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ENLIGHTENMENT TO PERFECTION

University of North Bengal

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Editor's Note

Dear friends,

A hearty welcome to the website of *Social Trends, The Journal of the Department of Sociology of North Bengal University* (www.socialtrendsnbu.in). The journal made a humble beginning in 2014 and since then it has achieved some important landmarks, becoming a full-fledged refereed/peer-reviewed journal with UGC's approval. We have published five volumes by now, one each year. In last three years there has been a gradual surge in inflow of articles and research papers from across disciplines. Though the journal has largely been a platform for the young scholars, there have been some notable contributions from celebrated members of the Indian social science fraternity too, rendering much support to us.

The *Social Trends* is on a mission to capture the fluid, hitherto unrecorded aspects of subjective and collective experiences in an unconventional language, while dialogically engaging with the social science discourses. We also carry forward the conviction that dialectical discourses impact the individual and collective actions and the actions, in turn, bring about changes in the discourses. It is always a delight to see that we are collectively transcending the limits of conventional academic disciplines in capturing the heterogeneous, multi-dimensional intricacies of dialectically moving self and the lifeworld. It is even more delightful to see young scholars enthusiastically participate in this promising endeavour. I would put it on record that our academic collaboration with the Research Committee (RC) on *Sociology of Everyday Life* of the Indian Sociological Society (ISS) has proved to be immensely beneficial, as both sides prosper in this collaboration.

The valuable counsel of the advisers, the critical comments of the referees, the active interest of the editorial team, and most importantly, the enthusiastic participation of the writers as well as readers always add value to the journal. I am sure, we will cross many more milestones in future and take the journal to new heights.

Sanjay K. Roy
31 March 2019

“Fixing” Female Bodies through Reproductive Medicine and Assisted Reproduction: An Ideological Critique

Pinaki Roy

Abstract: *An ideological critique of reproductive medicine and assisted reproduction’s disavowed socio-cultural complicity in the reiteration of the ideology of heterosexism necessitates a radical interrogation of the presupposed unmediated materiality of the sexed body. This ideological critique, which foregrounds the discursively and ideologically constructed materiality of the sexed body, refrains from fictionalizing the sexed body. On the contrary, this critique attempts to show that the sexed body is a “reified” entity, (re)produced as unmediated through mediations of different technologies of power and the ideological processes immanent in these technologies. These mediations render possible thinking of the sexed body as an entity, yet these mediations which are constitutive of the body are categorically disavowed by the so-called decontextualized medical knowledge and practice in search of objectivity and universality.*

Keywords: Reproductive medicine, assisted reproduction, female body, unmediated materiality, heterosexism, heterosexual duality, ideological foreclosure, ideological critique.

The Female Body in Reproductive Medicine: Towards Ideological Critique of Ideology

All branches of medical science work with a constructed notion of its object of knowledge. When medical sciences refer to the notion of the body in general, they refer to the male body, which acts as the quintessential point of reference. However, in “circumscribed” medical discourses, such as reproductive medicine, the object of medical gaze is the female body and its reproductive functions (Das 2010). Reproductive medicine actively constructs the universal and general notion of the female body as its object

of knowledge and intervention. Although expert discourses construct a singular conception of what constitutes the female body, there are plural possibilities of conception of what female body means varying according to plural subject-positions. The aim of the present paper is to figure the mediations of power and ideology in the construction of the universal and general female body in heterosexist terms, in the domain of reproductive medicine and assisted reproduction. This paper works at the intersection of medical sociology and anthropology, and feminist philosophy to achieve the desired aim. The paper does not however offer a complete review of the existing literature, which is not to say that it is an exploratory research, but attempts to work at the intersection of philosophical readings on body, knowledge, power and ideology, both theoretical and ethnographic texts on biomedical and reproductive technologies, and my own ethnography of the domain of reproductive medicine and assisted reproduction, *to provide an ideological critique of this domain's ideological practices.*

This paper attempts to locate the moments of the ideological, where the ideological is understood both in general sense, to imply the contingent closures that are induced on the play of difference, the contingency of which is forgotten in the very moment of inducing the closure, thereby fixing meaning, and in a more particular or specific sense, as heterosexist ideology, in an attempt to locate how contingent closures are induced on the very thinking of the possibilities of sex and gender, by restricting the play of difference to the duality of male/man/masculine and female/woman/feminine. The moments of the ideological closure, both in general and particular sense, has been located in the practices of reproductive medicine and assisted reproduction, especially in their construction of the sexed body, and more specifically in the construction of the female body as the veritable object of medical investigation and intervention, and how such construction is achieved through the ideological closure of other possibilities, which nevertheless continues to haunt the selfsameness of the truths and fixed meanings produced through such ideological acts of closure. The paper attempts to provide an ideological critique of the ideological closures in the construction of the universal and general conception of the female body – a process which has been identified in this paper with the act of *fixing the female body through reproductive medicine and assisted reproduction*, which requires feminist attention and critique.

Now there remains a significant question to be answered: how is it possible to render a critique of ideology if ideology is so all encompassing that the closures it induces on the play of difference is forgotten in the very act of

their institution? This takes us to Anirban Das’s *Towards a Politics of the (Im)possible: The Body in Third World Feminisms* (2010), where he engages with the problem of inevitability of ideological closure in the constitution of both the social and the subject. Das (2010), while recognizing that “the ideological is constitutive of both the social and the subject,” is unwilling to give up on the idea of critique of ideology. He does not seem to be carving out a radical outside from which the critique of ideology would emanate but seeks to retain the notion of subject as a “necessary fiction” capable of rendering an ideological critique. This is because the constitution of the embodied subject in and through the mediations of power and ideology involves both the reiteration and displacement of the structure, which is not reducible to a known calculus, and the critique of ideology therefore, from the position of the embodied subject, necessitates “working through” the “undecidabilities” born out of the repetition of the structure. Thus, the attempt to map the moments of the ideological, on my part, should be seen as charting out of the closure/s on the infinite play of difference, from within ideology, while recognizing the impossibility of mapping of such closures into a completely stable structure and my own complicity in the reiteration of these closures. The problem is further complicated by the fact, that in trying to provide an ideological critique, I have already entered as a located researcher in a triadic relationship with both the medical practitioners and the intending parents and particularly the intending mothers. Unlike the objectivist, who believes in distancing herself from the so called “subjects” of research, I have rather entered into an ethical communication with the subjects, especially with the women contending with infertility and infertility treatment, in my ideological demystification of the assumptions and practices of reproductive medicine and assisted reproduction, despite the dissimilar locations we occupy and represent.

Having stated that, a brief note on the itinerary of the overall argument is in order. This paper begins by offering a conceptual matrix for thinking the female body through a reading of the ideas of Foucault, Butler and Das. After having discussed in detail how the female body is constructed at the intersection of power, language and ideology, the paper goes on to “demystify” contemporary scholarship on body and postmodern biomedicine which argues that body has been denaturalized and molecularized, through a critique of Rose and Haraway. The paper critiques the ethnographies of Martin and Oudshoorn which point to a growing popularity in reproductive medicine of hormonal metaphors in conceptualizing the female body, and for somehow indicating that anatomic markers have been rendered superfluous. The paper then goes to substantiate its claim on the continuing

centrality of anatomy in the demarcation of bodily normality and pathology through a discussion of the “otherized” bodies in reproductive medicine and assisted reproductive, deriving theoretical inspiration from Canguilhem and Das. It concludes the discussion on the anatomic “fixing” of the female body as maternal body through a critical reflection on construction of the female body as a process of “fixing” female body to definite essences, by inducing ideological closure on otherwise indefinite possibilities. In the concluding section, the paper resorts to Hacking’s thoughts on sociological constructionism and calls for the need to nuance it further to problematize the complex power asymmetries and ideological processes through which objects and ideas about them become inextricably interwoven, and therefore, become analytically inseparable.

Power-Language-Ideology: A Conceptual Matrix for Thinking the Female Body

Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* talks about the entry of power in the domain of life, individual and species, through sex or body “as a means of access” to both (1980:146). In a significant interview titled *Body/Power*, given to the editorial collective of the *Queer Corps*, Foucault maps the emergence of the body social as the object of political discourse (in a “quasi-medical sense”) in the nineteenth century (Gordon 1980: 55). The monarch’s body he argued came to be replaced by the body social as the object of protection, the rituals of power previously meant to protect the monarch’s body from any violation whatsoever gave way to medico-therapeutic devices meant to protect the body social from pathological individuals. The body social in Foucault’s view is not a product of “universality of wills” as the liberals suggested but rather the effect of power operating on the “bodies of individuals” (50-1). This power does not merely repress the body; it produces and intensifies the body by producing effects at the level of knowledge. The individual’s knowledge of the body is thus the effect of power operating on the body through discipline and regulation (56-7). Foucault’s archaeological approach to the study of human sciences envisages unraveling the role of power, body and knowledge in their interconnection in the project of rendering human bodies intelligible, disciplined and normalized (61).

Judith Butler (1993) targets Foucault for presupposing that body pre-exists power – that it is a materiality that is only rendered intelligible through the intervention of power. In *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”*, Butler dubs any attempt to posit bodily materiality outside signifying practices or language as seeking refuge to a problematic

“empirical foundationalism” – a gesture involved in securing body as a “primary given” or the surface on which social, cultural and historical ‘inscription’ unfolds. It is in this context that Butler critiques Foucault for ignoring the complex process of materialization of body over time into a fixed and pre-given concrete natural entity. Butler’s recourse to the process of materialization of body however is not an attempt to affirm the materiality of women’s body as the foundational principle for feminist politics. On the contrary she seeks to deconstruct body’s materiality for dual purpose: firstly, to show that there is no bodily materiality outside the workings of power and language, and secondly, to establish that the attempt to deconstruct body’s materiality is not a rejection of body’s materiality *per se*, but a nuanced attempt to foreground the “metaphysical lodgings” and the misguided “political interests” associated with the epistemological certainty bodily materiality provides to feminist politics (1993: 30). Butler suggests that every effort to posit materiality outside of signification takes place in and through signification which is *always already* material. Materiality never completely escapes the signifying process by which it is posited. Butler adds that it is not an act of reducing body’s materiality to language but an attempt to show that *pure* materiality cannot be posited without signification (68).

Das (2010) however locates in Butler’s cautious move an exercise in reducing body’s materiality into a function of language (39). In *Towards a Politics of the (Im)possible: The Body in Third World Feminisms*, Das discusses the social and ideological production of the sexed body’s materiality. Das argues that the figuration of the sexed body as a concrete materiality located in ‘three dimensional anatomic space’ is a product not only of the working of power and language but also of the ideological process of hypostasis which produces the sexed body’s “concreteness” out of “abstraction”, and simultaneously obfuscates the history of such production (1). In his effort to grasp the role of power differentials and ideological foreclosures in the production of the sexed body, Das critiques theorizations of power, like that of Foucault and Butler, which are apprehensive of depth and overlook the ‘deep structures operating behind surfaces’. However, the emphasis on “deep structures” should not be read as a return to the idea of “hidden presence” or the depth models of the Enlightenment tradition. On the contrary it is a nuanced attempt to grasp the absences overshadowed by the surface – the “obvious fullness of presence”. In order to problematize the “full presence” of the sexed body, Das resorts to Heidegger’s philosophical reading of the notion of thing, which is premised on the idea that ‘(T)he usability of things to the “human”

is prior to the being of things as such' (17). Das uses this idea to think of the sexed body by proposing that it is only through human intervention, particularly through the mediation of power differentials and ideological foreclosures, that things like the sexed body achieves neutrality, that is, gets transformed from things *in use* to things *as such* – into unmediated materiality.

The crucial lesson that is learnt from the preceding discussion is that the sexed body is rendered an unmediated materiality in and through the mediation of power differentials and ideological processes, heterosexism being one of them. Heterosexism produces the body as *always already* marked by sexual difference – a difference that produced in co-operation by the society at large and the medical-institutional set up but camouflages as an unquestionable natural or biological fact. Although reproductive medicine and assisted reproduction, like other medico-scientific enterprises, portray themselves as de-contextualized and objective, they are not outside the workings of heterosexism. They actively reproduce the unmediated materiality of the sexed body within the foreclosures induced by heterosexual duality, the mutual exclusivity of the sexes, women's compulsory procreative function, and the pathological possibilities these heteronormative preconceptions entail.

The deployment of the power-language-ideology triad as a conceptual matrix enables us to grapple with the naturalization of the female body and motherhood as a social role and institution because it proposes how power differentials and the ideological foreclosures operate through signifying practices both in society at large and in the medical-institutional set up to definitively articulate the notion of female body in terms of the essential, "pre-programmed", sex-specific anatomical, physiological and hormonal factors and the compulsory procreative function associated with them. Any diversion from this is seen as an aberration from what the normal maternal body should be like, and is targeted for corrective or assistive medico-technological intervention. But developing a conceptual matrix is not enough, it is also necessary to interrogate the literature which assumes that postmodern biomedicine destabilizes the holistic (Rose) and naturalistic (Haraway) conception of body of modern medicine, especially when ethnographic data suggests that rather than simply denaturalizing, it is re-naturalizing the body in newer forms, through innovative means, and more so in case of contemporary reproductive technologies.

How Natural and Whole is the Body? Reading Body-Technology Encounters

In *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century*, Nikolas Rose talks about the shift in the twenty-first century biomedicine towards conceptualizing the living body at the level of molecules rather than as a “systemic whole” (2007: 11-12). Rose particularly cites the instance of molecular genomics where biomedical interventions are done at the level of DNA, and assisted reproduction where human gametes are handled outside the body (14). This is what Rose (2007) calls “molecular biopolitics” where body as a “systemic whole” ceases to be the prime focus. But the fact that gametes are handled outside the body through biomedical expertise, does not necessarily imply that the sexed body as the site of reproduction has entirely lost relevance. In case of aberration from the goal of procreation, the sexed body is targeted as the site of corrective or assistive intervention. What is defined as the reproductive system comes to stand for the body as a whole. Bodily integrity is understood as a projection of the reproductive system, composed of a system of sex-specific anatomy and hormones, which are taken as the quintessential markers of authentic sexed bodies.¹ The universality and fixity of these markers are hardly called into question, given the epistemological certainty they offer to reproductive medicine and assisted reproduction, their heterosexist conceptions. Therefore, to say in general terms that there has been shift towards “molecularization” is misleading.

In an effort to contradict Rose, following Donna Haraway (1991), it can be suggested that biomedical discourses today are “lumpy” (203-204). By the word “lumpy” is meant the “multiple languages”, “inharmonious heterogeneities” and “confusions at the boundaries of meanings” at the very heart of biomedical science itself. It is useful to come to terms with the complex, non-linear, tension-ridden trajectory of biomedical research and practice. But the word has to be deployed with criticality. The fact that postmodern biomedicine engenders multiplicities and boundary confusions, does not necessarily imply that the power differentials disappear, that ideological processes conventionally at work within biomedical sciences are eliminated. These are significant questions that must be asked before taking for granted the multiple possibilities that are opened up by the shifting and dissipated field of biomedical power.² Haraway (1991), despite her nuanced attempts to grasp the asymmetries within the dissipated field of biomedical power, ends up arguing that the age old hierarchies based on “natural origin” and “essences” are undermined in the contemporary

biomedical field. She argues that the historical specificity of the body in contemporary biomedicine is its “denaturalized” character (204). For her the body is no longer an immutable map of determinate biological functions as it has transformed into maneuverable locus of “strategic differences” (211). Thus, she assumes that body’s becoming of a maneuverable locus entails biomedical science’s giving up of its fetish for the natural and the organic. But the fact that body has been rendered a hybrid by biomedical technologies or that the body is *always already* a hybrid, a product of the failed modernist project of purification (see Latour 1993), should not obscure the ideology of biomedical science and technology, research and practice, and their attempt to reinstate the natural, by inducing foreclosure on the proliferation of hybrids, which are the inevitable by-products of their own operations.³

Thus, any generalization on the character of biomedical science and technology is misleading. To say that contemporary biomedicine denaturalizes, that it has no fetish for the natural or the organic, is to operate within the same ideological configuration which would have us believe that biomedical science and technologies like the reproductive technologies denaturalize, even when they reinstate what is scientifically labeled as natural or organic. Even nuanced attempts like that of Haraway ends up reiterating the unexamined denaturalization thesis. The most interesting fact is, the infertility experts themselves are often wary of recognizing their intervention as denaturalizing, even when the recognition would have enabled them establish biomedical science’s victory over the nature. In this context, it is worth looking at the different arguments infertility experts offer on body-technology encounter⁴ in assisted reproduction.

When an expert was asked whether or not contemporary reproductive technologies defy the natural bodily principles, the immediate response was:

ARTs⁵ cannot defy the natural principles. Reproduction has a fixed natural course. If there are hindrances, only limited alternatives are left. Problems like *tubal blockage*⁶ can be corrected surgically. But we are helpless when there is *azoospermia*⁷ or *anovulation*⁸. We cannot produce sperms! We can only stimulate egg production with limited success! Then how can we say that technology can defy the natural principles! Defy is not the right word. You can rather say bypass. I hope you understand the difference....⁹

On probing once again for greater clarity, the expert replied:

Reproductive system consists of a series of stages with definite functions. If there is a collapse in even one of the stages, the system breaks down, successful conception becomes impossible. In some cases, the collapse is surgically repairable, in many others, it is not. In the latter cases, we try to bypass the blockage by replicating the natural process outside the body. This is done in IVF¹⁰, where the sperm and the ovum are fertilized outside the body and later implanted into the uterus. In IVF we replicate the natural process. I mean we try to copy the natural process. But it is not as you said (refers to me) defying the natural course....¹¹

These excerpts remind me of Sarah Franklin’s (1997) ethnography of IVF, where she says that the experts see their practice as “giving nature a helping hand”, which is a way of suggesting that IVF can supplement nature, but cannot substitute it. In the excerpts presented above there is an explicit suggestion that science and technology can only replicate the natural processes by bypassing the hindrances to conception but it cannot completely defy body’s reality, its fixed principles. Instead of basking in the glory of biomedical expertise, the expert attempts to emphasize the irreparable bodily hindrances to conception and biomedicine’s attempt to bypass them. This stance can be read as serving dual purpose. Firstly, in saying that ARTs replicate rather than defy the body, the expert averts the risk of rendering the body a completely malleable entity. The deployment of terms like “replication” and “bypassing” can be seen as strategic. This is because; replication involves displacement from the original and the bypassing of nature or body in ARTs is not equivalent to directly challenging nature or body’s inherent principles. Secondly, the expert also averts undermining the relevance of science and technology in the face of nature or body’s fixed inherent principles. But this is achieved by arguing that science and technology attempts to negotiate body’s inherent principles by replicating them rather than defying them altogether. Thus, we have a perspective on body-technology encounter, where technology is seen as bypassing the bodily hindrances rather than outdoing the body altogether. However, we have another perspective which suggests that ARTs attempt to outdo the body by suppressing its internal principles and regulating it through external agents but very often fails to do so successfully. Here is an excerpt from an interview with an expert who holds such a view:

In IVF we control the body. Body’s inherent hormonal system is suppressed and replaced by hormones from outside. We attempt to make the body do things which it would not otherwise do due to

abnormal conditions. That is why ARTs is a blessing for infertile couples. It enables infertile couples to have their own children, even when there are anatomical or hormonal complications. Still ARTs have a lot to achieve. The success rate in IUI and IVF is still only 40%. We still do not know how to ascertain the viability of embryos; we transfer more than one embryo during IVF, which may also lead to multiple pregnancies, which is undesirable.... Moreover, the *take home baby*¹² rate is high when conception is natural. It is not completely possible to have the exact maternal environment which is one of the main reasons behind low success rate. There is no doubt that ARTs attempt to control women's ovulation to prepare the body for producing sufficient healthy follicles or for gestation. But often our effort fails to bear fruit, we have to resume the treatment cycle all over again. Very rarely are we successful at the very first go, we have to continue with the *empirical therapy*,¹³ a kind of trial and error method, you know!¹⁴

It is evident from the excerpt presented above that this perspective emphasizes more on the effort of ARTs to suppress and regulate the body rather than bypass it. It presupposes that biomedicine can control the body and substitute body's internal mechanisms by those induced technologically from outside, through techniques such as *ovarian induction*¹⁵, yet such substitution may not necessarily yield the desired quality and quantity of eggs for IVF. Substitution in this perspective is fraught with the element of doubt as these substitutions often fail to recreate the "exact maternal environment" that is necessary for successful conception. That is why low success rates in IUI¹⁶ and IVF is often attributed to the lacunae in reconstructing in hormonal terms the natural 'maternal environment' indispensable for conception. It is necessary to clarify that such a categorization of perspectives is not foolproof, because techniques such as *ovarian induction* is an integral part of IVF.¹⁷ This analytical separation has only been done to depict the two different perspectives on body-technology encounter, which often coexist in the context of IVF. In first case, technology is seen as bypassing the body and replicating the natural processes outside, and in the second, technology is seen as suppressing the internal mechanisms of the body, to substitute it with biomedically recreated bodily environment which conducive to conception, but only with very limited success. The third category of body-technology encounter views the body as "definitely flexible" but this flexibility is seen as a function of technology, and not an inherent element of body itself.

The most significant point that can be derived from these three instances of body-technology encounter is that in all the cases, technology is attributed with agency, although in varying degrees. Body, on the other hand, is represented as devoid of agency. It is either seen as incorrigible brute matter that has to be bypassed or as potentially mouldable but too rigid to be completely refashioned with success or as a function of technology. But what purpose do these three instances of body-technology encounter serve in trying to respond to the question: how natural and whole is the body? Through a theoretical re-appraisal of the ideas of Rose and Haraway, it can be argued that the sexed body, understood as a “systemic whole” composed of specific anatomical and hormonal functions, continues to be the object of ARTs’ intervention. On the basis of ethnographic data, it can be shown that infertility experts attempt to preserve the naturalness of the sexed body by attributing to it traits like fixity and rigidity. Although there is no singular notion of the sexed body, which all the practitioners unanimously agree upon, naturalness seems to be the underlying subtext in the multiple articulations of body’s interface with technology, where naturalness is narrowly defined in terms of universal and immutable internal principles. That is why there is problem in generalizing the denaturalization thesis, as the experts themselves are of the view that body’s internal principles cannot be adequately mastered by biomedical technologies.¹⁸ Even if the denaturalization thesis is provisionally retained, one has to look more critically into the ideological investment of specific biomedical technologies and their experts in specific socio-historical contexts, in retaining or renouncing the notions of biological ‘essences’ and ‘natural origins’.

The conception of the sexed body as a non-denaturalizable “systemic whole” is rendered possible not only through the mediation of power of reproductive medicine and assisted reproduction, and the array of techniques, technologies and arrangements developed by them, but also through ideological processes of hypostatization of an otherwise material-semiotic hybrid into a concrete unmediated materiality in terms of fundamental heterosexist principles.

From Sexed Anatomy to Sex Hormones: Engaging Further Complications

In *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction* (1987), Emily Martin argues that till the late eighteenth century female reproductive system was seen as “structurally analogous” to the male reproductive system (27). In the early nineteenth century the idea of structural similarity of male and female bodies came under vehement critique as it contradicted

the fundamental biological differences between men and women posited by the opponents (31). The latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of business metaphors like “saving and spending”, “loss and gain”, “intake and outgo”, and likened menstruation in women to the excessive sweating in men, but these new metaphors identified menstruation as “pathological” (34). Early twentieth century witnessed the emergence of new “medical models of female bodies” based on the organization of urban industrial space around the principle of hygiene (34-5). The development of molecular biology resulted in the re-conceptualization of women’s reproductive system in terms of “signal-response metaphor” – involving information transmission along “the hypothalamus-pituitary-ovarian axes” which prepares female body for reproduction (37-41). The failure to reproduce came to be viewed as unresponsiveness of the female body to the signals of reproduction. The denigration of menstruation as ‘pathological’ or ‘failed production’ in Martin’s view is associated with the ethos of an emerging industrial society which conceives of lack of response to signals of production as regression (47). Along with the female body as a whole, the “uterus” in particular came to be conceived of as a “machine” and the obstetrician as a “mechanic” – a development signifying the placing of mechanical intervention at the centre of the act of birthing (54-6). The mechanization of birthing Martin contends fragments the birthing process and equates it with labouring in factories where productivity is the prime concern, autonomy is minimized and regulation is maximized (66).

In Nelly Oudshoorn’s *Beyond the Natural Body: An Archaeology of Sex Hormones* (1994) the emphasis shifts from the historicization of the medical metaphors relating to female body and reproductive organs to sex hormones. Oudshoorn argues that by 1910 the idea that gonads are the authentic determinants of sexual difference came to be problematized within biology. The primacy attributed to ovaries and testes as the “seat of femininity and masculinity” gave way to sex-specific hormonal systems as markers of sexual difference (21-2). This in Oudshoorn’s view was radical enough to destabilize the “pre-scientific” logic of sexual duality. The turning point however according to Oudshoorn was 1920s and 30s when the even the sexual specificity of male and female hormones came to be destabilized within sex endocrinology with the coming to light of the “unexpected data” that female sex hormones could be present in male bodies and vice versa (25). Attempting to retain the mutual exclusivity of sex hormones, research in sex endocrinology came up with the *foodhypothesis* and the *adrenal hypothesis* (26-7). Researchers either argued that female hormones have a “functionless presence” in the male bodies or they clearly identified in

such presence the indication of pathology, leading to research on homosexuality (30-1). The quantitative theory of sex endocrinology destabilized classifications based on the anatomical criterion like the normal male, normal female and the abnormal intersex, engendering new categories like *virile male*, *effeminate male*, *feminine female* and *masculine female* (38). Measurement of opposite sex hormones in homosexuals was at the forefront of sex endocrinology (56). Oudshoorn ends by suggesting that although sex endocrinology rendered sexual difference matter of degree rather than kind, it did not end the sexual stereotyping of male and female hormonal systems, attributing stability and regularity to male hormones and “instability” and “lability” to female hormones (59).

Both Martin and Oudshoorn demonstrates that the production of scientific facts is situated and contextual, and to be more specific, that the supposed objective writing technology of biomedical science is imbued with heterosexism. But there are few disagreements with both. Although Martin’s ethnographic material is fascinating, she operates within a theoretical framework that presupposes authentic female body objectified and alienated in the process of (re)production. There is nostalgia for pre-mechanized and pre-technological approaches to birth in Martin’s tone. Martin seems to be oblivious of the crucial point, to put it in a Foucauldian style, that technology is productive. Technology produces the body it controls and regulates. The concern should not only be, in my view, the mechanization of the natural functions of the body through technology but how the body itself cannot be thought apart from the technologies which constitutes it, how technology itself cannot function without actively producing the body. Oudshoorn’s ambitious declaration of a “beyond” to the natural body also seems less convincing. To anticipate in the production of the hormonal body, a ‘beyond’ to the heterosexual matrix is problematic for two reasons: firstly, such a position overlooks the fact that the redefinition of masculinity and femininity that sex endocrinology entails takes place within the ambit of heterosexist principles. And secondly, it uncritically presupposes a linear transition from anatomic or gonadal certainty of sexual specificity to non-specific sex hormones as determinants of sexual difference.

In the following paragraphs, I elaborate through empirical substantiation, two important points: firstly, there is an internal tension within reproductive medicine regarding granting primacy either to the gonads or the hormones as the only determinant of sexual difference, and that there is definitely a nostalgia for the epistemological certainty provided by gonads or anatomy – visible and palpable – as the determinant of sexual difference, and secondly,

even when hormones are taken as non-specific markers of sexual difference, the associated uncertainties are precluded to render them continuous with the culturally constructed notions of sexual duality and mutual exclusivity of sexes.

In an editorial commentary titled ‘Deconstructing the Path to Reconstructing Reproductive Organs,’ in the *Journal of Assisted Reproduction and Genetics*, Albertini (2011) critically evaluates the obsession of current research in fertility preservation with gonad reconstruction – to somehow *artificially reconstruct the gonads* (emphasis mine) rather than reproduce, at the same time, the secretory roles intrinsic to them. Here is a long quote from Albertini:

The logistics behind such a monumental effort find their roots in the field of biomedical engineering, a staple of the regenerative medicine movement. And the momentum for such an endeavour has its origin in the emergent field of fertility preservation. In the case of the latter, the prospect of preserving ovarian or testicular function as a countermeasure to acquired or induced disorders such as premature ovarian failure, Turner’s syndrome, or Sertoli cell-only syndrome has evoked two independent lines of research. On the one hand are those subscribing to the *au naturel* approach. Cryopreserving testis or ovary (or pieces thereof) harbouring the elusive but much-sought-after germ cells are the goal here, with subsequent transplantation of these tissues into donor patients. This approach has received encouragement, direction, and tractability from the pioneering studies of Sibling; Gosden; Donnez and Meirow among others. The scenario exploited in these highly publicized cases involves whole ovary transplantation or transplantation of strips of ovarian cortex that have re-established cyclicity and reproductive competence to the small but fortunate number of patients who have benefitted from such treatments.

While many obstacles remain with respect to the use of tissue or whole organ transplantation, with respect to optimizing cryopreservation protocols, limiting damage from ischemia, and the genetic integrity of contained gametes, this *au naturel* approach attempts to maintain the valuable

supply of germ cells in a native environment or niche within which the subsequent steps of gametogenesis will proceed.

Yet another camp proffers a more ambitious agenda for preserving fertility that I refer to as the “deconstructing reconstructionists”. Let me explain. Accepting that our gonads are dualistic in function as both purveyors of the gametes upon which the next generations will derive and endocrine machines (and probably paracrine) in their secretory profile, not one, but two functional attributes must be recapitulated in the design of artificial gonads. The plot immediately and necessarily thickens when one considers these as not so mutually exclusive operational endpoints for a self-respecting mammalian gonad. If you are designing a testis, then there is no choice but to establish an organ equivalent bearing both gamete-producing spermatogonial stem cells and the cellular and endocrine environments known to sustain the process of spermatogenesis. Thus, any facsimile of an artificial testis must embody a seminiferous tubule analog that satisfies the complex interaction between Sertoli, Leydig, and germ cells. Getting sperm out of tubule equivalents is another matter but, for now, we will assume that access to sperm an appropriately temperature-regulated segment of male anatomy is possible.

If you are designing an ovary, then matters of proximity to the fallopian tube remain. This approach (*de novo* construction of an ovary equivalent) also implies anatomical proximity coupled to an ovulatory capacity. As we will see, such a feat may well exceed the expectations of the most optimistic among us....¹⁹

From the quote presented above, it is evident that Albertini (2011) delineates two predominant modes of attempting to preserve the fertility of the gonads, through gonad reconstruction, in the wake of “acquired or induced disorders”. The first approach, attempts to reconstruct the gonads, by using materials from the gonads, and restore the natural functions intrinsic to it. This is called the *au naturel* approach. The second approach, attempts to reconstruct the gonads artificially. Here the challenge is not only to replicate the anatomical structure, but also the accurate secretory functions intrinsic to the structure of the gonads. The second approach is called *de novo*.

Albertini particularly problematizes this second approach which emphasizes too much on the structure of gonads rather than their function. He clearly argues that reconstructing the testes or the ovaries is not enough, the processes of *spermatogenesis* or *folliculogenesis* has to be initiated, otherwise mere reconstruction of gonads is of no use. Thus, for him sexual function is not only anatomic, it is also hormonal. But the fact that he delineates the practitioners of the second approach as “deconstructing reconstructionists” implies that he notes in them an obsession with the anatomic aspect of the gonads, if not real, at least artificial. Although Albertini praises both of the modes of gonad reconstruction, he seems more inclined towards the first viz-a-viz the second approach, not only because it is scientifically faulty to have artificial organs, without proper hormonal functions, but also because the former preserves ‘...the genetic integrity of contained gametes...and maintain(s) the valuable supply of germ cells in a native environment or niche within which the subsequent steps of gametogenesis will proceed. ‘The tension here is twofold: firstly, there is disagreement among the researchers on what is to be granted primacy, the gonads or hormones, which precludes any idea of a general agreement that sex hormones are gaining primacy, and secondly, Albertini himself is more inclined towards the natural approach, which preserves the germ line, which also demonstrates that there is an implicit opposition to the increasing artificialization (read against nature) in gonad reconstruction practices in reproductive medicine.²⁰

During my fieldwork, I also found that the practitioners recognize the significance of hormones in determining a ‘healthy’ female body, but they are more inclined to refer to the anatomical markers of authentic femininity. The recurrent answer to the question on the essential markers of female body was provided in terms of the *primary* and *secondary sex characteristics*²¹. Both serve as visible indicators of sexual difference. The gross physicalist approach to the understanding of female body is evident from the constant reiteration of the centrality of the “healthy” ovaries, “unblocked” tubes, womb “without scars” and vagina devoid of anomalies as the basic markers of functioning female reproductive system. For men, on the other hand, the single, most oft-cited factor is sufficient motile sperms; the anatomical structure does not get primacy otherwise. In the context of modern medicine, Das (2010) argues, that the body is a generality produced through the conjunction of three bodies: the anatomical, the physiological and the biochemical or the hormonal. But, in practice, the body, which is a complex, non-homogeneous unity is always reduced to its anatomical structure, located in “three dimensional space.”(80) Most importantly, this

gross physicalist understanding of the body or anatomic reduction has profound heterosexist dimension, which operates at the very level of both the clinical and cultural imaginings of the female body. Moreover, as I have already argued, in opposition to Oudshoorn, the uncertainties unleashed by the hormones as non-specific markers of sexual differences are also flattened out in favour of sexual duality. This is evident in cases where the practitioners recognize the inevitable presence of male hormones in female bodies and vice-versa, as indications of pathology (which is also anticipated by Oudshoorn), and end up establishing a linear causal relation between female hormones and women’s subjectivity (which is most dangerous!). Here is an excerpt from one such interview where hormonal explanations were given by the ART practitioner for women’s “typical” subjectivity and biological make up:

Anatomy is significant; we need to check whether the patient has normal genital system. If there are complications, we try to correct them surgically. But the most important thing is oestrogen hormone! Women are women because of this hormone.... Oestrogen makes them more sympathetic, motherly and emotional. Maternal feelings are associated with oestrogen.... Normal women have regular ovulation cycles. Infertility occurs because of hormonal imbalances. Abnormalities in female hormone system also occur because of increased levels of male hormones. Male hormones hinder female reproduction.... *Women with high levels of male hormones are manly, they are more intelligent, more achievement oriented!* (Emphasis added)²²

It is evident, from the brief quote presented above, that the practitioner provides a hormonal argument for women’s nature, their inherent “maternal feelings” and how transgression from the normal level of female hormone results in the breach of socially accepted feminine qualities. The non-specific sex hormones, expressible in clinical measures, despite the accompanying uncertainties, are harnessed by the practitioners to justify their claims to the determination and classification of who is a better male or better female, which is also a way of reiterating sexual duality. Thus, the heterosexual duality is not breached with the understanding of body based on non-specific sex hormones, which contains in itself the potential for the sustained reproduction of the fundamental heterosexist principles. Having outlined how the anatomical indicators continue to be relevant in the postmodern biomedicine, in the figuration of the sexed body, and more specifically, the

female body, let me further demonstrate the salience of anatomical indicators in the figuration of the normal and the pathological or ‘abject’ bodies in reproductive medicine and assisted reproduction.

The Bodily Other(s): Anatomical “Messiness” and Abjection

Throughout this essay, a recurrent set of words have been normal and pathological. This section attempts to map the configurations of the normal and the pathological in the context of reproductive medicine and assisted reproduction. It is clear by now that the normal female body is one which is capable of successfully reproducing. The construction of this normal female body occurs viz-a-viz the paradigmatic pathological individuals, implicitly arranged in increasing order of abnormality: the older woman, the homosexual, and the hermaphrodite.²³ These are the paradigmatic pathological individuals, medically and socially, because of their inability to produce genetic offsprings through heterosexual sex. The fact that what is medically designated as pathological is continuous with social pathology shows that medicine is essentially a normative activity, which is engaged, along with the society at large, in determining the accepted standards of normality and pathology.

Here I deploy, though a bit reductively, two approaches to the study of normal and pathological. The first approach is associated with Canguilhem (1978), who argues that the normal is both a fact and a value. It is a fact as it is determined by a majority of cases of a particular kind. It is a value as it is associated with a notion of what “should” be (69). The normal, in this sense, implies the “majority of cases of a determinate kind, “*which is attributed a value preference, and medicine attempts to realize and maintain that condition.* (ibid, emphasis added) To put in Canguilhem’s own terms, ‘...the normal state designates both the habitual state of the organs, and their ideal...the reestablishment of this habitual ideal is the ordinary aim of therapeutics.’ (ibid.) For Canguilhem, the art of medicine exists because human being themselves designate certain states in life as pathological, as these states hinder the norm of continuance of life and medicine performs the significant task of re-establishing the norm, in the wake of deviations from the norm (69-70). In fact, life itself is viewed as a “normative activity” by Canguilhem, which *spontaneously* responds to the factors that hinder the “preservation” of life. Life is “normative” as it cannot remain “indifferent” to the conditions that both engender and hinder life (70). This is called *biological normativity* by Canguilhem, which is the responsiveness of life to the conditions that engenders life. In

understanding normativity, Canguilhem does not fall back upon a statistical means of determining or deriving the normal and the pathological. Although, he recognizes that “relative statistical frequency” is one way of deriving the normal and the pathological, he primarily focuses on the criterion of incompatibility of certain conditions with life as a means of determining the deviations from the normal (76-78). Through these ideas, Canguilhem demonstrates: firstly, that life, which is the object of biological sciences, is essentially a “normative” activity, which presupposes the norm of responsiveness of the organisms to the changing environmental conditions, and secondly, that biological normativity is dependent upon the environment, it is contingent and contextual.

The other approach is that of Das (2010), who demonstrates that construction of the normal body in modern medicine consists of both the statistical calculation of normalcy and the contingent and contextual notion of normativity (83). Das particularly argues that modern medicine borrows from statistics, terms and methods to construct the universal notion of the body, which accommodates normal variations, but not the abnormal deviations, which constitutes the pathological or “abject” bodies (ibid.). The construction of the universal body of modern medicine does not preclude the empirical variations of particular bodies, without which it is impossible to conceive of the body in general terms (ibid.). The normal body (involving normal variations), for Das, is determined by “the standard” parameters, which are material-semiotic (84). The hypostatization of these material-semiotic parameters into purely unmediated concrete indicators occurs through the mediation of knowledge, power and ideology, suggests Das (ibid.). If we take some instance from the present ethnography, then “healthy” ovaries, “unblocked” fallopian tubes, womb “without scars” and vagina without anomalies can be designated as the most oft-repeated, the material-semiotic indicators of the normal female body. This is not to say that there is no scope of normal variations within reproductive medicine and assisted reproduction. Variation such as ‘differential receptivity’ of different women to the possibilities of conception is part of the notion of normal female body in reproductive medicine. When the anomalies hinder or block the process of reproduction from following its natural course, which is also a hindrance to the continuance of life, such conditions are seen as pathological. Thus, is relevant the figures of the older woman, the homosexual, and the hermaphrodite within reproductive medicine and assisted reproduction. These are the paradigmatic pathological figures that facilitate the construction and maintenance of the normal, owing to the absence of the “standard” determinants of normalcy in these figures, although in varying

degrees. There is complete agreement with Das, when he says that ‘the normal has many “others”’ (ibid.) and that modern medicine attempts to “negotiate” ‘this otherness into defined territory of knowledge, into its defined categories of the abnormal.’ (84) Indeed, the relationship of medicine with the pathological is not merely that of exclusion, but of incessant negotiation with the challenges that are posed by the “abject” bodies to the selfsameness of medical knowledge. But all the ‘abject’ bodies are not of the same significance, some are more pathological than the others, and therefore, there is qualitative variation in attempts to negotiate each of them. The *older woman*, the obvious target of the normalizing interventions of assisted reproduction is the potentially normal pathological subject; the subject whose biological and social roles can be rendered coterminous with the norm of procreation, through technological intervention. The *homosexual*, though not the conventional target of assisted reproduction’s normalizing gesture, is located at the margin of the circuit of normalization. The homosexual is “yet” to be rendered completely normal. And beyond the limits of the normalizing gesture is the *hermaphrodite*, the most “abject” of all the bodies, owing to the “messiness” of its reproductive apparatus and the genital system. The hermaphrodite defies reproductive medicine’s neat and linear depiction of the natural course of reproduction and the logic of locating sexual difference in the sex specific anatomy and hormones. The homosexual, in this sense, is different from the hermaphrodite, because the homosexual’s anatomy, in its materiality, is at least sexually specific. This is why, in case of homosexuality, which is often identified as psychic abnormality, the pathology cannot be attributed to any visible or palpable anatomic factors, and is therefore, different from the hermaphroditism, which is characterized by “gross” anatomical and gonadal anomalies. The fact that visible anatomical and gonadal anomalies serve as “real”, “objective” and “unquestionable” empirical indicators of deviation from the norm of life-preservation, one can argue that the anatomical imagination continues to be crucial in postmodern biomedical technologies such as assisted reproduction. While it true that the “ontology of depth” in contemporary biomedicine has been problematized, it is also true that there is a contrary move within biomedicine in general and reproductive medicine in particular, which attempts to preserve the structure of knowledge in which the empirical indicators serve as determinants of pathology.²⁴

It is important to mention, that this section must be seen in continuity with the overall argument of this paper. In this section, I have particularly discussed the relevance of anatomy in the determination of pathology. Instead of valourizing the idea that body has been molecularized by postmodern

biomedical technologies, though I do not reject the possibility all together, I have been arguing that latest biomedical technologies, like assisted reproduction, attempts to retain the idea of unmediated (read natural, fixed, based on authentic internal principles) materiality of the sexed body, figured as a complex whole of comprising of sex specific anatomical make up and hormonal condition. The attempts to preserve the unmediated materiality of the sexed body is entirely continuous with the ideology of heterosexism, which bases sexual difference in the immediacy and specificity of sexed anatomy and sex specific hormones, and renders women’s child bearing function an ultimate biological and social role. Thus, it has hard to believe that biomedical technology in general and assisted reproduction in particular is a decontextualized and objective enterprise, given its social-cultural embeddedness and its complicity in the (re)production of the ideology of heterosexism. An ideological critique of reproductive medicine and assisted reproduction’s disavowed socio-cultural embeddedness and complicity in ideology of heterosexism necessitates a radical interrogation of the presupposed unmediated materiality of the sexed body. This ideological critique, which foregrounds the discursively and ideologically constructed materiality of the sexed body, refrains from fictionalizing the sexed body, by saying that it is unreal. On the contrary, following Das (2010), this ideological critique attempts to show that the sexed body is a “reified category”, (re)produced as unmediated through mediations of different technologies of power and the ideological processes immanent in these technologies. Body’s reality is that it is *always already* mediated by power and ideology; these mediations render possible thinking of the body as an entity, yet these mediations which are constitutive of the body are categorically disavowed by the so-called decontextualized medical knowledge and practice in search of objectivity and universality.

Throughout this paper, I have attempted to trace a few instances of these disavowed mediations, which despite their inherent tensions and uncertainties, unfailingly construct the female body as the site of heterosexual procreation, natural or assisted. But to say that the body is constructed, *always already* mediated is not enough, it is necessary to foreground, explicitly, what notion of construction one is deploying. The following section engages with this issue at hand.

Construction as “Fixing”: Nuancing Sociological Constructivism

Ian Hacking, in his book *The Social Construction of What?* (1999),²⁵ insists that it is necessary to make an analytical separation between the construction of the object and the construction of the ideas about the object.

The suggestion is that social sciences should be concerned with the *history of ideas*, the way certain ideas about certain objects are produced, the way meanings are ascribed to them by contingent socio-historical forces. He does not however suggest that the objects and the ideas about the objects or the meanings attributed to them are separable. On the contrary, he argues that the objects interact with the ideas about the objects in the process of their social structuring, so that the objects acquire and reiterate the essential meanings and descriptions attributed to them. This acquisition and reiteration of the ideas by the objects is manifested not only at the discursive level but also in the institutional and material practices. Now, let us try to deploy the analytical separation that Hacking suggests between - the object and the ideas about the object - with reference to the sexed body in assisted reproduction. If we closely follow Hacking's logic, then the sexed body itself is not a construction but the ideas about the sexed body, the different ways of conceiving it, are constructed by contingent factors. To put it in other words, the ways we conceive of the sexed body are not inevitable, but they are constructed as such through contingent factors. Moreover, Hacking argues, the "matrix" in which ideas proliferate and develop, plays a significant role in the determining the subjectivities of those about whom ideas are produced. This is called the *looping effect*. For example, the prevailing ideas about infertility as a medical condition determine how those categorized as infertile think of themselves, what they do and how they organize their practices. Thus, for Hacking, subjectivities are not indicative of definite essences; they are the effects of classificatory practices. Hacking's ideas are interesting, but there are fundamental disagreements.

Firstly, one may question the feasibility of making the analytical separation between the object and the idea, and a possible justification for such a questioning could be that it is impossible to think of the object as separate from the ideas about the object. To say that the object and the ideas about the object interacts, that there is a *looping effect* of the classification on the actions and practices of those classified is not enough, one has to come to terms with the fact that the imagination of the object is *always already* contaminated by the ideas about the object, which renders it impossible to think of the object as analytically separable. To think that the sexed body is analytically separable from the ideology of heterosexism is to presuppose that one can conceive of materiality without the mediation of ideology, (Das, 2010) which I argue is impossible. This first point is associated with the second one I am about to make. Indeed, the "matrix" is significant in engendering the ideas about the object, through various discursive and

material practices. The “matrix” of heterosexist ideas can be seen as actively (re)producing the body in its presupposed sexual differences, in changing *avatars*, through research and practice, in the expanding domain of reproductive medicine such as assisted reproduction, genetics, fertility preservation, regenerative medicine etc. The unmediated materiality of the sexed body is the effect of heterosexist ideas and practices of reproductive medicine and its allied fields, among other technologies of power, which precludes the possibility of thinking the sexed body beyond the naturalistic assumptions about its compulsory procreative function. But the normal female body is not a mere effect of the heterosexual ideas and practices, effect in the sense of being a determinate product of the unilateral ideological work of heterosexism. On the contrary, it is both the cause and effect of heterosexism. It is not simply the “matrix” of ideas that shapes the sexed body; the sexed body itself is a constitutive condition of the formation of the “matrix”. This recognition of the analytical inseparability and mutual inter-implication of the object and the “matrix” of ideas, the sexed body and the ideology of heterosexism is fundamental to an ideological critique of reproductive medicine and assisted reproduction’s essentialist figuration of the sexed body that this paper has attempted to achieve.

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Notes

1. Here, I am particularly interrogating the obvious idea that body is *always already* sexually differentiated, that sexual differentiation is seen as a natural or organic attribute of bodies in the context of reproductive medicine and assisted reproduction. This is an attempt to problematize the primacy of sexual difference in reproductive medicine and assisted reproduction rather than a rejection of sexual difference in the name of equality or sameness. The focus is particularly on how sexual difference is actively produced through power, signifying practices and ideological means so that it is rendered a transcendental truth.

2. It is interesting to note the tension built into reproduction medicine and assisted reproduction in so far as the issue of denaturalization is concerned. On the one hand, denaturalization acts as rhetoric to convince people that contemporary reproductive technology can achieve conception even in the face of bodily hindrances by 'bypassing' nature and its principles. On the other hand, though the experts attempt to convince others that ARTs are denaturalizing through various strategies, they are themselves not completely convinced that body is denaturalized in and through assisted reproduction. Technology is seen as mere supplement to what is chancy or divinely ordained.
3. Biomedical research and practice attempts to produce pure biological or natural entities out of material-semiotic or natural-cultural hybrids, that is, they attempt to purify and maintain the separation between the natural, the material and the semiotic, the cultural, but the irony is that any purificatory move ends up proliferating hybrids, they are the inevitable confusions produced by ideological attempts to avert confusion or boundary transgression. This argument is influenced by Bruno Latour, but also attempts to incorporate ideology as a crucial factor in imposing foreclosure on the proliferation of hybrids.
4. Body-technology encounter has been used as a concept to denote the different perspectives that the experts have on the interface between the maternal body and assisted reproductive technologies.
5. Acronym for Assisted Reproductive Technologies.
6. *Tubal Blockage* refers to a condition in which the fallopian tubes are blocked which in turn hinders the transmission of the ovum from the ovary to the uterus.
7. *Azoospermia* is a condition of male factor infertility where there is no sperm in the semen.
8. *Anovulation* is a condition of female factor infertility where there is no production of ovum in the ovaries.
9. This is a section from an interview with an infertility expert.
10. Acronym for In-Vitro Fertilization.
11. This is part of the same interview mentioned above.
12. The *Take Home Baby* is the final successful output of assisted reproduction, and refers to the live baby who is discharged from the hospital to be taken home by the intending parents.
13. The infertility experts use a series of investigative methods to ascertain the nature of hindrance to reproduction and the necessary treatment protocol one after the other, when one set of investigative method and

treatment protocol fails, the experts opt for the next set, this is called *empirical therapy*.

14. This is a long excerpt from an interview with an IVF expert.
15. *Ovarian induction* refers to the stimulation of the ovaries through the use of Follicle Stimulating Hormones (FSHs) to induce successful production of follicles for reproduction.
16. Acronym for Intra-Uterine Insemination.
17. A major critique of IVF emanates from its ovarian hyper-stimulation to produce multiple follicles to increase the success rate. Ovarian hyper-stimulation can cause ovarian cancer.
18. I believe that the discussion of the denaturalization of the body, in contemporary biomedicine and biotechnology, cannot be done from an objective position. Here, I have attempted to show whether the infertility experts, from their location within the practice, at all perceive their interventions as denaturalizing or not. Since, I am not concerned with the question whether the body is actually denaturalized or not (one can also suspect whether such a question can at all be asked irrespective of the location from which the question is asked), but with the perceptions of the infertility experts, I have just given instances from the field to show how the experts adhere to fixed and essentialist notions of the maternal/sexed body.
19. See David Albertini, ‘Deconstructing the Path to Reconstructing Reproductive Organs’ in *Journal of Assisted Reproduction and Genetics*, 2011, September; 28(9): 759–760. Published online 2011 August 26. doi: 10.1007/s10815-011-9624-7.
20. Please note that the journal from which the excerpt is taken is not an Indian journal. This has been taken from the *Journal of Assisted Reproduction and Genetics* to depict the tensions inherent in reproductive medicine. It must be read as a singular instance, rather than an attempt to make a generalization. Moreover, although my ethnography is situated in Kolkata and other medical materials are drawn from Indian practitioners, I am not making a generalization about Indian society or the city of Kolkata. It is just a preliminary attempt to map both the socio-cultural and ideological underpinnings of clinical practice.
21. Primary sex characteristics are sex characteristics one is born with and secondary sex characteristics develop with adulthood. Genitals are the example of the former and pubic hair of the latter.
22. This is an excerpt from an interview with an ART practitioner.
23. These instances were provided by the practitioners themselves, sometimes together or separately to define the normal female body in

ART. These categories are drawn from field data; I have just attempted to systematize them over here. The hierarchy was not provided by them. It is constructed on the basis of the arguments by the practitioners regarding how each of them is different from the normal female body.

24. It is interesting to read Foucault and Rose together in so far as they map the distinctiveness of the structures of knowledge of modernity and postmodernity respectively. Here I argue that the structure of knowledge dominant in modernity can be equally relevant in a context where the foundational assumptions are contrary to that of modernity.
25. See Ian Hacking, 'Why Ask What' in *The Social Construction of What?* United States of America, Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 1-34. The entire paragraph is a summarization of some of the key ideas discussed in this chapter of the book.

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(Re)Looking at “Dalit” Conceptualization

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Abstract: *In the post-colonial India, the ex-untouchables and the other marginalized castes of Indian social order has re-created their identity in the form of ‘Dalits’. This discourse of Dalits is not only present in the form of action-movements but also in the academic discourse of literary movements. The present paper will, thereby, try to look into the conceptualization of ‘Dalit’ within the Dalit discourse and would try to locate the theoretical underpinnings. In this quest of unraveling the problematic of Dalit conceptualization, the paper will delve into the theoretical approaches of specifically Ambedkar and will compare it with the standpoint of Harijan discourse as propounded by Gandhi. The present paper will also try to look into the various Dalit literatures and the conceptualization of Dalit there in, to critically analyze it.*

Keywords: Dalit, Caste, Ambedkar, Gandhi, Dalit Discourse, Scheduled Castes, Exclusion, Untouchables, Low Caste.

Introduction

Cultural, political and social situations have always been changed through history by changing ideals and visions. In India, historically the people living on the margins, so coined as untouchable castes have metamorphosed now, through various stages of socio-political changes over the last century, re-created their identity as Dalits. Such metamorphosis can be regarded as profound in contemporary Indian society because it has multi-layered implication for all. However, re-created identity of Dalits must need to be situated in context of the inclination towards homogenization in the contemporary era where the term “global” that is in vogue propels towards unification and conceptualization in theoretical discourses.

The untouchable castes of all variety were seen to have clubbed their identity under the term and concept Dalit progressively since the end of British colonialism in India. India being a heterogeneous society is stratified into various layers both horizontally and vertically with geographical variation. In Berreman’s words, ‘an urbanite might reveal quite a different view of caste-even of village caste-to fellow urbanites than to a village

acquaintance or in response to an inquiry about village life emanating from one known to be associated with the village milieu. Similarly, an untouchable informant amongst other untouchables-especially among his caste fellows-could be expected to give quite different reports about caste ranking than those given to a high-status outsider and his high-caste interpreter. To claim high social worth in such circumstances would seem to the informant to be ridiculous, if not dangerous. This does not mean that the claim is not harbored and that it is not expressed in safe company and acted upon when opportunity permits. Prudence can easily be mistaken for adherence to a dominant view. If so, it contributes to apparent consensus, but not to accuracy’ (Berreman 1962). Yet it assumed that the uniqueness of Indian society lies in the way of life where Caste is a stratification-parameter due to which scholars of every kind over the ages have been attracted towards studying and analyzing it. Here the term caste is being used synonymously with *jati* and *varna*, though needless to say, in theoretical discourses each has its own specific meaning and area of understanding.

For the present paper, caste may be defined as a hierarchical division of society with ascribed status believing in endogamous relationship following rules of commensality and with a fixed occupation among the Hindus of India. The word ‘caste’ is a European formulation connoting the *jati* reality of India that homogenizes it in a uniform way for the whole Indian subcontinent. However, *jati* is the localized hierarchical system that varies from region to region. In a particular region often all the *jatis* are not seen to be present. *Jati* and caste system is different from Varna system which was a relatively open, pan-Indian system that allowed relatively more social mobility in terms of occupation and status based on individual achievement.

Situating historically

B.R. Ambedkar, who also belonged to the untouchable caste Mahar, became a successor to the anti-caste movement tradition whose history can be traced from 200-100 BCE. Purusha Sukta of *Rig Veda* is considered to be the text from where the practice of caste system has originated. One thousand years after its emergence, Buddhism created a rupture in the caste system by bringing numerous people into its fold irrespective of their caste affiliation. Despite of everything caste system has undergone, it has evolved and developed. History of Indian subcontinent has preserved its anti-caste conflicts and movements like the mid-twelfth century Veerashaivas movement by Basava of South India, the Bhakti movements (starting from fourteenth century) by Saints like Ravidas, Chokhamela,

Kabir, Janabai, Tukaram, Chaitainya and so on who also became famous poets of the anti-caste tradition. Jyotiba Phule, the precursor to Ambedkar and his Satyashodhak Samaj became a major voice for anti-caste movement in western province of India. There exist many such examples like

Pandita Ramabai, perhaps India's first feminist, a Marathi Brahmin who rejected Hinduism and converted to Christianity (and challenged that, too); Swami Achutanand Harihar, who led the Adi Hindu movement, started the Bharatiya Achhut Mahasabha (Parliament of Indian Untouchables), and edited Achhut, the first Dalit journal; Ayyankali and Sree Narayana Guru, who shook up the old order in Malabar and Travancore; and the iconoclast Iyothee Thass and his Sakya Buddhists, who ridiculed Brahmin supremacy in the Tamil world. Among Ambedkar's contemporaries in the anticaste tradition were E.V. Ramasamy Naicker, known as "Periyar" in the Madras Presidency; Jogendranath Mandal of Bengal; and Babu Mangoo Ram, who founded the Adi Dharm movement in the Punjab that rejected both Sikhism and Hinduism." (<http://www.caravanmagazine.in/essay/doctor-and-saint>).

B. R. Ambedkar first used the term Dalit in around 1928 in his newspaper *Bahishkrit Bharat*. However, the term though gained prominence only after 1970s in Maharashtra, under Dalit Panthers movement, and can be termed to be the period of the beginning and resumption of Dalit Literature. Nevertheless, the history of Dalit usage requires further scrutiny so as to understand the socio-economic dynamics and politics behind it. The coinage of the very term Dalit and subsequent mobilization around it has a distinctive socio-political background though very unlike the meaning of the term as indexed by Dalit. Distinctiveness of the term Dalit lies in its engendering new political and ethical sensibilities as well as raising the identity question that challenged the existing history, politics and culture. The term Dalit that metamorphosed after 1970, gained predominance in the social milieu, had a broader definition. The Dalit Panthers included the Scheduled Tribes, neo-Budhists, the working people, the landless and poor peasants, women, and all those who are being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion under the trope of Dalit (Omvedt 2010:72). The earlier definitions of Dalit were given in terms of caste that tried to encapsulate all the downtrodden people like the ex-untouchables, Shudras and Ati-shudras and often was found to be synonymous to Scheduled castes.

One must note here that all such formulations of the term Dalit and its subsequent emergence as a political concept drew heavily from the historical writings from the pre-colonial times. Anti-caste movement was very much present from a very early era in a broad-based form of Bhakti movements throughout India, but such sentiments gained prominence with the vision of Jotiba Phule (1827-1890), who though in contemporary term will be clubbed under OBC category, founded Satyashodhak Samaj in 1875. Phule, tried to create an alternative history for the shudras (non-brahman) and atishudras (dalits) on a theoretical level. He argued that atishudras were more oppressed than the shudras and they have been reduced to the bottom of the social hierarchy because of their vigorous fight and opposition to Brahman domination. Furthermore, as per Phule shudras and atishudras symbolized the category of exploited and oppressed ones and thereby he drew comparison of them with the Blacks and native Indians of America. In this regard Omvedt writes that "Phule's broadsides are, in fact, an expression of a theory not simply religious domination and conquest but of exploitation" (Omvedt 2010: 19).

Greatness of Phule and his theorization can be seen in his insight and analytical ability to see the interwoven-ness of economic exploitation and cultural dominance that piggybacked on state power and ideology. Phule, thus, was the founding figure of not only anti-caste movement of Maharashtra but was also a pleader for farmers, women and other exploited categories. Dalit Literature draws heavily from Phule and his writings but he never talked about any exclusive category as Dalit. On a grass-root level, similar anti-caste movement can be seen in various corners throughout India, where some were the movements of untouchables but basically all were social reform movements in the form of anti-caste movement¹.

In the pre-colonial period another prominent figure who raised the issue of untouchability was M. K. Gandhi (1869-1948). In 1920, Gandhi first made a strong statement regarding untouchability. Gandhi said, 'Swaraj is as unattainable without the removal of the sin of untouchability as it is without Hindu-Muslim unity' (Zelliot 2001: 153). Though Gandhi called untouchability an evil however he could not overcome the garb of Varnashrama Dharma. He believed untouchability as a perversion of true Hinduism. Prior to him, B.G. Tilak also condemned untouchability while he wrote, 'It is a sin against God to say that a person is untouchable, who is not so to God Himself...Hinduism absorbed the Shudras, can it not absorb the untouchables?' (Zelliot 2001: 154). But for the first time in history of Indian caste system, untouchables or Ati-shudras or Pancham were given an identity and was named by Gandhi who called them Harijans, or Children

of God, that marked a significant shift in the social construction of caste status among Indians, and became a precursor to a new era where the terminology encapsulated the imagination of a large section of population. Zelliott notes:

Although Gandhi was not the first to cry out against untouchability, he was the most prominent caste Hindu to proclaim that it was harmful to Hinduism, to make its removal a personal responsibility of the caste Hindu, to keep it before the public eye with passionate oratory and vivid imagery, and to found an organization for service to Untouchables (Zelliott 2010: 155).

B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956) did not find Gandhi's condemnation of untouchability radical enough, and rejected his views as it was based on the Varna concept. In fact, Ambedkar found Gandhi's ideology paternalistic thus, in long run would operate against the untouchables. Gandhi sought to reform Indian caste system under the overarching traditional trope by means of which he assumed discrimination and distinction would diminish among the common people that would be ultimately beneficial for the integration of the country giving a strong foundation to the nationhood. So, caste reforms were a means to an end for Gandhi in his nation building dream. On the other hand, Ambedkar's programs were directed towards the foundational issue of caste-based marginality, therefore, they all intended for mainstreaming untouchables within Indian. He argued that as caste is more a way of life, rather an ideology that governs the ethos of people in society, for which it is impossible to extricate one's existence from its strings of control, so unless one goes beyond the caste authority of Hindus, it is not possible to upgrade oneself in society. He therefore, proposed to counter Hinduism by reviving Buddhism, another religious philosophy of the soil that has egalitarian outlook. Unlike Gandhi who popularized the exclusivist label of Harijan among the elite Hindus, Ambedkar avoided such labeling, perhaps for his upright and inclusive attitude for all in their own terms, avoided the nomenclature Dalit. His sparse use of the word Dalit reflects that for him, it was more a process through which certain caste groups got dominated and exploited. Even though popular Dalit term, as a political terminology, in last four decades draws its source and origin from the philosophical overtones of Ambedkar, but one must not ignore that as a coinage or in its conceptualization, Ambedkar directly had little to contribute. One can speculate that the framework with which Ambedkar wanted to eradicate untouchability was by throwing away with the structure and the

practices within so that one can completely absolve oneself from such identity. Whereas, the discourses, using Dalit as its key benchmark concept, in fact want to use it as an identity-label to rally around, use it as a group-closure mechanism that will ensure institutionalized socio-political exclusivity to operate as a pressure group, and provide an elevated sense in-group security that can mobilized as interest group.

Even after independence of India, caste and untouchability remained a site of politics, discussions, arguments and research, but it was only after 1970, a separate discourse on Dalits in the name of Dalit Studies emerged. Ambedkar’s views about untouchables as a political minority was extrapolated and was given a strong and radical voice in Dalit Studies, where claim was made that any authentic claim for the Dalits has to come from within, programs should be taken by the Dalits, and ought to be solely of the Dalits (Zelliot 2010; Omvedt 2010; Illiah 2009). Most of the Dalit scholars, writers and academicians were vocal about Dalits and a separate discourse exclusively for them. It was claimed that only a Dalit can give the true picture of the conditions of Dalits and no one else. It rejected most of the non-Dalit or upper caste Hindu ideologies, standpoints and theorization regarding caste and untouchables. Dalit Studies was being theorized to gain a space in mainstream academics, research and policy formulation, so that the socio-political space need not be shared by non-Dalit figures (Illiah 2009) who were vocal about caste system and its atrocious practices. Towards this end, Dalit studies firstly rejected Gandhian ideology and philosophy, and as a counter view-point forwarded Phule and Ambedkar’s arguments. Through numerous studies, stories, testimonies, poems, essays, theatre, etc. scholars of Dalit Studies have been trying to articulate the pain, consciousness, crisis and aspirations of the Dalits. Dalit Studies argued that reform movement of Mahars in Maharashtra was an alternative movement that contrasted to the Arya Samaj in Punjab, Brahmo Samaj in Bengal, Prarthana Samaj in Bombay by looking beyond the fold of Hinduism or pale of caste. They premised their claim not only on social justice but of complete social reform preceding justice, more in line with transformation and restructuring. Dalit studies have rejected the religion Hinduism as if it is no religion at all for Dalits as they do not have a space within to belong in.

Situating in Contemporary Society

Dalit Studies have tried to universalize the term and concept Dalit by taking instances mostly from Maharashtra, and some from Andra Pradesh and Karnataka, and most recently from Uttar Pradesh. They have taken Mahars

from Maharashtra, Malas from Andhra, Holeyars from Karnataka and Chamars from UP. Though the movement of Chamars can be seen as early as 1940s but their political mobilization happened in early 1980s with Kashiram and later with Mayawati, the first Dalit Chief Minister of UP from Bahujan Samaj Party. But the political mobilization of UP has a very different route and there exist an acute political motive which changed from time to time.

The term Dalit is both esoteric and exoteric in nature. “Dalit” is the widely used post-colonial term for the former untouchables and Avarna or Pancham of so called “Hindu religion” belonging to the Indian society. The term Dalit does not have a uniform definition. Various people, academicians, theoreticians have understood and defined it in different ways. Mainly who are non-Dalit writers and intellectuals have found its origin in Sanskrit where it originated from the term ‘Dal’ which means broken, crushed, scattered, downtrodden etc. Sabyasaachi in an article writes:

Perhaps we need to look at the etymology of the term ‘dalit’ for an answer ... that the root word dal in dalit has been borrowed into Sanskrit from Hebrew. It has two components ‘dal’ and ‘anti’. Dal in Hebrew has been used in two senses: it refers either to physical weakness or to a lowly, insignificant position in society. When ‘dal’ is used in combination with another Hebrew root-word ‘anti’ it describes an economic relationship. As clearly indicated by Harvey L Perkins, “Dal is derived from a verbal root which recognises that poverty is a process of being emptied, becoming unequal, being impoverished, dried up, made thin...so there is social frailty (and those suffering from it) are easily crushed and have not the means to recover”. Omprakash Valmiki pointed out that ‘the meaning of the term has a more inclusive meaning’ (‘Dalit Literature in the Eyes of Dalits’). Thus a prostitute is as much a dalit as is the spouse of an upper caste patriarch who is ill-treated, as are the victims of ethnocide and communalism irrespective of whether they are Hindus, Christians, Muslims or Sikhs. Nandita Bajaj’s paper discusses the emergence of a nascent dalit woman’s alliance which transcends

re-gional boundaries, a consciousness shared with similar intensity against an exploitation they face alone (Sabyasaachi 2014: 1658-1660).

But for Dalits it has qualitatively a different connotation but still it varies within the discourse of Dalit Studies. Though by most of the scholars, the social condition of untouchables are being universalized all over India equally but since it is a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society, it is very important to see whether the concept or the term Dalit which has come to the fore mostly in last three decades, as seen in social science/mainstream discourse, encapsulates the problem of caste/*jati* based deprivations of the untouchables in India today!

The term Dalit is basically used to understand the ex-Untouchables of India. Scholars, activists, theoreticians understand it in one way and the general mass understands it in some other way. Still who are Dalits and who are not is a blurred and contradictory field. By Dalit, the general mass of India basically understands those who are Scheduled Castes but activists, theorists and academician understand it in a different way.

Ambedkar was more astute when he talked of untouchability. He seldom used the term “Dalit”. Dalit connotation is more political rather than social to gain power. Conceptualizing Dalit is very difficult but in the discourse of Dalit, it has been conceptualized differently by respective Dalit Scholars, Dalit activists and other people vocal about Dalit as a Discourse. Hardtmann in her book conceptualizes Dalit as:

Scholars and activists use the term ‘Dalit’ in more ways than one: according to the criteria of either social status or economic position. A common usage among scholars, activists as well as the public is to mean the so-called untouchables, or those who are officially defined in 1935 when backward groups were listed on a schedule to get access to reserved seats. The most common usage among today’s scholars and activists seems to be to include all caste groups that were traditionally regarded as ‘untouchables’, although not all of them are now among the official list of ‘SCs’. Sometimes ‘Scheduled Tribes’ (STs) and even ‘Other Backward Classes’ (OBCs) are included. The other definition in which an economic criterion is used includes the economically disadvantaged, regardless of caste category. This has been among common usage among Marxists scholars. More recently Dalit

activists have come to include other categories outside of India in their definition, like Burakumin in Japan, to mention just one. In this study 'Dalit' will be used as an emic concept, referring to people who use it self-ascribingly (Hardtmann 2011: ix).

Michael observes:

the term Dalit is not merely a rejection of the very idea of pollution or impurity or 'Untouchability', it reveals a sense of a unified class, of a movement toward equality ... the word 'Dalit' particularly emphasizes the dehumanizing 'caste oppression' that makes them outcastes and Untouchables (a degradation not shared by the tribals or soshits), within the context of the Hindu caste system with its religio-social organizing principle of 'purity and pollution. (Michael 2007: 33,108-109).

The discourse on Dalit argues that Dalit politics pose challenge towards Brahmanic hegemony but by stressing that they are practically excluding those categories who are exploited, discriminated and marginalized within their own caste communities and furthermore Dalit as a discourse is unable to encapsulate the problem putting forward by the situation where non-Brahmans are the exploiters, even the Elite-Dalit groups who are further creating a distinction between non-elite-Dalits.

Moreover, by conceptualizing the category Dalit, it is also turning a blind eye towards the multiple jati realities where there are many lower and untouchable castes that are continuously getting marginalized and exploited. Dalit studies are taking only caste as their criteria for analysis but class and religion equally plays an important role in the contemporary era. West Bengal is an example of this where the socio-economic and cultural environment is very different from that of the rest of India. Dalit groups in many parts of the country shows that there exist a very rigid hierarchy among Dalit castes just like in case of Brahmans but which is relatively claimed to be absent in case of West Bengal. It is argued that the reason behind the lack of rigidity of hierarchy within a caste group in West Bengal may be due to the reason that here the society is more multi-religious and multi-ethnic. So, the mixing of various religion, ethnicity and class is more out here, hence less rigidity. Dalit literature per se is also limited here compared to the Dalit literature of other parts like that of south India and Maharashtra.

It is difficult and controversial to universalize Dalits. Caste issue has not featured significantly here in case of West Bengal, though Dalits - as the term goes, constitute a huge part of the population. Just like the way caste and the issue of Dalit feature in political discourse in few of the states it is not featured here in West Bengal but that does not mean that caste is non-existent here. It is quite prevalent but mainly in domestic sphere and spheres of marriage and has been kept relatively absent from public discourse more forcefully. It is also due to the hegemony exercised by Bengali intellectuals whose ideologies are that caste is something traditional, backward and hence not modern. It is a pre-modern institution. Also, it is claimed that the people here are more mobilized in terms of class which also happened because of left movement out here but small number of caste movements took place in the name of Namashudra movement of 1950s which was not quite a success. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay in his case study on Namashudras showed that movements among the lower castes like Namashudra of West Bengal aimed at upward cultural mobility for material and political advancement. Namashudras were during the pre-colonial period refuted their low ritual status and socio-economic and political alienation, but during the contemporary period they are being vocal about the fact that they are the most excluded category. The case of Namashudras who are historically exploited caste group and who are not only facing persistent social humiliation but also economic exploitation is being excluded in Dalit Studies as a theoretical discourse. In recent times we see that the Namashudras of this region are being articulated into the cult named Matua for an alternative spiritual and religious identity. But despite of having a Guru for the cult this ex-untouchable caste community is unable to get a separate identity through the cult in the name of Matua.

The case of West Bengal in terms of anti-caste politics is very grim. The caste associations are visibly absent in case of West Bengal. Backward castes are profoundly present but are not productively motivated to extract out of their miserable condition and establish themselves as political subject Dalit. This is the difference between the case of West Bengal and other states like Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar where Dalits as political subjects are visibly present and plays a crucial role. Pressure groups are, though, arising in West Bengal from low castes and backward communities like Rajbansis of North Bengal. There is substantial presence of caste question in West Bengal but are unable to articulate the present-day Dalit political question. There are separatist tendencies like that of Kamtapuri movement demanding separate state for their community's development from exclusion. Here the situation gets coloured and enveloped by the

false consciousness that class position of a person is much more than the case position which is specifically put forward by Bengali *bhadralok* discourse. The vast mass of ex-untouchable and low castes are present in rural as well as urban setting of West Bengal and are receiving political leadership from mass parties and organizations. The distribution of land by left government that is during the “barga” programme, it is claimed that much of the land is given to the so called dalits but rather these lands are actually passing into the hands of rich and prosperous peasants in West Bengal in the form of sale or lease. The development activities are not much helping at the grass root levels where the poor low caste people reside rather the development programmes are helping the affluent class people where elite-dalits are also present. Examples can be drawn from Birbhum and Midnapore districts specifically. Due to the domination of status achieved by education and service industry, a huge category of middle class is created here which includes people from all caste groups. This middle class is not only present in urban set up but also in rural setting. Due to this high visibility of middle class who gives much importance to education, the state is promoting their status and neglecting those at the bottom. These downtrodden poor and low caste people are ignored from most of the theoretical discourses since their condition is understood more in terms of class, education and power rather than caste. But data shows that the downtrodden, marginalized and poor people of urban and rural areas are mostly belong to the low and ex-untouchable castes.

Conceptualization of the Dalit: A Critique

Both this essentialist and instrumentalist interpretations with the urge to form a separate and alternative identity has led Dalit Studies attempting to homogenize all low caste and untouchable groups under the concept of Dalit, where they are encapsulating their life-experiences as one by talking that their socio-economic and religious conditions are as same. However, as we see in case of West Bengal, if we look at the marginalization of Dalits then we cannot understand it only by taking caste as a parameter because class, religion and ethnicity are equally important variable to be factored in for understanding their existential reality. The Scheduled Castes of Bengal do not have a prominent and separate political identity like those of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh and due to various factors the scenario of West Bengal is different but still poverty, marginalization and exploitation of lower castes due to the merging of caste and class cannot be denied but it is not effectively grappled by Dalit Studies because of lack of visibility of low castes here. On the surface level class

consciousness outweighs caste consciousness here in West Bengal which explains the failure of separate Scheduled Caste movement here but that does not mean caste-based exploitation and marginalization is absent. Examples can be drawn from various studies like that of Shekhar Bandyopadhyay's study on Namashudras, Ranabir Sammadar's work on Scheduled Castes of 24 Parganas and many more. These invisible agitations, problems and marginalization of low castes are not made visible by the discourse of Dalit Studies and hence as a result in terms of conceptualization of Dalits, the discourse is excluding these categories where not only caste but also education, politics and class are merging together to create segments and categories like elite-Dalits, middle class, affluent peasants and leaders who are marginalizing the poor low caste people.

Further, one must engage with what Robert Deliege argues:

the world-view of today's untouchables has undoubtedly been influenced by the democratic changes in Indian society. What is less clear, however, is whether untouchables were closer to Hindu orthodoxy and referred to religious concepts to legitimize their inferior position in the past, as Weber has argued. Untouchable myths of origin, the antiquity of which is well established, can be taken as a good illustration of the way untouchables view - and viewed - themselves and their place in society. The myth of origin widely held by untouchables throughout India claims that untouchables were originally respectable people whose present condition is the result of a misunderstanding, rather than of some inherent defect. The myth thus contests the position of untouchables within the caste system, though not the system itself, whose ideological foundations it continues to uphold. This ambiguity is typical of the position of untouchables within Indian society more generally (Deliege 1993: 533-549).

Argument of Berreman in this regard is found to hold ground where he states that:

One of the best-known findings-now a truism in the field of social stratification is that people are stratified, ranked, or socially valued on different dimensions or even different scales, simultaneously and situationally. Failure to recognize this is one of the rocks upon which studies of stratification have repeatedly foundered. It is one of several which imperils the course of those studying caste ranking in India.

I would, however, warn of a greater methodological sin: minimizing conflicts by not asking the relevant questions. One can... avoid the problem of multiple hierarchies by limiting himself to one hierarchy, or one aspect of a hierarchy, explicitly defined. One can also avoid the problem... by simply asking informants to rank the caste names; that is, by failing to confront the problem of the bases for the ranking. When asked to rank caste names, informants will do so, as the evidence testifies. They even do so with a high degree of agreement. What they have done, however, is a matter for speculation, especially since we do not know precisely how they were asked... Low caste informants, for example, might have ranked the castes in secular terms (economic standing, political influence), while high caste informants ranked them in ritual terms... Or, as a result of different interpretations of the question posed, one individual might have ranked the castes on the basis of ritual purity, another on wealth, another on style of life, another on education, etc. In view of status summation, rankings according to these different criteria would be likely to result in congruent hierarchies, giving the appearance of a single hierarchy. Wallace (1963: 27-29, 31ff) has made a major point of the fact that similar behavior can result from diverse motives, cognitions, and basic assumption.

Unless we can demonstrate the referents of a hierarchy, it is risky to claim that it represents a single, all-inclusive, or even paramount system of rank. As Aberle has noted (1959: 125) "Neither in the present nor the past can the ritual ranking of castes be understood without reference to the political and economic systems in which they are embedded." Neither can that ranking be understood apart from the values which underlie it or the interaction which expresses it (Berreman 1965: 123-125, 127).

The conceptualization of Dalit is unable to take into account the multiple *jati*-based realities and deprivations: Michael in his book says:

...it is well known that there is an intellectual critique and challenge to the very term 'Dalit' especially from the post-modernist and post structuralist scholars. Some intellectuals and activists are of the view that the term "Dalit" is hostile to the ex-Untouchables of today and this term has no ontological abilities and hermeneutic capacities of its own to help the ex-Untouchables in their total emancipation.

Thus, the category Dalit faces violent rejection both from the Dalits and from the non-Dalits (Michael 2007: 14-15).

There is a certain need for this theoretical construct of Dalit. Few scholars argue that there is a definite political necessity to hold on to this notion since constructs like Anarya, Shudra etc. have become out of date history. Akio Tanabe has rightly observed Raheja's notion of 'shifting positionality', where positionality and interrelationships shift between the principles of centrality, hierarchy and mutuality according to context and viewpoints, is useful in doing away with the scheme of presenting an overarching principle as in the Dumontian (hierarchy) or neo-Hocartian (centrality) positions [Raheja 1988]. However, her notion tends to fall to post-modernist relativism where everything is reduced to context and viewpoints, and lacks sensitivity to the actual politico-social structure in history in which these principles were embedded or the interrelationships between the three principles which should be coherent enough to make social reproduction possible (Tanabe 2006: 789).

One of the major theoretical fallacy can be observed in Dalit Studies is that by only taking into account of inducing exclusion of other lower and untouchable caste as the parameter to understand Indian society and inequality and discrimination is at best partial in nature. During the early years of Independence, it was assumed that caste system and the disabilities embedded in it will be abolished in the independent India, but rather caste has acquired a new form, and it has also changed to a great extent as a system of social relations. Tanabe rightly puts it that "...the ontology of caste, that is sacrificial principle, takes a particular form and meaning in contemporary context and how it is (not) connected to the moral basis of society" (Tanabe 2002). Caste system and its rigidity or flexibility is not uniform in different parts of India and as a result it has not created uniform status. This heterogeneity is not properly grasped by the scholars of Dalit Studies and as a result they are excluding few realities where class and religion has penetrated into caste system. The contemporary India and the system of stratification, discrimination, marginalization and exclusion is not solely based on caste but it is furthermore affected by occupation, modes of life, migration, power, education, ownership or non-ownership of power, control over land, bargaining power, competition and moreover caste-class nexus. We cannot understand the situation of exclusion without taking these factors into account. It is not only the status achieved by one's birth that is deciding the extent of exclusion which the Dalit Studies are claiming. The reality varies from place to place and time to time. Caste is not today what

it was during colonial times rather caste has re-constituted itself and emerged in a new form.

Also, in Dalit Studies the question of representation can be raised if one has to make it open and transparent. Does one's status as Dalit automatically make their claim valid or justified, and one's status as non-Dalit make their claim and point of views unjustified, invalid and elitist in nature as the discourse of Dalit Studies claims sometimes directly and indirectly? The so-called all-encompassing nature of Dalit Studies is excluding the voices and positions of non-Dalits. Due to this homogenization of various ex-untouchable *jatis* into the category Dalits, the discourse is unable to grapple with the reality which is not one but many. Reality is continuously constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed. In this multifaceted reality we cannot root our conceptualization in one parameter. The discourse Dalit has based its parameter on only one that is caste which is an essential characteristic of Hinduism. The other factors are not given enough importance. A situation which was a reality 100 years ago might not be a reality now. Though it is undoubtedly true that caste has put forward varieties of social disabilities and social stigma but in this contemporary world and Indian society we cannot rule out the critical presence of class and religion and various new categories created by new age institutions. These plural and diverse forms which are reason enough for exclusions are neglected by the conceptualization of Dalits which is further inducing exclusion of those categories whose boundaries are blurred.

Conclusion

Former untouchable as a broader category has been transfigured into the coinage "Dalit". But this homogenization of the untouchables of India under one platform "Dalit" poses serious theoretical fallacy and as a result proliferate exclusion. Thus, conceptualization of the term "Dalit" which has come to existence in the last three decades, as seen in social science discourse, does not encapsulate the *jati*-based deprivation of the contemporary world as it can be seen in case of West Bengal. Dalit Studies in a way that by conceptualizing the term "Dalit" for the sake of homogenization and antagonization of the historically, socially and economically exploited class, it is in fact turning a blind eye towards the multi-faceted *jati*-realities. As a result, the existing conditions of many untouchable castes are being ignored due to the conceptualization of a uniform term Dalit for all untouchables of India. In this contemporary period Dalit emerged as a new political and ethical subject which challenged existing

accounts of history, politics and culture. Hence there exists a dichotomy in the way Dalit as a discourse is taking its shape as the so-called all-encompassing nature of Dalit Studies, nonetheless, excludes many downtrodden *jatis* as well as the voices and positions of non-Dalits. It is very important for Dalit theoretical discourse to take various methodologies in order to understand the reality of the present times. It has to engage critically in various theoretical discourses and on the field research to grasp the reality because reality is not one but any dependent on time and region. Dalit as a concept the theoretical discourse is still in the making and it will strengthen its position as it tries to understand not just the field and practices in everyday world but also the state of mind.

Note

1. There were caste associations present in the form of low caste associations across India for the upliftment of so-called untouchables from the end of nineteenth century but became more prominent and common in early twentieth century. Caste associations and caste federations are not only restricted to low castes but are also found among the caste categories higher up in hierarchy. The activities involved are mostly in the form of social reform. Like for example Arya Samaj, a Hindu reform movement founded in 1875 and also Adi Hindu movement in Uttar Pradesh. There were ‘Adi’ movements which were the first major attempts among the untouchables to break with Hinduism. The Adi Dravida movement in the south, Ad Dharm in Punjab, Adi Andhra and Namashudra movements are some such movements which were going on at this point of time and created the ground for pan-Indian Dalit movement (Hardtmann 2009; Shah 2004).

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Symbols of Heterosexual Marriage and Negotiations of Heteronormativity: Narratives of Three Generations of Urban Middle-Class Bengali Women Living in Kolkata

Nabamita Das

Abstract: *Through interview-generated narratives of women of three generations of urban middle-class Bengalis living in Kolkata and other auto-ethnographic narrative texts; this paper seeks to examine gender, generation and class specific meanings of intimate heterosexual identities and relations. It focuses on the ways in which subjects negotiate, that is, confirm and interrogate, uphold and challenge, submit and rebel institutionalized heterosexuality or heteronormativity through the practice of bearing, not bearing and negotiating with symbols of marriage. Subjects' ongoing negotiations that tell stories of multiple and contradictory subjectivities, are analyzed to show how personal narratives of intimacy vary across a range of conflicting and competing colonialist, nationalist and trans-nationalist discourses of heterosexuality and cultural mandates of femininity. The paper:*

- *demonstrates that expressions of heterosexual love are socially ordered, culturally learnt and linguistically mediated*
- *examines the power and vulnerability of doing gender and doing class through doing intimacy*
- *brings out the cultural politics of gendering that mediated the colonial history of Bengal*
- *shows how this politics of gendering still reigns strong within a contemporary, urban middleclass Bengali society. This is particularly evident in its women's narratives of respectable middle-class femininity, who have now come to embody a "modern" Bengal, without, however, failing to bear the cultural "authenticity" of her nation, community, and family*
- *critiques the "individualization thesis" of reflexive modernization by demonstrating that practices of heterosexual love overlap with gender and class-cultural practices and are strongly embedded within family relations, both real and imagined, and*

- *interrogates a colonial-modernist concept of unilinear progress by illustrating, through generational narratives of heterosexual intimacy, the shifting meanings and mutual co-constitution of the putative dichotomous categories of “tradition” and “modern”, “East” and “West”.*

Key Words: Gender, love, heterosexuality, intimacy, family, class-culture, generation, postcolonial, reflexive modernization, narrative.

Introduction

Through ethnographic participation-observation and interview-generated narratives of three generations of urban middle-class women living in Kolkata; this paper demonstrates that personal expressions of heterosexuality, are, in fact, socially ordered, culturally learnt and linguistically mediated. The paper, in particular, seeks to illustrate gender, generation, and class specific meanings of intimate heterosexual identities and relations (Lawler 1999; Skeggs 1997; Jamieson 1998). It analyses the ways in which women give meaning to the institutional imperatives of Hindu, Bengali marital symbols borne only by them as mark of being married. Through this, it focuses on the ways in which these women negotiate; that is, confirm and interrogate, uphold and challenge, submit and rebel, institutionalized heterosexuality or hetero-normativity (Van Every 1996) at the inter and intra subjective levels of everyday expressions/practices of heterosexuality (Richardson 1996; Smart 1996; Jackson 1996). Subjects' ongoing negotiations at these inter-subjective levels tell stories of multiple and often contradictory subjectivities and “practices of intimacy” (Jamieson 2011) that vary across a range of discourses (Weedon 1987; Leahy 1994: 49); that are not amenable to rigid categorizations in terms of “modern” generation as opposed to the “traditional” generation, powerful and powerless, passive and active subjectivities (Mohanty 1991). Overall, the paper acknowledges heterosexual intimate practices as diverse heterosexuality rather than a monolithic, trans-historical heterosexuality (Smart 1996: 166, 170) and critically interrogates Giddens' (1991, 1992) theory of reflexive modernization that propounds universalized globalization, individualization and de-rationalization in the context of a “transformation of intimacy”.

Methodology

Methodologically committed to the concept of narrative as a typical form of social life (MacIntyre 1990: 129) and life as “storied” lives (Somers

1994; Riessman 1993; Weedon 2004) that are continuously constructed through varying narrations, hearing and telling (Jackson 1998), the paper focuses on how subjects themselves give meaning to bearing marital symbols. A focus on narrative and narrativity is able to appreciate the social construction of identity that is at once “temporal, relational, and cultural, as well as institutional, material and macro-structural” (Somers 1994: 607). The analysis of this paper is based on the findings of a field-based research carried out as part of a doctoral dissertation in the year 2010-11 and continued as an auto-ethnographic exploration thereafter by virtue of the researcher’s cultural participation into the field of enquiry. 26 women were interviewed across three generations. Generations were marked through age groupings and also through subjects’ relationships within the family. Subjects’ age ranged from 21 years to 71 years with many subjects representing the transitional age cohort between one generation and the other, allowing for continuity in cultural analysis. The generational splits through age groupings are as follows:

Third Generation	20-35 years
Second Generation	45-60 years
First Generation	70 years and above

Subjects’ reported speeches have been translated, retaining their culturally contextual meanings as far as possible. Prior permissions of subjects were taken to publish their photos and an ethic of dialogical research and auto-ethnography were maintained (Reed-Danahay 1997). Subjects were based in the city of Kolkata and their class identities were discerned by subjective identifications of themselves as middle-class Bengalis. Subjects’ narratives indicate middle-class location as ambiguous and fragmented. As an urban middle-class Bengali woman, I confess at the outset that my approach to this research and to the production of its sociological narrative does not assume unmediated, un-negotiated objectivity. Instead, it critically acknowledges positionalities of gender, class, generation and subjectivity of theoretical and methodological inclinations including the context of knowledge production; that variously shaped the narrative of this research (Plummer 1983; Steier 1991).

Marital Symbols: Institutional imperatives and subjective negotiations

A pair of *shakha* (white bangles of conch-shell), a pair of *pala* (red bangles made of red corals), *loha* (iron bangle) and *shindur* (vermillion applied in the parting of the hair) have traditionally been coded as symbols of a married Hindu Bengali *bhadramahila*. These symbols culturally signify good omen; a woman who bears such symbols ensures her husband's well-being and long life. Breaking of the bangles, particularly within the first year of marriage is, thus, considered inauspicious. This is strongly tied to the hetero-normative ideal of institutional marriage where unmarried women should not wear the symbols and widows are denied the "privilege" of bearing them. Widows, in addition, are also prohibited from wearing anything that is red in colour as red is codified with a meaning of sexuality that is only permitted within the licit boundaries of legal institutionalised heterosexual marriage. Myths about these symbols particularly the iron bangle, connote patriarchal territorial conquest. Such territorialisation of land can be metaphorically read in the context of marriage as men's sexual conquest and possession over women and their bodies. This paper, however, is concerned with how subjects make meaning to this ritual practice rather than trying to locate and trace the cultural history of these practices. In this, it is a study of the contemporary cultural practices and negotiations that can either take into account or can be unaware of how these practices emerged, if at all its emergence can be certainly traced. How myths take meaning in people's everyday lives is what this paper is going to be concerned with.

Popular representations of a married Hindu Bengali woman both within and across cultures, stereotype her in a "traditional" attire of a sari bearing all marital symbols. Such stereotypical representation is read from some nationalist perspectives to symbolise a *patibratanari* (husband worshipping woman) and from some radical feminist perspectives, to symbolise an oppressed victim of patriarchy. Both these perspectives read the "text" from outside, imposing their meaning rather than privileging the actor's meaning who could neither be *patibrata* nor oppressed and could possibly be re-signifying the stereotypical associations of these marital symbols by giving new meanings to bearing them. However, although meaning at one level is re-signified and creatively imbued with individual interpretation, no interpretation or re-signification is ever completely outside the broader chain of significations, or some kind of a discourse (Foucault 1990; Butler 1990).

By recognising the instability of meanings (Hall 1997), this paper appreciates from a post-colonial feminist lens, the necessity to take caution before

orientalising, exoticising and culturally homogenising “other” heterosexual expressions that are, in fact, plural, contradictory and nuanced (Spivak 1990; Mohanty 1991; Bulbeck 1998). The interactionist (Jackson and Scott 2010) and post-colonial feminist perspectives in this context offer varying and challenging modes of “reading resistance” in subjects’ everyday practices of intimacy. This way of reading resistance will interrogate the cultural stereotype of the “average third world woman” as victim (Mohanty 1991: 72). The paper will bring out subjects’ reflexive and creative negotiations of institutionalised heterosexuality but will also show how that such reflexivity is shaped and limited by subjects’ field and habitus (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 16-19; Lash 1994: 120), kinship and family relations, both real and imagined (Smart 2007; Morgan 1996) and a generational reproduction of gendered embodiments (Jamieson [1998] 1999).

The photo below is an instance of a Hindu Bengali ritual marriage where the man puts *shindur* on the woman’s forehead.

Photo-1: Illustrates a moment of Sindooradaan (giving the Sindoor) in Bengali Hindu ritual marriage.

[Source: Tanya Roy’s marriage album]



Many women, particularly within the age group of 50-70 years who regularly bear these symbols without “fail”, stress on the religious significance of such symbols but often comply with such practices as non-reflexive performance of routinised habit. 55-year-old home-maker Arpita narrates how the practice of wearing *shindur* has become a part of her everyday attire. The “failure” to uphold this practice, narrativised as disturbance of her Bengali, Hindu femininity and wifehood, demonstrates the naturalisation of this heterosexual practice. Such practices that familiarise her with the everydayness of hetero-reality are imbued with hegemonic gender, religious and communal codes where, a woman’s identity is equated with her identity

as someone's wife, and with the hetero-normative collective sentiment of the Hindu, Bengali community. Pushpa, 71-year-old, has lost her husband a year ago. She expresses her grief by saying that she is not as "fortunate" as her mother who passed away as "lucky" as a "rajrani" (queen) before her husband with her *shakha-sindoor* "intact". 40-year-old Dipti, a bank manager on the other hand complains how she is often pressurised to uphold these norms of marriage when she visits her husband's extended family. 51-year-old Dola similarly narrates how she is often talked about amongst her female colleagues for not conforming with such norms of marriage and being the "odd" one out. These hegemonic codes of heterosexual femininity are reinforced by the patriarchal institutions at large, policed within micro-interactive spaces of female homosociality and most effectively internalised as an integral part of heterosexual personhood by women themselves.

There are women who are sceptical of the religious significance of marital symbols and its regulative tradition but cannot deny completely, their semiotic value as "meaning-constitutive traditions" (Gross 2005: 288) which involve patterns of sense-making transmitted from one generation to the next. 32-year-old Suparna, an engineer says,

I am not a "big believer or something" of wearing *shindur* but since I have always seen ma wear it and how significant it is for her; it feels a little "strange" for me not to wear it at all. Moreover, being newlywed, it is a little "odd" to immediately break familiar taken-for-granted marital traditions in-laws' presence. So, I just wear it like a very small "dot" so that it cannot be easily visible. That way you take care of all sentiments! (Expresses contentment on her face).

Suparna's narrative brings out the concept of self as embedded within one's family relations and traditions (Smart 2007: 188) and as constituted by shared generational meanings that enable and pose limits to the self's unbounded creativity and agency which the individualisation thesis seems to unproblematically champion (Jamieson 1999; Gross 2005; Smart 2007). Suparna and many other women of her generation do not necessarily equate their femininity with such symbols. However, they cannot completely deny the semiotic value of marital symbols and hence bear them in a way that is inconspicuous. They often avoid the *shakha* and *pala* but rarely the gold made ornamental *loha* and bear the *shindur* by paradoxically concealing it. Women's modern professional identities and trans-national representation of self through "smart western wear", in 30-year-old Dia's words

sometimes seem to be at odds with the supposed traditional conformity with bearing marital symbols. Therefore, they negotiate this “traditional” practice that is also a part of their “modern” identity at the inter-subjective and the intra-subjective level, in a strategic way if not by its outright rejection.

Such negotiations appreciate the co-existence of otherwise dichotomous categories of “tradition” and “modernity” within an ambivalent third space of hybridity and manifest “interstitial agency” of “cultures in-between” (Bhabha 1996: 58). The next narrative will go further than the concept of hybridity to problematise the very category of “tradition” and “modern”. 30-year-old Anandita, a journalist narrates disdainfully,

I find wearing *shakha* and *pala*, but not so much *loha* as quite *gaiya* (of the rural) and “backward” *shekelepratha* (past traditions)! Although she claims, “love and marriage do not need symbols of proof”, she contradictorily wears her diamond wedding ring which she narrates as very “special” to me as it symbolises our “togetherness” and lifelong coupling.

It is interesting to appreciate Anandita’s subjectivity as fragmented and contradictory where she, at once confirms and rejects the semiotic registers of heterosexual love, romance and conjugality. What is more sociologically significant in this contradictory narrative is the influence of a broader orientalist politics of time and progress. It is interesting to note her chain of significations of *shakha* and *pala* as “rural” and rural as backward and backward as traditional, whereas it’s relational binary, the Eurocentric wedding ring, now cross-culturally widely accepted as part of a wedding vow, comes to be relationally signified as part of an urban, progressive and modern heterosexual identity. This association of an almost naturalised Western signifier of coupling with modernity and modernity with urbanity and urbanity with progress and progress with romantic monogamous marriage, narrativised as “lifelong coupling”, trans-nationally reproduces the hegemonic codes of heterosexual intimacy. This orientalist politics of a progressive Western form of coupling, is set against its “other”, the traditional, backward, rural significations of coupling that may often tell the same story.

It is also interesting to see how many women “modernize” these “traditional” marital symbols by wearing more decorative *shakha* and *pala* to exhibit it as an accessory or read in another way, as a spectacle of consumption. 53-year-old home-maker Gayatri narrates,

I have decorated my *shnakha* with gold patterns to make it appear as a “modern” accessory. I’ve also made it sleek. The clumsy ugly thick traditional ones look really *gaiya*. This way you don’t avoid wearing the *shakha* which may bring bad omen.

Gayatri simultaneously narrativises traditional symbols of marriage as an unavoidable part of self yet constraining; metaphorically represented through adjectives like “clumsy”, “thick” and “ugly”. To keep alive these traditional symbols, they need to be “decorated” and made “sleak”. Gayatri’s narrative makes a local tradition of heterosexuality viable within and through the globalised, capitalistic model of intimacy (Lasch 1977).

The traditional significance of marital symbols is also often secularised by re-defining and re-interpreting its religious value. This is evident in the narratives of women who do not regularly bear marital symbols but wear them as accessories to enhance a ‘traditional’ Bengali look’ represented by a white sari with a red border worn particularly although not exclusively during Bengali cultural festivities and religious ceremonies. A non-conformity with these Hindu ritualistic notions of marriage interrogates patriarchal gendered codes but cannot be seen as radical enough to lie outside of the codes of institutional marriage. No subjects narrated wearing them as accessories before they were married. This secular use of symbols as accessories also affirms hegemonic codes of middle-class Hindu Bengaliness that marks off through the Bengali bhadramahila’s body, the non-Bengali, the non-Hindu “others”. Women come to represent the cultural “authenticity” of a particular nation/community and bodily bear its claimed cultural superiority over “others” (Sarkar 2001, Chatterjee 1989).

Photo-2 The second woman from the right is married, wearing a sari with all the symbols of marriage on the occasion of Durga Puja, the most widely celebrated religious festival of the Bengalis.



Shindur Khela, literally translated as vermillion play is a Hindu Bengali cultural ritual performed during the fourth and final day of the most important Bengali religious-cultural festival of the worship of goddess Durga, the symbol of good over evil and the epitome of feminine strength. Shindur Khela is performed by married women although unmarried women also often take part in the “play”. Sindoor is rubbed onto each other’s faces and particularly onto the forehead of those married. Played within an intra-gender intimate space, this ritual symbolises marital happiness within and through female homosociality. 22-year-old student Chandrika and her cousin sisters, of whom one is married, get together for their family Durga Puja. She says,

We have a lot of fun putting *shindur* on each other’s’ cheeks. Sometimes, playfully in “fun”, we put it on each other’s’ forehead just to feel like we are married and imagine how we might look after we get married (shyly smiles). Boys also play along in this fun and act as if they were husband to their “girlfriend” and “would-be-wife”.

Photo-3 Illustrates the ritual of shindurkhela during the Bengal festival of Durga Puja.

[Photo 2&3, Source: Chandrika Podder’s personal album]



The communal and gendered connotation underpinning Shindur Khela, thus reproduces the “heterosexual imaginary” (Ingraham 1996) through the most effective means of “playful fun”.

31-year-old Sunanda is a teacher of the social sciences in a college. She claims,

As modern, progressive and educated women of today, we should not unreflectively and passively remain oppressed victims of male domination and its taken-for-granted rituals. Else, how would it differentiate us from the *shadharon modhhyo bittyo* (ordinary middle-class). I told my partner that forget about my wearing *shakha sindoor*, I will only get married if we just have a “court marriage” and a simple “engagement ring exchange ceremony” rather than go through all that “meaningless high caste Brahmanical Hindu ritual marriage”. Although my in-laws are pretty traditional and conservative and I knew they would not easily accept just a legal marriage, I told my partner that if he “cared” for me then he will have to “convince” his parents.

Sunanda’s resistance to “meaningless” rituals makes a “reflexive” political language of resistance to hegemonic codes of gender and casteism. In resisting a patriarchal religious discourse, however, she complies with a patriarchal legal discourse of legitimate institutionalised marriage. The Westernised ritual of ring ceremony adapted within the Bengali *bhadrasamaj* illustrates again local adaptations of hegemonic codes of trans-national intimacy (Puri 1999).

Sunanda’s “modern”, “educated” “progressive” middle-class self is contrasted with the “shadharon” and ‘oppressed’ other. These invocations of self-identity in relation to her intimate space politicise certain hierarchical value judgment that distinguishes the self from the other. Sunanda’s directly narrativised and implied binary can be seen to be an influence of hegemonic Western modernity and feminism (Mohanty 1991). What Sunanda’s educated, modern, progressive, self-reflexivity fails to critically interrogate is her conformity to a trans-national discourse of hetero-normative intimacy and a monolithic feminism that stereotypes and homogenises identity, experience and practices.

Conclusion

Subjects’ narratives empirically illustrate Foucault’s claim (1990: 95) that ‘where there is power there is resistance’. However, these empirical cases also illustrate the relatively less quoted second part of Foucault’s claim – ‘and yet or rather consequently this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power’ (95). Claims to different forms and practices

of intimacies such as “modern”, “progressive” or “traditional” may be ‘personal’ narratives of the self but nevertheless highly mediated by power relations and broader discourses of subject formation. Empirical instances of intimacy within contemporary post-colonial Bengal show that the theories of reflexive modernisation over exaggerate unbounded agency of unbridled individuals, fail to appreciate specific socio-cultural connectedness of personal lives (Smart 2007) that are, in fact, embedded within “meaning-constitutive traditions” (Gross 2005), structural and cultural relations of family, kinship, gender, generation (Jamieson 1998, 1999, 2011), and embodied class-culture through “habitus” (Bourdieu 1984).

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Understanding Happiness: Secrecy and Fantasy as Modes

Arunima Bhowmick

Abstract: *Happiness as a social concern, extending into a field of study, has been a phenomenon of the last three to four decades. This departure was seen with economists finding correlates to patterns in consumption and psychologists locating social indicators of happiness to support mental wellbeing. In fact, the term “wellbeing” became a more precise and acceptable one for providing a holistic understanding of happiness 1970s onwards. My focus in this paper is to travel back from this era of social indicative research and locate the position of classical thinkers of Sociology with regard to happiness. Thereby finding a platform to address the epistemological problematics in handling “happiness” as an object of social research presently. Sociology has seen a long absence of research in subjective wellbeing, though there has been perennial enquiry into the position of the individual in construction of society. The debates brought to focus by economists like Richard Layard on happiness fosters enough challenge to the ideas of subjective wellbeing and the objective social indicators used to explain the same. However, this position has a very strong emphasis on one’s “understanding” and “expectations”, both indicative of a regular journey between objective attributes of happiness and subjective negotiations. This paper tries to find ways into this negotiated world of secrets that lies on the other side of the objective reality, arriving at a social that offers its own methodological tools and ontological position for explaining the disjuncture and convergence in ideas of happiness.*

Keywords: Happiness, secrecy, fantasy, wellbeing, negotiated happiness.

Introduction

Happiness is the prime pursuit of every individual and to fulfill so, the concern of society and its makers remain in defining ways of attaining it. Happiness is a familiar as well as diverse idea in terms of social, cultural and political history, not one especially confined to philosophical deliberations. The concept gains close links with human action, exceeding the realm of ideas, in the works as early as those of Aristotle. In the Nicomachean Ethics (350

BCE), Aristotle stated that happiness is “the human good” - the only thing that humans desire for its own sake and own sake alone. A similar narrative can be derived from a dialogue delivered by Don Draper, the protagonist of an American television series called “Mad Men”¹. Don says, ‘What is happiness? It’s a moment before you need more happiness’. Both Aristotle and Don seem to be associating happiness with something good, desirable and an achievement in itself. Therefore, an active drive to attain a certain state of being (influenced by changing social conditions) is the constant factor for defining and revisiting happiness, simultaneously negating the “unhappy”. This hints at the prime episteme and the varied directions that can be explored to understand the same.

Much empirical evidences can be found, both from our everyday practices and structural formulations that repeatedly coax for a revisit into ideas of happiness. For me two evidences have worked very strongly. First, advertising taglines such as “Khushiyonki Home Delivery” (Domino’s Pizza), “Khushiyonki Chaabi” (Tata Nano motor vehicles), Khushiyonki Planning (Max Life Insurance Co.)² draw our attention to happiness as a superfluous notion that is being used to signify plenty of valuable things, confusing utility with exchange value. Secondly, the World Happiness Report of 2018 as published by the United Nation. The report mentions two interesting indicators of happiness among others; generosity and perceptions of corruption. Both evidences brought to cognizance that the subjective action in pursuit of happiness is guided by needs that are objectively prescribed and collective actions is an imperative.

Under such circumstances there is bound to be plurality of aims as well as conflicts among them, both at the level of individual and collective understanding of happiness. Thus, my attempt in this paper will be at delineating the subjective vs the objective and the individual vs the collective. In doing so I shall travel back and locate the position of classical thinkers with regard to happiness in Sociology, finding a platform to address the epistemological concerns with “happiness” presently. Sociology has seen a long absence of research in subjective wellbeing, though there has been perennial enquiry into the position of the individual in construction of society and the problems encountered in doing so. The historicity of happiness in human civilization has always been substantiated with intellectual endeavors and sought scientific explanations. At times it has been explicit and occasionally implicit. In a similar strain I would make a journey into both the explicit and subtle enquires, building grounds for offering an explanation for “happiness” in secrecy and a parallel world of fantasy. Though my

preoccupation will be with the epistemological position, a suggestive methodological possibility shall be couched in the issues that I highlight for understanding “happiness”.

History of the idea of happiness

Happiness found close links with the moral order of society in ancient times. The divine intervention in human life was seen as the ultimate intellectual source guiding human action. Explanation for happiness was sought in everything that was “morally good”³. Utilitarian conception of good was relegated to the margins, if not bracketed out as something bad and hedonistic. The will of God was seen as supreme and unchangeable. Hence “this-worldly” pleasures were often considered as defiance of the supreme and sufferings were destined for ones expelled from heaven. Human conduct was bound by religious principles and so was the understanding of happiness. Human rationality was perceived as too limited to count on and it would do better to rely on traditional wisdom and divine revelation (Ruut Veenhoven 2016). Similarly, the *Advaita Vedanta* offers the theory of non-dualism with a conviction that man is endowed with an innate quality of being (sat), consciousness (chit) and unalloyed happiness (ananda)⁴. He only has to look within to experience the jiva as an embodiment of the macrosmic existence. Refusing to rely merely on conceptual speculation, Advaita resorts to reasoning and scriptural authority to arrive at a conclusion that the “embodied self” is essentially the Supreme Self. It concludes that happiness or bliss is man’s innate quality and that it is not accrued from outside one’s self. Seeking happiness outside is man’s misdirected effort in attaining happiness. Thus, we see divine as the source for determining bliss, though not from similar or a single standpoint. Interpretation of the divine and its reach into the secular life have been diverse, following different school of thought. For instance, the Protestants in the West and Charbak Philosophy of the East.

The 18th century European Enlightenment challenged these ideas of divine control of human life and his chances to a more fulfilling/happy life. Some upheld the loving god over the punishing one. Thinkers proposed the idea of rational man and society a product of rational human contracts, which can be revised in view of undesirable consequences. Happiness still remained something to be closely associated with good life with over tones of morality. However, the role of human agency in attaining happiness gained some prominence. The English philosopher and father of modern Utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) said, ‘it is the greatest

happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong' (Burn 2005)⁵ Thus good or bad and associated sense of happiness cannot be determined by abstract moral principle, but by the reality of consequences in human life. Here came the hint of pleasure in the articulation of happiness. Another remarkable scientific position raising doubts on the juxtaposed view of morality and happiness can be seen in Emile Durkheim's (1858-1917) concept of "collective effervescence", the group mind of the individual influencing subjective well-being. Nevertheless, the celebration of the group mind and its production of a sense of elation makes us apprehensive about the subjective, pleasure seeking self. It puts to question the role of social sanctions and mores in generating a uniform condition for happiness, its feasibility and thereby, lack of human agency.

However, the ideological framework of happiness for the greatest number drew governments and initiated the use of scientific measures in defining happiness thereafter. Though not without opposition from the then liberals and socialists who had gained strength by the late nineteenth century, policy formulation and state regulation for human good and prosperity continued. However, by the beginning of 20th century the heightened spirit of Nationalism and nation building diverted the attention towards the altruistic goals and happiness as an individual endeavor became less important. Happiness found a new indicator for itself in human freedom. Democracy, civil society and organized collective life delegated immense value to individual freedom, equality and rights protecting the individual identity as well as non-subjugated collective life. Happiness found new roadmaps traversing the individual to collective and vice-versa.

Revival of the enquiry

As we see from the times of enlightenment, the foundations for happiness studies had already been laid. A renewed interest in happiness was seen in the later 20th century with the passing of the two world wars and its lingering ills. Democracy and peacemaking became the pressing concern of the power blocs. Individual freedom became an imperative for social and economic progress. Happiness became the new undisputed political agenda with welfarist policy reforms finding a revised mention, holding the hands of the socialists and liberals.

Such changes in the socio-political environment along with technical development accelerated empirical social science research into happiness. The journey that had begun with finding 'good life' had made its way into

“wellbeing” and “life-satisfaction”. Surveys and self-reports gained importance in Social Indicator Research by the 1970s for providing a quantitative value to life satisfaction in economics and positive psychology. The first surveys on happiness were conducted in 1940s in the USA as part of public opinion research (AIPO studies, Easterlin 1973). In the 1950s happiness became a parameter for understanding psychological and social conditions of aging (Kutner et. al. 1956). Mental health research also saw a good inclusion of happiness by the 1960s. Interestingly, since 2012 happiness research is conducted by The Global Happiness Council (GHC)⁶ every year. A new global network of leading academic specialists in happiness and key practitioners in areas ranging from psychology, economics, urban planning, civil society has been built to discuss best practices at the national and local levels, and encourage advancement of the causes of happiness and well-being.

Besides, several happiness surveys have been done in market research aimed at identifying client groups. And welfare policy investigations have been studying happiness to find correlation between social deprivation and unhappiness so that they can legitimize policy intervention. In this regard, Richard Layard the proponent of Happiness Economics⁷ states that as people keep achieving higher income levels, their idea of sufficient income index keeps moving farther. This keeps them engaged in work and in turn dismissing activities that might provide an experience of wellbeing, showing little correlation between happiness and income position.

On a similar line of thought, Daniel Kahneman has presented the idea of “focusing illusion” to show how affective emphasis on any single factor for happiness distorts the understanding of subjective life satisfaction. Like total utility, objective happiness is a moment-based concept, which is operationalized exclusively by measures of the affective state of individuals at particular moments in time. In this respect, objective happiness differs from standard measures of subjective well-being. The term “objective” is used because the judgment of happiness is made according to objective rules. The ultimate data for the judgment are, of course, subjective experiences (Kahneman and Tversky 2000)⁸.

Sociological distancing

Preoccupation with subjective well-being or happiness in its pure form has been rare in sociology. Reasons for such a pressing concern lying in the margins of a discipline so integrally associated with understanding society and individuals could be varied. Three categories of reason could be offered

to explain this disciplinary distancing: sociology on pragmatic terms has always remained concerned with social action rather than human feelings. Sociology seeks to explain social behavior and happiness is merely an underlying cause or effect of the same. In fact, happiness bears the risk of engaging in a tautological dilemma of being treated as a cause as well as effect.

Besides, it fosters an enquiry into the individual state of being, which sociology has always tried to abandon in its singularity. Secondly, sociology began its journey as a science for dealing with “social order” and ideologically maintained a position of indifference, if not total negation, in the lack of order or “the unhappy”. Sociologists like to remain the harbinger of social equality and cohesion, and notions driving them to celebrate anything contrary probably sets in some uneasiness. Finally, the difficulty in recording and measuring an idea like happiness, which is based on transitory variables, could put to question the “science” called sociology.

In sociology subjective experiences comes to be closely related to ideas such as *anomie*, *alienation*, *deprivation*, and *relativepoverty*. *Anomie* delves into the normlessness as fall out of the change in moral climate, and *alienation* as the collective feeling of being ruled by a system to which they are not a part (Beerling 1978). Hence, we see a search for reason to explain unhappiness and in turn becoming predisposed to the normative structures that ultimately aim at restoring happiness. This specificity in sociological research came with a political aim to locate social problems and address them rather than obsess with happiness.

Thus, an absolute absence of research into happiness in sociology isn't a true story. Thinkers like Auguste Comte (1851–1854), had mentioned about “*bonheur*” (happiness) to show how social progress gave rise to intellectual enlightenment as society moved from one state of consensus and ideological uprising to another (Ple 2000). In studies on deviation and crime too sociology makes an indirect approach towards happiness. Weberian methodological drift to interpretive sociology could be treated as an initiate to accommodate the subjective conditions of life. And one surely cannot discount the contributions of the social exchange theory and behaviorist school in sociology. George Homans proposed that human social interaction is an extension of economic exchange, where both interacting individuals weigh their rewards and risks (costs) and tries to behave in a fashion that maximizes social rewards, in turn escalating gratification. Thus, Exchange theory examines the processes establishing and sustaining reciprocity in social relations, or the mutual gratifications between individuals. The basic

assumption being that the individuals establish and continue social relations keeping in mind the mutual advantage. The initial impetus for social interaction is provided by the exchange of benefits, intrinsic and extrinsic, independently of normative obligations (Blau 1994: 152-6).

Assessing happiness - new directions in Sociology

In present society people not only seek to be happy but have begun to evaluate the kind of happiness they avail or fail to avail. With scientific research providing more view of conditions of happiness, it is commonly understood as *how much one likes the life one lives*, or more formally, the degree to which one evaluates one's life-as-a-whole positively (Veenhoven 2004). Ruut Veenhoven proposes three types of orientation towards happiness: social constructionist perception of subjective well-being as a mental construct, where one is blind of innate desires and affective exuberance. Subjective well-being arises from "reflective appraisal" of shared notions about life. Second, is the social comparative approach to subjective well-being. "Relative deprivation"¹⁰ has often been considered as an important parameter for determining differences in life chances in any society. Comparison offers discrepancy in outlook of life as it is and life as it should be. The less the difference between the two the higher the level of subjective well-being. However, there could be discrepancies at various level; like discrepancies between what one has and what one thinks one could have, and discrepancies between what one has and what one feels entitled to have (Michalos 1985). Both constructionist and comparative view of happiness, states subjective well-being as a regulated state of being that is arrived at through constant judgement. Besides, happiness cannot be heightened after a point.

It is beyond doubt that shared notions frame much of our appraisals, yet it cannot be said that all kinds of awareness are socially constructed. Thus, Veenhoven offers the third and a vital tenet to understanding subjective well-being in terms of "affect". Happiness depends on unreasoned emotional experience, which reflects gratification of needs. He says that affect and cognition are linked, but they are certainly not the same. While Assessing life one draw on both sources of information. In life people appear to use their mood as the prime source of information (Schwartz & Strack 1991), and consequently overall happiness typically correlates more strongly with hedonic levels of affect than with contentment (Veenhoven 2006)¹¹.

Four life qualities

According to Veenhoven, when we discuss happiness or subjective well-being, “quality of life” is our prime focus. In understanding quality, we need to consider both the subjective conditions and objective appraisal of life. To make it more explicit, he offers four qualities of life to evaluate happiness.

<i>Outer qualities</i>		<i>Inner qualities</i>
<i>Life-chances</i>	Livability of environment	Life-ability of the person
<i>Life-results</i>	Utility of life	Satisfaction

Source: Veenhoven (2000). *New Directions in the Study of Happiness: United States and International Perspectives*, University of Notre Dame, USA.

The two upper quadrants denote the “livability” of a social setting to which the individual belongs and life-ability is the person’s ability to make situations conducive for a happy life. Ability can be a very strong determinant, as best of livability conditions can fail to offer desired happiness. However, a significant ontological question remains on how far the socio-cultural and political conditions (livability) sustain life’s abilities.

The two lower quadrants tell us about the life goals that are determined by the social needs and motivations. Whereas satisfaction is something innate and subjective appreciation of life. Fulfilling “affective needs”¹² remains the prime focus after all. Thus, none of the life chances and its results work separately or in negation of each other, rather it’s the interplay between the culturally defined demands and life’s needs that get adapted at subjective level through affective appraisal. A variation in this context is proposed by Daniel Kahneman’s (2000) notion of “objective happiness”, which is the “raw” affective experience that underlies the overall evaluation of life.

Appropriating “pleasure” - exploring Secrets

Drawing close to Veenhoven’s idea of satisfaction in his enquiry of life-satisfaction/subjective well-being, I encounter a sense of passing happiness as expressed in terms of “pleasure” and in enduring terms, as “bliss”. Though life’s enduring satisfaction (bliss) provides a more holistic sense of happiness, moments of pleasure or enduring satisfaction in life’s part experiences could often become intense and all pervasive to attain life-as-a-whole satisfaction¹³. Here I see a point of departure for a fresh enquiry into the secret or the lie that circumscribes our social life. Trying to

understand happiness, no matter what techniques we employ, we cannot discount human interactions and its determining role in present social condition.

Society has moved far from simple, agrarian communities to modern, industrial ones. A society based on varied and complex network of social interactions, which are based on apprehensive as well as partial information. Simmel's article 'The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies' (1906) explores the role of information in social interactions in such societies. George Simmel (1858-1918) mentions that knowledge of the other always lies between full knowledge (which is unattainable) and complete ignorance. The lack of information is compensated with imagined inferences. Hence the assumed information (imagined truth) entails a certain amount of trust in the other and the relationship being fostered thereby. Control over information and concealing information from others define modern society. Therefore "knowledge of concealment"¹⁴ is of profound importance in Simmel's understanding of modern societies, which he liked to call "credit-economies" (Simmel 1906: 446). Hence, we see that modern society is based on assumptions of truth about others. Pleasure seeking too can then be based on assumed truth about things.

Thus, human creation of information and concealing the same, is a relational prerequisite to the form secret takes. Simmel argued that modern humans interact in much larger and dispersed social circle and their identities emerge accordingly. Secrets come to exist and function based on these multiple social relations. In such situations cues to happiness or subjective well-being could lie partly in the private (withheld information) and partly in public (projected information) sphere of information. A conscious separation between projected information and withheld information is a necessity because the ultimate choice to reveal and what to reveal as truth is decided by the individual. However, I feel the need to focus on the withheld information for the urgency of locating happiness in the relatively more unreal or assumed truth.

Discovery of secrets entails a certain kind of surveillance. Depending on the context, social roles and culture, secret searching may be permitted or prohibited, both as subjects or agents of surveillance. Freedom to seek information is very closely tied to norms of protecting information. Simmel had approached this dilemma very carefully, and said, 'In general, men credit themselves with the right to know everything which, without application of external illegal means, through purely psychological observation and reflection, it is possible to ascertain' (Simmel 1906: 455). This

undoubtedly hints at the methodological problems that studying of secrets can pose. But there can be no denying that it is a repertoire of information - information indeed worthy of research - if not for its content, definitely for the intentions of withholding them. Such intentions of concealing can act as correlates to pleasure or life satisfaction research.

Secret can be understood from two perspectives: one, the act of concealment and its objective intent in relation to attaining happiness; second, the assumed or imagined truth that arises from keeping secrets and its relation to ideas of pleasure. For the first, one can easily notice the duality of public-private underlying any form of information sharing. For example, between my identity as a public person and a private one can lie several layers of concealment. More importantly, I can control the act of concealment as I move along the continuum of public-private. It also brings to light the sharing intent of any secret, a purpose to enjoy the value of secret by having a good control over its revelation. According to Simmel, sharing secrets is a valuable resource in which individuals are implicitly saying, 'even though there is a risk here, I trust you to treat this sensitive information appropriately and it is only fair that you trust me with secrets as well' (Marx & Muschert 2007). Observation of acts of concealment and revelation, simultaneously, at the individual and collective level can explain the extent to which it generates pleasure or pain.

Communication over social media remains infested with such acts of secret keeping and secret sharing. An application named Sarahah was launched in 2017 for people to share information about each other in anonymity over Facebook. It allowed people to text messages to others and the person reading that could then reply anonymously. Initially, it was meant for workers to compliment their bosses but later it gained enormous popularity among wide audience. This secretly accessing the others led to passing of ideas and beliefs that one is skeptical of in close and direct interaction. Thereby, enabling individuals maintain a secret identity while revealing information that one might not like to hold back. It also throws light upon human desire to seek happiness by camouflaging oneself while sharing information that he or she considers valuable. It acts as a tool to control others' perception of oneself through anonymity and guided revelation.

The second perception holds the promise to unravel the existence of a parallel truth (the imagined reality as produced by keeping secrets). Objective appraisal of 'assumed truth' is an indication of the well-being it provides. Fantasies, if seen as reproduction of such imagined reality, can have lots to speak about pleasures and lack of it.

Fantasy: happiness and the “other” truth

The world of fantasy has been a parallel to the real for long in history. Even at times, history itself got absorbed and adapted in the fantasies of the present through animism, super naturals and magic. And most often those are pleasurable memories from the past recreated using “unreal”/“imagined” objects. For instance: the opulence of the kings and queens, the ideal love of princesses, magic wands transforming anything displeasing and dispelling all that’s ugly. This historicizing of “happy times”, indeed, gets revealed in the success of fantasies post 9/11% the Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter% that critics link to audience’s desire to escape from frightening and dangerous present into a comforting, simpler vision of past (Grossman 2002).

Two fantasy series, I would like to mention here, are Harry Potter and Generation 14 that have gained immense popularity. According to J. K. Rowling, the author of Harry Potter, a constant theme in the series has been death: ‘My books are largely about death. They open with the death of Harry’s parents. There is Voldemort’s obsession with conquering death and his quest for immortality at any price’¹⁵. As Harry sails through his adolescence, he is confronted with usual teenage social and emotional problems such as friendships, infatuation, schoolwork and exams, anxiety, depression; all that he overcomes with magic potions. The wizarding world of Harry Potter exists parallel to the real world and contains magical versions of the ordinary elements of everyday life.

The revival of the past or fantasizing about a fantastic future throws light upon the desire for pleasure or lack of it in the present. As, Patrick Curry puts it, ‘that just a there was life before modernity, so there can be life after it’ (Curry 1997: 15). However, fantasies like these and many others trigger an epistemological revisit into happiness and life-satisfaction. What is it that transports us into an imaginary state of bliss? Is “The truth” and its multiplicity opposing the universalizing nature of truth, a good way of treating happiness as a sensual and affective experience at multiple levels? Or is it an escape from the singular, totalizing reality to experience the forbidden; thereby upholding the singularity of truth.

Besides, when happiness becomes a commodity in itself, often separated from its utility, and a medium to sell other objects; one is wrapped in ontological considerations about the “real” and “imagined-to-be-real” happiness. Markets flooded with self-help books for happiness and happiness coaching classes must guide us into a fresh enquiry of happiness having an

“exchange value” in contrast to “use value”. Thus, making a pressing demand on us to understand happiness in the consumer society in terms of its symbolic value. In a society that is defined by consumption and value is appropriated in terms of exchange, images and imagined objects offer greater sense of gratification. ‘The media represents world that is more real than reality that we can experience. People lose the ability to distinguish between reality and fantasy. They also begin to engage with the fantasy without realizing what it really is. They seek happiness and fulfilment through the simulacra of reality, e.g. media and avoid the contact/interaction with the real world.’ (Baudrillard 1988: 166-184)

The 60-year-old man trying to inject the poison called “Botox” into his skin with a desire to appear younger is doing so to attain the happy images that he has in mind of “youth”. Now this youth doesn’t propose a young man of 20 years or in that case even in his 30s. Rather it’s an imaginary ideal of youth associated with 60 years of age. Hence, the ideal world of imagination or fantasy is being recreated as the real world of happiness.

Conclusion

Happiness studies, be it under the purview of positive psychology, economics or sociology, have their own limitations. Correlations such as income is inversely proportional to happiness cannot be considered true always and therefore should not be mistaken as suggesting a causal relationship. On the contrary, there could be instances where happiness leads to affluence. Besides, there isn’t any singular variable determining happiness, rather there can be multiplicity of factors (like health, illness, aging, geographic location, climate changes etc.). Another most vital consideration is the internal attributes like memory, mood and needs that are remote and unique to each individual and may not always find direct relation to the externality of things. Thus, making objectification of subjective well-being difficult after a point.

There’s no denying that one of the implicit reasons for conducting research into happiness is to find possible ways of increasing it and this shall push research into a prescriptive mode, moving closer to judgements. In fact, my endeavors to further happiness study by slipping into the secret domain also holds the risk of misinterpretation of the hidden, as secrets can be equivocal and invite manipulation of information. Nonetheless, Fantasies are never pure imagination, they invoke much of the reality within themselves. A neat detachment of both (reality and imagined reality) and vouching for a parallel reality in its own right could give way to methodological

misgivings. But there is a possibility too that one becomes more aware of these shortcomings and opens up the field for discovery of new methods and analyses.

The social character of happiness that often gets subsumed by enquires into the subjective actions of pleasure needs to be drawn out and understood from its embeddedness in the collective. Group activities as rudimentary as Picnics to as complex as social movements extend explanation for happiness in collective action. Thus, sociological insight will always have suggestions of happiness in all its enquiries. For what is being propagated as notions of happiness, whether through postulates of the real world or nurtured through fantasies, is determined by the social location and its corresponding cultural edifice.

Notes

1. Mad Men is a drama based on the business of advertising agencies and depicts the transition in the personal lives of the employees.
2. Economic Times Bureau, June 24, 2013. Article. Advertising taglines loaded with happiness gain flavor during slump season. [//
economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/
20736314.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst](http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/20736314.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)
3. A judgement based on the principalistic morality based on the biblical Ten Commandments. However the Advita School based on Indian Vedic philosophy proposes happiness or bliss as man's innate quality and that it is not accrued from outside one's self.
4. There's a belief that bliss is not capable of being pursuit or sought, as man, as an embodied self, is by nature blissful.
5. Burn raises an enquiry into Bentham's idea of happiness and sees it switching between a "parochial" and "universalist" approach.
6. <http://worldhappiness.report/ed/2018/>
7. Research in economics of happiness began in 1970s by Richard Easterlin at University of Southern California and one of the prime findings was a strong correlation of variables other than income with happiness.
8. Chapter 37 titled 'Experienced Utility and Objective Happiness: A Moment-Based Approach', pp. 673-692.
9. According to Comte happiness is understood as the result of the convergence (consensus) of three components: a scientific conception of the world, the

feelings of love and veneration, and a wisely ordered activity. The essay then demonstrates that the first of these components is of primary importance inasmuch as it is to frame a new horizon within which man is expected to return to a healthy state of mind, to reshape both his hopes and activities, and to discover his own participation in a supreme order acting through the laws of nature as well as through those of the civilization in which he lives.

10. Stouffer's (1949) classic study *The American Soldier*, assessed the satisfaction with promotion chances. Contrary to expectation, the satisfaction with this aspect of Army life appeared to be higher in units where promotion chances were low, such as the military police, than in units where promotion chances were high, such as the Air Force. This phenomenon was explained in terms of social comparison; because promotion was more common in the Air Force, Air Force personnel more often felt *entitled* to promotion. This case of satisfaction with promotion makes many sociologists think that all satisfaction depends on social comparison and thus also life satisfaction.
11. The reference has been drawn from Correlational Findings in the World Database of Happiness.
12. "Needs" are vital requirements for survival, such as eating, bonding and exercise. Nature seems to have safeguarded the gratification of these needs with affective signals such as hunger, love and zest. In this view positive mood signals that all needs are sufficiently met should not be equated with fulfillment of "wants". Needs are inborn and universal while 'wants' are acquired
13. Satisfaction attained after cognitive comparisons for realizing wants and balancing of negative and positive affect
14. Simmel's essay on secrecy is diffuse, covering an array of rather unconnected ideas and topics such as the knowledge individuals have of each other, communication, the lie; the social patterning of concealment as this involves forms such as interest groups, friendship and marriage; the social functions of secrecy and, at a more social psychological level, our "peculiar attraction" to it and its' opposite – betrayal; and finally, the organizational form of the secret society. (Gary T. Marx & Glenn W. Muschert)
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Thakurmar Jhuli: Recasting the Grandmother's Bag of Tales

Sudarshana Sen

Abstract: *The oldest children's literature worldwide was oral in origin. It has been a source of enjoyment to children for long. We were also no exception as kids. These stories started to take written shape in different languages of the world from the seventeenth century. It was from then to the eighteenth century that childhood came to be recognized as different from adulthood and the idea of the child as a separate entity slowly started to take shape. It is argued that child and childhood as distinct identities emerged sometime in the same period. It was obvious therefore that the concept of childhood surfaced only with the rise of the print culture, thereby substantiating the claim that the idea of child existed before children's literature. It is the adult who imposes on the child what it considers to be appropriate for it. One such means is 'children's literature'. Whatever way we may look at it, we have accepted that children's literature is a product of the culture and society like all other kinds of literature. Its producers and consumers are part of the same society, are culturally constructed occupying different positions of power. This paper will explore the immense possibilities of a world created by the adult through an acclaimed children's literary work by Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar's *Thakurmar Jhuli*. The paper will delve into the textual construction, a representation of the world in the book to see how the literature in question prepares the child for the future.*

Keywords: Child, Children's literature, Fantasy, fantasy in children's literature, *Thakurmar Jhuli*.

Introduction

Thakurmar Jhuli, first published in 1907, celebrates a life of hundred and ten odd years. It is one of the most celebrated books in the history of children's literature that has acceptability among most of children and adults of different generations after its publication. It has been a favourite among children and adults and is perhaps the reason behind its popularity. Or it may also be true that its popularity as a book may have attracted people from generations of readers to have a copy of it in their collection. Whatever

be the reason, the book is a compilation of stories and poems. It is named after a grandparent, *Thakurma*, the name by which the paternal grandparent is identified, a woman, old, fragile and a reservoir of tradition and heritage. She is here not a namesake. She is the story-teller to her grandchildren emphasizing the fact that we live in patrilocal families where ordinarily she is the old woman to cares and nurtures the child. In the book therefore she is the relation that it emphasized.

The role of the grand mother is important in the socializing of the child and the management of the household. In *Ray bari* a novel written by Giribala Debi (Ray 1995; Debi Giribala 2011) the portrayal of the grandmother is that of the power-centre of the household. She is characteristically called *karta-ma* the mother of the present head of the household is widowed, is simultaneously marginalized and empowered (Bagchi 1993). She is marginalized because her husband who was the head of the household (*karta*) is dead, is fully socialized in the customs of the family and knows the nitty-gritty of directing the household chores as she was once the head of the household when her husband was at the helm of things. She is empowered to educate new brides in the family in the ways and customs of the household. She is the disciplining agent for her grandchildren. She has lost her position as the head of the household to her daughter-in-law but is the repository of ritual practice. She has the treasure of popular wisdom (Bagchi 1993).

It is in the home that a child finds his or her natural habitat, his or her mental universe. The girl child is mentally socialized to prepare herself as a mother and a wife. It is (was) in the ethos of the family socialization that girl and boy child is (was) socialized in different traditions of gender identity. It was the bride who was seen as responsible for keeping the family in order and in peace ("*Sansarsukher hoy romonirgune*" meaning it is by the virtues of a woman that a family attains bliss). The book published in 1907 was the product of the colonial times and is true to its character. The entire nineteenth century witnessed female infanticide, child marriage, sufferings of child widows, self-immolation of wives after husband's death, the emergence of elite indigenous reformers setting priority to save the child and the woman. The primary tenets of moral justification of the British rule in India were slowly put to question in the century before the publication of the book. So, the stories collected in the book contained seeds of nationalism woven through fantasy (Nandy 1983), imprints of the woman's position in family and the moral burden of carrying all towards peace through the quest.

In the first edition of the book, in its Preface Rabindranath Tagore echoes a concern for the long-lost paternal grandparent, the *Thakurma* who is no more the story-teller. Rabindranath's concern does not only portray the lost tradition but also conveys the fact that even in Brahma families the upbringing of the child tended to rely on ritually knowledgeable grandmother (Bagchi 1993). The book according to the Preface by Tagore is a good and able replacement to the order. It definitely renders an edge over other compilers through this comment. But the point that Tagore had not delved into was that Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar, the compiler of the book is a male. The paradox of the compilation is this: that it is written by a male but is popularized in the name of a social role played by a woman. Perhaps such works were taken up by males during that period and Tagore himself was no exception to the rule. He had compiled poems for children (*Chelebhulonochhora*) and also written poems for children (*Shishu* and *ShishuBholanath*). Perhaps recasting of the compilation before critical eyes is because of this paradox of looking it at from the maleness (*purushali* as opposed the feminine, *meyeli*) of the voice of the compiler and the femininity of the role contextualized in the title. It is important here to note that the meaning of woman's tale is two: one is tales told by women and second is tales that are centred on women (Ramanujan in Dharwadekar 1999). It is in both senses that the compilation is taken up for interpretation in this paper. Much before this compilation was published, it was Reverend Rajsekhar Roy who had published a compilation of folktales from Bengal (*Banglar Upokothaor: Folktales of Bengal*) for children (1883). He too echoes the same lament as Tagore on the loss of story-telling grandmothers.

...I readily caught up the idea and cast about for materials. But where was an old story-telling woman to be got? I had myself when a little boy, heard hundreds it would be no exaggeration to say thousands of fairy tales from the same old woman, Sambhu's mother...I have reasons to believe that the stories given in this book are genuine sample of the old stories told by old Bengali women from age to age through hundred generations...(Dey, Preface, *Folktales of Bengal*, 1893)

Amrita Dasgupta (2017) writes that there was a tradition of storytelling by women in India in pre-colonial times which lost its eminence with the advent of print media and story writing became more emphasized than orality. Women as were not educated enough to write and publish books it was men who eventually became writers and story-tellers in print. In the colonial times it was men who dominated the literary scene while women writers were exceptions in Bengal. But she also posits that men were also the

collectors of stories in pre-colonial period. Therefore, we can find a connection to the woman's voice that is linked to the role of story-telling and also connect why it is the male who is the compiler of such stories. But we would like to concentrate on how the maleness of the voice of the story-teller overpowers the women's position in the stories that are told.

The compilation in question was not the first ever compilation of stories for children in Bengali language. But it is undoubtedly the first compilation that had been so popular with children and their parents throughout many generations in Bengal and among Bengalis (Maitra 2007). It was after the book celebrated a centenary of its publication in 2007 that soft copies of the book, translations in English from reputed publishers and internet/digitized versions with images were published which reinforce the idea of the range of popularity of the book. This article will analyse the content of the book in order to understand how and to what extent the book is appropriate for children.

The Book, the Reader: References to a context

Thakurmar Jhuli is a compilation of four categories of stories: tales of adventure, tales of demons, tales of animals and humorous tales. It also contains poems signifying the importance of lullabies for children. The author of the book collected these stories from rural folk narrators, lending the compilation a character of an original rendition of the cultural tradition of Bengal hundred years back. In a Preface to the book, famous poet Rabindranath Tagore echoes this story-telling by grandmothers as a dying tradition in Bengal. The stories in the context of a storytelling grandmother are then a reflection of the narrator's (in this case, women) thoughts, their dilemmas, inconsistencies and the like. The interpretation or *storying* is a reflection but should not be considered a reality per se. It is woven through a fantasy make-belief world, a reflection of the real, not the real per se. The stories in the book are *Dudher Sagar* (The Sea of Milk), *Kalabati Rajkanya* (Princess Kalabati), *Ghumonto Puri* (The Sleeping Palace), *Kakonmala Kanchanmala*, *Saat Bhai Champa* (The Seven Brothers and Champa), *Sheet Basanta* (Winter and Spring), *Kiranmala*, *Rooptarashi*, *Neelkamalaar Lalkamal*, *Dalim Kumar*, *Patalkanya Manimala* (Manimala the Daughter of Hell), *Sonar Kathi Rugar Kathi* (The Gold and Silver sticks), *Chang Bang*, *Shiyal Pandit* (The Knowledgeable Fox), *Sukhuaar Dukhu*, *Brahman Brahmani*, *Der Angule*, *Am Sandesh*, and *Phuralo*.

The first question that comes up is who can be called a child? What is children's literature and how is it described in the book? A child experiences childhood and it is the adult who idealizes childhood by the 'best time in life' and also deciding on what is 'good' for a child. A child develops into a man or a woman in different phases such as infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Childhood is the phase of development of human existence on earth as the one that begins from infancy and is extended till the puberty (marking the beginning of adolescence and ultimately the gateway to adulthood). Puberty is seen as a decisive stage and widely believed to mark the end of childhood on both the physical and psychological level. As body and mind develop, the young person undergoes visible changes in this phase of gradual transition from childhood to adulthood. During this phase, the state of relative psychological virtuousness, simplicity and inexperience ascribed to childhood is slowly replaced by a self-conscious state of experience, yet to be refined in the years leading up to adulthood. A child in this sense is between birth and puberty. To answer the second question, children's literature is often not written by a child. It is the adult who pens down stories that s/he thinks appropriate for the development of the mind of a child. So, it is worthy to state here that it is better to identify children's literature as 'literature for children' and *Thakurmar Jhuli* is one of these genres. Traditional children's literature, above all the classics, is frequently set in the countryside or in similarly secluded places. Famous representatives of this kind are for example *The Secret Garden*, *Alice in Wonderland*; *The Wind in the Willows*, *Winnie-the-Pooh* or *Tom's Midnight Garden*. It is believed that in these manageable, closed miniature worlds of imagination and fantasy the child can gradually come to terms with itself and its immediate surroundings such as friends or animals. By contrast, young adults are mostly shown in close contact with society. More and more frequently, the town replaces rural landscapes, with the scene of action shifting from the idyllic arcadia of childhood into the modern, anonymous bustling city life (Saxby 1997: 354-56). The features of children's literature are socialization and education of the child, learning the traditions of society, where the child is the protagonist, the story is embedded in a moral code, positive outlook towards life, structure and language are adapted to oblige the child's requirements and abilities (Saxby 1997: 20; Nodelman 2008: 76-81).

Fantasy is related to imagination, fancy, marvel and wonder, magic, adventures and impossibilities are inevitable to a fantasists' imagination. But it is not direct opposite to life. The use of fantasy in literature is divided into different sub-genres: animal fantasy, historical fantasy, heroic fantasy,

religious fantasy, gothic fantasy, humorous fantasy, ironic fantasy, time fantasy and toy fantasy. Animal fantasy can be traced to Aesop's fables (International Companion Encyclopedia: 282-294) where animals are fitted out with human traits such as distinctive characteristic behaviour, foibles and outward appearance telling a story in the form of allegory which can easily be transferable to human society. Such fantasies help children to identify the real, understand the crookedness of the real world not directly but through a make-belief world. The compilation in question also makes use of fantasy and it and how it is dealt with will be analyzed in details in later sections.

Recasting the Book under a critical eye

The book is written from a male perspective through a supposedly woman's voice. But the voice is unreal because it is the male author/compiler who speaks. The use of the name of a relation (paternal grandparent) is brought up to focus on the child protagonist (Kironmala in *Kironmala*, Lalkomal, Neelkomal, Champa and the like) and her/his relation with the women who is either a mother or a villain. The women in the different stories are in fact the central figures and are portrayed as mostly passive characters. The woman characters are mostly central to many stories in the book. They are torn between a binary: the good or the evil. Either she is beautiful and fit to be a princess or a queen or ugly as a demoness (*rakshashi*). The good woman is a wife, a mother, a good-natured village house-wife or an unmarried village girl who is always in distress not for any of her faults. She is always the receptor, the victim. On the other, the wicked woman is mostly a *rakshashi* (demoness) either trying to spread her evil rage or is at war with the 'other' characters in the story. She is active but is a perpetrator of evil deeds. The evil woman seeks change things for her own sake. So, agency of the woman to change and goodness per se does not go hand in hand. It cannot be a part of one self. It is torn apart to present to the reader an idea that good women should accept everything in life without questioning. She may give birth to a dog and an owl (*Budhhu Bhotoom*) which is impossible in reality (this is how fantasy is woven into the stories), should not question any such suspicions as the good will prevails for her at the end. There is this hope that everything will turn to her favour stacked for her at the closing stages of the story. She needs not panic or struggle for it. Her goodness will prove someday. The woman characters central to most of the stories are divided into a binary opposite giving prominence on the good over the evil. The stories preach docility and submission in women.

The author/compiler presents women as workers in everyday life rich or poor. The queen also performs cooking or acts out her own everyday work herself (In *Kalabati Rajkanya* the seven queens eat the sacred root by crushing it on the grinding stone themselves). Her duty as a “homemaker” comes first. The demoness may adapt to trouble the good-natured wife (*Kakonmala Kanchanmala*) stop the progress of a determined prince (*Kalabati Rajkanya*) but she is a woman first. Their desires conflict and are posed against each other in a binary opposition.

Another set of binary present in the stories is that between men and women. It is always the women who plot tricks against one another. Perhaps the household, the private sphere is more emphasized in the stories than the public, which the King or a man dominates. At several instances the beauty of the women in the stories are praised (*Kuch boron kanya* and *megh boron kesh* meaning the fair woman with her wavy hair), besides the heroism of men. We find two kinds of binaries in the stories: one of a good woman who is a mother and weak and the plotter, wicked, trickster woman usually the demoness and the other the home-bound dependent woman as opposed to the heroic man who fight, explore new lands, discover people, is brave and valorous. In each of these descriptions, a fantasy is woven into the reality of experiences, leading the mind to form its own frame of reference. The men are depicted as the defenders of the country (*desh*), are the ultimate judges of deeds (because it is the King who punishes the evil-doer at the end). Fantasy is important in the way the stories are told. In *Budhu Bhutum* the owl and the monkey are actually sons of a queen who was tricked. Their wives burn their animal skins so that they could have them as humans in the day-time. The *Bangoma and Bangomi*, the legendary birds of wisdom always help the deserving. The heroes in *Lalkamal Neelkamal* donate drops of blood to the blind young siblings to activate their sights. In *Saat Bhai Champa* the dead boys bloom to become seven flowers in the garden.

The book acts as an important code of message for the virtuous, innocent womanliness who has a complete devotion to family and community (the *rakhashi* or the demoness acts as a member of her community even if she is married into a human family). Rightfully culture specific embedded codes and symbols are constructed into the mosaic of the female characters. There are no male demons (*rakhash*) in contrast to the over presence of the woman version of the *rakhash*.

Let me take you to through the world represented in *Thakurmar Jhuli*, a world that a child as a reader comprehends: the story of *Sheyal Pandit* for

example. The crocodile brings his children to school. The school is a residential one where the crocodile leaves his all seven children under the tutelage of the teacher a fox. The fox eats all the children, one by one. Troubled by the thought that the crocodile might come asking for his children, the fox flees to the jungle. The reader might quite understand the kind of fear a child may have of a school! The question is what kind of idea the child frames of a teacher! Or let's take the story of *Kalabati Rajkanya* where the helpless mother and the demoness step-mother are posed against each other: one prays for her son the prince and the other stalls his voyage. The step-mother never works for the good of her step son. She throws a shawl over the prince from which innumerable soldiers emerge (*Kakanmala Kanchanmala*), mix magical concoction of hair oil seeking to change the physical form of the rival-wife (*satin*). In this way motherhood is not only eulogized but the importance of blood-tie gets emphasized. The *Duorani* (the wife of a king who is loved by him but is the evil) is embodied as selfish conspirator and the *Suorani* (the "good" wife of a king but not loved by him) the victim always deserves the happy ending. Every woman who acts a villain in the story blames the other. For example, in *Saat bhai Champa* the wives who had conspired against the mother of seven sons and a daughter blame each other before the king when caught of their misdeed. The women who act a victim are passive and quiet accepting that it is their fate to suffer. The women who are the villains and who acts the trajectory of the stories are bold in their misdeed but meek in accepting their faults. Their characters have different shades and are the main attraction in the stories. The moral of each story is the victory of the good and the valiant over the evil. But it also has an encoded message that being a woman is vulnerable but at the same time being an evil woman is even worse. Perhaps here at the end of each story we find the woman storyteller's sigh for relief in the happiness stored in the unseen future. Their life as experienced is full of sorrow and so they look forward to the future and wait for the unseen happiness accepting the fact that all ends well. Dey (1893) in the preface to the compilation called *Folktales of Bengal* says the story-teller woman of his childhood Sambhu's mother '...used always to end every one of her stories— and every orthodox Bengali story teller does the same...

"*Aamaar kothati furolo,*

Note gachhti murolo".

"*Keno re note muroli?*"

{ "My story ends,

With the decay of the spinach"

"Why did you spinach decay?"

<i>"Goru keno khay?"</i>	"Why does the cow eat (me)?"
<i>"Keno re goru khas?"</i>	"Why you cow eat (spinach)?"
<i>"Rakhal keno charayna?"</i>	"Why doesn't the shepherd take us to graze?"
<i>"Keno re rakhal charasna?"</i>	"Why doesn't the shepherd take the cow to graze?"
<i>"Bou keno bhaat deyna?"</i>	"Why does not the wife give meals?"
<i>"Keno re bou bhaat dis na?"</i>	"Why you wife do not give meals?"
<i>"Chhele keno kadey"</i>	"Why does the son cry?"
<i>"Keno re chhele kadis?"</i>	"Why do you cry son?"
<i>"Pipre keno khay"</i>	"Why does the ant eats me?"
<i>"keno re pipre khas"</i>	"Why you ant eat the son?"
<i>"Khabar jinish khaboi to!"</i>	"It is a piece to consume so shall eat!"
<i>Kut! Kut! Kut!</i> (In Original)	Eating sounds of the ant goes on}(Translation author)

The preface in question refers to the short poetry that every woman story-teller would end her stories. The poetry in fact describes the name blaming sequence that is operative in society. It is the ant at last that takes up the blame and with pride declares that a child's sweetness is the cause of its attraction and continues to poke the child. This again is woven in fantasy to portray that it is an over-arching shelter under which every adult can take refuge and demonstrate the truth about life. The child is the listener and the woman story-teller at the end to portray her journey as a woman finds refuge in the happiness that future beholds focusing on the fact that it is the child listener.

All the stories in the compilation weave power-struggles and violence in different forms. The rivalry of women for the attention of the King, their husband (Maitra 2007) looms large among them. It above everything else does not enhance the status of the women who fight among themselves for a man. The struggle of the mother to prove herself through her children

(*Kiranmala*) shows vengeance of rival wives and the mother over their infertility or impotency. Here the king is silent after receiving the news that one of his wives has produced a dead cat and dog which shows either his ignorance about human reproduction or his acceptance of the supremacy of women's judgement in this regard. Perhaps the author emphasizes on the division of judgments of two kinds: one that the King asserts and the other that the women folk presents bound within the boundary of their homes. The king does not interfere with the household judgments. In *Nilkamal Lalkamal* and *Dalimkumar* we find a message to support the good against the evil, in *Kiranmala*, we find the importance to bravery to defend one's loved ones, in *Kalabati Rajkanya* importance is on allegiance towards parents, *Kakanmala Kanchanmala* shows one should be true to one's promise, *Sheyal Pandit* articulates how one needs to be clever enough to survive in a world of tricksters.

Polygamy is a standard marriage practice throughout the stories, reflecting anxiety, apprehension of the woman characters of sharing one roof and a common husband. The stories express jealousy, submission, tricks, hatred, valour, pride and violence as remedy from all kinds of situation. Motherhood is emphasized in every story. The longing for a child, the childlessness of a wife, deep and earnest wait for a child to be born are very recurrent motive behind the turns that come up in the stories. Motherhood was important feature of the stories. Perhaps it may have been the source of predicaments and struggle for women too. The stories are never simply laid out. They are woven into sub-plots sometimes multiple plots and are expressed in chaste language (*sadhu bhasa* or the written language as opposed to *chalitbhasa*, the spoken language). If we accept that the compiler had collected folk stories told by grandmothers then we cannot accept the fact that they were told in chaste language! The compiler has imposed the language marking the standard way of story-telling of the time and therefore uplifts his status from a compiler to an author.

Thakurmar Jhuli was a product of and for the modern educated Bengali society. If modernism means emancipation, democracy, rationality, scientism then in what ways this book attains the standard is really doubtful. With stories based on restraint or passivity, authoritativeness, irrational behaviour and traditionalism it raises doubt over its presentation of the virtues of a "modern" world. Moreover, the over presence of passive women and their irrational behaviour in depiction of characters in the stories it also raises questions over the popularity of the book over generations of readers too. Is it noteworthy to say that it is the "normal" way a patriarchal society

would treat a gender biased presentation? The third important question is the way in which the stories have been portrayed and presented for a child who is naïve about the world around her/him. The complex way, in which the stories are plotted, the plots within plots are far than simple for a child to comprehend. If we accept the fact that the stories were collected (compiled/written) at a time when there were extended families where polygamous marriage ties, family feuds, jealousies were rampant still is it worthy to uphold the same in stories for the child? Can literature for children pass off with high appreciation for generations only with presence of animals in the name of it in the form of fantasy? Can we call such renditions adequate and appropriate enough to enrich (block?) the minds of the children? Isn't it time enough to rethink if the stories are healthy enough for the development of the mind of a child?

There is a gap between how children see the world and the adult likes him/her to see the world. Moreover, there is also a gap between the situation in which the child lives now and how s/he perceives it through the stories. Here the adult male author visualizes the world for him or her. Does he create a world for the child in what he believes? The adult might play a pivotal role by imposing upon the child what he considers appropriate for him or her. When we read literature for children it is a potent way to make sense for the child. Constructing the stories in the mind of the child is one of the fundamental means of making sense and a significant activity in the process of learning. Through these stories the child maps the possible roles s/he will like to play as an adult. The children discover the world in an imaginative engagement with the stories. Children's literature is a product of the culture and society. The author and the child-reader are both the producer and the consumer of the stories. They are part of the same society where these stories are culturally constructed but they occupy different power-positions in it. The nineteenth century colonial Bengal saw the rise of the educated middle class (*bhadralok*) where the family was prioritized lending importance to the child. This necessitated the understanding of the location of the child and therefore saw a proliferation of children's literature. But the doubt remains which section of the gentry at present may or likes to uphold the popularity of the book?

Story-telling has been a long tradition to engage children. Through *storying* or telling of stories to the child it is a tradition that has been in practice much before the start of writing stories for children. The publication of books as compilations of stories of folk tales already in the tradition or cultural practice of a society is evidence to it. The child may be a listener

or a reader, whatever position the child is in the society the emphasis is always on the growth of the child and its development into an adult who subscribes to the norms of society. The literature of any society therefore should be conscious of how adult's ideas seep into these stories so that the child does not imbibe an adult's world from the outset. Considering the popularity of this particular compilation throughout generations of readers young and old is it not appropriate time to reconsider the recreation of such literature for the child?

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Not born a Mother, but Naturalized into One: Experiences of Motherhood, Reality and Challenges

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Abstract: *Motherhood is constructed as a biological outcome based on the assumption that when a woman becomes a mother, she is naturally equipped to be one, while its complexities are rarely highlighted. Feminist writers on the subject argue that motherhood is a social, historical and cultural construct rather than a natural consequence of the maternal instinct (Burman 1994a).*

Motherhood presents itself as a natural outcome because a mother's personal and unique experience of motherhood interacts to a large degree with the social and cultural representations of motherhood. To be a perfect mother is a natural disposition, requiring little or no effort because mothers work on instincts. Generally accepted notions about motherhood do not change quickly or easily because many of those who concern themselves with issues central to motherhood fail to acknowledge or even recognize that motherhood has this social and historical character (Atkinson 1991). Mothers are trying to live up to something that is placed on them by themselves or other significant people. There is quite clearly a gap between what we claim to know about motherhood and what mothers themselves experience as mothers. Women's experiences as mothers, their inner perspectives are rarely examined. As a result, little is known about how women experience motherhood. The lived experience of motherhood often, if not always, contradicts the glorified representation of motherhood. Mothers have never really been given the opportunity to express the complexity of being a mother and therefore there are hardly any personal accounts or narratives on how mothers engage in a process of deconstruction and reconstruction of meanings around motherhood, whether their everyday lived experiences contradict or are disjunctive to these ideal images

Mothering as a complex and diverse experience and living up to an ideal is problematic. This paper explores the experiences, confessions and personal account of the researcher by looking at the subject of motherhood from the point of view of her relationship with her own mother and mothering her children. There is discussion around ideal representation of motherhood, a mother's expectations and image of motherhood and how these are challenged as the researcher, engages in a process of deconstruction and reconstruction of meanings around motherhood.

Keywords: Motherhood, mothers, lived experiences, social construction.

Introduction

Motherhood is constructed as a biological outcome, a natural stage based on the assumption that when a woman becomes mother, she is naturally equipped to be one. Sociologists tend to use the term for the social expectations, experiences, and structures associated with being a mother. Motherhood differentiates the biological fact of becoming a mother, from mothering the latter refers to the practices involved in taking care of children.

To be a perfect mother is a natural disposition, requiring little or no effort because mothers work on instincts the complexities never get highlighted. Motherhood presents itself as a natural outcome because a mother's personal and unique experience of motherhood interacts to a large degree with the social and cultural representations of motherhood. Generally accepted notions about motherhood do not change quickly or easily because many of those who concern themselves with issues central to motherhood fail to acknowledge or even recognize that motherhood has this social and historical character (Atkinson 1991). In the opinion of Douglas and Michaels (2004: 3) the mothers are:

Subjected to an onslaught of beatific imagery, romantic fantasies, self-righteous sermons, psychological warnings, terrifying movies about losing their children, and totally unrealistic advice about how to be the most perfect and revered mother in the neighborhood, maybe even in the whole country.

Feminist writers on the subject argue that motherhood is a social, historical and cultural construct, continuously redesigned according to changing societal and economic factors rather than a natural consequence of the maternal instinct (Burman 1994a; O'Reilly 2004). Similarly, the way motherhood is institutionalised results in the subordination of women and the reproduction of gender differentiation and hierarchy in family and work (Rich 1976; Firestone 1971). Simone de Beauvoir (1949) also highlighted biological difference and pregnancy which is responsible for alienating a woman from herself and prevents women from asserting their individuality and from being creative. Exploring the mothering role of women, Nancy Chodorow highlights that this role has a psychological influence on girls and boys affecting their ideas about masculinity and femininity and reproduces sexual inequality (Chodorow 1978: 11). These capacities for mothering are strongly internalised and psychologically enforced, and are built developmentally into the feminine psychic structure. Chodorow feels that there can never be equality between the sexes as long as women are held responsible for bringing up children (ibid: 39). Despite this, motherhood

is considered central to contemporary gendered expectations for women. The cultural expectation to bear and rear children is so strong that parenthood appears normative and childlessness deviant; in fact, it is considered a resource for some women (Ulrich and Weatherall 2000; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). The naturalness of wanting and enjoying motherhood has been explored and challenged by several scholars who show the force of gendered expectations that conflate motherhood and femininity (Marshall 1991). However, some feminists like Rich (1976) does not believe that they would have to give up motherhood to assert their feminine identity; she felt that in a patriarchal set up, motherhood is not a choice for most women. Motherhood has been transformed from something which was necessary, but now shaped and governed by cultural gender norms. She further added that motherhood is an institution and therefore women should have control over their own body and sexuality to reduce control of this institution over them.

Mothers are constantly trying to live up to something that is placed on them by themselves or other member of society since little attention is paid to the socio-economic and cultural factors that work with patriarchy to define good motherhood. The insider perspectives of women are rarely examined, there is a significant gap between what we perceive to know about motherhood and what mothers themselves experience as mothers. Mothers have rarely been given the opportunity to express the views on motherhood and hence therefore there are hardly any personal accounts or narratives on how mothers engage in a process of deconstruction and reconstruction of meanings around motherhood. It is seen that the personal accounts on motherhood if not always, contradicts the glorified representation of motherhood

This paper explores the experiences, confessions and personal account of the researcher by looking at the subject of motherhood from the point of view of her own mothering experience. There is discussion around ideal representation of motherhood, a mother's expectations and image of motherhood and how these are challenged, as the researcher, tries to deconstruct and reconstruct the meanings around motherhood through her own narratives making it very special for her.

Conceptual framework

Phenomenological sociology aims to explore the role human awareness plays in production of social action, social situation and social world. It

takes up prior assumptions, or assumed truths and question them in order to better understand the way the world around us has been socially constructed. Phenomenologists stress that social reality should not be conceived as a fixed and objective external reality. Rather, social reality is essentially a product of human activity *inter alia* through the process of typification, we constitute a meaningful social world around us. This is obviously not the achievement of isolated individuals acting alone, most of our typical assumptions, expectations and prescriptions indeed are socially derived. The idea of social construction of reality is based on the thought that people interact by using symbols to interpret one another and assign meaning to perception and experience. Berger and Luckmann's (1966) concept of the social construction of reality focuses on how people and groups interacting in a social system, create, overtime, concepts and mental representations of each other's action and these concepts eventually become habituated into reciprocal roles played by actors in relations to each other.

Social and cultural forces are instrumental in constructing the meaning of womanhood, men and women which guide and govern their lives and social activities. Cultural understanding of the categories "man" and "woman" have been done by Sherry Ottner (1974) in her nature/culture argument where she opines that women's physiology and reproductive functions make her closer to nature and men seek cultural means of creation and are therefore associated with culture. According to MacCormack and Strathern (1980) men are considered closer to culture because of their movement in social and geographical space and hence they are more aware than women and thus part of "public sphere". This constructed the gender roles in our society assigning women the position of rearing and caring. It is socially accepted that as a woman one should be nurturing, should have a desire to bear children and plan for them accordingly.

The ideology of motherhood differs according to the socio-cultural context, ethnicity, gender and class, (Rich 1976). The ideology of the West focuses on the fact that motherhood is based on instincts and intuitions; however, the concept of a natural mother is a construction, which needs discussion and deconstruction. In the patriarchal Indian society, mothers of sons have more respect. A woman is considered "complete" after she attains motherhood, not only does this assign her supreme status in society but it also helps to cement her marital bond (Phoenix et al. 1991). Motherhood establishes women's credentials as a woman, but at the same time the women finds herself under the influence of strong mothering ideologies which are further governed by patriarchal ideologies and patrilineal kinship patterns. The dominant mothering ideologies demand that the women should

relinquish their individuality, since it benefits the system of patriarchy and helps to confine the women to the private sphere. However, mothering ideologies are not fixed, rather fluid and they are representation of social, economic and cultural fabric of society.

My own-construction/deconstruction/ reconstruction of motherhood

The image of mothers when produced by experts and the knowledge they produce helps in cultural understanding of the subject and motherhood is one subject where knowledge is produced without consulting the mothers. Amy Rossiter addresses this discrepancy in her research on mothering and the perpetuation of patriarchy. She demonstrates that created by experts put pressure on women creating unrealistic definitions of motherhood. According to Rossiter,

... it was clear... that images of “mothers”, when produced by experts, come to define mothering –that is, to lay claim to all that can be said about mothering, to become final statement of how mothers naturally are. This process leaves mothers attempting to relate their experiences to such images, rather than themselves making images which conform to their concrete experiences (Rossiter 1988: 17).

Mothers are rarely consulted when a discourse is constructed around motherhood. The portrayal by media shapes the social construction of women, reinforces the stereotype of women, the wife and then mother, whether they want or not. For me the generalized other¹ was mediated through my family, friends, and adults. My view on having my own children was formed at a young age by these significant others and by the time I reached the game stage, me and my sister were already acting the ways these others were expecting us to act.

Me and my sister were socialized to believing that girls will always get married and bear children. As a child my plays and conversations revolved around this, I remember saying things like “when I will have my own children” or “when my children will get married”. It is strange but there was no ‘if’ about it, and for me there was no iota of doubt because I truly did not believe that there was anything else for me. We never played games about super heroes or women doing business, our games revolved around mothers and their children, going shopping or to video parlors to play games or eat ice-cream. I had heard conversation making references to some women in the social circle who did not have *bacche* (children) and because

of which their life was incomplete. This reiterated my belief about having children and how imperative they were for my existence.

Motherhood: Not Ascribed needs preparation

As I grew older and had my own children I began to question about the “ultimate fulfillment” (Marshall 1991: 68) motherhood had to offer. I presumed that a mother will bring me an experience of overwhelming love for my child as I was guided by the assumption that women are naturally ascribed to be mothers and are equipped to meet daily needs of their children. Bartlett (1994: 62) points out that there ‘... is an assumption that one does not need to learn how to be a mother, that the role is intrinsically rooted in a women’s nature.’ For me, there was no preparation to motherhood, although I had read some books on pregnancy and child care nothing prepares you more than bringing your own baby home.

... I cried from the moment we brought her from the hospital, these were tears of joy, anxiety or fear I could not comprehend. The baby looked so fragile and I was totally confused on how I was going to handle her. My body ached with the labour I had gone through, I felt weak, how was I going to handle this baby.

Motherhood is extremely tricky and women need to be informed what they are entering into, the lack of preparedness was taking a toll on me. I remembered those pictorial representations of mothers in media glowing and beaming with joy and here I was not even getting time to comb my hair.

... I kept blaming myself that I was not handling it properly, but no one had actually told me about it. I would stare at my child when she would cry because I could not address her needs, cleaning toilet and the smell was equally nauseating for me and the long hours of carrying the baby would drain all my energy.

Dominant mothering ideologies make mothers feel frustrated and overwhelmed. A mother is considered to be omnipotent and having institutive skills to meet the demands of her child. However, there is a gap between what we claim to know about motherhood and what a mother experiences, my lived experiences were totally contradicting the glorified representation of motherhood.

I had no idea what to do and unfortunately as long as my mother was around. I never felt the need to learn as well. It was only after

she left that I became a nervous wreck as I didn't know how to bathe her, or understand what she needed.

People assume that a mother knows what to do since motherhood is intrinsically rooted in her, however the assumption that motherhood happens instinctively is not correct and new mothers need a lot of advice and assistance. I panicked and called my mother to my residence, to learn from her and share my feelings with her and I was relieved when she said 'it will take time, but you will gradually learn' this statement was a breather for me, so motherhood did not come naturally.' Motherhood cannot be imagined without assistance. The twenty first century world seems to have made things easy for mothers as there are endless products like diapers, baby food, play stations, feeding chairs etc. but the reality is less rosy than what is being advertised. There was always this brigade of senior women who would conveniently make the statement 'you are so lucky to have these facilities; our days are over with nappy washing and drying.'

Mothers actually attempt to live up to ideal representations around motherhood, because a mother's personal and unique experience of motherhood interacts to a large degree with the social and cultural representations of motherhood (Parker 1996). Mothers are constantly trying to live up to expectation placed on them by others.

I was constantly being judged on how I was handling my baby, whether she was wet or dry and in public places if the baby kept on crying, people would give you dirty stares, making you feel inadequate. Apart from them, I had my own friends who had become mothers recently but they were now behaving like "champions", from feeding to toilet training to sickness, they had mastered Dr Spock. This made me feel guilty, insensitive and not good enough.

In speaking to mothers everywhere, Kitzingers has observed:

There always seems to be other mothers who are coping much better than we are, too. They are better organized, more contented, always consistent, calm and understanding. Their babies sleep four hours at a stretch from the very beginning, wake, feed, play and then sleep again. They have a regular routine. We are in a state of chaos. Motherhood is about trial and error and does not come naturally and this needs to be addressed (1994: 4).

The boundaries between what is natural and what you become is blurred for many mothers, it is only through the process of socialization that it becomes a part that is natural to them. Mothers do not feel immediately an incredible maternal bond with the child rather, motherhood is naturalized. The skills of motherhood have become relatively automatic as mothers actively engage with their children. Welldon (1988) proposes that such an ideal image leads people, including mothers, to believe that all mothers will be able to deal with motherhood with a kind of instant skill, precision and dexterity. Welldon (1988:18) says that most women in fact know very little about babies and that they often expect that a “...maternal instinct” will come to the fore and will perform miracles.’

According to cultural norms mothers do not experience any incongruent feelings, a mother has no negative feelings towards her child and is instead loving patient and caring. I was totally haunted by the unconditional love stereotype describing motherhood, there were parts of me who could never relate to this image.

I found myself loosing temper, I wanted my child to behave correctly when we went for social outings and may people had mentioned to me that anger and hatred for the child was totally unacceptable and against the ideal of maternity.

On the contrary, I found it difficult to accept how my friends children would behave, they would make the place dirty, throw things and I would look to their mothers expecting the same reactions like mine , but they seemed still looked so much in awe for their children, so were my emotions unacceptable?

I always wondered who are these good mothers, are they the ones who let their children do anything or are they the ones who guide their children, give them love and teach them social etiquettes. For me motherhood was overwhelming and not automatic and easy, as for some of my friends, there is nothing duplicate about motherhood, what works for me, may not work for another mother.

Motherhood: Not the only Identity

With the passage of time, I had now naturalized into a mother, I was spending good quality time with my child. In the mean time I was offered a job and decided to go to an office environment. I was chastised from nearly all quarters of society, made to feel guilty and shameful about taking this

decision. ‘*She is so heartless, leaving such a small child home and going to work*’, there were others who would come to my house in my absence and later tell me ‘*the baby was sleeping **alone** so we left a teddy with her*’. I began to wonder if motherhood is the only identity I am supposed to have. I come from a traditional family, clearly defined on the dichotomies of the bread winner and home maker; however, I felt that by actively pursuing my own goals I would be able to make my daughter independent and this action of mine would help her foster growth in the future. I decided to pursue my own goals, but the idea of leaving my child alone made me very guilty. Had my better half supported me, I would have lived with an exclusive identity of being a mother; he made me believe that I needed this for my own wellbeing.

By the time I went into my second pregnancy, which was after a hiatus of thirteen years, “motherhood” for me had become a deep personal issue rather than abstract concept and I incorporated all that I had discovered by my own personal style of mothering in raising this new bundle. After, availing six months of maternity leave I was back to work, happy to meet my students and prepare my lectures and do my research. Initially, I had guilt pangs but I was able to negotiate them better now. My children take pride in the fact that I am a working mummy and when my son tells me that I am the world’s best mother, I now have the courage to accept this statement without guilt or shame- I have achieved the status of a mother without losing myself in the process.

Conclusion

Dominant mothering ideologies that have been set up constantly subjecting mothers to scanners and surveillance. Destabilizing the dominant discourse surrounding motherhood allows women to refine their roles (O’Relly 2004: 47). Women should question the expectations that are placed on them by the society and the immediate surroundings and discourses. For some women motherhood empowers them while for the others it takes away their existence and this is due to the positioning of mothers in different social, economic and political positions. Mothers need to be supported, there are different views on what a good mother should be and we should not be using our biases to judge the behavior of others. The twenty-first century mothers have to deal with what Douglas and Michaels (2004) refer to as the “new momism”, which is a highly romanticized yet demanding view of motherhood, in which the standards of success are impossible to meet. In

standard Indian perception, the mother is expected to do all the things for all the people, take care of children, have a career and still prepare dinner for her family. This concept exists in the ideology of the family and puts extra stress and burden on the mothers. Therefore, women now need to plan mothering with intention, because the choices they make will affect their life deeply. Dominant ideologies around motherhood have been there for too long and they will not disappear. Modern mothers can question the archaic notions of motherhood based on patriarchal ideologies, but the new mother will need to navigate, explore and redefine the traditional notions of motherhood and make her choices and define and develop her own standards of an ideal motherhood.

Notes

1. Mead's theory of the emergent self helps explain how the self emerges from social interaction, responding to others opinion about oneself and how internalizing external opinions and internal feelings shapes ones and perspective of others towards our self helps in internalizing them as our own perspective.

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Reciprocity and Relations following Death: Reflections on the Practice of “Sarau” in Sikkim

Sandhya Thapa

Abstract: *The reciprocal exchange of goods and gifts following the death, among the kin and community, among the Nepalis in Sikkim and other places is called Sarau. The practice is prevalent among the other two prominent communities of Sikkim, the Lepchas and Bhutias, although they use different names. The practice is socially standardized and keep the community members connected and united. The differential perceptions and practice about the goods exchanged at the individual level however could be a source of social cohesion. Although the practice is universal among the Nepalis one can notice some changes in recent years. Drawing from her participatory observations the author gives a changing account of the practice of Sarau and its social significance among the Nepalis of Sikkim.*

Keywords: Sarau, Nepalis of Sikkim, reciprocity, social solidarity, gift exchange, social tension.

Introduction

The social relationship is primarily accepted as a fundamental foundation of all social formations and the basis of human society and the norm of reciprocity is a universal principle (Gouldner 1960), on which social relations, both individual and group relations, work. The social norm of reciprocity works on the collectively shared perception that a gift or favour or compassion will be reciprocated in one form or the other. Based on the expectation that people will respond to each other in similar ways in similar situations, reciprocal norms promote the mutual interdependence, love, care, emotions and strengthen social solidarity. Various forms of reciprocity and their social significance have been documented in various classical works of the sociologist and anthropologists. The theorists in general agree that social exchange involves a series of interactions that generate obligations (Emerson 1976 cited in Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005) and these interactions are usually seen as interdependent and contingent on the actions of another person (Blau 1964 cited in Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005).

Sarau in Sikkim and also among the Nepalis in other places, is such a norm of reciprocity that involves reciprocal obligations during various occasions like birth, marriage and death. The state of Sikkim is ethnically and culturally diverse; it is inhabited by three major ethnic groups, namely, Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepalis practicing three predominant religious world views - Hinduism (57.76 percent), Buddhism (27.39 percent) having a blend of animistic practices, and Christianity (9.91 percent) as per 2011 Census. Against this backdrop, the paper attempts to explore how material exchanges based on the principle of reciprocity are practiced following the death in Sikkimese society and how the practice has evolved over the years. Drawing from personal experiences and day to day observations, I endeavor to depict the system, evolution and significance of reciprocal relationship, and how the system works in maintaining social relationships and solidarity in social life of the Sikkimese Nepalis.

Conceptual Framework

How the norms of reciprocity in various forms work in social life could be found in the works of sociologists and anthropologists. Simmel (1950), Malinowski (1926), Marcel Mauss (1950), Gouldner (1960) and Levi-Strauss (1969) widely discussed about the reciprocal obligations and illuminated the concept and its dimensions. Arguing from the structuralist perspective, Levi-Strauss (1969) stated that reciprocity is a universal norm and basis of human relationships (cited in Gouldner 1960) which promotes the mutual interdependence, collective solidarity, contributing to the stability of a social system. In the similar vein, Hobhouse (1906) and Thurnwald (1932) also held reciprocity as the vital principle of society and the basis of the entire social and ethical life of primitive civilizations (cited in Gouldner 1960). Mauss has stated that reciprocity creates obligations and using Robert Axelrod's terminology is a tit-for-tat strategy (Parisi and Ghei 2003) and reciprocating demonstrates one's own liberality, honour, and wealth. The nature and pattern of reciprocity also reflects social networks, which Bourdieu calls social capital (Putnam 2001, cited in Diekmann 2004).

The nature and significance of reciprocity is contextual, which need to be understood and located in a cultural context. Gouldner (1960) considered reciprocity as "folk belief" that involves the culturally drawn collective expectations. As a cultural mandate, reciprocity implies how one should behave and obligated to behave reciprocally. For instance, in Polynesia, failure to reciprocate often signify losing *mana*, - one's spiritual source of authority and wealth (Molm et. al. 2007). Therefore, despite its universal

practice, there are studies (Parker 1998; Rousseau & Schalk 2000) that bring to light that every individual does not value reciprocity in the same degree and there is a lot of cross cultural and individual variations in the practice of reciprocity (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005).

“Sarau” among the Nepalis of Sikkim: A First-hand View

Sarau is an ethnic term for reciprocity used by the Nepalis in Sikkim, Darjeeling Hills and in other places. A similar practice of gift exchange can be found among the other communities of Sikkim, namely the Lepchas and Bhutias. The Bhutias use their term *thusho* and the Lepchas call it *adut*. The village where I spent my childhood days in south district of Sikkim was multi-ethnic, inhabited by the members of two predominant communities, namely, the Chettri-Bahun, who were the upper-caste Hindu, and the Lepcha a Buddhist tribe. Other communities in the village like Rai, Limbu who were widely considered as Hindus but had their own strong animistic practices with their own priests or Shamans. There were some Sherpa households and very few Bhutia households, who were predominantly Buddhist. However, the trace of animism was strong and one could also notice a very strong synthesis of animistic practices with their dominant world view among the Hindus as well as the Buddhists.

My reminiscences of the nature of reciprocity that was in practice in those days among two predominant communities - the Lepchas and Chettri-Bahun are so different from the practices of today. The reciprocal practice of *Sarau* has evolved over the years and today one can see much wider participation, often beyond the close kin and community. Earlier, the religious differences and socio-cultural distinctiveness were specifically pronounced in the nature of reciprocity practiced in birth, marriage and death rituals.

The death ceremony and rituals among Buddhist Lepchas, as I remember, were a combination of Buddhist and animistic traditions. The Buddhist Lamas (Monks) and the Lepcha priest, namely, *Boongthing*, were regarded as inevitable for performing the death rituals. The observance of death rituals during grieving period was considered to be primarily an intra-community affair and so was the practice of *Sarau* or gift exchange. *Sarau* following death used to be in the form of material support, both in cash and kind. The participation of each household of the community in the village was socially obligatory especially in helping the family by providing free labour in performing various works. The death rituals as I have witnessed among the Lepcha and Bhutia used to be relatively expensive and elaborate affair and continued for days. I still remember the members of other communities

discussing how these expensive rituals and practices often put some families to economic hardship. However, for the concerned community, the justification was rooted in cultural and religious faith and beliefs. Since the cremation of body depended on the availability of auspicious date, often predicted by monks/ Lamas, which meant a wait for a few days and even a week, serving food to the visitors and monks by the bereaved family would continue for days. It was customary to serve the visitors with proper meals, which included not only non-vegetarian items but also locally brewed liquor Raksi or fermented millet *chiang*, till the rituals were over. However, such serving of the food was restricted to the visiting relatives and members of the community. Therefore, to meet the huge expenses incurred, the collective support from the community households in the form of firewood for cremation and cooking, Dalda¹(Vanaspati Oil) for rituals purpose, rice, vegetables, *chiang*², had a huge use value. The materials given as gifts by the community members had both material and symbolic value. Moreover, these conventional practices were almost obligatory and mandatory for all community people as they were reciprocated whenever such situations arose in other families of the community. While the assistance in the form of cash, kind and free labour provided instrumental value, the voluntary nature of assistance without any agreements and reciprocal expectation during such uncertain period following death, had a high symbolic significance. The exchange was done not only to meet a cultural norm but also to express social solidarity. The fear of social isolation and the expectations of similar act in similar situations, often works as underlying principle for such a practice. The nature of reciprocity was mostly an intra-community affair and the participation of other communities was very restricted. The participation of non-community members was restricted to participation in funeral procession and in the final day *Kutse Shegu*³ and the Sarau done by them would always be in the form of exchange of cash. The non-community visitors during the mourning period, if there were any, were also not served with full meals.

The practices during the mourning period after death were however significantly different among the Hindu Chettri-Bahun communities. Serving the visitors during the grieving period was often restricted to tea and snacks. The principle purity-pollution was strictly adhered to in cooking and serving. The guests coming from a distance were served snacks such as *puri-sabji* prepared away from the *maraughar*,⁴ kitchen or hearth. Meals for the relatives coming from long distance was cooked in neighbors' or nearby relative's house close by.

Traditionally, among the Chettri-Bahun the gifts included “*mano*⁵ – *chamal*” along with butter or ghee, ginger, sugar etc. to the *marau* within five to ten days of the incidence of death. The intra- community solidarity was apparent as it was binding for all households of the community to offer something material. This offering has substantive value as these were the items used by “*kriya – putri*”⁶. The items are also used for preparing food items during *antheysti Kriya*⁷ or *kam* (widely used in Sikkim), which would take place on the 13th day after death. However, despite being Hindu, I noticed that my parents and any other visitor of other Nepali communities were never offering *mano-chamal* and *sarau* would take the forms of cash and other kinds. Unlike among the Lepcha and Bhutia, where the assistance in the form of kind often included locally prepared Rakshi and fermented millet, among the Chettri-Bahun communities, items like tealeaf, fruits, sugar, milk etc. were included, which were widely required to serve the visitors during grieving period.

The justification offered by my father and the fellow villagers was that “*marau ko lagi maanchey tayarihudaina*” meaning *death never comes prepared* unlike occasion like wedding and child birth, when people have ample time to be prepared and save at the time of need. Therefore, the collective support in the forms of cash and kind come handy for the bereaved family that are not well off. For the lower and middleclass families too such community support in the form of cash and kind is highly useful. The rich families too do not say “no” to the Sarau practices because they take it as a symbol of social support and as a symbol of community solidarity at the time of crisis. Such participation in village was almost mandatory at the community and village level and at least one person from each household did participate in funeral procession or paid a visit during the grieving period or in the final ceremony. If for some unavoidable reasons, they were unable to participate, they used to send the condolence offering through some other people as their representative. The underlying reason for mandatory participation in rituals and give Sarau is the fear of social isolation. There was a saying “*marda malamipaudiana*”, which means, in case of non-participation, you will be socially isolated in such situation. The participation and assistance in the form of cash and kind was symbolically and substantively important as it marked the expression of solidarity through community participation.

The village being agrarian in nature, agriculture was the major source of livelihood except for a very few individuals, who were doing government service as school teacher, in the forest department, health centers, animal and veterinary services and so on. Therefore, despite being a small village

with two communities remaining in adjacent hamlets, the ethnic boundary was clearly and rigidly maintained as the death and other rituals used to be purely intra community affairs. The practice of Sarau existed beyond the community only in a very few cases, mostly among the colleagues in a common service and among the higher classes. Therefore, Mauss' argument that reciprocity clearly demonstrated one's own liberality, honour, wealth and social status was also evidently pronounced in the village. The quantity and quality of the exchange also varied according to the social prestige and position of the family in the village. My father being widely respected as headmaster used to participate among all communities either in the funeral procession or during the mourning period or on the day of the final ritual. He used to offer Sarau mostly in the form of cash, but sometimes, both in cash and kind. Such exchanges helped reproduce his high position in society.

The second narration is based on my experiences in the 1989 in another village called Makha in East Sikkim where my parental house still exists. The tragic incident of passing away of my grandma in my own house gave me the ample opportunity to observe the Sarau practices in my village at the community level and beyond. The village was inhabited by different Nepali castes and communities. There was diversity in terms of religion and communities but common language (i.e. Nepali), physical proximity and a sense of common neighborhood facilitated inter-community participation in death, and other rituals. Sarau used to be both in the form of cash and kind, however offering in cash was more common. The reciprocal exchange or *sarau* was witnessed not only in the form of cash and kind but also helping the *marauhar* with free labour from the time of death to the day of final rituals. The village youth used to take the responsibilities in the form of managing and coordinating work like funeral procession construction of tent/pandal, serving tea and snacks to the visitors, shopping, cooking and serving food till the final ceremony was over. However, the community people and kin were widely involved in performing all rituals and activities. The village was inhabited mostly by the Hindu families but there were a few Buddhist and Christian families as well and one could see the participation of people from all communities in death and other rituals with Sarau exchanges.

Another incident of death in our family was on 14th February 2017, when my mother passed away. After the death my mother the rites and rituals followed and I could notice some significant changes in the practice of Sarau as compared to 1990s. In the 1989, the community participation was prominent and overwhelming. My mother was a highly respected school teacher at a time when very few women were educated and were working

as school teacher in Sikkim in the early 1950s. In those days, literacy rate was low and women receiving education was unheard of. She started her teaching career at the age of 16, after passing her high school examination from a boarding school in Darjeeling. She was known for her high work commitment and dedication, for which she was later honored with State and National Award for Teachers. A strict disciplinarian she encouraged us, the six siblings, to go for higher education. I often heard from the villagers and her students, some of whom are now occupying high positions in State bureaucracy and in various government offices, about her commitment, her endeavor and zeal in spreading the education and literacy in the village. She had the record of even not availing the maternity leave during birth of six of us and joining school within three to seven days of child birth, immediately after birth rites were over. It is because of her life long sacrifice and commitment, her death was a big issue and people from within and outside the village and community came forward to pay their last tribute and respect. Unlike on the earlier occasions, when the collective participation was restricted within village, this time around, apart from the participation from the village and community the well-wishers and admirers from different parts of state came forward to offer condolences. Diekmann (2004) and Putnam (2001) highlighted a close association between social capital and the norms of reciprocity and this was amply evident in the wider participation of people in mourning my mother's death. Our relatives from the sides of our parents came with Sarau gifts, the friends and colleagues of mine and those of all by siblings, who are working in different parts of the State, my mother's former students, who represented different castes and communities, came for the mourning. My mother being a Christian and my father a liberal Hindu, the ceremonies were a combination of both religious traditions.

Parisi and Ghei (2003) have observed that gift giving and other forms of exchange work on the principle of reciprocity. The huge participation in the form of Sarau practices at the time of death of my mother could, thus, be explained as a response to our family participation in similar situations to the families of the fellow villagers, community people and in the larger society. Pakyntein (2011) in a study of reciprocity among Pnar Society in Meghalaya has also reported that the level of participation and the nature of exchange vary depending on the social status and position of the family or individuals involved in such exchanges. Reciprocity is obligational (Mauss 1950) and receiving cash and kind is necessary for maintenance of social relationships; refusal to receive gifts, on the other hand, was not in conformity with the social expectations and would mean refusal to accept the

relationship. Therefore, the offerings, both in cash and kind, were accepted and acknowledged with gratitude and in conformity with the social tradition.

A major shift has been noticed in terms of community participation and nature of physical support. The collective participation of village youth throughout the mourning period for assisting in various work and even staying during the night, which was seen in earlier cases, seemed to have relatively weakened this time around. My village, which is located at a distance of 42 Kms from Gangtok, has not remained isolated from the wider structural transformation that has affected the Sikkimese society. The awareness of education, the initiatives of the state government for free and compulsory education and incentive given by the state government in terms of higher and technical education have been grabbed by both hands by the villagers. The development initiatives of the state since 1989, existence of Senior Secondary School and many Junior High school, private schools in the village, infrastructural developments in the form of road connectivity, awareness through mass and social media and aspirations for higher education and job opportunities and incentives given by the state government have contributed positively towards overall development of the people. This has made the members of the younger generation, even in villages, more mobile; they now migrate to distant places, both within and outside the state, in their efforts to tap educational and employment opportunities. Back in 1989, I still remember as a young girl when we used to be in the village during holidays, we often used to participate in *marauhar* in our neighborhood especially in assisting them various works, mostly serving tea and taking care of the visitors. A clear gender division was maintained then; the males were responsible for the outside work like construction of shed in the outside courtyard for visitors, preparing the burial ground, temporary dining place and so on, while the women had to prepare food and serve food and tea to the guests. This time, since a large majority of the youth were out of village in connection with study and jobs, the participation of youth in the rites and rituals was largely absent. In the absence of youth volunteers, the mourning families now hire the services of the professional groups, especially for catering services for all the days and for the final day of rituals and ceremony.

One can also notice a significant change in selection of the materials for gift. Although, the essence has remained same over the years, the changing realities of society, impact of market and global culture could be noticed in selection of gifts and the amount of cash. One noticeable change is offering food to the visitors during the mourning period, with the common logic that guests come from faraway places because of expanding social network of

the mourning family; this was earlier restricted only to the day of Sradh, or final day ceremony. One can also see flexibility in observing the commensality as people representing different castes and communities interdine. I have observed the same practice among the Hindu Chettri-Bahun and other Nepali communities. The other changes includes the change in menu and recipes reflecting the family honour and status, replacement of traditional gift items like ghee, rice and *chiang* etc. with new market oriented product like soft drinks viz, Coke, Fanta, Sprite, tealeaf, sugar, juices, dry fruits, *atta*, flour, fruits and even biscuits, cooking oil, vegetables etc., and sometimes even a sack of rice. The contribution in the form of cash, which varies depending on degree of closeness as well as the socio-economic status of the bereaved family and the gift giver has remained universal. Catering service especially for preparing food has now become almost common trend. In some pockets of Sikkim, however, the role of Samaj/ *Kidu/ tarzoom* in village and community association of Nepali, Bhutia and Lepcha respectively is still found and active. The practice of serving non-vegetarian items and use of liquor and alcohol has either been stopped or reduced to a considerable extent even among the Lepcha-Bhutia communities. Pakyntein (2011) has observed that although the essence of reciprocity has remained and is still in practice, there has been substantial modification in the modes of gifting and exchange of free service among Khasi-Pnar society in Meghalaya. However, despite all changes, the nature of reciprocity in Sarau has retained its essence in contemporary Sikkim, extending beyond ethnic, religious, caste and village boundaries, a trend set into motion by the external forces like modernization and structural transformation in Sikkim, a state which is in transition but still firmly rooted in tradition.

Although going through some modifications in recent years, the reciprocal exchange in Sarau carries a both moral and material support, thus having both symbolic and substantive value. The social obligation here is bound by tradition, although the subjects involved in the exchange, apply their agencies in bringing about some improvisations. However, in all cases the Sarau is of great help for the needy in particular, the cash and kind, the practice brings and provide strength to the family in bereavement. The financial burden of serving food to the visitors is to a large extent compensated by the financial and material support. Unlike marriage where people might comment about the mismanagement and quality of food being served, experience suggests that death being a tragic occasion, no visitor or participant complains about the quality of food being served or about hospitality. Looking at it critically, the new trend also underlines some

concerns that indicate to what Merton would have termed the dysfunctional aspects of the evolving system. Since a gift is never free (Mauss 1950), and it engages the honour of both the giver and receiver and the expectation that people will reciprocate similarly, the growing trend of dependence on monetary and material goods sometimes creates stress to a middleclass family. Interactions with many friends of mine from middleclass background and state government employees brought to light that despite its virtually voluntary nature and functional importance, there are situations, when many such incidents occur simultaneously, reciprocal obligations during death, marriage, child birth, visiting people in hospital etc. sometime put them in financial stress and time constraint.

The practice of Sarau among the Nepalis in Sikkim has evolved over the years, from an intra- community practice of exchange following death to a form of exchange that involves all the friends and intimate ones, besides the members of one's own community. One can see that the involvement of the members of one's immediate community has thinned over the years because the dispersal of the younger generation for education and job. The mode of selection of the materials for exchange has also changed as people now prefer global products and cash rather than agricultural products, which they used to exchange earlier. Despite these changes in practice Sarau remains a major institution of social solidarity; it also helps perpetuation of social hierarchy as selection of "gift" is done in conformity with one's social position and financial condition.

Notes

1. Dalda or Vanaspati oil for lighting lamp in the name of departed soul as common among Buddhists
2. Locally fermented millet having alcoholic content
3. The ceremony called Kutse Shegu is held on the 49th day following the death and is aimed to purify the atmosphere. All the well-wishers are invited to visit the house of the deceased. Food and drinks are offered to the visitors. In this ceremony those who could not pay their condolences earlier do so by offering a folded *khada* and some money to the bereaved family.
4. A Nepali term *maraughar* literally means house where death has taken place.

5. Mano, is copper container used for measuring grains almost equivalent to half kg and *chamal* means rice. Therefore Mano-Chamal refers to one full container of rice
6. The sons of the deceased who performs all rituals and remains isolated taking food only once in a day
7. The final death rituals and ceremony takes place in 13th Day among Hindu Chettri- Bahun.

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Elites and Field of Power: Methodological Reflections from Bikaner

Suraj Beri

Abstract: *This paper explains the relationship between elite practices and elite claims. It argues that empirical focus on the discrepancy between elite accounts of their self and their practices can be one of the core areas of the methodological dimensions of elite research. It would demonstrate the complex of nature social inequalities and its reproduction. It concludes by arguing that field work in elite research can be made more fruitful by paying close attention to observational data and hence empirical research may look beyond “what is said” and to reach closer to “what is done”.*

Keywords: Elite, practices, space, subjectivity, fieldwork, social inequality, state-society relations.

Introduction

Studies on elites engage with questions about the nature of power and production of inequality. These studies demonstrate the dual challenge of “reaching to the top echelons of the power” firstly for individuals as part of mobility of their career and status and secondly for researchers to conduct interviews. It provides an opportunity to examine the nature of state-society relations through the character of elites located in different fields. In recent years, the central methodological debate for elite studies has been mostly about i) accessing the elite, ii) constructing the general structure of the elite sphere to establish an empirical pattern of their social life and iii) recruitment of individuals to these elite positions.

A major methodological issue in the elite studies is regarding the normative concerns related to the study of “elite”, particularly when it is referred with negative connotations. Studying the development in polity and economy thus also hinges on moral issues like egalitarianism and justice, and with it

comes the critical evaluation of those who are in the positions of wealth, power, and privilege. The sociological theory deals with these themes, via a more concrete analysis of the phenomenon of social mobility and patterns of dominance instead of moralizing the debate.¹ For instance, social scientists have found it difficult to theorize elites and democracy together. Therefore, a *sociological* study of the elite should necessarily demarcate the *normative* questions from the empirical ones (a dictum by Max Weber). The study of elites should focus on the way the social structure is organized; and how the privilege is organized; spaces of mobilities for lower classes; change within the elite groups with the process of democratization etc. Thus, the objective is to examine the institutionalization of power. Nevertheless, doing research on elites is much more complex than said. Elites usually 'establish certain barriers to set themselves apart' from other social classes (Hertz & Imber 1995: viii). This is more so in studying urban elites. During the fieldwork, I could access elites in Bikaner relatively easily (although not always) in comparison to elites in metropolitan cities like Delhi or Mumbai. While locating elites in a rural setting is relatively even easier than in urban areas. Rural elites would also perceive a university researcher differently. In other words, spatial context does have a crucial role to play in the response of elites for opening up to researchers' gaze. Thus, elite's relation to research also is influenced by the various kinds of social processes.

Modern social science methods have gone through considerable elaboration in studying the elite relations. From the survey methods to the qualitative ethnographies, this diversity of method also depicts the essential differences in the questions asked and consequently studied (Moyser & Wagstaffe 1987). Depending upon the theoretical assumption behind the definition of elite, unit of analysis is identified in the empirical studies. In many cases, the identification of "elite" itself becomes a key theoretical advance. The operationalizing of the concept of the elite in field-based research raises a key question of "boundary" for elite studies. Though *boundary making* has been crucial to understand the questions regarding ethnicity, class, identity formation, it has been scarcely studied in the elite studies². Bourdieu's work has been foremost among the studies on class boundaries between working classes and middle class. This is where lies the role of symbolic resources (e.g. titles, claim making, royal heritage etc.) in strengthening the social and political identities of competing groups. In his work on class practices of consumption and taste, Bourdieu (1984) argues that dominant classes tend to define their own culture as superior to that of lower classes via the symbolic binaries constructed in the realm of consumption. Symbolic boundaries also then separate one group of individuals or groups from others

and by articulating and legitimizing certain “status” people monopolize key resources (Lamont & Molnar 2002: 168).

The analytical distinction between the economic domain and political domain is one such blind spot in elite studies. Drawing their theoretical model on various sources, scholars emphasize one over another in explaining the power relations and forms of inequalities. It marks difference in approaches of Marxists, functionalists and classical elite theorists. For some Marxists, class power defines the nature of state and politics, for others state is able to maintain “relative autonomy” from the capitalist mode of production. Thus, political power is differently organized and cannot be reduced to economic order per se.

On the other hand, functionalists would explain the difference between economy, polity and society as part of historical development. Drawing on the insights of Durkheim and Parsons they argue that society gets differentiated with the process of social change and development. Functionalists explored the growing differentiation of institutions and specialized roles of elites in different institutional realms (Eisenstadt 1963). Accordingly, elites tend to regulate the allocation of sources in their own domain and influence such processes in other connected domains as well (Eisenstadt 1963). The provoking debates between pluralists and elite analysts have opened up new areas of research. The empirical research can further elaborate upon the boundary making among the elites and the sources through which these boundaries are institutionalized. The issue of “boundary” indicates toward another theoretical concern in elite studies i.e. the community variable. Studying “community power”, within the context of the local town, has been the most interesting within the elite studies research (see, Waste 1986; Hunter 1953). Floyd Hunter popularized the usage of “reputational method” to study the community elites in the local power structure. It also provides insights to explore how elites build symbolic boundaries to distinguish themselves from others.

Elite research: Challenges and Questions

Mike Savage & Karol Williams (2008) suggest that instead of studying elites as structural positions, there should be attempt to study via the concept of *social resources* that several individuals or institutions hold and how do these resources contribute to the formation of certain class groupings (Savage & Williams 2008). In the recent studies on elites, empirical questions, regarding what elites practice and what they project, have raised methodological issues of conducting fieldwork. For instance, Shamus Khan

in his study of an elite school St. Paul's boarding school in New Hampshire, argues that there is difference between what elites "say" and what they "actually do" (Khan & Jerolmack 2013). Emphasizing the importance of ethnographic "observational data" these authors suggest that study of elite respondents must not rely solely on interview data, as it presents only a partial picture of their everyday life (Khan & Jerolmack 2013: 11–12). In the absence of the observational data the study would show only an "idealized and well systematized world view" of the elite respondents, which is actually a form of their posturing as "learned capital" and misses the way privilege is constructed (ibid).

The Indian Context

Studying the elite structure in an Indian town is important to understand the *regional* dynamics of power, stratification and social change. As we know, the recent writings on power and middle class have remained limited to the study of metropolitan India and the emerging social currents in Indian towns remain to be studied empirically. During 1970s many significant studies were conducted to understand the formation of political parties on small towns, emergence middle class, transformation in rural authority, but most of them focused either on formation of political parties or on changing agrarian structures (for instance, see works by Chakravarty 1975; Bayly 1975). The larger "field of power" in town remains to be studied in a systematic manner. Recognizing this gap in existing scholarship on elites, this research aims to interrogate the changes in the power structure of Bikaner town. Instead of focusing on one community and its elites, this study has examined the town elite structure as a whole.

Most of these researches are conducted on rise of political leadership in rural contexts in different states of India (Sharma 1976; Chakravarty 1975). A major emphasis in good number of studies has been to analyze social background of the elites i.e. rural/urban, linguistic identity, caste and religious composition, and education and family background (Navlakha 1989; Sharma 1988). Unfortunately, these studies lack any engagement with the internal life practices of elites and their relation to each other. Social background studies compare the social indicators of elites and general population and identify prerequisites of elite careers. Social anthropological studies on the patterns of marriage and networks among these rural elites depict their rise in the post-independent India. Political leaders are the most researched group of elites in Indian social sciences. This fact also shows their "visibility" in the public domain. Even these elites are also interested in sharing their

success stories with academic researchers. The social science research also legitimizes their mobility through its own research. In contrast to this, business elites are hardly “visible” both in public domain and in academic researches. Since their constituency lies in economy, they tend to avoid public scrutiny. This point also emerged strongly in the present research. It appears to them that this kind of research might ask questions regarding the sources of their wealth formation and economic position³. Not just the organizational hierarchies but also their social settings prohibit critical enquiry of their everyday knowhow and professional secrets. On the other hand, politicians were always excited about the interview and its publication; this relates to the fact that these elites are intrinsically connected to public domain. They also take deep interest in news coverage of their programmes, rallies, polls and opinion surveys.

There are numerous studies on rural elites and emergence of ‘dominant castes’ in late 1970’s, on changing agrarian structure and labour relations in countryside, also on changing class profile of communities in the context of educational and occupational diversification. During the late 1990s spate of researches have come which study urban middle classes in terms of their politics, their occupational profiles, formation of middle class in lower castes and minority communities etc.

Entering the Field: Bikaner City

This study aimed to understand the macro process of democratization of the political sphere and continuity of economic differences within the town. It sought to understand how traditionally marginalized social groups negotiate with the power structure. Initial exploration of the Bikaner’s town elite sphere raised questions of differentiated elites. For instance, during the pilot study locals described Bikaner elite circle through the binary of “maharaja and *chunav* (election) leaders”, “kisanneta and vyapari” etc. On probing further, it came out that these different leaders also come from different castes and spheres of society. In yet another interaction with a local councilor the issue of different interests and fields emerged prominently. For instance, one did not hear of any business elites entering electoral politics in Bikaner. Therefore, it was important to understand empirically whether political sphere is completely isolated from business or there exists an organic connection. The field provided the rationale for elite classification. Along with the changing profiles of legislative members in political sphere, it was important equally crucial to map the changes happening in the field of economy. To explore the dynamics of elite formation

across these various spheres the universe was broadly categorized in three broad fields: economy, polity and culture.

The traditional segregation of space and symbolic value attached to city space remain significant for contemporary political process. Similarly, the politics of a name also provides access to mark the space of the city, its historicity, and the identity of its people in a clear and unequivocal manner. The name of each city is marked and fixed in a particular time and space, that is how people tend to affiliate and develop a sense of belonging, and community life. The question of *naming* indicates the contradiction of claims and contestation of power relations, resources, community relations and so on.

Elite Networks & Field of Power: The relationship between “what they say” and “what they do”

My first encounter with business leaders of the Bikaner happened on a visit to local *baba ramdev mela* (fair) in September of 2015 when I met a prominent *bhujia* businessman Ram Agarwal (names changed to maintain anonymity). This was my first experience of local culture and customary routines of such figures. However, my position as a researcher was strengthened by the contact through which I had come to visit this fair. During my interview with him, I tried to introduce my research work to him. Unlike the laymen who would not have such experience of being a research subject, he was aware of the market surveys and media projections about him and his product. He was candid in describing his family background, while others around him were yet to become normal of my presence in the small informal gathering. It was a gathering of these elites with their family, relatives and close friends. These business leaders were dressed in traditional attire of white *kurta pajama* and were waiting to start the *pooja* and *arti*. After that Ram Agarwal invited me for a dinner with them along with other office bearers of Bikaner Vyapar Mandal, the professional body of business groups in Bikaner. In the background one could hear the *marwari* songs being played, and people reciting the warriorship and philanthropic works of local deity named *Ramdev*, a Tanwar Rajput. As scholars working on elites know, these are the informal spaces where one could also further gain contacts of other such elites and also observe their interactions with masses. The elites organize their philanthropic works around such religious and cultural programmes. More than the belief and worship, these occasions are avenues of public image construction of these business personalities.

Writing on the methodological aspect while conducting interviews with business elites on philanthropy in United States, Galaskiewicz argues that prior information about scheduling interview is quite essential (Galaskiewicz 1987). To document their cultural engagements, Galaskiewicz suggests scrolling through the local newspapers, magazine articles in order to get a sense of business elites' future programmes and events (Galaskiewicz 1987). Elite interviews are quite effective to provide the attitudes of both business and political elites. I did not experience any difference in the willingness of the respondents in terms of their political affiliation. What mattered, however, is the way most of the political elites wanted to portray their regional image and interest to move beyond their district politics.

Bikaner being a town allows more space for business elites and political elites to mingle and meet often in public gatherings, religious fairs, and administrative meetings. Even though few of them had lost in the latest elections, this did not quite affect their public interaction and administrative contacts. Rather, in many instances it can be seen that individual remains powerful and has more maneuvering capacity than political parties have. Madan Joshi is one such case, being an MLA from Congress party in 1970s, who is famous for his sweet and snacks shop. While in 2008 and 2013 he again contested elections from the ticket of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and became MLA. He was very soft-spoken during interviews and skillful in using Marwari language for political satires.

Another example can be given of a senior Congress leader, Suresh Malla, who has been part of congress leadership for a very long period of time. He has been a cabinet Minister in erstwhile Ashok Gehlot government and served as important minister for Bikaner region. He comes from a predominant Pushkarna Brahmin community of Bikaner. During the interview, Kalla seem quite polite and patient on the question of political diversity in local Congress. He was quite candid in raising questions on the conflicts among congress leadership. He was full of accounts of hard work and ground work that he did since his college days. Whereas in the observational data on his campaigns, his 6-7 days fast at public park, his behaviour during the party meetings and interaction with juniors, contradict his interview accounts. He is well known for being a very dominating leader, and someone who can successfully mobilize his lobby to minimize the rise of another powerful leadership within Bikaner Congress.

Elite Authority on Display: Limits of Interviews

Another name among district political elites who has quite strong hold individually is Bhupi Singh (a senior most politician from Kolayat). At the same time, it was obvious during the interviews that to understand their descriptions and narratives in fuller view, one required to have “double hearing” during the interview. The *first* is to hear what the respondent is particularly *wants to share* and tell me about the field and his position. The *Second* is to understand from the overall mood, body gestures and nature of responses, what they *do not want* to tell you. This “double hearing” helped me a lot to frame questions with different kinds of elites to compare the “double responses” of different elites. Interestingly, another crucial aspect of this field experience was the continuous display of authority by elites. This gives researcher the impression that this how elite live their lives. It brings to an important point: how do elite inhabit privilege. This paper, hence, makes a case for combining the observation data on what do the elites practice, what they say in their interviews. The problem with this possibility is that elites are mostly spoken to, rarely observed.

Elites writing about themselves: Self-fashioning and construction of Imagery

One of the very interesting things from the fieldwork was to locate the literature produced by elites themselves. Though only few elites have contributed to the writing about their role, family history, and future endeavors, these are quite informative accounts of their social life. Moreover, these literatures add on to their agenda of public image building. The contradiction of confidentiality and public advertising through the research is another important revelation from the fieldwork. Most of the business elites had conservative opinions about the politicians. Almost everyone agreed that there is a “lack of political will” among the leadership of Bikaner and which has cost in terms of business projects, developmental programmes one could have bargained from the state or central government. In the case of political elites, it is comparatively easier to access them in their offices or homes. In addition, due to their public profiles, it is quite possible to verify the biographical information these elite provide. Their engagement with any political event or program can also be sought through other participants such as media personnel. This general awareness about the interviews, surveys make political elites more responsive to academic research.

For example, Rathore princely elites of the Bikaner town have commissioned several works on their family history and organized many scholarship programs to celebrate the birth and death anniversaries of their ancestral family members⁴. The recent generation members like Karni Singh and his daughter Shree Kumari have organized systematically their family documents and historical records of treaties of the Bikaner State.

On the other hand, the non-royal upper caste elites have also produced their own literature about their success and kinship networks across the country. These community magazines are quite popular among these elites and help them in spreading their social works and community welfare activities. Some of the popular magazines read and distributed in Bikaner city are *Pushkarna Jagat*, *Marwari Samaj*, *Marwar India*, *Manak Rajasthani*, *Brahmin Swarnkar*. These magazines more often than not also provide a platform to find marriage partner for the members of the communities. Scholars have highlighted the difficulties associated with the getting information about the business groups and companies⁵. The business elites of the town lack documentation of their career and corporate structure. For example, unlike the national level data available in the form of *Who's Who* in Indian Business, these elites hardly have any such database to reveal during the interview. Even the recently formed companies and industrial units show nothing more than the company's executive position and financial performance in a given year. It is due to these reasons the *social history* of economic institutions (Bikaner Vyapar Mandal, Jila Udyog Sangh etc.) becomes crucial to develop a framework for the organization and changes in business groups.

Among the above-mentioned various variables what might influence the nature of information gathered and obtained from the elites is my location as a researcher based in a nationally recognized educational institution. Different elites interpreted my own location as PhD research student in different ways. While for some politicians, I was there in Bikaner to map out the conditions to suggest the candidature for next elections, for some others I represented audit personnel and have come to Bikaner to audit these economic elites. Similarly, during the interviews my caste identity was also crucial for these elites to know and decipher "who" is collecting the information. According to their convenience during interviews, I was "outsider" in terms of the castes who are currently dominant in Bikaner, but due to the proximity of my native town, many of them were quite relaxed and pursued discussion with enthusiasm and great passion. Knowing that I have been collecting the information of major business groups and

their strategies of domination, many of the business elites actually suggested me to work and help in building their online portals after the completion of my PhD project.

Conclusion

The analysis of field notes on research on elites has contributes to the idea that mere elite accounts about their lives cannot stand in for their actual practices. Instead, these accounts must be seen as a form of action aimed to posture in a certain manner to confirm their identity as elites. Many sociologists doing elite studies have avoided any examination of what elites do, and instead have primarily focused on what elites say they do. In other words, these scholars concentrate their attention on the cultural frameworks or interpretive schemes their respondents utilize and bring into the discussion, or the values they claim to hold, or self-reports of their behaviour. Sociological literature on action and individual suggests that it is imperative to understand, how actors think, yet elite studies can open up the debate to contest the above-mentioned hypothesis. Thus, even in interview accounts, researchers infer the behavioural intent of the respondents instead of focusing on mere intent or claims or values. The attention is directed to hypothetical action through the accounts.

During the course of my fieldwork, I have found that political elites tend to be very comfortable with interviews and seem like they are always ready for the questions and the format of the whole process. Because of the exposure of political elites to journalists interview and popular media blitz, they have learnt the art of how to present themselves during the interview. In a way, they have developed a form of capital through the experience of being in front of camera and large audiences. During the interviews, many of these political elites would be comfortable about openness in politics, praising the value of hardwork, educational qualifications and diversity. Whereas in observational settings, they might be seen practicing nuanced and subtle form of social closures i.e. whom to include in meetings, invite for program, who can access them, marrying their children to people from other communities, and so on.

Notes

1. Studies on elite have also maintained this dictum rather sharply as the study of elite also poses question for their 'moral' character as their

privilege and domination is put in parallel to the powerlessness of the masses and poor. An empirical research aims instead to highlight the processes through and within which certain social phenomena might take place and has implications for larger society. For a brief summary of various modes of doing elite research, see Ursula Hoffman-Lange, 2007. 'Methods of Elite Research.' In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior* edited by Russell J. Dalton and Hans-Dieter Klingemann: 919–928. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

2. Even though a Marxist analysis on class boundaries and middle class is quite popular in class studies, studies on elites' boundary making are quite rare.
3. Almost every business elite whom I had contacted for conducting interview clarified it in the first place whether my research is, in any possible way, related to income tax department or financial audit.
4. For example, Rajya Shree Kumari, the granddaughter of Maharaja Karni Singh has come up with two such publications on her family history. See Rajyashree Kumari, *The Lalgarh Palace, Home of the Maharajas of Bikaner* (2009). Dev Books: New Delhi. Rajyashree Kumari Bikaner, *The Maharajas of Bikaner* (2012) New Delhi: Amaryllis. Few of the books were written quite early, for instance see K. M. Panikkar, 1937. *His Highness, The Maharaja of Bikaner: A Biography*. London: Oxford University Press; Rathore, L.S. 2007. *The Regal Patriot: Maharaja Ganga Singh of Bikaner*. New Delhi: Roli Books; Karni Singh, 2011 (1974). *The Relations of the House of Bikaner with the Central Powers*. Bikaner: Books Treasure Jodhpur and Maharaja Ganga Singhji Trust, Bikaner.
5. One of the interesting accounts of the ways to access the business executives is provided by Micheal Useem (1995). For a detailed view of several techniques utilized to gain information, see Michael Useem, 'Reaching Corporate Executives' in Rosanna Hertz & Jonathan Imber (eds) *Studying Elites Using Qualitative Methods* (1995). Sage Publications: California: 18–39.

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Complexities of School Choice: Some Reflections from the Field

Indrani Sengupta

Abstract: *The paper is an attempt to understand how parents choose schools for their children in the present context of changing educational landscape where private schools are increasing in number. I situate the study in the urban fringes of Maslandapur and Madhyamgram where private players are investing enormously in schools. This gives a spatial dimension to the context of choice. The study shows that choice of school is not based on cost and benefit calculation; the guiding principle being social recognition where the choice of private schools is increasingly becoming a part of this culture. Although the parents reside in the periphery, their aspirations are no less than the city dwellers. The study highlights how parents negotiate with their own space and choose schools of different shades, which are hierarchically located in terms of quality, status and glamour, for their children. Differential control over material resources contribute to selection of schools which have differential pay structures. It is thus important that right based approach to education with a common school system is encouraged. The significance of the study lies in bringing out the complexities that surround the notion of choice of school which point out that the freedom to choose does not always bring intended benefits.*

Keywords: Choice, school education, urban fringe, privatization.

Introduction

The paper seeks to explore various dimensions of choice of school by parents from different socioeconomic background in the suburbs of North 24 Parganas. This issue assumes importance against the backdrop of privatization of school education in India where parents are “actively” choosing private schools for their children which is documented in various studies (Srivastava 2007; Nambissan 2010a; 2010b, 2012). At the elementary level, education is conceived as a fundamental right which mandates that every child has the right to education (RTE 2009). Hence various measures are undertaken to ensure education of every child at the elementary level which include incentives as one such measure. They are provided on the

assumption that parents are 'rational' and hence government schools that lower cost through incentives would be preferred because parents maximize net benefits. Despite such incentives in government schools, parents from different socioeconomic backgrounds are increasingly choosing private schools which are fee based.¹ This questions the neo-classical assumption that human beings are "rational". If the cost of education is low or free, then it is more likely that parents from low income group would prefer government schools over private schools. But the mushrooming of low fee private schools and the subsequent rise in enrolment of students from lower income strata show that it is not a mere calculation of monetary cost and benefit. Looking closely at the statistics we find that in India, the percentage of students enrolled in government schools have fallen from 80.37 % in 2009-10 to 74.75% in 2014-15 and there is a simultaneous rise of private school enrolment from 19.49 % to 22.74% (DISE 2009-10, 2014-15). It is at this juncture that a deeper scrutiny at the notion of 'choice of school' becomes pertinent. The choice of private schools over government schools is anything but straightforward and has to be understood within a particular context which the paper attempts to foreground through a multisite case study in two suburbs- Maslandapur and Madhyamgram in the district of North 24 Parganas. The analysis goes beyond Rational Choice Theory (RCT), which treats individuals as calculative, self-interested agents. Rather, I draw from the literature of psychology and sociology to unravel the complexities of choice in the education market. Specifically, the paper uses Bourdieu's concept of capital - social, economic and cultural, and Simon's (1982) bounded rationality to understand the process of choice. Choice of school is a complex process which needs to be investigated against the background of various policies undertaken by the Government as well as the structural changes in the economy which is increasingly getting integrated into the global market.

Education policies in India have undergone massive changes since the 1990s after the introduction of economic reforms. One of the notable changes is the reduced role of the Government (Venkatanarayanan 2015). In the 1980s expansion of schools took place through programmes like Operation Blackboard which aimed at providing access to schools within 1km. At the elementary level, the policies have shifted gradually towards market-based reforms where private actors participate in the provisioning of education. The manifestation of privatization has taken different forms. First, the increase in low fee private schools in education which provide an alternative way to the low-income parents to opt out of government schools. The second is that Section 12(1) (c) of the RTE Act of 2009 allows private

unaided schools to enroll students from the disadvantaged section. Third, it is through the introduction of public private partnership in India that education landscape is changing towards the “private management”. There are also various advocacy networks in the education market which invest in schools claiming it to be a philanthropic effort. What we see today is a rapid drift towards privatization. This has also resulted in closing down of government schools in various parts of India as they are unable to attract students. The issue of school choice is important to our understanding of how “private” is slowly entering the domain of school education. By looking at the factors that are taken into account while making choice, one can ascertain what is going wrong with public education or it is just a ‘culture’ of private schooling that parents are responding to.

The study is situated in the urban fringes of the city in the census town of Maslandapur and Madhyamgram. Urban fringes are defined as transition zones which have shown substantial changes in the occupation structure of its dwellers and are characterized by significant increase in population density (Pryor 1968; Rao et al. 1991). These areas provide a fertile ground to understand choice because of the transformation that is happening within these spaces with urbanization. As the city is not able to hold its population pressure, people who are migrating from nearby villages are pushed into its periphery. I have observed that the educational opportunities in these spaces do not match that of the city and that the aspirations of the people in these areas are no less than that of the city dwellers. As private schools are getting established in these areas, there is a shift of students from government schools to private schools in these areas because of the growing preference for English as a medium of study. The paper thus throws light on how people negotiate with their space and make choices on schools. These two sites provide insights as to how parents who have resources and stay close to the city are able to make choices outside their areas. Contextualizing choice of schools would allow us to bring interplay of geographical, social and historical contexts in the decision-making process.

Are parents rational?

The literature on school choice is dominated by Rational Choice Theory (RCT) which maintains that parents weigh costs and benefits of education while arriving at a decision regarding choice of school. The theory is untenable because it assumes that parents have complete information about schools and are able to act at the best interests of their wards (Bosetti 1998; 2004). The parents are considered to be agents who maximize utility of sending a child to a school subject to constraints like income and other

household assets. The preferences of the parents are also considered to be exogenous as if decision making takes place in a vacuum. That 'social structures and institutions thickly structure (but do not determine) individual understandings, preferences, aspirations and expectations' (Hogan 1999) is simply ignored in this theory. Research on school choice is mostly based on developed countries where education reforms have taken the form of providing vouchers (Lubienski 2007; Schneider et. al. 2000, Chubb and Moe 1990). The proponents of RCT whose ideologies are shaped by neoclassical thoughts are of the view that vouchers would enable people to choose between options which render more autonomy to the parents in school selection. This will also create competition among schools in the sense that schools would try to perform better to attract parents and hence "efficiency" would be achieved. This is symptomatic of how the market functions through increasing consumer sovereignty and incentive to the schools to supply "good quality" treating students and parents as consumers. This goal of providing voucher to parents rests on the assumption that parents prefer good quality schools for their children (Chubb and Moe 1990). But "school quality" is often a misnomer for "student quality" as argued by Wells and Crain (2003) where the selection of schools by parents also depend on the social background of other students i.e. by class and colour. This suggests that giving more options to parents might not result in the intended benefit of improving schools and creating competition. That school choice is a dynamic and complex process involving aspirations of parents and also sometimes a strategy to maintain class position (Ball 2003) has been well established in the sociological studies on school choice and this focuses on the "non-rational aspects of choice and strategy".

The limitations of RCT have been put forward by Simon (1986) while explaining the concept of "bounded rationality". He incorporated subjective element in the decision making (self-perception of the decision maker) by demarcating it from objective rationality. Constraints on the decision-making process such as i.e. incomplete information, a lack of self-confidence, or low expectation lead to what Simon calls "satisficing" as opposed to maximizing (Well and Crain 1992). This concept is relevant in the domain of educational choice which is dominated by uncertainty of future returns, expectation and informational constraints. Although Behavioural Economics have gained from exchanges with the discipline of psychology, it has taken a backseat in explaining how social structures or institutions might affect decision making. The complexity of choice in education needs one to consider the context in which it is situated because decision making in education is closely connected to the culture and societal norms in which

the individual makes decision. Choice-sets, which are constitutive of various set of schools, are not the same across all the social class because of the resources (both social capital and economic capital) which constitute the choice set (Bell 2009). This means that working class families has a choice-set of low-quality schools while the middleclass families have better schools in their choice-sets. The difference lies in the social networks that are activated differently by the parents from different social milieu. Thus, individuals enter the market with some bundle of market capacities derived from the families, schools and neighbourhood (Hogan 1999). This brings forth the importance of social context in which an individual is embedded.

The cultural reproduction theories locate the school choice process within a specific social context. Most of the sociological studies attempting to understand school choice have borrowed Bourdieu's (1986) framework to understand decision making across families. Contrary to rational choice theory, there is a role assigned to human agency in Bourdieu's theory. Bourdieu's different forms of capital- economic, social, cultural and symbolic - are important tools to understand reproduction of class positions. It is through education that existing social class structures are maintained through cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passerson 1977). Bourdieu's concept of cultural and social capital along with the notion of habitus provides a good theoretical framework to understand choice in the present context. While cultural capital is loosely defined in terms of educational qualifications, social capital is in terms of networks and ties and each of these capitals are convertible into economic capital. The concept of habitus is important because it refers to the disposition of an individual which guides him to use these different forms of capital which helps him/her to gain educational advantage.

In India, there is a dearth of research on school choice except for a few (Nambissan 2010a; 2012; Vincent and Menon 2011; Srivastava 2007). Research on school choice point out that choice of a school is guided by socio-economic conditions and "the large institutional and social context" (Nambissan 2012: 53). Studies that have examined choice of school have not considered the potential of urban fringe as a powerful destination for the private players and how parents are responding to it. I bring the context of location in the choice problem that parents are confronted with and how they navigate the sphere of decision-making subject to the constraints they face.

Context, methods and data analysis

The study is located in the suburbs of North 24 Parganas. It is a multisite case study because the localities chosen are different. The multisite case study method uses more than one case to arrive at an understanding of the desired phenomenon. Miles and Huberman explained: 'By looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases, we can understand a single - case finding, grounding it by specifying how and where and, if possible, why it carries on as it does' (1994: 29). As it is a multisite case study, it enabled me to draw an understanding of how location plays a role in choice of schools and how people from similar social class could make more choices because of difference in location. I have purposively selected the field sites of Madhyamgram and Maslandapur in North 24 Parganas, where private players are gradually investing in the form of private schools. Denizens of Madhyamgram are at an advantageous position as it is located near to the city but the area of Maslandapur is farther away from the city and hence some choices are out of reach for the people in that area. Maslandapur is a census town with about 2685 households with literacy rate of 87.86% while Madhyamgram has 48942 households with literacy rate of 89.60% (Census 2011). Schools in these areas are predominantly government run but the number of private schools has been increasing over the years in these areas. In North 24 Parganas, the number of government schools in the year 2001 was 4559 and the number of private schools was 162 whereas in 2012, the number of government school is 5863 and the number of private schools is 939. If we compare the numbers, we observe that the growth of private school has been much higher during this period which is almost five times the number of private schools in 2001. In these areas, new low-cost private schools are mushrooming as parents from low income group are demanding private schools (they perceive private schools to be of better quality). Microfinance institutes like Bandhan have set up schools in these areas in the name of "corporate social responsibility" where students from disadvantaged background can learn free of cost. At the same time, they run schools called Bandhan Academy which charge fees from students. The establishment of private schools in these areas have opened up many options for the parents who can exercise choice according to their will.

In order to understand the process of selection of schools by parents, I selected some schools which are government run and private schools (both recognized and unrecognized) located in these areas. As my focus was on elementary education, I purposively selected schools which are primary with no upper primary section and primary with upper primary section. I

have selected 5 schools, 3 from Maslandapur (two government schools and one private school), and two from Madhyamgram (one government school and one private school). Purposive sampling was done due to two reasons. Firstly, I needed to interview respondents fulfilling certain criteria, in this case beneficiaries of incentives. It was also a “sampling of context” where selection of students in different locations was done to get respondents from different socio-economic background. The rationale for selecting schools of differential managements was to get parents from diverse backgrounds. This implicitly gave class dimension to my analysis. Within the government education as well there exists difference “in terms of resources, accessibility, clientele and degree of informality” as observed by Majumdar and Mooij (2011: 31). Thus, in some cases, I interviewed parents from a reputed government school in that area and a school where enrolment is falling over the years. In that area, schools which used to be managed by village education committees (VECs) are no more under VECs because of the recent Panchayat election which took away the power from the VECs. In some schools there are mother teacher associations which work together towards children’s development.

In some cases, I went beyond the schools to collect data from the community through snowball sampling and selected some parents from these areas who chose schools outside their locality. Some of the parents thus selected were schoolteachers of different management (both government and private) who provided insights to how the system of education works and how they apply their own experiences as teachers when they select schools for their children.

Visits were made during recess in schools so that information could be extracted when respondents are relatively free. This involved interviewing schoolteachers and mothers who would wait outside the school gate for their children. I made frequent visits to the respondents’ houses to get internal dynamics of decision making.

I interviewed the respondents using an interview schedule as well as took field notes when I visited schools based on direct observation. I recorded some conversations with the respondents’ permission. I have carried out focus group discussion with students, parents and teachers of various schools. Informal conversation helped me understand the class structure to which a particular respondent belonged. In this case, it helped me understand how choices made are reflection of one’s class position. I became an “insider” to them and hence communicating with them became easier.

I started my fieldwork using snowball sampling. I thought it was a convenient way to start in the beginning when one does not know how many people to interview. According to Bryman, in this process ‘the researcher samples initially a small group of people relevant to the research questions and these sampled participants propose other participants who have had the experience or characteristics relevant to the research (2012: 424). I have interviewed 19 parents, 20 teachers and 18 students. Of the 19 parents interviewed, 10 parents were from government sponsored schools and 9 were from private English medium schools. The interviews were semi structured and open ended which encouraged the informants to speak their minds and helped me get additional information. The interviews with the students were mainly confined to how they think of their schools and mostly on learning that takes place within school. As decisions are mostly made by parents on which school to consider for their children, students were not asked questions on choice of school.

Data analysis is done by breaking the qualitative data into themes. The analysis of data started during data collection as argued by Merriam that “qualitative design in emergent” ((2009: 169). Thus, some of the issues which were not considered important before entering the field sites emerged as important determinants of choice of a school.

Deconstructing the black box of choice

The important factors determining school choice are divided into various components which include academic aspects (reputation of the school, medium of instruction, students’ performance in board examination), discipline in school, geographical proximity of school and non-academic characteristics (socioeconomic background of other students). Although the starting point of unravelling the meanings of choice was based on the above criteria, there were other factors which emerged as relevant to choice-making in education. For instance, the present policy of the state government related to admission in schools also acted as a constraint in decision making. Children enrolled in schools up to the primary level often faced difficulties in securing enrolment in schools of their parents’ choice at the upper primary level due to the lottery system of admission. Therefore, often the most desired school in the parents’ choice set² cannot be accessed due to the state’s system of lottery. One of the reasons of low enrolment rate in many government-run primary schools, as cited by a Headmaster of a primary school, is that parents look for schools up to higher secondary level. This is because some parents do not want to take the risk of going

through the hassles of the lottery system after the primary level. The schools having primary and higher secondary levels in the same premise are preferred because a child can easily move to the upper primary level without going through the system of lottery if he/she is a student of that school at the primary level. Thus, parents who are more informed about the school system look for schools up to higher secondary levels. This process is also mediated by spatial inequalities as some areas that are my field sites do not have secondary or higher secondary schools. But well-resourced parents overcame it by looking for schools outside their localities. The decision to make a choice of one school over the other is a result of interaction of many factors as my findings suggest. The factors include a person's social and economic status, the social environment in which a person is embedded, the state policy, the information that one has and the desire to be recognized as "dignified". The subtleties or nuances of choice making are traced through the qualitative interviews of parents and students of various social and economic backgrounds which reveal how choices made by individuals reflect their class status.

The issues addressed here are – (a) increasing preference for English medium private schools by parents from lower income groups³ in the suburban area, and (b) how the middleclass⁴ parents are responding to it and hence making decisions that make them distinct from other low-income parents. The shift towards the private school by low income parents emerged from the following field observation in Maslandapur where a private school has been set up in the year 2012 by Bandhan Micro finance institute in the name of Bandhan Academy.

The two primary schools are adjacent to each other so much so that the clamour of children from one school pervades through the wall of the other school. Both the schools provide education up to the primary level (Class IV). Both the schools have parents who belong to low income strata (earning approximately Rs. 5000 per month) and work mainly in the informal sector which is confirmed by the headmaster and headmistress of the schools. The fee charged by the private school is Rs. 200 per month and the school bus fee is Rs. 300 per month while primary education in government school is free. Interestingly, the low-cost private school which is newly established has 183 students and the Government primary school has enrolment strength of 139. The head teacher of the government run primary school opined that parents have taken

their children out of his school to the private school because they think the quality of private school is better.

The above observation hints at the demand for private schools among the parents from low income group. Earlier, there were no private schools in the vicinity and the parents had no choice but to avail government primary schools. But as the private players are now setting up affordable schools for the poor in suburban and rural areas, they are able to attract many parents. Parents can exercise choice in a market where there are more options, which, in this case, is the presence of private provisioning of education. In this case, it did not depend on whether the government schools were non-functioning. It is interesting to note that the government school that I visited was functioning well with regular classes and had a good infrastructure in the form of concrete buildings, better seating arrangements, and good toilet facilities. During my field visits in the school, the headmaster was seen actively engaging in activities of the school from monitoring the classes by making rounds to seeing whether children washed their hands with Dettol before having mid-day meals. The question then arises as to why there is a flight of children from this school when it is functioning well or why some parents chose private school over this government school. It prompted me to delve further into the process of school choice through the lens of parents.

Parents from both the schools were interviewed to understand why they chose one school over the other. Parents who enrolled their children in the private school want “quality education at low cost”. The notion of “good” in education that the parents constructed varied. The majority of parents in the private school were in favour of English medium instruction. They feel it is important to learn English from the beginning (at the primary level) to get a job. A parent took pride in saying that her child who studies at class IV speaks good English and recites poems in English and also scores good marks in English. All the parents interviewed do not understand the language but the mere fact that their children are learning English and speaking English made them ecstatic. English as a “marker of status” has also been discussed by Nambissan (2012) who argued how English speaking is associated with getting a middle-class white-collar job.

Information asymmetry is a part of the choice making process and this problem gets aggravated when parents do not possess the required capital (social and cultural). The mere advertisement of “English medium school” gave them the signal that the school is good. This supply side inducement through advertisements often lures parents to make certain choices. When

a priori assumption of the parents in the locality is that “government school e porashuna hoy na” which means “no learning happens in government schools”, it becomes easier for the private players to attract ‘clients’ as in case of the private school in Maslandapur. As the parents were mostly uneducated, they never sought information about how learning takes place inside schools. The parents do not seek information about the credentials of teachers or whether the teachers are able to teach in English. Apart from English medium instruction, few parents liked school uniform which distinctively represents English medium school as against government school. One of the parents remarked “school dress ta amar bhalolage. Oder tie porte hoy jeta onno kono school e nei ei area te” which means ‘I like the school uniform. They have to wear tie which is not there in any of the schools in this area’.

What we observe is that there is an attempt by parents to come out of the poverty trap through education but by not merely gaining education through government schools. Private schools appear as a “positional good” for them which they can brag about in front of other parents that they consider are their likes. Thus, by exercising choice the parents from the same income group try to become “distinct” in their own group. It is also noteworthy that the parents who chose private schools were also members of Bandhan Samity who provide them loans. It is through the members of the Samity that the information about the school got transmitted within the community. Some members of the community took different positions in terms of investment in private mode of education point out the tension between structure and agency which can be best understood through the notion of habitus developed by Bourdieu (1977). Within the same community some members enrolled their children in government schools and some preferred private schools although the average income level is the same in these two categories. Thus, in this case, habitus, which is the disposition of individual towards certain action works independently of the social class to which the individual belongs thereby giving more autonomy to individual agency. This is also indicative of how the concept of habitus can hold both the agency and structure in tension (Reay et. al. 2005). We should also note that within this community, the members of the Bandhan Samity chose this particular school thereby falling into a particular group and exhibited group specific behaviour. Bourdieu (1993) also suggested how members of the same cultural group can differ because ‘no two individual habituses are alike’. In case of the parents who are members of the Samity activated their social networks through other members to choose this school. We also observe traces of “aspirational habitus” which is a concept used by Baker and

Brown (2008) to describe how people from disadvantaged background, who had no or little formal education, understood the value of education as a tool of social mobility. This behaviour is observed among the parents who chose private school for their children. But their imagination of “good” in education followed the larger perception of good in education constructed by the upper middle class and the middle class, i.e., the quality of private school is better. As discussed earlier, understanding of quality among parents is fuzzy and sometimes it is synonymous to English medium instruction.

Other important factors of choosing a private school over a government school are extra-curricular activities which the private school encourages and the government school does not. This involves taking part in sports, playing computer games and other indoor activities like singing and dancing. One of the parents who have two sons, the elder one studying in government school and the younger son in Bandhan Academy, understands the difference between the functioning of two schools. She remarked: ‘There are too many students in government schools and my elder son finds it difficult to learn computer because one computer is shared by four students.’

But what is striking is that apart from academic criteria, these low-income parents accorded primacy to co-curricular activities. This is quite similar to Lareau’s (2003) observation of upbringing of middle-class child in the USA which she termed as “concerted cultivation”, which means a strategy used by middle class parents to rear their children through organized activities like swimming, playing basket balls and other extra-curricular activities and hence fixing their leisure time. While the capacities of these parents in my sample are limited, there is an element of “concerted cultivation” which they might have imbibed from the middle-class parents. While the middle-class parents do not rely on co-curricular activities within the school, the low-income parents rely on school to fulfil this objective as their limited means would not allow them to invest on these activities outside school.

There are important family dynamics of choice which also influence the decision of choosing a particular school over the others. There is a lot of negotiations and bargaining that happens within the family about investing in a private school. The schooling experience of the first-born child also helped the parents to make decisions on the second child. Bidisha, a mother of two sons, who serves mid-day meals in a government school, sent her younger son to Bandhan Academy. She explained why she decided to enroll her younger son in a Government school:

The income of our family is around Rs. 4500 and sending two children to a private school is difficult for us. When we considered schools for our elder son, this private school was not there. We could have shifted him to the private school afterwards but he got his friends there in government school. Also, the elder one is not as smart as the younger one. He likes sports. So, we thought we should spend more money on the younger son. The younger son comes first in the class.

This suggests how the parents face complex choices about schooling decisions within the family and hence the choices they make are an outcome of family dynamics. The limited income that they earn is not sufficient for enrolling all their children in a private school. So, they have to favour the one who is understood to be more promising. So, compromises are part of the choice process when there are economic constraints and it is as if the members within the family compete to grab resources. In case of schooling decision, the resources that the parents possess are diverted more towards the child who is considered a better student and is a prospective future earner. We also observe that the presence of an affordable private school made it easier for this family to enroll their second son to a private school which could not happen for the first child because Bandhan Academy was not established then. The mother showed preference for a private school for the elder son as well but in this case the choices made appear irreversible because the elder son got accustomed to his school as the mother quoted. We find that children's friends appear to be a significant factor in the decision of changing schools and hence choice of schools other than the resource constraint. This is similar to Reay and Ball's observation of decision making within the family among working class parents who emphasize on "children's concerns about their friends" (1998: 432). It may not be just about friends. Having studied in a Bengali medium government school the child develops a "comfort zone" (where the medium of instruction and light course load matter), which she/he would not want to lose by shifting to an English medium private school.

Location plays a significant role in selecting schools which are considered to be of better quality outside their locality. The parents who reside in areas proximate to the city are in a better position as they are able to extend their choice sets by considering schools outside their area. Although these areas are located at the fringes of the city, the well connectedness of these areas with the city through various means of transport enable them to go beyond their own space to make choices on schools. The aspirations

of the city dwellers pervade this space as the parents at the fringes of the city make additional effort to “look like” the city dwellers through the choices they make. This is observed in areas which are few kilometres away from Maslandapur, the areas where land prices are escalating as more migrants from nearby villages are pushed into the fringes for the lack of space in the city. Madhyamgram, on the other hand, is closer to the city of Kolkata. Madhyamgram has few private schools which attract students from adjacent areas of New Barrackpur and Bisharpara where private schools are only up to the primary level. Some parents with both economic and cultural capital residing in these areas are able to exercise choice by sending their children to top notch schools in the city even though that requires a lot of investment of time on travel. A mother of an 11-year-old child explained why she took the risk of sending her only son to a school far off from her place:

Although there are many English medium schools in the locality, I preferred this school because of the brand name it carries. You do not find branded schools in Madhyamgram. Also, the quality of teachers is good in this school. We do not need to provide private tuition for him. We can afford the school fee since we have only one child. The school bus comes here and it is expensive as I have to spend Rs. 3000 on school bus. We spend around Rs. 7000 per month on his schooling which includes transportation fee. If I had two children, I could not have spent this amount on one child. The school has smart boards as well where the concepts are visually taught. I want to provide him the best education.

The above remark reflects various links that connect the reasons for choosing a school. There appears to be an attempt to “stand out” by making choices outside one’s locality for the sake of a “brand” name. The attitude demonstrated by this family is not completely based on school quality but towards getting recognition in the society through school choice. This recognition also drives the parents to move out of their familiar spaces to the other space which is unfamiliar to them, i.e., the city. This is in contrast to various studies (Bell 2007; Burgess et al. 2014) which state that geographical proximity is considered while choosing a school. The desire to be labelled as different from others has driven the family to make choices beyond their locality, even when it meant spending a large amount on transportation. Unlike the parents interviewed in Maslandapur, this particular middle-class mother talks about the quality of school teachers as an important factor in making choices. As an educated mother, she goes through the

lessons taught in school as she teaches the child after school and hence, she has an idea of how the school is imparting education. Also, she keeps track of the pedagogical practices inside the classroom as she mentions the use of smart boards. Once again, we find the working of habitus, which differs from the low-income parents of Maslandapur. The understanding of the society and schools are different for this middle-class mother who has cultural and social capital. Her internalized dispositions and the social networks (her friends and husband's friends) have helped her to make the decision on school.

We also observe how the number of children in the family is linked with the type of school to be chosen. In this case we observe "quality quantity trade off" in Becker's (1991) term, i.e., how investment in education decreases with increase in the number of children. The remarks made by the mother points out how the best education of her child is related to her fertility decision taken earlier.

Gender dynamics of choice among the middle-class parents also throws light on how subtly girls are discriminated against in choice decision where distribution of resources within the family is in favour of boys. This finds reflection in the choices made by Mr. Karmakar who is a father of two children, one daughter and a son. The son, who is elder of the two children by two years, goes to a private school in Sodepur while the daughter studies in a nearby government school. The decision to send the daughter to a government school has been very aptly put by the father as follows:

My daughter is more inclined towards extra-curricular activities like dancing and singing. So, I thought that sending her to a costly private school is not worth it. She does not like to study. The school is also close to my house so I chose this government school.

There is a stereotypical belief that the daughter is not competent enough as compared to the boy and hence government school is the best place for her. His sense of who belongs to a particular school is guided by the internalized belief system that daughter's education does not require as much attention as his boy's education. The extra-curricular activities that he focuses on are tools of justifying why he chose a government school for his daughter. Thus, through this choice the daughter and the son are being brought up differentially through schooling. There is also an attempt to bind the daughter to her familiar space through a school which is 'close to his house', and to the socially constructed feminine roles like "dancing and singing".

It is interesting to note that some parents in the same region who are themselves teachers of government run schools prefer their children to study in private schools citing reasons like 'English medium schools fit this corporate world'. Also, curriculums in English medium schools which are mainly affiliated to Delhi boards are one of the motivating factors for choosing English medium schools for these parents in Madhyamgram. As these parents are teachers in schools and aware of what is taught in Bengali medium schools, they are able to make decisions taking into account what is taught in schools. They are of the view that the state curriculum is not updated. Also, some of the schoolteachers of government school also tutor students from Delhi boards like I.C.S.E. and C.B.S.E.⁵²

One pertinent question is whether the choices made on schools bring satisfaction to the parents. It is at this juncture that psychology enters in choice problem. Too many choices might not always make a person better off as suggested by Schwartz (2009). Schwartz (2009) argues 'too much choice can lead to paralysis, inferior performance and dissatisfaction'. A parent who had many schools to choose from and ended up choosing a private school 14 kilometres away from his locality remarked:

I chose an English medium school for my son which is quite reputed. But I am disappointed with this school. Only passing the examination is what the school stresses on. Everything, from uniforms to books to copies, is to be brought from the school. Even after spending so much on school, I have to provide tutors after school. I could have rather chosen a government school for him and could spend more on tuition.

Although choice of school after all rational considerations should have brought satisfying results for the parents and children, we find that the aftermath of such choices is not always satisfying. It is because what private schools advertise and promise and what they actually deliver are not the same. The lack of information about the actual performance of the schools before selection often causes dissatisfaction for parents after the child is enrolled. This also happens because while making choices parents are bound by their own perceptions and also the networks that surround them. This leads parents to blame themselves for their inability to select the best school for their children as in the above case. According to Schwartz, 'When the choice set is large, blaming the world is a much less plausible option ...In other words, self-blame for disappointing results becomes more likely as the choice set grows larger' (2009: 397).

Thus, what we observe is that choices are not merely made by taking account of only academic quality of school. In many cases, parents follow the suit and exhibit 'bounded rationality' as Simon (1986) calls it. There are various social elements that mediate the space of decision making. There are tensions, bargaining and negotiations that make up the choice process. There is also consideration of child's development that encompasses extra-curricular activities. Because changing schools frequently might affect the child's learning, choice of schools also is a risky task for the parents. We observe how social and cultural capital along with the parent's disposition and his sense of the world or his habitus plays a role in selecting a school. While location is an important factor in choosing a particular school, we find that availability of transportation facilities of the school in the suburbs from the city enables a parent to choose a desired school of the city.

School choice and private tuition

Private tuition among the students is very much prevalent in the field sites. It is sometimes considered to be mandatory to go for tuition after school. As most of the parents from low income group in Maslandapur can hardly write their names, they find it difficult to guide the children. Thus, private tuition emerges as a compulsory investment for them. While the parents decide on school, they keep searching for tutors who would guide their children. In many cases, the schoolteachers who are poorly paid in the private schools provide tuitions to these children. The parents believe that the prevalence of the tuition market enables them to compensate for low quality learning in schools. For instance, Mr. Karmakar, whose son goes to an English medium school, is not satisfied with the school and he believes that it is only in tuition that his son is learning. All the parents that are interviewed agree that tuition is important for their child and hence look for tutors while making decisions on choice of school. This culture of tutoring is very much commonplace in the areas I have visited. This also suggests that parents do not rely on schools completely for their ward's education. But the type of tuitions varied according to the fee structure, class size, subjects taught and it depended largely on how much extra a parent can spend. While engaging private tutor has become an integral part of upper and middle-class education culture the lower-class families also follow suit, since the perception of "good" education builds the pressure.

Conclusion

The present study reveals the complex interaction of various factors in making decisions on schools. It is not only the academic criteria on which parents choose a particular school and is not a mere cost and benefit analysis. The preference of private schools in these urban fringes indicates parental aspiration which propels them to spend more on education. However, information asymmetry and one's own individual habitus and resources restrict the best choices that could be made for the children. We also find traces of family dynamics in choice of school where the most promising child goes to a private school which parents consider "good". Gender also comes out as an important determinant of whether the child would go to a private school. The drift towards the private by many parents is also because government schools are considered to be of inferior quality which is sometimes linked with the curriculum in the school. The parents with both economic and cultural capital are able to put extra effort by sending their child to city schools. These parents do not want to compromise with the brand value when it comes to selecting school. Selecting such schools is also a means to represent oneself as distinct from others in the same locality.

We have found that too many options to choose from often lead to confusion due to informational constraint about the functioning of schools. The lottery system of admission followed in government schools often restricts the parents to enroll their children into the schools of their preference. Thus, some parents are seen to prefer schools where secondary education is also available, abandoning primary schools. Private schools lure parents through English medium instruction. In this study, we find that the members of Bandhan Samity mainly chose Bandhan Academy for their children. Contrary to the belief that government schools are discarded by parents due to low quality, we find that parents in Maslandapur chose private schools due to English instruction.

Nevertheless, the parents want their children to get quality education but parents from the lower strata of income are not informed about the functioning of school because of their less interaction with the school. Learning by rote is one method that is followed in the private schools which have been confirmed by the students in my sample. What is happening within the school is often monitored by parents with cultural capital who make it a point to see what is being taught from time to time. This study thus highlights how choices made by parents are not always good for them because of the resources with which they make such choices are not equal. With the advent of privatization, inequality in delivery of education is expected

to increase because the school system is hierarchical from low end private schools to elite private schools. The social and economic inequality finds reflection in selection of school and quality of school helps perpetuate social inequality. We also find spatial inequality which restricts the parents to make certain choices because the good private schools are situated at the core of the city. There is thus a need to probe deeper into how people make choices before making any policy. With the advent of privatization of education, the idea of common education system would be a challenging one because private bodies lure “customers” to sell their products. Private English medium education stands fetishized. As the policy of the state in the neoliberal era is drifting towards “public private partnership”, we can find instances of government schools not able to hold more students. This stands in contrast to the Right to Education (2009) Act.

Notes

1. Srivastava (2007a; 2007b) has worked extensively on low fee private school and showed that parents from lower income strata are choosing low fee private schools.
2. Bell (2009) used choice set to mean set of schools that parents consider.
3. Low income group are those parents whose income is considered below the annual per capita income of West Bengal which stands at Rs. 65932 in the year 2013.
4. Middle class in this study is defined in terms of education level, language competencies, occupation, consumption pattern and based on the respondent’s self-definition. In many cases, the respondents’ assert themselves as “moddhyobitto” in the interviews conducted. It is not a homogeneous group but there are some social and cultural similarities among the middle class and the way they reflect on the world. They have an urge of searching for something better and a constant anxiety of whether they would be able to maintain their status.
5. I.C.S.E stands Indian Council for School Examination and C.B.S.E. stands for Central Board of School Examination.

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Self, Attachments and Detachments

Sinjini Roy

Abstract: *In trying to understand the process of self-formation, this paper argues that attachments and detachments work in a dialectical interface as self transcends through stages and transcends layers in one individual's life time. The author draws from her personal experiences in an autobiographical style while illustrating her observations and discourse about the formation of self of an individual through attachments and detachments. The formation of self happens only through interaction between one member with the other members in a lifeworld or social space and the fluid self moves through a developmental cycle. The core argument of the paper is that while one's attachments and detachments reflect one's taste, interests and demands of the situation, the experiences thus gathered have a direct bearing upon her self-formation, which, in turn, reflects upon future attachments and detachments.*

Keywords: Self, self-formation, attachment, detachments, dialectics, dynamics, developmental cycle of self-formation.

Introduction

One of the universal structural principles of social life (in the sense of Rousseau¹ and Levi-Strauss²) is embeddedness or attachment. The feminist thinkers like Julia Kristeva (1980)³ and Nancy Chodorow (1994)⁴ have also observed that the child's attachment with her/his mother leaves a permanent imprint on the psyche of the child even when she/he, the later state of life, is subjected to linguistic and symbolic influences. However, attachment works as a dialectical counterforce to detachment. This can be explained in two ways. First, the process called "attachment" becomes intelligible only in contrast to the process called "detachment" (in the sense of linguistic binary of Saussure). Second, the social process of attachment is entangled with the simultaneous process of detachment, as they can cohabit in a dialectical unity. In reality, the social processes of attachment and detachment are far more complex than the way they appear in a binary, as it is not simply either this or that (in exclusion). It can be both, and the elements of attachments and detachments could be mixed in differential

proportions in a particular social relation or process. Further, there is a great deal of dynamism in time-space term in a singular social relation. A relation that appears only attachment in a given time and space and progresses into detachment and the reverse can also happen. A great deal of considerations, assessments, strategies, interests go into the selections of objects and individuals and relations of attachment and detachment. All these contribute to self-formation, self-deconstruction and reconstruction. In other words, one's self formation can be judged through attachments and detachments.

My parents and my lifeworld

My mother conceived after one and a half years of her marriage. She and my father together dreamt of a child. While my mother gave me the safest shelter and nursed me as a part of her body my father took the best possible care of both my mother and me, the unborn. My mother told me that I had given her no trouble during her pregnancy. My parents dreamt of a daughter and my father dreamt about me (he saw me as a 5-6 year old girl, dark complexioned, puffy cheeks, sitting on a heap of paddy straw in the outer courtyard of his village house, waiving hands to him with a smiling face while he was going out for his office) and narrated my physical features to my mother before I was born. Strangely, my physical features resemble the girl who appeared in my father's dream. My birth was the first physical detachment from my mother. However, during breast-feeding years the physical attachment continued. Physical attachments of many forms continued in my early years. For many years I slept with my father and mother on both sides. At least one of them, mostly my father, accompanied me in all my movements outside our house in my early years.

From my childhood I was very close to my mother. Both my parents were very caring as well as protective. I was very obedient and not so demanding as a child. Both my parents had given me more than what I wanted. My father's profession, his reputation as a teacher, his appearance everything played a crucial part in creating a distance between me and my father. He loved me a lot, never scolded me nor slapped me but there was something which made me feel scared of him. My father taught me right from my early school days, he has been my dearest and trusted teacher all through, even today. But I was always driven by a feeling that I fall short of meeting his expectation. This could be one of the reasons that I approach him for help yet I shy away from him.

This distance with my father pushed me closer to my mother. Interestingly my mother used to rebuke me and quarreled with me quite often and had slapped me up on many occasions. But that did not impact our friendship. She gave me the basic education both at home and at school (incidentally she was a teacher in the primary school where I studied), educated me about physical changes in my childhood, adolescence and adulthood. I used to depend on her in my everyday activities and decisions. When I grew up and went to high school my equation with my mother continued to be as strong as before. Starting from my first menstruation to my first crush I used to share everything with her. My mother, with all her experience and knowledge, always gave me advice to deal with my life cycle changes. My mother is a very emotionally balanced person. I was down with a serious ailment at the age of 12. My father completely broke down but my mother remained calm and provided strength to both me and my father. Before my board exam I used to study the whole night while my mother remained awake with me.

In 2007 I moved to Kolkata for my graduation. Leaving my parents, childhood friends and my birth place for a metropolis was a major decision. It was a mix of new adjustments, troubles, uncertainties and dreams, an invitation to a new life. I used to miss my parents while encountering the hardships of city life. The travel, the temperature, crowd, pollution, untimely eating, college discipline – everything was troubling me. I was missing the quietness of home and a life that was completely trouble-free. The glamour and glitters of the metropolis couldn't fill the vacuum of my life. The small town and Bengali medium background created an instant cultural gap with my metropolitan English educated classmates. The new city, new friends, new language, and different lifestyle put me in a state of culture shock. I was worried that I would not be able to adjust with the new lifeworld around me. I was so upset that I used to call my mother for emotional support and cry.

A couple of months passed by and life started becoming easier. I made some friends and three of us made a close-knit group. We spent a lot of time together and my friends helped me adjusting with city life. The college, the classroom, eateries, movies, music and new friends helped building an attachment with metropolitan life. I was so engrossed in this new life that I started feeling less and less presence of my parents in my everyday life. My new friends, my new lifestyle in a way started replacing the most precious relations of my life. I remained busy with my studies; friends and cultural activities so much so that I often used to forget to call up my

parents. Bangla bands were the new craze of the metropolitan youth in those days. I became a part of a band and its lead singer. I used to spend long hours with my band members experimenting new-wave songs. Guitar was my new fantasy. Knowing about this new interest of mine, my parents, especially my mother, become very upset. My parents worried that I would do badly in my studies. My mother stopped talking to me. My father was upset but persuaded me to stay away from my newly found passion. I was terribly disturbed because music was my love and I did not want to let down my band members by quitting it. I was upset and down with the feeling that my parents do not understand me and my likings anymore. The combination of all these issues contributed to push my parents away from me. I realized the split in my self and the resulting tensions.

This distance and detachment grew and got deepened when I moved to Delhi for my Masters. During my two years stay in Delhi I loved and enjoyed my newly found freedom to the full. I became culturally active. The JNU campus was full of activities; it offered me space to explore myself and flourish academically. I used to sing in various cultural programmes in the university campus, got associated with a local theatre group called Behroop and acted in plays produced by the group. I became active in students' politics. The food fest, occasional grand dinner, fashion parade, trying hands in badminton and table tennis were part of hostel life. The life in the hostel and campus was full of fun. JNU looked to me as a complete package where one can easily get lost. The importance of my parents in my everyday life became less and less. I received calls from my parents every night but never felt the urge to call them, to enquire about them. I used to be under severe stress while preparing assignments and on examination days. On those occasions, I used to call my parents hoping that talking to them would ease my tension.

The attachment with JNU culture was so magical. I visited the campus many times after I had left it hoping to rediscover the same magic. But I was hoping for the impossible. Every time I visit the campus sadness engulfs me; my hostel room is no more mine, most of my friends have left the campus, the department is taken over by a fresh groups of students, completely unknown to me, my teachers do not have time to talk to me, I am no more a part of the students' movement, if I get to attend a cultural programme I am only a part of the audience, the admirers of the performer that I was have all left the campus. In one word, I was nobody in the space that was once mine. A sense of nothingness overwhelms me. I wonder, if it is complete detachment. Perhaps not, because JNU gives me an identity

that matters in my career. Those two years of campus life, all the good and bad things, exist in the self that I am, in my conscious and unconscious self.

One lesson I have learnt from this story of my early life is that when everything in life is going fine and when one is lost in her own world the attachment with parents is less, but when in trouble she would fall back on her parents the most trusted of all relations. Therefore, attachment and detachment are never exclusive in practice; they are mixed up; the tilt on either side would depend on the situation.

The crisis and after

In early 2012, in my final semester in JNU I was feeling it. I was losing weight lost appetite, always short of energy, having knee pain, and breathlessness while climbing stairs. I fainted on a couple of occasions and was taken to hospital by my friends. I suppressed all these from my parents thinking they would worry. I somehow managed to complete the semester and returned to our house in Siliguri. I returned with high fever and joint pains. All kinds of medical examinations failed to diagnose the disease. My parents consulted the best doctors in Siliguri but my health deteriorated to the point that I could not walk any more. I was taken to Kolkata and after rounds of tests I was diagnosed having a rare kind of autoimmune disease. I was shattered when the doctor said that it is something which does not have cure and I will have to live with it. It was a disaster in our small family. The magnitude of the disaster can hardly be captured in language. Periodic visits to hospitals, rounds of pathological tests, medicines, lifestyle change, a lot of restrictions on food and movements became the language of my life thereafter.

Apart from physical and psychological impacts, what pained me the most was that I had to compromise with my singing, my passion from my childhood. My voice developed cracks and my lungs lost strength. The quality of my singing dropped and I could not sing the songs with higher notes; I soon lost many of my admirers. I knew my father, who was the most trusted admirer of my singing was crying in silence. I was also worried about my career. When many of my friends joined MPhil or PhD programmes in top Indian and foreign universities I had to stay home under the care of my parents. I was very depressed. That was the time when I could feel the pain my parents were going through. I could not look at my father's sad, worried face. My parents concealed all their worries and found time to talk to me and be with me, doing silent counselling. Physical proximity (expressed through caring, loving touches) and lot of talking had their healing effects.

In the evening time both my parents used to sit in front of me and I used to read out the songs loudly. They used to take me for the evening walk. My mother would make chicken stew almost every day. Within weeks the weakness and the symptoms of ailment were gone. I started reading books, listening to music and one day with everyone's surprise I started singing. During that time the one song that I used to sing was a Rabindrasangeet 'আরো আরো প্রভু আরো আরো, এমনি করে এমনি করে আমায় মারো'.

There was a line in that song 'দেখি কেমনে কাঁদাতে পারো'।

It means saying to God "no matter how much you may try to give me trouble you won't be able to make me cry". My mother used to take me for movie shows. My father kept on motivating me to get back to studies.

Gradually I got back to the normal rhythm of life. I joined the PhD programme in North Bengal University, cracked NET, got teaching job in a government college, completed my PhD within a reasonable time, had my thesis published as a book. I could do all this with the enormous support of my parents, teachers, close ones and friends. In the process, my looks changed substantially, because of the ailments and drugs. Massive hair loss, darkening of skin, and weight gain had a depressing effect on my psyche. I lost some friends because of this crisis. However, I have made peace with these inevitable changes that came with the crisis. Notwithstanding the ordeals, I look at the positives. I am a stronger and mature self now. I understand my life and the world around me much better and ready to confront many more crises.

Empathy, the rule of life

My fieldwork among the middleclass elderly people in Kolkata was a unique learning experience. I have learnt that fieldwork is a form of sociation or social interaction full of embeddedness and empathy. I learnt about how urban families are becoming smaller and finally to lone-member households. How "rational" fertility control, dispersal of younger member and deaths in family are contributing to this process. I have seen how the NRI parents (parents with their grown-up children settled in a foreign country) long (with a sense of regret) for their lone child and grandchild settled in the USA or in Europe or Australia. I have seen them living with frail health, ailments and loads of uncertainties and insecurities. Yet they strive for a good life, a life and death of honour. Yet they make friends with old age home inmates, sing and dance and move around in groups and take part in collective activities. Dispersal and careerism have impacted urban

middleclass families in a big way. But the longing for love and care and the warmth of relations have not withered. Working in the urban neighbourhood called Salt Lake and in two old age homes I made many elderly friends, who had extended me unqualified love and support. A close look at the problems of the senior citizens made me a mature and sensitive self and tied me into relations of mutual empathy. Rousseau's idea of pity as the foundation of social relations always fascinates me. I look at my life and the people around me in the same light. My interaction with my respondents changed my approach towards life and my relationship with my parents and all the elderly people I see around me. I am in regular touch with many of my respondents and make occasional visits to their homes.

Detachment as a means to be in peace

From attachments we draw immense pleasure, happiness and emotional support and any form of attachments involves certain degree of reciprocal care and respect and a sense of responsibility. It helps us value ourselves and the people who care for us. But sometimes, attachment can bring pain, sufferings and even humiliation. It takes us to a situation where we feel betrayed and helpless. And that very feeling guides us to detach ourselves from certain relationships. I am a kind of person who trusts people very easily and eager to build relations based on love and mutual empathy. I always focus on the brighter side of people and try not to be judgmental. Because of my over sensitive nature I get hurt quite often. I reflect deeply on the little things that happen in my life and in doing so I get upset, depressed and vulnerable. I try to console myself asking: 'I am not overreacting since this is not something abnormal that happens in life?'. However, there have been instances when people whom I considered to be my closest friends have broken my trust and heart. When I realize that a person, whom I had considered to be my trusted friend, is not reciprocating my love and trust, I silently withdraw from the relation. Instead of engaging into an argument I prefer to distance myself from that person and from all her/his negativities. In this section, I will recount the relationships from which I have dissociated myself after being betrayed.

I am the single child of my parents. Since childhood I was raised in a very protective environment. Both my father and mother were working parents and I had to spend a considerable amount of time staying at home alone since my childhood. I was in my won world. I used to read story books, listen to music, sing songs and paint and thus enjoy my time. In my childhood I had a few friends. In school, I had the habit of talking to everyone but I

made friendship only with those with whom I had mutual liking. I had a friend called Adrita. We were friends since our primary school days. She was sensible, quiet, and brilliant in studies. All the teachers used to love her because of her academic performance as well as her behavior. She always stood first in class. She used to sit beside me in class, would play hide and seek, *kabadi*, *kith kith*, with me. During tiffin hours we used to share our tiffin with each other. Both of us got admitted to the same high school, the most reputed Bengali Medium School in our town. There also Adrita continued to hold the top position in class. I never stood first in class and my teachers never noticed my presence in the class. I had more interest in extracurricular activities than studies. In high school, I made a few new friends. Almost in every class we (me and Adrita) were in different sections. However, we would go to school and return home together since she used to stay close to my house. After class X board examination, Adrita chose science and I decided to take humanities. But she and I used to go to the same tuition for English and Bengali language. We used to have a lot of fun in our tuition classes. Our English teacher had small son. He would sit with us and play with us. Both our English and Bengali teachers were more like our friends and we would chat on very common and trivial issues. I used to visit Adrita's place on her birthdays. Her parents were very religious and they used to have puja in every month. I used to visit her place to have *prasad*. They had a Guava tree just in the front courtyard of their house. She used to keep aside the bigger ones for me. They had a field just behind their house. On hot summer evenings we used to sit there and chat for hours. On the day before teachers' day we used to buy gifts for our teachers. In Saraswati puja we would wear saree and attend the puja organized in our primary school. I was a certain visitor at Adrita's house to have bhog on the day of Saraswati Puja. Before Durga Puja we would visit the market to buy cosmetics together. Just after Lakshmi puja we used to have a three day long fair in the local fairground. I and Adrita visited the fair all the three days. We used to have *phuchka*, *papri chat* and *momo*. Adrita had fascination for glass-bangles (*kancher churi*) and I have always been an ear ring lover. We used to buy a lot of bangles and earrings and would return home happy. I had very few friends in my childhood and Adrita was one special friend who made my childhood days bright and colorful.

In our class XII Board Examination, I scored the highest marks in English in our school, which was more than her score by a few marks. Adrita could not take this in a very positive light. She outscored me in Bengali but I was not upset about that because she had always been a better student in all classes. It was useless to draw a comparison between two of us because

she was in Science stream while I was in Arts. After school she took admission in Siliguri college whereas I took admission in one of the reputed colleges in Kolkata. After I moved to Kolkata, my contacts with Adrita thinned. Whenever I made a home trip during holidays, I would try to contact her but I was never welcomed with warmth by her. Whenever I met Adrita in a shop or on road, by chance, I would always go up to her and initiate a conversation. She would reply but she never took interest in asking me about my life in Kolkata. I could sense that the warmth of our friendship was missing. Now when I visit home, I notice that Adrita makes all efforts to avoid a chance meeting in the market place or on the university campus. It really hurts me because she was one of the closest friends in my childhood. We shared a lot of memories together. I was always curious about her studies, her personal life and about her career. I kept on asking my mother about Adrita. Adrita did very well in her masters and completed PhD with UGC fellowship. She got married and got a teaching job in a high school through School Service Commission. I really don't understand why she has suddenly stopped taking to me. The inferiority feeling or jealousy on her part might be one of the reasons. Even after having an extraordinary result she has been looking for a right job according to her qualification. I, on the other hand, despite being not so good student, studied in good college and the best university in the country and got the teaching job in a government college at a very young age. All these factors might have contributed to creating a distance with my closest childhood friend. Sensing that she does not want to maintain friendship with me I also gradually moved away from the relationship, because no relation can survive if it is one sided. While visiting home if I get to see her, I try avoid her. Making an eye contact will create a compulsion to interact with her which I do not want. Jealousy, physical distance, uneven career achievements have contributed to creating a huge emotional gap between two of us. Cold behavior, loss of warmth and avoidance have made the gap wider.

For the second instance of detachment I have to go back to my JNU days. In 2010 I went to Jawaharlal Nehru University for doing my Masters in Sociology. I stayed in a hostel on the university campus for two years. These two years gave me some wonderful memories which I will cherish throughout my life. The CSSS offered us amazing courses and best of professors and a very productive academic ambiance. Apart from academics I used to enjoy the vibrant cosmopolitan campus environment, which finds representation of diverse cultures that India is. I made friends with fellow students from Kerala, North East, Rajasthan and Maharastra and even Bangladesh.

The most interesting part of my JNU experience, however, has been my involvement in its politically vibrant environment. The posters, the graffiti on walls, *mashal julus*, effigy burning and protest march, sloganeering, *dharnas*, discussion about political and social issues at Ganga and Godavari *dhabas*, critical analysis of various government policies, street plays on political and social issues, everything was fascinating and magical, to say the least. I was awe-struck observing the way the student leaders delivered speeches in front of large gatherings. I often saw the student leaders and the activists representing different political ideologies, the Left, the Nationalists, the Ambedkarites, discussing and debating political issues sitting in front of the academic buildings. The students were doing their Masters, MPhil or PhD while receiving political training. In my early days in the hostel, one night, one of my friends, who was senior to me and was very active in student politics, took me to one of her friend's room where I could see the leaders and activists of Students Federation of India whom I had been consciously avoiding until then. But that day, when I went there, initially I was a little hesitant to interact but very soon I realized that they were very friendly and welcoming. I was supposed to submit a term paper on Tagore's Nationalism in a couple of days. That day, I had a long discussion on Nationalism with some of them, which helped me draw a better and critical understanding of the question of nationalism. I got so excited after discussing with them that I decided to visit them more often. They made me understand the meaning of their slogan 'Study and Struggle Long Live'. I started visiting them on a daily basis, attending their *mashal julus*, protest marches, and I started helping them sticking the posters on *dhabas* and inside the mess. During the protest march I used to give slogans and would sing protest songs. Then came an indefinite hunger strike organized by all the students' organizations demanding immediate union election, which was held up for four years. I joined the strike and sat for a relay hunger strike. After almost a week's struggle we succeeded and we finally had our election after a gap of four years. I used to hang out with my friends and comrades. We used to celebrate each other's birthdays. We would go for attending political speeches outside the campus as well. We would also go for distributing our old clothes to the refugees coming from Myanmar. I campaigned vigorously for our candidates in Union Election as well as in GSCAS (Gender Sensitization Committee against Sexual Harassment). We cried together after our defeat to AISA in Union Election. However, we had a huge celebration after winning the GSCASH election. I had a wonderful time with all of them; but there were some with whom I had developed a very strong bonding. In 2012 I left JNU sick, feeble and

depressed. I messed up my MPhil entrance. I returned home and was not in a condition to even move. My activist friends and comrades knew about my health condition but they didn't bother to call me once to enquire about my health. That was the time I realized that politics will never be my comfort zone. I did activism because I believed in an ideology and a particular perception about the present society, culture and polity and in the process gathered huge political experience. I put a lot of emotion into my activism and also in the relationships that I had built up with many of my comrades. As I was out of campus, all of them forgot about me. I was hurt as I had a reality check. I felt that political activism bereft of emotion and attachment is meaningless. Reflecting back, I thought I would have done better in my studies had I not been involved in political activism. Contrarily, I also think that had I not joined students' politics I would have missed out an important lesson of my life. The painful experience of detachment taught me a lesson; I decided that I would keep faith in the ideology but do politics in my own way, preserving my individual or subjective freedom. I also resolved to extend issue-based support to the political outfit of my choice and would refuse to be taken over by any hegemonic force.

From these two instances we observe a few things about the process of self-formation. At the level of personal relation, friends always jealously compare their achievements and if one is doing much better than the other the relation can be in trouble. The power equation also works here. So long one is underperforming than the other and if the two friends accept this as natural there is no problem; but, if the one who had been underperforming so long outperforms the other the relation is in serious trouble. My political activism has taught me that when the young students join politics, they nurse a dream and their attachment is highly emotive, but the organization works on some "rational" non-emotive principles. So long as you are there active you matter but the moment you move out you are reduced to "nothingness". The organization has a mind but no heart. In a way the attachments and detachments from the subject's point of view is fluid. It works like Engel's dialectical law of 'quantitative change leading to qualitative change'⁵. Once gone, it is impossible to restore the mutual trust and at that point one has to get out of the relationship in order to buy peace. Distancing can really hurt and can even bring depression but it is not at all a bad idea to remove the "tumour". This is a strategy to good life, as a look for new relations, new truths of life, bidding good bye to the rotten ones, applying another dialectical law (proposed by Engels) called 'negation of negation'.

Conclusion

A very brief narrative of some of my lived experiences tells me a few things about the formation of the self that I am. First, one's self is difficult to capture in "concrete"; its fluid and always in the process of becoming through an endless reflexive dialogue between the person (the subject) and the world around her (the object). Second, one way of looking at self-formation is that it evolves through attachments and detachments, which again are not exclusive and unrelated processes. There could be attachment in detachment and the vice-versa. While a few relations are stable, like my relations with my parents, because they are 'total' (where love is unqualified and there is no trust deficit, where the members are tied in a spirit of altruism) most other relations are partial, and fragile, like the relations with the friends, colleagues and comrades in a political organization. The stable relations can withstand temporary detachments since such detachments are not based on any deficit of trust and care but result out of some pragmatic considerations. The partial relations, on the other hand, move through a developmental cycle. Initially, it takes time to build such relations since they develop in a relatively new unknown place when the will to get into a relation for emotional security is at its peak. Relations can also build centering a collective dream, as in case of political activism. But with passage of time and closer interaction the negative sides of the persons/objects in interaction come to the open; the initially hidden personality traits (jealousy, will to domination or authoritarianism) come to the fore. In such a situation, the honest and the naïve partner in the relation suffers the most. But life moves on through detachments and attachments with the new and significant ones. Finally, I tried to bring in the process of attachments and detachments with the geo-physical space narrating how I developed attachment, and then detachment, with the JNU campus, with the space called my hostel room, the Department, the library, the canteens, the theatre group, the cultural programmes, the political organization, the individuals who add life to the campus and make it as it is. After leaving the campus in all my later visits I felt that I was an unknown outsider to the campus. But the impression of two years of active participation in campus life and politics lingers; although I am an 'outsider' to the campus now the mental attachment in the form of imaginaries and fantasies is 'inner' and permanent.

Notes

1. Rousseau believed that people have a genuine human kindness or compassion for their fellow man. Rousseau equated compassion with pity, and he believed that people did not relish the problems of less fortunate people, but desired to help them (Rousseau 2008).
2. In elaborating one of the structural principles of kinship in the book *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1969) Levi-Strauss observed that the drive for new relations (which is the source of both unity and security) prompt the aboriginal communities to practice exogamy by exchanging daughters outside their own communities.
3. Julia Kristeva (1980) argues that the impressions drawn by a child in the semiotic (pre-linguistic phase) leaves a permanent imprint on the self, formed in the later linguistic phase and the early impressions and images often contradict the linguistic or symbolic formations.
4. Contradicting the father centric interpretation of father-daughter and mother-son relationship of Freud Chodorow offers a mother-centric interpretation of the relationships where the symbolically constructed feminine or masculine self is contracted by the early (pre-linguistic) impressions drawn by both the mother and the children (Chodorow 1994).
5. One can use the three dialectical laws (i. unity of the opposites, ii. quantitative change leading to qualitative change, and iii. negation of negation) to explain the changing relations and dialectically evolving self of a person (Engels 1947)

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Identity Crisis in a Cross-cultural Paradox: My Experience

Sonam Choden Bhutia

Abstract: *“Identity” is a sum total of perceptions one accepts, imbibes and is fostered on by the society. It is related to both ascribed and acquired social constructs like caste, class, religion and language. Though caste, class, religion are important components of a person’s identity it is through language that the unique ethnic, social, religion and cultural identity is expressed. Language in both written and spoken form is the factor that binds other components of a person’s identity and it is crucial for cultural preservation.*

Related to the issue of cultural preservation, one finds the role of language especially in case of Tibetan identity. Despite the Chinese insistence that Tibet has always been a part of China, the Tibetan religion, customs, culture and language preserve distinctive features supporting the right to self-determination and independence. In exile, Tibetans under the guidance of His Holiness Dalai Lama have been successful in keeping their identity alive. However, in the recent times, the fear of losing their identity is specially felt when there is a shift away from Tibetan language; with many scattered around the world the Tibetans are under pressure to adopt languages other than their mother tongue.

Sociologically, it is stated that endogamous marriage helps in preserving racial purity and culture. Tibetans marrying outside the community face many challenges of which one is the problem of identity. As a daughter of Tibetan father, a Bhutanese mother and the wife of a Sikkimese Bhutia, the confusion arises as to where I, as an individual, stand and face Identity crisis in certain situations in my everyday life. Starting from my experience as a person faced with multiple identity “tags”, the paper attempts to bring forth issues and dilemmas of identity faced by children of mixed parentage. It also highlights the challenges and issues of identity that come up in inter-community marriages.

Keywords: Identity, culture, language, Tibetans, cultural preservation, identity crisis, multiple identities, intercommunity marriage.

“Identity” is a sum total of perceptions one accepts, imbibes and is fostered on by the society. It is related to both ascribed and acquired social constructs

like caste, class, religion and language. Though caste, class, religion are important components of a person's identity it is through language that the unique ethnic, social, religion and cultural identity is expressed. Language in both written and spoken form is the factor that binds other components of a person's identity and it is crucial for cultural preservation.

According to Oxford English Dictionary, the term "identity" means the fact of being who or what a person or thing is. It is found in different forms in societies like in the form of caste, class, religion, language and so on. Language and social identity are often linked together as it is generally perceived that language defines an individual's identity. So, learning and preserving one's language is vital. Identifying oneself through language is witnessed in our everyday life which is commonly linked with adolescence. The ability to speak many languages is important for inter-cultural relations as it is an expression of one's unique cultural identity.

The role of sociologists is to talk about issues which plague the fabric of our society. Identity is one such issue. This paper will bring forth issues and dilemmas that face a child of mixed parentage; it would also highlight the challenges and issues of identity that come up in inter-community marriages.

I have decided to narrate my experiences with an understanding that like me, there could be many other individuals with the similar background, who are also silently experiencing the challenges of identity.

In my search for an identity through self-reflection I try and reconcile my different identity tags with reality. Each one of us has a story of where we come from, our lineage and heritage, and so on.

My father is a Tibetan who came to Sikkim in the early 1960s. He settled in Dharma Chakra Centre, Rumtek, which is a small Tibetan settlement in Rumtek set up by His Holiness the Sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa in 1961. My mother, a Shartshok Bhutanese had also come to Sikkim in the mid-60s with her family settled in the periphery of Rumtek monastery. The monastery has been an integral part of our lives and the religion was the binding force. I was born and brought up in Rumtek. The Tibetans, especially those who came and settled after the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1959, are referred to as "refugees" by the host community in Sikkim. The memories of my childhood are rather pleasant as the monastery and its administration took care of the lay community in the area. The language spoken was mostly Tibetan and after the demise of my mother in 1981, I lived with my maternal grandparents who gave me the opportunity to learn

and speak Bhutanese language. In the settlement, both the male and female members would be actively involved in the domestic chores and in the activities of the monastery. The children of the lay people were sent to many missionary schools and Public schools for education in Gangtok, Pakyong, Darjeeling and Kalimpong by the monastery with the help of western sponsorship. I was fortunate to get an opportunity to go to a Christian missionary school for education. The boarding life in a community environment helped me to be independent. I do not remember a single moment where I experienced any kind of discrimination because of my identity. This is because at that age, we were residing in a community where traits of learning, hard work, honesty and respect were valued and emphasized.

However, later, when I came back home in Dharma Chakra Centre, Rumtek, after my graduation, I began to observe the difference with not much knowledge and realisation that there was hardly any interaction between the Tibetans and the local Bhutias. It was a closed clustered populated area. The road to Sang Martam demarcated the area as Tibetans lived above the road and the Bhutias lived below the road. Though both Bhutias and Tibetans gathered in the monastery on various religious occasions, there was hardly any social interaction between the members of the two communities beyond the monastery. Notwithstanding religious and cultural similarity, the Tibetans were perceived as “different”, the “other”. This “other” notion is generally used to maintain the existence of a group (Cinoglu and Arikan 2012). This distinctive phenomenon is the hallmark of the area. I observed that the host community looked down upon Tibetans and referred to them as “Bhodpa refugees”. Most of the Tibetans have retained their Tibetan identity and many have also naturalized themselves as Indians by virtue of their birth and naturalization. In December, 2010, when an India-born Tibetan woman challenged India’s Ministry of External Affairs in the Delhi High Court for denying her an Indian passport, the court ruled in her favour. The Court held that Tibetans born in India on or after 26th January 1950 but before 1st July 1987 regardless of their parentage enjoy birthright citizenship (High Court of Delhi 2010). The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) issued directions that Tibetan applicants born in India between January 26th, 1950 and July 1st 1987 be treated as Indian citizen by birth’ (*Hindustan Times*, 8 November 2017).

After my marriage in 2004 to a Sikkimese Bhutia, I moved to Gangtok. During the initial period of my marriage, I experienced a peculiar sense of belongingness to which I did not pay much heed as at that moment my intense love and affection for my husband refused to see anything else but

to be happy with the thought of being together for lifetime. Love was in the air and nothing mattered to me at that moment. My paternal aunt had come all the way from Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh, for the wedding but she did not seem too happy as I was getting married to a non-Tibetan. She could not accept that I, being the only child in the family with good educational background, was marrying a local Bhutia. My father did not have any objection; he was in fact very happy for me, the reason being his own “good” experience of inter-community marriage. My aunt dissuaded my father and my relatives from wearing brocade attire for the wedding. It was symbolic protest. In Gangtok, I had overheard some people from the neighbourhood telling that my husband had married a “Bhodpa”, meaning Tibetan and not a Bhutia. As I became exposed to the society in Gangtok, I began to realize that Tibetans were considered to be different and were regarded as “refugees”. At times, the word “refugee” is used in a derogatory manner which reflected the general assumption about the Tibetans being self centred, business-minded and calculative. Some Sikkimese were, however, of appreciation of the Tibetan way of life, their hard-working nature, self-determination and dedication to one’s identity and culture.

As a Tibetan I made it a point to converse in Tibetan language with fellow Tibetans whenever I interacted with them. However, to my surprise when I first settled in Gangtok, I found that most of the Sikkimese Bhutias were conversing with each other in Nepali language. After the birth of my son, my mother-in-law suggested that every member of our family should speak only in Bhutia language. Others were quite well conversed with the language but for me it was new although it seemed quite similar to Tibetan language. So along with my son I learnt to speak the Bhutia language. For me it was good as I could speak Tibetan, Bhutanese and now Bhutia language. Occasionally I would try to speak in Tibetan with my son but it was discouraged in the family, perhaps for the established notion that the child should learn the father’s language, and not the mother’s and I had to concede. This I felt was the effect of the prescribed gender roles and norms that exist in the formation of identity. I began to realize that the socialization process is crafted in a way to accommodate the patriarchal concerns, which fostered the superiority of males. I gave in to the idea willingly and made sure that we converse in Bhutia language only. However, during my visits to Rumtek, many Tibetans would remind me of my roots and they would advise me to teach Tibetan language to my children which I never took seriously. My maternal family would tell me to teach Bhutanese language to my children. Despite these pressures, even after my daughter was born, Bhutia was the only language used in the family. However, during

my last visit to Dharamshala I met many of my Tibetan relatives who emphasized that I and my children speak Tibetan in order to preserve the Tibetan language and culture as they feel that some Tibetans in exile, like me, are neglecting their Tibetan identity. To compound my dilemma my Bhutanese relatives pressurize me to speak Bhutanese and preserve my links with Bhutanese culture. Sandwiched and bewildered between these conflicting demands of languages and cultures, I began to feel the need for self-reflection. I realized that I am a Tibetan in the company of my Tibetan relatives and a Bhutanese amidst my Bhutanese relatives and a Bhutia while in Gangtok. My husband, on the other hand, seems to be free from all these conflicting identity demands. It is probably because he is a man and a Sikkimese in his own homeland. I being an ordinary woman, play multiple roles in my efforts to please everyone in the game. I try in vain to define my identity amidst conflicting identity demands. Hence, I live in identity crisis perpetually.

According to Merriam Webster's Dictionary, the definition of identity crisis is a personal psycho-social conflict especially in adolescence that involves confusion about one's social role and after a sense of loss of continuity to one's personality. Similarly, Erik Erikson describes an identity crisis as a period of intense exploration of different roles and aspects of the self. Whitbourne has pointed out that an "identity crisis" may occur at any time in your adult years when an individual is faced with a challenge to her sense of self. In addition, not every adolescent goes through an identity crisis; instead, she/he accepts the roles and values handed down by his or her parents (Whitbourne 2010).

As a Sikkimese Tibetan, I am no longer a refugee. My identity now is that of a mother, wife, daughter-in-law. But my father as a Tibetan insists that I should speak Tibetan language and follow Tibetan traditions. I find it difficult because I cannot associate myself with Tibet as I have not seen Tibet. So, who am I? I speak Bhutanese language but I do not live in Bhutan, so who am I? I speak Bhutia language as I am married to a Bhutia and a born Indian but still people look at me differently. Again, I cannot forget my Tibetan roots and I can easily identify myself for the Tibetan issues. So, this kind of unresolved crisis left me struggling to locate my "self". I realise that these confusions were hindering my personality development with no strong sense of identity and confidence.

Freud mentions that the identity of woman is determined biologically. Women mostly wonder as 'Where am I? What am I doing here?' Women are becoming aware of an identity crisis in their own lives, a crisis which began

many generations ago, has grown worse with each succeeding generation and will not end until women themselves and their daughters give their lives a new image which the women now so desperately need. I think women had to suffer this crisis of identity, the problem that is unspoken; apparently the problem that has no names which began a hundred years ago, and have to suffer even today, simply to become fully human (Friedan 1963).

Experiencing such identity crisis in certain situations of my everyday life leaves me confused. Psychological distress with no clear sense of self and such confusion makes me insecure and uncertain about my true role. As a result, I lack the sense of intense patriotism to Tibet unlike the ones who are pure born Tibetans.

Sometimes, the fear of losing my Tibetan identity engulfs me when there is a shift in domains of language use, culture and immediate community or family and kinship environment. When I am in the company of fellow Tibetans the fear increases even more. One Tibetan lady from my hometown but now settled in America who is married to a Tibetan always boasts of her origin and her family in front of me, who is married to a non-Tibetan while she and her son are both pure Tibetans. She would take pride of the fact that they have maintained the racial purity while blaming me for diluting it. She makes me feel uncomfortable and awkward forcing me to negotiate and compromise with conflicting identity demands in my everyday life existence.

Mishra in her book *Tibetan Refugees in India* (2014) has observed:

Tibetan youth identity, educational and occupational aspirations in exile is at the same time to be understood as processes of negotiation and compromise and not as something given or fixed in time and space. Tibetan youth in India have diverse ways of defining and interpreting ways of 'being Tibetan' in their own lives. They are not passive, disempowered but recipients of diverse cultures in exile. They are actually straddling dialogic forms of Tibetan and mixed multicultural identities, rather than living out one uniform, monolithic way of being Tibetan.

Therefore, as a part of my existential strategy I reconcile with my conflicting emotions and dilemmas, perceiving that I am a product of multi-cultural environment and a person with split identity or mixed identity.

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Childbirth Practices and Midwifery: Exploring Social Changes in Indian Context

Rukmani Sharma

Abstract: *Healthy women represent health standards of any nation, although the maternal health care throughout the world is severely damaged. The paper discusses changes in the social location of Dais and their socio-cultural roles over the decades till the contemporary society. Many scholars have brought to light the way politics of knowledge works, and how the knowledge based on experience, skill, insights and culture is denounced. State has taken several measures in maternal health care but has failed in yielding good results. The paper tries to compare birth practices in different parts of India and tries to evaluate the reasons behind the similarities and differences. Three major areas of the problem have been located in childbirth practices. First, despite of government measures the rural and poor women continue to face discrimination in the maternal health care, particularly those who depend on unskilled birth attendants; second, the over-medicalization of childbirth; and third, the continued practice of homebirth.*

Keywords: Dais, midwife, over-medicalization, social change, place of birth, government plans, politics of knowledge.

Introduction

Healthy women are the representation of the health standards of any nation, significantly because of their role in creating healthy infants, but the maternal health care throughout the world is severely undermined. Studies have shown that about half a million deaths occur every year due to childbirth and related complications (Koblinsky and Campbell 2003). In addition, 90% of maternal deaths are in the developing countries (WHO 2005). India has a high rate of maternal mortality rate although various state-sponsored programs are in place (Ved and Dua 2005). Childbirth and associated system of health-care is shaped by various rituals and traditions in all parts of the world. Childbirth continues to be considered primarily as *women's business*.

Since the practice was related to various degrees of purity and pollution, the doctors (mostly from upper caste), who were usually men known as “kaviraj” and “hakims”, secluded themselves from birth. Childbirth was clearly the domain of traditional *Dais* that included herbal medicines and supernatural practices (Ghosh 2016).

According to Ghosh (2016) the expectant mother was supported by the experienced women of the family and neighbourhood; and assisted by low caste *Dais*. *Dais* are addressed differently in different society¹. Often the term *midwife* is confused with the term “traditional birth attendants”. Traditional birth attendants (TBAs) or *Dais* have been the main health care providers for women during childbirth. They play a significant role for women when it is about cultural competence, consolation, empathy and psychological support during pregnancy, labor pain, with benefits to mother and her new born child (Yousuf et al. 2010). Indian *Dai*, according to Sarah Pinto (2006), is someone who attend the pregnant ladies, assist them to deliver the child and help them in the post-partum chores, but this may not necessarily be done by the single person throughout India. The *Dai*'s main task is not only catching the baby but also cutting the cord and consequently removing “the polluted and dangerous” placenta. There are also some poor families where the cord is believed to be cut by the mother herself, for the fear that the child may become more familiar with *Dai* than the mother (Pinto 2006). Louis Dumont (1980) in his study among the South Indians referred to the Tamil traditional birth attendants, locally known as “*maruttavacci*” (female doctors), associating it with the lower caste involved in removing impurities of both the menstruation and birth along with the task of cutting the umbilical cord. According to him, they were mainly the wives of washermen and barbers (Dumont 1980).

Childbirth practices and social change

The practice of home birth with the assistance of traditional birth attendants or *Dais* is no more a widely practiced phenomenon. Home birth practice is an age-old tradition in India. It is a phenomenon where childbirth occurs at home (not in a hospital) in the presence or absence of a professional attendant (WHO 1997). There has been a tremendous change in the last few decades regarding the choice of the place of birth. With the advent of formal health care institutions with its co-related modern machines and health care technology some significant changes have taken place in the whole perception and practice of child birth and mother-child care. Some specific and notable changes are in the form of caesarean birth in

complicated situations, ligation, monitors to examine the motion of unborn child, injection to reduce pain during labour, forceps and so on. These new technologies were first invented in the sphere of obstetrics, and then were put to large-scale use in the healthcare system. Although people were hesitant in accepting these technologies because of pressure of tradition and culture over time these practices were adjusted into the culture of the people. These inventions were widely welcomed and induced into the practice of child birth; the modern medical science thus established its dominance over oral knowledge.

Yogendra Singh (2012) has observed that the initiations of modernization of India had emerged during the national movement of freedom struggle in India. He claimed that the colonial rule had created consciousness among the leaders about the improvement in the technological and scientific skills. Similarly, we can also locate the advent of modern health care institutions for maternity care within the modernization process that India had experienced. As a part of its strategy to make its holds strong in India the British introduced modern maternity care service and took measures to improve the status of women. These were welcomed by the new elite, educated and social reformist section in order to formulate their own approach to modernize India. Yogendra Singh (2012) emphasized that science and technology failed to make an impact on the “fundamental values” that society and the individual members cherished. The instrumental power is dominant only till the relation between the means to an end is established. According to Lal Behari Dey (1878), *Dais* were believed to be of great significance in the traditional socio-cultural discourses around the phenomenon of birth. *Dais* had a figure of a mother and believed to have secret connection with God. Thus, Yogendra Singh (2012) is right in asserting his claim that the *Dais* are included in various rituals in Indian society despite of the fact that their social role is declining.

Conceptualizing childbirth: Contemporary critics

Kalpana Ram (2009) in her essay ‘Rural Midwives in South Asia’ has criticized the way in which politics of knowledge works. She argues that the criticism of the traditional childbearing methods and practices was one way to criticize the entire indigenous culture. According to Ram (2009), Dumont’s *Homo Hierarchicus* (1980) is most problematic for his utmost importance to religion and reduction of entire Indian culture into merely a system of hierarchy through the complex of purity and pollution. The knowledge which the midwives possess is not acknowledged because of

its lack in literary tradition. The medium of transfer of knowledge is from hand to hand (or orally). Ram (2009) has expressed her discontent regarding the attitudes of both the Indian tradition as well as of the western tradition which are least interested in the knowledge that is acquired from body to body. *Dais* representing the lower caste are the women who stood at the intersection of multiple layers of power play. Their knowledge and wisdom of the traditional practice of childbirth has been devalued by the patriarchal order and ever-growing inclination and faith towards western medicine and healthcare. The unwritten traditional knowledge of the *Dais* has no value in the society which only gives legitimacy to the knowledge that is documented. Thus, the knowledge system based upon experience, skill, insight and culture is denounced (Ghosh 2016) and allowed to vanish.

State policies on childbirth in India

There are many State schemes which foster changes in the birth practices. Mira Sadgopal (2009) points to various schemes such as the Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY), which aims to reduce the maternal and neonatal mortality. The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) strongly urges expectant mothers to go through “institutional delivery” and avoid home birth. This attempt has led to the marginalization of the *Dais* or traditional birth attendants and their age-old tradition of childcare, thereby excluding them from the category of “skilled birth attendants”. The idea of “mainstream” maternity care itself is vague. There arise certain questions like whether proper maternity care means “hospital-centered” childbirth care. If so, then several critics have pointed out that this model is gender-insensitive and highly commercialized. Or, does it imply the parallel practice of indigenous healing and midwifery traditions? Does it mean institutionalized changes only at the primary health care centre to incorporate rural poor? Is there a scope for the referral units, that are mostly allopathic, to become sensitive to the knowledge and skill of the traditional birth attendants and allow them to serve as a backup for home births? An examination of all these questions suggests that the hope of incorporation of the best indigenous knowledge and practice of traditional birth attendants into the modern health care system seems to be on the wane. The need of the hour is a well-linked scheme of women-friendly comprehensive maternity services where maternity services would not only serve as essential referral facilities but also harmonize with the indigenous practices.

The organizations of global health agencies like The World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), United

Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and others claim that the reason for the high mortality is within the indigenous practice of communities and that can only be met through technological and managerial solutions. The blame on the *Dais* can be traced since the colonial invasion, which created a tradition-modernity binary, in which the modern was always projected as superior over the traditional. In the last three decades, the official effort to incorporate *Dias* to extend primary health care has been reversed. The trained *Dais* were never incorporated effectively and this has contributed to their marginalization and exclusion from the modern and formal health system. The slower rate of reduction in infant mortality rate and few other factors prompted a reconsideration of the health governance strategy. The overall approach of the Dai-training continued to treat the *Dais* as illiterate, superstitious and unhygienic. However, in the 1990s, because of the lack of any solid evidence that TBAs can reduce maternal mortality rate, the interest in training *Dais* waned. Mira Sadgopal (2009) claims that the training itself has stopped *Dais* from intervening in critical and emergency situations, forced women to non-existent facilities, and taught them unsafe practices for “safe delivery” like the use of rubber sheets.

Historical and political factors responsible for the change in birth practices

It has been observed that historical and political conditions also shape the nature and character of birth practices (Ghosh 2016). According to Ghosh (2016), the traditional system of childbirth practice only existed in its pure form until the nineteenth century. In rural India, non-institutional birth is still in practice but several changes have also come due to the interference of modern medical practices. The Western midwifery system was introduced by the missionaries sporadically in the first half of the nineteenth century. Such efforts to medicalize childbirth can be located in the colonial efforts to “civilize the natives”, who according to the British were the victims of oppressive social system. A new set of policies was started in the latter half of the 19th century that redefined the experience of women during childbirth.

Ambalika Guha (2017) also argues that medicalization of childbirth in India began in Colonial India as an attempt to ‘sanitize’ the *zenana* (it refers to the secluded quarters of the respectable households inhabited by women) as prominent site of childbirth practices and replace them with trained midwives and qualified female doctors. According to scholars like Mavalankar, Raman, Vora (2010) the development of midwifery was started

as early as 1797 in Madras with the setting up of a “lying-in-hospital”. The first formal training for midwife was started in the same institution in Madras sanctioned by the British government. There were trained midwives from Britain as well traditional birth attendants who were trained by the European midwives in these midwifery schools were allowed to practice childbirth care independently.

Birth practices in Indian Context: A brief overview

Notwithstanding the efforts made historically and even by the present government, traditional birth attendants still continue to play an important role in many parts of India. A study done by a group of scholars in Rajasthan found that unlike many parts of India, where the medicalized child birth have become a norm, people in Rajasthan still strongly favour home birth. Some people avail the facility of institutionalized childbirth only when the expecting mother’s health takes a critical turn or in the cases where the pregnant women is very young. (Iyengar, et al. 2008). The Indian government’s National Rural Health Mission has invested heavily in promoting mother-child health care facilities from 2006 onwards, and this has led to a marked increase in the number of institutional deliveries across India (ibid).

The situation of Dai in the inner Himalayas was not very different. The study done by Thakur, Sinha and Pathak (2017) in Mashobra district found that though there were the availability of government facilitated maternal services the attitudes of women favouring home delivery remained unaltered because TBAs fed the common cultural and spiritual needs.

A similar study done in Maharashtra by group of scholars among the tribal population found the prevalence of the practice of birth at home by traditional birth attendants to a significant scale. The group found that around 90% of the tribal women preferred delivery conducted by the TBAs mainly because of the strong belief and faith in Dais and the various rituals which they conduct. Poverty is another factor that prevents the tribals from availing the modern health care facilities (Begum, et al. 2017). However, the scholars in the present context blamed “ignorance” of the tribal women due to their poverty and illiteracy as the main reason for not availing modern health care and institutional birth. However, the group failed to record the inadequacies in the modern health system.

The first major issue that has been figured out is the failure on the part of the government to acknowledge the traditional practices and care of the

Dais and this led to the fading out of their indigenous knowledge. In a study done by the Ratika Thakur and others found that only one TBA had passed on her indigenous knowledge to her successor (grand-daughter), however in other cases due the lack of interest of the government health centres the skill was not passed on (Ratika Thakur, et al. 2017). The untrained TBAs, with lack of knowledge, cannot deal with the complicated cases involving risks that might result in the maternal and child mortality. The incorporation of the *Dais* into the mainstream health centres is important in reducing the maternal mortality rate especially in the rural areas as some studies shows how the quality of relationship between the birth givers and birthing mothers affects the delivery experiences of the mothers. Unn Dahlberg and IngvildAune (2012) have observed that the quality of relationships and relational continuity between the birth givers and birthing mothers are the key to the positive birth experience. The TBAs are aware of the importance of interpersonal relationships and they take extra care in building a relationship of trust with the expecting mothers. In their own words, ‘through relational continuity, psychological trust and predictability may be created. Relational continuity allows the midwife to meet the woman in the context of a holistic perspective. This may promote well-being and a potential for personal growth for the individual woman and her partner, and could in turn promote “empowerment” for the whole family’ (Dahlberg and Aune 2012). Ghosh (2016) has elaborated the relevance of the *Dai* in traditional childbirth practices. He notes that the knowledge of the *Dai* should be preserved as there are many traditional practices of *Dai* that have been devalued since ages but there are also many practices which have found its validity in the realm of so-called scientific world. There is widespread prevalence of obstetric violence in Indian hospitals which has been widely reported. While in government hospitals the incidences of abuses like, shaming, verbal abuse, scolding, yelling and also include physical abuse such as slapping and episiotomies are practiced at rampant (Rao 2015). WHO and the other international agencies have significantly put forward the importance of midwifery or skilled birth attendants but the government of India has only promoted the “institutional birth”, though it has been funded internally by Reproductive and Child Health Programme and nationally funded by National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) (Mavalankar et al. 2010). Thus, the financially disadvantaged section has to suffer both in opting for home birth and choosing institutional birth.

In case of Bengal, during the late 19th and early 20th century, the medicalization of childbirth was promoted by the social reformist and nationalist discourse especially by the middleclass Bengalis. In twentieth

century, individual tracts on scientific midwifery gained centrality, though the tracts were inherently scientific an attempt was made to write in lucid Bengali terms to attract popular readership. The professionalization of midwifery in 1940s was considered to be the keystone towards nation's building. This was initiated by the new educated Bengalis explicitly to improve the condition of the 'low-status' Bengali women in socio-cultural codes. Developing the discourse of midwifery became one of the ways in which they attempted "modernize" middleclass women as mothers. The political condition in Indian society in the first half of the 20th century was suitable for introducing Western medicine to strengthen its roots in India as the elite reformers or the so called "Bhadroloks" desired their spouses to complement their progressive ideology through adherence to the scientific systems and thereby becoming true "Bhadramahilas" themselves.

The case of Siliguri

The structure of midwifery and TBAs in town is different from what we generally find in the rural areas. My study in Siliguri on the birth practices has yielded different result on the presence of TBAs and their role in the society (Sharma 2018). Siliguri, a class one city, is located in northern side of state of West Bengal. A total of 30 women, selected by random sampling from various caste and class backgrounds, were interviewed to know about the prevalent birth practices and their social implications. The respondents comprised of mothers (irrespective of the age), health-in-charge of the maternity health centre, a Traditional Birth Attendant (TBA) and a trained midwife. The study found that assistance of TBAs in childbirth is not a common practice among the urban mothers any more. I tried to find out the areas of conflict between the modern and traditional forms of childbirth and the increasing trend towards the medicalization of childbirth. In an interview with Birla Paul, the health-in-charge of a primary health centres in Siliguri, narrated many instances of the contradiction as well as adjustment between the modern prescribed methods by the doctors and the methods of the old traditions.

Birla narrated that:

the expectant mothers are very conscious and particular about the bio-medicine prescribed to them. However, simultaneously, they follow certain rituals that can be harmful for the maternal health. Few examples of which are the rituals of *Sadh* according to which they can only consume food after the ritual is completed. The health centres has female working members who perform the duty of

surveillance and identify the pregnant women and give them the medical attention they need.

It can be stated that in Siliguri only institutionalised birth takes place. It is primarily the North Bengal Medical College, which was established in 1968, serves as a low-cost provider for the facility of maternity services in the area. It is primarily the mothers of the low-income who avails the maternity services in these government hospitals. It was very difficult to find TBAs as well as new generation mothers who have experienced home births. A few mothers who had experienced home birth are aged. The perception of the mothers regarding TBAs was also sociologically important to note. The TBAs are generally believed to be unskilled with little knowledge and are thought to be accessed by only the people who are superstitious.

The Atur Ghar

In the process of medicalization of childbirth in India the childbirth which was primarily a female oriented ritual has gradually become a medical event (Guha 2015). This resulted in the mixing of medical intervention in the performance of the childbirth rituals. Some of the rituals like making up of Atur Ghar (a makeshift arrangement for childbirth) also has lost its relevance due to the rapid increase of institutional birth. In Atur Ghar in Bengal, several prescribed and at the same time “polluted” acts and rituals were performed, some by the *Dais* and some by the elderly and experienced female members. The design of the ‘Atur Ghar’ with only one opening through the door replicates the closed, warm condition of the mother’s womb (Ghosh 2016). According to Health Family and Welfare Department in West In 2011-12 West Bengal recorded 80% institutional deliveries, which indicates the waning importance of Atur Ghar and the traditional knowledge.

Over-medicalization of Childbirth

The second issue in the current discourse is over-medicalization of childbirth, which refers to a state where the birthing process is severely commercialized specially in the places, such as urban centres like Siliguri, where the unavailability of the maternal health facility is not a problem. The genesis of the problem can be located in the 19th and 20th century studies in physiology about women’s body. The terminologies like “engine-object-path” where the engine represents uterus, objects represents foetus and path is the vaginal canal to were used in some classical obstetrics text books to describe the phenomenon. This reductionist approach weakens

the women's agency and thus undermines the biological and sociocultural significance of the birth.

In this technique centred notion of a pregnant woman is considered as a patient. This leads the pregnant women to lose the agency over her own body. In medicalizing childbirth, it is mandatory that the patient, or the mother, is subjected to regular monitoring by the doctors in the form of overdoses of medicines and electoral foetal monitoring (EFM), induced labour, delivery by caesarean section, episiotomy, epidural anesthesia, and so on (Hausman 2005). Health care has become an industry where the technical side is given more significance than the care aspect. The industrial rationality to develop productivity is applied to the institution of healthcare system. The result of which is the practice of caesarean section as a production line to increase efficiency (Rattner 2009). Gradually it comes in the common understanding that labour is an illness where operation can be required to hit a setback through c-section. Thus, within few years there has been massive rise in caesarean birth. It shows that the private hospitals have conducted 27.7% C-section in 2005-2006 which has increased to about 40.9% in 2015-2016 (Kaul 2007). Thus, we can find a change in culture of birth practice of the people which is extensively motivated by the notion of profit in the health care system.

Making Homebirth a Luxury: Sensing Class in Childbirth

The third issue in the field of contemporary birth practices is making child birth at home a luxury. The urban educated mothers who had a bitter and problem-ridden experience in their initial birth, which might have been a normal birth in hospital, are now ready to experience an alternative child birth practice in case of their later childbirths. In a newspaper article (*Times of India*, 2016, 17 July) Lina Duncan, practicing midwifery in India, explains how the urban women are opting for an alternative birth practice at home. The article narrates different experiences of the women on childbirth in formal birth giving institution and then how they are different from their experiences of child birth assisted by Lina Duncan. While home births are still numerically insignificant the new urban educated women are looking forward to child birth experiences compared to what they experience in busy labour wards in modern hospitals. Lina Duncan started with just one out of hospital delivery in a year, which went up to 14 the following year and in 2015 it went up to 38 women who had midwife assisted childbirth.

The women who are opting for midwife are mostly those women who had disturbing experience at the time of their first child birth. The needs of the would-be mothers are mostly comfort, privacy and the words of ease which they find in these midwives who are available on call 24/7. They are equipped with all medical facilities of birth during prenatal phase, nutritional help and postpartum care.

Aloka Mehta, one of the respondents, remembers how her first baby was pulled out by the doctor three weeks before the due date to suit his holiday plans. She was put under medication to speed up labour. She felt herself to be a mere tick mark in the list of the doctor. For her second birth she turned one of the rooms in her house into a birthing room where she had the favourite music played by her husband and her midwife maid to make the whole process of child birth much less daunting. She explained how she felt much more empowered and dignified. After giving birth and cuddling her new born, she called her dear ones to give them the good news and went back to bedroom to sleep. The former software professional-turned-childbirth practitioner says, “when there’s love and no fear, birth happens like a song”.

Over-medicalization of the childbirth made these urban educated women to choose an experience where they could feel empowered and have control of the situation. However, the problem arises when a form of birth which is considered ideal by these women becomes a luxurious product which could be availed only by who can afford it. The service of midwifery comes at a cost that are more expensive than the birth at birth giving intuitions. Thus, we can say that the concept of “normal birth” is sold as a product that can be availed by only those who can afford it; empowerment and maximum control over the body come with a cost.

Conclusion

The promotion of institutional birth has put the traditional birth giving knowledge of the Dais and their profession in jeopardy. Despite suggestions from WHO and other health bodies there has been no proper arrangement for training of the *Dais* and incorporate them into the institutional mother and child care practices. This has caused the loss of livelihood of the low-caste impoverished women and their knowledge of birth giving. The over medicalization of birth giving practices has inflicted loss of agency and control over body for the mothers. The near complete take-over of birth giving practices by modern medicine has commodified the concept of

“normal birth”. A section of educated urban women who look at institutional birth critically try for alternative birth giving experience at home with the help of professional midwife find the experience gratifying but much more expensive than the institutional birth. For the average women it is thus so difficult to get out of the modern, over medicalized, over commodified mother birth giving practices.

There are several movements going across the world in order to humanize child birth. There is a growing consensus around women’s human rights and access to evidence-based care. Though women today are more liberated from the restricted and scheduled private world and have entered into the public sphere, they largely become alienated while losing their agency in her own reproductive labour. She barely has any control over the market-driven forces which exercises dominance through knowledge and power over her body. Maternal mortality rate has become the single most factor for safe motherhood, however the overall goal should be complete maternal health care and rights of the women.

Note

1. In Maharashtra they are referred to as “suin”, in Tamil Nadu they are called as “maruttuvachi” and in Bengal and many other North Indian states they are referred directly by their caste occupations like “dom”, “chamar”, “nain”, “bisodin” or “mehrin”. *Dai* is a hereditary profession which is passed from one generation to the other like the usual caste occupations. The tradition of *Dai* involved knowledge with community care.

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Informal Settlements: A Study of Displaced Living in a Kolkata Slum

Kahini Palit

Abstract: *In the absence of a sound planning for the ever-growing population and soaring real-estate prices in the city of Kolkata, a large number of people, ranging from labourers in the informal sector to those who migrated to the city in search of means of subsistence, are forced to live in informal settlements, as encroachers of government lands, subject to eviction whenever the government feels like cleaning up or developing urban facilities like flyovers or green parks. Such evictions often do not offer any compensation, let alone rehabilitation. In most cases, the argument made by the authorities for not providing rehabilitation is that the inhabitants were illegal encroachers and did not possess any legal documents. Again, rehabilitation provided by the government in distant places away from the city fails to serve its purpose, since without income generating infrastructure in the relocated area, the new settlers are forced to come back to the city and set up new informal settlements, as the city offers livelihood opportunities.*

Keywords: Development, displacement, eviction, rehabilitation, compensation, informal settlements, slum.

Introduction

Forced evictions have become one of the greatest human rights challenges in India in recent years. In just four years, from 2010 to 2014, more than 2 million people were forcibly evicted from their homes in India (Lok Sabha: Reference Note). Displacements induced by development projects have been a commonplace news in the city (Kolkata), and gradually people seem to have eased into the fact that in order for development to proceed, some structural changes need to take place, and if unfortunately, some hundreds need to be moved, or simply driven away (often the argument is that they had been illegally living on government's lands), it is a sacrifice that needs to be made. Hardly ever, in everyday discussions, the query arises whether this is the only way to "development". Thus, according to Samadder (2013), 'the dream of publishing Calcutta into the 21st century with subways, flyovers, underground markets, wide boulevards and islands of picture postcard

suburban villages vanishing into the distant green, which Louis Mumford characterized as metropolis continues' (pp. 17).

According to the celebrated writer and activist Harsh Mander, 'the people who build cities are considered illegitimate residents with no rights. Cities are not planned in a way that its working population can live dignified lives. And since that does not happen, they are forced to sleep on the streets and live in slums. And when you live in a slum, there is a danger of the state turning against you. And when the state uses non-state actors, especially the mafia and goons, it causes a situation of helplessness, of injustice, and inequality' (Kakoty 2016). According to a 2003 UN Habitat report, one-third of Kolkata lives in more than 5,500 registered and unregistered slums (Bera 2015). Life in a city acts as a pull factor contrary to the push factors of the countryside. The rural poor migrate to the cities where they have no chance of a proper housing, and therefore their inevitable address becomes the *jhopris* and shanties of urban slums. These slums always stand a chance of being demolished to give way to "development projects". However, for the government, these men account for "collateral damage" that cannot be helped if the State is to keep the wheel of "progress" and "development" rolling. Overnight, they become the "no-where men" of the land, ready to vanish (Banerjee 2013). Government of West Bengal started the eviction drive in 2001, when squatters were evicted beside the Tolly Nullah (canal) in south Kolkata. Dutta (2007) reports that since then, the list has lengthened: Beliaghata, Lake Gardens, Bagbazar, Bellilious Road, Singur, Nandigram. Eviction also took place in the rail colonies beside the tracks between the Ballygunge and Tollygunge stations on the south suburban line, a long stretch where an estimated 20,000 people lived. After stiff resistance from settlers in May 2002, the colony was crushed on December 15, 2005. No comprehensive rehabilitation plan has been made for squatters from other canalsides in Beliaghata and Bagbazar. Strong resistance from rail colony squatters at Lake Gardens forced the government to negotiate with them. About 2,000 families were asked to resettle at Nonadanga on the eastern fringe of the city. Only around 280 families went there, as there was no arrangement for living. Others rented dingy rooms far from Lake Gardens. Thus, the city's poorest and marginalized communities often find themselves the victim of the State's authoritarian and destructive development policies. Urbanization in India, in its urge to develop "world class city standards" continues to forcibly evict the urban poor from their settlements.

Overview of the field

This work is part of the fieldwork I conducted for my research on development induced displacement in Kolkata. The fieldwork was conducted in the slums on the Tolly Canal bank (Kolkata). In course of the fieldwork, a deeper glance into the slum life on the canal bank uncovered many stories. People living in slums are considered strictly as “the other” by the wealthier residents of the city. The slum, in general, was “the unknown”, to be feared and despised. But in the course of my journey, I came to find a deeper meaning of the word, that it was not a typical cliché dirty shantytown, unhygienic in all possible ways, and of course, prone to crime. I found families living there to be very peaceful, fun loving, and happy. Even though there was a lingering fear of eviction, it did not interrupt their daily lives. They knew it might come someday, but again, there might be the possibility of a compensation being given. So, they lived their lives forward. In the life in the settlement, there were friends and couples who loved each other dearly, children were born and taken care of, and all kinds of relationships. Their homes were tidy and cozy, and no matter how poor they were, or how small their room, they welcomed guests, shared tea with them, and chitchatted in a most unfeigned way.

My objective was to understand the lived experiences of the displaced, and to understand it from the point of view of the people who experienced it first-hand. The study was conducted by means of the qualitative method of ethnography. It was conducted in course of several weeks in the April of 2017, with several hours spent with the respondents. Most of the respondents remained busy during the day, with either professional work or household ones. Thus, late afternoon was chosen to conduct the fieldwork.

Conversations mostly took place in open spaces, like sitting on a rickety bench on the side of the road, or a makeshift community temple. The informal settings helped to keep the casual tone of the discussion, so that people felt comfortable enough to talk. It also helped in attracting more respondents, who, after their initial queries, got sucked up quickly into the conversation.

In 2001, hundreds of families living on the Tolly Canal banks were evicted, and their houses were destroyed. The Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority (KMDA) cleared out houses within 15ft distance from the bank with bulldozers. Thousands witnessed the demolition of their homes along with valuable assets, and were left with no perceivable future. After the dust settled, many were forced to live in rents nearby, for the nearby area provided their bread and butter, some others tried to hold on to their lands and remains of the house they had. Sometime after, some people came

back to their old places, repaired or built bamboo or brick houses and had been living there ever since. Nearly 16 years had passed before news of another eviction had been heard in recent times. Although no official notice had been given, the officials of KMDA had already measured the area to be cleared. The canal bank dwellers were living their days in anticipation.

Lives on the canal banks

The canal bank slums were like any other slum in the city, a shabby neighbourhood, with *kaccha* and *pukka* houses, with naked children on the porch, a long line of women collecting tap water, and a dispersed crowd here and there. None of the lands in the slum belonged legally to the residents, but most families were living in a particular piece of land for several years, many for more than half a century. Most of them had moved there many decades back, pushed by crisis of income sources in their native places like Amtala or Canning. Many had been living on the canal bank for three to four generations. During the time of the fieldwork, most of them were pretty much settled there, with children studying in nearby schools, and their parents contributing to the unorganized sector in the nearby area.

In recent times, an imminent eviction drive by the Government had been sanctioned, and the lands had already been measured for eviction. The officials of the KMDA had appeared with long measuring tapes, and carried out their job of calculating the dimensions of the lands to be vacated, providing just a mere information to the residents that they would have to move. People were living in fear that they could be evicted any day. But since it was not happening, they were kind of living in the hope that it never would. Hundreds of households lived in stark uncertainty regarding their future. Neither they knew the Government policies, nor did they know whether they would be compensated, and what kind of compensation (if at all) awaited them. They lived a marginal existence, and some of them conveyed to me that they felt like they were at the mercy of the authorities. There were no spokespersons for them, although occasionally, at the times of eviction drives, different political parties came to support their agenda, but it mostly served their own purpose of asserting their political voice, and thus ascertaining their own existence in the political world. There was an amount of certainty in the fact that since the lands had been measured, the Government would soon displace those people for the project of widening the Tolly Canal. Those people, their livelihoods, the future of their children and the local economy where most of them worked in the unorganized sector would feel the blow.

For the news of eviction that lurked in the air, no announcement of compensation had been made. During the 2001 eviction, only a handful of families, who were favoured by the then ruling political party got a meager amount as compensation, which was undoubtedly inadequate in present times. They had heard that evicted people from many other slums got one room flats as compensation in Nonadanga, in the eastern fringe of the city. The canal bank contained hundreds, if not thousands of households lined along the narrow edge. Most of them hoped for a flat as compensation. The small settlements in the slum faced different kinds of trouble during different seasons. Sometimes the monsoons severely damaged the roofs which were already leaking, sometimes the bamboo walls screeched in a heavy wind. An apartment life would be a welcome change for many who barely had money to repair the leaking roofs, or broken walls.

Presently, even though they knew about the imminent eviction, most of them had not made any plans for the future, as they lacked the resources to buy a house or a plot of land in the city. In the event of eviction, they would probably have to move to a rented house nearby and request the authorities to give them time to move out before the demolition took place, for if the government decided to evict them, then there was very little they could do. But there was a silver lining after all; a good compensation, hopefully a flat, or land nearby which would help them rebuild their lives.

During the fieldwork, people shared with me many stories. In the following section, I will try to narrate a selected few of those interviews that were taken in most informal places.

I met Puja while she was lying in wait with a few other women to collect tap water in plastic containers. She was a gaunt middle-aged woman, and the water felt heavy on her thin arms. Her maxi dress was stained from dirt and sweat, and looked baggy on her slender body. As we started talking, she complained vehemently about the injustice of eviction. During the past eviction drive of the Tolly Canal banks, they were not served with any official notice of eviction, and one fine day people came and broke the houses which fell in the measured line of 15 ft from the bank. Puja and some of her neighbours had since rebuilt what was left of their houses. But not everyone was lucky enough to have that. She showed me the bank of the Canal where there had been houses once. But after they were evicted, the bank was widened, and thus the land on which the houses stood was no more.

Puja seemed petrified of the recent news of eviction that people were talking about. She lived there with her ailing old father along with her two unmarried sisters. They worked as household help in the nearby area. She had been living there all her life, her grandmother had brought her mother when she was a child, from their ancestral home in Amtala, pushed by crisis of income opportunities in the native village.

'Oh sister, where will we find the money to buy a house? We are daily wage earners, with so little income....' She went on.

There was an utter helplessness in her tone of voice which was difficult to ignore. They were a family with marginal income, with the additional responsibility of caring for their sick father. The dread in her eyes was visible as she talked about their predicament in the event of eviction. And the horrible fact was that they had no way to stop the authorities from carrying it out.

After talking a while with Puja, I found myself in conversation with Babai. He was a short, stout man in his 30s, stylish in his attire and earring. He talked about his experience of eviction and house demolitions by the bulldozers during the eviction of the Canal bank in 2001. He complained that only the people who were closer to the then ruling political party in West Bengal (CPI-M) received the compensation money, while others got nothing. Losing their house, his family was forced to move away to a far location near Joka. But the semi-rural area offered not enough income opportunities, on one hand, and, the commute to workplace was long and costly, on the other. As a result, their earnings dropped severely. As life was becoming increasingly difficult there, a friend helped him to rent the place he and his family presently lived on the Canal bank (6 years since).

Since Tolly Canal was situated in the middle of the city area, houses for rent in the areas nearby were too costly for the canal bank dwellers to afford. Moreover, there were not enough rented houses nearby, so, in case of eviction, they had to move far away to resettle, which again didn't have the urban facilities and avenues of income. As a result, their already marginalized status was further reinforced. Thus, moving away from the Canal bank where they had their sustenance was not a feasible option for them, nor could they stay there if they were evicted. Hundreds and hundreds of families lived in that grim reality.

Babai thought that in the event of another eviction, paying a meager sum of money as compensation was highly unacceptable. Money could be earned, but since their homes would be taken away from them, the only

compensation should be to provide them with a tract of land where they could build their homes.

But it seemed immaterial what they wanted or needed. For the needs of development, they had to stand aside. It is absolutely dependent on the Government to pay for compensation or rehabilitation, but whether they would pay for it was another question altogether. The people were unsure about their rights, and what they were going to get had little parity with their demands.

On the canal bank, by the broken brick wall, I also talked to the cheerful 47-year-old Raju whose native land was Madhubani in Bihar. He was bare-bodied, wearing a blue lungi (a long piece of cloth to wrap around the lower abdomen, and which extended up to the ankle). He approached me, and in a hushed tone asked me how many feet inwards from the bank would the Government clear up. As I assured him that I had nothing to do with the Government, he seemed unconvinced. He thought that my work must have something to do with the Government, and it was reflected throughout our conversation. The first thing he assured me was that he was not a tenant like many other canal bank dwellers, and that he had himself gone to the Alipore Court for the ownership of his house.

'Write down that I have Electricity Bill as my Identity proof', he said.

He must have hoped in his heart that in the next eviction drive, only tenants would be evicted, and those who had legal papers would be spared. That was the most probable reason he emphasized with grave seriousness on his ownership of the house and that he possessed the necessary documents.

His story was similar to many others in the slum. Half of his house fell under bulldozer during the past eviction of the canal. He and his brothers stayed alternately on that half-broken room which they covered with plastic sheets, until things came to a calmer state, and they could build the broken part again. He had since been living there with his two unmarried brothers, his wife and his son; all five of them living in the same room. At first, I thought that I had heard wrong, but he assured me that they could not afford a bigger place, and it was absolutely necessary for his brothers to live there, since they worked nearby.

Raju thought that it would break his heart to leave that place.

'This place is so beautiful, and we are happy here. We live in so much freedom here, you see, this is a very beautiful place. Where will we go? Wherever we go, we will feel pain to leave this place. Where will

our children study, and where will we work? We do not want to leave this place, Sister. Will you please write about us, that we do not want compensation, we want to spend the rest of our lives here...'

Kindly tell the Government this' he said as we departed.

The dubiety in which all those people were living was appalling. They had no idea when they might be evicted, and what else would follow. Their homes would be bulldozed, bamboo huts would be set on fire. I felt their horror as they talked about how happy their lives were on the bank, and what would happen to them in the event of eviction.

I visited another part of the Canal bank in the following days. Aligned along the edge of the bank were houses. I walked along the narrow cement path, on one side of it was the canal, an open deep ridge sloping down to the shallow water level, and on the other side was the array of houses. As I treaded forward, someone warned me to walk along the side of the houses because the path towards the canal side was slippery. I dreadfully looked towards the bank and thought that should somebody slip, that person would slip down several feet, in the black sticky mud of the side of the canal. Luckily, I stuck to the safe side of the path, and did not slip.

Glancing forward, I could see the wide canal with shallow water, trees on its other bank created a beautiful green landscape, the sky looked wide and blue; it was a nice, calming sight.

No matter how small their houses were, or how meager the income, many of them didn't want to leave their homes in probability of a better prospect of rehabilitation, like a flat. But since they had no means of knowing what awaited their future, or informing the authorities of their dispositions, their ardent request to me was that I must write about them.

Relocation appeared to be an inadequate solution to the problem of displacement. Without sufficient income opportunities in the relocated place, people were forced to search for alternatives in or near their old places.

I found perfect families, lives with rich stories- most of those people were surely known for their labour in the city, but their existence was defined by it, and very few of their employers were concerned with where and how they lived. In the event of an eviction, the disruption of lives of those people would indeed be immense.

The thing that was most intriguing in the entire fieldwork was that people were not entirely sure about why they were evicted from their homes after living there for 40 or more years. Although they didn't possess legal papers

of ownership of their homes, they had been contributing to the local economy and had been a part of the city for a long time. Most of them were voters, and local political parties acquired their support in times of political rallies. It was not the question of rights of a few people only. Disruption of lives of thousands of people due to eviction was not something the authorities could ignore. But they ignored it nevertheless, in stark violation of human rights.

Conclusion

In accordance with the objectives of my research, through the keen eyes of an ethnographer, I tried to unfold the everyday realities of the people who lived on the Tolly Canal bank who had faced eviction in the past (2001), and who waited for another eviction which they feared would disrupt their lives yet again. I watched the horrors in their eyes as they talked about the imminent eviction that would take place soon. I uncovered two sets of views among the people regarding eviction- some wanted to hold on to their homes by any means necessary, and did not want any kind of compensation or rehabilitation in exchange for their homes; while some others were more optimistic, since they hoped that if rehabilitation was given by means of a flat, it would be much better than the jhopris where they currently lived. Although, most people I met during fieldwork loved the ambience of the canal bank, with the urban facilities available in the area. Moving to a different locale was heartbreaking for them. Many had also heard about the state of rehabilitation offered by the Government, and decided that they were better off without it.

But the irony of the situation was that people were unsure of whether they were going to be offered any kind of rehabilitation at all. They felt helpless about it. They were a marginalized section, and had no power to voice their demands and problems to the concerned authorities. And most of all they were unsure about who made the final call which sealed their destinies. They were aware of their rights, and during 2001 they tried to stall the eviction drive with the help of the ruling political party, but with little success. The coming eviction would surely deal a harder blow to the daily lives of those people.

Rehabilitation was surely a welcome solution to the horror of eviction, which many on the canal bank hoped for. But careful consideration of the socio-economic conditions of the people being rehabilitated, along with allocation of optimum space for all family members, in addition to income generating sources in the relocation area must be the top priorities of the Government trying to rehabilitate hundreds and thousands of evicted families. It was not

as simple as uprooting a few people from a place, and placing them in a different locale. It was uprooting a whole lot more, their lives and livelihoods, and the future of their children. Relocation to a place with insufficient income opportunities to sustain their lives often proved to be fruitless, as people came back to their old places or nearby due to the convenience of income in the location.

Ethnographic work on the Tolly canal bank provided me with an unambiguous picture of the condition of people who were evicted without the Government providing any rehabilitation, and the way people had to cope after losing their homes, and the role of the Government in the whole eviction scenario. I also came to understand the way canal bank dwellers felt about another imminent eviction, and was deeply touched by their anxiety of the uncertainty of the near future. In conversation with them, I uncovered their history of living in the place, how their lives were entangled with the area, and just how much they loved their homes.

The story which I uncovered revealed a few important things. Although regulations regarding rehabilitation in case of displacement were in effect, the first instinct of the Government had been eviction, without even a compensation, let alone rehabilitation, in several cases. The would-be evicted people were often kept in the dark, without any prior official notification, and they felt helpless as the demolition of the houses started one day. For development of the city and its extension, as well as infrastructural growth, those people had to pay a heavy toll. Even though being the major part of the informal working force of the city, the rest of the city seemed oblivious of the whole thing. Nobody knew what happened to the evicted people afterwards. After being evicted from one place, they moved to another slum in search of a house, and lived there until another eviction. Many came back to whatever space was left after their house was grazed to the ground. The Government had no central law for the criteria of getting rehabilitated, so that people were entirely unsure whether they would be offered any rehabilitation. News travelled of people getting rehabilitation in nice flats, but they were often considered to be the lucky ones, as people didn't get rehabilitation every time eviction took place. Many of the slum dwellers also fought for their rights of getting rehabilitation, and sometimes the fights turned ugly.

My fieldwork provided just a glimpse of the development induced displacement, and the state of the rehabilitation scenario in West Bengal. Many such evictions had taken place in the last few years, and many more would be taking place in near future. But the Government required a

comprehensive plan for developing the city, with as few casualties as possible. Eviction is a human rights violation, and when carried out without rehabilitation of the evicted, it violated regulations. Thus, in case of evictions, rehabilitation was unquestionably the immediate necessity. But rehabilitation in the outskirts of the city without proper planning and groundwork failed to serve the purpose, and reinforced the already vulnerable status of the evicted people. In case of rehabilitation in locales far away from the heart of the city, in addition to providing a house or land, the Government required to generate income opportunities in the area. Without the means of subsistence, the marginalized people like wage labours or women working as household help could not continue living in the relocated place, and were forced to search for alternatives in other slums in the city, as living in rented houses was beyond what they could afford. In that case the vicious circle continued, people continued to move from one slum to the other, and rehabilitation did little to solve the problem of the slum population of the city.

Glancing in another light, since many such marginalized, would-be evicted people looked forward to a good rehabilitation, by means of proper planning, by helping in the development of socio-economic conditions of the places of rehabilitation, the Government could fruitfully use the human resource in the development of the area on one hand, and reduce poverty on the other. And since ‘*Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*’- the resolution taken by United Nations Sustainable Development Summit 2015 mentions that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, lending a hand to the marginalized by means of proper utilization of resources seem to be long overdue.

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Changing Dynamics of Family Roles: Sharing Experiences from Everyday Life

Winkeyla Bhutia

Abstract: *Statistics regarding the participation of the women at work in Sikkim has been encouraging. Factors like education, employment opportunities, reservation in employment, education and political bodies have combined to achieve this. However, the increase in work participation of women also calls for a reorganization of the various roles within the household. Based on my experience as a working woman in an urban setting, this paper attempts to throw light on the changes in the relations within the family in an urban Bhutia household vis-à-vis an earlier situation in a Bhutia family while also exploring the stresses and changes resulting changes in the larger social structure.*

Keywords: Roles, everyday life, social structures, working women, employment, patriarchy.

Introduction

The “self” of an individual is largely drawn out of the ways the elements of the wider social structures influence our actions, thought process, relationships, values and our outlooks in our everyday life. The world of everyday life or the life-world as understood by Schutz is seen as an intersubjective world where individuals create social reality while at the same time constrained by the preexisting social structures. Social structures at the local level as well as at the global level tend to influence our choices in everyday life.

No doubt, changes take place in the world of work, but occupation or employment continue to be the major social filter through which the lives of individuals and families are structured (Crompton and Harris 1998). The women taking up paid work is a common occurrence in today’s world. A number of reasons maybe attributed to this. With modern education and changing outlook women now want to improve themselves by tapping opportunities in the employment market. They are no longer happy about

being “just housewives.” The need to meet the expenses of running a household and urge to improve the quality of life are the factors that push women into paid work. The desire for financial independence has also been an important motive in seeing women taking up paid employment. Full time employment of women is likely to clash with the hours spent in daily chores as a result of which the working women have to make adjustments in order to balance home and work. One way would therefore be a redistribution of household tasks among the family members living together, or in the time allotted to a particular task.

The conventional patriarchal arrangement demands men to be the breadwinners, while women are seen as homemaker, care giver and in the role of a nurturer. In contrast, emphasis on shared roles based on an egalitarian ideal is seen as something nontraditional, or even an act of deviance (Amato and Booth 1995). House work, childcare and care for the elderly and the sick are considered “feminine” roles and are generally attributed to womenfolk, irrespective of their role outside the house. Likewise, decision making and authority are often vested on the males in the family. This orientation about the role of women takes place in the early years of the socialization and becomes inbuilt in the personality of the girls as well as the boys, so much so that if they deviate a little, they are blamed for not doing “their job properly”.

We have data to show that compared to the situation in the 1960s, men and women in the 1980s were more open to accept that women should have their own careers and be good mothers alongside being active members in important family decisions. They were also more likely to accept that men should do their share of household duties and child care. In spite of these changes, men remain more conservative on these issues than women (Thornton 1989).

‘Attitude change is likely to impact personal feelings as well as dyadic aspects of relationships. As wives become less traditional in outlook, they tend to perceive that they are disadvantaged or exploited and thus become less happy with their marriages. In terms of behaviour, they may demand more decision-making power or press their husbands to spend more time doing housework and child-care. Since the status quo benefits men, many husbands resist these changes. Thus, when wives’ attitudes turn progressive, there is likely to be more overt conflicts between spouses and less stability in the relationship’ (Amato and Booth 1995: 58) Despite men and women being recognized as equal citizens in the eyes of the law, the society attributes differential roles, rights and obligations to the men and women.

The Bhutia Community

The Bhutia community structures gender relations in tune with a patriarchal order. Studies on the Bhutias of Sikkim (Bhasin 2002; Bhattacharya 1994) refer to them as an egalitarian society. However, overtures of patriarchy surround everyday life. For instance, the men are placed above the women in gender hierarchy, preferences are given to sons over daughters, customary laws privilege men over women, division of labour among men and women is not egalitarian and everyday practices of social relations show glaring instances of gender bias.

Historically, the Bhutias are believed to have migrated to Sikkim from Tibet at different periods in history. A large majority of the Bhutias are Buddhist, while a few of them are Muslim or Christian. Although they may not have the dowry system yet, the birth of a son is much coveted, so much so that in the past if a woman had only daughters, she was referred to as “barren” and pitied. In families with limited income, bias against daughter is reflected in sending her to an ordinary government aided school, while the parents, without fail, would try and get the son admitted to a private English medium school, which involves higher cost. After marriage the girl moves to her husband’s house. If her work area is in a different place, she might take up a different residence in a different place but will continue to visit her husband’s family every weekend on vacation. This is the standard trend although there might be some exceptions. Reliance on family members and close kin for various works from child supervision to support in times of crisis is also widely popular.

As daughter

Having grown up in a household with three sisters and one brother we seldom looked for companionship outside the family. Both my parents were in state Government service and it was nothing out of the ordinary to see my mother going out to work. In fact, it was always understood that after our studies we would all seek paid jobs and be financially independent. My paternal grandmother lived with us and I have faint memories of her taking care and supervising my two younger sisters when they were babies. In reflection, I think about how much my parents might have sacrificed to ensure that all their five children had a well provided, cared, happy childhood. Since all of us were educated in private boarding schools, it must have also been financially taxing for them.

My father grew up in a village and was singlehandedly brought up by his mother. He knows how to cook and clean but I do not remember him engaging in household chores. When we were small, I remember him being away from home on work engagements for days and months. My father was the provider in a typical patriarchal sense while my mother remained the nurturer and the homemaker. Even though he was able to cook and clean my father always discouraged my older brother from performing household chores as, he believed, it was the responsibility of the girls. In this way he was very traditional in his outlook when it came to the distribution of household tasks. My brother was exempted from the household tasks as a result of which he cannot cook even today. On the other hand, he encouraged my brother to participate only in chores that were considered “masculine”, like repair works around the house, chores which required strength and chores which were done outside the house. He was also very strict with us; he never liked his daughters going out with friends in the evenings, since he believed that the girls should stay indoors after dark. Notwithstanding all the patriarchal ideals that he nursed dearly, he loved us very much and he was not very expressive in displaying his affections. Today he has become old and childlike. He has become very open about his emotions and affections. Once the patriarch who exuded authority and sternness has today come to be totally dependent on my mother because of old age and health problems. In fact, today, it is my mother who is completely in charge of family finances, a responsibility which was held by my father for as long.

My mother is the second youngest in a family of 6 children. She grew up during a time when boys and girls were brought up following differential norms and standards. Even though she was brought up in a loving household, her parents were patriarchal in their outlook and mindset. When it came to making decisions, her father’s words were counted as final. My mother never saw my father before marriage but she never questioned the arrangement.

In my vacation days, I saw my mother waking up early every day at 4:30 am. She was singularly responsible for cooking the family meals for the day, giving us a bath and changing us, serving us breakfast, packing our lunches for the day. Her mother-in-law, my grandmother, was already an old lady and she could not help much in domestic work. Therefore, it was my mother who had to manage almost everything by her herself. After finishing her household works for the morning and instructing my grandmother about her lunch my mother would dress for work and leave home by 9 am. In retrospect I wonder if she had enough time to eat her

breakfast. Unlike the present day there were no vehicles and so she had to walk 8 kilometres to reach the school where she taught. The terrain here is uneven therefore her walk to school meant walking uphill as well as downhill. After work hours were equally taxing as it meant reaching home on time and attending to the daily chores like preparing dinner, washing up, cleaning, and supervising the children with their studies. She rarely had time for herself.

My father being the head of the household his word was often taken as final by the other members. My mother too never overstepped his authority and gave him the patriarch's place. An advice she keeps giving me after my marriage was to compromise to the male authority. Rather she has tried to teach us to respect and honour our husbands. She often says the status of the family is dependent on the status of one's husband and therefore we, the wives, must be the first ones to honour it. Today having gone through marriage and motherhood my mother and her daughters have become the best of friends. She remains non-judgmental about us and even today she remains the guiding force behind all of us. Since my mother is much younger than my father in age, in old age, my father has come to be completely dependent on her.

As wife

I got married with the idea that my husband and I would be partners in egalitarian roles. My mother disagrees with this "modern foolish notion" of mine and says that the idea of egalitarianism is utopian.

I have tried to accept my mother's way but I find myself deflecting time and again. I find myself voicing my opinions in a voice louder than my husband's. I find myself speaking up if I think he is wrong and I also often find myself asking him to do his share in the care of our children. Sometimes when I think about my mother and her relationship with my father and compare it with my relationship with my husband, I feel guilty. My husband and I argue and fight and disagree over things in ways which would have been unthinkable for my parents. I think my education, the influences from the wider social structures have shaped my sense of who I am and how I ought to be. Having been brought up in a relatively liberal social ambience, my husband, unlike my father, gives me some free space to be the person I want to be. He is kind, loving and considerate but the patriarchal influence over him sometimes become evident in his outlook and behaviour. For instance, irrespective of whether I am tired or not tired I have to attend to my children and take care of their needs and wants. No doubt my husband

extends his helping hands, but if he is tired or does not want to do it then he won't do it. He has a choice; I, on the other hand, do not have that choice. Since I am the mother, I have to do it. As a wife and a daughter-in-law, I have to also try and work hard in maintaining my relation with my husband's extended family. If the daughter-in-law does not meet the social expectations or the social obligations of the extended family of the in-laws then she would be blamed. This I think is a regular feature everywhere in the country. Women tend to carry the responsibility of maintaining the social relations within their own family members and the members of their husbands' families. The social obligations and role expectations tend to increase after marriage. Now the ties are no longer limited to one's family of orientation but gets extended to a whole lot of in-laws and other kin of the husband's extended family. If I am busy I tend to ignore the obligations that I hold towards the members of my family of orientation, assuming that they will understand my situation but when it comes to my husband's side of the family I go out of my way to make sure I discharge all my responsibilities without blemish.

As mother

I have two small boys aged 5 and 9. Being conscious of the egalitarian roles of the men and women I try to instill similar values in the upbringing of my children. Yet I must confess I backtrack in my thoughts and practice and often find myself being patriarchal in my everyday life activities. For instance, I forget and say something like "boys should not cry" or something like "you are behaving like a girl". Furthermore, I am also conscious that I am constantly trying to encourage my children to do activities such as sports, music etc. which, I feel, will help them be successful in their later lives. As a result, I am constantly routinising their lives leaving them with little time to discover themselves as children. This leads to me being increasingly stressed because of the obligations that I have to meet being a mother, a daughter, a wife, and daughter-in-law and as a working woman. Parenting today is no longer limited to just raising your child physically. Social structures in the form of media, literature, science, education etc. come as powerful influences on the perception and practice of parenting. Therefore, the way my mother raised her children is something I may no longer be satisfied with and I will definitely not try it on my children. For instance, when we were kids we had to invent our own games and ideas to keep ourselves busy; the grownups did not have the time to entertain us. Today, the modern parents insist give time to their children. I find myself constantly trying to entertain my children in ways that would supposedly be

a gainful learning experience for them. Moreover, our judgment on raising children is extensively influenced by consumerism which dictates how one should or should not be. I also expect my husband to be an equal participant in the rearing and upbringing of my children.

As working woman

Being an employed woman, I spend considerable time in a day away from home and family. Often, I find myself torn between wanting to do well in my profession and at the same time wanting to conform to the established notion of “good wife”, daughter-in-law, mother and daughter. Therefore, stress of time management as a professional and the “guilt” emanating from neglect of the traditional roles is a battle that I encounter on a regular basis. Education has influenced the desire to do well in my profession while my socialization reminds me the need to perform my duties and responsibilities as a mother, wife, daughter and a daughter-in-law. My hometown is a small town and relationships are often “primary” in nature. While living in the midst of primary relations one has to meet the obligations to perform social calls during illnesses, marriages, birth and death ceremonies within the community. Sometimes, I end up attending four weddings in a single day. This also effects drain of one’s finances. The idea of reciprocity in terms of social obligations remains a deeply rooted norm in the Sikkimese society. When my children fall ill it is often I who stays back to care for them. When I have something really important at work, my husband stays back with the sick child. Since I am a teacher, I prepare for my lessons either while in the college or late at night after the children go to bed. I do most of the child care activities like feeding, washing, cleaning and putting them to bed; I spend my mornings and evenings with the children.

I live with my in-laws who are there to help my husband and me whenever there is a need. My father-in-law is the one who looks after my children when I have to go to work during their vacations. I am also able to make social calls and fulfill social obligations because of the presence of my in-laws at home. Moreover, major responsibilities at home are borne by them which is why I am able to give myself the time to do my work and study.

I started working before I got married. Managing work and family when I was unmarried was not a problem at all. Since I lived with my parents there was not much familial obligations and domestic work was something I did according to my free will. Things changed after marriage. Although my in-laws never insisted that I do domestic chores yet a sense of guilt would creep in if I do not participate in everyday house work. Upon

introspection I think it was the way that I or rather we girls are socialized and brought up to see ourselves as principal managers of home. So, if we do not manage or look after the homes after marriage a sense of guilt engulfs us. The difference between my mother and me is that she accepted things unquestioningly while I often question the traditional gender roles, although, ultimately, I conduct myself as a “proper” wife or daughter-in-law, in conformity with the structured gender roles. The patriarchal socialization process has been so entrenched in me that I often find myself being pulled into that direction, forcing me to suppress my will to re-lay gender relations on egalitarian principle. Whenever there is a shortage of grocery at home, I take the blame on me considering it a management failure. We understand that family is not the only agency of socialization. Even when the family provides a liberal ambience, the people outside one’s immediate family, for example, the neighbours, friends and colleagues, who are also the active agents of patriarchal social order, would pull you into traditional roles.

However, one can see that things are changing for the better; the barriers of age-old patriarchal tradition, whereby men mature to dominate and a woman to serve is now being challenged. While the social order and its active agents would reduce women to subservience the latter would try to break free of all shackles. My mother and many women of her generation were true victims of this. The inroads made by many women in their battle for equality can, to a large extent, be credited to the education of both men and women. Working women have given a death blow to the notion that the male always the breadwinner and this has led to the questioning and challenging of other man-made skewed traditions.

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Masculinized Strategic Studies: It's Impact on the Daily Discourse of Security Policies

Shayesta Nishat Ahmed

Abstract: *The paper deliberates on addressing the question as to how the masculine streak in the security structure appears as “normal” and why does it get normalized in the security structure. It would look into how the shortcomings of the conventional perceptions and decision-making have impacted the national security concerns of the state as it is generally taken for granted that the national security discourses are built along the lines of masculinist high politics. The military bend of International Relations working in close quarters with disciplines like Security Studies, comes up with a subdued response to the numerous hurdles in the security of humans and the environment.*

The paper is divided into four parts; the first part attempts at looking into the background and defining the concept of “masculinity”; masculinity in international security studies and at the different variants of masculinity and the different layers of masculinist traditions that are spread across the spectrum. In the second part, the paper looks at the absorption of qualitative masculinist attributes that permeate the discipline of international security studies. In the third part, the paper examines the military bend of masculinity in security studies. The fourth and the final part of the paper talks about how the masculinist trend plays a role in promoting the gendered biases against both the male and female victims in the light of the eschewed gendered security policies.

Keywords: Masculinized Security Studies, Strategic Culture, Militarized Security, Policy-Making, Gendered Bias.

Introduction

Lucidity, strength, power and independence are such attributes which have always been credited as essential as well an integral part of the rational public men seen in the helm of public and state affairs. Such beliefs, which are also internalized by the wider world, also prepare the ground for such misguided notions to be put to practice. These set of qualities are considered “masculine” and have been associated with statespersons, bureaucrats, diplomats and, of course, the military chiefs. There is also an unhealthy

apprehension of values considered to be “feminine” or womanly, as they are driven by emotions and not reason, naivety, weak, sensitive and opting more for cooperation than conflict. Women are perceived to be unprepared for the tough life of a public man and rough situations which might arise while defending the country.

The military bent of subject like International Relations, which is connected closely with discipline like Security Studies, offers a subdued response to the numerous hurdles that come in the way to the security of humans and the environment. J. Ann Tickner, in her book *Gender and International Relations*, went on to elucidate how the realist attributes of rationality, strength and power which are correlated with foreign policy, even military and national affairs, perpetuate the hegemonic masculinity of these issues which are strategic in nature (1992: 3). She suggests that instead of taking power as the coercive means through which a state ensures security at the expense of other states, an ethos of ‘mutual enablement rather than domination’ could make up a positive and peaceful notion of security (ibid: 65; Ruddick 1989).

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Background and Definition of the Concept of Masculinity

The recent scholarship in the field of international relations showcases the excessively gendered nature of the discipline wherein there is a great divide in the comprehension of the issues on the lines of femininity and masculinity. But only when femininity and masculinity are studied collectively, can we draw upon a holistic understanding of how the gender factor works into international politics. However, any serious attempt which is made into bringing forth a gendered perspective in to the discipline cannot be done before beginning with a debate on masculinity itself (Tickner 1992: 6).

The majority of the policy-making bodies in the international arena are seen to be adhering to the real politic frameworks, which is seen to be completely devoid of women in terms of representation in the policy-making course or in accommodating the interests and issues of women. The fields of diplomacy, military, defense and even commerce excellently exemplify how women have only been recent additions (Grant 1992: 86). At this point, it is greatly important to comprehend that gender theorists 'are not generally referring to biological differences between males and females, but to a set of culturally shaped and defined characteristics associated with masculinity and femininity' which varies from person, time and extent (Tickner 1992: 7). This is also because real politics begins with the assumption of rationality which favours masculinity and is explicitly rooted in it. These also incidentally are the war-prone qualities which give rise to the offensive security policies of a state (Hutchings 2008: 392).

The state system can many a times be perceived to be at the heart of the power associations in the case of the variable called gender. The state being at the core of this power system, is unable to see gender, as it is inundated by men, and so no difference is visible. There is a gendered division of labour and power relations in the international system, which is widely visible in the manner that the subject is considered to be coming under the realm of "hard politics", such as military affairs, defense, police work, economic policies, and women are generally made to look after areas of "soft power" like social and health welfare, women and child development and education. The idea behind this distinction is to depict these hard-powered divisions as heavily masculine and where women are more often allotted areas that are peripheral to the working of the state. It is at times like this that women miss out on opportunities in participating in the policy-making process and even on the representation front.

Definitions of Masculinity and Masculinized Security Studies

Conventionally, it can be observed that literal and cultural narratives of the concept of gender arise from the society itself. This leads on to an understanding that a person's behaviour is determined by the gender that she/he identifies with. Masculinity as such does not exist in vacuum, and only exists in contrast to femininity, and it is manifest in the different cultural treatment of the males and the females of the society. Raewyn Connell, in her book *Masculinities*, talks about the four main strategies of arriving at the definition of masculinity, which are more often seen to be combined while being put to practice (2005: 68)

The first is the “essentialist’ definition and it is seen to single out a feature that delineates the nucleus of the masculine (ibid.). Sigmund Freud also can be seen equating masculinity with being activeness and femininity with passivity (Freud 1905). The second is the positivist strategy, which essentially is rooted in empiricism, and which brings out an oversimplified definition of masculinity which identifies it with the factuality of what men are. This definition forms the logical bedrock for the drawing of the “masculinity-femininity (M/F) scales in psychology” (Connell 2005: 69). However, it needs to be reckoned that, the attributes of masculinity and femininity go well beyond the compartmental sexual divisions; rather, they stretch out to the different ways as men and women combine elements of both in different proportions (Kessler and McKenna 1978).

The third is a “normative” definition which recognizes the differences, but end up offering a standardized understanding of masculinity, which combines the behavioural patterns that men possess. In this, there is a stringent division of conventional sex roles and behavior as individuals approach masculinity and femininity in varying degrees and methods. The problem here is that these ascertained norms are strictly built to be followed by the majority of the men. The question arises here is that does that make this section of the men “unmasculine”? There is yet no adequate measure to analyze the stipulated amount of manliness needed to be called masculine, or the lack of which might stereotypically lead on to one being called gay or effeminate (Connell 2005: 70).

The fourth strategy, called the ‘semiotic’ approach, characterizes masculinity through the usage of a structure of symbolic distinctions where the traits of masculinity and femininity are contrasted in totality. Active examples of this strategy can be found in the field of structural linguistics, wherein the fundamentals of speech are made distinct by their contrast from one another. This has been put to use widely by feminist scholars and the cultural study of gender and symbolism (ibid).

Masculinism emerges automatically, in its own rights, while there is any discussion on the issue of male privilege. What is at the root of the gendered oppression is rather an amalgamation of other hierarchies as patriarchy, race, class (Walby 1990). The term androcentric¹ might also be a more suitable one to delineate the present-day gender relations. Many gender theorists are of the view that the contemporary gender order can be accused of playing out in just the same manner, which is correlated to the male anatomy and the masculine power that they derive from it. But most importantly, a distinction is sought to be made between men and masculinity,

the latter of which can be held to charge for the terrible disparity in the gender continuum. Masculinity facilitates men's access to power and privilege, not because of their bodies but through the cultural association of their bodies with the idea of masculinity. It is these qualities of masculinity which are allied with the concept of power (Hooper 2012: 42).

Male identities are internalized in language as well as institutional practices. There is an intrinsic pattern in the starkly drawn pervasive gender binaries that drive the epistemological dualities of the social culture as has been observed in the works of French psychoanalytic feminists working on Jacques Lacan's theory of development and linguistic separation of the Self from Other (ibid: 43). These binaries perpetuated and drew hierarchical structures which equated masculinity with being active and successful and femininity with compliance and passivity (Moi 1985). These strands of phallogocentric logic eliminate any optimistic legroom for women to climb up the ladder of gender hierarchy which unfailingly places them below the masculine. This is how the masculine and the feminine are portrayed to be relational to each other, even in the terms of linguistic designs. Despite the fact that these terminologies are mostly rendered as relational, while putting these dichotomous terms in to conceptual use in our daily lives, they appear naturalized and all encompassing. Phallogocentrism originates from the allegorical linkage between speech and the elucidation of the male and the female that emanates from the presence of the penis, in the case of the masculine and the absence of it, in the case of the female.

The various shades of Masculinity and Masculinized states

In the course of studying women, there has arisen a widespread debate regarding the variations that crop up based on race, religion, class and even sexuality². Feminism, as such has to embrace on the task of incorporation all these differences too (Harding 1986). However, the tendency of scholars to often study men and masculinities as monolithic constructs as an undifferentiated whole is challenging and problematic. The multiple varieties of masculinities are assimilated to the point of global and universal subjugation of women (Connell 1987: 183; Blanchard 2014: 63). Similarly, impossible and romanticized ideas of real manhood are set in front of the society and they are put at odds with other alternative and "secondary" masculinities, as for instance, black masculinities, queer masculinities, trans-masculinities, Asian masculinities, Arab masculinities, African masculinities, disabled masculinities, working class masculinities, and the like. The positioning of masculinity is in two pronged directions, external and internal;

the external on the one hand is portrayed in the amalgamated domination of the male over the female and the internal on the other hand, is the ascendancy of one class or section of men over another in the gamut of the masculinities exists. Feminist critiques and gender theorists ought to also recognize these multiple masculinities and the fact that even within the array of these multiplicities, there is the presence of the hegemonic and the subordinate among them (Connell 1987: 183). Here the role of power returns to affirm the fact of the way in which hegemonic masculinities attempt to maintain its dominance in the flexible scales of gender construct and identity. The capillaries of power struggle among the diverse range of masculinities and their access and benefits from power is depicted fittingly in the fluid process of delineating the model kind of hegemonic masculinity for the popular and social imagination (Connell 1987: 184).

The idea of hegemonic masculinity originated around twenty years ago and has impacted recent studies on the subject of gender, masculinity and social hierarchies. The theory of hegemonic masculinity first emerged as a result of a field study on social inequality in Australian high schools. The study discussed about the debate on the function of men's bodies and their experiences that went in to the construction of masculinities and the role that they play together in Australian labour politics (Kessler et al. 1982). The project pragmatically substantiated the presence of multiple masculinities and hierarchies, both in terms of gender and class. The idea of hegemonized masculinities came around to be complimented with the phrase of 'emphasized masculinities' to depict the hierarchical differences between, not merely the masculine and the feminine, but also the different variations of men.

Among the multiple layers of masculinities that expand in distinct patterns in cultural, historical, institutional and political avenues, the type which is to be considered here is the "citizen warrior", "rational economic man", "civilian strategist", "good soldier" and martyr and also the breadwinner (Murphy 1998). Acknowledgement should also be made of the presence of alternative and even competing notions of masculinities, as for example, the idea of the Japanese corporate *Sararīman* (salary man) which shifted the contending divide between the farmer and the warrior after the Japanese defeat in World War II and played a crucial role in the social and economic revolution that came in Japan's way (Dasgupta 2003: 122).

On top of the above variants of masculinity, it is also imperative to analyze the significance and privilege of belonging to a particular brand of masculinity, that too the most influential in the sociological pyramid, which the white

male belongs to. The international system and the Westphalian state model is in fact created entirely by the hands of the white male, keeping in mind the sociological situation of the time-period, where the involvement and role of any other actor was completely out of the question. Whiteness as a privilege is at most times invisible to the white male population themselves; rather, their self-conception is of a just, rational person and real people (Halberstam 2002: 353). This claim to universality and normality of the white male position is used to create generalized and universalizing understandings of international politics, society and economics (Dyer 1997: 2). It is not surprising now that the present international system emanates out of these “entrenched privileges”. It is this same whiteness that can be attributed to the titular idea of hegemonic masculinity.

To a large extent, hegemonic masculinity is not compatible with the majority of the male individuals and can be challenged both by resistant femininities and alternative masculinities (Dunn 2008). Though it may appear as complex, nevertheless, gender is encouraged in various ways in which it intermingles with the motivation of maintaining intersectionality with other elements of power relationships, be it race, class, fluidity in gender, age, nationality etc. Intersectionality encourages us to analyze gender not in isolation, but rather, through situating it in relations with various dimensions of power can be challenged both by resistant femininities and alternative masculinities’ (ibid.). The study of these intersectionality assists in identifying and structuring the linear development of marginalized masculinities as “protest masculinities”, “working class masculinities”, and other unemployed working-class masculinities who struggle for the cause of challenging the dominance and influence and authority of middle-class bourgeoisie masculinities.

While studying these protest masculinities which are a marginalized section in itself, the issue of queer masculinities needs to be considered more specifically as it can be said to be situated on the fringes of the power equation within their own gender. The interrelationship of hegemonic masculinity with homosexual masculinity has revolved around the point of criminalization of homosexual relationships. In the case of male-to-male sex it has also to endure along with the social stigmatization, the possibility of intimidation, terrorization and even violence, be it legal or even illegal. The reason behind the pressure to ‘act like a man’ emanates from the unknowing fan base of hegemonic masculinity. More often than not, the reason behind this is due to the choice of homosexual masculinity to opt out of the conventional gender order and sex-specific behaviour, destabilizing the definitions of stereotypical masculinity in society. The larger issue is

that hegemonic masculinity identifies as to being entirely heterosexual and departing from this narrative and being homosexual shatters this hegemony.

The Military Bend of Masculinity in Security Studies

In a world entwined with violence and wars, masculinity plays the role of the enabler of this complicated relationship. The innate aggressiveness in the whole securitizing agenda lacks any space for females in the course of decision-making in the sphere of national security (Blanchard 2003: 1290). The task of protecting lives and honour of the “weaker sex” falls under the purview of the male combatants. This binary has served as a significant rationale behind differentiating the two sexes. The problem that arises here is that gender is more of a social construct, rather than a biological divide (Hudson 2005: 156; Tickner 1997). Social constructivists argue that war is a constructed phenomenon, rather than being unavoidable, as suggested by realists (Tickner 1992: 51).

Frank Barret (2001: 79), in his article ‘The Organizational Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity: The case of the US Navy’, went on to define the term hegemonic masculinity as:

... a particular idealized image of masculinity in relation to which images of femininity and other masculinities are marginalized and subordinated. The hegemonic ideal of masculinity in current Western culture is a man who is independent, risk-taking, aggressive, heterosexual and rational.

The definition of hegemonic masculinity that Barrett builds on is the one provided by R. W. Connell (1995) in her large body of work. In an work that he wrote in 2001, Barrett demonstrates how certain attributes are taken to be associated with masculinity and additionally are valorised in contrast to certain others, which are not. The qualities that are highlighted as being significant and instrumental in maintaining the preservation of the state system are incidentally the same ones which are identified as masculinist characteristics. This might as well be the method to confirm to the idea of hegemonic masculinity in the scrutiny of military culture. This is precisely how culture is rooted quite understatedly so in the varied methods of conducting masculinity and perpetuating it onto the value systems that disparages the feminine other, that might comprise not merely women, but the children, the homosexual and even the aged.

From the above deliberations, we might arrive at the realization of the variable of masculinity which went on to be recognised as the rationale

behind political violence. These observations imply a causal or constitutive relation between war and masculinity that might be mutually enabling (Elshtain 1995; Barrett 2001). Carol Cohn added emphasis on the point by drawing our attention to ways in which the attributes of masculinity permeates the discipline of nuclear politics, where security and defense analysts use it to recognize the significance of their defense policies and decisions (Cohn 1989).

In the current times, the portrayal of men in popular culture and media too goes a long way in reinforcing the stereotype of men being violent towards women and even other men. Moreover, trends of hyper-masculinity in the discourse of strategic and security studies, is rooted in and is accentuated by the gendered militarism, an aspect that is so starkly evident in the gendered militarism and militarized masculinities of this discourse of national security. What is much needed is a re-imagination of masculinity not merely in the discipline under observation, but also in the general understandings of daily personal experiences of civilians (Salter 2013: 74-75).

The definition of a patriot in the common parlance is envisaged as man who more often than not is in the military, working towards securing their countries along with the women and children, from intruders and other enemy states or organizations. Perceiving women who are aware of foreign policy concerns and international affairs as being too emotional to be trusted with crucial decision-making activities necessitated for the sake of national security is a long-standing concern of gender theorists. Weakness has time and again been associated with femininity and a great impediment in issues of national defense. In the name of politics, what we have been experiencing is majorly the politics of men, as it is only men who are always in majority, be it in parliaments, politicians, bureaucracies, military generals, pressure groups and even in the corporate houses. Even the role of leaders appointed is traditionally offered to men on a more priority basis. The very few women leaders who have been successful in breaching this divide, such as Indira Gandhi, Angela Merkel and Margaret Thatcher, have been able to do so only by being able to manoeuvre past men's networks, rather than that of the women (Connell 2005: 204).

As mentioned earlier, even women in key positions in the state politics are made out to be too emotionally volatile to be trusted with the hard decisions that are to be made for the security of the state. Following this line of argument, there is a latent resistance to accepting women in primary roles of leadership and command. The role of the head of the state that may be the President or Prime Minister, being assigned as the role of the

Commander-in-Chief, leads to the popular understanding that the post is to be associated with the attributes of manliness and masculinity. This in turn leads to form the basis of the distrust and uncertainty in electing a female to these posts (Tickner 1992: 3). Even when a woman happens to be the head of the state, there is always present a small inclination to institutionally resist it. This is evident in the inadequate representation of female leaders in the political arena worldwide, so much so that women's voices are deemed to be feeble.

Masculinist trend towards the Gendered Biases of the International Security Policies

Gender theorists have discussed at length about the deep relation between masculinity, war and violence. Joanna Burke examined how masculinities were constructed in the World War I period in Europe. The drills in particular contributed to bringing about economy in emotions and self-discipline in men on military training (Bourke 1996: 178–80).

Men not partaking in war-fighting and other military activities were also looked down upon, as opposed to military men, who lived with the high possibility of death or physical disabilities. Barbara Ehrenreich views that it was not merely men who made wars, but rather many a times it is the opposite, when wars made men (Ehrenreich 1987: xvi). Military service, which is still compulsory in many countries, is seen to be providing a rite of passage for boys to turn to men; involving a very physical training that shapes the male body and mind (Hopper 2012: 81-83). It is this hegemonic masculinity that is at play which overlooks the security needs of male individuals and constructs the victim identity around the female. The tendency to create these binaries of victimhood and aggressor result in the stereotyping of gender behaviour which assumes the aggressor to be perpetually male. For example, if we take the case of child soldiers who are enlisted by a variety of groups, most are presumed to be males. Many even find it difficult to envisage female fighters, be it child soldiers or adults, despite the fact that 30% of child fighters are observed to be females (Fox and Lawless 2004). It is also important to remember that not all of the child soldiers who happen to be female are active combatants, as a majority of them are on the other hand conscripted, more so forcefully and through abductions and kidnappings for purposes of doing domestic work and also as sex slaves.

R. Charli Carpenter stresses that even when the human security approach recognizes gender constructs, certain practices only come to reify the same

gendered understandings of who is it that is to be secured. The programs and modules that tender to Gender Based Violence (GBV) irrefutably end up depicting women and children as the principle target that require protection, ignoring defenceless men who are especially affected in an occasion of violence (2006: 85). Men and boys often are killed or maimed in clashes and at times of conflict, in an effort to wipe out the future warriors. These gendered assumptions, while drawing up GBV modules, operate on the logic that overlooks the trepidations of civilian men (2006: 99). The feminist security perspective commits to rendering this narrow definition of the victim and perpetrator as false and works on the broadening of security by redefining and bringing about a common and comprehensive understanding of universal security (Hoogensen and Stuvoy 2006: 209). In the words of Tickner and other feminist scholars, there might be two possible ways to bring about a satisfactory balance among the sexes. In the first place, there is the need to alter the discourse around the discipline and practice of security by highlighting the inequalities and the issues in the production of the concept of gender, and secondly, increasing the universal participation and representation of women in the political, economic, social, military and foreign-policy process and decision-making, where traditionally, women have been systematically been absent and marginalized in all spheres of key decision-making, in international and the local organizations (Tickner 1992: 142).

Violence on Men and its Role in Building the Hegemony in Masculinity

Matther C. Guttman argues that masculinity is unconsciously or consciously taken to be the norm, and studying it as a separate discipline is unnecessary. In popular perception, the discipline of gender studies is generally taken to be synonymous with women's studies. Going even further, it has to be understood that a satisfactory comprehension of masculinity cannot be had by merely reducing it to a biological study of the male sex and only men (1997: 403). Hence in order to transcend the lenses of security from realist frameworks to human security, what is needed is to understand that the focus should not merely be on including women and looking at how they were overlooked and even hampered as women beings, but also how the gendered security should not be at the cost of marginalization of men. This would involve looking in to the cases of how men are targeted and victimized, in times of conflict and even in peace times.

There is a remarkably negligent amount of study in the case of male sexual violence in wartime or otherwise. The evidence of the use of sexual violence

upon males came to light most extensively in the aftermath of the Yugoslavia war that started in 1991, where instances of the use of sexual violence as a tool of war was reported extensively including several cases of sexual violence on females. Curiously enough, there was hardly any news of any kind of assault on the men. These cases of sexual violence may range from cases of forced nudity to instances of mass rape and torture, and sometimes both. On further probing, the cases of sexual violence and assault on men too came to light. However, the evidence of male rapes in war time is not confined to the case of Yugoslavia alone: it stretches to political prisoners in confinement too, both in war time prisons and state prisons. These cases are not merely scantily reported, but there is also a dearth of any actions taken subsequently around them. Cases in Greece, Chile, El Salvador saw many reports on instances of rape and sexual assault on political prisoners. Reports from the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture depict that many of the Sri Lankan refugee men in London in 1997-98 also faced such sexual violence (Oosterhoff et al. 2004: 68-73). The media coverage in the news channels and popular culture has scant accounting of this situation. The most recent cases of such instances came out with the pictures of the heinous and inhuman sexual and physical torture being inflicted on the Abu Ghraib prison inmates in Iraq.

Sexually assaulted victims are often perceived in a negative light owing to gender stereotypes according to which the women perpetual victims while the males are the aggressor. Even the medical help that is provided is insensitive of the situations of male rape victims and even dismissive of it at times, are unable to help them deal with the trauma inflicted upon them and provide the same support that the female victims of trauma are able to access. The shame of being homosexually assaulted weighs down upon them on a number of occasions and results in them being increasingly marginalized, because of the narrow idea about any other form of sexual behaviour, apart from the heterosexual kind (Oosterhoff et al. 2004, 68). Hence, it is safe to comprehend that this very same stereotype of the masculine as the “active and aggressive” kind does not hamper anyone else more seriously than the men themselves, just as the attributes of “passive and peaceful” females affect women.

Even in the occupational front, men face these gender biases at a far larger extent than we let ourselves realize. Men working as health care workers, male nurses, baby-sitters, at some point of their career, face questioning gazes regarding their choice of careers. This is evident in the perception that the care-giving business is essentially the domain of the women.

Concluding the paper, we can say that the social constructs of binaries in the sphere of gender would require a serious relook at the established hierarchies of gender and engendering the discipline of security studies and policy-making. There is also an urgent need to take in the subject of male insecurities seriously, and persuade men along with women to contribute towards bringing down these gender inequalities (Cohn 1993: 239). Men have to come out and voice the security and other feminine concerns of women and comprehend the full extent of their insecurities, together with women. The very nature and essence of these organizations and institutions that are broadly masculine need to be altered.

Notes

1. Androcentrism refers to the gender order which places the male gender above the female in the gender hierarchy. In the daily social, cultural and economic activities also the masculine stand point is placed at the pivot of worldly understanding and practices.
2. Human sexuality and sexual orientation have been psychologically and physically found to be in a continuum between heterosexuality to homosexuality at various degrees. Alfred Kinsey, in his experiment and study of sexuality in the 1940s of sexuality, found that sexuality is fluid in nature and may shift along the continuum.

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Bel Bibaha Among the Newars and its Social Significance

Ritu Mangar

Abstract: *The Newars are a fairly complex group, speaking Nepali and Newari, the two languages of Indo-Aryan and a Tibeto-Burmese linguistic group, respectively. The Newars are the oldest among the communities that had settled down in the Kathmandu valley, long back and the majority of them still live there. The Newars distinguish themselves from the dominant Brahmin-Chettris, the Nepali upper castes, in terms of culture. The two important rituals, among many others, that distinguish the Newars from other communities are Ihi and Barha. These rituals, in the mould of “primitive” practice of nature worship, mark two critical junctures in the lives of women. The literal meaning of Ihi is marriage to a belfruit (wood apple) and it is a ceremony of immense social and religious significance to the Newars especially the females. The Ihi ceremony is looked at with high veneration by the Newars. The paper highlights the social significance of the ceremony, the rituals that are performed, the reasons behind its practice and the changes that have come about with the passage of time.*

Keywords: Newars, Ihi, Belbibaha, marriage, Belfruit, Gobaju, Deobaju, Pre-puberty ritual, divine marriage, Gufa, Kanyadaan, Sati, widowhood, widow remarriage.

Introduction

The Nepalese people are the admixture of multiple cultures, traditions and languages. Among them the Newar community is considered to be the exceptional one. The Newars claim themselves as Vaisyas¹ according to the Hindu Varna system. It has been claimed that the Newars are a mixed race of the Mongoloid and Aryan blood. The Newars are divided along religious line; while some follow Hinduism some others follow Buddhism. The Newars had been a fairly complex group, speaking Nepali and Newari, belonging to Indo-Aryan and a Tibeto-Burmese linguistic group, respectively. Newari was the mother tongue of the Newars.

The Newars distinguish themselves from the dominant Brahmin-Chettris, the Nepali upper castes, in terms of culture. The two important rituals,

among many others, that distinguish the Newars from other communities are Ihi and Barha. These rituals, in the mould of “primitive” practice of nature worship, mark two critical junctures in the lives of women. The literal meaning of Ihi is marriage to a belfruit (wood apple) and it is a ceremony of immense social and religious significance to the Newars especially the females. The Ihi ceremony is looked at with high veneration by the Newars. This ritual is in practice since hundreds of years

The Newars, in general, practice monogamy. They prefer to live in joint family, which are patriarchal and patrilocal. Marriage is one of the universal social institutions. Its purposes, functions and forms may differ from society to society. Marriage can have very different implications in different cultures. Marriage indicates a long-lasting bond between the husband and wife; it gets its social recognition through some ceremony.

Newars have their own marriage form and the rituals practiced in marriage, birth and death, which are different from the other Nepali communities. A Newar girl has to first go through the ritual of Ihi before her actual alliance with a human spouse and this custom is accepted and followed by both the Shivamargis and Buddhamargis. A Newar girl goes through the Ihi ceremony before she reaches puberty. In Newar community, Ihi ceremony is seen as the first marriage of the girl and the marriage with the human husband is the second marriage. The ritual of Bel Bibaha is very sacred for the Newari girl and is conducted by the priest called Gobaju⁵ for Buddhist Newars and Deobaju⁶ for the Hindu Newars. Perhaps the most striking feature of the Newars at the present time is their curious mixture of Hindu Buddhist religious ideas.

The present paper is based on a brief field study conducted by me in different areas of Kalimpong town, and in a village inhabited predominantly by the Newars.

Bel Bibaha among the Newars

Newars are well known for the rich and unique culture that they practice. From the birth of a child to death of a man there are different rituals and customs uniquely practiced. Among the Newars, traditionally, girls are to be married three times during their lifetime. The first one being Ihi, where the girl is married to a Bel fruit, second is Bahra, where the girl is married to the Sun God and third with a real human being.

The first marriage is called Ihi in Newari or Bel Sanga Bibaha in Nepali in which the girl marries a Bel fruit (wood apple)⁷ which is considered as a symbol of representation of Lord Shiva.

It is edible even by the Newar girls prior to their Ihi but once the Ihi is done eating of the Bel fruit is forbidden and considered as a taboo. As Bel fruit has a peculiar quality of not getting rotten and remaining fresh forever, it is sometimes considered as divine male or incarnation of God.

In some cases, after the ceremony, the Bel is immersed in some sacred river in fear of getting damaged and as widows are allowed to remarry among the Newar community a woman is never considered a widow since the Bel fruit to which she was originally married is presumed to be always in existence.

The ceremony of Ihi is performed both at the collective level and individually. The marriage between a virgin Newari girl and Bel fruit is held before the girl attains puberty. In this marriage ceremony, known as Ihi, the Bel fruit must look rich and ripe and must not be damaged in any form. If by chance the fruit turns out to be a damaged one, it is believed that the girl or the bride will be destined to spend the rest of her life with an ugly looking unfaithful husband after her real marriage. However, the most significant aspect of the Bel marriage is that once married to god, the woman will remain pure and chaste for her entire life. With this marriage to the immortal Lord the Newar girl will not follow widowhood even when her husband passes away.

Performance of Ihi adds status to a grown-up girl in the society. Once Ihi is performed, the girl is considered as mature and expected to behave as an adult. If the girl dying after her Ihi, would be treated as an adult and all the death rites meant for an adult would be performed.

Age of Marriage: The ritual is recognized as a pre-puberty ritual, so it is performed before puberty. It is held at a girl's odd age and the generally accepted age is five, seven, nine and eleven years of age. The standard age for performing Ihi is considered is seven, before a girl starts menstruating.

Rituals and procedures followed during the Ihi ceremony: The rites and rituals for performing Ihi are similar to an actual marriage. The date is set by consulting a Brahmin along with the girl's horoscope. Before the ceremony, there is a ritual known as Guffaw Racine, where the girl is kept in a Gufa (Dark place) for three days. Within this period the girl is not

supposed to have any kind of interaction with the male members, she is allowed to interact with the female members only. No sunlight is allowed to penetrate where the girl is kept. The bride has to fast all these days. She is allowed to eat only after the worshipping is over after sun set. She is supposed to eat only fruits, sweets etc. but no salty food is to be taken.

The main ceremony of Ihi is carried out for two days. It begins with a purification ritual and ends with Kanyadaan⁸ of the girl by her father. In the absence of the girl's father the girl's grandfather or her father's brother can do it.

The first day of Ihi is called Dusala Kriya. On this day, the house is cleaned, washed and purified with a mixture of red-soil and cow-dung. The girl has to take bath and come out of the Gufa and perform a *puja* in front of the Sun God. She has to meet the early sun rays and worship the Sun God, and then she is escorted to the place where the ceremony is to be held by her father. She is adorned in all finery, new clothes, gold ornaments. In the case of mass Ihi, the girls assemble outside at the purified courtyard, where the ceremony is held. They sit in a neat line around the courtyard. The priest then performs the Lasakus *puja* (a welcoming rite) followed by rounds of rituals.

On the very day of Ihi, i.e. the second day, the major event takes place. A mandap or enclosure is constructed out of banana stems and at the centre is suspended a real square cloth tied to the four corners of the stems. The day starts with a bath and the girl has to fast and not eat anything until the rituals are completed. The girl is dressed in a bridal suit, different kinds of ornaments, red *tika*, their feet and toes are painted with red colour. Godadhune or washing of the girl's feet is done by her parents and her family members who also fast until the rituals are over. Vermillion powder is applied on the girl's hair parting or *sindoor* in Nepali signifying wedlock.

The *bel* fruit is wrapped with several rounds of yellow threads and it represents the bride's groom. During the ceremony, the girl is given the *bel* to hold and during the Kanyadaan the *bel* is handed over to the girl by her parents. After the completion of the rituals, the girl is given jewelry, ornaments, money as a sort of dowry. All the relatives of the girl attend the ceremony to give her blessings. A feast is organized at the end of the day. Ihi is performed with great zeal. When the ceremony is over, the *bel* is wrapped in a piece of cloth and kept away by the family elders in a separate and sacred place to prevent any damage. In the event of detection of damage to the *bel*, the girl is considered a widow from then on. If the girl

dies before her real marriage to a human groom, then her *bel* is immersed in a river, so that it is washed away.

Myth and Reasons behind the practice of Ihi

There are myths and historical reasons behind the practice of the ritual of Ihi. The most common reason is that during the time of Ranas⁹, the dignity of the Newari girls was under threat. The Ranas and his men used to follow the girls and look at them with lusty eyes. The worried Newars, at this juncture, planned and married their daughters to the *bel* fruit in order to save their future generations. They selected *bel* since it is widely considered holy and found in single. The Ranas had the tradition of respecting and protecting the married women. The Ranas also became conscious of not disturbing the married girls because *bel* marriage involves god and had religious sanction. Since marrying with a *bel* fruit saved the Newari girls from the evil men and also saved the Newari community the practice is still prevalent. With changing times, the marriage has gained symbolic value.

It is also said that the tradition of Ihi started during the fourteenth century, after a raid by Shams-Uddin-Ilyas a warlord from Bengal. The invading force pillaged the land, burnt palaces, looted temples, killed, men and young boys, dishonored girls but largely left married women alone. This led people to believe that marrying pre-puberty girls to Gods would save them from dishonor in any future raid.

It is also believed that the Newars are Chandrabangshi¹⁰. Hence, marrying their daughters to the *bel* fruit, which is thought of as an icon of representation of Lord Shiva, would mean paying respect and gratitude to him. The Newar girls are dedicated to Lord Shiva on whose head the moon God resides.

In order to prevent the loss of stature and the shame that accompanies widowhood as well as to enable women to divorce if they wish to do so, Newars established the practice of Ihi.

Ihi is performed to save the girls from various dangers, in particular the possible of attacks from malicious spirits. But by far the most commonly given reason is to protect the girl from the awful stigma of widowhood. Since Ihi ties the girls in an eternal marriage with God, the death of a mortal husband cannot deprive her of her married status thus freeing her from the custom of having to burn on her husband's funeral pyre which was prevalent among the Hindu communities earlier.

The reason for the practice of Ihi from economic perspective is that the dowry, gifts, ornaments worn and given at the time of the ceremony are kept and stored for the girl's real marriage ceremony with a human groom. Economically, it is helpful for the girl's parents to conduct a real marriage in the future.

Social Significance of Ihi

Ihi is considered a marriage in Newar society in symbolic terms and it has a meaningful place in the lives of Newari women. It is regarded as the most sacred of all the domestic rituals. It is a ceremony of immense social and religious importance to the Newars especially for the females.

Marrying the girls to God ensures that she becomes and remains fertile. It also ensures that the girl acquires active and healthy reproductive power. The most significant aspect of the Bel marriage is that once married to Lord Shiva, the girl will remain pure and chaste.

The ritual is functionally related to the marriage and remarriage of a Newar girl. It is a tradition that empowers women and gives them some kind of liberation from the social stigmas attached to marriage, divorce and widowhood. Newars believe that once a girl has been married to a divinity, the breakdown of secular marriage can bear no social stigma. Ihi is a tradition that plays a significant role in the life of women as it empowers her and protects her from the awful stigma of widowhood. Thus, even in case of an untimely death of the husband the woman is never observed widowed.

Indeed, Ihi for the Newar girls is a form of empowerment. It saves the women from being sacrificed as Sati¹¹ which was prevalent and practiced a couple of centuries back in Nepal and India and which had sanctions from the Hindu religion. Ihi links the girls in an eternal marriage with God, therefore the death of a mortal human spouse could not deprive her of the married status, thus freeing her from the custom of Sati.

An Ihi rite also accords a widow the right to remarry, thus liberating the women from Hindu orthodoxy. A Newar widow, in the case of her husband's death can marry again according to her will.

The general belief among the Hindu and Buddhist Newar communities is that a proper marriage with full rites can be held only once in a lifetime. Thus, any subsequent marriage, if any, is considered having secondary importance. So, a woman, if she wishes, can theoretically break her marriage

with her husband by giving the gift of betel nuts that she had received during the wedding back to him or by putting those nuts under the pillow and leave the house quietly. There is nothing illegal in this process of divorce of a Newari girl. But nowadays the Newars in general consider this process of ending a marriage outdated. They take the legal route to end a marriage.

Symbolically marriage with God allows freedom to a Newari girl from the boundaries of her social marriage. Therefore, performance of Ihi creates a society with no widows and therefore no stigma is associated with widowhood.

Ihi also functions as an adult initiation ceremony. A Newar girl is treated as an adult member after she observes the Ihi ceremony. She then is allowed to participate in the religious activities and is given her share of family responsibilities. She is also allowed to perform family religious rituals after she observes the Ihi ceremony.

The Newar family is patriarchal and the women are generally tied to household chores, bearing and rearing children and serving the other members of the family. A woman is supposed to submit to the desires of her husband. The girls are taught household works in the Ihi ceremony and it was a kind of training for the young adolescent girls to prepare for the future domestic works of everyday life.

Earlier, in Ihi, the girls were kept in the Gufa for three days but now some changes have come about. The significance of this Gufa period for the girls is that during the period of isolation the female members of the family accompany her and discuss about life after marriage. They guide her about what she should and shouldn't do after marriage. They also openly discuss about sexual life after marriage and it was mainly done to control the desires of an adolescent. No male member is allowed to come in contact with the girl during the Gufa period and it is a mode of training the girl regarding maintaining her purity and chastity in the future. Ihi also marks a girl turning into a fertile woman.

Ihi is done during the pre-puberty stage; so, it helps to understand the physical and mental changes occurring at teen age. It is a symbolic way to be prepared for the upcoming physical and mental changes as well as for a greater social responsibility. From economic point of view, Ihi is significant as it acts as a kind of investment by the girl's parents for her future. The gifts, dowry, ornaments used and given during the Ihi ceremony are kept in a store for the real marriage of the girl with a human husband. It, thus,

becomes easier for the parents to organize the real marriage of their daughter a few years later.

According to the customary laws of the Newars, it is binding on a man to get his daughter married before she reaches puberty. The conventional belief was that if a daughter is given away before her first puberty, she would be taken as cent percent virgin and the giving away of a virgin or Kanya in marriage at a ceremony called Kanyadaan was a great *punya* or religious credit. Ihi, in that way saved the girls from child marriage. As the Newar girls were already married to the *bel* fruit at a very young age there was no need to marry very young girls and it prevented child marriage. It also saves the parents from the stigma of going to hell for not marrying pre-puberty daughters as real Kanyadaan is performed during Ihi. It is a tradition that has saved them from dishonor.

Changes and Variations in the Ihi Practices

One of the major changes that has come in some of the rituals of Ihi is the duration of the ceremony. Nowadays instead of two-day ceremony, Ihi is conducted in a day; it starts in the morning and is completed by the evening.

The other change that has come is in the performance of Gufa ritual before the Ihi ceremony. Earlier the girls were kept in the Gufa for three days but nowadays she is kept in isolation for a shorter period ranging between 12 hours and 12 minutes. The main reason behind this change is that people these days, particularly in the urban and semi-urban areas, are busy and they do not have enough leisure to be a part of three-day long celebration. Also, the kind of orientation the girls had to undergo in the Gufa under the supervision of senior and experienced women has now lost its relevance. Girls these days receive the necessary life cycle training through the print media, TV, internet and so on.

One of the differences in the practice of Ihi in the hills of Darjeeling from those of Nepal is the custom of animal sacrifice. In the hills of Darjeeling animal sacrifice is not performed during the ceremony while it is customary in Nepal. Earlier Ihi was not performed separately as a ceremony as it was combined with the house warming ceremony or during a puja performance (called Tanko) by the aged among the Newars.

The other change is that instead of a jagya or holy fire, 108 diya or lights are burnt, particularly by the Buddhist priest. The other change that has come in the Ihi ceremony is that in Nepal it is not performed by the lower

caste Newars such as Dhobi, Khargi but in Darjeeling hills members of all castes practice Ihi.

There are some differences in the performances of rituals of Ihi ceremony when conducted by a Gobaju and a Deobaju. While the Buddhist priest uses a coin to put vermilion powder in the forehead of the bride the Hindu priest uses the stem of the bel fruit to put vermilion powder on the bride's forehead.

Conclusion

The practice of Ihi or Bel Bibaha is found only among the Newars. This traditional ritual, which is still in practice because of its continuing relevance, gives distinctiveness to Newar culture from that of the dominant Brahmin-Chettri culture. The observation of Bel Bibaha by the Newar women contrasts their position and status from that of other Hindu women among the Nepali speaking population. This ritual has been in practice for many centuries both among the Buddhist and Hindu Newars.

Over the years the members of the Newar community have migrated outside Nepal to different regions and they, in the process, have lost many of their traditional cultural practices but the practice of Bel Bibaha can still be found among the Newars universally. The Newars in Kalimpong are scattered in different areas, under panchayat as well as municipal areas. They live in harmony and co-operation with people of other communities, be they tribe or caste. Every tribe has its own unique culture, tradition and history which separate them from the others groups, but the practice of Bel Bibaha adds uniqueness to the culture of the Newars residing in Kalimpong.

There are many reasons and myths behind the practice of Bel Bibaha but by far the most commonly given reason is to protect the girl from the awful stigma of widowhood. This is also a reason why a Newar girl is never considered a widow even after the death of her husband; because her first marriage with Bel is considered permanent and Bel fruit the symbolic husband is immortal.

The Newars are of the opinion that performance of Bel Bibaha is important for the continuation and preservation of their culture. They also believe that it is an age-old tradition and they can ill-afford to discontinue it. Notwithstanding some changes in the performance of the rituals and despite some variations in some of the practices of Bel Bibaha in Nepal and in the

Darjeeling hills it is still performed with high veneration by the Newar community even today.

The tradition of Bel Bibaha is still performed in the Newari community with slight changes in the original customs and rites. In Kalimpong, the Newar association named Akhil Bharatiya Newar Sangathan plays a significant role in the preservation of the Newar cultural heritage and upliftment of the community. Bel Bibaha are organized in a mass by the association and even the poorest of the poor families are helped and assisted by the association for the observation of Bel Bibaha of the young girls. The social significance of Ihi is immense for the Newar women. At a time when women were ill-treated as widow, and practices like child marriage and Sati being in vogue, the practice of Ihi saved the women from the social stigma. Ihi also had brought the Newari women a higher status as compared to other Hindu women. The sacredness of the practice is another factor that has ensured its continuity. Looked at it from another angle, it can be seen as a ritual through which patriarchal control over the women's sexuality and social life was maintained since the girls from an early age were supposed to maintain their chastity and not give in to any sexual activity unless her marriage with the human husband.

In today's Darjeeling hills, where every tribe or community is trying to protect and assert its distinctive identity, the Newars certainly show how its cultural distinctiveness can be preserved through the practice of Bel Bibaha.

Notes

1. Vaishya is one of the four varnas of the Hindu social order in Nepal and India. The Vaisyas are the third-highest of the four varnas or categories into which Hindu society is traditionally divided, ranking above the Sudras. Vaisya includes a large number of distinct castes of similar ranking, traditionally traders, moneylenders, or farmers.
2. Those who worshipped Lord Buddha were known as Buddhamargi and those who worshipped Lord Shiva were known as Shivamargi.
3. Ihi is the Newari term for Bel Bibaha (Nepali) which literally means marriage of a girl to a bel fruit.
4. Bahratayegu or bahrachuyegu is a coming of age ritual in Newar community of Nepal in which girls between the ages of 7 to 13 are married to the sun god in a 12-day ceremony. Bahratayegu is a second marriage of a Newar girl, the first one being ihi; the marriage with the bel fruit. In

Nepal Bhasabahra means a “cave” and tayegu or chuyegu mean “to put”, thus Bahratayegu is the ceremony where Newar girls are put in a cave for 12 days.

5. Gobaju is the term which stands for the Buddhist Newar priest
6. Deobaju is the term which stands for the Hindu priest respectively.
7. The *bel* tree (scientific name - *Aegle Marmelos*) is found growing at about 1200-1300 meters above sea level in the Himalayan regions and is found grown especially near Shiva temples. Bel tree is worshipped by all Hindus. A *bel* fruit commonly known as wood apple is round and grey in colour when raw, but turns yellow when ripe. It has a hard outer coat and the inside is orange in colour and fibrous and sweet in taste.
8. Kanyadaan refers to “giving away the virgin”. It is observed as a significant ritual in the Hindu marriage system.
9. Rana dynasty is a Khas Rajput (Chhetri) dynasty and was autocratic leaders which ruled the Kingdom of Nepal from 1846 until 1951. The dynasty is descended from Bal Narsingh Kunwar who was the son-in-law of Thapa Kaji Nain Singh Thapa of powerful Thapa dynasty. The founder of this dynasty was Jung Bahadur Rana
10. The descendants of Chandra (moon God) who resides at the head of Lord Shiva.
11. Sati is an obsolete Hindu funeral custom sanctioned by religious practice in which the women/widow immolates herself on one’s husband’s funeral pyre.

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Negotiating Social Security through Network Building: A Study of the Livelihoods of Resident Caretakers in the new Metropolis of Kolkata

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***Abstract:** The “resident caretakers”, who constitute a distinct category of indentured labor in the newly emerging urban metropolises of India, have remained a relatively neglected component of research in the field of sociology of labor relations, and therefore they rightfully deserve meticulous attention from the scholars. The present study explores the patterns of migration and re-settlement of this category of urban labour force in one of the major suburban cities of Kolkata as an attempt to uncover the process of their absorption into the urban informal sector. The growing number of these indentured laborers in the urban informal sector in India has remained marginalized and denied most of their rights that are given to the formal sector workers. The present paper thus intends to examine this issue as a redresser to the problem of social security among these urban contractual laborers that is multiplying every day in the major cities of West Bengal with the development of the new towns, confiscating boundaries of the upper middle class. The study uses ethnographic case accounts drawn from qualitative face-to-face interviews that draw attention to their livelihood patterns and the vignettes of their network building processes through the derivative component of social capital that is constantly been generated in specific interactional contexts. This in the long run builds together in maintaining a constant sense of identity, personal wellbeing and social recognition of their form of labor in a relatively “negotiated” social space.*

Keywords: Resident caretakers, metropolis, informal sector, migration, livelihoods, indentured labour, social security.

Introduction

The caretaking occupation is slowly receiving heightened importance in the all the major urban metropolises of India and that world. As the lifestyles of the urban middle classes are undergoing rapid changes with their

increasing spending capacities, choice of employment, consumption patterns, and their attendant connoisseurs of life, the demand for security and service production is becoming an ultimate necessity. In addition, to the contemporary urban world is grappling with a host of uncertainties in the form of crime, old age problems, damage to property due to ecological factors and varied other social problems that impact the metabolism of city life from time to time. This is subsequently increasing the need for resident caretakers who in the Indian context function not only as guardians of the big housing premises but also as caregivers of urban nuclear families. For the younger ones they supplement the role of parents, sharing the socialization function. They are largely responsible for the social organization of city life through facilitating the employer's needs from time to time.

The present paper takes into consideration six case studies of urban resident caretakers who reside in the various cooperative flats in the City of Salt Lake, a region where numerous conglomerations of urban resettlement projects are still proliferating and in the process deciphering newly developed patterns of labor relationships, mostly contractual, that are often encountered in a formally unrecognized and intuitively foreign social setting. The empirical findings of the study reveal that the "resident caretakers" bear their countryside origins as mostly rural participants in the agriculture labor force in the circumferential districts of West Bengal and states adjacent to it like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand and are typically migrant indentured laborers who make their entry into city life with the accompaniment of their families chiefly for the purpose of finding a new employment which would suffice to their bare needs of subsistence. The primary reason for this urban perusal is largely accounted for their relative lack of economic dependence on former profession that avail as a result of the persistent vulnerability of cultural and social distress prevailing this occupation.

However, this present employment generation¹, due to the multiple spaces they inhabit in the urban context, takes on peculiar forms, informal sector of urban city life owing mainly to the nature of their job structure. This is because the kind of employer-employee relationship that is being generated through these rural-urban intersections, informs the much broader definitions of social protection and more essentially social security as it incorporates the more non-statutory and private measures of social assistance and recognition of their personal wellbeing. This is mainly comprehended by the fact that the fundamental aspect of their working-class lives is their *insecurity*, which is coherently defined not only by their separation from

the means of production, but also lack of their access to means of subsistence, which is not always guaranteed (Das 2003). For these poor laborers, caretaking becomes the only possible job that ensures their survival as it requires minor financial input, relatively low levels of skills and minimal educational qualifications. It is mainly in complementary to their expectations of a basic living allowance in the urban cityscapes that these migrant workers establish useful ties with their social superiors and enter into dependency relationships where they accept a wide range of contractual and semi contractual commitments. However, the relative absence of a meaningful social security arrangement becomes a problem not merely for these individual contractual workers and their families but also bears wider implications for the economy and society.

Constitutional Provisions for Social Security for the Resident Caretakers

In common parlance the term “social security” refers to the protection which society provides for its members against the economic and social distress that otherwise would be caused by substantial reduction or ceasing of earnings resulting from sickness, maternity, employment injury, unemployment, invalidity, old age, and death; the provision of medical care; and the provision of subsidies for families and children. In the Indian context, the concept of social security is derived from the provisions of Article 38 of the Constitution, which requires that the State should promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting a social order based on justice - social, economic and political – in all walks of life. Article 41 requires that within the limits of economic capacity and development the State shall make effective provisions for securing the right to work, to education and public assistance, in case of unemployment old age, sickness and disablement, and in other case of undeserved want. Article 42 requires that the State should make provisions for securing just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief. Article 47 mandates the State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people, and work for improvement of public health. These provisions are in accordance with Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man* which states that society owes subsistence to citizens either by procuring work or by ensuring the means of existence for those who are unable to work. The Right to work enables a person to earn his livelihood through work. If for any reason the person is not able to work, society has to provide him with the means of livelihood by other means. Society has therefore the obligation to provide everyone with either work or other means of livelihood.

Notwithstanding all the measures taken by the Government to protect the rights of the unorganized sector workers the most important characteristic for the majority of the workforce in this sector has been the absence of any form of social protection. The urban residential caretaker presents one such category whose rights for social protection have not yet been recognized. The resident caretakers neither have employment and income security nor the security against the contingencies of life due to their too little income. In addition to this, they have no facility for covering risks such as ill-health, accidents, death and old age. A large body of the social protection policies in India largely covering the unorganized sector workers has remained silent about a large section of the workforce of which the resident caretakers constitute a part. In the following paragraphs I have the major problems the resident caretakers face due to lack of social protection.

First, it is an irony that India is a signatory of a number of international conventions including the ILO conventions, yet, out of about 41 conventions ratified, it is mainly the minimum wages legislations that cover the informal workers and others deal with the conditions of workers in the organized sector only. The crisis becomes severer as the size of employment in the informal sector is increasing since globalization. In fact, the need for minimum wages provides one such issue that has not been taken into consideration on account of the employment of resident caretakers. The meagre salary they receive from their employers is not sufficient to maintain a minimum standard of living.

Second, there is no life insurance, old age pension or retirement benefit for them. There are no statutory holidays or annual vacations. Whenever they wish to take a holiday, they have to depute somebody whom they have to pay from their own salary. In cases, where the unorganized worker has a clearly identifiable employer and the employer has the capacity to pay, the employer has the primary responsibility of ensuring basic conditions of work. The role of the government is of regulation and enforcement of rules. But in cases where the employer cannot be identified or does not have the capacity for creating appropriate conditions of work, the responsibility of the state in creating appropriate conditions of work will be paramount. Given the weak state of voice and representation of the unorganized workers, the state and the civil society organizations have the most important role in contributing to an industrial and labour relations environment in which the minimum conditions of work of the unorganized, workers can be secured.

It is the state which alone is constitutionally mandated to enforce society-wide regulations and create conditions for the development of the economy.

Third, resident caretakers are sometimes classified as independent contractors instead of employees. Numerous factors apply to determine whether a person is a true independent contractor as opposed to an employee but some key factors include the amount of control exercised over the duties and how they are performed; the chance of profit or risk of loss and ownership of the tools or equipment for the job. The fact that the employer and the employee have chosen to call the resident caretaker an “independent contractor” the employer’s option of entering into a written contract with the resident caretaker should not be overlooked and taken into consideration². Employment contracts often help clarify issues like the employee’s duties, statutory payment obligations, rights upon termination and other key elements of the employment relationship.

Fourth, the termination of employment of a resident caretaker is governed by the provisions in the *Employment Standards Act*. In reality, however, a flat owner can terminate the employment of a caretaker if he plans in good faith to depute another caretaker. The caretaker thus loses his job as well as shelter.

Fifth, the resident caretaker represents a category of rural non-agricultural wage workers and self-employed workers who have no viable means of earning a livelihood through farming. These workers also have low educational attainment and, as the study reveals, they take up manufacturing and petty trading activities and production related occupations in the unorganized sector before getting the job of a resident caretaker. This is primarily because they lack the skills for moving into formal sector work or more productive occupations. This sheds light on the limited access to human and physical capital among the unorganized workers which acts as a major constraint on access to jobs or growth of self-employed activities.

Sixth, in India, by and large, trade union activities are largely oriented towards organizing the organized workers rather than the unorganized sector workers. The trade union initiative is aimed at generating awareness among the workers regarding the existing legal provisions that are available for their protection and for providing an appropriate platform and structure for exercising their “voice”. The trade union movement in a developing country like India is largely oriented towards the organized workers whose interests are protected through a large number of labor legislations. Furthermore, arguably, there is not much concern from the government as well the trade unions for the workers in the unorganized sector. However, it can safely be

argued that the trade unions have a definite role to play in organizing the workers in the unorganized sector in India. This is also applicable for resident caretakers. Although efforts are being made in undertaking this activity in right earnest, there is still a large gap in this regard.

Network Building and Social Capital: A Space for Negotiating Livelihood

It has long been debated that social capital involves self-help and mutual aid which are the only resources that poor people possess to mitigate their circumstances, the norms or rules of reciprocity they use (as a social resource) to negotiate their belongingness to the urban setting and the way it affects their economic condition as a part of their participation in their daily labor. The poor people in a place generally know many people like themselves who belong to the same community and many have some scattered connections to people in other places. This accounts for the causal mechanisms through which social capital is linked mainly through the types of reciprocity that are exchanged in interactional settings. Thus, while the aspect of migration has been a potential marker to explain the reasons for which these resident caretakers are compelled to sustain livelihood by seeking better employment in the urban spaces, it cannot nevertheless be structurally enunciated without taking into consideration the strategic implications of the network building processes through which these spaces are being built which only be determined synthetically by taking into consideration the aspects of social capital accumulation of the caretakers these negotiations are being built for ensuring their social security.

The intellectual history of the concept of social capital³ can be traced back to the works of Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Georg Simmel, John Dewey, and Max Weber. These scholars have emphasized the role of culture in economic development — an implicit use of the idea of social capital. However, the first systematic exposition of the term and its entry into the academic debates can be attributed to the works of Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and James S. Coleman (1988). However, it was the pioneering work of Robert D. Putnam (1993) that heavily popularized the term among social scientists and attracted the attention of researchers and policymakers. He defines social capital as “... features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (Putnam 1993: 167). Social capital refers to connections among individuals — social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them (Putnam 2000: 18-

19). For him, social networks have value and social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups. Social capital is closely related to “civic virtue”. The number of civic associations and degree of participation in those associations indicate the richness of social capital in a society.

Observations from the Field

I present here the results of the qualitative interviews that were taken in the caretakers’ residences that will determine the conditions under which these working-class people live and contribute to social capital. The basic observation is that social capital presupposes social interaction and such interactions take place in a localized spatio-temporal context causing the local dependence of people in the neighborhood. Being in the particular place or being a part of place-based social support network people get help or can help the others. One reason for the geographical boundedness of this mutual help is that mutual help presupposes trust and trust relations takes time to develop through routinized place-based interactions characterized by what Giddens (1987) has termed “co-presence”. From this argument, it follows that the norms and practice of reciprocity tend to be spatially bounded; these tend to happen in limited geographical spaces.

The consequences of such network building that are facilitated by the norms of reciprocity and mutual trust can take trivial forms. When I interviewed Govindo a caretaker, aged 63, who hails from Nadia district of West Bengal I found some remarkable insights that underlie the potential causes of their migration and the way the structuring of social capital is contextualized in different spaces. Govindo has been working in the city for the last 23 years and is now residing with his family. Govindo remarked:

I never even dreamt that he would ever get the chance to become an owner of a flat in New Town. When asked how he got this opportunity he said that a few years back the Government hoisted a lottery for LIG (Lower Income Group) one-room flats in an area beside Eco-Park. It is known as Sampurna Housing Society. Sampurna Apartments by Bengal DCL Housing Development Co. Ltd. is one of the popular residential projects in New Town, Kolkata. It is an upcoming project with expected possession in Dec 2017. It has thoughtfully designed residences which the people from the lower income groups can afford. My employer had helped immensely in this respect in noticing the advertisement in the papers and the filling up of the forms from time to time.

Moreover, Govindo is currently a member of Sukanta Swayambhar Gosthi, a Self-Help Group in West Bengal set up to organize and strengthen poor and marginal sections of the society. Its main office is in Burdwan and has a branch at Salt Lake. With a subscription of Rs 200 every year he attends temple *Kirtan* a few times a year and visits the major temples of Kolkata and Burdwan to offer *puja*. The group also provides monetary help to its members. This shows that contrary to popular belief the poor households are engaged in myriad of micro enterprises which are linked to their livelihood. As a source of employment, the micro enterprise has a lot of potential because of its ease of entry and low startup capital. On many occasions such groups also play a significant role in self-employment when employment in organized sector or even wage employment is scarce.

I also asked the residential caretakers about the types of economic benefits that they get from the flat members and the other caretakers who are residing in the flats adjacent to his residence. The fact that city-life had exposed these caretakers to the partial fluidity of the boundaries elite networks has allowed them to understand the importance of “trust” as a determining factor of their community life. This can however be explained more theoretically by bringing into context the ways in which the caretakers ensure their stability of economic livelihood by the sincere accumulation of bridging capital and by the subsequent possession of bonding capital that are generated through the employer-employee relationship.

As with the case of Subhas who was originally a farmer of the Sundarban delta, and had been a resident of Pathgola village located just a few kilometres away from the dense forest Sundarban, known mostly for its mangrove trees and the home of the most ferocious and enchanting creature, the Royal Bengal Tiger. When I asked him the reason for taking up this job he conveyed to me that in the Pathgola region, where climate change is a very unique phenomenon and the pertinent issue has been that rainfall patterns are changing over the Sundarbans every year. As a result a large number of poor people living in such agriculturally marginal areas now move out of their areas to other places without any guarantee and protection of wages, dignity of labor and life. Hence, family migration from rural areas occurs largely as survival option. The city space has imbued within him a fresh hope for starting a new life.

As Subhas recounted:

I receive a bonus during the Pujas. Also, the previous secretary of this building used to give me Rs 500 during the pujas and gave me

clothes but after his replacement the new secretary does not bother to give me anything. Furthermore, I should say that I am really lucky to have a family of doctors residing in of the flats of my Housing Society. They provide me with all sorts of medical needs. I have good relationship with all the members of the flat. It is primarily for that reason that I am here for so long. They have complete faith in me and I always make sure to put all my heart and soul into my work. They care for me very much. So, despite of my merger salary I am willing to stay here because the people in this flat really love me... I have somehow managed to sustain my livelihood in this way.

The laborers belonging to the same status situation help each other in many ways. As for Niranjana Biswas:

When I am not in the house and out for work, I ask my fellow caretakers to keep an eye on the front gates. In case of any family exigency they also offer me with much assistance because we all belong to the same category of people. There is an understanding that if today I am in want, the other persons might be in want tomorrow. Because of this good relation exist.

Thus, mutual help based on reciprocity and expectation of a certain degree of security act as the foundation of social networks among the caretakers. Most of the people who are recruited as residential caretakers are newcomers to the city and they use the existing social networks as a part of their survival strategy to weather off the difficulties that face them.

Linking social capital refers to ties and networks among individuals and groups who occupy very different social positions and power. It reaches out to people in dissimilar situations, such as those who are entirely outside the community. Linking social capital may involve network and ties of a particular community with states or other agencies.

It must also be considered that social isolation and exclusion are one of the many processes that that the rural migrants have to encounter in their aspect of everyday lives. Dissimilar people who suddenly find themselves in proximity of each other, with no social script to guide them, are far more likely to behave like strangers in an elevator than neighbours. However, these processes are also not entirely insurmountable. Social interactions are highly contingent on context, at both the individual and organizational levels, and changing social contexts in which these processes are operating has the potential to disrupt (or exacerbate) their effects.

The next case study enumerates the experience of a caretaker from Bihar who took employment at the Handloom Industry of Barabazar through the help and assistance of his fellow employees was able to get this job.

As Nandalal recounts:

One of my friends has earlier worked here in Salt Lake for a couple of years as a caretaker. It is from him that I got to know about this job. Prior to this I worked in a garment store in Barabazar for 2-3 months. There I was able to build contacts with some of the employees who would provide me with information of any kind of new job with a better salary. One of them informed me of a landlord in Salt Lake who was in search of a caretaker. When I contacted him and he offered me the job and that is how I came to be a caretaker.

Thus, a defining aspect of being poor or being out of job is that one is not a member of — or is even actively excluded from — certain social networks and institutions, ones that could be used to secure good jobs and decent housing (Wilson 1996). This makes impossible to separate social capital from the material circumstances that define people's wellbeing and more importantly their social security. Without access to employment information networks, rural migrants to the city find themselves trapped in low-wage jobs (Loury 1977). Hence diffuse sets of social ties are crucial to the provision of better job opportunities.

Most of the caretakers being originally farmers whose main source of income is daily casual labor carried out in the fields, there is practice of surplus exchange of rice and other vegetables derived from cultivation, a part of which is shared on an informal basis. This probably due to the fact that they know that for several months in year their families will be in short of food because of the decline in harvest caused due to the changing weather conditions. After they have found a job at the city there is a practice of bringing a part of the surplus to their new residence and exchanging it among fellow caretakers. This informal exchange of food on a reciprocal basis widely practiced among residential caretakers forms an important part of Putnam's generalized reciprocity. As for Gautam:

When there is surplus rice or vegetables in the village, I bring them to my Kolkata residence and barter them with my neighboring caretakers. Social relations and the bonding between us are very intimate and we often share as much as we can. Since we belong to the same economic category and live in the same neighbourhood

we are fully aware of each other's difficulties. A lender today might turn a borrower tomorrow. This awareness of each other's vulnerability helps to develop a relationship of cooperation and trust, and so there is mutual help and sympathy.

It must also be considered that social isolation and exclusion are one of the many processes that the disadvantaged have to encounter in their aspect of everyday lives. As this study has shown the urban resident caretaker presents one such category whose rights for social protection have not yet been recognized. The majority of the social protection policies in India largely covering the unorganized sector workers has remained passive for a large section of the workforce and the resident caretakers resembles one such category of the vast majority those who have been left out. The migratory experiences of these labourers shows that the majority of them fall under the category of displaced peasants who have left agriculture or have lost their jobs due to the destruction of the domicile industries that they were traditionally engaged to. The cumulative result of these two mutually reinforcing processes, has brought these different people into contact with each other into developing a relationship of trust. As studies has shown in such circumstances it has always been the case that dissimilar people who suddenly find themselves in proximity of each other, with no *social script* to guide them, are far more likely to behave like strangers in an elevator than neighbours. However, insurmountable such processes may be, social interactions based on reciprocity are seen to be highly contingent on context, at both the individual and organizational levels. A disruption of the contexts in which these processes are operating has the potential to derange (or exacerbate) their effects. Intuitively, then, the basic idea of "social capital" entails that at the communities endowed with a rich stock of social networks and civic associations will be more in a much stronger position to combat poverty (Moser 1996; Narayan 1997), resolve disputes (Schafft and Brown 2000), and/or take advantage of new opportunities (Isham 1999) and conversely, the *absence* of social ties has the potential to concurrently hinder the consequences of survival. The contending dualism of city space and community life has been shaped to a large extent through such negotiations of social security procurement renders inevitably to eradicate the broader generalizations of social development policy making in the abridged form.

Conclusion

The present study brings to light the ways in which the resident caretakers have evolved as a new category of labor force in the urban informal sector. The arrival of the residential caretaker marked the arrival of a certain category of unskilled labor force whose supply and demand are greatly controlled by a particular section of urbanites, chiefly, the urban middle class. Therefore, one can see that their class identity is to a great extent shaped and reshaped by the middle class “value” consciousness. The extent to which the middle-class people of Salt Lake City value their labor is determined by the contents of negotiations regarding the terms and conditions of their recruitment. Adequate social security provisioning has been a major stimulus in the process of socio-political development and economic growth of developing nations like India. This need has been particularly realized with the globalization induced policies of the government which have led to contractualization, outsourcing, informalisation of industries which, in turn, have contributed to the rapid growth of the unorganized sector. This essentially demands that the benefits from the social security schemes for informal sector workers should not be restricted to the beneficiary workers alone but should be shared by the entire economy and society in terms of better productivity and improved wellbeing. A work force with higher capability and security could contribute to higher growth, which, in turn, would enhance the aggregate demands in the economy through higher purchasing power of this vast mass of the work force. The mutually reinforcing nature of this relationship needs to be recognized and exploited and evaluated in terms of the larger societal context. The structure of the urban economy of India is reflective of these changes characterized by various development shifts through urbanization, creation of new jobs in the informal sector, the transfer of agricultural work into various forms of non-agricultural work; increasing migration of various types, including circular migration; and the take-over of land for various mineral and industrial projects and the consequent destruction of older livelihoods. It is in these crucial times that universal social security can become the main benefactor in making these development transitions easier and less contagious. It is of no doubt that more and newer kinds of jobs are needed for the successful economic prosperity of a nation, but social security can be the necessary catalyst in making these transitions from old to new jobs and occupations more worthwhile (Nathan 2012; Kanbur 2003). Social security, in the form of an assured social minimum, can promote the self-employed workers like the resident caretakers who are lacking individual or household security in undertaking more productive investments. Therefore, necessary steps

should be taken to improve understanding of the temporary nature of their employment relations as well as to make the necessary revision of labor legislations in the line with conditions of the informal sector.

Note

1. The extent of diversification of non-farm employment is very high in the heavily urbanized districts of West Bengal particularly in Kolkata where there is complete absence in agricultural work. This mainly accounts for the policies taken by the Government of India to increase employment elasticity in the urban sectors in order to cater to the problem of adequate employment generation which so far however has remained as one of the most pressing social and economic problems in the state as much as in the rest of India.

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Cross Cultural Marriages and the Problem of Adjustment in Conjugal Life

Chandrani Chhetri

Abstract: India is a multicultural society and in the era of globalization people have become more mobile. Love relation among the members representing different cultures is becoming common. But societies and cultures being patriarchal, it is the women who have to make sacrifices and go through the painful process of learning and unlearning cultures. When the husbands extend all support, the wives manage to make the necessary adjustments but when the husbands do not stand by their struggling wives the marriages develop unreconcilable fissures.

Keywords: cross-cultural marriage, globalization, love, care, adjustments, support.

Introduction

Cross cultural marriages are not uncommon in India, because of its heterogeneous populations and loosely followed rules of marriage. All couples experience different kinds of problems in their conjugal life but the ones representing different cultural backgrounds are likely to face more problems in adjusting with each other. With globalization and greater spatial movements, the incidence of cross-cultural marriages has definitely increased over the years. Such marriages promote tolerance and brotherhood among the peoples of different cultures. The spread of education and new economic opportunities are the two major factors that offer greater freedom to the members of the younger generation in selection of spouses. Two families tied by marital relation but differ on beliefs, level of education, values and culture traits might issue like (1) whose customs are to be followed and (2) whose customs are of higher value. But with some improvisation and adjustments they find their way out from the possible social chaos.

There are advantages as well as disadvantages of cross-cultural marriages. The spouses are under pressure to learn each other's culture and make

compromises and adjustments in their ways of living. Mutual appreciation is one of the potential benefits of such marriages. The spouses as well as the families that are now tied by kinship ties become more tolerant and appreciative of each other's cultures. The children of such couples also learn elements of their parents' differential cultures, although they might be facing some serious problems as well while adjusting with two cultural traditions. Of course, such marriages are not risk-free. The spouses face multiple challenges in adjusting with each other and in mitigating the misunderstandings which might crop up while negotiating differential expectations and different cultural practices, tastes and value systems. One culture may promote women's submissive role whereas other may allow greater individual autonomy. Often, such marriages happen against the will of the parents and in violation of the prevailing cultural expectations. The couple encounters parents' objections; their friends' disapproval and their children may find disapproval from their peers in school and often get confused about their identities. The couple may fight over the mode of upbringing of the children as both of them might want their children to grow up the way they want.

The main purpose of this study of a few cross-cultural marriages in Sikkim is to explore the problems that face the couples, their children and family members. The focus here is on how the women involved in such marriages transform themselves while adjusting with the members of the families of their husbands and their differential cultural practices and expectations. In a patriarchal social order, the bride joins the groom's family and is expected to embrace the latter's culture. The women are constrained to make all kinds of adjustments and adopt a new way of life, a new language in a new social and geo-cultural space. The men, on the other hand, are free from such obligations as they are privileged to continue with their way of life, without making much adjustment.

The paper is based on three case studies of cross-cultural marriages in Sikkim. In the first two cases, the grooms are from Nepali community and brides are from other community and other country and in the third case, a Nepali Rai woman is married to a Bengali man.

Case 1

Sunita, a Bengali middleclass girl from a small town of North Bengal was a part of a small family of two sisters and parents. Sunita's father was a service holder while mother a housewife. The liberal ambience in the family helped Sunita and her sister growing up with values of women empowerment,

self-dignity, power of decision making, and so on. From her childhood Sunita used to help her parents by doing outdoor works like shopping, banking operations, cycling, bike riding etc. She had a tomboyish image.

It was in the university that she met handsome, shy Pranab, who hailed from a large joint family, based in rural Sikkim. Soon Sunita and Pranab fell in love. Their affairs turned into marriage within one year (1999). The marriage happened without much planning before they could know each other's culture properly. The marriage function was organized by Sunita's family at their home following the Bengali tradition. Some of Pranab's relatives who joined the marriage party were very much eager to know the rituals followed in a Bengali marriage. On the auspicious day the ceremony was over by midnight. Pranab and his family members experienced the difference as in the hills all marriage-related functions are organized during day time.

The couple settled in a neo-local residence, at Pranab's workplace, away from the latter's parental home. Sunita was new to the place and used to wait for Pranab the whole day, as Pranab had to attend his work. She had no friends to talk. The time table followed in the hills also posed a big problem for Sunita. In the evening time, when plainsmen return from work, have tea and snacks the hill people are busy preparing meals for dinner. Sunita had difficulty in adjusting with this routine; she was also shocked that after evening there was no social life in the hills.

Pranab remained very supportive and never complained for anything. He silently observed how Sunita was accommodating herself with the new culture. In order to help Sunita fight out loneliness the first thing Pranab did was to arrange cable connection to their television set.

One day, Sunita heard the sound of a bell called "Dhangro", which was being played by a traditional faith healer from a nearby house. On enquiry, Sunita learnt about traditional beliefs and faiths practiced by people of Sikkim. On another day, Sunita woke up from deep sleep hearing a weird sound and chanting hymn by a Jogi at mid night. She was horrified but later was told that it is an age-old Nepali custom to remove evil spirits and be free from sins by donating cash and kind to the "jogis". Sunita started following such local practices in order to be acquainted with the local culture.

Durga Puja is the main festival in both cultures. But the modes of celebration are different. In her childhood, Sunita used to enjoy this festival by pandal hopping, roaming from day to night with friends and family members, having special food and a lot of fun. The five-day long festival meant complete

fun; no cooking at home and total freedom from studies and other obligations. Sunita missed those childhood days badly sitting alone in her husband's place. As a Buhari (daughter-in-law) now she is expected to be in the kitchen most of the time. Along with other daughter-in-laws in her in-law's house she cooks special food for relatives who are supposed to visit them of the festival days, following Nepali tradition. She had to mould herself according to the demands of the culture of her new place. Now she longs for the festive days so that she could return to her parental house and recreate those moments of *puja* days in Bengali style.

The couple have been visiting their Mulghar i.e. Pranab's original residence occasionally. It is a joint family. In the village residence, Sunita always tried to get up early since that was the norm, but she always found out that other family members were already active in the kitchen and had two rounds of morning tea. Despite her honest efforts she failed to wake up early enough in the morning to outwit the other family members. She felt embarrassed thinking that she had failed to fulfill her in-law's expectations.

Sunita faced serious language problem, in the initial years after marriage, in communicating with in-laws in Nepali. She could not communicate in Bengali since other members had little knowledge about it. She could not find another Bengali in among the neighbours with whom she could have chatted. Lack of communication brought her a sense of isolation. In one sense, not knowing the language proved to be a boon since she could not decode the criticism her in-laws might have heaped on her inefficiencies. Sunita tried to overcome the crisis situations with smiles. To manage the situation, Sunita used Hindi as the lingua franca, which was understood by most of the family members excepting her mother-in-law and some senior members, who would not speak anything but Nepali. Both Sunita's family members and in-law's family sometimes laughed at each other over language and often cracked jokes on it in front of Sunita. Sometimes negative remarks in generalized terms were passed by the relatives of both sides which made Sunita upset. Every time she tried to correct them by providing detailed information about the two cultures she directly observed.

Within one year of marriage Sunita had to shift to another place as she got teaching job in a school where she had to explain in Nepali. Sunita had no other choice but to learn Nepali language because she not only had to teach her students but had to communicate with the maid servant, shopkeepers and other common people as well, who would communicate through local language only. Within a couple of years, Sunita became fluent in Nepali language.

It took Sunita some time to learn cooking of different local vegetables. To adapt to the awkward smell of dry fish and Kinema (fermented food) was a big challenge for Sunita. During the first Durga Puja holidays, when Sunita and Pranab went to their village home, Sunita was shocked to see a huge amount of raw mutton pieces hanging under the kitchen roof. It was a process of drying meat, which is a delicacy in Nepali food culture. Even people having refrigerator use this traditional technique of drying meat. Sunita felt awkward and disturbed but could not express her feelings even to her husband.

Sunita did not know how to ask her fiancée about his religious identity. So, it remained a secret to her before marriage. It was only after their marriage she came to know that her husband is also a Hindu. Sunita was happy since she knew that adjusting with a different religious culture would have been a big problem.

Sunita and Pranab have been together for the last 19 years. The actual crisis starts in this phase of life. Now their only son has become an adolescent. The teenager has embraced the Sikkimese culture and refuses to speak Bengali. He feels ashamed of speaking in his mother tongue and hides his mother's identity in front of his friends. This upsets Sunita. Despite the couple's honest efforts to adjust with each other's culture, the child does feel strong attachment to either father's culture or mother's culture. Sunita is very confused and puzzled at her son's behaviour. Notwithstanding some difficulties, Sunita has made sincere efforts to embrace her husband's culture and learnt to compromise. Until recently, life was quite smooth. Of late, however, Sunita has developed some differences with her husband over their only son's upbringing. Both of them want to follow their own style of parenting. Sunita is afraid of interferences of her husband when she is dealing with her son. She fears that their differential approaches might have some negative impact on the personality formation of the child. Till date Sunita has ignored every cold behaviour of her husband with a smile. Whenever there was any differences of opinion or adjustment problem with her spouse, Sunita used to think that the differences could be because of their differential cultural backgrounds. However, rounds of discussions with her close ones have taught Sunita that such conflicts arise not because of different cultural background but definitely because of elements of patriarchy in any family and differences in approach to the conjugal relation.

Her son's behavior puts her in stress and in a state of helplessness. Her son expresses her unhappiness over his mixed physical features and relatively not so fair complexion. Bishal, her son, has developed inferiority complex.

Sunita thinks that it may be a typical adolescence problem and hopes that it will soon be over as he matures with age. She hopes that one day her son will learn to respect and follow both the cultures.

Sunita is by and large happy with the support she has received from her in-laws so far. She does not have grudges against any of her in-laws. She believes that the success of marriages depends largely upon the family background and status and the approach to relations by the spouses. She feels that it is not differences in cultures rather individual level difference that sometimes create problems in their marital life. She feels that it is their educational background which would make their relation stronger. With mutual love, respect, and care, Sunita feels, the difficulties emanate from cross-cultural marriages could be overcome. She suggests that before marriage every couple must know each other's culture well so that they can adjust well after marriage. In some lonely moments, Sunita, a student of sociology, deeply feels that the traditional caste-based marriages within the same culture have some advantages in any woman's life, as she will have to make compromises to a lesser extent.

Case 2

Lory Fe Jagopa is a Philippino bride of a Nepali Sikkimese man. Lory is the eldest among six children of her father. After her mother's death her father married second time. According to their norm children's consent is required for the father to marry second time. All five daughters and one son allowed their father to marry again. Lory is the prettiest among her siblings. Her father is a businessman.

In her in-law's family, Lory lives with her husband, a four-year-old son and two-year-old daughter, a widow mother-in-law and a younger brother-in-law.

Lory's was an intercountry cross-cultural marriage. Lory was associated with one INGO called Universal Peace Federation. Her three maternal uncles had encouraged her to join this NGO when she was a high school student. As a part of the NGO she worked for the orphans, provided food to starving people, participated in cleaning streets and toilets, worked for the rehabilitation centers and arranged group marriages. Among her three maternal uncles the first one married a Japanese, the second one a Thai girl and the third a Philippino girl. All these marriages were organized by the NGO. When Lory grew up, she was brought to the capital city Manila by her uncles and admitted her into International Peace Leadership College. Lory joined the NGO when she was in college. She was the secretary of

PACRB, i.e., Philippine Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles.

After completion of her graduation she did her MA in Business Administration and started working as a lecturer. In 2010 the NGO with the help of the college organized a group marriage ceremony for 25-27 couples. Lory had also sent her photo for selection and so did her would be husband, who was also a member of that NGO. They sent their half and full body photos. According to the norm of their organization, the founder and all the assistants sat together, followed the match procedure by reading the forehead and ears of all the willing boys and girls. Once the pairs were selected, they had to take blessings from the head of the INGO. Hence in 2012, her would be husband from India went to Philippines along with the then culture Minister of Sikkim. Her husband received financial support from different sources as the journey was very expensive. On 19th April, 2012 the couple tied their knot through a function at Manila.

Her husband belongs to a conservative Hindu Pranami family. His family members had strong objection in this union as Lory is a Christian. But after marriage when Lory came to a remote village of West district of Sikkim the villagers and the in-laws were all impressed by the beautiful, very fair princess like Buhari (daughter in law); they all welcomed her.

Lory purchased a book before her marriage and started learning about Indian culture. In order to know each other's culture, the couple used to have video chat and long conversation through WhatsApp. They used to share each other's cultural differences but when the lady reached her in-laws' place, she faced the actual challenge. Language was an obstacle. Whenever she tried to communicate in Nepali it was misunderstood by the people. Moreover, her accent was so different.

After marriage, Lory came to Sikkim and joined a private university as an accountant. The university was not far from her house. She wanted to keep herself busy in order to save herself from loneliness and possible depression. In 2015, however, the institution closed down because of some technical problems. During her association with the university, she started interacting with so many people and started learning Nepali language. In a joking mood Lory told me that not knowing the language at the beginning was an advantage since she could not decode the sarcastic and critical comments, which they might have been hurled at her. She recalls that whenever she gave a smile without understanding anyone's conversation people used to say Bichara Buhari (poor daughter-in-law). Tagalog which is Lory's mother tongue, came to disuse. She was laughing revealing the

fact that only when she gets very angry, she enters into the washroom and releases her anger by shouting in Tagalog which nobody out here would understand.

Although a Christian, Lory has no prejudice performing pujas. But her children are little confused about the religion they have to be follow. Sometimes they ask their mother 'Mamma, where is God? How does he look like?' Lory tries to answer in her own way saying that God lives in the sky and he wears white cloth. But her son replies saying 'no, he stays in the Mandir, the temple placed in their home. Lory often cuts jokes on this issue to her mother-in-law, pronouncing that her first child is a Christian and the second one is Hindu.

Although her husband informed her that they belong to a Pranami family which does not allow non-vegetarian food, Lory took it lightly as in Philippines no one is a complete vegetarian. It was unthinkable for her. She thought that her in-laws eat less meat only. After marriage the first thing she had to sacrifice was the delicious non-vegetarian food made of pork, beef, seafood, octopus, crabs and egg and so on. She realized the gravity of the problem then. Sacrificing her loved food habits and becoming vegetarian was a big challenge for her. When she was pregnant with her first baby, the neighbours showed their sympathy by offering less spicy fried chicken to her secretly. Otherwise she was dependent on rice and fruits only.

Later on, she worked out a new survival strategy. Now whenever she goes outside, she visits a non-vegetarian restaurant and eats heart out. Sometimes she secretly manages to boil eggs at home and eats. Once she dared to have fry eggs at home but was caught by the in-laws.

Lory grew up knowing one kind of tea made of milk and sugar. In Sikkim, people generally prefer tea with sugar as well as salt. Some guests like tea with milk and sugar, some prefer just black tea and yet some others prefer tea with salt and milk. Lory gets utterly confused when she has to make different kinds of tea to the taste of different guests.

In 2016, four years after their marriage, Lory visited her parental home in Philippines, along with her husband and children. Her family members and friends were all shocked noticing that Lory's skin complexion had darkened dramatically. Lory explained the situation blaming it on the warmer climate and use of firewood for cooking.

Disagreements and misunderstanding with husband and in-laws disturbed her on many occasions. But her family values, lessons of humanity she has learnt from her parents and the head of the NGO prevent her from taking

any negative step. Lory also does not want to disturb her son's upbringing. Her parents have advised her that she should carry on with the present arrangement as long as her husband supports her.

Case 3

The third case is that of a Bengali groom and a Nepali bride. Sandhya and Akhil are living a happy conjugal life for the last 25 years. Sandhya is the second among nine sisters. Her father is a farmer and mother a housewife. Her father and mother have primary school level education. At the time of Sandhya's marriage her father-in-law and mother in-law were alive. After the death of her father-in-law, her mother-in-law started staying with Akhil's married brothers. Akhil is the youngest among five brothers and three sisters.

Sandhya and Akhil came to know each other in April 1992, when they joined two different government schools in the same place. It was a very remote place of West District of Sikkim. They were staying in a same building. One day, the headmaster of Sandhya's school introduced her to Akhil. The place was so remote that they hardly had any one to talk to. The two lonely young persons living in the same building soon became friends. They started sharing professional as well as personal problems. Akhil, by nature is a very caring person. His decency, politeness attracted Sandhya. The place where they lived was Lepcha dominated. Sandhya saw many of the boys belonging to that place indulge in different kinds of drug and alcohol addiction. Sandhya wanted to marry a person who would be free of any kind of addiction. She found Akhil the right choice.

There were several small but touchy incidents which enhanced Sandhya's admiration for Akhil. One day Sandhya found that one of her photos from her album was missing. She soon discovered that it was Akhil who had stolen it. The friendship soon turned into love. They decided to marry. There was no objection from Akhil's family but Sandhya's family members were against the alliance. In the hills, the plainsmen (Akhil was one) are referred to as Madeshia, which is one way to show them in poor light. Sandhya's family members were worried that it will be a mismatch since the Madeshias nurse an inferior culture. With the interference of some of Sandhya's relatives and local panchayat members the problem was sorted out. In 1993 they got married.

Sandhya feels that she did not face much trouble in her conjugal life so far; her adjustment with a different culture was also smooth. Being in Sikkim, surrounded by the Sikkimese, made her adjustments trouble free. It is only occasionally, during summer/winter vacations or festive seasons that she

goes to her in-law's place. At the beginning of their married life when she visited her in-law's place during summer season it was a very difficult time for her as the climate out there was extremely hot. But everyone in her husband's family treated her with love and affection which made her adjustments easy. Being the youngest daughter-in-law at home everyone loves her. All the elder brothers of Akhil cut jokes at her. Even today they wait for Akhil and Sandhya before planning and celebrating a major occasion in the family. Other family members have also accepted her as the perfect daughter-in-law. Sandhya maintains good relationship with all of them. Everyone shares their secrets with Sandhya. Sandhya, in order to honour their faith, keeps everything confidential and because of this she is loved by all.

Subham, their only son, was born a year after their marriage in a Primary Health Centre at West District of Sikkim. No one came to guide Sandhya during her critical days. After six months she moved towards Kolkata, where Akhil's family lives. There, Sandhya learnt some elementary lessons about child care from her mother-in-law and other family members. After seven years of their son's birth, their daughter Sangita was born. The couple became very busy and happy in their family life.

Until the death of her mother-in-law Sandhya followed the traditional Bengali habits like entering toilet with minimum clothes to maintain hygiene, which she was very uncomfortable with, and separating Amish and Niramish food that is vegetarian and non-vegetarian items as her mother-in-law was a widow who was a strict vegetarian. Now that her mother-in-law is not there Sandhya lives with greater freedom.

Bengalis enjoy Durga puja and everything associated with it, especially pandal hopping in group. Born and brought up in hill culture Sandhya and her children never liked it. No one ever forced them to join in this event. Akhil does not like pandal hopping. Therefore, it was not a problem to anybody. Sandhya remains busy in other activities during puja days. She expressed her happiness and pride while informing that in this year's puja she prepared tea eleven times a day for the family members.

Sandhya taught her children to bow down their head in front of all elders, which is to be done every evening according to Rai custom. Her children sometimes get confused about how to wish a person. Bengalis are less formal in wishing someone while the Nepalis are very particular in this matter. Akhil's family members are very happy seeing the politeness in her children. Children have learnt offering anything to anybody using both hands, which is a typical Nepali custom.

Sandhya expressed her dislike for the way the Bengalis in general talk to their parents or senior members. Initially watching a conversation, she thought they were arguing, quarrelling. Plain people speak loudly which Sandhya does not like as she taught her children to be polite.

Though the time-tables followed in Kolkata and in Sikkim do not match Sandhya and her family members have adopted the time-table followed in Kolkata in their family in Sikkim. They have introduced the habit of waking up early and going to bed late at night. Sandhya and Akhil thus find time to spend with their children after working hours. The children also get more time to study.

Initially, after marriage, Sandhya was communicating with her in-laws in English and Hindi. During her stay in her in-law's house for two months of winter holidays she learnt Bengali. At the first year Akhil used to help Sandhya in her conversation with members of her in-law's family. Whenever she spoke in Nepali Akhil's family members inquired she was backbiting. Now, at their own residence in Sikkim both Sandhya and Akhil speak in Nepali with their children but when they are at Akhil's place all four communicate in Bengali. Sandhya believes that cross cultural marriages are beneficial for socialization of children as they easily learn two languages and two cultures.

Sandhya learnt how to make roti and other Bengali dishes from her mother-in-law, when she was alive. In the beginning, in her in-law's place, she took time to adjust with the idea of using sugar in almost all dishes. She did not like the sweetened taste. But had all the dishes happily since she did not want to offend her mother-in-law. With time, however, Sandhya and her children have started loving the taste of Bengali dishes. The spicy Bengali foods were also a problem that she has overcome with time. Sandhya was surprised seeing so many dishes the Bengalis prepare for a main meal and the enormous amount of time they spent on cooking. The Nepalis prepare simple, less spicy dishes and they spend much less time in the kitchen. She learnt cooking different items from both cultures. Today, during festive time, she tries to cook food according to family members' choice.

Both of them belong to the same religion, there is no big adjustment problem in this regard. Sandhya's parents also do not follow traditional Rai culture. Sandhya has learnt from her mother-in-law about the importance of Laxmi Puja, in which the role of a daughter-in-law is very important. Even today, she remains present every year in Kolkata just for this occasion.

Now Sandhya's children have grown up and it is the time to think about their career. Sandhya gets little bit upset as her children have lost the opportunity to have a Sikkim Subject Domicile. According to the norm if a Sikkimese girl marries a non-Sikkimese boy the next generation are not entitled to have the same. By implication, they are not entitled to the facilities meant for the Sikkimese, nor even tax relaxation in job. They have to face open competition. But Sandhya accepts the fact positively. Since Sandhya and Akhil were aware of this from the beginning they have groomed their children in a way that they would be able to cope with the situation.

A thought sometimes that comes to Sandhya's mind is what kind of spouse her children will select. She thinks that she will give her children full liberty in this matter; she would not have any objection if her children select their spouses from different cultures. She however would like if her daughter selects a Bengali groom and son a Nepali bride. She feels that the Bengali girls are pampered by their family members. They hardly go through the hardships that an average Nepali girl goes through. That is precisely why she thinks that if her son marries a Bengali girl, she would face a lot of adjustment problems. A Nepali daughter-in-law would be more caring and understanding.

Conclusion

The three case studies narrated above help us in drawing a few observations. First, out of three cases one, the last one, is a very successful story because the bride could stay in her own state in the midst of her own culture but the earlier two marriages have problems because the brides had to leave their own culture and had to adjust with a completely different culture. In the case where the marriage worked out well the bride had to visit her in-law's place only occasionally and she took it as a fun to pick up the traits of her in-law's culture and got enriched in the process. The couple is happy notwithstanding the fact that their children would be debarred from the special privileges meant for the Sikkimese citizens. Second, much of the success of a cross-cultural marriage depends upon the love, care and understanding between the husband and wife. In a patriarchal social order, it is often the women who make all the sacrifices and adjustments and go through the process of unlearning and learning cultures, which is very difficult and painful. In this difficult journey what matters most is the husband's support; it gives added strength and courage to a woman to adjust and overcome the family problems.

A Journey from the Periphery to the Core of Middleclassness

Sanjay K. Roy

Abstract: *The bourgeois democratic societies of Western and Indian forms always provide some free space using which an individual can move through ranks. One such movement or social mobility could be from rural lower-middleclass position to the urban middleclass position. One can leave the struggling days on the margins behind to move to the affluence and social recognition that urban middleclassness offers. The present paper is an auto-narrative of such as journey of a “refugee” child to the core of middleclass culture in West Bengal.*

Keywords: East Pakistan, village, childhood, refugee, education, social mobility, middleclassness.

Forewords

Jeffrey, Craig, Patricia Jeffery and Roger Jeffery in their book *Degrees Without Freedom? Education, Masculinities and Unemployment in North India* (2007) have addressed the uncertainties that face a person in his journey to be a part of middleclass. They have argued that having the necessary education, occupation and income is not enough to qualify as a member of the middleclass; it, in addition, requires a different kind of investment, covering not only economic and social capital, but also the psychic investment of desire and discipline. The journey from the periphery to the core of middleclassness is indeed long and painful and full of uncertainties; there could thus be many successful as well as failed journeys.

There cannot be just one homogenous definition of middleclass culture or middleclassness. However, the reference often goes to the metropolitan middleclass. Defined in terms of certain level of control over economic,

social (which also includes political), and cultural capital (in Bourdieu's sense), one can identify at least three distinct categories – the petty-bourgeois, the managerial class and the intelligentsia – which might constitute the urban middleclass. My reference group here is the metropolitan intelligentsia or the intellectual class. Their material affluence, access to the highest level of education, involvement in teaching and research, will to refine wisdom, certain level of mastery over different cultural fields like literature, art, music, language skill and accent, political and social awareness, progressive ideas and ideals (the ideals of modernity), and a certain standard of living generally qualify them to be the bearers and practitioners of metropolitan middleclassness. The metropolitan middleclassness is a “dreamland” for most of the struggling youth. They toil hard for days, months and years to reach their coveted dreamland that promises to provide the security, comfort and recognition of a sort.

In this paper, I would give an autobiographical narrative of my journey from the “dominant-core” of a village society to the “margin” and then to the core of the metropolitan middleclassness.

The journey begins

I was born in January 1960 in a remote village in Bogra district of erstwhile East Pakistan. So remote was the place that we had to walk three miles towards the east to reach the nearest rail station and the same distance on the opposite direction to reach the nearest bus stoppage. We had to walk the distance on the muddy roads and cross a stream on the way both sides. Ours was a big family of 11 members, struggling economically, post land reforms (which was put in place around 1952-53), bearing a sub-infeudatory legacy. My father was matriculate (the only one among the 10 villages in the area) and a primary school head master, and my mother had primary school level education. We had seven acres of land, low marshy land and dry land put together, that produced just enough to meet our food requirements round the year. Rain and floods were the only source of water for cultivation. There was no surplus nor enough cash crop to meet the cash requirements. By the time I was 9-10, I was already learning the art of cultivation, alongside my studies. We had bare minimum clothes, had the habit of bathing in the open pond, knew the art of catching fish with bare hands, did not know the use of toilet, did not know that one has to use soap in every bath, spoke the local dialect (which I have completely forgotten now), and nursed lower middleclass ambitions. I learnt swimming as soon as I learnt walking and mastered the art of climbing all kinds of trees which

were almost like my childhood companions. The shared expectation being low, and life chances being the bare minimum, I would have been happy being a primary school teacher-cum-cultivator had we stayed on in our village in East Pakistan. I did not have any exposure to the outside world and carried a baggage of complexes while interacting with harbingers of urban culture (in the context of East Pakistan in the 1960s).

Yet, we were a part of the “dominant core” of our village community. We had just enough land and cash (father’s salary) to sustain ourselves. In terms of agrarian class-category, we were the non-cultivating owners, when most of the villagers had very small holdings or were landless labourers on other’s field, small cultivators and sharecroppers. We had zamindari legacy. We had a *durga* mandir and our family patronized most of the religious functions in the village. Good students from neighbouring villages came to our house to take special tuitions from my father for preparation of a district level scholarship test in class V. Every elderly member of our family had some education, and we, all brothers and sisters, were doing fairly well in our school level education. Ours was one of the three families in the village that had its own pond, which was used by the fellow villagers for bath and washing. We had a mango and jackfruit orchard, which most of the other villagers did not have. Our house was at the middle of the village and the homestead was elevated (perhaps by using the excess mud amassed by digging the pond); the annual flood used to affect all the houses excepting ours. The pond in front of the house not only had its multiple functionality but also was a status symbol. The most important function of the pond was to save the women members of the family from travelling a distance for bath and washing. In the absence of the Brahmins, we were the uppermost caste in the village. The neighbouring Muslims and lower caste Hindus used to work on our land and gave us service in different other ways. My father was not a member of any political organization or any local self-government but was an important informal leader. All the village disputes were settled through *salishi* (a kind of informal litigation by the elderly members of the village community) in which my father had a leadership role. Being a part of the “dominant”, playing with nature, playing with friends, I had a very happy and colourful childhood.

The escape and the fall to insignificance

The “communal harmony” in rural East Pakistan started to fracture within a couple of months from the onset of the freedom struggle in March 1971. In a summer night of June, the same year, the communal lot from our Muslim neighbourhood attacked our house and looted everything we had.

We ran out for lives and took shelter in the house of a Muslim friend of my father. He gave us shelter for next three months and arranged our safe escape to India in September. The Muslim friend of my father saved us in innumerable ways, risking his position by defying pressures from the communal section of his community.

In India, we had a long period of hardship. For some months we lived in the house of our close kin at Gangarampur (now in South Dinajpur district) and then moved to our own house in January 1972. For a few of years, between 1971 and 1975, we had to manage with government ration and Rs. 200 a month (which we received as a part of our share of profit from a printing press, that was managed by our close relatives in Gangarampur, in which my father had invested some money before our migration); we were often half-fed and undernourished; the secondary needs often remained unaddressed. The near-total lack of social and cultural capital made our fights often more distressing. Our house in Raiganj, then a small sub-divisional town, was on its outskirts. It was a two-room *kutchcha* house made of tin, timber and bamboo on an 8-katha plot that my father had bought a year before our migration. The shared morale in the family was low and we were growing up uncared with fettered ambitions.

We did not have an inspiring neighbourhood in our new locale. Most of our neighbours were of East Pakistan origin and were struggling economically and socially. The “education culture” was completely absent; all my playmates were school dropouts and be easy prey to anti-social ways of life. The social degeneration of the late 60s and early 1970s was evident; the youth were largely converted into lumpens with the patronage of leaders of the Congress party. I noticed a kind of hopelessness in my youth. I was a part of it for a short spell. I took part in group clashes in late 1972, and was once beaten up badly by the hooligans of a rival group, hospitalized for a couple of days – an incident that proved to be a turning point of my life. I asked myself “What am I doing?” My family helped me out of the rot through sessions of silent counselling.

We were handicapped by two other problems. First, we did not have any social network (“social capital”), nor any access to political leaders, who could have helped us. Second, the Bengali dialect that we knew and spoke was substantially different from the one spoken in this part of Bengal. My friends in the neighbourhood and school used to laugh at me for my dialect and accent. I had to go through a very painful process of first unlearning the way we spoke and then learning a substantially different mannerism for communication. The painful process impacted my psyche and morale adversely; I picked up the habit of keeping mum for years, even when I

reached college. This hindered the natural growth of speech in my early days. Even when I became active in politics, I was always hesitant making public speeches. Third, we had to unlearn much of our past culture and learn the elements of new culture (the dress, food habit, the daily activities, bathing style, religious and social practices, a new political culture) in order to be accepted. The poor access to material, social and cultural capital kept us on the margin for many years. With shabby dress, discriminating foot wear and no pocket money I lived with inferiority complex in the company of my friends in school, college and university. In order to save money on travel I used to walk 5-6 kilometres a day to school and market and back. Living on the margin for years definitely had its toll on our collective psyche and our sense of self, something that is very difficult, if not impossible, to capture in the language of social sciences.

The rise to the core of middleclassness

The economic condition of our family started improving when we started a book shop sometime in 1975. My unemployed graduate elder brother took the initiative. He had to sell my mother's jewelry to collect the seed money. My father, I and my younger brother also did our part in the shop. I spent hours in the shop alongside my studies. By mid-1980s our economic condition improved substantially. I made a mark in my academics from school up to university and earned recognition in our local social circle. Having topped in Masters I moved to Delhi School of Economics for MPhil and PhD. It was a "matter" of pride and a ray of hope for my family that had fallen into a sudden spell of indignity and denial by then. In 1985, I got the job of a lecturer in the Department of Sociology of North Bengal University. I received Commonwealth post-doctoral fellowship to study in the University of Sussex and made a couple of short trips to Vienna and Sydney as post-Doctoral fellow, visited the some of the top Indian universities either to attend seminars/conferences or as a visiting fellow. All these experiences made my journey into both, the new social core and my transformed self much enriching. However, throughout this journey I remained shaky and nervous in sorting out my language issues, both Bengali and English. Hours spent at our shop during college days spared me moments of escape in Bengali literature and helped me in turn pick up the finer nuances of the language. But I had to struggle with English. In the first few months in Delhi School of Economics I was always gasping for right kind of vocabulary to manage daily communication, inside and outside the classroom. I was definitely feeling like a "fish out of water". On many occasions I thought of leaving DSE. During my one-year stay in Sussex

University (1991-92) I had to deliver lectures to English audience. I knew English by then, but my accent was a big issue. After joining the university in 1985, I had a difficult time mastering English to be fluent in my class lectures and seminars. Many critical comments were hurled at me by my colleagues with metropolitan background. Every hurdle or humiliation made me determined to elevate myself to a new level, to be a stronger person.

I had offers to marry someone with an upper-middleclass metropolitan core. But I consciously turned them down because I was still not comfortable in their company and culture. I was still in transition emotionally from the margin to the core; the direction of course being metropolitan middleclass culture.

Now, I think, I am mature as a teacher, and I interact with my colleagues in the metropolitan universities and global universities at ease. I have by and large sorted out my speech problem and picked up metropolitan Bengali and English accent. I do not suffer from any inferiority complex. I have my relatives and academic friends living in Kolkata and other Indian metropolises and there isn't any cultural gap I believe, as far as our sense of middleclassness is concerned. I have a house in Kolkata and I feel at home in the culture shared by the residents of the housing complex. I can communicate and interact with them at ease. My exposure to Rabindrasangeet, and my active participation in Left politics (I had the opportunity to work alongside top leaders of a leading Left party in West Bengal) helped me integrate with the urban culture in many ways.

I now feel that I have completed a difficult journey from the core of a village culture to the margin of metropolitan middleclassness and finally to the core of the metropolitan middleclassness. Thus, the movement remained two pronged, divided on one side between the rural-urban and on the other between lower class-middle class. But these often got subsumed into each other and made overlapping injunctions as well as provided rationales to finally arrive at the urban middleclassness. Finally, I have settled down into this middleclassness with all its advantages, progressiveness and petty-bourgeois opportunism and its vices. This privileged social position is something I will zealously cling to and would be worried to lose since it gives me my identity ensures the way I want to live.

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BOOK REVIEW

Life of the Middleclass Aged in Kolkata

By Sinjini Roy

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The book under review is based on the author's PhD thesis in Sociology of the University of North Bengal. This is the outcome of her in depth empirical research among the middleclass aged of the city of Kolkata. In her study, the author has meticulously examined, analyzed and diagnosed the issues and problems of the elderly male and female living with or without family members both in their own houses or flats and in the old age homes on the basis of her field data. The study explores the social processes through which the elderly population moves from multigenerational big joint and extended households to the stage of living alone, where the institution of family and kinship-oriented care system breaks down for the interplay of various endogenous and exogenous forces. There are altogether nine chapters in this book followed by a rich bibliography, index and glossary of popular Bengali terms.

Chapter 1 is *Introduction*, dealing mainly with the context and background of the study, objectives of research, conceptual framework and methodology of the study. While dealing with the methodology the nature and strategy of field work as well as the problems faced in field studies are also highlighted, which is usually not a practice in most of the ethnographic discourses. To this extent the methodology section of this book is a unique one. However, it would have been more interesting and attractive if the ethical issues in field work and data collection were also included in this section.

Chapter 2 is *Aged in Literature*, primarily dealing with the review of important literatures on the subject under study. While reviewing the literatures the author basically reviewed the works those dealt with the relationship of the aged with their children and kin members those who live in their own houses /flats and also among the aged and their relations with

the inmates of old age home. Review also covers the literatures dealing with the problems of the aged living either in their own home or in old age home. The literatures dealing with the policies and programmes for the wellbeing of the aged, including the literatures on theoretical and methodological discourses for the study of elderly were also reviewed. On the basis of review works the author identified the research gaps and those helped her to justify the significance of the present research.

Chapter 3 is *Socio-economic Background of the Elderly*. In this section the author presented the various aspects of demographic attributes and socio-economic background of the elderly with the help of tables and figures. There are altogether 31 tables in this chapter. The tables presented in this section are very rich with valuable facts and findings and those are analyzed both in quantitative and qualitative manners. In this chapter the author clearly noted that there are significant differences in life ways as well as in quality of life between the elderly living in their own houses and in the old age homes.

Chapter 4 is *Household and Families of the Aged in Salt Lake City*, in which one can get the details of household and family including their various types and forms which have been presented through micro genealogical diagrams. Family relations, care system and the problems of the aged are also discussed in this section. This chapter clearly shows the micro-changes those have taken place in urban middle-class families and how such forces significantly impacted upon the life of the aged living in Salt Lake City of Kolkata.

Chapter 5 is *Households and Families of the Aged Living in Old Age Homes*. In this section the aged living in old age homes and their previous household dimensions and dynamics of inter personal family relations are thoroughly discussed with the help of diagrams and their scientific analyses. The issues like burden, loss of values, cruelty those have emerged in urban, middle class families of Kolkata as new social phenomena are also highlighted very brilliantly.

Chapter 6 is *Dispersal of Family Members and its Impact on the Life of the Aged*. Here the author examined the nature of dispersal among the members of urban middleclass families due to various reasons as per demands of the emerged situation. How the dispersal of members has changed the structure and pattern of relationship in traditional middleclass families in Kolkata are discussed and analyzed thoroughly. The consequences of dispersal and the mechanisms evolved out of such structural and

functional transformation in household pattern and family relations are also examined and discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 7 & 8 are *Life of the Aged in Salt Lake City* and *Life of the Aged in Old Age Homes* respectively. These two chapters are basically dealing with the details of daily life as well as quality of life of the aged, both men and women, in two different social settings. The challenges and opportunities in the life of the aged living in both the contexts are discussed in this chapter through concrete case studies and narratives of the elderly. The various problems of the aged as well as the mechanisms of their adaptation and adjustment for survival and live a (good) life at the old age are also discussed from the perspectives of the aged. These two chapters represented the real picture of aspirations, hopes, desires and failures of the “aged” and the mechanism through which they are confronting with the realities (joys and pains) of life under emerged situation. The most crucial findings of these two chapters are the aged irrespective of their place of residence have made the constant efforts not only to live by fighting with the problems of aging, but also to lead a good life by engaging themselves in various forms of creative activities. The gender differences in adaptive process of the elderly under changing circumstances are also discussed in these two chapters.

Chapter 9 is *Conclusion*, divided into ten small sections primarily dealing with the summary of the findings, their critical analysis and interrelations based on data gathered for the present study. Various theoretical debates in understanding the issues and problems under study are nicely explained to arrive at logical conclusions. Concluding remarks are drawn on the basis of analytical discussions of facts and findings within the help of theoretical frame and analytical tools of sociology, anthropology and social science research.

This study clearly reveals that the middle class aged under scrutiny are leading their life in a serious care crisis. As a result, they themselves are making and finding their own ways and means for making manifold adjustments to cope with the system in which they are a part of the whole. Their adaptation process sometimes cuts across the conventional means, customs and relations, but that does not drastically affect the social relations. The face to face and day to day relations, specially the parent-child relation is gradually replaced by occasional visits of parents to sons and daughters or vice-versa is an emerging trend. The use of modern gadgets for maintaining interpersonal relations between family members is a very popular trend. It has also been pointed out that there are significant differences in

life ways between the aged those who lead their life in own homes and those who stay in old age homes. It is very painful to learn that the aged living in homes have either failed all efforts to stay with their family members or have lost their own home and family together.

The study suggests that the conventional theoretical scheme and methodological tools of examining the dynamics of family in Indian context by way of rigid dichotomy between “tradition and modern”, “collectivism and individualism”, “localism and globalism”, “modernity and alternative modernity” “continuity of east and historicity of west” are gradually losing their significance under contemporary and fast changing social situation which is not only very complex but also hybridized and determined much by market forces and consumer culture. The empirical realities compel us to think about evolving composite approaches and perspectives for understanding the social realities of the nature and functions of family. Here the author deserve credit as she has pointed out that in post-modern time no theoretical discourse is comprehensive and good enough to capture the complex and changing realities of family and social life.

The book will serve the interests of the researchers not only in the field of sociology and anthropology but also of a number of disciplines like social work, social welfare, social development, psychology and policy studies. The book reflects the labor and interest of the author to handle this complex subject. The author deserves all appreciations for her pioneering work on “aged” in the background of urban middle-class family in Kolkata. I would recommend this book for those who want food for thought in the era of risk society. This book would prove to be of value to the policy makers and planners.

It is expected that the author will continue her research on “elderly” in coming days in the light of new paradigms and cross-cultural perspectives.

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