doubt that with proper access to modern education the low caste people would be empowered enough not only to access white collar jobs they would also be conscious and empowered enough to fight caste hierarchy. They would be able to fight the hegemonic power under the guidance of their organic leadership. Ashwini Deshpande has supported the policy of positive discrimination arguing that this would indeed alter the composition of the elite positions in the society (Deshpande 2013: 8). The structural process

of exclusion is now approached through affirmative action in the form of Constitutional as it would have been absurd to expect that the upper castes would have sacrificed their position like the Samurai Patriots of Japan.⁷ Ambedkar justly referred to this in the speech protesting the ban on drinking water from the lake of *Mahad* by untouchables.

The reason for bringing the contemporary argument on eradication of caste and state's policy on reservations in education and employment is basically to show that the revolution which Phule wanted to bring. He was convinced that a sudden overthrow of existing government only because they are *white* or foreigners was not the solution to end caste-class oppression or systemic exclusion. Phule, being a government employee of Pune Municipality, called for changes staying within the system, as he knew that the ousting of existing govt. from power would not liberate the *shudra-atishudras*' rather it would only be a replacement of the *white sahibs* with the *brown sahibs*. He was the harbinger of change in the system of governance not through lofty ideals and social theories but through policy intervention, attacking the root cause of the misery. His approach thus was an eye opener to the later statesmen of Modern India.

Notes

1. *Kshatriyas* and *Vaishyas* are the intermediary castes between Brahmins and Shudras and untouchables, traditionally the warrior and businessmen, absent in the then Maratha provinces. The role was thus played by the Gujar (Gujarati) and Marwaris of Rajasthan who were the moneylenders of the low caste peasants.
2. See O'Hanlon, Rosalind, 1985. *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*. Cambridge University Press, p. 6.
3. *Rights of Man (1791)*, a book by Thomas Paine, including 31 articles, posits that popular political revolution is permissible when a government does not safeguard the natural rights of its people. Using these points as a base it defends the French Revolution against Edmund Burke's attack in *Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790)*.

4. See Prologue, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule, Edited by G P Deshpande 2002, Left Word New Delhi, p. 118.
5. See Chapter four, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule, Edited by G P Deshpande 2002, p. 161.
6. For details see James Scott, *Moral Economy of the Peasants* (1976).
7. From Arjun Dangle (ed.), *Poisoned Bread: Translated from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1992), pp. 223-33.

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A Sociological View of Management of Health of the Migrant Workers in Kolkata

Nibedita Bayen

Kolkata, the economic capital of eastern India, attracts skilled and semi-skilled labourers, who migrate for a living. The migrants include sex workers, taxi drivers, shoemakers, porters, rickshaw pullers and child labourers. They migrate from Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and different regions of West Bengal. Migrants, who migrate by taking the help of a village migration network, usually take shelter in slum areas. Such places are identified by the city administration as places of extra attention to prevent outbreak of diseases. The municipal corporation puts in place a robust malaria control plan in the city. The present paper would analyse how migrant labourers are governed by the city administration as a part of its malaria-control drive and how the perceptions of health and illness of these migrant labourers change in the process.

Keywords: migrant labourer, malaria, governance, medicalization, illness, identity, body.

Introduction

A young person seeking medical attention arrived at a Municipal Corporation run Malaria clinic with fever around 10 in the morning. Lab technicians enquired about his age in broken Hindias the person was struggling with his Bengali. The person replied coyly that he was twenty. Hearing the reply, the lab technician started laughing loudly while saying to the other people who were present at that very room that how could one be twenty years without having moustache. This small incidence is indicative of the health condition of migrant labourers and medicalization of their body in the metropolitan Kolkata. The city is bearing the legacy of colonial rule not only in its architecture but also in the form of health governance. Traditional grounds of racial and indigenous medical system's identity are dispersed, whenever they

are found to rest in the narcissistic myths of nationalism or western cultural supremacy. In this paper, I have made an attempt to explain how migrant labourers are governed to suppress the malaria situation in the city and change their perception about health and illness in the process.

Kolkata¹ and its migrants

Kolkata is the economic capital and the only metropolitan city in eastern India. Due to its proximity to river port and seaport and the road junction point to reach various economic zones², people from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha have migrated to Kolkata for livelihood. Migrants with/without having any particular skill take the help of village networks³ to reach in the city and look for cheap shelter in the slum areas of the city. Such slums⁴ are the hubs of informal sector economic activities and located near various economic zones of the city⁵. Such slums are distributed in the north, middle and south parts of the city. The migrants prefer slum areas because it suits their budget and also because they find a lot of people who are already known. They can also identify with the slum life easily since it carries a lot of their village culture and it provides a place where they can live without the pressure of social segregation. Here the migrant labourers get an opportunity to taste of their village food, share emotion, and a sense of belongingness. The slum life gives them a sense of security.

Social and cultural background of migrants

Suppression of skill/s as sustenance technique in host place is the first lesson that migrants learn after arriving at Kolkata. They want to protect themselves from the insecurities that the new place offers by using the already existing network which landed them to the city. Unskilled or skilled migrants do the kind of works for sustenance that the Bengalis do not want to do. The male migrants do the work like porter, taxi driver, plumber, mason and so on. Migrant women prefer domestic work, or work as helpers in construction work and sex-worker. Bengalis love to call migrants by different nicknames. Bengalis call people from Bihar as “khotta”, people from Odisha as “ure” and Muslims as “nyara” – all in derogatory sense. The migrants mostly belong to the lower

castes. Shadow of caste is very apparent on their lives and that shadows turn long and dark during their search for jobs and when seek supports during certain emergencies. One of the most sordid situations or emergency happens in the life of migrant labourers when they fall sick due to the dreaded disease called malaria. Malaria can happen to people in Kolkata throughout the year. The reasons are complex and multi-layered. The major reason is the tropical climatic condition of Kolkata. Mosquitos, which are the carrier of the malaria parasite, can easily sustain and multiply their population in tropical weather condition. Mosquitos keep changing their behavioural pattern; they change the hiding place, breeding condition and place for their sustenance with the changes in disease governance policies and programmes (Biswas 2010). The ill-informed migrant labourers, busy earning their livelihood, want to keep themselves away from the sultry, sweaty dark shelter room and sleep at night on the pavements. Not used to mosquito net they become the easy victims of the disease. Malaria mosquitos prefer to bite human being between dusk and dawn, to collect protein for their eggs (NVBDCP 2014).

What is malaria?

Malaria is a vector borne disease. It is transmitted into human body by a mosquito bite. Malaria is found mainly in hot humid climate and in a marshy place. Malaria is caused by parasites of the genus Plasmodium. The parasites spread to people through the bites of an infected Anopheles variety of mosquitoes, called "malaria vectors," which bite mainly between dusk and dawn (WHO 2010). Biting time of each vector species is determined by its generic character but can be readily determined by environmental conditions.

Impact of malaria on human body

Malaria is an acute febrile illness. If not treated properly and on time, this disease can progress to critical illness including multi-organ failure, often leading to death (WHO 2014). Most of those who fall ill survive after an illness of 10-20 days but 1-3% of those who contact *P. falciparum* do not. However, environmental disturbance, malnutrition and the failure of drugs once used to control the disease have conspired to make malaria as serious a

problem now as it was during the first half of the twentieth century (<http://www.malaria.org/lifehealth.html>).

Economic impact of malaria

In a report, prepared by Malaria Foundation International for Centre for Development (Harvard University and London School of hygiene and tropical Medicine, 2014) explained: ‘these considerations indicate that the cost of malaria is substantially greater than economists have previously estimated. Traditional estimates have looked at some of the short-run costs of malaria without taking into account the longer-term effects of malaria on economic growth and development. Short-run costs – including lost work time, economic losses associated with infant and child mortality and morbidity, and the costs of treatment and prevention – are typically estimated to be higher than one percent of a country’s gross national product. These estimates, however, neglect many other short-run costs. For instance, very few studies include the economic costs of the pain and suffering associated with the disease. Yet researchers have found that households might be willing to pay several times the direct income loss caused by malaria in order to avoid it, suggesting that the pain, suffering and uncertainty associated with the disease is very high and should certainly be included among its short-term costs’ (pp. 1-13). This economic impact actually drove colonial rulers to initiate research to find out possible solutions and to introduce system of public health in Kolkata (Calcutta).

Malaria in Kolkata⁶: The importance of locale in governance

The presence of malaria in Kolkata is reflected in the writings of colonial rulers more than in Indian medical books (Harrison 1994, Arnold 2000, Samanta 2010, and Debroy 2013). The simple reason of such hyped literary expression of colonial time is the impact of the disease that adversely impacted finance of the East India Company and threw a spanner on the attempt to earn by utilising a place’s natural condition like weather for cultivation of cash crops. The uncanny feeling towards the space and people of the place propelled them to search out every possible reason of sustenance of the suspicious diseases. Colonial rulers were extremely concerned about the financial loss in plantation sector

and weakening strength of army. One of the major reasons of this remarkable financial loss and weakening of army was the repetitive occurrence of malaria among both the labourers and army. Migrant labourers were encouraged to migrate from different areas of India to work in tea gardens of North Bengal. The frequent attack of malaria among the migrant labourers had disrupted the daily plantation work and due to such disruption, financial loss was unavoidable. In an attempt to protect, to recover financial loss in plantation sector, and to restore the spirit of army the colonial rulers established a research laboratory in Kolkata and Sir Ronald Ross had been engaged to unearth the malaria conundrum. Nandini Bhattacharya (2011) in her recent research has found that the "locale" and its economic interest instigated the colonial masters to patronize research and medicalization of this menace called malaria. This importance of "locale" also prompted experiments with the concept of "public health" (Harrison 1994) in Kolkata and its nearby areas. Kolkata was first to witness the hegemonic expansion of western medicine and treatment; the fringe areas of Kolkata also got the flavour of the western medicine as the part of the plan of expansion of business of medicine. However, in rural Bengal traditional medicine continued to play a dominant part for many years. However, the post offices had begun to publicize the news about the overarching power of western medicine. Colonial rulers did not confine their research on the role of mosquito in spreading the disease but they had searched out the role of the migrants in spreading this disease. Colonial mechanism of knowledge generation and knowledge networks⁷ helped the rulers to build and protect their castle in India. Their art of listening to and understanding Indian people and their culture was not flawless.

After independence the "locale", has not yet lost any significance in administration. Even in post-colonial governance formation and dissemination of knowledge about disease have been along the line of "white mask black skin" syndrome. The government, that consists of personnel who are to provide services to the fellow citizens are carrying the mentality like the colonial masters. Colonial rulers established their identity as master (Fanon 1986). Even after independence, it has been observed that Government officials are guided by the perception that the citizens whom they are serving must behave like slaves. Infected citizens without letter

of recommendation from a higher officials or politicians are not be attended to by the officials of lower administration. If these citizens are from the “underprivileged” section the government officials would expect more servitude and silence. Migrants are considered as the permanently alien in their own country (Fanon 1986). They live in a state of absolute depersonalization. Rural fringes along with distant areas of India are still under the grip of traditional medicine. The persistence of colonial attitude⁸ towards illiterate labourers/ villagers and restricted access to medical service oblige them to end their quest for medical assistance at the door of traditional doctors.

Malaria among the migrant labourers and their resistance

Municipal Corporation⁹ has been assigned, as part of the public health and sanitary conservancy programme, the responsibility to address the malaria menace in Kolkata. Municipal Corporation works in its 141 wards providing basic amenities to the citizen while making them aware about their rights. The term “citizen” is not a homogenous category. The migrant labourers placed at the bottom of the category of citizens. In other words, they are “less citizens” in terms of their rights. Among them, the situation of the sex-worker is more complex because of the profession’s non-legal status. This practice of categorization is the importunity of the practice of the colonial rulers that seems to linger in the postcolonial discourse and governance.

Labourers who migrate from Bihar, Odisha, Utter Pradesh, and Jharkhand prefer to remain as unnoticed to protect themselves from the unknown complications. They are constrained to follow the village network to find the *locale*¹⁰ for job and night shelter. This locale is the slums where they have developed small ghettos of their village/district people. This locale actually has achieved a significance space in disease governance. This space has become the centre of development but actually provide a context of conflict between governance and development. As migrant labourers find this space as their backbone they continually search out their survival strategy, resistance and negotiation patterns.

Majority of these migrant labourers are of the lower castes and have a very small amount of cultivable land in their villages. They do not have bank accounts rather they prefer to keep money at

moneylender's box but they keep mobile phone to communicate with family and village mates. Another significant feature about these migrant labourers is that a few of their villages have been turned into battlefield between Maoist groups and the government forces. Physical and psychological stresses are part and parcel of their lives.

Migrants after reaching Kolkata, countenance the pressure of cultural domination. This cultural domination/ethnic supremacy tries to create the impact upon their everyday life and push them in a locale. Inside this locale, a good number of migrants cannot sleep inside one mosquito net. They use bed sheet to cover their body parts in their effort to stay away from mosquito, albeit without success. Very often they become easy prey to malaria.

However, the migrant labourers continue with their everyday life, clinging to their conventional way of life (the mode of sleeping), including food habit and language and daily work routine. Yet, a few changes in their food habit can be noticed; they now eat rice twice a day, instead of roti, and one variety of lentils¹¹. A very few of them can afford non-vegetarian food. Their dietary habit keeps them undernourished and anaemic with low level of resistance to diseases. They are found wanting when they fall the victims of malaria and when they are forced to cooperate with the government initiative to control the vector. Water containers, which are used by these labourers to meet their need of sanitation and hydration of body, are considered as the source of mosquito. When the representatives of KMC undertake anti-malaria drive and try to destroy the places of mosquito breeding throw the water from the water-containers and sometimes confiscate them. They even threaten the labourers with eviction drive. This creates moments of tension and conflict between the urban administration and the migrant labourers.

Culture of illness among migrant labourers: Passive acceptance of systemic decisions

In Kolkata, the migrant labourers generally live with the concept of illness that they have learnt in their villages. Even, the shared perception of illness has a strong community (caste/communal) dimension. The community decides the pattern of everyday life and within this pattern of life the perception of and mode of

treatment of illness is also included. Migrants from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh share almost the same understanding of illness. For them fever is the most significant indicator of illness; reasons of fever are secondary to them. Firstly, they say that 'Sharir hay to bimar hay' (it's natural to catch disease so long as we are alive). Some of them would say "disease is God's grace". A very few of them would acknowledge that they do not have a proper place to live, that they live in unhealthy condition, and they are significantly malnourished. The hard physical labour and the unhealthy work condition also do not help them living a healthy life. The sex workers would generally say they have done "sin" and that is why the God m with diseases. They hardly recognize mosquito bite as the root cause of the malaria.

Mellor and Shilling (1997) have rightly observed: 'bodies are not just a source of work but are a location for the effects of work' (p. 98). Again, Shilling has observed: 'the disciplining of worker's body was not accomplished purely on the basis of overt physical coercion, but relied heavily upon an associated *reorganization of space and time*. In terms of space, Foucault (1979) highlights how modern factory production, enclosed, partitioned, and ranked bodies in order to facilitate their functional productivity. The *enclosure* of bodies within factories confined work to the particular space, a space that visibly belonged to the employer and over which the labourers had no rights. Manufacture supplemented this process and helped neutralize the dispositions groups brought with them into the workplace' (pp. 79-80). The performance of sick role and deceptive perception of illness of the labourers can be analysed in the light of above perspective. The cumulative impact of the workspace that is found as small, cramped, damp, dingy, and the pressure to complete the work within the given time is the source of tension among the migrant labourers. They do not feel comfortable within the workstation. They do not sleep or eat properly. They understand the problem but the solution was beyond their means. The women who work as sex workers, domestic help or construction worker confront 'the double burden of waged labour and reproductive body work'. Being unskilled, they do odd jobs in the informal sector, where exploitation exists in its crudest form, in order to subsist. At the same time, they have to pretend to be healthy and sustain their hard-working image to prevent dismissal from work. They cannot afford to be

“ill” because that would mean ill-treatment, verbal abuse, wage loss, and even dismissal.

Migrant labourers do not come to the city with a clear understanding of malaria, but those who are living in Kolkata more than a year and those who had someone suffered from malaria develop their own perception about the disease. From their experience, they can relate symptoms like heavy body ache, loss of appetite, “feeling cold”, cough and cold with malaria. The migrant labourers often get confused when they have to answer the queries of the health workers or lab technicians who visit them occasionally. Most of the time, the workers and their family members are reluctant to speak about their illness and are confused about the symptoms. This could be strategic or out of ignorance. Ignorance is present because they do not know for sure what could be the difference between a normal viral fever and malaria fever. Strategic because they do not want to be labelled malaria infected and lose their livelihood. Through conversation with the health workers, they also change their conventional understanding of illness. Greater and clearer knowledge about illness make them depressed and worried because the implications of malaria could unsettle their mental composure. The migrant sex workers generally put their symptoms differently than other migrant workers. They do not get an opportunity to express their uneasiness arising out of fever. Detected illness or symptoms like body ache, cough and cold can directly affect their livelihood. Migrant sex workers suffer from various STDs, HIV/AIDS, RTIs¹² and problems associated with alcohol consumption. For them fever is normal and is not considered illness. They cannot claim to ill unless pimps tell them to do so. Pimps decide the time of consultation with a doctor. As a partial solution, the sex workers have set up an NGO named Durbar. Durbar organises medical camps and routine blood test to prevent HIV/AIDS. However, pimps and *malkins* do not allow the sex workers to go to the clinic or camp to do so. With peer-group pressure, the sex workers are allowed to do a routine blood test.

Due to lack of education, psychological barrier and social denunciation sex worker hesitate to ask for any kind of assistance from the larger society. The control of the pimp and malkins over their body is so complete that they live with the illusion that both pimp and malkins are aware about their health problems and

they have the capacity to control all kinds of hazards including health. For sex workers, health problem is a hazard. They feel uncomfortable in describing their health problem but can give a name to their private organs. They live with fear about the government institutions, particularly police. Sex workers do not want to visit government hospitals because their experiences in government hospitals have created a strong sense of exclusion in them. Those who went to government hospital could not express their identity because sex work is illegal in India. The illegality of their profession makes them ineligible to access health benefits. HIV/AIDS is very common among the sex workers. They never tell the customers about their infection, even when they know about it. The disclosure would mean loss of livelihood. When their health condition deteriorates to an unbearable level they hesitate to visit the government hospitals, where they would have received highly subsidized medical treatment, because of the fear of ostracization. When the visit to government hospital becomes an absolute necessity, they visit with a lot of fear about disclosure of their identity.

About the modern health system Foucault has observed: 'medical certainty is based not on the completely observed individuality but on the completely scanned multiplicity of individual facts'. He has argued that after being informed about the medical history the medical practitioners are stricken within "stylised repetition of act"¹³ and hence they withdraw themselves from the role of medical practitioners. Migrant sex workers have been socially conditioned to feel that they are the "polluting person".¹⁴ Foucault has further said: 'clinical experience sees a new space opening up before it: the tangible space of the body, which at the same time is that opaque mass in which secrets, invisible lesions, and the very mystery of origin lie hidden. The medicine of symptoms will gradually recede, until it finally disappears before the medicine of organs, sites, causes, before a clinic wholly ordered in accordance with pathological anatomy' (Foucault 2003: 150).

Reflecting back to their journey to the point of being sex workers one can see that many of these women are the victims of the child marriage and after having children they were thrown away from their in-laws' house. I met with one girl who was thrown out because she failed to give birth of child. She could not bear that agony. In order to make a living she initially searched for a manual

job. However, her parents and brother assured her of support for modest living. She did not wish to live on the mercy of others. With the help of a local agency she migrated to the city and became a sex worker. In the initial stage, even after repeated counselling, she did not take any precaution by using condoms. Therefore, she became pregnant. Worried that a child can affect her work she went for abortion, albeit beyond the legally permissible period.¹⁵ Drawing confidence from her pregnancy she filed a lawsuit against her in-law's and husband demanding the return of the dowry money that her father had given at the time of marriage. She met the cost from her saved money. She now feels that her body is genuinely feminine, which demystifies the "infertile body" that her in-laws had labelled on her. She now lives with a sense of injustice and a lot of grudges meted to her. At the same time, she feels low because of the abusive nature of her job and the accumulated ailments that are out to cripple her body.

For the pimps and *malkins* life is no better. They live in fear. They avoid the NGO Durbar. Only in problems like STDs, RTDs they consult the organization's doctor. Otherwise, they visit private doctors or nursing homes when faced with ailments. The pimps and *malkins* want to maintain total secrecy about their body and diseases. They avoid government hospitals in fear of being exposed. They generally think that the government keeps records about them to inform police but does not provide the desired services.

Fever, including the one related to malaria, but a very few of them consult government-run hospital. They have a general tendency not to pay importance to malaria or any other fever. They have developed this "pattern" of behaviour out of the experience they have drawn from their interactions with the doctors in the past. Their life-style also conditions their perceptions. They begin their work in the late morning after taking breakfast and alcohol. During the daytime, they mainly consume beer but since afternoon, they start taking other kinds of alcohols. Since evening, they lose their normal sensations to the extent that they cannot sense mosquito bite. Sometimes, when they cannot keep track of their money they start shouting on their clients and the fellow sex workers. Pimps are supposed do a settlement between the client and drunken sex worker to avoid police intervention. For them this is a routine task and it is difficult for them to understand the health condition of the sex workers. Usually people learn about

their body, illness and sick role from their family members or from peer group or the agency with whom they interact. For these sex workers, it is not possible to address their health problems. They live in confinement. They are not allowed to interact with each other. They are informed categorically by the pimp and *malkins* that, in this profession nobody wants to listen to others. Therefore, they should not tell anyone about their physical problem and related psychological issues. Only pimps and *malkins* are there to listen to them. Only when some serious illness or problem arises the fellow sex workers come to know about it. Migrant sex workers do not get the opportunity to share their problem even with their family members. Those who regularly commute by train are able to interact with other daily commuters, share their problem to receive their counsel in solving other problems. Thee pimps and the *malkins* want total control. They generate the belief that allopathic treatment is no good for their health. They advise them to consult homeopathic doctors and quacks and sorcerer. They advise to avoid allopathic doctor due to their financial instability. The quack doctors interact with them in their own language and understand their problem better and the waiting patients resemble the class of the sex workers. This makes them comfortable seeing them rather than the doctors representing the modern medicine.

With the allopathic doctors, the sex workers feel a strong language and cultural gap; they cannot follow what the doctors say. They also cannot explain the symptoms properly; there is wide gap in their perception of body and the way the doctors want to understand. The sex workers feel that their body is stigmatised. The conversation with doctors gives them a feeling of embarrassment. They do not want to allow a person like a doctor who has different prestige in society touch their body. Another fear that prevents them from taking medical help is that if they are identified as ill and are out of their job then who will look after their children and their kin. Consequently, even if they visit a modern medical practitioner they do not continue with the follow-up visits. Sex workers and pimps become silent carriers of the diseases and suffer in the process.

Pimps¹⁶, after diagnosis of the malaria, prefer to return home or are brought to Kolkata from their home for treatment. Disclosure of identity is not the only issue that worries for the pimps and *malkins*. Concealment of their sick role is a strategy to maintain

their position in the social hierarchy (Alcoff et. al. 2006)¹⁷. They want to develop the image that they are free of any illness, especially of STDs. This identity of free from any illness allows them to negotiate with the sex worker, NGO workers and clients. To uphold the identity and hierarchy they even try to hide the illness of the sex workers. Both pimps and sex workers are advised to consult the quacks and most frequently, sex workers' identity and mental state are moulded the way the pimp, *malkin* and specially the clients want.

The nature of job of migrant labourers (including the sex workers) is tiring and hazardous. They do not stay in the workplace for more than six months at a stretch. Those who come from rural Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand give equal attention to their agricultural land because agricultural produce helps them to maintain their family. Most of them take their children to Kolkata, mainly the male children, and sometimes relatives' children to learn some skills and earn some money. Child labourers usually work for a low wage with board and lodging. Child labourers, like the adult ones, also work for six months and then they return home to work in the agricultural field. After completing their agricultural work, they interact with other village mates to decide their next destination. Sometimes they carry on their work in the same workplace where they worked six months back. Due to this pattern of migration, workshop owners who are also migrants from Bihar put extreme pressure on the workers to complete work within a specified time. They continually push them to work for longer hours with less time for rest. Owners are aware of recurrence of malaria but they know that the labourers are not. Labourers are never encouraged to consult government clinic and they are never advised to use a mosquito net. Only a few migrant labourers use coils to protect them from mosquito bite. With growing public awareness and pressure, the KMC sends health workers to the residential areas to locate breeding spots and the infected persons. The workshop owners in the slum areas however take little preventive care. Due to work pressure, migrant labourers work on weekends and on holidays too. Relentless work by sitting in one position makes their life stressful. To get relief from stress they often visit the nearby red-light zone and catch STDs. Consumption of local variety of alcohol keeps them less aware about the real problems of their life and the problems of their body.

They forget their past and cannot remember if they had ever suffered from malaria. Because of their mobile nature and work pressure, they do not keep record of their past ailments. The case of a house cleaner in a clinic can be relevant here. This woman in her mid-30s is the mother of two children. She visited the clinic to collect the blood test report of her sixteen-year-old boy. The report confirmed malaria vivax positive. She came for the report on the next day of the test day although she was advised to collect the report a day earlier. Asked about the reason, she said that she could not manage leave. She was under pressure to complete her day's work in order to be in the good book of her employer. As the lab technician could remember that the woman's another boy suffered from malaria few days ago, he tried not to repeat the doses of the medicine to her. This woman admitted that she forgot the entire doses and other things associated with it. However, asked about the reason of the cause of the disease to her boys she replied that the presence of the pond in her locality was the root cause.

A lab technician talked about one patient, a migrant from Bihar, who, having caught malaria, swallowed all the medicines at once. He did it to get rid of fever sooner, without understanding the implications. Those who are alcoholic take the medicine with drink and not with water. Once I met a trucker in a clinic. He was a migrant from Uttar Pradesh. He came to the clinic malaria test because he had suffered from malaria. Previous year he was not aware about this disease and did self-medication. When he was almost unconscious, his friends had brought him to the clinic. He had the belief that this clinic has some special power to cure his disease. He stays vary far from the clinic, but faith had brought him here. However, he does not know the proper reason or the role of the mosquito behind this disease; he had a vague understanding his movement during night might be the cause of this fever. Now he understands that this fever is different from other fevers and needs special treatment. Since he had to cover a long distance to come to the clinic he stayed there and collected his report and medicine. Because of the last years' experience, he reached the clinic at the earliest without wasting a day after catching fever. He wanted to be cured early.

It is found that the migrant labourers who have been coming to this city for job for several years have suffered from malaria more than once. Despite this, their knowledge about the disease is shrouded with wrong information. They have revealed the fact that the degree of suffering in their first experience with the disease has gradually been lesser in their second and third experiences. They actually became habituated with the experience of the disease. Their stock of knowledge about the bodily feelings due to the disease has developed a mental stability against this fever. They, over the years, learn to take the disease and the related sufferings lightly and get on with their regular activities.

The newer migrants depend on the migrants who have been in the city for many years for advice on selection of doctor, medicine and foods when they are down with malaria. New migrants usually take shelter in the village ghettos in city. The male members outnumber the female migrants and they do not follow any ritual during their illness, although they all are very religious. They take the fever as god gifted and visit the nearby temple praying for early recovery. They perform a gesture touching the ears with hand and simultaneously doing the sit ups. Few among them prefer to go to Kalighat Kali temple to offer special prayer. The Muslims, on the other hand, offer their prayer at the mosque.

Conclusion

Migrant labourers in Kolkata are the victims of the medicalization of malaria and medicalization of their body. Both of these forms of medicalization are inter-related. While the health and civic administration holds migration as the one of the root cause of the spread of malaria, the migrant labourers are taken to the ones who are largely responsible for the spread of the disease in the city. However, neither the centre nor the state government has a declared policy to give special medical attention to migrant labourers or to control migration process in order to check the spread of malaria. The state administration resorts to suppression of the voice of migrants in order to prevent the spread of panic in the city and tries to manage the crisis with highly inadequate and ineffective medical intervention leaving the migrants in a state of confusion. In the absence of an effective and free medical setup, the affected migrants depend on homeopathy treatment and on

the quack doctors, thus complicating the eradication of the menace. Moreover, their inability to identify the symptoms of the disease (because of lack of consciousness) and, most importantly, the compulsion of presentation of a fit body in their work place makes them suppress the truth about their illness. They are the victims of the situation and play their part dictated to them by the power hierarchy. The livelihood compulsions make them surrender to the system while suppressing their critical agency. Acceptance of these strategies by the migrant labourers gives permission to the government to validate the medicalization of malaria and body of migrants. Thus, the migrant labourers who have never been registered in any government document and as they select their place of work in community specific areas for existence become the moorings of the malaria governance of the city administration.

Notes

1. I have only given a very brief sketch of the city.
2. Economic zones include business hubs and manufacturing units.
3. Village network means a network of human agents who give information and contact for jobs in the city. They help the villagers and their family members to migrate throughout India and even outside.
4. For more details about the slums of Kolkata one may read W. C. Schenk, 'Slum Diversity in Kolkata', *Columbia Undergraduate Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, Fall 2009.
5. Development of slum in Kolkata is associated primarily with industrialization and partition of Bengal in 1947.
6. History of malaria in the history of city Kolkata is pretty old and intriguing. However, the fever malaria was not known as "malaria" before the colonial intervention to know the cause of the fever that actually had become a great threat to the pink health of the colonial army and financial loss at plantation sector. The city plan of the Calcutta was designed to separate the geographical space of the city into two distinct spaces. In the one space, colonial rulers had settled with provisions to prevent diseases like malaria etc. and in the other space were for the natives without much civic

arrangements. Due to this reason “locale” or the space played very important role during colonial rule and after independence this model is continuing in urban planning and governance (Pati & Harrison 2009)

7. The native labourers had a “hand to mouth” existence. Agrarian crowding furthered migration to cities, where the poor were packed into sub-human living conditions in slums. ‘Modern economic circumstances combined with caste, educational and other traditional impediments to upward... poor class of Indians who were especially prone to succumb to disease’. Ira Klein, ‘Death in India’, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 1973, Vol. 32, No. 4: 639-659.
8. ‘The fantasy of the native is precisely to occupy the master’s place while keeping his place in the slave’s avenging anger’. F. Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (translated by Charles Lam Markmann), UK: Pluto Press, 1986.
9. The 74th Amendment of the Indian Constitution empowers the municipal corporations to enhance and guarantee the rights of the citizens.
10. Or the social place where the slum dwellers or the migrant labourers face caste related oppression/ conflict/ state induced violence.
11. Rice is relatively cheaper and easier to cook compare to Roti.
12. HIV/AIDS (Human Immuno Virus/ Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome) – which breaks down the body’s immune system, leaving the victim vulnerable to a host of life threatening infections, neurological disorders or unusual malignancies. STD (Sexually Transmitted Diseases) are transmitted predominantly by sexual contact and caused by a wide range of bacterial, viral, protozoal, and fungal agents and ectoparasites. RTI stands for Reproductive Tract Infection. Park K. (2011). *Park’s textbook of preventive and social medicine*. 21st Edition. M/s Banarsidas Bhanot. Jabalpur.
13. According to Judith Butler (2012) gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through *stylized repetition of acts*. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. Pp. 191-192

14. According to Mary Douglas (1966) 'a polluting person is always in the wrong. He(sic)as developed some wrong condition or simply crossed over some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone'. Pp. 56.
15. For greater details one can see: Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act 1971-When pregnancies may be terminated by registered medical practitionershttp://www.medindia.net/Indian_Health_Act/medical-termination-of-pregnancy-act-1971-when-pregnancies-may-be-terminated-by-registered-medical-practitioners.htm#ixzz2w1OZxpwu
16. Pimps migrate from a small village of Medinipur District of West Bengal, which is located at West Bengal-Odisha border.
17. 'often we create positive and meaningful identities that enable us to better understand and negotiate the social world...Like identities, identity politics in itself is neither positive nor negative. At its minimum, it is a claim that identities are politically relevant, an irrefutable fact. Identities are the locus and nodal point by which political structures are played out, mobilized, reinforced and sometimes challenged...Obviously, identities can be recognized in pernicious ways...for the purposes of discrimination' (Alcoff and Mohanty,*Identity politics reconsidered*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2006, p. 6).

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Vulnerability of the Aged in India and their Rights

Sinjini Roy

The aged constitute a vulnerable section of society, since they lose authority, live alone losing their spouses, often materially dependent, ailing and no more physically active. Frail health, ailments, loss of spouse, dispersal of family members, loss of economic independence and authority make the elderly "dependent", "burden" and insecure. Atrocities, in the form of ill-treatment, cheating, robbing of property, infringement of rights, physical and mental harm, murder, and other forms of crime against the elderly by the family members and kin and by the larger society is common all over the world; India is no exception. When the families are smaller in size and the younger members disperse because of professional compulsions the elderly are left alone as the family support system grows weaker. The atrocities against the elderly, whose contribution to the society can hardly be overstated, and are rich in human resources, are being documented and reported in the "texts". The global and national bodies, the academia and policy makers, are coming out with innovative ideas to address these problems. Drawing from the available studies I have, in the present paper, highlighted the nature of atrocities that are done to the elderly members in India and have reviewed the policies that have been put in place to address their problems and protect their rights. What matters in the present-day context is to give them their due and to protect their rights.

Keywords: elderly, atrocities, rights, loneliness, depression, ailments, NGOs, old-age homes.

Introduction

Following the global trend, the population of older persons in India is always increasing; 19.8 million in 1951, 76 million in 2001 and 96 million in 2011 (Ganapathi 2011: 1). The aged (or elderly) men and women are perceived as a vulnerable section of population in India and all over the world since they are subjected to atrocities/abuse by their close relations, often by their family members, neighbours and unknown strangers. The International

Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA) takes serious note of the 'neglect, violation of human, legal and medical rights and deprivation of the elderly' (cf. Ganapathi 2011: 1). The violence is not just physical but also mental, psychological and economic. Despite greater vigilance by the media and government agencies a very few cases of violation of the rights and atrocities against them are reported in the media. Soneja (n. d.) of HelpAge India observes that the atrocities against the aged remain '... grossly underreported and un-discussed as the older people themselves do not want to discuss it, and the relatives and neighbours who are aware of this do not want to get involved' (n. d.: 13). A careful examination of whatever reports and writings come out would reveal the cruel, inhuman face of the close kin, neighbours and "interested" members of the society to whom the elderly look for support, care and security.

"Loneliness" that often engulfs the elderly, impacts upon their health, psyche, and desire to remain active. Hannah Devlin of *The Times*, London, reports, citing experts, that 'loneliness in old age is twice as bad for your health as obesity, scientists have warned'. Prof. John Cacioppo, a neuroscientist at the University of Chicago, has rightly observed 'that feeling isolated or rejected can have profound negative effects on health, ranging from blood pressure to sleep patterns' (Devlin 2014). Scientific studies in the USA confirm that more and more aged people now feel lonely and that the loneliest 'individuals were twice as likely to die as those who were most sociable'. Scientists have found that 'loneliness can lead to larger morning rise of the "stress" hormone cortisol, which increases the risk of heart attacks and strokes. There is also evidence that being isolated can make people more fearful of perceived threats. Loneliness is also linked to loss of purpose in life, loss of happiness and a risk factor for depression. As a solution, scientists are emphasizing on maintaining close supportive social relations. According to Prof. Cacioppo, 'maintaining close relationships was as important as finding an idyllic backdrop, warm weather and good food, when planning for retirement'. Caroline Abrahams, charity director at Age UK, has said: 'being lonely not only makes life miserable for older people, it is also really bad for their health, making them more vulnerable to illness' (Devlin 2014). As a way out, Prof. Abrahams suggests: 'We need to do more to support older people to stay socially connected'.

People who feel isolated often feel they are to blame, which deepens feelings of being stigmatized and disconnected from society'.

The sufferings of the aged, linked to ageing and loneliness, are not typical of the USA, UK or other Western countries; similar problems are reported from within India as well. A general observation is that depression and dementia are becoming a common problem for the elderly in different parts of India, particularly in urban areas. PKB Nayar, chairman, Centre for Gerontological Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, observes: 'Depression is becoming a common problem among the elderly. Most families may treat their old for diabetes, eye ailments or heart conditions but not for dementia' (Verma 2014), because of lack of awareness.

The rate of suicide among the elderly in India is reportedly on the rise. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, in 2013, 19.6 per cent of the 8,646 people who committed suicide in Kerala were above 60 (Verma 2014).

Mukhopadhyay in an article titled 'Bardhyaker Ashuk' (2013: 6) has observed that the aged can easily be the victims of different forms of psychotic disorders, namely, schizophrenia, dementia, Alzheimer, visual hallucination, delusion and so on. Prolonged ill-treatment and neglect at the hands of the family members make them feel isolated, marginalized and they can also develop a sense of mistrust about the family members. The elderly often apprehend that their property will be appropriated and their rights would be infringed upon by the family members and close kin. A part solution, according to doctor Mukhopadhyay, is family and social support to the elderly so that they feel cared and secure.

Using secondary sources, I have, in this paper, drawn an account of the ways the elderly in India are subjected to attacks, ill-treatment by different social forces, an account of the nature of their vulnerability and insecurity, an account of their rights guaranteed by the State and international agencies, and the responses of the elderly to all these.

Nature of atrocities

Scholars in the field of social gerontology agree that the 'cases of crimes against the elderly are on the rise across the country' (Mishra and Patel 2013: 14). The aged, who are often victims of hurt, murder and various forms of abuse, live in isolation in a state of perpetual fear. The culprits are often the family members, close kin, domestic help, neighbours and strangers. The National Crime Records Bureau report (2010) has recorded 32496 incidents of murder of the elderly and 5836 cases of different other forms of assault and kidnapping in India between 2001 and 2010.

With some risk of generalization, Ganapathi (2011) observes that about 28 per cent of the elderly live in urban area and many of them face fear, neglect, isolation and economic insecurity. Urbanization makes the elderly vulnerable to atrocities of different forms; they are the soft targets of the criminals. Crimes against the elderly come under (1) "violent crimes", which include murder, sexual assault and burglary; (2) "financial crimes", such as property disputes and fraud; and (3) "elder abuse" at both physical and emotional levels. Murder is the most common crime against the elderly and very often than not it is the domestic help, the watchman or the driver, or a person known to the old persons who is the culprit (Ganapathi 2011).

Based on a study covering 12 major cities, HelpAge India (2011) has found that the elderly are abused verbally (60 per cent), physically (48 per cent), emotionally (37 per cent) and economically (35 per cent). Such exclusive categorization of the forms of abuse can be misleading since one person may be subjected to various forms of abuse. However, 20 per cent of the elderly feel that they are neglected in the family as well as in the larger society. HelpAge India (2011) reveals that almost 52 per cent of the aged in Delhi face harassment over property. Also, crime against the elderly people in Delhi is four times more than that in Mumbai and double than that of Bangalore, according to the NGO. A study by Pune-based NGO International Longevity Centre (ILC), which helps the Pune crime branch run its 24-hour helpline, reports that about 60 per cent of the crimes against senior citizens in Pune are property-related whereas in Mumbai 95 percent of the cases arise out of property disputes (Ganapathi 2011: 2).

Emotional abuse is another very prominent form of violence against the elderly. It could include denial of food and medicines to the old persons, verbal abuse or withdrawal of means of communication to the outside world, forcing them to do certain chores, or even locking them up at home. A recent study by HelpAge India reports that most elders are ill-treated by their own family members like children, who constitute the largest group of perpetrators at 47.3 per cent, the spouses are estimated to be 19.3 per cent, while other relatives and grandchildren constitute 8.8 per cent and 8.6 per cent respectively. A spokesperson for the Social Counselling Cell (SCC) of Mumbai Police informs that among 1,200 complaints about domestic disputes, 40 per cent of the cases involve the abuse of elderly persons at the hands of their sons and daughters.

The major types of atrocities are in the form of burglary, molestations and other criminal acts. The Group for Economic and Social Studies (2009), in its study of four metropolises, has classified the crimes against the aged as 'crime against the body (murder, attempt to murder, hurt and kidnapping etc.), crime against the property (robbery, burglary and theft) and economic crime (cheating, criminal breach of trust etc.).

The growing crimes against the elderly persons place them in a perpetual state of fear. Ferraro and LaGrange (1987) have defined "fear of crime" as 'an emotional response of dread or anxiety to crime a person associates with'. The social situations that make the aged vulnerable to atrocities by the criminals leave them scared, terrorized. Thus, Ward (1990) has defined fear of crime as 'a lack of a sense of security and feeling of vulnerability'. The state of fear of crime, according to Ward, has three important dimensions: '(a) the individual's cognitive perception of being threatened, (b) a corresponding affective experience and (c) an appropriate motive or action tendency' (cited in Mishra and Patel 2013: 14).

Mishra and Patel (2013) have done "content analysis" of the reports on crimes against the elderly drawing from some daily newspapers in Delhi, Kanpur, Lucknow, Meerut, Roorkee and Unnao from April 2012 to September 2012. They have found that 170 cases of crimes against the aged were reported during this period; 76 cases of murder, eight cases of attempt to murder, 11

cases of cheating, 15 cases of robbery and six cases of kidnapping, seven cases of theft, 14 cases of hurt, nine cases of mistreatment and 11 cases of chain snatching. In the remaining 13 cases, there were accidents (8) and suicides (5). The study found that a significantly high number of crimes (43 per cent of the cases) are committed by 'family members, relatives and even neighbours'. Sharing of property and wealth defines the motive. Some other studies also have found that family members, relatives and neighbours pose serious threat to physical and mental and financial wellbeing of the elderly (Patel 2010; Rufus and Shekhar 2011). Patel (2010) has found that 25 per cent crimes against elderly are committed by their own family members, particularly by sons, daughters-in-law, relatives, neighbours and servants. She has found that the causes responsible for crime against the elderly are property and land disputes, caste rivalries, living alone, lack of attention from police and rural factionalism.

Mishra and Patel (2013) have cited some case studies in support of their observations. In one case, the daughter-in-law and his grandson were accused of kidnapping the elderly in New Delhi (*Amar Ujala* 2012). The kidnapping took place in connection with grabbing of property. In another case, the son conspired in having his father kidnapped in Nagalsauti, a village near Meerut in Western Uttar Pradesh, for land (*Dainik Jagran* 4 September 2012). In yet another case, a girl accused that her cousins have murdered her father for his property in Malihabad, Lucknow. While the elderly being abused and killed by family members is a matter of serious concern, the number of murders of the elderly living alone or with spouse also speaks of extreme vulnerability of the elderly. For instance, six elderly women, in separate cases, were murdered after robbery in their homes at Lucknow in a span of six months (*Times of India* 21 March 2012). In all these cases, the victims were staying alone. The killers were found to be acquaintances in most of these incidents. In another case, an elderly couple was murdered after robbery at Roorkee in their house at night (*Daikin Jagran* 11 September 2012). Such cases reveal the risk for the elderly staying alone.

The study also shows that in 73 (42.94 per cent) cases the crime has been committed by unknown persons and criminals, and in 34 cases the neighbours had a hand in the crime. Such incidents

of crimes only add to the perception of insecurity. On-fung et al. (2009) rightly observe that once criminal cases appear in their locality, the older persons often experience an increased level of fear apprehending that they can also be the victims.

Rediffmail News (2016) reports that on the occasion of the United Nations World Elder Abuse Day on June 15, 2016 the Agewell Foundation, a NGO, interacted with over 3,400 old people in 323 districts across India through its network of volunteers to understand the cause and effect of elder abuse in their own houses and discussed the ways and means to take care of the needs and rights of old people. The exercise brought to light that 65 per cent of old people are poor with no source of known income. '35 per cent have money or properties, savings, investments, inheritance and or supportive children. Irrespective to their financial status, most old people face elder abuse in one form or the other'.

About 9 per cent of those surveyed said they had been physically harassed or assaulted, while 13 per cent said they were denied of their basic needs. Another 13 per cent quoted mental torture and 20 per cent cited restrictions on their social life. Misbehaviour and ill-treatment were cited by 37 per cent while 8 per cent cited other forms of harassment.

Denial of food, medicines, emotional blackmailing, threat, shouting, abuse and beating are common forms of atrocities. There can be more serious cases attached to physical disability of the elderly.

Subha Soneja (n. d.) of Help Age India has done a report for the WHO on the 'elder abuse in India' based on a target group study on 58 elderly men and women in New Delhi. The participants in the group discussion covered elderly men and women from lower, middle, upper middle and higher economic classes and a group of health care workers. The major findings of the study are as follows:

1. Not a single instance of physical abuse was reported. The participants were in agreement in saying that 'violence did not exist in their communities', except in abnormal cases (p. 11). A study by HelpAge India (cited in Soneja n. d.: 14) on

the elderly patients in the outpatient department of a tertiary care hospital reveals that 'about 85% of the older persons have felt "loved and wanted" by their family members while only about 10% felt they were being "tolerated", 4% had felt "the need to go to an old age home" while 1% made no comments on the issue'.

2. The lower and middle-income groups identified "economic problem" as their main problem. Financial abuse was linked largely with people of the lower-middle income group, especially women. The widows in this class seemed more vulnerable as their dependence on the male members was total.
3. The upper middleclass participants mentioned of "mental health problems, highlighting lack of work, lack of facilities for utilization of leisure time and a general feeling of loneliness. They had no financial problem but felt ignored by the other (younger) members of the family.
4. Both the low-income group and middle-income group mentioned about "lack of emotional support" and care from the other members of the family. They used expressions like "neglect", "verbal abuse", "experience of loneliness in everything", "a sense of insecurity" and a "feeling of being burden".
5. In some cases, the older couples complained that they are attached to different hearths of different sons, which they do not like.
6. Among other problems the elderly mentioned of "health problem", problem of living alone with disabilities and insufficient treatment, and "lack of adequate accommodation in the house" (Soneja n. d.: 6).
7. In the low-income group, the women came out to be the worst sufferers; they had no income of their own and were dependent on their spouses for everything (p. 7). They were in the habit of concealing their ailments for fear of being considered "burden" by their family members. The widows were solely dependent on their children who decide whether

the elderly need any medical treatment. This was however not the problem of the upper classes.

8. The members of the lower classes mentioned of "lack of caring attitude in daughters-in-law and "lack of space" in the existing house.
9. The participants in the discussion perceived "abuse" as behavior of extreme violence" and "neglect/abandonment" as unexpected and painful. The elderly acknowledged "disrespect" and undignified life as something they do not deserve. Verbal abuse by the daughter-in-law was a part of their life and they do not take it seriously. Economic abuse was primarily in the form of "dispossession of property".
10. The elderly members are treated as "burdens" by the younger members both in terms of money and time (P. 10). The younger members, who were supposed to be "care givers" have now become non-caring and subject the elderly to neglect. Lack of adjustment between the members of two generations was cited as a problem. Because of their dependence there is a growing realization among the elderly that in order to survive they will have to adjust with the younger generation (p. 10).
11. The participants mentioned frail health and other forms of dependence for not lodging formal complaint even when they are ill-treated in the family. For them, formal complaints would mean direct confrontation and straining of relations (p. 11).
12. The participants felt ashamed of telling about ill-treatment at the hands of their family members. They were also afraid of retaliation by the family members in case of intervention by an outside agency like NGO. A large majority felt that social agencies could hardly do anything to help them. For them, it was emotionally satisfying to be able to see their children even if that would mean bearing of certain degree of ill-treatment.
13. The elderly from across the classes '...were of the view that the cases of abuse reported in the press were only aberrations

and abuse did not exist in society in general. Media was blamed for sensationalizing the issue'. They, however, admitted that 'neglect would occur because of pressures of modern life styles and changes in the value system' (Soneja n. d.: 16).

The crux of the issue has been captured in the last point. The elder abuse is not the broad-based reality in India. While stray cases of cruelty and a general sense of neglect prevail, people in India still value relations. C. T. Titus, a former professor of English summed up their situation saying: 'This is the age when you become a superfluous entity. It is not that my children have disowned me but they live in a world of their own' (Verma2014).

S. Irudaya Rajan, one of the members of the research team that conducted a study titled *Situation of Elderly in Kerala: Evidences from Kerala Aging Survey 2014*, observes: 'The reduction in family size, migration and the high work participation rate of women have led to an increasingly graying population living alone'. He further observes: 'In Kerala, it isn't uncommon to see a 90-year-old staying with a 75-year-old relative because the rest of the family will be either in the Gulf or Delhi' (Verma 2014). The *Kerala State Planning Board Report 2009*, reveals that about six per cent of the elderly in the state live alone - 7.5 per cent of whom are in the 60-64 age group and 10.3 per cent are 80+. The state also has 400 old-age homes (the highest among the states in India) with 15,000 boarders.

Reports from West Bengal

In terms of crimes against the elderly, Kolkata follows the all-India trend. According to National Crimes Records Bureau, 320 senior citizens were murdered in Bengal in 2012, an alarming jump from 198 in 2011. State Home department sources reveal that three adjoining districts of North and South 24-Paraganas and Howrah, which are overwhelmingly urban, had over 776 crimes against senior citizens in 2012, with 64 cases of deaths. In 2011, there were 665 crimes and 49 deaths. The crimes are reported from different parts of the city (Ghosh 2015: 1).

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) did a study on 1300 families covering the states of West Bengal, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra, Panjab and Himachal Pradesh, and found that the general awareness about the government programmes and the mental health of the elderly is very poor. Indrani Chakraborty, who did the report on West Bengal observed: 'more than 50 per cent of the elderly in West Bengal suffer from problems like mental distance with their children, living away from their children, loneliness resulting out of death of one of the spouses, and dementia'. The survey also found that only about 21 per cent of the elderly in West Bengal (as against 44 per cent in India) are physically agile while the remaining 79 per cent suffer from various ailments. Besides, the report mentioned dismal economic condition of the elderly; '60 per cent depending on either family members or on old-age pension given by the state' (*Ananda Bazaar Patrika* 2014: 6).

The incidents of crimes against elderly are often reported in the media, newspaper and television. Most cases of crimes against the elderly are reported from the urban areas. Among the issues often figure as reasons in the incidents are sharing of money, ornaments and landed property. Here is a brief account of some of the cases that came out in newspaper in West Bengal.

An 82-year-old chartered accountant Mr. Ranjit Chatterjee was strangled to death when he was reading the morning newspaper seating in chair with a cup of tea. The incident took place at his residence at 17 Bipin Pal Road, near Desopriya Park in South Kolkata. Mr. Chatterjee was living in his apartment with his bed-ridden wife. Their only daughter lives in the US. The police arrested one Sona Das (40) a cleaner, who has been working in this housing complex for the last 15 years. Das has confessed the crime. According to investigating officer the motive behind the crime was money (*The Telegraph* 22 November 2013, Calcutta: 22).

Panic and fear gripped the other residents in the housing complex after this murder. Atashi Chatterjee, 75, who lives alone in the first floor of the apartment, told her cleaner the following day that he was not needed anymore. Some other residents had stopped the entry of the gardeners and water carriers in the complex. Mrs. Banani Das, who lives in the complex with her ailing husband and two maids (with their 40-year-old son living

in Swansea, UK) said: 'When our gardener came to our house for the monthly maintenance of the dozen flower pots on my balcony I asked him to stand on the road. Our maid took the pots from our first-floor balcony to the footpath and carried them up after doing cleaning. Till last month he was allowed to come to our balcony and even have tea'. Two other elderly Mr. Saroj and Mrs. Sujata Mukherjee, living in the complex, said: 'we live in fear everyday and at the mercy of the domestic helps.' The 62-year old Parboni Bonerjee of Selimpur said: 'I drop the key to my domestic help everyday because I cannot climb the steps each time. She has been working for us for 15 years. But after yesterday (the murder of Mr. Chatterjee) I am unsure.' Her only son works with IBM in Mumbai. A man, who lives in Delhi, leaving his parents in their house at Bipin Pal Road, said: 'I had asked them to join me several times before but they refused. Yesterday my father asked me to take them away. I could feel the helplessness in his voice' (*The Telegraph* 22 November 2013: 22).

Explaining the situation sociologist Prasanta Ray said: 'With the breakdown of the joint family, the support system in the family is gone. The vulnerability of the old will keep increasing'. Ranadip Ranjan Ghosh Roy, a psychiatrist, explained the situation saying 'the insecurity of living alone is aggravated among the old because of their failing faculties'. The incident (the murder of Ranjit Chatterjee), according to him, 'will increase the feeling of hopelessness among that age group because they identify with the people with whom it has happened' (*The Telegraph* 22 November 2013: 22).

In Salt Lake BJ Block, Sector V Mrs. Tandra Bhattachariya (67) and her son Shaumya (40) were found dead in the canal nearby on 17 November 2013; two bodies were tied with a rope. Mr. Shyamal Bhattachariya, husband of deceased Tandra, claimed that the mother and the son were in depression for some time over the suicide of their only daughter Sarmistha a few months back. Sarmistha was an employee with Apple in the US but she had to come back two years back because of illness of her mother-in-law. Her husband did not allow her to go back to US and out of depression she killed herself. Shaumya was working in a multinational IT Company in Sector V. His company offered him posting in the US. But Mr. and Mrs. Bhattacharya did not allow

him to go because they were yet to overcome the trauma of loss of their daughter. On his refusal of the offer, Shaumya was sacked from his job which made him depressed. According to Mr. Bhattacharya, the mother and her two children were emotionally so strongly attached that she and Shaumya could not bear the shock and committed suicide (*Ananda Bazaar Patrika* 19 November 2013: 9).

On 16 July 2015, a couple, Prangobindo Das (78) and Renuka Das (75), both retired professors, were murdered in their flat in Indralok Abasan in Paikpara, North Kolkata. Prangobindo Das was a former professor of Burdwan University and Mrs. Das had retired from Dumdum Sarojini Naidu College. The only daughter of the couple lives in the US. The maid was absconding since the incidence. The investigating police officer claimed that the motive was to loot the belongings of the couple; they were killed because the assailant(s) were known to them. The maid might have done the murder in connivance with her known criminals (*Ganasakti* 17 July 2015: 1).

On 26 February 2014, a group of miscreants looted money and ornaments from the 70-year-old Padma Bhattacharya, at gun point, from her residence at B 3/2 Northern Park, Bansdronei, South Kolkata, at around 12 noon. The promoter husband of the lady had gone out in connection with some work. Their only daughter, who is married, lives in another part of the city (*Ananda Bazar Patrika* 27 February 2014).

Mr. Deb Kumar Mukherjee (78) was murdered on 11 June 2015 in his own house at 108 Elliot Road, Kolkata. He was killed despite being a member of the "pronam" programme of the State police which was to ensure his protection. Under the "pronam" scheme, a police officer from the local police station is supposed to visit the elderly and inquire about his health, security and other needs and provide the necessary support (*Ganasakti* 12 June 2015: 2).

On 7 June 2015 police recovered a decomposed body of Mr. Asutosh Chakraborty (79) from his flat in Baghajatin Colony, Patuli, Kolkata. Mr. Chakraborty, a retired employee of a private company, was living alone in this house for many years. His wife and the only son Samit Chakraborty live in a flat at Lake Gardens while his only daughter, married, lives in Sonarpur in South 24-

Paraganas. Mr. Chakraborty was not in contact with his family members for many years (*Ganasakti* 8 June 2015).

Around the same time, a 93-year-old woman, Shanta Bhattacharya, was strangled in Ultadanga and her belongings, money and ornaments, robbed. In 2012, 68-year-old Phoolrenu Choudhury, who was living alone in her house, was brutally killed by robbers, while her belongings were looted (Ghosh 2015: 1). In two years, 2012-2014, as many as 666 senior citizens were kidnapped in Bengal, half of them were women. *Ganasakti* 21 June 2016 reports that one Mr. Malin Kumar Datta, 69, was found dead in his flat in the second floor of Manoprobha housing complex at Santoshpur Avenue of Kolkata. Having been reported the police recovered him and took him to hospital where he was declared dead. Mr Datta was living alone in his flat and had acute asthma. Police suspected that Mr. Datta died of asthma attack.

On 25 June 2016, 75-year-old Widow Madhabi Jana was beaten to death by her daughter-in-law and 20-year old grandson in her own house at Baranagar. Madhabi Jana was the mother of a son and three daughters, two of whom are married out. She was living in the house constructed by her late husband, with her son, daughter-in-law and grandson. She had a long history of ill-treatment at the hands of her daughter-in-law and grandson and was taking food in the house of one of her married daughters, who lives close by. Mrs. Jana recently gave away a part of her 5 cottah land to one of her daughters. Angry at this, her daughter-in-law and grandson put pressure on her to give them the remaining part of her land, which she declined. Following an altercation the daughter-in-law and grandson beat her to death. Madhabi's son came forward to save her but he was also beaten up by the duo (*Ganasakti* 26 June 2016: 2).

Gangopadhyay (2013) reports on two incidents of extreme form of ill treatment of the elderly by their own family members. An 81-year-old widow, who served as a police officer, now retired, used to live in her own house with her son, who was a government employee, and daughter-in-law. In the absence of her son, the daughter-in-law abused her verbally. Apprehending further trouble, she refrained from lodging a complaint with the police. But some of her friends came forward and had an informal talk with the local police officer. The police called the daughter-in-

law and threatened her of action if she does not amend her behavior. After this, the situation improved for the elderly lady.

In another case reported by Gangopadhyay (2013), the son of an elderly lady who lives in the US came and persuaded his mother to hand over their South Kolkata house to a promoter and promised to take her with him to US. On the day of departure, the son left leaving his mother in the airport.

Sumon De (*Anandabazar Patrika* 1 March 2014) has drawn a positive picture of the lives of celebrity senior citizens in Kolkata. He has interviewed the personalities like Amala Sankar (94), who still does dancing and painting, Ramapada Chaudhury (91), the noted writer, who still studies for long hours and writes, Nirendranath Chakraborty (90), one of the top poets in West Bengal, who is still regular in writing poems, Mrinal Sen (91) the celebrity filmmaker, who is still active in reading. According to De, all of these senior citizens draw inspiration from their love for the city of Kolkata and for humanity. They share a deep sense of love for life, which they consider can be very beautiful if one is engaged in creative activities. De (2014) observes that the recipes to preserve physical and mental health include (1) controlled and balanced diet, (2) sound sleep for 6-8 hours a day, (3) regular exercise, (4) doing things like reading, watching movies, gardening, engaging in welfare activities, and so on, (5) spending time with people of all age groups, particularly the younger ones, (6) visiting the neighbours and relatives to keep in good relations, (7) taking care of dress and doing those things that one loves, (8) touring different places on a regular basis, and (9) keeping in touch with doctors.

In my study on the elderly in Kolkata I have found that the aged generally confront problems like (1) dispersal of children, (2) loss of spouse, (3) aging-related ailments, (4) loss of a child, sometimes the only child, (5) insensitive treatment at the hands of family members, (7) loss of activities, importance, and status, (8) a feeling of loneliness, depression and of “nothingness”, and so on. Besides, they, especially the middleclass elderly, live in a state of perpetual fear because they are the soft targets of the criminals, who set an eye on their property and assets (Roy 2016).

Confronted with such problems, many of the middleclass aged take refuge in old-age homes, which have mushroomed in Kolkata in recent years. They prefer the Homes run by the private owners or the ones run by trustee boards. In Kolkata, there is only one state run old-age home and all others are either run by a private owner or NGO. For the better managed Homes, the good ones, there is a long waiting list. The boarders have to pay up to Rs. 5 lakh as security deposit and pay a monthly rent between Rs. 10-20 thousand. But the Homes have their limitations. According to Moulimadhab Ghatak, a specialist in physical medicine and rehab, 'many Homes cannot meet the necessary physical, mental and nutritional needs of the elderly. Besides, in many Homes, the elderly are made to live in congested unhygienic rooms.' The most serious crisis that faces the aged comes when they move to Homes is that of adjustment. After living in a family setup for all these years they have to adjust in a completely new social and physical ambiance (Gangopadhyay 2013). The facilities that the Homes offer vary widely; in some, one has to pay a small amount of Rs. 2000 per month but in some others, they pay as much as Rs. 28,000 a month plus a deposit of Rupees 7-10 lakh. The Homes therefore cater to the needs of different classes of elderly.

The experienced and specialist senior citizens of the city admit that there is a growing tendency among the elderly to move to old-age homes. They say: 'the number of elderly who prefer a shift to old-age home is on the rise but the number of Homes is not growing enough to match the demand. The dispersal of the children leaves the parents alone; the rising crimes make the elderly insecure in their own house. The childless parents do not have someone to take care of. All these factors explain why there is a growing demand for old-age homes. Sociologist Abhijit Mitra explains the problem saying: 'the society is forgetting that to care for the elderly is its responsibility. Earlier, the social values constrained the younger generation to care for the elderly but now that binding is no more. They fail to realize what the elderly want the most is the warmth of physical proximity of the family members and not a "secure" life in old-age home (Mukhopadhyay 2014).

In an article in *Anandabazar Patrika* (8 June 2014) Guhathakurta has busted many stereotypes attached to life in old-age homes and has drawn a positive picture of the life of the elderly who

have chosen the Home life while enjoying their freedom to the full. Guhathakurta has referred to some cases in support of his view. Mr. Biren Hazra (67), for example, lives in an old-age home on Delhi Road in Kolkata. He shifted here in 2010. Unmarried Birenbau was an engineer, and served in high positions in government departments and earned enough to live the rest of his life. He has seven brothers and two sisters who have dispersed to different parts of the country, leaving their parental house in Burdwan almost deserted. He chose to live the rest of his life in the Home where he enjoys his freedom and a secure life. He is served food four times a day, and there is a ward boy to take care of all his works. He is associated with NGOs doing welfare activities and is passionate about periodic tours to places both inside and outside the country. Full of life Mr. Hazra had no complaints about anything.

Bharati Talukdar, retired Headmistress of school in Kolkata, who lost her husband a couple of years back, lives in an old-age home in Hooghly district while her colleague-friend unmarried Anima Ghosh lives in the adjacent room in the same Home. Bharati Ghosh's daughter, who lives in Kolkata after marriage, often visits her, and even stays for a night or two in the guesthouse of the Home. The two friends enjoy each other's company and spend long hours together. They go out on tours together once or twice every year. Mrs. Ghosh's daughter makes the necessary arrangements.

Mrs. Manasi Bandyopadhyay's husband, who worked in high positions as an employee of the central government, passed away a few years back. Her daughter and son have transferable jobs. Tired of shifting places, Mrs. Bandyopadhyay has chosen to live in an old-age home in East Kolkata. Mrs. Bandyopadhyay felt that the women, who live alone, are looked at with pity and a lot of curiosity. There is an established notion that the elderly who live in old-age homes are abandoned by their children and live in isolated pitiable condition. She feels, this is a stereotype, far from the reality. She explained: 'we live a good life here with a lot of freedom and without being a liability on anyone; we come here to live and not to die' (Guhathakurta 2014).

Mr. Samir Chattopadhyay was a successful businessman based in Allahabad. He had a big house, two cars, and servants, all

indicating a happy, settled life. But some kind of boredom grasped him. With six-month notice, he disposed of all his business and properties and left Allahabad to take refuge in an old-age home in the suburbs of Kolkata along with his aging wife. His only daughter, who is their only child, who is married and lives in Allahabad, was shocked at the decision of her parents. In explaining the decision, Samirbabu said: 'my business was doing well when I decided to leave. I thought, I have earned enough and now it's time to retire in peace. It's now time to relax, enjoy life, write poems, and spend time with wife'. 'Our daughter was upset with our decision, she came and saw the arrangements here and returned satisfied. She was under the stereotypical notion about old-age homes, but now her opinion has changed. One can live a happy and secure life in the Home', Samirbabu said. A group of trained service providers work in this Home, helping the boarders. There is an arrangement for weekly health check-up; the home management arranges for hospitalization, treatment and even complicated surgery; they help perform the last rites in case of death and do the necessary communication with the family members. The borders gradually develop some kind of relations with each other; they celebrate the birthdays and important festivals together; special meals are served on special occasions. The borders live with a great deal of empathy for one another. The Home is equipped with television sets and internet facility.

Mr. Chattopadhyay holds the opinion that moving to old-age home leaving family is not easy, yet life in the Home is not all that bad. He said: 'we are all stuck to the notion that there cannot be life beyond family. It requires only a change of perception about the old-age homes. The decision to shift to Home, in a way, conforms to the ancient Indian notion of Banaprastho, the last state of Chaturasrama (as outlined in *Manusamhita*), which perhaps works even in modern time.' According to Indologist Narsinghprasad Bhaduri, there was a social reason for Chaturasrama; the idea was to hand over the responsibilities to the next generation and live a life of seclusion in the forest in order to avoid conflicts of authority' (Guhathakurta 2014).

The standard explanations that are offered for the rising crimes against the elderly in the metropolises are as follows:

1. In the globalised world the members of the younger generation move away from home to different parts of the world, leaving the senior citizens lonely.
2. In the absence of neighbourhood culture in new townships the senior citizens living alone become more vulnerable to attacks of the miscreants (Ghosh 2015: 2); the communication among those who live in the same housing complex is also thinning.
3. With more and more people living longer, the households are getting smaller and congested, causing stress in joint and extended families. Even where they are co residing, marginalization, isolation and insecurity is felt by the older persons due to the generation gap and changes in lifestyle. Increase in lifespan also results in chronic functional disabilities creating a need for assistance required by the older person to manage chores as simple as the activities of daily living. With the traditional system of the lady of the house looking after the older family members at home is slowly changing as the women at home are also participating in activities outside home and carry their own career ambitions. There is a growing realization among older persons that they are more often than not being perceived by their children as burden (Soneja n. d.: 4).
4. Soneja (n. d.) identified absence of traditional values and negative attitude of the younger generation as the most important cause of "maltreatment". She further observes: 'Due to technical advances and migration from rural to urban areas, the roles of older people have become ill defined and too insignificant for the family' (p. 13). Physical disability resulting from prolonged illness makes the elderly "burdens" on the family members. The result could be neglect and ill-treatment.

Initiatives to address the problems

The initiatives to protect the aged from the atrocities, crimes, loneliness, depression, fear, aging-related health problems and other forms of abuse can be classified into: (1) the legal-

administrative interventions, (2) old-age homes, which are run by the government, by the NGOs and the private investors, and (3) NGO-guided self-initiatives.

1. Legal-administrative initiatives

Both the central and the state governments have launched a number of schemes to address the problems that face the elderly. The policies are meant to promote the health, well-being and the right of the elderly to live with freedom.

In 1999 the central government formulated the National Policy for Older Persons to promote health, safety, social security and wellbeing of the senior citizens. The policy strives to encourage families to take care of the elderly members. It also proposes to support voluntary and non-governmental organizations to supplement the care provided by the family and provide care and protection to the senior citizens. The major objective of the policy is to make older people fully independent citizens.

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has adopted the Integrated Programme for Older Persons (IPOP) in 1992 with provisions to provide financial assistance up to 90 per cent of the project cost to NGOs. The projects would be in the areas of establishing and maintaining old-age homes, day care centres, mobile medicare units and to provide non-institutional services to the elderly. The thrust of the programme is to cover the elderly with Alzheimer's disease and people suffering from dementia, formation of senior citizens' association, training for the care providers and counselling for the elderly.

A National Council for Older Persons (NCOP) has been formed by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to administer the National Policy on Older Persons 1999. Among other things the NCOP suggest (1) steps to make old age productive and interesting, and (2) measures to enhance the quality of intergenerational relationships.

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has taken an initiative called the National Programme for the Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE) in the Eleventh Five Year Plan from 2010-11 with an outlay of Rs. 288 crore for the plan period. A wide range of health

schemes covering 100 identified districts in 21 states were covered in the scheme.

The Ministry of Finance has announced a Senior Citizens Savings Scheme to be executed through the post offices which offers higher rate of interest on the deposits. The Reserve bank of India has permitted higher rates of interest on savings schemes of senior citizens. Following this most banks provide higher rate of interest on the saving schemes of the senior citizens. With fast dropping interest rates the scheme is losing its functionality. Besides, there are different schemes that give tax exemptions on income and spending on treatment to senior citizens. In the event of commodification of health services and escalation of treatment cost such small concessions have lost their significance.

The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities has introduced a scheme to constitute a group called “geriatric animators”, a group of trained youth, who take care of the elderly lying in bed after a stroke or having dementia. The trained groups of care givers do counselling, give company to those who live alone, help in bank and post office works. Although the service is paid (something like Rs. 170-200 for eight hours’ service) they are trained to serve like family members (Gangopadhyay 2013).

Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has made it mandatory to reserve two seats for senior citizens in the front row of the buses of State Road Transport Undertakings and some state governments are giving fare concessions to senior citizens.

Under Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS) the Central Government provides monthly pension of Rs. 200 to all elderly persons over 65 years of age belonging to households below poverty line. The state governments opting for the scheme contribute an additional Rs. 200 which makes the total pension Rs. 400 per month. The Ministry has lowered the age limit from existing 65 years to 60 years and the pension amount for senior citizens of 80 years and above has been enhanced from Rs. 200/- to Rs. 500/- with effect from 1 April 2011. The number of total beneficiaries would thus increase from 171 lakh to 243 lakh.

An important piece of legislation has been The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens, 2007, a central government

Act, which has been notified by most states and the union territories. The main provisions of the Act are (1) the maintenance of parents/ senior citizens by children/relatives has been obligatory and to be adjudicated through tribunals to be set up by the state governments, (2) revocation of transfer of property by senior citizens in case of negligence by relatives who have received the property, (3) penal provision for abandonment of senior citizens by the children, (4) establishment of old age homes for indigent senior citizens, and (5) adequate medical facilities and security for senior citizens (National Human Rights Commission 2011: 15-17).

The National Human Rights Commission, India, organizes periodic awareness programmes, and supports NGOs to organize such programmes relating to health, security and issues relating to wellbeing of the elderly. The Commission does (1) review the activities and performances of the institutions like old age homes run with government support, and (2) undertake measures for publicity, awareness, familiarization, and sensitization of the public as well as Central and State Government officers about the rights of the elderly (National Human Rights Commission 2011: 20).

At the global level, the UN adopted its first International Plan of Action of Aging in Vienna in 1982 and the UN General Assembly adopted the UN Principles for Older Persons in 1991 with an objective to promote independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity. In 1995 the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted a resolution to guarantee economic and social and cultural rights of the older persons. In 1999, the UN on the occasion of celebration of the International Year of Older Persons identified four areas as important for drawing up an action plan which are (1) the situation of older persons, (2) individual lifelong development, (3) the relationship between generations, and (4) the interrelationship of population, ageing and development. In 2002, the 2nd World Assembly on Ageing (WAA) adopted a political declaration and an International Strategic Plan of Action on Ageing, which mandated (1) to ensure the Rights of older persons, (2) to protect older persons from 'neglect, abuse and violence' in all situations and (3) to recognize

'their role and contribution to society' (National Human Rights Commission 2011: 17-18).

The theme of the International Day of Older Persons in 2003 was 'mainstreaming ageing: forging links between the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the Millennium Development Goals'. Following this the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) worked out its action plan for "mainstreaming" in the areas of work, reproductive health, gender issues and humanitarian responses to conflict situations. WHO's mainstreaming objective is to focus on principles and methods of developing health care systems that are responsive to ageing (National Human Rights Commission 2011: 19).

Besides the national and international institutions, the individual experts also put across their programmes for addressing the problems of the elderly. Mishra and Patel (2013), for example, have suggested community policing to protect the elderly from atrocities. The idea is to set up "community watch programmes" in coordination with police and to intensify police patrolling in the areas and colonies where there is higher concentration of the elderly (p. 21). They also speak for self-awareness programmes which would add to their protection. The other measures that can go with the idea of community policing are (1) setting up of senior citizens cell in every district police headquarters, (2) sensitizing the police personnel about the rights of the elderly, (3) preparation of data base of crimes to have a better understanding of the vulnerability of the elderly, (4) effective vigil and patrolling and timely intervention, (5) to maintain a register of the elderly in an area, and keep in touch with them over phone and encourage them to get in touch with police even when they apprehend any form of attack (Das 2009).

2. *Old-age homes*

On the website <http://www.justdial.com/Kolkata/old-age-home> one can find a list of nearly 100 old age homes in Kolkata, mostly privately owned, and some are run by missionary trusts. It is quite possible that information about many of the Homes is not available on website. It is also important to note that most of the Homes have come up in recent decades starting from late 1980s and in

recent years. Kolkata, in recent decades, has seen a rapid growth in the number of old-age homes all over the city and its outskirts, yet there is not enough room to accommodate the willing elderly applicants. The stigma that was earlier attached to old-age home living is thinning and more and more senior citizens are now willingly shifting to these Homes for a secure and better life. The movement to the Homes is perceived by the elderly as a solution to many of their problems. The old-age homes are of different standards as they cater to the needs of the elderly representing diverse economic backgrounds. The monthly rent per person varies from Rs. 2000 to 20,000. Going by the advertisement of one high class home named Jagriti Dham (also known as S.V. Home for the Aged) at Diamond Harbour Road, which accommodates 180 ailing bed-ridden elderly, where the charges are very high, one can have a sense of the standard of the Home.

The new and innovative architectural designs now are being put in place to cater to the practical needs of old-age. The new Homes thus promise to be “elderly friendly” with provisions like wheel chair and walker enabled spaces & ramps, spacious lifts to accommodate stretchers, comfortable and user-friendly door handles for people with arthritis and so on. The stress is being laid on provisions for adequate safety and security of the aged, like, 24 hrs manned gate with intercom; high boundary walls, CCTV, emergency button in every room and frequently occupied areas, 24x7 ambulance, attendant and emergency healthcare, personal care at every step and so on. Health care provisions are also being upgraded with provisions for visiting doctors, 24 hrs ambulance, trained nurses round the clock and so on. The social spiritual needs of the elderly are also taken care of with provisions for yoga cum meditation, worship hall, coffee shop, library, games room, conference room, and so on (Source: <http://www.svhomeforaged.org/services.php>).

The professional service providers are very innovative and they draw out their scheme after some market research. Here is such an idea which works on extending professional services keeping the ailing elderly in their own residence. Here is an example an agency named Deep Probeen Porisheba which has put an advertisement on the web offering in-home services for the elderly in kolkata and outskirts. The promised services include (1) all

services to be delivered t home, (2) professional, consistent and reliable services, (3) a membership package to suit every need, (4) compassionate, dedicated and trained sahayak staff, (5) expert panel of qualified physicians and medical professionals, and (6) regular progress reports to family members delivered anywhere in the world. (Source: <http://dppindia.com/?gclid=CLj7xp6t1M0CFdWGaAodgCsIYw>).

The state of Kerala, which has the highest proportion of elderly people (60 and above) and where the life expectancy is 70, which is higher than the national average, is successfully running day-care centres for the aged. The elderly people find the old-age homes, run by private owners as well as state, as a solution to many of their problems. Kerala has the highest number of old-age homes in the country – close to 400 with 1500 boarders. The state-run Homes are running beyond capacity and the private ones have a long waiting list (Verma 2014: 5).

P.C. Varghese, an 82-year-old former income tax officer, and his wife now live in a 410-sq. feet living unit in Mission Valley, a private trust-run senior citizen care home for those aged 65 and above in Kottayam. About the arrangements he said: 'I am very happy here'. His ancestral home in a nearby town is locked. 'Our three children live abroad. I intend to live here until my last breath', he adds (Verma 2014: 5).

The two-storey building with 62 living units is home to 24 people, including three couples. For the last eight months, Varghese and his 75-year old wife have taken on lease a deluxe unit which consists of an air-conditioned bedroom with attached washroom and a small foyer. At mission Valley, 95 per cent of the units were booked in less than six months of its launch.

Rajamma, another elderly, lives in a government-run old-age home in Thiruvananthapuram. Her sole possessions are three pairs of traditional Kerala sari. She sleeps on an iron cot in the dormitory which she shares with 25 other women. The mother of seven children was left by her daughter at the Home for Women in Poojapura a year ago (Verma 2014: 5).

The superintendent of the Home said: 'Earlier we were just a care home but most women who were left here were never taken back by their children. They would give us false address and we couldn't

trace them. So, the social justice department decided to turn it into a full-fledged old-age home. The place has a sanctioned strength of 25 residents but houses 50 (Verma 2014: 5).

The state of Kerala is one of the first states in the country to adopt an ageing policy and implement “mental health programme” in all districts. The ministry of social justice and panchayats has categorized the elderly into “new old” (60-69 years), old (70-79) and “oldest” (80 and above) and has made arrangements to ‘rehabilitate the elderly in their homes’ (Verma 2014). The government has prepared the “We Care” scheme under which college students will be trained and be asked to provide voluntary services to old-age homes. Non-government organizations are also being asked to set up old-age homes. The government is also considering a scheme in which individuals can adopt elderly people, on lines of child adoption schemes.

The state government has also planned a Model Anganwadi project which aims to bring together three generations - the toddler, the teenager and the aged - under one roof. In the coming years with a fall in the use of Anganwadis and in school enrolments (because of low population growth), the government will use the premises to house the elderly (Verma 2014).

One can thus see that a lot of innovative programmes and schemes are being worked out and implemented to make the old-age homes happy homes for the elderly keeping in consideration all their requirements and problems. However, in the neo-liberal social order there is a possibility of commodification of such services.

3. NGO guided self-initiative

Gangopadhyay (2013) gives us an outline of how the aged with their own initiative form an NGO or social network and take up programmes to make their life better. She basically speaks about the significance of individual “agency” and it can be transformed into a “collective agency” through social network and mutual support.

60+ Ishani Bhattacharya of Kamalgazi, Sonarpur, was in depression after the death of her husband; she lost the desire to live. Sukanya Sinha (70) of Bhawanipur lost her only daughter

and was in deep depression. Aparna Chakraborty (62) of Ballygunj, the wife of a busy doctor, had her son and daughter settled in the US and was feeling lonely. Mr. Pathik Bandyopadhyay (67) of Patuli, South Kolkata, was feeling lonely after losing his wife. His only son is settled in Mumbai, where he lives with his family (Gangopadhyay 2013). Although these senior citizens live in different parts of the city yet they are connected to each other through social network.

In Kolkata, there are NGOs which are working on some better alternatives for the aged based on the idea of social planning. It combines informal social networking and planning about how to best utilize the old-age, where to look for care and support. Mr. Amlan Bandyopadhyay and Mrs. Manosree Bandyopadhyay, whose two sons have settled in the US, have joined the informal group of the elderly. Many members of the group stood by Mr. Bandyopadhyay when, a few months back, he fell ill and had to undergo a surgery. The group keeps record of some basic information of the members like contact number, blood group, health report card with information of major ailments. The group discusses financial planning and exchange necessary information. The group promotes the idea of keeping physically active and mentally alert, encourages the members to undertake the work/projects which they could not do for want of time. Pre-retirement counselling has helped many to discover the "hidden self" in the elderly. The members of the group engage themselves in activities like social networking, learning music, vocal or instrumental. They sit in *adda* in coffee shops, go for movies, or go out for a tour in group. The members help each other with their experience and expertise in doing bank transactions, hospitalization, saving management and so on. They stand by each other in their moments of crises. They extend help even for their friends who have taken refuge in old-age homes. Some of them have taken to creative writings. Those who live close by go for morning walk together and exchange social visits. `

In Kolkata, there is an umbrella body for the elderly named Varishtha Nagarik Mancha (VNM), which collaborates with NGOs, to organize awareness workshops for the elderly periodically and offers different kinds of assistance. One such workshop was organized at Natyashodh Sansthan in Salt Lake

on 26 March 2014. Experts from different fields spoke on fields covering various aspects of old-age related problems. Gerontologist Indrani Chakraborty spoke on various inconveniences faced by the aged. She said: 'Breaking of joint family system has given rise to security issues related to finances, health and legal matters'. Mr. K. K. Chakraborty, former general manager, State bank Group, highlighted the importance of spreading "financial literacy", meaning awareness about the special rights of the elderly among them. Consumer rights activist Alok Mukherjee, explained the some of the provisions of the maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, especially the provision that makes it mandatory for children or legal heirs to provide for their parents or aged relatives. He emphasized on using the rights like standing in separate queues meant for the elderly, use of seats in public transport meant for the senior citizens, making use of IT relief and airfare concessions. Mr. Mukherjee prescribed: 'You should make small groups of 60+, play cards, go to the library and discuss these issues. This would raise your awareness level' (Chakraborty 2014).

There is also an informal group called Parents in India Children Abroad (PICA). Neurologist N. N. Sarangi said while the children get busy enhancing their career prospects abroad, their parents in India suffer from depression due to insecurity and this, along with dementia, is becoming very common among the aging population. To get out of the crisis he prescribes regular exercise, right diet and life style modifications from an early stage of life (Chakraborty 2014). Mr. Samar Chakraborty, former chief general manager, Calcutta Telephones, emphasized on being updated with modern information technology, which, apart from easing communication, provide multiple devises to make life simple, particularly when the physical mobility of the elderly becomes restricted (Chakraborty 2014).

Conclusion

Based on information from the secondary sources I have tried to draw an understanding of the problems faced by the elderly in India and particularly in the state of West Bengal. We have seen that the elderly in India are subjected to (1) criminal attacks,

including murder for their property, money, ornaments, (2) physical and verbal abuse at hands of the family members, and (3) mental torture of different kinds by the close ones. The senior citizens, who have taken their family and society forward with their invaluable contributions, experience loss of authority and importance in the family and in the larger society. They encounter loneliness because of death or dispersal of the family members, and suffer from depression, schizophrenia, and dementia. The common problem of the elderly in India as well as in West Bengal is that they live in an ambience of fear, amidst insecurities of different forms, which demands administrative intervention. Reading the literature, one invariably draws an impression that it is not only the close kin and the greedy criminals who are to be blamed but it is the whole social arrangement, which includes the state as well, which is responsible for the plight of the elderly. Basically, it refers to non-recognition of the immense contribution towards building of society that these human beings have made and are still capable of making. The problem can be articulated as a serious infringement of their rights; they after all deserve a fair and better deal.

It is good for the elderly that they now are being paid some attention by the state administration. This has resulted some legislations, programmes and policy declarations. The thrust of the legislations and administrative programmes are (1) extension of financial and other material benefits, particularly to the poor, (2) definition of the rights of the elderly which the state is bound to protect, (3) regeneration of the sagging family values and social care, (4) introduction of penal measure for the family members if they neglect or abuse their parents whose property they would inherit, (5) improvement of the facilities in the old-age homes in line with the special needs of old-age, (6) creation of network societies, (7) camps for spreading awareness about the rights of the elderly, (8) training programmes for the service providers to sensitise them to approach their job with empathy, (9) programmes for extension of the professional care to the elderly in their own houses, and so on.

Given that the aged in a city are a heterogeneous lot in terms of class, family composition, health status, locational status, and in terms of self-care, the institutional facilities would apply to them

differentially. The most common thing that they need is the protection of their right to live in safety and care and with dignity. Their involvement in productive activities makes their life at this stage meaningful while those who suffer from loneliness are most likely to die sooner. The family members and other close kin of the elderly ought to be guided by a sense of compassion, a sense of humanity, a sense of reciprocity to take them out of vulnerability and marginal existence. The family in the present case matters the most as most of the elderly might not even be aware of the State-initiated policies and programmes.

In my study on the middleclass elderly in Kolkata (Roy 2016) I have found that an overwhelming majority of the elderly are not aware of the state-sponsored supportive programmes or the legislations. They do not expect anything from the State. When the family care system breaks down because of downsizing of family, dispersal of family members and death of spouses they feel lonely, insecure. Aging and ailments take them to a stage when they cannot take care of themselves. The criminal attacks on the elderly living alone, which have become everyday affairs in the city, make them more insecure. As a solution, they move to old-age homes. The privately-run Homes in Kolkata are run on profit motive, and therefore the services they offer fall short of the expectations of the borders. The innovations in the care system that are in place in Kerala can be a major step forward, especially for those who do not have economic problems. The senior citizens with upper and middleclass background do not need economic support; rather, they need security and better professional care with a human touch. The state should consider more effective economic measures for the elderly fighting with poverty apart from social discrimination. Expression of “agency” in forming social networks in the mould of self-help is a welcome move.

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The Everyday Life of the Jewellery Karigars in Siliguri: A Case Study

Sylvia Raha

The conventional predominance of the Bengali Swarnakars in jewellery making is on the wane as the non-Bengali karigars are taking their place. Making jewellery is no longer a caste occupation in the Hindu social order as non-swarnakars are also finding a place in the craft. Counted in the informal sector the karigars are subjected to the crudest form of exploitation which leads to their alienation at work place. The elements of estrangement pervade their family and social life.

Keywords: Swarnakar, karigars, alienation, jewellery trade, family life.

Introduction

Incidents and changes happening in every micro or macro moment are stitched together to form an individual's life. The routine, habitual and repetitive activities are collaged together to form everyday life which continues in a wave form. In order live a life, an individual has to engage in productive activity, called work. Repetitive works, with least deviation, from an unchanged everyday working life. The everyday working lives of the *karigars* are like the playback singers behind beautiful actresses. A lot of hard work is ignored in the aura of gold jewellery. This paper talks about the "behind the scene" reality of the everyday working life of the *karigars*, their struggles, and sufferings, who work hard to create a beautiful world of art and fashion and fantasy in exchange of the bare minimum that is required for their survival. This paper focuses on the daily routine of the *karigars* who spend a large part of their life in workshops for making jewellery.

Karigars are an important part of jewellery industry. Their art and skills transform the raw gold metal into fashionable gold jewellery which is adorned by both women and men; thus, they are the real goldsmiths (Baxi and Prasad 2005: 223). Their daily life consists of activities at work and family. The day to day activities of the

karigars do not merely alienate them from the products they produce, but also from the working activities, which ultimately bring vulnerability in their family life as well (Bottomore 2000). They generally place themselves under the category of Vaishya caste (trader and merchants) in Hindu caste hierarchy. Jewellery *karigars* in siliguri belong to several sub-castes, namely, Karmakar, Sonar, Vishwakarma, Verma and so on. Despite differences in their caste positions all these castes are clubbed under the Other Backward Caste (OBC) group by the government for the purpose of protective discrimination.

Fieldwork

The present paper is based on the primary data which have been collected applying case study and direct interview methods. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the *karigars*, who are working in workshops for making jewellery, from different parts of Siliguri. I have visited 4 jewellery workshops where the *karigars* are working in a group of 6 on an average and 22 small jewellery shops with attached workshops. For my study, I had selected 8 Karigars from 4 workshops and 8 Karigars from jewellery shops. I have studied their working life in details, interviewing them in person with the help of a prepared interview schedule.

A brief account of the Everyday life of the Jewellery karigars

Karigars of Siliguri constitutes a heterogeneous group as one can find both Biharis and Bengalis among them. Bihari *karigars* have learnt their skill of making and refining gold jewellery after coming to Siligui. They have learnt the skill from the fellow members of their own community, who have their shops on Hill Cart Road and Khudirampally; a few Biharis have learnt the art from Bengali traditional jewellers, who have their shops in Mahabirsthan. Bengali *karigars* have come to Siliguri from Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, Coochbihar and several districts of Bangladesh. They are the most skilled craftsmen because they have inherited the art of making jewellery from their forefathers. As they had less capital to set up their own shops, they continued their hereditary occupations as *karigars*. Over generations, they have worked under jewellery shop

owners. A few of the Bengali *karigars* have come to Siliguri from Alipurduar and Jalpaiguri after they failed to establish their business in those two places.

In order to know about the daily routine of the *karigars* it is important to know the working environment of the workshops. The daily life of the *karigars* includes various responsibilities which are required to run the workshop. Jewellery workshop is the place or a system where a group of *karigars* interdependently related with each other for making gold jewellery. The relationship among the workers is more or less intimate. They not only work together but also share their food and make fun of each other. There is a kind of division of labour, though not complex, as all the *karigars* are dependent on each other for making one single jewellery product. Working in a team gives a sense of solidarity to the workers. In the following section, I have briefly discussed the important aspects of the everyday life of the workers.

Duration of work. Karigars start their day by reaching workshop in the morning around 8:30 am. The workshop is generally opened either by the shop owner or the senior most *karigar*, who is entrusted with the responsibility. If the owner or the senior *karigar* arrives late, the rest of the *karigars* wait in front of the workshop, on the road. On most occasions, they have to wait for 20 to 30 minutes, before the workshop is opened. In the words of one of the respondent Mr. Rajesh Karmakar, who is working under a jewellery shop owner has said: 'I come to the workshop within 8:30 am or else the shop owner gets angry. But when he comes late I have to wait for him outside the shop and this is not fair'. On the contrary, the *karigars* who have their own shop maintain their own schedule of work. Mr. Umesh Prasad, a jewellery shop owner, opens his workshop between 8:00am and 8:30 am during the summer season and after 10:00 am in the winter season. He is punctual about his timing. He thinks every businessman should follow a routine. The customers would know about the timing of the business in order to plan their visits. Now the business is down and the customer flow is less, yet Mr. Prasad is in the habit of maintaining the time. He said: 'it has become a habit for me to open the workshop on time. With the timing, out of customer flow I get enough leisure time; I seat ideal, read a newspaper, wait for the customers/ jewellery shop owners to come. But I am

punctual about the duration of my work.' Thus, the perceptions of a worker can vary depending on whether he is a mere worker or a shop-owner-cum-worker (a petty bourgeois).

The working hour is long and the environment within the workshop is unhygienic, to say the least; the *karigars* get completely exhausted and fatigued by the end of the long working day. In general, they are expected to work for 10-11 hours a day. By the end of the day the *karigars*, in general, lose their energy and concentration. The closing time of the workshop is not fixed; it varies with the varying workload and seasons.

Beginning of the work. After the workshop is opened by the shop owner or the senior *karigar*, all the *karigars* get to their works assigned to them. They start their work after dusting and cleaning the workshop, splashing water on the open space in front of the workshop and lighting incense stick in front of the image of God. Each *karigar* is given a specific duty which he performs before getting to jewellery making. The *karigars*, before starting jewellery making, worship their tools and instruments, which they consider "sacred" (to use Durkheimian term) by praying to the *God Viswakarma*. Mr. Dulal Mondol has said: 'for us, all the works that we do after entering the workshop, are sacred. There are some works, like cleaning and dusting, which the owner would never do. After opening the workshop, he would sit on his chair and command us to do those works for him. We cannot say "no" to the owner because we all do this kind works because he is our *Mallik* (owner/employer).

Work environment. Working environment plays a significant part in the working life of the *karigars*. It is the place where the *karigars* spend their long working hours every day. It is natural that the work environment would have a direct bearing on the life of the *karigars*, their health, and mental condition. I have found that most of the *karigars* confront some form of health-related problems due to an unhealthy work environment. The size of the workshops is generally small and congested. Small jewellery shop owners keep at least one *karigar* in their workshop. For them, the workshop size, on an average, is approximately 5 feet by 5 feet. For the medium sized shops, where 6-7 workers work, the room size is 9 feet by 10 feet. Besides congestion, the work involves burner, flame and high temperature resulting from heating and melting the gold.

Free movement of air inside the workshop is restricted in the absence of windows and ceiling fans. The working environment becomes intolerable due to rising heat, irritating smoke, and smell of the chemical used for melting gold. For cooling down the temperature inside the workshop they use a table fan. While the work is on, the *karigars* are not allowed to use fan as it interferes with the process of making jewellery. Inadequate ventilation and polluted air inside the workshop stress the *karigars* and cause fatigue and drowsiness. The *karigars* are made to inhale toxic particles day after day, thus inviting irreversible ailments. In general terms, this can be termed occupational hazards, but from the perspective of the *karigars*, it is 'taken-for-granted realm of routine' (Storey 2014). I have found that 16 of the *karigars*, whom I have studied, suffer from asthma and spondylitis. Other 3 *karigars* have developed eye problems. Mr. Shubhas Karmakar, of the *karigars* has said: 'few weeks ago, I started feeling a weird sensation in my right-hand finger, which turned worse within a few days as I continued working with my jewellery tools and instruments. My hand started shaking while making jewellery.' The other *karigars* have complained having pain in hand, arms, neck, shoulder, and the back.

Work distribution. Jewellery making involves multiple steps and each step needs specialization on the part of the *karigars* to accomplish the work. These *karigars* with specialised skill are depended on each other in order to complete a single jewellery product. Making of a single item of jewellery involves four kinds of specialist *karigars*, namely, *melting wala*, *patra cum die wala*, *sona/rupa karigar* and *polishing and shining wala*. The *melting wala's* work is to melt the gold bars. *Patra wala cum die wala's* work is to use this gold bar to make wires and smaller sheets of standard size by hammering or using machines. Then the *sona/rupa karigars* take up the gold wire from *Patrawala* for creating designs, moulding of the micro parts of an ornament, soldering various parts of design by heating to form single finished jewellery products. They also give the finishing touches (glowing) to the gold jewellery. The *karigars*, who work in the shops of the traditional *swarnakars*, play a crucial part in making jewellery. They also have their own workshops where they take an order from the local jewellery sellers who do not have any *karigar* of their own. They are the actual goldsmiths or *Sona/Rupa Karigars*.

In the last category of the *karigars*, the polishing and shining *walas*, finally put a shine on the jewellery using indigenous techniques. The process of jewellery making thus follows a standard *division of labour*¹ among the specialist *karigars*, who work in harmony, although they are placed in a hierarchy in terms of payment and status. Several *karigars* who falls under the category *patra wala* and *die wala* say a common word related to their work. Among them, one respondent and a *karigar*, Mr. Jagat Prasad has said: 'now-a-days, it has become difficult to sustain our hereditary business. The machine-made products have captured the market. We have been turning the gold into thin/wide wire for making a gold jewellery design. Now those products are easily available in the markets. Jewellers who used to depend on me for those products are now purchasing the machine-made jewellery from the middle-man who comes from Kolkata to sell the products in Siliguri. We are, as a result, in the process of losing our livelihood.' Another *karigar*, Mr. Pradip Goswami, is a specialist *rupa karigar*; he has inherited this craft from his father. Even his grandfather was in the same profession. Four months back, Mr. Goswami purchased a polishing and shining machine, which has minimised his production cost, as he does not have anything for polishing work. But this mechanisation has led to a loss of job of the polishing *karigars*. This is a typical example of how the mechanization of production, which is unavoidable in order to cut the production cost, leads to loss of job of the traditional craftsmen. In the jewellery trade, the *patrawala-cum-diewala*, and polishing *wala*/shining *wala* are the direct victims of mechanization of the jewellery production. The larger is the trade greater is mechanization; the highest degree of mechanization could be seen in the corporate jewellery trade.

Relationship among the karigars inside the workshop. Relation among the *karigars* is generally cordial as everybody get into much *focused interaction*.² A *karigar* has to deal with his fellow *karigars*, consumers and the owners of the jewellery shop. Although they are dependent on each other for making one single jewellery product, their everyday interactions are primarily work related. While working inside the workshop, they communicate through body gestures and verbally. The working environment often yields informal relation like friendship although an individual worker tries to maintain his own creative form of work through his skills, which he does not want to share with other workers (Simmel

1971); everybody in workplace tries to maintain his unique skills. The relationship between the *karigars* and the owner of the workshop and between the *karigars* and the owner of the jewellery shop is largely formal and hierarchical.

Break time. The gold jewellery making requires a minute and detailed work, which leaves its stress and another negative impact on the body and mind of the worker. The stressful body posture for a long time leaves the worker exhausted. As a way out, the *karigars* take short breaks, 5 to 6 times a day on an average, to relax their eyes and muscles. At the time of the break, they drink tea from the local “chai-wala” for refreshment. In jewellery workshop, the workers are not allowed to take break in a group, excepting the lunch break between 2pm to 2:30pm.

Extra work. Besides jewellery making the workers have to do some additional works every day; such as, bringing jewellery making orders from the known jewellery shops and delivering the finished jewellery to the respective jewellery shops. The small traders without workshops of their own sublet the orders to the relatively bigger traders owing workshops, where the *karigars* work.

Family Life of the Karigars

The thought process and activities of the *karigars in social life* are largely governed by family values. Since, the parents, in general want their children to continue with their gold jewellery making business or craft, they do not give much importance to formal education. The *karigars* in Siliguri are continuing with their family occupation over three generations. They have learnt the skill and techniques of making jewellery from their father and other male relatives. As they have to carry forward their hereditary occupations their family members are least bothered about the formal education. Raju Prasad, one of my informants, has captured the situation like this: ‘my father and the family members never motivated me for going to the school. They gave more emphasis on learning the craft of making jewellery. I had least interest in studies and going to school early morning, so, I turned myself towards the family craft. Right from my early childhood, I was moulded to join the family occupation of jewellery-making’. He further said: making jewellery is a part of our socialisation

process; we are trained to carry our family occupation forward; we start learning the craft early at the age of 14. When we settle down with our business, the parents and close relative put pressure for getting married at an early age.' On an average, the *karigars* get married at the age of 20, which is lower than the legal age at marriage.

Out of 16 informants, 5 (31.25 percent) of the *karigars* have studied up to class IV, 8 (50 percent) *karigars* studied till class IX and 3 (18.75 percent) could barely read and write. When formal education is not a cultural priority the *karigars*, in general, get dropout at the junior high school level and that is when they start working. The lack of education shapes their everyday life in many ways; they do not try for an alternative occupation which would have given them a better life; they have no habit of saving and investing money in other enterprises. On the whole, lack of formal education constricts their livelihood opportunities and they end up falling back on their traditional occupation.

Out of 16 *karigars*, 7 have said that they have an affable relation with their family members. Family members understand the ups and down in the business. Wives stand by their husbands when they are financially down, at the time of work crisis. As this is their hereditary occupations they are aware of the lean period in business and they are used to the hardship that falls on them. One informant, Mr. Pallav Dutta, has said: 'my wife supports me all the time. She understands the jewellery business and the crisis that we face every year. She never complains because her father is also a *karigar*. She is well accustomed with the fluctuating fortunes of the business. She tackles the situations very well.' In this case, the husband and wife work in perfect harmony to weather off the crisis. On the contrary, 9 other *karigars* have said that the relations with the family members are good but the relations come under stress at the time of financial crisis. In the words of Mr. Gopal Barman 'during the off seasons, when the jewellery market is down, the work load is considerably low, and so is the income. This is the time my relations with the family members become under stress. With low income, I cannot meet the basic needs of my family members and everybody is unhappy with me. With my limited resources, I cannot do much to take the family out of crisis'.

This is a crisis that is common to most of the *karigars* I have studied. The family life gets disturbed because of the financial crisis and the *karigars* become depressed. The financial crisis compels some of the *karigars* to take a loan from the known and close ones and they try their luck in gambling or by buying lottery tickets. When things do not work out well, the relations in the family worsen; bad economic management deepens the crisis. They cannot pay the school fee of their children and cannot pay for medical treatment which is becoming more and more expensive. They sometimes turn to alcoholism in order to get rid of stress, but this leaves them further impoverished. All this leaves a destabilizing effect on their family life and family relations. They spend some time with their friends till 9:30 – 10:00 pm, after work, and return home late. They return home terribly tired, go off to sleep after having dinner with the family. Things, however, turn normal when the business is back on its track.

There are a few *karigars* who stay away from the family in order to earn their living. These *karigars* have learnt the skill of making jewellery from the local jewellers at places like Ishlampur, Alipurduar, Mainaguri, Bagdogra, Malbazar and Siliguri Khudirampally and Mahabirathan. They have chosen this occupation because they neither need any formal education nor any capital for getting into this work. As they are barely literate or less educated, for them jewellery making is a relatively easy task from where they can earn a living. Although it requires skill and hard work it is part of their shared culture. The *karigars*, living away from their families, remit most of what they earn, to their respective families. The *karigars* in Siliguri earn Rs. 15000 to Rs. 17000 per month, on an average. They go meet their family members thrice a month on an average.

Conclusion

The life the *karigars* in Siliguri is governed by a process called *habitualization*³, where they are 'expected to follow particular routine' (Storey 2014: 56). This habitualised routine forces the *karigars* into monotonous work every day. Their day begins with a glitter and brings a chance to innovate and create a piece of art which will be held close to someone's heart, and each day ends

with a shadow of crises, like, apathy towards social well-being, physical damage, and psychological wear and tear, an agony that unsettles them emotionally.

The *karigars* work without the job security that their formal sector counterparts enjoy. They live with a sense of “alienation” at work because of the division of labour which results into loss of the individual skill of the craftsmen. The alienation also works in a sense that the impoverished *karigars* do not consume the products they produce. The hard and long working hours involve the extraction of “surplus value” in Marxian sense. The workers also show some signs of a shared “culture of poverty” as they are less educated, take to alcohol, and do not invest money in their children’s education, have no knowledge about value of educations. All this restrict their economic and social mobility. The way of life they live is sustained over generations. It demonstrates some features of culture of poverty outlined by Oscar Lewis. The moot point of the concept is ‘Once the culture of poverty has come into existence it tends to perpetuate itself’ (Lewis 1966). We have noticed that the children are taken out of school early and are engaged in family craft, which kills the possibility of upward social and economic mobility. The collective perception of life is passed on from one generation to the other. In other words, there is a shared sense of surrender to their habitual everyday life and an urge to break free is almost invisible.

Notes

1. Karl Marx defines the term division of labour as ‘the totality of heterogeneous forms of useful labour, which differ in order, genus, species and variety’ (Capital I, Ch. 1).
2. The term “focused interaction” is derived from the work of Erving Goffman, and the concept has played a crucial role in understanding the interactions among the co-workers. Focused interaction takes place when an individual give direct interaction to what people say or does (Giddens et al. : 2003).
3. Berger and Luckmann have introduced this term in their book *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge*, where they have observed: ‘all human activities are subjected to habitualisation (...) , implies that the action in question may be

performed again in the future in the same manner and with the same economical effort.'

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Discourse Formation and Praxis in Everyday Life

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In sociology, and in other social sciences, we generally talk about others, while keeping absolutely mum about ourselves. The result is so called "objective" (in most cases manipulated) "scientific" dispassionate "texts"¹ which obscure the reality and do not help enriching our collective wisdom. Subjective knowledge (in Weberian sense), drawn by applying reflexive or autobiographical method, which is usually given no respect in the so-called scientific tradition, could be an alternative mode of doing sociology. Discourses in sociology and other social sciences could be drawn from lived experiences, with high degree of embeddedness, which would help understand the dynamics of everyday life social praxis better.

Keywords: Self-formation, tradition, caste, patriarchy, texts, discourse, praxis, communalism, secularism, critical agency.

The self-formation

We grow up with a rich treasure of lived experiences; draw up ideas and perceptions about the life and the world around, much of which could be mediated through traditions, language (given "texts") and constructed (by the powerful) knowledge (Foucault 1980) . We get into an endless dialogue with the traditions, with the given discourses and with macro societal and historical forces, and decide about our societal role or individual course of action. In the process of growing up and in everyday life we move through significant events which work as the turning points in shaping our discourses and self.

Besides one's lived experiences, the given body of knowledge (objective, mediated, documented in secondary sources, which the learned enlightened section of society is privileged to access) also helps shape one's discourses. The important historical figures or the philosophers constitute the "significant others" who leave,

through their writings, speeches and all other texts, a lasting impact by shaping our views and approach to life.

In all cases, we objectify (or other) the elements of discourses that are on offer in a given time, scrutinize them in the light of the available wisdom and experiences and then internalize only those elements into our "relative self"² which pass the test. The process does not stop there; the reflexion on the elements of discourses continues in the light of newly gained experience and knowledge to reach a new discourse (or a modified and enriched one). In other words, our dialogues with and reflections on the body of knowledge in a point in time go on through a process of "objectification of self"³ and we move forward through a continuous process of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of self. This adds dynamism to our temporal discourses and the "constructed self" moves on from one position to another.

Human beings draw identities while engaging dialogically with the given systemic identities. The primordial identities, which are structurally given and which are also called statuses (like caste, religion, gender, race, class and so on) do not go uncontested at the level of the individual agency⁴ and at the level of the dynamic collective⁵. As we interact with the socially given forms and statuses, as we develop a critical agency, we dialogue, contest, deconstruct and reconstruct the given forms or identities. The identities that we construct are temporal and always carry an element of doubt and are therefore open to revision and change.

In dialogue with patriarchy and caste

Let me give a couple of illustrations in support of my thesis (outlined above) from my own experiences. I was born a boy in a patriarchal and feudal social order, which was indeed a privileged position compared to the position of three of my elder sisters and two younger sisters. Having enjoyed the privilege and favourable treatment I grew up as a self-confident domineering person inculcating elements of patriarchal sense of superiority vis-a-vis the persons of the opposite gender. I developed a notion that my sisters (five in total) will be married out and we, three brothers, will always be in the family with all our privileges and

responsibilities. A shared perception, which followed from this, was that we (the brothers) are “more” and they (sisters) are “less” members of the family in terms of status, rights, responsibilities and privileges. Gender discrimination was omnipresent in our everyday life, in the way we were treated, both in the family and in the village community.

Our sisters were not fair in complexion, not “good-looking” by any social standard and did not acquire enough education to be somebody or to be economically self-reliant. After school level education or graduation, they were taken off and were married out with great difficulties and search by paying some amount of dowry. Up to primary or high school level, our sisters were as good as we brothers were in terms of examination performance. But as we moved to higher classes the sisters fell behind while the brothers excelled. In my effort to interpret this turn of events I realised that the patriarchal social order is programmed to destroy the self-confidence of the girls of average looks and average talent. In their socialisation process a clear and loud message is conveyed to them and that is “you are only good enough to be housewife”. For us, the brothers, the message was to be “somebody” that would ensure our economic self-reliance and give us a status of honour. In our high school days, we knew that as we grow up we will have to take the responsibility not only of our aging parents but also of the members of our family of procreation. In my early boyhood, I definitely cherished the privileged treatment and never questioned this iniquitous gender treatment.

In the latter stage of my life, I had to deal with two women, my wife and my daughter, more intimately. In dealing with them I critiqued many elements of patriarchy which were intimately (or unconsciously) guiding my “self”, deconstructed⁶ many such elements to be a new self, with new discourse and approach to the persons of the opposite gender, both within and outside the family. The treatment of my wife also has passed through a course of evolution; in the early stage of our conjugal life, the patriarchal elements in me were predominant while in the later stage the relationship is re-laid on the principle of partnership and friendship. Even after the change of discourse I cannot say for sure that I am totally free of the elements of domination and patriarchy, which sustain their conscious and unconscious

presence in me. In rearing our only daughter, I not only did play the role of father but that of a mother as well, doing things that a less gender sensitive man would not have thought of doing.⁷ What I have learnt from my experience is that a gender sensitive man may not be free of patriarchal elements which are deeply rooted either in the conscious or unconscious self, but his treatment of the intimate ones of the opposite gender could be significantly different from those who are less self-reflective and less sensitive. While living in a relation (any relation), thus, one is dialogically involved in self-reflection and goes on reconstructing the ever-shifting discourses of everyday life.

I have been through the same course of evolution with reference to my caste identity. Needless to say, caste, like gender, is a social construct. The politics of caste means segregation, discrimination and subjugation of the "lower castes" by the "upper castes". The unequal control of the economic, social and cultural capital (to borrow the phrases of Pierre Bourdieu) by the members of the different castes helps continuation of the caste principles and the caste system. The reproduction of social inequality and hierarchy is done with hegemonic intention. As a child interacts with her/his friends in a multi-caste situation in preschool or early school stage she/he is told about the principles of commensality, caste boundaries and caste identities. Gradually the child learns to take these cultural elements as "real" and learns about the practice of othering and boundary maintenance. As the child grows up further she/he is taught about caste occupation and then caste endogamy. If the members practise the caste principles as "sacred" (in Durkheimian sense) the reproduction of the caste system is guaranteed. But the reality of caste consciousness and caste relations are not as simple and static as this. The growing, conscious, individual self engages in a dialogue with the given discourses on "caste" empowered by her/his lived experiences, starts questioning the "validity" or "rationality" of the caste principles in the light of an ever-maturing sense of value and justice. Soon the person finds herself or himself in conflict with the given discourses (both in language and philosophy). In this task of deconstructing the given elements of culture and discourses, an individual self, which has already grown out to be a critical self, draws from experiences and the "significant other"

(which again can be an association with enlightened person, an ideology or the texts).

This point of deconstruction is necessarily a point of reconstruction because an individual mind cannot be in a void, without discourses, true or false. This can potentially take a revolutionary turn at the individual and collective levels. At the individual level, a naive believer of the caste system, a conformist or a loyal follower can turn into a non-believer and thus rebels against the system. Stressing my memory the furthest I can recollect, in my childhood I was told (by my illiterate grandmother and neighbours, of course, not by my parents) not to dine in the houses of my Muslim and lower-caste friends, who lived close to my primary school, and who used to offer me food at the lunch break in their house. I used to enjoy the food as I used to be very hungry, knowing little about the caste principles and community boundaries. I saw them (the Muslims and the lower caste fellows) sitting at a distance when served food on the religious and social occasions in our house. As I grew up I learnt about the “politics” of caste system and started reflecting on the learnt discourses on caste system and community boundaries and found no reason to follow them. In terms of “value preference”⁸(in Weberian sense) I stand against caste system. If I have found a new discourse on the institution of caste, it certainly defines the course of my interaction with the members of other castes many of whom are my friends and neighbours. In this way, old discourses make way for new discourses through a continuous process of deconstruction and reconstruction.

Following the rules of Marxist dialectics, we can say that the processes of deconstruction and reconstruction of the elements of culture or discourse work simultaneously and inseparably; they can be segregated only at the conceptual level. The dialectics may even work at the level of “unconscious”. The process works like quantitative change leading to qualitative change (one of the dialectical laws outlined by Engels in his *Anti Duhring*) and we often remain unconscious about the point of transformation or “liberation”. Thus, over the years, our discourses on anything that matters in our life change over time.

Discourses and praxis of secularism

We can approach the institution of religion in the same way as we did to gender and caste questions. I could see a transformation in me vis-à-vis my discourses on religion. Until the college level I was religious, following the footsteps of my parents, who were “honestly” religious, although not communal (in Gandhian sense). My father who was a primary school teacher had many Muslim friends, colleagues, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers. Many of his Muslim students spent nights in our house, sharing bed with me, while preparing for the scholarship examination, which was held in erstwhile East Pakistan at the end of class V. I also had a number of Muslim friends, who were my classmates and playmates. In my childhood, I was very fond of the stories of the Ramayana and Mahabharata. My grandfather’s younger brother was my guru in this; he used to read out pages and chapters of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana and I was the regular and most curious among listeners. Arjun, Bhim, Krishna and of course Ram were my childhood heroes. I was fond of listening Ramayana gaan⁹, which were staged in the inner and outer courtyards of our house at least once a year. I grew up in a house where Durga puja and puja of other deities, particularly Kali, Laxmi and Swaraswati, were held on a regular basis following the calendar of festivals. There was the presence of gods and goddesses in all other social functions like marriage, *annaprashan*, *sradh*, *nabanya*, and so on. There was a *thakur ghar* with the idol of goddess Laxmi and my mother used to offer puja after bath every day. On every Saturday evening, we used to organize Sani puja in the inner courtyard of our house, near the Tulsi plant. Having grown up in such a religious ambience I was left with no choice but to appropriate the elements of religious beliefs and develop a self, loaded with religious faith. The alternative courses of looking at religion were yet to open up before me.

The religious faith and Hindu (religious and minority) identity was reinforced and reproduced in everyday life particularly when there was an overwhelming presence of the majority “other”, the Muslim community, which had a distinct and visible religious culture (faith and practices). In one way, we were the oppressors (like the Hindu landlord exploiting the Muslim subjects) while on

other occasions the Muslims, particularly the “communal” section, was the oppressor. Their communal consciousness¹⁰, which had its manifestation in their everyday interaction with the neighbouring Hindus, was strengthened by their anger against the Hindu sub-infeudators¹¹, who were the exploiters. Being cultivators and sharecroppers, our Muslim neighbours not only nursed a sense of anger, they also had an eye on the land owned by the Hindus. Even the agricultural labourers, who were mostly Muslim, had reasons to be angry with the Hindu landlords. The community identity and the class identity thus were juxtaposed.

It is in this context that the villagers drew their identities, “communal” or “secular”. In the 1020s, 1930s and 1940s the social and political space in Bengal and in many other provinces of undivided India was largely communalized. India earned its independence through a series of communal conflicts which forced the refugees from either side to cross the newly drawn borders. My parents survived a communal riot in early 1950 and fled to India. They had gone back to their place in East Pakistan when things settled down after Nehru-Liaquat Agreement of 1950 (Agreement between the Governments of India and Pakistan Regarding Security and Rights of the Minorities). Again, in 1971, during Bangladesh freedom struggle, we faced communal attacks and came to India to save our lives. We were alien and unwanted in our birth place, the land of our forefathers. Living through such horrid experiences it was quite usual for us to be communal (the Muslim haters in this case). Passing through similar experiences as we did, many of my friends turned “communal” while nursing communal hatred. Millions of Hindu refugees, who had to leave the land of their forefathers, came to India, leaving behind the horrors of communal frenzy. Those who came over to the comforting and secure ambience of the Hindu majority country (India), not necessarily became “communal”. The refugee rehabilitation movement in the 1950s and 1960s in West Bengal and other parts was essentially a Leftist movement with a secular ideology.

Now the question is why I did not take the communal line following many of my friends. It is indeed a matter of fact that with growing age I ceased to be “religious” and turned secular, not in Gandhian sense but in “atheist” sense, in modernist sense, in Marxist sense.

Such a perception of life is a part of “practical consciousness”,¹² to use Anthony Giddens’ phrase, (See William and Seawell 1992) that largely determines my approach to the members of different religious faiths, with whom I interact in my everyday life. Following is a brief narrative of how it happened.

My parents lived through the historical developments in the decades before and after independence while living in a remote village in erstwhile East Bengal (later East Pakistan), where the Hindus were in minority. Carrying a sub-feudatory lineage (the worst form of exploiters of the poor peasants under the feudal system that continued until the abolition of Zamindari system in early 1950s in East Pakistan) they have been the victims of communal conflicts (or riots) first in 1950 and then in 1971. On both occasions, their property and houses were looted and they were made homeless. Immediately after the loot, they took shelter in the houses of their Muslim friends in a neighbouring village and then migrated to India with their help. On the second occasion (of which I was a part and can recollect the events in minute details) we were sheltered by one of my father’s closest and trusted Muslim friends for three months. Our Muslim hosts provided us all kinds of protection and some form of material support towards our sustenance. I was only 12 in 1971 and I saw everything with my frightened and inquisitive eyes. On both occasions, our whole family could have been massacred; we would not have survived without the help of our Muslim family friends. Those friends of ours saved us defying all threats from the communalized sections of the Muslims who had overwhelming presence in the area. These two incidents constitute the foundations from where I draw my “secular” identity; I can say with pride that I am not communal. All the members of our family sustain a sense of indebtedness to those humane friends of ours without getting an opportunity to reciprocate their favour.

The incidents help us understand two sides of religious identity; one communal, which was shared in common by the attackers for whom all Hindus are the “enemy” and other secular, shared by a section of Muslim friends, who despite being Muslim by religion, upheld the universal value of humanity. All the parties involved in the present case are “religious”, either Hindu or Muslim, but some are “communal” while some others are “secular”. Among the “secular” section again there could be two

sub-categories; one, religious yet humane and other non-religious and secular. Religion thus can produce contrasting identities among its followers in one historical time and space. Ours was not the only one incident of communal amity; the literature on partition and refugee movement is full of such incidents.

Apart from these historical developments which caused us much suffering because of communal divide among the people and which contributed significantly to the formation of my secular identity, my readings and political activism are the two other important factors that had strong influence on my discourses on secularism and communalism. Two important significant others who had great influence on me are Karl Marx and Rabindranath Tagore. Rabindranath was an active member of a reformed and modernized Hindu sect called Brahma who followed a form of monotheism (based on Vedantic ideas of bliss (*ananda*) and universal love) but he was secular in his own way, in his writings, and treatment of the Muslim subjects of his Zamindari estate. He treated all the Muslim characters of his novels and stories with empathy and recorded his strong protest against partition of Bengal in 1905 and communalization of society in the pre-partition days in his novel *Ghare Baire*. My adherence to Marxism and involvement in Left politics with full conviction since my college days also have helped getting rid of the elements of religious identity and pushed me towards atheism and class-based universal fraternity. Secularism to me is not just a belief it is indeed a discourse that shapes my praxis in my everyday life; it gives me a way of living, a commitment to my sense of truth. It guides me to take a position vis-a-vis Hindutva and Islamic fundamentalism; it helps understand the writings of Savarkar, Gandhi, Jinnah or the communists like P. C. Joshi, G. Adhikari and many others. My discourse on religion finds reflection in my writings, whenever they touch issues like religion or communalism, and in my social and political activities, in my interaction with the fellow members of all religious faiths.

Conclusion

This has been an experimental paper both in methodological and substantive terms. I have demonstrated how drawing from our rich body of personal experiences in different phases of our life

we can form discourses with conviction and embeddedness, which, in turn, guide us to interaction in our everyday life. I have particularly argued that our discourses on gender relations and caste are charted out drawing elements from the given “traditions” and our dialogical engagement with them at the level of interaction or praxis. Following Marx (e.g., *Theses on Feuerbach*) I would also argue that discourse formation and praxis are inseparable and hence dialogically interfaced¹³ (Althusser 2005).

The thrust of the paper has been the discourse on and praxis of religion and communalism, which have been inescapable in our everyday life in contemporary India. My contention is that at the personal and collective levels, we can think of three possible positions vis-à-vis religion and secularism. First, as it is done in most Western democracies, religion is a private matter and the State has absolutely nothing to do with it. Second, as we find in India, the State is mandated (by the Constitution) to function as a facilitator of religious and cultural rights, particularly that of the minority communities, which it accomplishes through appropriate legislation and administration. Third, is the atheist position where individuals and groups do not believe in religion; they are guided by the ideals of universal brotherhood or humanism, which is one of ideals of modernism. In the former Communist countries of the East Europe I met many such people who claim to be “atheist”. I personally think that taking an atheist position is the most effective means to counter communalism and prevent formation of communal identity, which is the nastiest divider of people at the global scale, particularly in the post-cold war situation (Huntington 1996). But even the “atheists” may not be completely free of the elements of religion (particularly that of the religion of their parents or forefathers) from which they draw elements of their culture and they could express their anger when they see the religious fundamentalists organizing a terrorist attack killing hundreds of people belonging to other religious communities. An illustration of this point could be the rise of the neo-nationalists across Europe in reaction to terror attacks by the Islamic fundamentalists and immigration of the non-European “coloured” people who represent different faiths and culture. Thus, one particular individual or a group could theoretically and practically be inside and outside communal identity, depending on circumstances and their reading of the prevailing situation. Even my heart bleeds to

see proliferation of communal frenzy in our country and the subcontinent.

Notes

1. A "text" in post-structuralist sense could be a speech, an article or book, a film, a play or anything communicated in articulated form.
2. "Individual self" is always relative, bound to a space and time, which evolves in the light of new experiences.
3. This is a moment of self-reflexion.
4. A conscious-critical self, which is there in every individual, suppressed or free.
5. Ever changing collective perceptions or discourses.
6. The word "deconstruction" in Derridian sense means criticism and rejection (Derrida 1976).
7. Being a working mother my wife left our daughter to my care during the day time on week days and I had to wash her on many occasions.
8. The subjective sense of relatively enduring "good" and "bad", which are often drawn from the collective tradition, which an individual would want to uphold.
9. A performance of a composition of songs and narratives on the stories based on the life of Ram, the hero of the epic the *Ramayana*. The performance was done in rural East Bengal in the evening time by a male folk singer and his team in the inner or outer courtyard of the houses of the well-off Hindus.
10. A sense of being a part of a religious community with suppressed or expressed hatred for other religious communities, particularly the religious minority community.
11. In the zamindari system that was followed until early 1950s a zamindar used to sub-let parts of his estate to the sub-infeudators, who imposed high land rent on the tenants, in their effort to maximize profit.
12. According Foucault, consciousness on a subject that has direct bearing on one's everyday life interactions (See Hall 2008).
13. Louis Althusser in *For Marx* (2005) has lauded Marx for his unique contribution to method to knowledge where the latter asserts that the process of consciousness (or knowledge) formation is

inseparable from the process of social participation or interaction; they work on each other in an endless feed-back.

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A Tribute to Professor Rajat Subhra Mukhopadhyay on his Retirement

To,
Professor Rajat Subhra Mukhopadhyay
Department of Sociology
North Bengal University

Dear Professor Mukhopadhyay,

Congratulations on completion of your illustrious career as a teacher, spanning over thirty one years, beginning in mid-1985 and ending on 9 November 2016, first in the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology and then in the Department of Sociology of North Bengal University.

Over these years, you have been the dearest colleague for the teachers and staff, the most popular teacher, an able administrator, an honest and sincere researcher and a critic when the system was at fault. You have set your own standards and have been astoundingly consistent in maintaining them; you have set new standards for others to emulate.

Through your scholarly and popular writings in English and Bengali respectively you have added meaningful knowledge to the discipline of Sociology and other social sciences, expressed your concern on multiple social issues and helped sensitize the masses on issues of their struggle for a better life.

You have helped your students in so many ways and encouraged them to do well. You have nursed your scholars with utmost care and helped them mature; many of whom are now well established in life. You have helped your colleagues by sharing information and with your wise counsel whenever they asked for help.

You have worked tirelessly for the wellbeing of the Department and led from the front to encounter whenever a crisis faced it, minor or major. You have served as the Head of the Department on several occasions and served as a very active member of different academic bodies and committees of the university.

You are leaving behind a proud legacy and a huge responsibility for all those who will stay in the Department for some more years,

to take it forward. We will miss you and your leadership badly in this task. We will miss the warmth of your presence in the Department; will miss your leadership and counsel in all our future endeavours. We would beg your kind presence in the Department whenever we would need you in our future programmes.

The teachers, non-teaching staff, the scholars and the students feel extremely proud and privileged to have your warm company over these years.

We thank you for everything that you have done for this Department, for all of us, and wish you a healthy, creative and meaningful long life.

With kind regards,

Teachers, scholars, students and non-teaching staff of the Department of Sociology, North Bengal University

16 December 2016

Sharit K. Bhowmik: My Teacher, My Friend

Sanjay K. Roy

Sharit Bhowmik (SB) was my teacher at the Dept. of Sociology and Social Anthropology of North Bengal University, during my MA programme (1979-81). He taught us Political Sociology and Industrial Sociology. With his rare quality of keeping things simple and precise, Prof. Bhowmik could generate interest in students in whatever he taught by linking concepts with the lived reality.

His simplicity and down-to-earth approach led to a special bond of love and friendship with me that lasted until he crossed over. As his first research student, I found in him a supervisor who was “soft” and not overly critical of my work and writings and made me feel at home discussing my problems and difficulties.

Every time I visited Delhi he and, of course, Minakshi *boudi*, were by hosts, both in Patpadganj and CR Park. The three of us would chat until midnight. This continued until Sharitda shifted to Mumbai University. I was pursuing my PhD in Delhi School of Economics in the mid-1980s when Sharitda wanted me to teach at the NBU, the position he had left vacant, and extended all possible help in getting me there. It was indeed a privilege for me to teach the courses that he taught us. He offered appreciative and encouraging comments on whatever I wrote, possibly motivated more by his love for me than the inherent merit of my writings and recommended me to so many places and gave me countless opportunities that helped advance my academic career.

I see Sharitda as a man of immense wisdom, grounded in his approach in all relationships, with family and friends, who worked for the downtrodden with all conviction and empathy. He was a man with a bourgeois legacy yet totally declassed. He represented the family of garden owners and spent a lifetime fighting for the rights of the tea workers, the street vendors and the workers in the urban informal sector.

He had a life-long interest in working class movement, which includes movement of the tea garden workers, industrial workers in Mumbai, street vendors in Kolkata, informal sector workers in metropolitan cities and those in workers’ cooperative movement. He encouraged his research students to work on subjects of

relevance to the lives of the downtrodden, the oppressed and expressed his disgust with the late 1980s and 1990s trend – amongst the students of the Department of Sociology, Delhi University - of selecting abstract topics, unconnected to the life of the “common” people, for their research.

As a Marxist, he was conscious about the role of the “philosophers” in applying knowledge to change the course of history. His other activism apart, he was instrumental in forming a workers’ cooperative in Sonali Tea Garden in Dooars in the early 1980s. The tea workers in North Bengal had a special place in his life. He visited the region at least once a year, which was entirely our gain as we could meet him and Minakshi *boudi*. Every field trip to Dooars garden meant a visit to the North Bengal University campus, where his ex-students and friends, who lived close by, were privileged to be in his warm company.

We met on 15 July 2016 in the IGNOU guesthouse in Delhi for the last time. He attended the expert committee meeting on syllabus revision for IGNOU sociology courses for two days and he was about to leave for Delhi airport after lunch. Post lunch, the members of the committee came out to the open space in front of the guesthouse and stood in a row to bid him good bye and this turned out to be a prophetic good bye.

Thank you Sharitda for everything you have done for me, for the downtrodden and the discipline of Sociology. I will miss you badly all my life.

Note to the contributors

Social Trends invites unpublished, original research-based articles (not exceeding 10,000 words) on contemporary issues of social relevance, brief notes on on-going research and book reviews (not exceeding 2000 words) on recently published books. Only soft copies of the articles/book reviews/research notes should be sent to the editor by email: sanroynb@rediffmail.com

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Published by: *The Registrar,*
University of North Bengal,
Dist. Darjeeling, W.B. - 734013
Printed by: *The University Press,*
University of North Bengal